To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Randy J. Hendricks entitled "Companion to Owls: Robert Penn Warren and the Literature of Knowledge." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

Robert Y. Drake, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

Vice Provost and
Dean of the Graduate School

COMPANION TO OWLS: ROBERT PENN WARREN AND THE LITERATURE OF KNOWLEDGE

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Randy J. Hendricks

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I am a brother to dragons, and a companion to owls . . . .
My harp also is turned to mourning, and my organ into the voice of them that weep.

Job 30: 29-31

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With the aid of all these people I have written a better work than I otherwise could have.

ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of "Companion to Owls" is to examine how Robert Penn Warren's ideas about the relationship between the self and an interconnected world--ideas which collectively make up his loose theory of knowledge--have been born and borne out in selections from his poetry, novels, and prose studies of history and literature. A secondary and closely related purpose is to show how Warren's thinking derived from and affected his own interpretations of American history and American literary history.

A statement of the basic tenets of Warren's philosophy of knowledge is established by inductive means in the first chapter. Thereafter, the study is devoted to close readings of works in each of the major genres. Formal analysis of Warren's works--especially in the areas of structure, language, and characterization--is employed with frequent crosstextual reference to prove the binding nature of his theme of knowledge.

The study reveals that Warren's works reflect his use of imaginative inquiry to interpret the past in the pursuit of a sustaining knowledge. Warren's extensive use of national, regional, and even a personal past in his writing is interpreted as the work of an individual critic of modern American values and as the work of a descendant from the tradition of democratic questioners which includes Hawthorne, Melville, and Twain.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS*

All the King's Men	AKM
At Heaven's Gate	AHG
Band of Angels	BA
Brother to Dragons	BD
Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce	CJ
Democracy and Poetry	DP
Homage to Theodore Dreiser	HTD
John Brown: The Making of a Martyr	JB
Jefferson Davis Gets His Citizenship Back	JD
"Knowledge and the Image of Man"	"Knowledge"
The Legacy of the Civil War	Legacy
Meet Me in the Green Glen	Meet Me
New & Selected Essays	N&SE
New & Selected Poems 1923-1985	N&SP
Robert Penn Warren Talking: Interviews 1950-1978	Talking
Selected Essays	SE
Selected Poems of Herman Melville	SPHM
Who Speaks for the Negro?	Who Speaks?
World Enough and Time	WET

*These abbreviated forms of titles of Warren's works have been used where necessary for parenthetical documentation of sources within the text. Other abbreviations used in parenthetical documentation are obvious and used in conformance with standard MLA practice.

INTRODUCTION

Since James A. Grimshaw compiled his invaluable Robert Penn Warren: A Descriptive Bibliography (1979), several important, even landmark, studies of Warren's work have appeared. Some critics writing during the past decade have generally been more interested than critics before them in the whole Warren--in Warren the critic, Warren the historian, Warren the poet and Warren the novelist. Others have focused on Warren's late poetry as the achievement which assures his lasting place in American literature. In addition to two collections of previously published essays and reviews by scholars which were edited early in the 1980's by Neil Nakadate and William Bedford Clark, there have been several conferences devoted to the study of Warren, and two new collections of original scholarly essays have been published. The 1981 collection of essays edited by Walter B. Edgar (A Southern Renascence Man) assembled a group of well-known critics to explore Warren's various talents.

Then in 1986 Grimshaw edited a collection of original essays (Time's Glory) by critics who had become established Warren scholars, including new articles by Victor Strandberg and James H. Justus. Though the essays in this collection are almost uniformly enlightening, the book is weighted heavily in the direction of Warren's fiction. With five of seven essays devoted to his

fiction, the volume includes only one essay on Warren's poetry (Strandberg's) and only one on his nonfiction (Justus'). Uncollected essays too numerous to list here have also focused on one particular genre at the expense of the others. Of course, this kind of focus is valid and necessary, but it is also an indication of an emerging debate in Warren studies over where Warren's genius found its best expression.

Four works published over the last decade have made significant contributions to the ongoing debate. The first of these was Marshall Walker's A Vision Earned, a book "primarily concerned with Warren the maker rather than with Warren the critic or teacher" (18). By making only brief references to Warren's literary criticism and historical studies, Walker excludes a vital part of Warren's total achievement, perhaps in part because he is reacting against the tendency in academia to see Warren primarily as a critic whose work is out of favor, along with the criticism of T.S. Eliot and Cleanth Brooks. It will become clear by chapter three of this study that I consider Warren as something of a maker even when he is writing criticism. Of the disfavor which has greeted much of Warren's fiction, Walker concludes that Warren has been discounted by reviewers whose preference was for something quite different from what Warren wrote: "The reviewer . . . is not prepared for [a novel which tells a story]: a novel

of intellectual pretension should offer not story but myth, or an exteme quality of language, or deep anxieties about being a novel at all, or an intricate symbolic order just this side of opacity." Warren, on the other hand, blatantly and without apology told stories, as Walker goes on to point out (231). Walker also offers valuable insight into Warren's "regionalism" and concludes that Warren was "A Southerner before he was an American" (237).

At one level the wording expresses an obvious truth, yet much depends on what is meant exactly by the term Southerner here. Walker asserts that Warren took from his native region a Christian view of human freedom as the source of good and also of evil (237). Warren might have preferred the term older American to Southerner here, just as he did in The Legacy of the Civil War. For him the term American might apply equally to the modern Northerner with his Treasury of Virtue and the modern Southerner with his Great Alibi, the terms Warren used to describe each region's attempt to absolve itself from the responsibility of human freedom.

Warren criticism was raised to a new level in 1981 when James H. Justus published The Achievement of Robert Penn Warren. Justus explores the basic themes in Warren and discusses each of the genres comprehensively, adding much to our understanding of "the how" of Warren's art. Without confining himself to a formal thesis, Justus works

from the basic premise that Warren's writing

> derives in large measure from the cultural circumstances of place and time in his career. It is shaped by his being both a border Southerner and a transregional intellectual; the values of the country and small town, including the tangled benefits of social cohesion and Christian assumptions about the nature of man, are often seen in conflict with the values of life governed by art and the academy. (xiv)

Justus' emphasis on Warren's status as a "border Southerner" and a "transregional intellectual" mildly contradicts Walker's assertion that Warren was "A Southerner before he was an American," and comes nearer to an accurate assessment of Warren's relation to and artistic use of his native region. One might add that in some sense Warren is a "Western" writer as well as a "Southern" writer, and the West, as a region and as a theme, figures prominently in his work from the early "The Ballad of Billie Potts" (1943) to the late Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce (1983).[1] Justus also traces the evolution of Naturalism in Warren's work, arguing that it is not something Warren outgrew after his early work, but is an important pole in a characteristic, tension-filled double vision. The "Christian assumptions" Warren adopted from his native region are seen by Justus as a corollary to the intellectual and literary development of Naturalism in the

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[1]Professor Robert Drake has often stressed the point that Warren may be the most Western of the Southern writers he teaches in his course on Twentieth-Century Southern Fiction at The University of Tennessee.

late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. The argument that the doctrine of Original Sin and naturalistic theory affirm similar views of the human condition is the best explanation yet to account for Warren's particular power in creating unsophisticated, Ancient Mariner figures, characters who "live into" (the phrase is borrowed from Warren) their "Christian" vision.

Justus' findings about the influences which shaped Warren's career and his readings of individual works with crosstextual resonance are presented with a fullness that was new to Warren criticism when the book first appeared. Building upon the ground paved by Leonard Casper, Charles Bohner, and Victor Strandberg, all of whose works remain interesting despite the fact that they are dated now because Warren lived and wrote long after they were published, Justus produces the most comprehensive study of Warren yet, though his work, too, is outdated by Warren's having survived the book by nearly a decade.

In <u>In the Heart's Last Kingdom</u> (1984), Calvin Bedient argues that Warren's late poetry distinguishes him as one of the greats and attempts to locate the source of his particular greatness in the poetry.

> Casting off the regal diction with which he had earlier tried to warm himself, [Warren] began to blaze inwardly with a direct and passionate pursuit of the real. What he lived for was what he could not live without, and his words, at their best, seemed resonant with actual life. The joy he was after--namely, "knowledge based on the empathic imagination"--may have been jettisoned by "the

> world of science, technology, big organization--and of course the business culture"; but he would have it, singlehandedly he would replant it in America, if passion could do it, if anyone could do it. Both retreating and advancing to nature, like some latter-day Thoreau, Ishmael, or Whitman, he sought to reconcile, in Rilke's words, "the Individual and the All"--sought "the moment of exaltation, the artistically important Moment, . . . in which the two scales of the balance counterpoise one another." (4)

One can agree with Bedient that Warren's final phase, which began in the mid-1960's with the composition of Audubon or, arguably, with the volume of poems entitled Incarnations, was, like the last phase of Henry James, his major one. But the break is not so clear to me, the early work not so comparatively bad as Bedient seems to think. For one thing, while there is some accuracy in Bedient's assertion that "Warren was schooled in, and virtually parodied, the precious rhetoric that an injured but high sensibility applies to itself as a balm" (7), Warren's rhetoric ("bombastic" at times, as Leslie Fielder called it) is often what most distinguishes him from other writers who might be said to have an "injured but high sensibility." One thinks of Allen Tate and T.S. Eliot. And Warren has testified to his own early rebellion against the stateliness of the poetic tone of his mentor John Crowe Ransom.

There is sometimes something unsettling in Warren's early poetic style, to be sure; and Bedient, who is fond of lists, offers several good and randomly selected examples: "We may endeavor definition," "the bosom's nocturnal

disquiet," "the fanged commotion rude." Yet if such phrases make one want to reach for Whitman, as Bedient says they do (6), one also remembers Warren's comparison of Whitman's poetry to Melville's. Like Melville's, Warren's poetic style was early on wrenching toward a highly personal voice. And such an interpretation does not wholly deny the lingering influence of the poets Bedient mentions as those from whom Warren borrowed in his early poetry: Marvell, Yeats, T.S. Eliot, Auden, and Ransom. One may arrive at the same conclusion that Bedient arrives at--that Audubon represents Warren's greatest poetic achievement (Warren himself thought so [Talking 279]); but one may also see, along with Harold Bloom, who also came to admire Warren's poetry written after 1965, that Warren arrived at this achievement less suddenly than Bedient claims. It is also possible to see the late poetry as Warren's highest achievement without disparaging the other work as derivative and marked by "too much . . . manner, . . . too much aspiration or too much ego" (Bedient 8). And, finally, Bedient's claim that Warren's fiction delayed his creative fulfillment (17) shows too little understanding of a complex creative mind and can also be easily refuted by Warren's testimony that his poems came first. Still, Bedient's book is an enthusiastic and powerfully conceived product, written in a sometimes startling maverick style.

John Burt's book, Robert Penn Warren and American Idealism (1989), is a complicated study, but Burt's reading of Warren's major works in the context of Jeffersonian Idealism is an important contribution to Warren studies. Where Bedient finds Warren "suddenly" speaking in an authentic and affirmative voice, Burt builds upon a more established critical view of Warren's use of dialectic. Burt calls Warren's vision an "elegiac politics," which he defines as a politics based on loss and misery but which nevertheless mediates toward something else. He sees in Warren a tendency to press imaginative vision to the brink of an absolute knowledge before fearfully withdrawing. This basic movement has been seen before, however, and one wants to say with Cleanth Brooks in his review that the book, though insightful, is in its terminology more complex than it needs to be (589). Burt argues that in seeking to approach a transcendental world through poetry, Warren faces the dilemma of all great poets. The poetry threatens to remove the poet from what Burt calls the "neutral territory" into a world words cannot express. The motivation of Warren's characteristic poetic movement then would seem to be a yearning for passage into a transcendental realm and a fear that his own poetic power might take him there. Burt's theory of the anxiety of the strong poet seems to reverse Harold Bloom's theory in The Anxiety of Influence that the poet's anxiety is caused by an

established literary tradition. According to Burt, the poet fears his own powers to transcend the actual world rather than his circumscription in poetic tradition.

While the poetic movement Burt describes does capture a poetic dilemma Warren faces, Burt's explanation that the "backing away" from total vision in Warren's poetry represents a fear of transcendence must be qualified by evidence that Warren was almost from the beginning of his career aware of a necessary failure in poetry which would preclude such an anxiety. And like Brooks, I find "neutral territory" a too disparaging term for the world of living, breathing men and women Warren wrote about in his poetry, fiction, and nonfiction (588). On the other hand, Burt's discussion of the problem that American Idealism posed for Warren is the most significant contribution to a growing body of criticism that emphasizes Warren's understanding of American history as an inspiration for his art. It tends, like most Warren criticism along these lines, to see Warren questioning American democracy and chastising idealists such as Thomas Jefferson, rather than as an artist suddenly singing an affirmative if isolated anthem in Audubon.

In this study I have steadfastly refused to say that Warren's greatness lay in one particular genre. Though I have made clear that some works strike me as more powerful and more successful as art than others, I believe that Warren's greatness is less isolable than some others have

imagined. I find it more difficult than some, Bedient and Bloom especially, to conclude that Warren's greatness lay solely in his poetry and particularly in his late poetry; and I find it impossible to agree with the line of conventional wisdom which states that Warren's powers as a novelist declined after All the King's Men and World Enough and Time.

In scope, this study is narrower than Justus', since I focus specifically on the theme of knowledge. On the other hand, it is broader than the other studies I have discussed above in the brief and very selective review of criticism written during the past decade. I have focused on the fact that all of Warren's work was creative to the extent that in the various forms and genres, even the histories and works of literary criticism, the effort is always a personal quest for knowledge via an imagination grounded in experience. I have attempted to show how all of Warren's work is bound together by the theme of knowledge and a steadfast concentration on what is "imminently human" (to borrow the phrase Warren used to describe Melville's inspiration) to make a true oeuvre. My method has been to arrive at a statement of Warren's theory of knowledge inductively, then to analyze individual works within the separate genres, to describe the various forms that imaginative inquiry takes in Warren, and to establish connections between works while demonstrating the relation

between the theme of knowledge and a number of sub-themes in the body of Warren's work.

Having pointed out some of my differences with a number of Warren critics, I am compelled to say that I owe much to them for my own understanding of Warren. That debt will be made obvious by my references to their work in the body of this study. It will be clear that the disagreements I have with other critics are rarely if ever absolute. There is no established word on Warren, but there is a rich body of criticism that serves as substantial background for additional critical inquiry into his work. This is, indeed, an exciting time for the student of Warren.

The primary purpose of this study is to examine how Warren's ideas about the relationship between the self and an interconnected world have been born and borne out in selections from his poetry, novels, and prose studies of history and literature. A secondary purpose is to show how Warren's thinking developed from his own interpretations of American history and American literary history. Warren's philosophy developed over time, of course; and his major theme--the "inevitable osmosis of being"--and the subsidiary idea that the world is an enormous spider web are not codes or formulas by which he wrote, but beliefs about the human condition with which he tested time and time again the possibilities of a meaningful existence.

There is, however, a consistency of outlook which spans Warren's career and makes it possible to see in his creative writing a pattern that is consistent with the paradigm and the dialectic which I have defined in my first chapter. I should reiterate that by creative writing, I mean all of Warren's structured writing, for every attempt at understanding was, to his mind, a creative attempt.

Each major genre is considered separately in the study and organization is tightened by grouping the works specifically by sub-genre and/or subject within the three major divisions of non-fiction, poetry, and fiction. In chapter one, several of Warren's works are used as sources to define the major tenets of his philosophy. Chapters two and three add to the attempt to synthesize Warren's main philosophical and theoretical ideas through close analysis of his major non-fiction prose works. In chapter two, Warren's interpretation of the significance of two major historical issues--the Civil War and race relations in its aftermath--are examined. It is in this area that Warren's regionalism, his thinking as a Southerner, can most readily be discerned; therefore, I have chosen to treat these subjects early in the study. It is also in this area that the evolution of Warren's thinking is most clearly demonstrated in his own writing. Chapter three follows naturally with its focus on Warren's studies in American literary history.

Chapter four begins the attempt to identify in Warren's poetry the images and structures linked to his theory of knowledge by analysis of selected lyrical and short narrative poems. The shorter poems I discuss have, for the most part, received a good amount of critical attention before and so have tentatively begun to be established as Warren's most important short poems. A second criterion I have used in choosing from among the short poems is the range of subjects Warren addressed in his poetry. I have tried to include poems about as many different subjects as possible. There are poems considered here which are about love, about the parent-child relationship, about the significance of the past, about historical figures and events, and about events from the poet's past. Chapter five analyzes and connects the three major narrative poems: Brother to Dragons, Audubon: A Vision, and Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce.

The relation of prose style and narrative structure to the theme of knowledge can be traced in the novels, to which chapters six through eight are devoted. While all the novels receive some attention, the decision to emphasize five involved several factors. A discussion of Night Rider, Warren's first novel (1939), is appropriate in this study because it establishes a standard to which later characters and techniques can be compared to see Warren's development as a novelist. All the King's Men (1946) is,

of course, Warren's most highly acclaimed novel.[2] It is also his best treatment of a typical premise: a young man's involvement with a communal/political center, often a political party or a business organization, and how his quest for identity relates to that center. Wilderness (1961) represents Warren's most open application of his theories of history to fiction, and it is further distinguished by the fact that it is the only one of his novels in which the protagonist is not a Southerner. Meet Me in the Green Glen (1971) is Warren's most direct, fictional treatment of the theme of love. The last novel I devote a complete analysis to is Warren's final novel, A Place to Come to (1977). It reveals Warren's continuing interest in some of the major issues he was concerned with in the earlier novels and serves as a good point of conclusion not only for Warren's fiction, but for all his work before the final chapter, in which I consider Warren's place in American literature.

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[2]There have been some notable voices of dissent from this view, of course. Saul Maloff in The New Republic (3 March 1973) argues, among other things, that All the King's Men is a very bad novel which became an immediate critical success because of a general revulsion against the predominating proletarian literature of the preceding decade (30). William Faulkner wrote that Warren should have rejected the Willie Stark story to develop the Cass Mastern episode into a novel (Selected Letters of William Faulkner 239).

Chapter 1

WARREN'S KNOWLEDGE: SELFHOOD AND CONFLICT

Robert Penn Warren was one of the most prolific writers of the twentieth century. He published ten novels and eleven volumes of poetry, and four times his poetry appeared in a Selected Poems. He remains the only writer to have won a Pulitzer Prize for both poetry (twice) and fiction. Besides these accomplishments, he produced works in a number of other forms: short stories, drama, critical essays, history, biography and social criticism, not to mention his collaboration with Cleanth Brooks on two of the most influential textbooks for the teaching of literature--Understanding Poetry and Understanding Fiction. Warren demonstrated substantial courage in taking risks with form and subject--writing book-length, narrative poems and returning to the South to write studies on race relations, to name just two examples.

Yet Warren maintained an interest in a few central themes in all his work. The foremost of these themes is the theme of self-identity. He pursued this theme with two primary philosophical tenets: his conception of the world as an enormous spider web (AKM 200) and his sense of the importance of the past. The relationship between self-identity and an interconnected world is the most important factor in Warren's philosophy and art.

Warren himself provided a statement of the basic elements of his philosophy in the important essay "Knowledge and the Image of Man":

> . . . 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 implements of knowledge--books, libraries, laboratories, seminars--distinguish man from the brute. No, knowledge gives him his identity because it gives him an 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. (241)

Warren goes on, however, to say that man's identity depends on how he distinguishes himself from nature: man "disintegrates his primal instinctive sense of unity" ("Knowledge" 241). The terms Warren often uses for this disintegration are man's separateness or his Original Sin, terms that describe the condition of man's separateness from God, from nature, and from other men. Warren's sense of Original Sin has been defined by John Crowe Ransom as "the betrayal of our original nature that we commit in the interest of our rational evolution and progress" (211). Ninety years before Ransom wrote this definition, Herman Melville made a statement, while writing of Nathaniel Hawthorne's work, which can also be applied to Warren's idea of separateness: "Certain it is . . . that this great power of blackness in [Hawthorne] derives its force from

its appeals to that Calvinistic sense of Innate Depravity and Original Sin, from whose visitations, in some shape or other, no deeply thinking mind is always and wholly free. For in certain moods, no man can weigh this world without throwing in something, somehow like Original Sin, to strike the uneven balance" (406). In Warren's work, if man is perceptive, this "uneven balance" leads to his agony; but this pain may itself move him toward redemption. Perhaps this separateness is a Miltonic "fortunate fall." As Warren writes,

> In the pain of isolation [man] may achieve the courage and clarity of mind to envisage the tragic pathos of life, and once he realizes that the tragic experience is universal and a corollary of man's place in nature, he may return to a communion with man and nature. ("Knowledge" 241)

Man can, according to Warren, "return to his lost unity" through "the discovery of love, and law. But love through separateness, and law through rebellion" ("Knowledge" 241-42).

To attain vision is to achieve a synthesis of thought which establishes man's place for him in a holistic universe. For Warren, to attain vision is synonomous with achieving selfhood. In a later essay, Democracy and Poetry, Warren wrote of the implications of selfhood which have concerned him as a writer.

> I mean by the self; in individuation, the felt principle of significant unity.
>
> The qualifiers felt and significant demand special comment. By felt I mean that I am here concerned, not with a theoretical analysis as such,

> but with what a more or less aware individual may experience as his own selfhood, and what he assumes about other individuals. By significant I mean two things: continuity--the self as a development in time, with a past and a future; and responsibility--the self as a moral identity, recognizing itself as capable of action worthy of praise or blame. (Foreword xii-xiii)

The emphasis on the term felt here identifies Warren with a body of romantic thinking that minimizes the intellect in the search for self-knowledge. The intellect, in and of itself, implies a certain distance from the object under consideration. Emotional response to experience, rather than "theoretical analysis," determines the individual's view of himself.

Warren was not, however, a writer who suffered from a dissociation of his own sensibilities. What he believed, put quite simply, is that man lives by ideas which may give him an image of himself but that every idea by which he lives must be tested and borne out by experience, which constantly influences the shape of the ideas.

The second qualifier in Warren's definition of the self reveals two very important aspects of his world view, which he calls continuity and responsibility. Perhaps the worst thing that can happen to a character in Warren's poetry or fiction is that he or she loses sight of the past or the future as a shaping force in the present. The "osmosis of being" has temporal as well as spatial implications. Those spatial or social implications are suggested by Warren's emphasis on responsibility. As

Warren makes clear in the passage quoted above, the acceptance of responsibility is crucial. If man does not recognize his condition of separateness and clings instead to a dream of his innocence, he does not accept responsibility for himself. The consequences of such an uninformed life can be disastrous. Warren's imagery employed to present his idea of interconnection in "Knowledge and the Image of Man" is not nearly so frightening as his most famous image of interconnection in All the King's Men. Jack Burden, who has been studying the diary of Cass Mastern, draws the following conclusion from Mastern's life:

> 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. (200)

Despite this image of a ferocious God, which echoes Jonathan Edwards' image of the condition of sinners, one who has discovered self in Warren's works has a perception of his inner being which reflects the unity he perceives in the spider-web world. Man, if he achieves vision, is an integration of elements--an acceptance of the past, a sense

of the future, a sense of responsibility--and he is part of the larger integration of the one world, connected to all other men who live and who have lived and who, in at least one respect, have a common experience with him, the tragic experience of man's separation from the innocence of nature. The important question is how does man achieve a vision which synthesizes his inner being and gives him a place in the world. All of Warren's writing has been addressed in one way or another to this question.

Warren's remarks in "Knowledge and the Image of Man" reveal a three-stage paradigm of experience by which man may arrive at vision: (1) a disunion of the self with nature and society--Original Sin, (2) a struggle through a crisis of identity, (3) a return to unity based on the knowledge of the universal fall of man and an acceptance of experience and responsibility. For Warren, true vision can come to man only out of the pain of isolation. If man does not recognize his separateness, his "fall" from the perfect unity of nature, any peace of mind he has is a false peace, a peace based on an illusory innocence. To discover a way to live in a community requires that man struggle through a process by which he comes to terms with the disparity between the "idea" of what he thinks life should be, his innocence (sometimes called by Warren the "original dream" in juxtaposition with "Original Sin"), and the "reality" of the way he finds life to be, his experience. Warren's

definition of "reality"--"whatever any person might think validated his existence" (qtd. in Kehl 117)--reveals that, in Warren's lexicon, it is a term synonomous with the "selfhood" that may follow knowledge. For the perceptive mind, the disparity between the ideal and the factual is what Warren calls the terrible division of the modern age in one novel (AKM 462), but the body of his work makes clear that the "terrible division" has always been a human problem.

Yet the problem Warren refers to as the "terrible division" was intensified with the advent of Pragmatism, Progressivism and scientific positivism after the American Civil War. For Warren it is that war even more than the First World War which gave rise to the dissolution of a civilization and gave us our modernity. Warren returns to the Civil War again and again in his work. He does so in part because he is a Southerner with ancestors who fought in the war, but he also returns to the war because he sees it as the central conflict which intensified the conflict of the "terrible division" and paradoxically created the nation. For both North and South the War represented a loss of innocence. Warren sees in the conflict between the North and the South an inner conflict, but he also sees an inner conflict at work within each side and within the individuals who participated in the War. It is an inner conflict between innocence and experience, the fact and

the idea, knowing and not-knowing, love and separateness, all of which are terms Warren uses in various contexts to label the conflict. The process toward knowledge for Warren is dramatic as it follows the basic paradigm outlined above, but it is simultaneously dialectic as the individual swings between the poles of the central conflict. And the combination of these two movements has an enormous influence on Warren's structures.

The individual quest for selfhood overrides all other subjects in Warren's oeuvre--history, race relations, family, politics, composition, art, religion. All of these subjects are treated with an eye for what they mean to the individual. All are linked to the theme of the developing self through the process toward knowledge suggested by the basic paradigm of experience. However, the secondary subjects are nothing less, in some cases, than obsessions for Warren. No writer has been more consciously influenced by American history than Warren. American history and American literature were important, interrelated subjects, testing grounds really, for his developing theories of knowledge. The subjects of his works--poetic, fictional and non-fictional--have in common the conflict of idea and fact which Warren documents through his historical studies. Thomas Jefferson, John Brown, the Civil War, Jefferson Davis, segregation, the Civil Rights Movement--all have in common the disparity

between how they have been viewed by official history; how, in the case of the men, they viewed themselves; and how Warren interprets them as something between the idealistic notions associated with them and the factuality of the socio-historical context that shaped them, men or movements, into being what they were.

But the large historical event or figure is not ultimately Warren's chief concern as a historian. There is a strong link between personal history and national history in Warren's view. They become interrelated themes in his writings, even in the formal histories and works of social criticism. It can be reasonably argued, for example, that the integration of the individual personality is the major theme of works with such seemingly outwardly focused titles as Segregation, Who Speaks for the Negro? and The Legacy of the Civil War. Behind all these works lies Warren's key belief that the facts of history, personal or national, must be accepted and respected, in as much as it is possible for human beings to know them, in order for the individual to develop his selfhood through knowledge. For Warren, as L. Hugh Moore, Jr., has demonstrated, man must respect historical fact for very specific reasons. First, an awareness of historical facts is necessary to aid the individual in confronting his own sinful nature. Second, such an awareness tempers idealism, the clinging to false dreams by the idealist anyway, and thus serves as a

corrective. And "Finally, the facts will free one from a dependence on history, on the notion that things will work out well, that life is not a tragedy; this realization throws one back on his own human resources" (Moore 14). Thus, while Warren insists, in the end, on a doctrine of self-reliance, it is a far cry from the Emersonian brand, which finally alienates man from man and man from history with its majority-of-one philosophy and its disdain of the past. In contrast, Warren, closer philosophically to Melville and Hawthorne, implicates man in a brotherhood of complicity and defines the self as the awareness that grows out of that brotherhood.

Warren's career-long quarrel with Emerson is well known and has often been referred to in definitions of Warren's philosophy. Yet Warren's most thorough critic, James H. Justus, has very accurately noticed that Warren would probably agree with the definition of man that Emerson provided in "Fate."

> Man is not order of nature, sack and sack, belly and members, link in a chain, nor any ignominious baggage; but a stupendous antagonism, a dragging together of the poles of the Universe. He betrays his relation to what is below him,--thick-skulled, small-brained, fishy, quadrumanous, quadruped ill-disguised, hardly escaped into biped,--and has paid for the new powers by loss of some of the old ones. But the lightning which explodes and fashions planets, maker of planets and suns, is in him. On one side elemental order, sandstone and granite, rock-ledges, peat-bog, forest, sea and shore; and on the other part thought, the spirit which composes and decomposes nature,--here they are, side by side, god and devil, mind and matter, kind

> and conspirator, belt and spasm, riding peacefully together in the eye and brain of every man.
> ("Fate" 221-222)

While it is true that thinking of man as a "stupendous antagonism" and a "dragging together of the poles of the Universe" sounds very much like Warren's own dialectical thinking, and while Justus acknowledges that the "darker impulses and human instinct do not ride very peacefully together in most of Warren's characters" (Justus 3), there is limited usefulness in the comparison, finally, for it tends to discount the fundamental difference between Warren's philosophy of man as a creature of continuity and Emerson's philosophy of man as a creature capable of a transcendence and self-sufficiency which denies the continuity of the individual life.

The fundamental difference which Warren saw between his own philosophy and Emerson's might best be expressed in Warren's ontological concept of "inwardness." The concept of inwardness is one of the most important in Warren; and, like most of his philosophical concepts, applies to literary theory as well as ontology. Most simply, Warren means by inwardness what he has defined as the self in Democracy and Poetry, "a felt sense of significant unity." Inwardness is, generally, a deeper awareness of the spider's web than what one achieves through an abstract thinking--the kind of thinking behind most Abolitionism, Emersonianism, "higher lawism" and legalism--all methods

and schools of thought which Warren defines and takes to task in various works. Warren's concept of inwardness is similar to Carlyle's concept of "sincerity" in that both are conditions based on a willingness by the individual to test his actions by his motives in performing them. For Warren, no less than for Carlyle, such a willingness to confront the inner self constitutes a kind of heroism, as the examples Warren provides in such works as The Legacy of the Civil War will bear out.

More specifically, however, inwardness most often manifests itself as an awareness of the doubleness of life. The Civil War (and Warren emphasizes the inner conflict of a civil war) is important for its symbolic value. It is, like segregation, another of Warren's important subjects, symbolic of and related to the inner conflict of the individual. In the fiction and in the narrative poetry the same doubleness is often dramatized by the conflict between the man of action and the man of idea, by the conflict between public promise and private motive, or by the conflict between platonic love and sexuality.

One of the remarkable achievements of Warren's life's work is the wholeness of vision with which he wrote. One of the chief marks of that vision is what we may justifiably call his theory of knowledge, though Warren himself would not have thought of it as something he derived from theoretical analysis. Man's experience in

the spider-web world is massive and inscrutable even while the basic image of the spider's web suggests a frightening logic, and man knows himself by his attempt to understand his experience. The Civil War is monstrous, Warren says in The Legacy of the Civil War. The Civil War is "massively symbolic in its inexhaustible and sibylline significance" (Legacy 8). We cannot analyze the War, Warren writes,

> but we feel that we must try. We must try because it is a way of understanding our own deeper selves, and that need to understand ourselves is what takes us, always to the deeper contemplations of art, literature, religion, and history. (81)

Historical study, literature, and literary criticism are not only connected by the "need to understand ourselves," as Warren writes here, but also by the fact that they involve a common process. Any attempt to reduce Warren's poetic theory too easily to a formula is checked by the "fable" with which "Pure and Impure Poetry" begins. Like the Civil War, the poem is a monster, Warren says, and any critic who would trust his method--psychological, moralistic, formalistic, historical--or any combination of these to defeat the monster is trying to emulate the dexterity of Orillo by slashing off the monster's arms and throwing them into the river before they could reattach themselves. But the poem is an even more potent adversary than Orillo's foe.

> There is only one way to conquer the monster: you must eat it, bones, blood, skin, pelt, and gristle. And even then the monster is not dead, for it lives in you, is assimilated into you and

> you are different, and somewhat monstrous yourself, for having eaten it. (N&SE 4).

There is more here than Warren's impulse to be a storyteller even when he is being a critic. And there is more than an eccentric metaphor for the process of knowledge or a kind of coyness here. Warren's eating metaphor becomes meaningful in the context of his other works. For instance, in "The Interim," a poem in the "Tale of Time" sequence of poems about the relation of the personal and familial past to the self, these lines appear in answer to the question of what meaning there is in the past:

> You must eat [the dead] completely, bone, blood,
> flesh, gristle, even
> Such hair as can be forced. You
> Must undertake this in the dark of the moon, but
> At your plenilune of anguish. (N&SP 249)

The language in the poem, written over twenty years after the essay, is strikingly close to the language of the essay. The significance lies in the fact that the process of reading and understanding a poem is the same as "reading" and understanding history, personal or national. That process will always be painful and it will always end in failure because success will be an illusion. Full success is only possible if one leaves out certain elements, and on this point Warren attacks philosophical and critical systems which he sees as based on absolute knowledge. Doctrines of "pure poetry"--Poe's, Shelley's, Pater's, that of the Symbolists, the Imagists, etc.,--all

fail because of their common misconception that the meaning of a poem lies in a particular part of that poem (N&SE 20). Likewise, philosophies based on absolute knowledge--New England Transcendentalism, "higher lawism," "legalism"--fail because they do not account for facts inwardly but rather outwardly and abstractly. In short, the failure of such philosophical and critical approaches is the failure to recognize the meaning of an object or an event in full relation to its context and in its wholeness. Warren's "ingestive" theory sets itself against such systems of absolute knowledge. Knowledge is never absolute in Warren; it is always a tension between two poles with balance possible but not guaranteed. Warren's own recognition of what wisdom is available to man is expressed in his essay on Conrad:

> Wisdom . . . is the recognition of man's condition, the condition of the creature made without gills or fins but dropped into the sea, the necessity of living with the ever renewing dilemma of idea as opposed to nature, morality to action, "utopianism" to "secular logic" . . ., justice to material interests. Man must make his life somehow in the dialectical process of these terms, and in so far as he is to achieve redemption he must do so through an awareness of his condition that identifies him with the general human communion, not in abstraction, not in mere doctrine, but immediately. The victory is never won, the redemption must be continually re-earned. And as for history, there is no Fiddler's Green, at least not near and soon. History is a process fraught with risks, and the moral regeneration of society depends not upon shifts in mechanism but upon the moral regeneration of men. (N&SE 156-57).

History and poetry are both attempts at knowledge. Poetry is knowledge, as Warren says in "Knowledge and the Image of Man," a knowledge of form (244). Or as he said in his essay on The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, "knowing is making." Here Warren could well mean both the process of composition and of criticism, for the poet, if he is good, is self-critical, and the poem, if it is good, "involves the participation of the reader" (N&SE 25). Warren's conception of art as knowledge found its most succinct expression in his definition of the philosophical writer, which appeared along with his succinct definition of wisdom in the seminal essay on Conrad:

> The philosophical novelist, or poet, is one for whom the documentation of the world is constantly striving to rise to the level of generalization about values, for whom the image strives to rise to symbol, for whom images always fall into a dialectical configuration, for whom the urgency of experience, no matter how vividly and strongly experience may enchant, is the urgency to know the meaning of experience. This is not to say that the philosophical novelist is schematic and deductive. It is to say quite the contrary, that he is willing to go naked into the pit, again and again. (N&SE 160)

Warren is such a philosophical writer whose works were to a large extent inspired by the American past. If the Civil War gave America a "monstrous" image of inwardness by which to know itself, it also, with the formulation of pragmatism as a philosophy, made dominant a new way to live. The emerging concern with transportation and supply, especially after Grant's blunder in the Wilderness, the

emergence of the concept of total War, even such seemingly trivial developments as the large-scale production of ready-made clothes were all part of the "experimental intelligence, the experimental imagination" at work on both sides during the War (Legacy 16). The clash of the Monitor and the Merrimac is a similar example, even a symbol of the War as Warren saw it. The War did not create pragmatism, but it did something "to create a climate peculiarly favorable to the formulation of this aspect of intelligence as a philosophy" (Legacy 17).

In emphasizing the relation of the War to the development of pragmatism in America, Warren is partially following in the line of thinking that Melville established during the War and that William James refined. Several of Melville's poems emphasize the Machiavellian and scientific approach to war, expressing concern that the approach would obscure the dream of the Founding Fathers. Melville's genius was the inwardness expressed in such concerns, Warren argued in his assessments of Melville's work. James was closer to the thinking of a Lincoln in his inwardness, especially as expressed in the following lines from James' speech at the dedication of the Shaw Memorial, lines which Warren liked to quote: "the victory to be philosophically prayed for is that of the more inclusive side--of the side which even in the hour of triumph will to some degree do justice to the ideals in which the vanquished interests lay."

The thinking of such men has its corollary in the development in American literature of the growth of consciousness as a theme, especially in the works of writers such as Twain, Henry James, and Theodore Dreiser. Warren saw the fact that the existing conscience, a conscience which had its base in Orthodox Christianity and Idealism, was replaced by the theme of the educable consciousness as a primary measure of value as one of the primary developments of post-Romantic American literature. In technique Warren's writing often follows the tenets of Realism and Naturalism as those schools developed through various writers, but philosophically, despite the strong line of Naturalism that persists in his work, Warren's own thinking is significantly derived from the philosophy of Pragmatism as it was formally developed by William James.[1]

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[1]Warren's affinity with William James is quite strong. In fact, there may be nearly as many positive references to James in the body of Warren's work as there are negative references to Emerson. In his introduction to James for American Literature: The Makers and the Making, Warren singled James out among the age's "thinkers" for special praise:

> William James, with his roots (in a peculiar way) in Emerson, in his father's religious attitude to life, in his own scientific training, and in his taste for art, was trying to work out a philosophy that might carry the old values of moral will, social responsibility, democratic conviction, and religious faith into a period that, with scientific positivism on the one hand and cynical opportunism on the other seemed to deny all such values.
>
> (vol. 2, 1525-26)

Warren has declared his admiration for several nineteenth century Pragmatists. Along with Justice Holmes, Lincoln was admired by Warren as a man aware of the distinction between principle and reality, the "ought to be" and the "is," and the need to act on the second effectively without destroying all traces of value of the first. Holmes' idea that law must be based on experience rather than a priori assumptions grew from the War, which nourished "his tragic sense of life and his soldierly ethic" (Legacy 19). Warren sees Holmes, typically, caught between the poles of knowledge, in this case, the absolutes of "higher law" and "legalism." The great flaw in both of these absolute positions is that the ideas are not submitted to context. Such thinking manifests itself more often in flaming rhetoric than in logical application of principles to life. It is, like systems of pure poetry, absolute at the expense of concreteness and wholeness. There is also in such absolute thinking a moral failure, as Warren said of the general thinking which guided the post-war South, "to allow, through the inductive scrutiny of fact, for change, for the working of the life process through history" (Legacy 34).

The failure of both "higher law" thinking and "legalism" is that both are detrimental to the self-scrutiny necessary for the growth of knowledge; both are examples of philosophy divorced from life, "outwardness"

in thinking, which absolves the individual and the community of responsibility. Both give the individual and the community a false image of self. Warren saw Pragmatism as a compromise between Transcendentalism and Southern Society (Legacy 41). He saw it, in other words, as the same sort of dialectical thinking which complements the dramatic structure of much of his own work.

Chapter 2

ROBERT PENN WARREN AND AMERICAN HISTORY

In a large way Emerson, or a least Emersonian thinking, is the subject of Warren's first book: John Brown: The Making of a Martyr; for it is the Eastern abolitionist thinking of a Garrison combined with the "higher law" thinking of an Emerson and, finally, the ego of John Brown himself which make the martyr in this case. The biases of the book have long been noted, and Warren himself has called it a book "shot through with Southern defensiveness" (Who Speaks 320). The book is important, though, and, despite its bias, not without certain powers which became typical of Warren's later works. L. Hugh Moore praises Warren's accomplishment here of rendering the "texture" of the time and place (28). Yet Warren's achievement goes beyond verisimilitude. Political matters such as the Compromise of 1850 and the debate over the future of Kansas are treated with the same even-handedness and wholeness of vision exemplified in The Legacy of the Civil War.

The failures of the book, however, ultimately reveal more to the Warren reader, for the "southern defensiveness" is inextricably related to the not unworthy purpose of debunking abolitionist martyr-making. As a subject, therefore, John Brown appealed to Warren on several fronts. There were the several dramatic events to be

rendered which suited Warren's taste for the "big" scene in drama. There was the political conflict, played out in Warren's interpretation by the free-soil/slave-state polar contingencies. There was, of course, the maniacal figure of John Brown himself, who presented a fascinating study in the "image of man." And then there was the Sage of Concord, who did not act, but commented in a way that drew Warren's wrath. There is even a greater demonstration of sympathy for Brown than for Emerson, for Emerson had a greater hand, finally, in the "making" of the martyr. There is a foreshadowing of the tack his career would take in the fact that the subject of Warren's first book is the one which had become a focus of debate between the Hawthornesque/Emersonian schools of American Romanticism. And within this context, Warren's treatment of Emerson, Warren's early pronouncements on race, and his use of Brown as a study of the way man makes an image of himself are of primary importance to understanding the contribution this book makes to Warren's developing theories of knowledge.

Warren saw John Brown, in part, as an Emersonian man, a man for whom the past was nothing. He wrote, "John Brown never looked back; his past and history were simply an instrument for framing astounding future" (310). As such a man, Brown is a prototype, as Moore has said, for the type of Warren character who denies the significance of his

own past (110). But Emerson, too, is targeted as another type who was to develop in Warren's later fiction. This type may be called the complicitor. Warren wrote that Emerson and Thoreau, both of whom praised John Brown, did so out of a failure to see the facts. Warren attacked Emerson's comparison of Brown with Lincoln as a comparison that was true as far as matters of rhetoric went, but in matters of fact it was an inconsequential comparison (414). Warren also wrote that Emerson and Thoreau took Brown on Brown's own terms. They accepted too easily his own valuation of himself. Emerson thought Brown was "something . . . which would correspond to the fine ideas and the big word" of Transcendentalism (245). The Sage's chief failure, Warren contends, was that he lived in words, not facts. For Brown, on the other hand, vocabulary was only a valuable instrument, for the Brown whom Warren reveals is utilitarian rather than idealistic. Emerson, who exemplifies one strand of American innocence, could not understand how Brown's rhetoric could differ so from his own (245).

Warren attempts to divorce Brown from the casuistry of men like Emerson, Garrison, Parker, et al, whom he sometimes conveniently lumps together according to their responses to Brown. The relation between Brown and these men as Warren depicts it in the biography is interestingly like the relation between Willie Stark and his constituants

in All the King's Men and the relation between Lilburn Lewis, the slave murderer, and several other characters in Brother to Dragons. All of these relationships are variations of the dangerous relationship between the man of action and those who would have their ideas fulfilled vicariously through the man of action. John Brown acted murderously and was hailed, to Warren's great disgust, as a great exemplar of the "higher-law" thinking of distant Boston. The relation was mutual; for Brown, as the man of action, needed the complicitors' support. Warren wrote:

> [Brown] heard remotely, as an echo, the shouts from many people, thousands of people, who filled the paved streets of cities far to the East, the well-mannered applause of great men sitting in large, richly furnished rooms. That echo rose and multiplied in his mind, as the cheering rose between the poor, unpainted shacks and dwindled out into the wide silence of the prairie. (215)

To further characterize Brown, Warren uses the dialectic of "higher law" and pragmatism. In relation to Warren's theme of self-knowledge, Brown exemplifies yet another strand of American innocence. He is an "innocent" to the extent that he is single-minded. Warren's Brown is very conscious of the public figure he makes; he is a man who long before the culmination of events at Harper's Ferry learned the habit of dramatizing himself (JB 20). Warren finds Brown's willingness to act independently less a sign of self-reliance than a sign of an egotism which would not allow him to act jointly with others (JB 106). The massacre at Pottawatomie is central, for it was there,

Warren says, that Brown first developed a Machiavellian attitude toward means. That is, he learned that a "higher law" man, as Warren most often uses the term, is not obligated to regard the morality of his means. This thinking was justified for Brown by his favorite biblical verse: "Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin." Warren is aware of the curious marriage of pragmatism and divine ordinance at work in such a way of thinking and believes that Emerson understood only half of Brown's motivation when he said that Brown had made the gallows as sacred as the cross.

The heart of Warren's interpretation of John Brown's motivation is that Brown drove maniacally forward to achieve meaning for himself in the world. Here is Warren's explanation of Brown's refusal to avail himself of an insanity plea at his trial:

> It would have meant a repudiation of himself, and in comparison to such a thing the danger of the noose was inconsequential; it would have meant that he himself was nothing, and all his life, since the youthful period of doubt when he felt a "steady, strong desire to die," had been spent in ruthless, passionate attempt to prove to the world that he, John Brown, was something. (JB 401)[1]

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[1] In Light in August Faulkner's Joe Christmas uses similar reasoning as he refuses the peace of a life with Joanna Burden:

> Why not? It would mean ease, security, for the rest of your life. You would never have to move again. And you might as well be married to her. . . . No. If I give in now, I will deny all the thirty years that I have lived to make me what I chose to be. (232)

Both writers were drawn by the figure whose mania was manifested as the need to preserve the created self.

Warren's purpose is ultimately more than the debunking of a martyr. There is an interest in the psychology of the maniacal drive to publically be. It is an interest which also informs Warren's studies of Twain and Dreiser; and similar motivations drive, to one degree or another, such fictional characters as Willie Stark, Percy Munn, Jerry Calhoun, Jeremiah Beaumont, and Murray Guilfort. In John Brown, Warren saw what he interpreted as one side of a two-sided American phenomenon: the desire for recognition as a means of achieving self. Its antithetical counterpart is a desire for obscurity, an escape from self; and through several characters (Jack Burden, Jeremiah Beaumont, Amantha Starr, Isham Lewis) Warren dramatizes this desire in westward flight.

Besides its "higher law" versus pragmatism theme, John Brown is, along with "The Briar Patch," important as an early document on Warren's thinking about race. It is a revealing fact of Warren's development that these are also the two works toward which he later felt his greatest displeasure. Both contain some of his most unfortunate comments, despite the fact that Warren's ideas about race were liberal compared to those of some other Agrarians. Overall, however, Warren's honesty is not as measurable in any other area he chose to explore as on racial matters, and that honesty includes being honest with himself. Warren moved from being a segregationist in the thirties when he wrote John Brown and "The Briar Patch"--works in

which he argued that the black American was best suited to life on the farm--to being a forceful critic of segregation in the fifties and sixties when he wrote Segregation and Who Speaks for the Negro?. He had taken a hard look at himself as well as at American society. Yet he remained a critic who insisted on seeing segregation (as he insisted on seeing slavery) in the context of the culture of which segregation was a part.

Warren's early thinking about race relations was influenced by Agrarian philosophy. In a 1977 interview Warren said that the Agrarians had been right in their Jeffersonian vision of man's relationship to nature but they had also been "very ignorant" in expecting a society could be built on a system of small farms and small towns such as the one they proposed. Warren maintained, however, that subsistence farming "could take up a lot of slack" (Talking 221-22). In a self-revelatory passage in Who Speaks for the Negro?, Warren remembered the romantic view he had held of the rural dweller who retained his individuality by his close ties to the land and his isolation from modern industrial America (287). Warren's own agrarian innocence at this stage in his career is a parallel to the innocence of the American idealism he saw in Jefferson and later Emerson. In section two of chapter one of Who Speaks for the Negro?, a chapter entitled "The Cleft Stick" (Warren's phrase for "the tragic dilemma of

opposing goods, and opposing evils" [27]), Warren relates the entire work to the development of his own thinking about race, particularly to the composition of "The Briar Patch." He says,

> When I wrote the essay, I was a student in England, and had been out of the South for almost five years; and the image of the South I carried in my head was one of massive immobility in all ways, in both its virtues and vices--it was an image of the unchangeable human condition, beautiful, sad, tragic. (12)

It could be charged that this passage merely represents Warren's apologetics for his earlier segregationist politics; but this charge is less likely to be made by a thorough reader of Warren, especially a reader of his poetry, who understands that an image such as the one employed here is used often by Warren to suggest an inadequate or inflexible vision. The basic idea can be seen as Warren goes on to describe how the "unchangeable human condition" had changed and how the Depression had made him aware of the fact that there was no way to escape the notion of change. There was a need to "claw out" of the desperation of the Depression which made change necessary. Warren puts what he learned about the inadequacy of his image of the South in terms of another image by alluding to the primary image of Western knowledge:

> . . . you had to take a bite of the apple from the mysterious tree that had sprung up in the Confederate--no, the old American--garden. The apple might, incidentally, have given some knowledge of good and evil; but it certainly gave a

> knowledge of more profound consequence, the knowledge of the inevitability of change.
> (Who Speaks 12)

What Warren says he learned about the South is, of course, important, but just as intriguing is his fascination for how he learned it and his impulse to metaphorize and universalize that process. Basic to Warren's theory of knowledge is the idea that man's image of himself is constantly modified; and if Warren is to be taken at his word, the Depression was the instigation of that way of thinking for him.

The same dangers of reformist casuistry that concerned him in John Brown continued to be a focus for Warren in his later writing about both the Civil War and race relations. His analyses of the Civil War appeared in works entitled The Legacy of the Civil War, Jefferson Davis Gets His Citizenship Back and several articles on the subject besides. One novel, Wilderness, tellingly subtitled A Tale of the Civil War, is Warren's artistic attempt to interpret the meaning of that war in terms of individual identity, and another, Band of Angels, uses the War as a background for its major theme of the nature of freedom. These novels are very closely associated with Warren's historical and biographical writings on the War and its men, and the same issues are addressed in the two major studies on race relations, Segregation and Who Speaks for the Negro?. Both of these latter works are interesting social documents, but

both are also attempts by Warren to clarify his own understanding of the problem of race relations. Both developed to some extent out of his own dissatisfaction with "The Briar Patch." As Warren wrote in Who Speaks for the Negro?, the dissatisfaction was "like the discomfort you feel when your poem doesn't quite come off, when you've had to fake, or twist, or pad it, when you haven't really explored the impulse" (11). The fact that Warren makes this particular analogy suggests the common thread of imaginative inquiry that cuts across lines of genre in his writing. Segregation and Who Speaks for the Negro? are attempts to "explore the impulse," and they bear some similarities to Warren's middle and late poetry as conscious attempts to find a frame for knowledge. They are also, in a very large way, studies not to be separated from his studies of the Civil War and its complex of issues. The issues addressed in the two studies on race relations are part of the "legacy" of the war, and Warren viewed segregation at the "emotional equivalent" of slavery (Who Speaks 427).

Warren himself had very personal ties to the Civil War. Both his grandfathers fought for the Confederacy; they were, in fact, at Shiloh together. A predominant image from Warren's childhood which appears over and over in his writing is of his maternal grandfather sitting in a straightback chair in the yard telling tales of the War or

describing campaigns, complete with illustration of battle formations traced out on the ground with a stick for young Robert Penn sitting at his feet. This image is the starting point of Legacy and Jefferson Davis Gets His Citizenship Back. Thus Warren's way into history is always personal. The question always seems to be: What do these events mean to me?

The Legacy of the Civil War is Warren's most direct attempt to discover the meaning of the War in the totality of American experience. The very language of the opening paragraphs connects this study with Warren's philosophical statements on the relation of knowledge to selfhood:

> The Civil War is our only "felt" history--history lived in the national imagination. This is not to say that the War is always and by all men, felt in the same way. Quite the contrary. But this fact is an index to the very complexity, depth, and fundamental significance of the event. It is an overwhelming and vital image of human, and national, experience. (Legacy 4)

The emphasis on the imagination and on the "vital image" of experience echoes the idea expressed in "Knowledge and the Image of Man" that man knows by a process based on his own experience. The term "felt" relates the idea to the definition of self in Democracy and Poetry.

The "Revolution did not create a nation except on paper . . .," wrote Warren. "The vision had not been finally submitted to the test of history. There was little awareness of the cost of having a history" (Legacy 3). Before the Civil War America was like the "innocent" man,

like the Jefferson Warren created in Brother to Dragons, for instance. The problem with such innocence is a resulting destructive delusion: "the vision of the Founding Fathers, which men had suffered and died to validate, became merely a daydream of easy and automatic victories, a vulgar delusion of manifest destiny, a conviction of being a people divinely chosen to live on milk and honey at small expense" (Legacy 3). The Civil War, as Warren interprets its significance in Legacy, made Americans aware of the cost of having a history, a development which, to Warren's mind, created America.

As a "vital image" of identity the War is the Homeric period which marks America's true beginning for Warren. The heroes of the War are "figures," "images," as well as human. They were different from men of the present, Warren argues, in their individualism. They achieved identity by attempting to come to a moral awareness in a process that contrasts with the practices of the present age of conformity and uniformity. Without irony, or more accurately with an insistence on the necessity of irony, Warren also recognizes that a corollary to this individuality is a sense of community. He points for example to Pickett's admonition to his men at Gettysburg before charging the enemy: "Don't forget today that you are from Old Virginia!" Warren comments that "the notion of place has a natural relation to the notion of identity

in community, in the shared place" (Legacy 91). In short, the heroic figures of the War exemplify the dialectic of moral awareness outlined in Democracy and Poetry: a sense of oneself as a development over time and a sense of oneself as a responsible member of a community. Warren realizes that the appeal of such images of the men of the War is nostalgic, even at times, absurd. This does not to his mind, however, make the images less "true," for it is finally the "inwardness" of the War to which these images relate that makes it the beginning of America's real national history.

Strong Union sentiment in the South is one example of the doubleness Warren sees. More dramatic examples include the relationship of Generals Simon Bolivar Buckner and Ulysses S. Grant. Enemies in War, Buckner, who had once loaned money to the destitute Grant, surrendered to him at Fort Donelson. Warren emphasizes the ironic situation in writing of the visit Buckner paid later to the dying Grant:

> . . . when Buckner had come out from the dying man and the reporters demanded what had passed between them, he said, with tears in his eyes, that it was "too sacred."

And Warren adds,

> We may remember the Confederate generals, in their gray sashes, walking as pallbearers at the funeral of Grant. (Legacy 85-86)

Such images give the War its inwardness, its doublesidedness, the significance of which Warren clarifies to some extent by contrasting it with the Revolution, a war

that was in some ways too easy for Americans, at least as it exists in the national imagination. It offers no inner conflict. The fascinating theory is that it was only through inner conflict that America was born, and the same principle applies to the individual.

Warren sees that systematic thinking about the North-South conflict tended to be polarized and self-absolving rather than double-sided and self-incriminating. The worst excesses of Northern "higher law" thinking were seen in John Brown and his backers. James Redpath's assertion that if only one Negro survived the general slaughter of his race as the price of freedom, the price would be cheap for the return of that freedom is perhaps the most frightening example Warren can give (Legacy 20-21).

On the other hand, the South became a closed society, a defense for itself as real for Warren as the guns pointed north, for it refused any criticism of itself from the inside; it stopped growing; it rigidified. Warren's analysis here superbly documents the development of that rigid South which William Faulkner and other Southern writers, including Warren himself, dramatized clashing with a new order based on pragmatism and technology. A "new man" emerged which Warren sees represented in various degrees by Sherman, Grant, Lincoln, Justice Holmes, and William James. The failure of the Southerner in the end is

the same as the failure of the Abolitionist and Transcendentalist branches of Northern reformism--the lack of willingness to be self-criticizing. In The Legacy of the Civil War Warren sees self-criticism not only as a path to an existential knowledge, but also as a means of practical solutions to social problems. Pragmatism as it was practiced by men like Lincoln, Holmes and William James was a reaction to the disaster of the polar alternatives of "higher law" thinking and "legalism," the treatment of the Constitution as sacred and inviolable text. Warren wrote in Legacy that "the philosophy of pragmatism represented an attempt to establish the right relation between intellect and society--the relation which had been violated by the Transcendentalist repudiation of society, and Southern society's repudiation of criticism" (41).

Warren's frequent comparison of Davis's thinking to Lincoln's in Jefferson Davis Gets His Citizenship Back adds to his discussion of the "new manism" begun in Legacy. It is also a good indication of the evenness of his treatment. To say that the President of the Confederacy saw no magic in Emancipation would raise a smirk of irony, but to point out in the same paragaraph that the President of the United States held the same notion (JD 42) undermines one of the most cherished images of Northern self-righteousness. Warren also compares the two men in terms of their ambition; neither of them had a simple

ambition at either extreme, either "the trivial vanity of strut and preen, with no relation to accomplishment" or the "fuelling, depersonalizing devotion to an objective endeavor, the locale of which may be a poet's desk or a soldier's battlefield" (JD 52). The ambition of both is complex and ultimately unknowable in relation to the one's success and the other's failure, but in the complex of motivations Warren sees their motivation as a part of their difference from modern men. It involves and is involved in their struggle for moral awareness in action which Warren often contrasts with what he sees as the moral complacency of modern America.

Warren analyzes the differences between Davis and Lincoln in the context of polarized interpretations of the Constitution. The pragmatism that developed in the North, at first as a war-time attitude, is contrasted by Warren to the attitude of Southerners to show that the differences between Lincoln and Davis reflect differences between their societies to a large extent. Lincoln's willingness to give illegal orders during the War is indicative of the evolutionary attitude the North generally took toward the Constitution. Many Southerners, including Davis, "saw the Constitution as equivalent to the tablets that Moses delivered from Sinai" (62). Although Warren also wrote in Jefferson Davis that Davis did not regard slavery as an institution sanctioned by holy writ, there is no real

contradiction here on Warren's part. Instead Warren sees Davis as a tragic figure whose beliefs rigidified along with those of his region.

The basic difference in regional attitudes is further reflected in the pragmatic tactics of the North and the codified behavior of the South. Southern commanders were shot practicing the outmoded chivalric gesture of charging the enemy on horseback at the front of their troops. In fact, Warren argues that the Civil War saw within it the change from chivalric war to modern war, as exemplified by Sherman's policy of total war. This, he argues, was the result of the "logic of experience" (JD 66). Warren writes:

> There is a straight line of logic leading from Sherman's theory to Coventry, buzz bombs on London, the Dresden fire raid, the Tokyo fire raid, and Hiroshima. (JD 66)

Grant's "swap system" is another example of the practical new-manism. Grant "had an incalculable amount of blood to swap" (JD 67), and to strenghten his position he refused either truce for tending to dead and wounded or prisoner exchanges.

Warren's theory of new-manism is comparable in some ways to R.W.B. Lewis's theory of the American Adam applied to post-war culture. The new men of pragmatism were cut off from traditional society and its notions of values and conduct. The emergence of the new man during the War polarized the conflict between men of antique values and men of developing new values. The implications of that

conflict are very important to Warren's theme of knowledge. Warren, in many contexts, looks to the War and the late nineteenth century as the time when social upheaval led to shifting values for individuals and communities. Most notably, the new man was a man of educable consciousness; the traditional man had been a man of conscience. The chivalric gesture and a strong sense of state loyalty were signs of the hold of that conscience. So were the reservations about waging war on civilians of such pre-Sherman officers as General George B. McClellan, General George Gordon Meade and Colonel Robert Gould Shaw (JD 65).

The conflict between a rigid society and the emerging consciousness in the works of Mark Twain and Henry James reflects the conflict Warren is identifying here, and like his predecessors, Warren was interested in the effect of the conflict on self-knowledge, or to use the more Jamesian phrase, the growth of consciousness. The comparison between Lincoln and Davis and the broader comparision between Northern and Southern societies are ultimately comparisons between two ways of knowing.

From these polar reactions of North and South to the War Warren formulates in The Legacy of the Civil War his dual theory of regional absolution--the Treasury of Virtue and The Great Alibi. These he labels interestingly as "psychological" costs of the War because each represents a

way of repressing individual and regional responsibility for the horror of the War.

The Great Alibi is the Southerner's sense that he is trapped in history, and as theory it is at once Warren's most scathing attack on his own region and his most perceptive explanation for its failure to deal humanely and responsibly with the poverty and racial strife that have plagued it.

> By the Great Alibi the South explains, condones, and transmutes everything. By a simple reference to the "War," any Southern female could, not too long ago, put on the glass slipper and be whisked away to the ball. Any goose could dream herself (or himself) a swan--surrounded, of course, by a good many geese for contrast and devoted hand-service. Even now, any common lyncher becomes a defender of the Southern tradition, and any rabble-rouser the gallant leader of a thin gray line of heroes, his hat on saber-point to provide reference by which to hold formation in the charge. By the Great Alibi pellagra, hookworm, and illiteracy are all explained, or explained away, and mortgages are converted into badges of distinction. Laziness becomes the aesthetic sense, blood-lust rising from a matrix of boredom and resentful misery becomes a high sense of honor, and ignorance becomes divine revelation. By the Great Alibi the Southerner makes his Big Medicine. He turns defeat into victory, defects into virtues. Even more pathetically, he turns his great virtues into absurdities--sometimes vicious absurdities.
> (Legacy 54-55)

While the Southerner feels conveniently trapped in history, the Northerner feels automatically redeemed by history with his heritage of the Treasury of Virtue. Here the image of the self may be based on a rewriting of history that suits the deepest needs of the Northerner.

> He knows, as everybody knows, that the War saved the Union. He knows, as everybody knows--and as Lincoln, with sardonic understatement, said--that slavery was the sine qua non of the War. But that sine qua non is not enough for the deep need for justification. Even "almost all," if the all is salted with psychological and historical realism, is not enough. The sine qua non has to become a secretly enshrined ikon of a boy in blue striking off, with one hand, iron shackles from a grizzle-headed Uncle Tom weeping in gratitude, and the other passing out McGuffey's First Reader to a rolypoly pickaninny laughing in hope.
>
> (Legacy 60)

Together the Treasury of Virtue and the Great Alibi represent the complete failure of self-awareness as Warren defines it in Democracy and Poetry--a sense of continuity and responsibility. Inheritors of the Treasury of Virtue fail to recognize the relevance of history to the present and those of the Great Alibi fail to realize their responsibility in an interconnected world. In the end Warren relates the disparate regional responses to the War to the importance of the study of history for the individual in the present. Self-awareness is the linking of past and future for Warren, and self-awareness is simultaneously an achievement of imaginative interpretation of historical fact and a perspective from which to study the past.

The Treasury of Virtue and The Great Alibi extend their influence far into the twentieth century. Warren finds examples of both ways of thinking in Segregation. Warren early establishes both patterns of thinking in the book with two vignettes portraying what he labels the

cliché of fear and the cliché of hate. In the first a black woman tells of her fear for herself and her children after her husband has been murdered by a white man. "It is the thing the uninitiate would expect," Warren writes (Segregation 9). It is, in other words, a fulfillment of what an inheritor of the Treasury of Virtue would expect. The other image is of a white boy Warren met at a replica of Fort Nashborough. The boy had hitchhiked from Atlanta to see "things that got history, and such." When Warren mentions recent racial conflicts that have occurred in Atlanta, the boy launches into an angry attack on the troublesome "Niggers" (Segregation 10-11).

"This, too, is a cliché," Warren writes.

> The boy, standing on the ground of history and heroism, his intellect and imagination stirred by the fact, shudders with that other, automatic emotion which my question had evoked. The cliché had come true: the cliché of hate. And somehow the hallowedness of the ground he stood on had vindicated, as it were, that hate. (Segregation 11)

In this image Warren captures the stance of the Great Alibi. The Great Alibi is seen through the Southern White who feels he cannot tolerate desegregation because to accept it would be a repudiation of what he thinks is his past.

There is another treatment of the "Treasury of Virtue" in the book in Warren's criticism of the New York press. As Warren explains what he sees as the "informed and reasoned" suspicion of the New York press by Southerners,

it is clear that he thinks the Northern press is guilty of the same abstractionism that was to be seen in many abolitionists:

> I have seen a Southern newspaper man of high integrity and ability (an integrationist, by the way) suddenly strike down his fist and exclaim: "Well, by God, it's just a fact, it's not in them not to load the dice in a news story!" And another, a man publicly on record against the Citizens Councils and all such organizations: "Life magazine's editorial on the Till case, that sure fixed it. If Till's father had died a hero's death fighting for liberty, as Life said, that would have been as irrelevant as the actual fact that he was executed by the American army for rape-murder. It sure makes it hard." (Segregation 15)

With such examples, the book goes beyond clichés and extremes in search of context. There is even one of the most difficult problems which could confront the white interviewer, the exclamation by an educated black man that "No white man ever born ever understood what a Negro is thinking. What he's feeling." And then the man adds the factor which reveals the complex relation of self and society: "And half the time that Negro . . . he don't understand either" (17).

In Who Speaks for the Negro?, despite the high level of objectivity Warren achieves through the interview format, there is little doubt with what speakers he is in ideological agreement or disagreement. However, more important for Warren than the ideological biases of the speakers is the method of thinking which is revealed in their answers to his questions. Nils Douglas, Lolis Elie,

Martin Luther King, Jr., and others are admirable, or at least deserving of sympathy, because each thinks inwardly and reveals a doubleness that plagues or enhances him. On Lolis Elie's belief that "there is more public opinion now to enforce race justice than there was," Warren writes:

> These recollections of a discovered rapport, a new sympathy, undergird, it would seem, his notion that the moral climate has improved. But there is that other side of him, the angry fatalism that denies all social progress, and makes him cry out and demand when--when!--will white men recognize him as a man. It is this angry fatalism that had made him tell me, the day before, that he was about ready to become a Black Muslim, that he was about convinced that the white man is a white devil and "there's nothing in his history to disprove it."
>
> Lolis Elie . . . is caught in a cleft stick. But not of history. Of himself. (Who Speaks 40-41)

More aware of his own inwardness and its relation to race justice is Martin Luther King, Jr. Warren's interpretation of King's demeanor is striking:

> I have mentioned the physical compactness, the sense of completeness, that Dr. King gives. This is related to something else, something more significant, that appears as soon as you put a question to him. Even if it is a question that you know he has heard a hundred times before, there is a withdrawing inward, a slight veiling of his face, as it were. There is the impression that for an answer for even that old stale question he must look inward to find a real answer, not just the answer he gave yesterday, which today may no longer be meaningful to him. It is a remarkable trait--if my reading is correct: the need to go inward to test the truth that has already been tested, perhaps over and over again, in the world outside. (Who Speaks 210)

Warren's admiration for these men, especially King, is based on their respect for reality, that which validates their existence for them, even in the pursuit of their

idealistic goals. Or if the feeling is not admiration, it is usually an understanding of the plight of an unresolved wrestling with doubleness. Other leaders Warren treats respectfully while yet finding indications of their unwillingness to face the complexity of the issues. There is fact behind Charles Evers' rhetoric, but the rhetoric disturbs Warren:

> He is not talking to me, across the desk, in the room above Lynch Street. He is talking to a hall full of people, to a meeting under the blazing sky, to a crowd. Or talking to himself. I wish he could really remember what he and Medgar [Evers] had really said, word for word. It is not a question of there being no truth behind the rhetoric. But I feel that the truth--and the emotion of that truth--have become officialized. (Who Speaks 102)

The appraisal here distinguishes Evers from a man like King by more than ideology. Each is measured by whether he views the problems inwardly or outwardly.

The attitude of Malcolm X is for Warren, "Like the Ku Klux Klan in reverse" (Who Speaks 161). When Malcolm X says he is not interested in any man's moral nature, Warren recoils, comparing him to Machiavelli, Bishop Paley and Stalin. Malcolm X's chief failure is his conception of history as doom (Who Speaks 256-57), a conception which absolves the individual of moral responsibility. James Baldwin is another interesting example. Baldwin is in Warren's estimation an admirable writer of power who understands the relation between racial integration and personal integration, but there are two Baldwins: the

polemicist who attacked William Faulkner and the author of The Fire Next Time. Warren's comparison of Baldwin with Faulkner is yet another approach to the theme of reality beneath the facade or the official face:

> . . . the real Baldwin and the real Faulkner are, in one way, very much alike: both are concerned with "truth" as lived, are concerned with the density of experience and the inevitable paradoxicality of feeling, with the shifting depth of being. Both are willing to recognize the tearing self-division that may be implicit in experience, to recognize that the logic of experience is multiphase and contradictory; and are yet willing to submit themselves, without reservation, to this risk of experience.
> (Who Speaks 296-297)

Each writer has sought the knowledge of self through drama, but Faulkner's "reality [is] absorbed into the objective thing created" (Who Speaks 297). Baldwin's drama is subjective. As Warren says, we think of Faulkner's characters when we think of Faulkner, but of Baldwin himself when we think of Baldwin, "for what Baldwin has most powerfully created is a self" (Who Speaks 297).

This dialectic of attitudes is emphasized by Warren as he compares and contrasts an answer of one interviewee with his recollection of that by another. The approach to race-related problems is thus constantly measured against standards of selfhood. How much of what is revealed is really a face? How much an inward conviction that has been tested and re-tested? These seem to be the uppermost questions behind the questions Warren asks. Even recurring questions, especially questions about the validity of W.E.B.

Dubois' theory of the "psychic split" in the black race and Gunnar Myrdal's pragmatic theory that Southern planters should have been compensated for their losses after the Civil War, seem intended to gauge the degree of self-exploration the interviewee is willing to risk for an answer.

Party-line, "officialized" thinking (what Warren sometimes called "right" thinking) on any issue was repugnant to Warren as a danger to individualism. It is in writing of such ways of thinking that Warren often reveals his deep regionalist sense and his belief that, as an outsider from the main forces and values of modern American life, the Southerner has something in common with the Black and the Jew. The most dangerous thing they have in common is the tendency to "accept the values of the dominant group and internalize them." Self-hatred is often a result of this process because "the most destructive value that can be internalized is the certainty which the dominant group holds of its own total superiority" (Who Speaks 55). Near the end of Who Speaks for the Negro?, in a passage which does much to raise the book above whatever datedness it suffers, Warren reveals an interconnectedness of seemingly polarized groups. The passage also reveals Warren's refusal to succumb to an easy liberalism, as well as his suspicion of those who do succumb.

> It is easy to say to the Southerner that he should give up his Southern-ness and just be a good

> American. It is easy to say to the Negro that he should give up his Negro-ness and just be a good American--who is got up in blackface. Negroes and white Southerners do, in fact, want to be Americans, but by and large they want to be themselves too; and the fact that both belong to minorities means that both may cling defensively to what they are, or what they take themselves to be. They may refuse to be totally devalued, gutted, and scraped before being flung into the melting pot. But that is one solution, and some Negroes and white Southerners, in self-hatred--sometimes self-hatred disguised as liberalism--or in self-seeking, accept it; they "pass."
> (Who Speaks 426-27)

"Passing" here is a psychological cost equivalent to the Treasury of Virtue and the Great Alibi. The solution Warren prefers to "passing" is an awareness of one's self in relation to a history that is not conceived of as a doom or as a pattern of frozen moments. For the Southerner it means "to inspect what his Southern-ness really means." He would learn, among other things, that the South was not a rigid, closed society before 1861-65; that he could continue to honor his Confederate heroes (several of whom were not adherents of slavery) for their virtues; that if he looked deeper than the rhetoric he "might decide that being against segregation would not necessarily mean that he is spitting on grandpa's grave." He would learn that history "is a story of the constant revision of value" and he might, through discovering his past, discover himself (Who Speaks 427-28).

This process toward knowledge requires a "creation" of reality for Warren, reality meaning, again, whatever

validates life for the individual. "Creation" here should not be confused with "fabrication." It is instead a term for an imaginative process that approximates reality, often in the form of story or myth; it is not haphazardly that Warren defines history as the story of changing values. The attitude toward history that Warren recommends is summed up as he applies the Treasury of Virtue and the Great Alibi polarity to the widely held theory of the War's inevitability, a theory that would, of course, absolve both sides of responsibility.

> The Great Alibi and the Treasury of Virtue--they come back again to us as soon as we begin to speculate about the inevitability of the Civil War and undertake the sorting out of causes which that entails. This does not mean that historians should give up the topic. It merely means that historians, and readers of history too, should look twice at themselves when the topic is mentioned. It means that we should seek to end the obscene gratifications of history, and try to learn what the contemplation of the past, conducted with psychological depth and humane breadth, can do for us. What happens if, by the act of historical imagination--the historian's and our own--we are transported into the documented, recreated moment of the past and, in a double vision, see the problems and values of that moment and those of our own, set against each other in mutual criticism and clarification? What happens if, in innocence, we can accept this process without trying to justify the present by the past or the past by the present? We might, then, ask the question about inevitability in the only way that is fruitful--in the recognition that there can never be a yes-or-no answer, but that the framing of perspectives of causality and context, as rigorously as possible even though provisionally, fulfills our urgent need to try to determine the limits of responsibility in experience. (Legacy 99-100)

This passage represents Warren's most succinct statement on the relation between history and imaginative

knowledge. A synonym for "innocence" as it is used in this passage would be, oddly, logic, for by both terms Warren often means the attempted objective appraisal of fact, even though he is always aware of the impossibility of total objectivity just as he is aware of the limitations of imaginative seeking. Warren emphasizes the inevitable failure of achieving complete understandings, and that inevitable failure necessitates that formulations be tentative. There is no illusion for Warren that these ideas were original; but he stresses them often as if he is attacking another, more predominant way of thinking, as if he wants always to challenge a tendency to gloss over American history or to smooth out its rough edges. "Officialized" rhetoric is always suspicious, a fact which undermines the most precious notions of both the Treasury of Virtue and the Great Alibi. To claim full understanding in itself entails a lack of self-criticism. Yet Warren emphasizes the necessity of juxtaposing the past and the present for mutual criticism. The past is a rebuke to the present, but it must itself be criticized from the standpoint of modern values. This is exactly the premise behind such cross-historical interchanges as those between Cass Mastern and Jack Burden in All the King's Men and Thomas Jefferson and R.P.W. in Brother to Dragons. Most critics who have misread Warren, especially in regard to a work such as Brother to Dragons in which he treads on

sacred historical ground, have done so because they have not grasped that the juxtaposition of the past and the present is for the sake of a mutual criticism.

The imagination's importance in Warren's proffered solution can hardly be overstated. The imagination is for Warren that creative faculty by which one identifies himself with the past and feels himself into the future, whereby he becomes aware of himself as part of a continuity of human life. And he is also aware of himself as a moral agent who will speak, not in lingo, but out of inwardness. Of black leadership, for instance, Warren optimistically writes in his conclusion of Who Speaks for the Negro?:

> . . . there is a growing will to confront the risks of the future, whatever they may be. And there is a growing awareness that more than courage is required to face those risks. Many Negro leaders--more and more of them--are becoming aware of the fundamental need for an act of imagination to deal as systematically as possible with that fog of contingency which is the future. For many know that if you do not try to feel into, predict, and examine the possibilities of the future, you will become the victim of the future. (416)

The Great Alibi and the Treasury of Virtue, the "new man" and the traditional man, the cliche of fear and the cliche of hate, the codified South and the pragmatic North, Lincoln and Davis, Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, James Baldwin and William Faulkner--the very proliferation of the terms employed in Warren's dialectic reveals his recognition that American experience is multitudinous and resistant to theoretical analysis even while he brings a

remarkable wholeness of vision to it. After "The Briar Patch" and John Brown: The Making of a Martyr, that wholeness of vision is achieved in large part by Warren's theme of imaginative knowledge. Even with the differing genres and the variety of methods that he used, the non-fiction prose is bound together and achieves its power by Warren's willingness to submit the material to imaginative constructs.

One method by which Warren attempts to explore the significance of events which did occur, for example, is by constructing an alternative scenario. One such scenario is used in his comparison of Lincoln and Davis in Jefferson Davis Gets His Citizenship Back:

> Less than a year after little Jeff's birth--before he could have character or aspirations worth mentioning, of course--another man-child was born, some hundred miles away in Kentucky, in another log cabin, to even poorer parentage. The parents of Abraham Lincoln were somewhat ambitionlessly caught up in a drift northward, across the Ohio and into frontier country, where, in spite of poverty and hardship, the boy, driven by some remorseless will to excel, reached out for learning and for a place in the world of power which would be worthy of the self he felt he was. By early middle age, the boy born in the frontier cabin was a success, living in a spacious white house in town, practicing law for good fees, and dabbling in politics. . . . What would have happened if Thomas Lincoln had followed the drive to Mississippi as the land where energy and cunning in a new fluidity might make a man great--the same land that William Faulkner's great-grandfather came to as a penniless youth and that Faulkner himself was to write about? Or what would have happened if Samuel Davis had sought his luck northward across the Ohio? How much is a man the product of his society? (28-29)

The point is suggested, not untypically, by interrogatives, a rhetorical device that suggests the tenuousness of knowledge. The main point of Warren's rhetorical inquiry is not that all could have been different, though it does suggest that possiblility. It is instead that man is known in context. This does not mean that he is doomed to think a certain way, but that the way he does think is tested against the way of his society. Imagining the alternative scenario is an exploration of the possibility of meaning and definition in the actual scenario of history.

The theme of imaginative knowledge is also a corollary to Warren's personal approach. What James Justus has said about Who Speaks for the Negro? is not without relevance to most of Warren's later non-fiction:

> Who Speaks for the Negro? is personal in its exploration of freedom and fate, motive and act, the contingency of events and the exertion of will, the paradoxes of history, identities both private and public, the pragmatic uses of an idea, the psychology of the reformer: in brief, the subjects and themes that account for the aesthetic integration of Warren's work as a whole. (Justus 150)

In a recent article Hugh Ruppersburg accurately sees that the value of Who Speaks for the Negro? lies in the fact that it was an attempt by Warren "to investigate in the matrix of contemporary affairs the important themes of his poetry and fiction" and also that the book is "informed by Warren's characteristic vision of American history in process" (116). What both Justus and Ruppersburg have

seen is that Who Speaks for the Negro? sprang, as did Warren's poetry and fiction, from his own need to know what the issues meant in the complex of an interpenetrating self and society. There is an almost constant interplay between personal and social experiences in Who Speaks for the Negro? which makes the book's underlying theme of the interconnection of human experience all the more apparent. The interview with Robert Moses provides a good example. At one point during the interview, Moses mentions a conversation he once had with his father, and Warren's memory of his own father is triggered by what Moses says.

> And I am thinking of my own father. He was born in 1869, son of a Confederate veteran, and raised in the Reconstruction South. His mother died when he was quite young, and his father when he was in his teens, leaving several younger children, three of them by a second wife who was not much older than my father himself. He buckled down to run the family, postponing his own ambitions, studying at night, later taking courses at a little college at night--or rather, being tutored by an instructor at the college. I have his old Greek and German grammars, faded, yellow, falling apart. I have lost the old copy of Dante's Inferno with the illustrations by Doré, which had belonged, I think, to his father. I have the poems he wrote; I had an anthology in which one or two were printed, more than sixty-five years ago, but it is lost. He studied law by himself, the copies of Blackstone and Montesquieu were in the house for years. Meanwhile, he did his duty to the family left in his charge. He got married fairly late.
>
> I am remembering what the father of Robert Moses said to him "about whether he was satisfied or not--you know, his whole purpose in life," and how "he had decided to put his energies into his personal family," and I hear in my head, clear as can be, my own father's voice--an old man's voice--saying to me that he had had to choose, had had to realize that certain things were not for him, but he was happy.

> I think, then, that I understand something about Robert Moses. (Who Speaks 99-100)

The knowledge comes here through the imaginative act which creates connections, this time through a double layering of memory: Warren's memory of what Robert Moses recently said, and the memory of what his own father had said years before.

Warren's feelings about his own father were very important to his development. Eventually he even wrote a memoir, Portrait of a Father, in which he elaborated on the sacrifices that marked his father's life. An awareness of those sacrifices may, indeed, have prompted the question Warren put to Moses which led to the revelation of an interconnectedness of experience to begin with: "Had your father had ambitions like your own?" (Who Speaks 90). It is relevant to consider Warren's relationship with his father briefly, for it will help to reiterate the point being made about Warren's personal and imaginative approach to knowledge. In its very structure Portrait of a Father is a memory piece. Warren admits that there is much which he does not know and that the memoir is not the product of extensive research into his father's life. His real concerns are suggested by his preference for "a chronology of vividness and sequence, not of event, but of recollection" (Portrait 30); and what he attempts to set down in Portrait is what the father is in the son's mind, which is the significant reality for Warren as the book

itself suggests. To corroborate this interpretation there is a passage Warren wrote in a letter dated January 7, 1985, two years before "Portrait of a Father" appeared as an essay in The Southern Review in the spring of 1987:

> I never really knew my father, except as a kind of benign presence until after my mother died--when I had been away since the age of fifteen. Then I discovered him [and] for many years--until he died at the age of 85, we saw each other often. Often took trips together. And discovered each other. After his death he became more real to me than ever. If being an obsessive subject for poems means "being real." (Letter to the author)

There is a parallel between the development of Warren's father from a "benign presence" into a dynamic part of his life and the awareness expressed in Who Speaks for the Negro? of how his thinking about the South had changed. The parallel is in the kinetic process of a subject's transformation from a static image into a moving one. The imagination's importance in the transformation is strongly suggested by one sentence in the passage from the letter: "After his death he became more real to me than ever." The composition of Portrait of a Father may have been Warren's attempt to vitalize that reality the way the composition of Who Speaks for the Negro? was an attempt to vitalize and clarify another reality: that change is essential.

Even the structures as well as the content of Segregation and Jefferson Davis Gets His Citizenship Back reflect both the personal impulse that gave rise to their

compositions and Warren's creative exploration of the meaning of historical material.

Segregation is important in the scheme of Warren's body of work for both its method and its theme of self-division. The subtitle, The Inner Conflict in the South, refers to both a regional division and a widespread inner division among Southerners. The point again is that history bears its relation to the individual in the spider web of the world.

Though most of the book is a reporting of conversations Warren had with people in the South on the subject of desegregation, it can be usefully regarded as a book of three parts because of the particular way in which it begins and ends. The structure actually reflects the theme of discovery, for it follows a pattern of Warren's own separation from the experience he is exploring, his recollection of the engagement with the experience, and, finally, an assessment of its meaning.

Warren's way into his subject is personal:

> "I'm glad it's you going," my friend, a Southerner, long resident in New York, said, "and not me." But I went back, for going back this time, like all the other times, was a necessary part of my life. I was going back to look at the landscapes and streets I had known--Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas, Mississippi, Louisiana--to look at the faces, to hear the voices, to hear in fact, the voices in my own blood. A girl from Mississippi had said to me: "I feel it's all happening inside of me, every bit of it. It's all there."
>
> I know what she meant. (3)

But he leaps from this to the end of the experience, his departure from Memphis and the South on a plane; and the plane's-eye view of the South at the beginning of the book suggests the separateness of the native son who has come back, not for comfort like a prodigal son, but for an understanding of what it is that he feels separated from. From the plane the South seems very distant now.

> It seems like a thousand years since I first drove that road [Highway 61], more than twenty-five years ago, a new concrete slab then, dizzily glittering in the August sun-blaze, driving past the rows of tenant shacks, Negro shacks set in the infinite cotton fields, and it seems like a hundred years since I last drove it, last week, in the rain, then toward sunset the sky clearing a little, but clouds solid and low on the west like a black range of mountains frill upward with an edge of bloody gold light, quickly extingushed. (Segregation 4)

The purpose of Warren's method of introduction seems to be to make the body of the book appear as a reflection of his memory. The experiences of the last few weeks are framed as "past" experiences over which the mind now pauses. The experiences are presented thus not as hard-core, journalistic reports, but as memories Warren is putting on the pages. This process suggests that he must go back into the experience of the inteviews to gain some meaning from them.

The conversations which make up the bulk of Segregation are rendered in vignettes. Effectively, these vignettes become images with which Warren creatively suggests the multiplicity of perspectives on the problem. The vignettes

are rendered in rapid succession, with Warren making connections between them simply by iterating the questions which are raised by the images of people talking: What are the white man's reasons for segregation? Is it only power he wants to retain? What does the Negro want? Do the feelings of the black man toward the exclusions of segregation differ from the feelings of any man confronting the necessary exclusions of life? The answers are multiple, whether the questions apply to both or only one of the races. Within the space of a few pages, for example, the reader hears the opinion of a black man that the white man is a complete mystery to him. Another says with certainty that the white man is motivated by his fears of mongrelization. Then a "hill-man" organizer for the Citizens Council says, "The Court . . . hit caint take no stick and mix folks up like you swivel and swull eggs broke in a bowl. Naw . . . you got to raise 'em up, the niggers, not bring the white folks down to nigger level." This same man says, in answer to Warren's question of how, that by education, segregated, of course, the blacks will be raised. Then follows the report of a black grade-school teacher's saying, "You ought to see the school house I teach in . . . set in the mud and hogs can come under it, and the privies set back in the mud. And see some of the children that come there, out of homes with nothing, worse than the school house, no sanitation or cleanness, with

disease and dirt and no manners. You wouldn't blame a white person for not wanting the white child set down beside them." Then there is the white segregationist, a spouter of ethnology, saying, "Take India. They are a pure white people like you and me, and they had a pretty good civilization, too. Till they got to shipping on a little Negro blood. It don't take much to do the damage. Look at 'em now." Then there is the intellectual Baptist minister, who refers to Acts 17: "This is the passage the integrationists are always quoting to prove that integration is Christian. But they won't quote it all. It's the end that counts." And Warren plays his part by supplying the passage: "And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation" (Segregation 18-26).

The method, multi-themed, perhaps cacophonous, is simply to let people talk, to listen to the human voice trying to express human feeling. One realizes within a few pages that Warren was revealing his technique when he opened the book by saying he was after "the voices in [his] own blood" (emphasis added). Moreover, the method of presenting the material as memory suggests that the words and events are indeed happening inside him. One of the most striking things about the method is its similarity to that of Warren's book-length poem Brother to Dragons, the

original version of which had appeared three years earlier in 1953. In that poem Thomas Jefferson and the other "voices" meet at an unspecified place and time to speak about the significance of the brutal past, the murder by Jefferson's nephews of a slave. One of the voices in that poem is that of R.P.W., whose role is similar to that of Warren's in Segregation, even down to the point that it is that figure alone who must come to some meaning in the end. The common points of the two works suggest yet again something of the significance of imaginative inquiry as a theme of Warren's total work.

With the theme of "inner conflict" in Segregation, Warren emphasizes his theory that the fate of the individual is tied ultimately to the fate of a society, to a brotherhood. Warren frames the narrative of his experiences during the trip back to the South by returning again near the end to the flight of his plane out of Memphis and describing the relief from responsibility he had felt as the Southerner leaving the South. It is, of course, the same relief from responsibility his friend had expressed in the book's opening line: "I'm glad it's you going [back to the South] . . . and not me." Warren recognizes the feeling as the relief of flight from reality, a major theme in all his works, for it is often by flight that Warren illustrates the failure of man to live up to himself. Given Warren's definition of reality as

that which validates man's life for him, flight from reality is a flight from self. In this case he realizes that the reality being fled from is "the fact of self-division."

The conclusion of Segregation simultaneously suggests the problem of self-division and the inward approach Warren thinks the problem requires. In the interview with himself Warren actually creates two voices; the voice of the interviewer is rendered in the tone of a somewhat distanced persona, the interviewee in that of a Southerner who is aware of the responsibility of self. Yet the technique reveals a doubleness in Warren himself which gives yet another meaning to the "voices in [his] own blood." A brief quote will illustrate the tone and pattern.

> Q. You're a Southerner, aren't you?
> A. Yes.
> Q. Are you afraid of the power state?
> A. Yes.
> Q. Do you think the Northern press sometimes distorts Southern news?
> A. Yes.
> Q. Assuming that they do, why do they do it?
> A. They like to feel good.
> Q. What do you think the South ought to do about that distortion?
> A. Nothing.
> Q. Nothing? What do you mean, nothing?
> A. The distortion--that's the Yankees' problem, not ours.
> Q. You mean they ought to let the South work out a way to live with the Negro?
> A. I don't think the problem is to learn to live with the Negro.
> Q. What is it then?
> A. It is to learn to live with ourselves.

In some ways Segregation is a compact attempt by Warren to do just that. But its personal nature does not,

to Warren's mind, undermine its value as a social document. As Warren wrote of Baldwin, the fact that he speaks for himself is "the source of Baldwin's power. Whatever is vague, blurred, or self-contradictory in his utterances somehow testifies to the magisterial authenticity of the utterance--it is the dramatic image of a man struggling to make sense of the relation of personal tensions to the tensions of the race issue" (Who Speaks 296). The knowledge of doubleness that is suggested by the form of Segregation is applied directly at the regional level in the final answer given in the self-interview to the question of what the South has to contribute to the national life.

> If the South is really able to face up to itself and its situation, it may achieve identity, moral identity. Then in a country where moral identity is hard to come by, the South, because it has had to deal concretely with a moral problem, may offer some leadership. And we need any we can get. If we are to break out of the national rhythm, the rhythm between complacency and panic. (Segregation 66)

In Jefferson Davis Gets His Citizenship Back, Warren's way into history is once again personal. The first twenty-six pages are autobiographical, in fact; and early in the book appears the familiar image of the boy Warren listening to his maternal grandfather talking about the War. The image is an example of the latter of the two kinds of memory Warren defines:

> One is narrative, the unspooling in the head of what has happened, like a movie film with no

> voices. The other is symbolic--the image, say, of a dead friend of long ago, with a characteristic expression of face, which may be called up by name. (JD 1)

Warren makes no distinction between the two kinds of memory in terms of their value, yet one of the important impulses behind the book is to account for a change from what seems to be symbolic memory into a more mature narrative memory achieved through the process of historical imagination. It may simply be, however, that meaning is given to the symbolic memory, which is static, through historical imagination, which is dynamic, narrative memory.

In any event, as the subject of biography, Jefferson Davis is treated by a method very different from the way John Brown was treated fifty years earlier. This difference cannot be accounted for simply by the fact that the later work is less the product of a defensive sensibility than the earlier, though it is. The later is rather a more conscious effort on Warren's part to treat both the historical personage and the process of imaginative knowledge as subjects. One of the major thrusts of Jefferson Davis is to show how Robert Penn Warren came to know Jefferson Davis. That is, how Jefferson Davis, the figure, changed from being an image in the "old dark wordless flow" of the author's childhood into a figure clouded in adult-world fact and mythology. Warren writes of the vagueness of his feeling as a boy and his wondering about the significance of history that were

stirred by his several visits--made alone in the family Chevrolet with an element of quest--to Fairview, Kentucky, to see the monument erected to Davis' memory.

> Was the blank shaft that was rising there trying to say something about that war of long ago when young men had ridden away from the same countryside to die for whatever they had died for? Was the tall shaft, now stubbed at the top, what history was? Certainly these words did not come into my fuddled head. Childhood and adolescence do not live much by words, by abstractions, for words freeze meaning in its living surge, or come only as bubbles that rise and burst from the dark, unpredictable flow of feeling. And, looking back years later, we know how hard it is to sink ourselves again into the old dark wordless flow. We have more and more words now, and being truly adult is largely the effort to make the lying words stand for the old living truth. (JD 24-25)

Warren's point that the fall from the pre-lapsarian "flow" is a fall into language--"lying words"--suggests his full awareness of his dual subject--the object of the biography and the process of coming to know the object. The effort to understand the past in its relation to the present, which is the aim of this book and so many others that Warren wrote, is a painful process because of the limitation of words. That limitation, for Warren, especially in his poetry but also here, intensifies the anguishing need to know, to "focus some meaning, however hard to define, on the relation of past and present, old pain and glory and new pain and glory" (JD 25).

There is little that is anguishing in the tone of Jefferson Davis, however. It seems that Warren must establish his method before he can ask, twenty-six pages

into the book, "Who was this Jefferson Davis?" The question comes as the formalization of the childhood vagueness of feeling, interestingly articulated still as a question, a sign of the adult problem.

In the comparison of Davis with Lincoln and in such anecdotes as the one describing the sorrowful end brought on Davis' daughter by her father's refusal to allow her to marry the Syracuse lawyer she had fallen in love with, Warren attempts to separate Davis from the polar symbolism that obscured his image from the time of the war. For the North he had been largely a cowardly criminal and for the South an emblem of the "eternal City of the Soul." Warren's method is also his attempt to clarify for himself what that image of Davis, out of the old wordless flow of childhood, means. Warren's way out of history, so to speak, is personal, too. He concludes Jefferson Davis by a method which became common in his writings after 1953. He leaves the past to describe an event in the present taking place on the same ground as those events from the past he has been exploring. Variations of the method are practiced in Brother to Dragons and Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce, and Warren employs similar endings in two of his novels by writing objective, statistical descriptions of modern Kentucky near the end of World Enough and Time and of modern Tennessee at the end of Meet Me in the Green Glen.

At the end of Jefferson Davis, there is a long, tongue-in-cheek description of the celebration of the restoration of Davis's citizenship from May 31 through June 3, 1979, in his birthplace of Todd County, Kentucky. The emphasis in the description of the community drama commemorating the major events in Davis's life and the square dance following its second performance is on the historical apathy of the crowd, despite their ostensible motivation for gathering. Warren's purpose is not simply to portray the poor hicks of Todd County in their apathy and their ignorance, however. In fact, he applauds their efforts and mentions several who are neither apathetic nor ignorant. But his descriptions of the square dancers for whom Jefferson Davis is just a name--"if that" (JD 101)--and of a twenty year old who, caught in the rain with the others on the third night of the celebration, is miserable without his TV and beer are comically juxtaposed with the historical events which have been previously narrated in the book. The emphasis on the gross sensualism and ignorance of modern Todd Countians seems to corroborate what Warren argued in Legacy, that the lives of the men of the War were different in their stuggle for moral awareness and inwardness from the lives lived in a society whose uniformity and complacency are a result of movements which began during that War.

The description of the official celebration is more functionally comic than just comic, finally, for it is

juxtaposed with yet another narrative of Warren's private visit to the site of Davis's monument on a trip made with his brother. At the end of Brother to Dragons, R.P.W. visits the home of the Lewises with his father, and in Chief Joseph the poet visits the battlefield with friends, riding in a Honda, a fact which strikes the poet as another comic juxtapositon. The point of these transhistorical juxtapositions seems to be to illustrate that one must confront history alone, and the last few pages of Jefferson Davis are a description of this process which flings us back on the first twenty-five pages of autobiography that introduced the book. In language that evokes the mood of ritual, the opening of the section seems to set the process for understanding in motion:

> It is a rainy morning in late August. I want to stand before the monument to see it rear, as years before, blank and lonely against the sky. There is no person in sight--none near the towering obelisk. And there is nobody beneath that structure. (JD 107)

But the way by which Warren came to this spot where a region has commemorated its hero is once again personal, just as the fact that Warren wanted to stand before the monument arises out of his personal past.

> That morning, last August, I had already stood beside occupied graves, some miles southward of Fairview. My brother and I--wordless, as usual on such occasions--had observed the graves of our parents, then of his first wife, and then of one of the two persons who had been my closest friends in boyhood, the one who had been my tutor in boyish woodcraft and who, through short years of greatness and long years of failure, had remained a friend. (JD 108)

The next step in the process is to turn from the familial past to the communal past. Warren and his brother "discover" Old Jeff Davis, a figure from boyhood times in Guthrie who for a while was confused in the boy Warren's mind with the hero he heard so much about. The description of the graves of Old Jeff and his wife in "the potter's field" is an important passage for the meaning to be taken from the experience, for it suggests the process by which, after the growth of reason in adulthood has led to Warren's awareness of the distinction between the two Jeff Davises, his imagination rejoins them. Old Jeff, of course, has long ceased to be confused with Jefferson Davis, yet there is a need to know him as well as the great man. Warren humanizes the image of Old Jeff to make him more than a static image in his memory. The process is the process of historical synthesis by which Old Jeff and Jefferson Davis become linked again through Warren's vision of each man's common human suffering. The wife's tombstone was

> the handiwork of the bereaved, twisted old husband, the town's feckless jack-of-all-trades, whose grief-stricken masterpiece was scarcely a masterpiece. He had obviously first made a wooden box, some twenty inches by thirty, and about five inches deep, then filled it with cement, probably bracing it with scraps of chickenwire. At last, before the cement had really hardened, he had, with some blunt blade, scratched on an epitaph. (JD 109)

Though this may seem a lavish and sentimental passage at first, it illustrates Warren's propensity for imaginatively creating a scene through minute detail; and the irony of limitation, the awareness of the provisional nature of the

imaginative creation, is captured in the statement that at once affirms and denies: the "masterpiece was scarcely a masterpiece." Warren's purpose here becomes even clearer when, after humanizing and distinguishing Old Jeff and linking him to the Jefferson Davis who is the subject of the book through the human need, at any level, to monumentalize life, Warren suggests another link between the Jack-of-all-trades and the President of the Confederacy:

> Beside the crank-sided slab was a neater little stone, commercial-made--the kind a grateful government sets up to commemorate its penniless veteran. From it I learned that Old Jeff, too, had served his country, at the time of the Spanish-American War and a little thereafter. In heroism or in quaking fear--it is not recorded. (JD 109-10)

This fusion is the product of imaginative knowing. But Warren has not finished his process of imaginative synthesis, nor of criticizing modern society. Warren speculates that Davis would have rejected the citizenship that was restored to him in 1979, for his sense of honor would not allow him to accept anything that looked like pardon. (One remembers Warren's argument that it was John Brown's sense of himself which made it impossible for him to plead insanity, even to save his own life.) Warren also speculates that neither Lincoln nor Grant would happily accept citizenship in a society "that sometimes seems technologically and philosophically devoted to the depersonalization of men." Then Warren goes on to write,

"In a way, in their irrefrangible personal identity, Lincoln and Grant were almost as old-fashioned as Jefferson Davis" (JD 113). Thus Warren brings the poles of traditional and "new" man together in a vision of wholeness.

Warren ends Jefferson Davis by quoting Herodotus of Halicarnassus on his purpose as a historian: ". . . that the great deeds of men may not be forgotten . . . whether Greek or foreigner; and especially the causes of their wars" (JD 114). Warren's book is directed by a similar public purpose. But the book is much more than a monument like the one erected in Todd County. In its structure it reflects the process of remembering that means more than the hollowness of a name. It is a book directed by the historian's view, but it depicts a consciousness emerging from the innocence of youth, moving away from the subject and coming back to the subject informed and with imaginative power, as an adult trying to make "lying words" work. In its structure, the book resembles many of Warren's poems, and it has in common with his later poems an emphasis on the knower as well as the known. That is, the process by which the ostensible subject of the work comes to be known is finally just as important a subject for the work's total meaning. Jefferson Davis Gets His Citizenship Back is separated from John Brown: The Making of a Martyr by the more than the fifty years between their compositions.

The imaginative participation in history and the double seeing--these are the elements of Warren's historical vision. The imaginative participation gives life to the images of history; the double seeing insists on the facts which always deny the easy, one-sided answers. The resulting vision is both a perspective from which history and the present are viewed and a continuing development of that very process.

Without minimizing either Warren's prediction of the future of Negro leadership or the "solution" for the white Southerner he offers, one may see them as examples of his theory of knowledge applied to specific subjects, subjects in which, like the Civil War, he was intently interested. And the subjects were important not only for prose studies but for his fiction and poetry as well. In the next chapter of this study, I consider how Warren's theories of knowledge affected and were affected by the criticism he undertook to write of his American predecessors; for criticism was, like historical method, a creative act of discovery for him.

CHAPTER 3

WARREN'S LITERARY CRITICISM AND THE LONG AMERICAN DIALECTIC

In Democracy and Poetry, an essay delivered in 1974 as the Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities and published the following year, Warren wrote that

> . . . the ordinary, decent, intelligent citizen, functioning in the morally neutral world of technologies, easily begins to assume that the only self worth having is one to be defined primarily by its capacity to deny its "self." Fluidity of selves replaces integrity of self as a source of effectiveness, and identity is conceived of in terms of mere action, with action determined completely by the fluctuating contingencies of environment. (58-59)

He goes on to write, "The fundamental role of the citizen is no longer that of producer but of consumer" (60), a sentence which indicates he would agree with Daniel Boorstin's argument that as America entered its technological age, the idea of community was significantly altered. The ancient idea of a "fellowship of skill was displaced by the democracy of cash" (Boorstin 89). As society drifts toward the abolition of self, Warren continues, people take time off to find themselves, not realizing that "the self is never to be found, but must be created" (89). What happens to poetry in such a society is what happens to poetry in Huxley's Brave New World. It is canned for the consuming public, a public which is "a devouring negativity" (62).

As political criticism Democracy and Poetry is open to attack from several factions. One can imagine the ire aroused in critics of certain overt political biases by Warren's old-fashioned diction: the "ordinary, decent, intelligent citizen," the "solid citizen," even the term "citizen." Such terms are--like "protagonist," "plot," and "universal"--inadequate in the complexity of contemporary critical pluralism, a pluralism that seems to mean that a reading of a text exemplifies one class of several possible classes of readings of that text. The tone of Warren's diction is too masculine, patriarchal, moral and elitist, a sign of a lingering Agrarianism, perhaps a sign that he does not allow for the other "classes" of readings. An adequate reading of Democracy and Poetry, however, reveals that it achieves its power as a defense of poetry at least in part because of its self-conscious diction. It is the diction of "the grumpy old codger" (DP 67) who insists on himself and in the effort to make "lying words" work refuses to speak in lingo. There is a clear-eyed optimism in Democracy and Poetry, and there is a similar optimism in Warren's "Introduction" for the 1984 anothology Fifty Years of American Poetry. That optimism is resisted, however, by the criticism of the "codger" who carries with him a distinct image of himself as an outsider as he ranges over American history and American literary history. The epigraph Warren chose for Democracy and Poetry from

St.-John Perse says much about his conception of his own role: "And it is enough for the poet to be the guilty conscience of his time."

The dual roles of poetry Warren identifies in Democracy and Poetry--poetry as diagnosis and poetry as therapy--suggest the critical function of poetry as well as the dialectic of self and society. Warren sees that poetry has been a "corrosive criticism of our democracy" as there has been a correspondence between the diminishing self in literature and in the general course of American history (DP 3). Yet he also sees that poetry is therapeutic as a "form" that provides a self-restoring contact with the world (DP 74).

How that form is achieved through the poet's search for knowledge of his relation to a community (country) is in part the subject of Democracy and Poetry and is no less than an obsessive interest in the body of Warren's criticism. That criticism is made up almost entirely of studies of American writers, and the American writers who have interested him most have been, in some regard "failures." They are failures because of the beliefs which lie in back of their literary creations. Most of the writers have been questioners rather than affirmers of American experience; and, perhaps not unrelatedly, most of the modern writers Warren has been interested in have been Southerners. It is fitting that in one of the final

critical efforts Warren made, a culminating defense of poetry to stand beside Sidney's and Shelley's in the estimation of Monroe K. Spears (110), American literature was his proving ground.

The body of Warren's literary criticism does reveal certain tenets of a critical theory by which he valued other writers (and I use the term theory advisedly for Warren was not a systematic critic). However, the criticism also provides insight into his own methods and themes, particularly as he attempts in his consideration of each author to establish the terms of the dialectic at work in the division of absolutes and contingencies. His criticism is thus, like his historical writing, a useful gloss on his own creative works.

Warren is, of course, most famous in the academic world for the textbooks he co-edited with Cleanth Brooks--Understanding Poetry and Understanding Fiction. It should be remembered, however, that both were textbooks developed for students, and, as Louis D. Rubin points out, they were intended more to teach a methodology for reading than to establish a critical theory (30). Warren has authored a number of works which more explicitly reveal his own critical stance. What might surprise some readers of the two textbooks is a strain of biographical and social criticism in Warren's critical oeuvre. Warren is not a strict formalist. As James H. Justus has pointed out,

Warren's criticism is of an older school that insists on seeing the artist as more than aesthetic man (119). This much of Warren's critical interests is clear enough from even a cursory reading of the essays on American writers, which are rich in biography and cultural analysis both within the texts and in Warren's profusion of notes. But Justus is also correct in asserting simultaneously that Warren's respect for the text is not lessened by such a view of a writer's work. For Warren, the work of art is the objectified product of a maker who fashions it out of subjective experience. There may be jags; and part of the work of art may resist the vision of the artist; but the art is an effort to capture more than musicality, rhythm, an arresting image, a social problem, or even irony (for even the ironic view must undergo the test of irony). Composition is itself a process that involves the tension between two contrasting aspects of mental faculty--the subjective impulse which gives rise to the work and the objective critical faculty with which the writer rejects that which he discovers does not work.

Much of Warren's criticism of American writers developed from his work as a co-editor, with Cleanth Brooks and R.W.B. Lewis, of the anthology American Literature: The Makers and the Making. More and more critics are becoming aware of the fact that American experience and the way that experience was captured and criticized in American

literature is important for understanding Warren's work. Among the important assessments are R.W.B. Lewis's "Warren's Long Visit to American Literature" (in The Yale Review) and William Bedford Clark's "Robert Penn Warren's Love Affair with America" (in The Southern Review). John Burt's recent book Robert Penn Warren and American Idealism also attests to the importance of Warren's fascination with the idea on which America was founded. The relation of American writers to their country has also been a noteworthy subject of several interviews conducted with Warren, especially the 1976 television interview with Bill Moyers. However, something quite specific about Warren's interest in American literature is suggested by the fact that Warren tries to understand how the writers' experiences became transformed into a knowledge that was then embodied in art, or how that transformation was itself the act of becoming aware of the knowledge. Warren's interpretation of the works of American writers is a part of a broader interpretation, unschematic in design, of American experience, philosophy and literature, or the relationship of all three. In the end one finds that, for Warren, the process of reading and composing and the process of coming to understand history, personal or communal, are interrelated or interpenetrating processes. They are, in fact, different manifestations of the same human process toward self-knowledge. But even in the act

of criticism Warren is aware of human failure in that process. His multiple interests are especially evident in the studies of Whittier, Melville, Hawthorne, Twain, and Dreiser. These will be the main examples used in this chapter. Consideration of Warren's estimation of his contemporaries and near-contemporaries will appear in the final chapter of this study.

Consideration of Warren's most theoretical piece, "Pure and Impure Poetry," is a useful way to preface a discussion of his criticism of American writers. In this 1943 essay Warren refuted various doctrines of poetic composition and criticism. The basic argument may be summarized as follows: Poetry is pure. By poetry Warren seems to mean the essence of a work, perhaps the abstraction of meaning, but felt rather than articulated because articulation taints the poetry. Poems, therefore, are not pure. They contain, sometimes, even more dross than the imperfections of the world call for. Poems

> mar themselves with cacophonies, jagged rhythms, ugly words and ugly thoughts, colloquialisms, clichés, sterile technical terms, headwork and argument, self-contradictions, clevernesses, irony, realisms--all things which call us back to the world of prose and imperfection. (N&SE 5)

The imperfections are necessary, Warren argues, in order for the poetry to retain its "purity," for the purity of the poem can exist only in the context of elements that resist it. At one level this argument sounds like a New Critic's preference for irony as the measurement of a

poem's worth, but the poetic theory suggested by Warren's words is more directly related to his own thinking about knowledge than to a formal school of criticism. (I am not discounting, however, the possibility that formalism may be based on some similar philosophy.) Warren's definition of a poem, in fact, recalls the definition of wisdom in his essay on Conrad as the recognition of the constant opposition of idea and nature. It also recalls the Conradian recognition for the need to sink the self in a destructive element in order to have self definition. It is not just the cleverness or the irony that makes the poem. It is the tension between the purity and impurity. The idea of the poem must be tested against the facts of the world as the poet sees them, and the way he sees those facts is his ultimate risk. Those facts are the destructive element which the idea must sink into to have value.

To illustrate the points he makes in "Pure and Impure Poetry," Warren offers Tennyson's "Princess" and Shelley's "The Indian Girl's Song" as examples of attempts to "try to make one poem as pure as possible" (N&SE 5). In the garden setting of both poems, nature conspires with the lover to "suggest the purity of the moment," to give the "essence of young, untarnished love" (N&SE 5, 6). In contrast to these two examples Warren sets the garden scene in Romeo and Juliet, in which nature again appears to conspire with

a lover but also in which this conspiracy is seen in the context offered by the combination of Mercutio outside the garden wall uttering a clever and bawdy joke; the distrust of the lady to whom the lover speaks the "pure" poetry; and the voice of the nurse from inside, the voice of expediency. Warren's summarizing comments on this scene are important:

> It is time to ask ourselves if the celebrated poetry of this scene, which as poetry is pure, exists despite the impurities of the total composition, if the effect would be more purely poetic were the nurse and Mercutio absent and the lady a more sympathetic critic of pure poems. I do not think so. The effect might even be more vulnerable poetically if the impurities were purged away. Mercutio, the lady, and the nurse are critics of the lover, who believes in pure poems, but perhaps they are necessary. Perhaps the lover can be accepted only in their context. The poem seems to say: "I know the worst that can be said on this subject, and I am giving fair warning. Read at your own risk." So the poetry arises from a recalcitrant and contradictory context; and finally involves that context. (N&SE 7)

The failure of the poems by Tennyson and Shelley is that they violate context. "Nature . . . strains out of nature, it wants to be called by another name, it wants to spiritualize itself by calling itself another name" (N&SE 6). In other words, a dependence on the pathetic fallacy in both poems leads to an unearned vision. Such a transcendence of nature may be the resting point of a poem, but it cannot be the beginning point. It should be noted that Warren's theory in "Pure and Impure Poetry" does not deny the "purity" of poetry; it simply insists on a

critical context as a means of giving that "purity" significance and meaning. "A poem, to be good, must earn itself," Warren writes. "It is a motion toward a point of rest, but if it is not a resisted motion, it is a motion of no consequence" (N&SE 24). Warren's theory does not deny the impulse of a poem, nor does it glorify the ironic undercutting of that impulse. Some readers have tended to see in Warren's writing a tendency to revel in the dark and the bloody, to milk despair from naturalistic evidence, or to give full play to Mercutio without recognizing the reality of the feelings of the lover. Even John Crowe Ransom was put off by the "naturalism" in Warren's first novel Night Rider. In Warren's life's work there is no such tendency, really; the effort is always toward balance, not balance as a virtue in itself, but as a way to have meaning in context, a way to find meaning through some integration of man's idea of himself and the natural facts which resist his idea. Often, the integration of self is unachieved, as is the case in Night Rider, but even in that early work the effort and the need for integration are there. In fact, irony, as a technique, is ambiguous in Warren, as will be demonstrated in subsequent chapters. The realistic unraveling of a romantic idea often twists until it winds up affirming, in some ways, the original idea, the original dream.

The value Warren places on both a resistance of naturalism and on an ironic treatment of the ideal in poetry is a correlative to his theory of knowledge, though he does not assert such in any schematic, systematic way. Warren's valuation of this inclusiveness is also discernible in his criticism of Hawthorne, Melville, Whittier, Twain, and Dreiser, all writers whose quarrel with America Warren interpreted as a quarrel within themselves. Warren's tendency is to see nineteenth century American literature in terms of polar contingencies--the power of blackness school set against the party of hope, especially the Transcendentalists and especially Emerson. There is no essay on Emerson in either volume of Warren's Selected Essays, but Emerson is present as a representative of one school of thought in every study of American writers Warren did write. What is at stake in the polar division for Warren is nothing less than the meaning of America, a country which was the world's first to be confronted with the question of its own meaning. At the crux of the division are conflicting ideas about the self. There are, in fact, fundamental points of agreement between Emerson's doctrine of self-reliance and Warren's concept of selfhood. Both emphasize the importance of "community" and the harmful effects on the self of a "society." Emerson's "Go love thy woodchopper" and "Society everywhere is a conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members"

are sentiments which correspond to the basic ideas in Warren's Democracy and Poetry. However, the concept of community behind Emerson's woodchopper and Warren's concept of community are at odds, for what makes the individual a member of a community in Warren's philosophy is the recognition of the universality of tragic experience and a resulting awareness of responsiblity for the self. Warren would have agreed that a man should love his woodchopper because his own "love afar is spite at home," but Warren would have understood "home" very differently from Emerson. Warren's metaphysical vision of the relation between the self and the "woodchopper," we might say, would contradict Emerson's concept of a community of self-reliant individuals. For, finally, Warren's metaphysics come to rest more substantially on the natural and social world than Emerson's phenomenalism and his Oversoul. To love the woodchopper for Warren would have meant to know the woodchopper as a participant in tragic experience, and communal interaction at such a level would be, necessarily, confounding. Whereas for Emerson the love of the woodchopper is symbolic of the simplicity that one's community should represent, for Warren he would be symbolic of the complexity one's community inevitably does represent. Among the American Romantics, Hawthorne and Melville were in their ideas about what constitutes membership in a community precursors of Warren.

The implications of the tension between the Emersonian and Hawthornesque traditions are apparent even in the title of Warren's Essay on Hawthorne: "Hawthorne Revisited: Some Remarks on Hell-Firedness." The following passage is central in the essay:

> . . . we may guess that in Hawthorne's emotional involvement with the violence of the New England past is some feeling that in that violence there was at least a confronting of reality, which was lacking in the doctrines of Transcendentalists, Brook Farmers, and Unitarians, and in Emerson, along with the current horde of reformers. (N&SE 78)

The tone here confirms that Warren's opinion of the "horde of reformers" remained in 1973 basically unchanged from 1929 when he wrote John Brown: The Making of a Martyr. However, the "Southern defensiveness" of the first book is gone, and what lies behind the criticism of Emerson and the "horde" is more than a twentieth century snicker at pre-1860 American idealism. What Warren is doing is identifying the American tradition to which he himself belongs. He is finding his literary fathers, as it were. I do not mean to suggest a deep psychological process took place in the writing of the Hawthorne and other essays (though such might be). I simply mean that writing these essays was a way of homecoming, of discovering affinity with fellow artists, fellow American artists.

One clear affinity between Hawthorne and Warren is in the use of the past. Hawthorne seized the past, violent or not, as the reality he could write about. The past had

happened; and, though it serves as clay for molding into story, it is not in any strict idealistic sense phenomenal. The violent past of New England could not be transcended in any of the ways offered by the groups Warren lists along with the "horde of reformers." Something that resembled Warren's own ingestive theory had to be employed in this seizure of the past. Warren, too, seized upon the violent past of his own region in early works like Night Rider and "The Ballad of Billie Potts." The imaginations of both men fed upon historical reality in a very special way.

Warren's closest analyses in the essay are of "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" and The Scarlet Letter, which he sees as closely related by the view of history they incorporate.

Warren reads "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" as a rebuke to the official interpretation of the American Revolution, an ironic glance at the kind of thinking exhibited by Emerson's line about the "shot heard round the world." (Melville treated that official attitude even more ironically in his poetry.) Hawthorne's Robin, says Warren, is a parody of Emerson's self-reliant man, but he is placed in a story in which experience suggests Hawthornesque (Conradian) wisdom: "the part of wisdom is to recognize the paradoxical aspects of reality and to confront the tragic tension at its core" (N&SE 84). Warren

has used a similar technique with his own characters and dramatic situations time and time again. Adam Stanton is something of a "cold" Robin in All the King's Men, and Little Billie Potts rides back into his father's country with an attitude of "shrewdness" similar to what Warren sees in Robin, an attitude that is indirectly responsible for Little Billie's death. Perhaps the hero of Wilderness Adam Rosenzweig, with his idealistic notions of freedom and how it can be achieved in America, is the greatest Robin of all in Warren's work. On the whole Warren's essay helps to clarify the link between his own work and Hawthorne's not only through the magnetic pull of the regional past on both but also through the ironic treatment of their "son" figures, whether they be literal or surrogate sons.

Warren's reading of The Scarlet Letter takes on contemporary "misreadings" of the novel prompted by doctrines which correspond to theories of "pure" poetry. To the ideas that the novel is a simple cautionary tale against sin or a tract for women's liberation, Warren responds,

> The concern of Hawthorne here, as in his work in general, lies in the tension between the demands of spirit and those of nature. Indeed, the Transcendentalists had insisted upon this issue, but Hawthorne's view, profoundly ironical as it was in seeing the tension between the two realms as the very irremediable essence of life, in its tragedy and glory and even comedy, was far different from anything that ever crossed a transcendental mind. (N&SE 100)

The ironical view is preferred by Warren because in its insistence on the complexity of disparate elements it is closer to the reality of existence, the "irremediable essence of life," than a vision of their peaceful coexistence, as Emerson had it in "Fate." To Warren's way of thinking, man is not glorious but may earn glory. A similar belief was found, as Warren saw, in Hawthorne's use of nature to check the demand of spirit. Ultimately what Hawthorne's work suggests is Original Sin, as Melville had seen. Of Hawthorne's vision, Warren writes, "Man is doomed to live in a world where nature is denied and human nature distorted, and--most shatteringly of all--in a world where love and hate may be 'the same thing at bottom.'" So men live, Warren goes on to say, by their ability to give coherence to illusion and their capacity for pity (N&SE 101). In other words, they live by a felt knowledge and sense of communal responsibility, to use the terms Warren gives to the determiners of the self in Democracy and Poetry.

What Melville and Warren saw in Hawthorne's "power of blackness" was not a ghastliness, not just an attempt for a Poesque heightening of melancholy, but a meaning achieved through tension. Warren makes much of Emerson's reaction to The Scarlet Letter--"Ghastly, ghastly"--to point out that Transcendentalism led to shortcomings in reading as well as practical life. Emerson failed to read Hawthorne

adequately because of his assumption of equilibrium in human life as long as man remains uncorrupted by society. For Hawthorne, on the other hand, as for Warren, nature unredeemed by an idea or principle is not enough. Even Hester, who is "natural," suffers because she cannot be merely natural. That she yearns for more, as Warren points out, is suggested by the men she involves herself with (N&SE 98).

The comparison of Hawthorne's vision with Emerson's reveals Hawthorne's to be the incomplete or "impure" vision. Warren's admiration is due partly to this failure, just as part of his admiration for Melville is linked to that writer's "failure" to produce the kinds of poems admirable among his contemporaries. Ultimately what such a critical interpretation means in the assessment of Hawthorne's art and his place in American letters is as important as the philosophical distinctions. Warren gives to Hawthorne the place in American literature which Hemingway reserved for Twain. "Hawthorne," Warren writes, "discovered American literature in its inwardness" (N&SE 70). The Scarlet Letter, according to Warren, was the first American novel which took form as an expression of emotion and meaning (N&SE 88).

To Melville, in whom he saw even more of a kindred spirit, a "modern" one, Warren applies the same critical principles--the discovery of the relation between the life

and the milieu in the work, the test of inwardness, and the identification of the poles within which knowledge is earned. Two works, the 1946 essay "Melville the Poet" and the 1970 edition of Melville's poems, combine to make Melville, along with Whitter, the nineteenth century writer to whom Warren paid the most formal attention, but for Warren, Melville "needs some special interpretation" (N&SE 220).

The impulse behind "Melville the Poet" is defensive. Warren addresses the charges that Melville never learned the craft of verse by arguing that the wrenchings in Melville's poetry are more the attempts to establish his individual, "masculine," "nervous," "dramatic" style than a sign of ineptitude (N&SE 221-22). The poetic form, in other words, is emblematic of his philosophy. Warren sees that Melville, like Hardy, was neither an optimist nor a pessimist but one who saw the possibility for something better; and like Hardy, again, Melville emphasized the historical process (N&SE 230).

The Selected Poems of Herman Melville may be the most fascinating document for anyone interested in the study of Warren's scholarship. Warren subtitles the volume A Reader's Edition, by which he does not mean, as one at first suspects, that he has put together a volume for the general public rather than for scholars. He means it is his edition, Warren's. He is the reader. The fact is at one

level literally true. Of the four hundred and fifty-eight pages in the volume, almost half (two hundred and eight) are taken up by Warren's introduction, his notes on the introduction, and his notes on the texts of Melville's poems. But the approach to the poems, suggested by the subtitle, furthermore reveals Warren's consciousness of the subjective base of criticism. The following statement appears in the short beginning section, "A Note on This Book":

> I have dared to hope that, in the end, a true account of my experience with the poetry might be as useful as an edition designed for some idealized norm of "the reader." (vii)

The passage is important for it reveals something of the critical dialectic at work in Warren, a critical dialectic between the subjective "a reader" and the objective "the reader." It is in the rhythmic interplay between the personal and the objective that criticism becomes an imaginative act, but for Warren it was nevertheless an act subordinate to the creation of art. The normative reader obviously exists only as a fiction, as Warren suggests with the word idealized and the use of quotation marks. Warren's New Critical bias for the "ideal" reader is, of course, another sign of obvious "failure." As he goes on to write, a general acceptance of an estimate of a poet's work is more likely to indicate critical atrophy than a discovery of truth (viii). Still, Warren's subjectivity is not the same as the subjectivity of the structuralist

critic and certainly not the subjectivity of the deconstructionist. Perhaps Warren would have preferred to call his critical stance "logical" criticism, given his preference for that term in other contexts; but one can see in it elements of formalist, psychological and sociological principles of criticism. An instructive adaptation to his criticism of what Warren said of poetry in "Pure and Impure Poetry" might be that nothing is to be legislated arbitrarily out of criticism. Warren is, indeed, a practical critic who assumes the validity of Henry James' emphasis on the granted donée; but in the study of Melville the granted donée is a critical method whereby the elements of a work are used in an attempt to understand something of the creative process and its relation to knowledge.

Perhaps it is in writing of Melville, too, that Warren comes closest to identifying the major problem confronting his critical theory: how does one distinguish between the philosophy and the art? And how does a critic extract the philosophy from the work? Or should he? These are, of course, fundamental questions about the relation of knowledge and art, and the answers, even in America's relatively short literary history, have been various. There is Emerson's in "The Poet," for example, and Poe's in "The Philosophy of Composition" and "The Poetic Principle." Unexpectedly, Emerson's idea of the coexistence of philosophy (Truth) and art (Beauty) is

closer to Warren's own thinking than Poe's "pure" theory of their necessary distinction. What distinguishes Warren from either is the theory of the relationship between language and idea. Warren's thinking on the matter corresponds to his philosophy of inclusiveness, as suggested by the following long passage on the polarity of ideology and human values in Melville's poetry:

> We cannot be too schematic about such polarities. . . . One pair shades into another. One pole does not cancel out its opposite. All belong to the complex texture of life as lived, to the density and equivocalness of experience. But to live in any full sense demands the effort to comprehend this complexity of texture, this density and equivocalness of experience, and yet not forfeit the ability to act. The man who "sees through it," but who, at the same time, can act, who has a sense of the tragedy of the human plight--that is the hero for Melville. (SPHM 22)

Such a man is also the Hawthornesque, the Conradian, and the Warrenesque hero, finally. Since composition is for Warren an act toward comprehension and since living in the full sense is in the act, not in the completion, we may surmise that a poetic wrestling with the "density and equivocalness of experience" is a process of self-definition. The coexistence of polar truths negates any theory of the purity of language for Warren; the coexistence makes language equivocal because language is a part of "life as lived." To return to what Warren said of language in Jefferson Davis Gets his Citizenship Back, the business of being an adult is to make "lying words stand for the old living truth" (JD 24). Perhaps just as

instructive is what Warren said in an interview with Richard B. Sale about the difficult time he had completing the novel At Heaven's Gate:

> I had about an eighty-page synopsis--almost paragraph by paragraph--of what I wanted to get accomplished in that novel. I had it all worked out. Practically a book by itself. I spent a year or two in the planning, trying to live the novel in the planning level. Put it that way. In other words, I was trying to compose the novel in my head without breaking fully into language. I was separating language totally from mechanics, from plot and characterization. I had a bitter struggle with that novel because I had done the one thing I found I couldn't do in my work. I was violating what I conceive to be, for me at least, a basic necessity: the thing of character, the thing of action--idea--must be in terms of the language of the novel. (Talking 108-09)

Very interesting here is the phrase "trying to live the novel," for it equates the inclusiveness necessary for living with a similar necessity for composition. Language cannot be divorced from idea. Emerson would have agreed. However, what Emerson would have called the corruption of the purity of a word as a sign for a natural fact is for Warren "historical necessity." They are the same process at bottom, but what the process means for literature is different for each. For Emerson language that is not simple, that does not immediately correspond to a natural fact, is duplicitous and without "real" value. For Warren, language is always duplicitous (equivocal) and "real" values such as Emerson had in mind with phenomenalism do not exist. For Emerson, theoretically, the point of rest begins with the word, for the word is pure and does not

resist itself. For Warren, language is a way toward a point of rest, but it is a maze that reflects the "complex texture of life as lived." This basic theoretical difference lies behind Emerson's championing of Whitman and Warren's of Melville.

Even more understanding of Warren's sense of poetic value and its relation to his theory of knowledge can be extracted from his comparison of Melville's and Whitman's war poetry. Warren calls Whitman the "bigger" poet (SPHM 26), avoiding calling him the better poet while actually seeming to. His distinction between Whitman's synthesizing poetry and Melville's "analytical" poetry is in no way revolutionary, but it sets up a comparison that reveals that Warren's preference is for the values lying behind Melville's technique and not Whitman's. Whitman, the democratic affirmer, misses something important that Melville, the democratic questioner, sees. Warren notes the fact that Whitman became something of a questioner himself with "some sobering second thoughts" in Democratic Vistas (SPHM 29). In the war poetry, though, Whitman values the "will to possess"; Melville the inner conflict (SPHM 26).

It seems necessary here to quote two full paragraphs which reveal the essence of Melville's difference from Whitman as Warren saw it:

> . . . when Whitman writes a poem about the death letter from the front, the powerful "Come up from

> the Fields, Father," the family is safely Northern, on a farm in Ohio, and the Northern reader Whitman was writing for could find his patriotism, his selfish interests, and all his human and humane feelings mobilized together and focused in the image--"ritualized." This is not to say that Whitman merely manipulates what are called stock responses in the reader, but it is to say that he was characteristically more concerned with intensity and purity of feeling than with any complexity or painful richness of feeling.
>
> To return to the poem, if Melville had written it, the farm might very well have been in Georgia, and the dead son one of those "Slain Collegians" about whom he did write a poem; then the Northern reader, whose own son had been habitually shot at by the now dead Georgia lad, might have had some divisions of attitude to deal with. Like all decent poetry, that of Melville aims at the moment of poise, of synthesis, but for him the poise and the synthesis are hard-won, and often incomplete and provisional, and the awareness of that fact is the point, the "truth," of the poetry. To summarize, Whitman, in his poems of the war, is ritualistic, Melville is dramatic, ultimately tragic. (SPHM 27)

Warren's discussion of the Unionism of the two poets is one of his important statements on milieu. It is similar to his definition of abolitionism in his study of Whittier in that he defines two ways of looking at the subject. There is no mystique in the Union for Melville as there is for Whitman, Warren asserts. Melville's attitude toward it is modern and reflects the birth of Pragmatism, the struggle to achieve a unity that reconciled the conflict between the spirit and the machine that was intensified by the Civil War. The Union Melville saw in his analytical method included the 1863 conscription riots in New York in a poem like "The House-top." (Interestingly, Warren chose the same incident for

inclusion in his novel of the Civil War, Wilderness.) Melville, in other words, saw through the "Treasury of Virtue," and in poems like "The Conflict of Convictions" questioned the costs of victory as a possible corruption of the Founders' dream of America by draining all capability of sympathy from the North. This problem constitutes something of an idée fixe in Warren's reading of Melville to rival references to Myrdal's theory in Who Speaks for the Negro?. Indeed, the two ideas are closely related and reveal much about Warren's own temperament, as captured again in the following passage:

> William James, in the oration at the dedication of the monument, on Boston Common, to Robert Gould Shaw and his Negro regiment, the 54th Massachusetts Infantry, says that "the victory to be philosophically prayed for is that of the more inclusive side--the side which even in the hour of triumph will do some degree of justice to the ideals in which the vanquished interests lay." Both Whitman and Melville, both good Unionists, would doubtless have accepted this formulation. But Whitman would have understood it to operate by aggregation or absorption, and to aim at the wiping out of distinction in the process. Melville would have understood it to operate by an analysis to locate first principles, and by dialectic. . . . For "clear thought," which Santayana names as one of the two things not granted Whitman to achieve, is at the center of Melville's poetry, the effort to achieve awareness of the distinctions and paradoxes of life and to resolve them. (SPHM 30).

Here Warren identifies in Melville the same sort of inclusiveness that is central in his own vision. In comparing Melville with Whitman, Warren is not proclaiming the poetic merit of the one over the other; he is, nevertheless, championing Melville as the poet whose vision

depends on knowledge as much as will, knowledge, that is, as the product and process of a dialectic as opposed to a pure will which wipes out distinction in an Emersonian transcendence or Whitmanesque "aggregation." Warren's championing of Melville even extends to a defense of Clarel, a work that has had relatively few defenders. Yet, even here Warren's interests are more scholarly than critical, and here again the poem is in some form a monster: "Clarel is a monstrously long poem" (SPHM 35). Warren praises the poem's richness of theme, not its technical achievement. By seeing the poem "as what it turned out to be, and not what it set out to be" (SPHM 44), Warren reads Clarel as a precursor to The Waste Land (SPHM 36). Clarel, Warren argues, with its dependence upon the impingement of one character upon another, is closer to a Henry James novel than to Moby Dick (SPHM 45). Others, of course, have seen a post-Romantic impulse in Melville's work after Moby Dick. Robert Milder, for example, has written that ". . . more than any other American text, Mardi gives voice to the transatlantic moment when the romantic confidence in nature and the self yielded to a paralyzing despondency in the presence of an alien, God-bereft universe" (432). Yet Warren, in a passage that is characteristic of his critical style for the way it asserts a point then pulls back from it to reevaluate it, shows that Melville had little influence on modernism.

> [Melville] is one of the makers of modernity, of our consciousness and conscience. But no, we cannot say that of Melville. He did not make anything--except the poetry. And his poetry was, for all practical purposes, lost. The author of Clarel was, we might say, a seismograph that nobody looked at. (SPHM 46)

Melville is being read here in light of Eliot's The Waste Land, the seismograph that many did look at, including the Fugitive poets at Vanderbilt.

Warren also attempts, rather boldly, to show the complex relation in art between Melville's personal life and these aspects of history and milieu--the War, Unionism, etc. Warren reads the war poetry, in fact, as a record of Melville's search for a way to rebuild his life after professional and personal failure. The war gave to Melville the objective fact by which he could see his personal fate in terms of a national one. Furthermore, in Billy Budd, which Warren discusses in relation to "Billy in the Darbies," Melville's personal life is seen as the driving force behind the novel's father-son theme. Warren argues that the deaths of Melville's two sons, first Malcolm by suicide then later Stanwix, caused Melville to rethink his novel in terms of the father-son conflict. One change reflecting the new sense of the novel was the transformation of Billy from an older man, a gunner, into the youth readers know him as. Warren also speculates that the great sense of family failure in Melville--his father's, his own, his sons'--led to a sense of doom in

Melville rather than a sense of individual culpability. Like Melville's sons, Billy had his flaw, not their waywardness, but a stutter which is a mark of Original Sin and fatal to him. By Warren's interpretation of the symbolic significance of Billy's stutter, one is reminded of the birthmark on the face of Georgiana, which had a similar significance for the husband who would remove it, in Hawthorne's story "The Birthmark" or even the heart-shaped birthmark on Warren's own Little Billie Potts, which signifies his identity and is, ironically, "shaped for luck." Billy Budd's stutter is, as Warren reads it, the objectification, the universalization, of personal experience. In this manner art is therapeutic for the artist, for the objectifying may reduce self-division, releasing even more energy for the creative effort (SPHM 9).

From the interplay of personal life and society he sees at work in Melville's art, Warren identifies the working dialectic in terms of "ambiguity" and "actuality." Ironically, the war was good for Melville, for it gave him the big and bloody actuality he needed in a subject, as the New England past had done for Hawthorne; and Melville needed the actual in a special way. His mind could be moved only by what was "urgently human" (SPHM 11). For Melville, the war "would serve his need only if the centrifugal whirl toward violent action was perfectly balanced by the centripetal pull toward an inwardness of

apparently unresolvable mystery, a tormenting ambiguity" (SPHM 11). This inscrutable inwardness is then the value that, in poetic form, creates both tension and a means of balance through resistance. One need not look far into Melville's war poetry for examples of what Warren values. One famous example from "Shiloh" is the line, "What like a bullet can undeceive!" a line which undercuts the youthful patriotism and expectation of glory in action. In "Malvern Hill" the ambiguity of nature is suggested by the "elms," in "Shiloh," by the "swallow."

In Warren's reading of nineteenth-century American literary history, Hawthorne and Melville have the unsettling and unsettled position of being questioners of the "official" version of the American story and of an unthinking patriotism based on a faith in democracy as a "natural" form of government. Both insisted on an actuality which represented the opposite of an idealistic phenomenalism, and both used their actuality--the New England past or the Civil War--as testing grounds for knowledge. The actuality is either an affront to idealism or it is a defensive solidity set against cosmic ambiguity. The result is art that is based on an inward tension and reflects the attempt to solve that tension dramatically by including its poles of feeling in a new vision. Warren sees Twain and Dreiser as the post-Romantic inheritors of the unsettled relation to America he saw in Hawthorne and Melville.

Biographically, Twain was interesting for Warren (Warren even wrote a poem about Twain, as he did about Dreiser). The single most important fact in Twain's psyche for Warren is his sense of doubleness, which was revealed in his attitude toward the past and the future. Twain's antipathy for the Southern past drove him west, which appeared to be all future. In fact, some elements of his life followed a pattern similar to that of several of Warren's own characters. This past/future dichotomy influenced another significant tension in Twain, a double standard in his attitude toward the present. He had a contempt for the Gilded Age in print but engaged in a life-long quest for riches through speculation.

Twain's ambivalent feelings toward a tradition based on "Walter Scottism" and toward a country that, simultaneously, seemed to be all future made him a central figure in the emerging philosophical order. It is in his dramatization of the conflict between an educable and an absolute conscience that Twain is unsettlingly modern, according to Warren; and the greatest example of the conflict is to be seen in his two most famous creations: Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn. Tom Sawyer was "cheering to parents" and "comforting to patriots"; but Tom's "stretchers" arise from the romantic view of life, the Walter Scottism that plagued the South and sickened Twain, and they represented society at large because the ideas

were in all the books. Against Tom's romanticism Twain used Huck to bring in the "criticism of fact" (N&SE 115).

Especially intriguing for Warren is the nature of Huck's status as an outsider. Huck is not, like his Pap, outside civilized society because of a brutish nature of his own, a reading of his character for which Warren takes V.S. Pritchett to task (N&SE 116, note). Huck is instead an outsider by philosophy. His insistence on substance and experience is, Warren notes, close to the formalized Pragmatism of William James. Warren seems to have in mind here a work like "The Sentiment of Rationality" in which James argues that an accurate, absolute philosphy would be useless given the mind's habitual resistance to non-entity in favor of substance as a source of knowledge. One could add that Huck's insistence on substance as a source of knowledge links him philosophically with Hawthorne and Melville with their uses of the New England past and the Civil War respectively as the actuality on which knowledge could be based.

Warren saw Dreiser in close relationship with Twain. In fact, he extracted a large passage from the essay on Twain for inclusion in his book Homage to Theodore Dreiser. Or perhaps the grafting was the other way around. Both works were published in 1971. One of the practices the two writers had in common was the criticism of American industrial values and squalor of city life in

the age of Robber Barons. Warren compares Twain's Hank Morgan, the "Boss," with Dreiser's Cowperwood, and one might compare Warren's Bogan Murdock and Willie Stark to both of them. Warren sees that there is a deeper criticism, a resisted criticism, in the creation of all of these figures, however. Twain's need to pursue the riches around him in the Gilded Age stands against his criticism of its values in Morgan. Dreiser's fascination with the Robber Barons as Nietzschean supermen and his job as an editor of a popular women's magazine resist his criticism of the age's values. The irony, the criticism of the age and the type of entrepreneur and tycoon, is not pure in either case. The figures are at the center of a brand of social criticism which can be called the tragedy of success story, a particularly American story, as Warren saw it in Dreiser.

The nature of Dreiser's tragedy in An American Tragedy is a key issue for Warren. The term "American" is all important. As in Hawthorne and Melville, there is a recognition in Dreiser of the importance of illusion in the American psyche. Dreiser discovers the illusion based on materialism rather than phenomenalism, but Warren's fascination is still with the writer who sees through the illusion. The one who sees through it, Dreiser, makes a tragedy about one, Clyde, who doesn't see through it. For Clyde there is an illusion behind the broader illusion,

which is the illusion that one may create a self within the greater illusion, or that he may redeem a self (HTD 137-38). Warren sees in Clyde something akin to what Arthur Miller sees in his own Willie Loman:

> In the story of Clyde, Dreiser is trying to write the root tragedy. It is a tragedy concerned, as tragedy must be, with the nature of destiny, but, as the root tragedy, it seeks the lowest common denominator of tragic effect, an effect grounded in the essential human situation. It is a type of tragedy based on the notion that, on whatever scale, man's lot is always the same. He is the mechanism envisioned by Jacques Loeb, but he is a mechanism with consciousness. His tragedy lies in the doubleness of his nature. He is doomed, as mechanism, to enact a certain role. As a consciousness, he is doomed to seek self-definition in the "terrors and wonders of individuality," the last illusion and the source of final pain. (HTD 138)

Warren asserts that this philosophical sense of doubleness had an important influence on Dreiser's form. Dreiser, in fact, invents a genre that depends on dialectic, Warren argues. In Dreiser's Trilogy, for example, Cowperwood was approached as a "Specimen," and Warren insists on this word as a tell-tale of the kind of novel Dreiser was out to write. Modeled on Yerkes, who exemplified the "financier," Cowperwoood is offered as a fictional creation intended to show "the nature of such a man and his meaning in society and nature" (HTD 76). As Warren says, "The method is narrative but the motive is expository" (HTD 76).

Warren is seeing a pertinence in Dreiser's use of history that may tell us something about Warren's own use

of history in his fiction and narrative poetry. Rather than trying to write an historical novel, "Dreiser is trying to invent a genre, a novel in which all the outer facts are certified and the inner facts are imaginatively extrapolated from that evidence, and the whole, outer and inner, is offered as a document" (HTD 76). This is a fairly startling assertion of the marriage of philosophy and art from which Warren, again not uncharacteristically, pulls back: "Perhaps it is too strong to say that Dreiser was trying to invent a genre" (HTD 77). The documentary novel was, after all, a result of the same impulses which gave rise to the realistic fiction written after the Civil War. However, what Warren says about the relation of the documentary novel to time distinguishes it from other genres. "Time in the ordinary novel is the very medium of existence"; however, "Time is not the medium of the documentary novel. Dialectic is the medium" (HTD 78).

It would be wrong to say that a novel such as All the King's Men, or any of Warren's other novels, takes a philosophical dialectic rather than time as its medium. However, the form of Warren's novels brings them close to the documentary form he defines here and perhaps explains in part what distinguishes them from the typical historical novel. Ultimately "philosophical novel" is a more satisfying label than either "documentary novel" or "historical novel" to describe Warren's novels, but they do

often combine the temporal medium of a paradigm of experience (separation and return) with a dialectic of values in their forms.

Warren does not write all of this to suggest that Dreiser approaches his subject coldly or as though he were writing a social allegory. The philosophy is not poured into the pattern. Rather the philosophy is intricately linked with the method, and the nature of the philosophy links Dreiser with philosophical novelists like Conrad and Melville:

> The hero who is instructed in the nature of things and can face his knowledge, knows that values have sanction and validity only in the passion of their assertion. He is aware of the root-irony that even he, the man of will, is part of the machine of the universe, and is, like the veriest weakling, a creature of "chemisms." (HTD 80-81)

Or again:

> The ultimate wisdom, Dreiser would seem to say, is to be unillusioned, but to know, in a strange paradoxical doubleness, the necessity of illusion. . . . For only by the acceptance of the illusion that creates individuality, can it be said, to quote the last words of The Titan, "Thou hast lived." (HTD 85)

The "illusion that creates individuality," as he has it here for Dreiser, is an important idea in all of Warren. It is an idea he sees in common in Conrad, Melville and Dreiser and even Hawthorne, and Twain if we take the poem about Twain as evidence. Each derives from the idea "the ultimate virtue, to understand the pathos of those who are born to struggle in the world where illusion

is the only reality" (HTD 85). This pity for illusion is a visionary achievement for Warren; it is a condition more redemptive than illusion. In fact, disillusionment is a necessary step before the higher vision can be achieved. It is the state marked by pity for illusion that Warren moves his own heroes and heroines toward, not always successfully. For the only way to achieve such knowledge is to, like Dreiser, live into it. Warren says, that Dreiser's awareness of this knowledge is a "naturalistic insight . . . akin to Christian charity" (HTD 86).

Warren's analysis of the method whereby Dreiser derived his knowledge and also made an emblem of it in his novels reveals an important term for Warren's theory of knowledge---ingurgitation. Against Mencken's charge that Dreiser's "ideas always seem to be deduced from his feelings," Warren defends Dreiser by agreeing: "ideas that signified anything to Dreiser were absorbed into his own experience, were ingurgitated and assimilated with an innocent, uncritical voracity" (HTD 91). For all his bumbling, Dreiser's sense of inwardness reveals itself (a test, one guesses, Mencken might fail), and it is this inwardness which makes him an artist; he is a novelist because of the deep need to make sense of himself. Simultaneously, he tries "to master and reconcile two of the great seminal ideas of the age, that of depth psychology and that of the study of the phenomena of life

in terms of the laws of physics and chemistry" (HTD 91); and so "the writing of fiction and the study of science and philosophy intertwine" (HTD 92). For Dreiser, as for William James, ideas had to interpenetrate with experience, and dramatization was Dreiser's process for absorbing ideas into his bloodstream (HTD 93). Furthermore, this process depended, ironically, upon an essential external reality: "Life is there, ready for the understanding that will make art possible and the art that will make understanding possible" (HTD 111). In this sentence Warren declares his theory of the inclusive relation of knowledge and art; they intertwine in process and are interdependent in creation. The art is the result of a dialectical interplay between the imagination of the artist and an external actuality.

In some ways John Greenleaf Whittier is, as Monroe K. Spears has said, the most "unlikely" subject in all of Warren's criticism (105). The Quaker Abolitionist would, on the surface, seem to offer little for Warren's critical tastes. Yet Whittier is, after Melville, the most fascinating figure of the nineteenth century poetry for Warren, to judge from the quantity of critical attention Warren paid to him. What is fascinating for Warren is the way Whittier's life and work cut across the two halves of the nineteenth century and their different ideas about the nature of knowledge and conscience. Whittier, in his life and in the dramatic difference between his early and later

poetry, gave Warren a figure by which to see that change in thinking dramatized.

Warren's article, "John Greenleaf Whittier: Poetry as Experience," suggests by its title the inward nature he saw in Whittier's poetry, but he saw it as a kind of poetry Whittier lived into. None of Whittier's early poetry, propaganda for the Abolititonist movement, showed any signs of inwardness despite its technical achievement. The "social" aspect of Whittier's poetry developed from the same way of thinking that Warren sees exemplified in certain of Whittier's critical reactions. Whittier rejected Walden as "heathenish," and he was so repulsed by Whitman that he flung Leaves of Grass into the fire. With such actions Whittier could be a model for some of Warren's own pious men, a Seth Parton (Band of Angels), for example, a high-minded man who, like Whittier, attaches himself to a specific cause as the inculcating machinery of his virtues. Whittier's early poetry was a reflection of that high-minded use of machinery.

Whittier must, therefore, be understood in relation to Abolitionism for Warren, and Warren's long definition of Abolitionism in the essay is yet another of his indictments of organized nineteenth century reformism. More centrally, however, Warren sees the radical Abolitionist at one pole of the emerging central question about the nature of the self and the nature of conscience.

Abolitionism suffered the same failure as Transcendentalism in Warren's view. Its radical adherents, Garrison chiefly, tended to think abstractly. They failed to see the issue of slavery in its political and social context. As he commonly does, Warren uses context to help with his definition. In this case he contrasts the Abolitionist and the Emancipationist. While Abolitionists are abstractionists, Warren's very examples of Emancipationists--Abraham Lincoln and Robert E. Lee, among others--suggest the inclusive doubleness of context that he explored in The Legacy of the Civil War. Part of the legacy of the war is important for framing Warren's understanding of Whittier's achievement. Just as it ushered in new, pragmatic theories of government and a change in the base of the country's economy from agricultural to industrial interests, the Civil War that ended slavery in America brought on a cultural crisis. The crisis turned America, ironically, away from idealistic, absolute notions such as those held by Abolitionists. The Gilded Age, of course, was the economic result of post-War pragmatism, but in the world of philosophy that pragmatism took on the central question of the nature of the conscience and its relation to consciousness.

Warren sees Whittier's career as a split one analogous to the opposition of the poles of absolute and educable conscience. What saved Whittier from a Garrisonian brand

of Abolitionism in the first place was his pluralistic view of man: "Whittier saw man among men, in his social as well as in other dimensions, and as the proper object of appeal to reason rather than the target for contumely; and nothing could more infuriate the radical Garrison, who was publicly to accuse Whittier of being a traitor to principle" (N&SE 251). Whittier's belief in the "principles of institutional reform and political action" combined with his adherence to Quaker pacifism led him to such acts as the condemnation of John Brown (N&SE 252).

It is this willingness that he perceives in Whittier to face the complexity of his own beliefs that moves Warren. In fact, Warren's admiration for what he determines to be Whittier's first really fine poem, "Ichabod," is based on that poem's expression of an inward complexity of emotion. Written in response to Daniel Webster's defense of the Compromise over the Fugitive Slave Bill, the poem "came more directly and personally out of [Whittier's] political commitment than any of his previous work"; yet the poem is effective because of "a division of feeling on the part of the poet" (N&SE 256). The "tension between old trust and new disappointment" gives rise to an attitude of grief, rather than rage. Even so, Warren detects a note of the killer's instinct in the poem: "If Webster had been motivated by ambition, then pity is one attitude his pride could not forgive" (N&SE 257).

As the war ended, nevertheless, Whittier was faced with the Abolitionist's predicament of having his cause removed. In time, Warren says, Whittier's poetry began to reflect his repudiation of his previous notions of poetry and became grounded in experience. Warren sees "Snow-Bound," which he calls a minor masterpiece, as an important document in Whittier's personal change as well as a document of cultural change. Personally, the poem comes for Whittier at a time when it is apparent he will never marry, and it comes toward the end of the war when "the joy of victory would, necessarily, carry with it a sense of emptiness" (N&SE 270). That emptiness, Warren surmises, may be represented in the figure of Harriet Livermore in the poem. In her search for a satisfying religion, Livermore represents one strain of thought in nineteenth-century America. Her restlessness in her search aligns her with characters such as Nathan and Nehemiah in Melville's Clarel. She also bears a relation to Margaret Fuller, who, Warren points out, was the model for Zenobia in Hawthorne's The Blithedale Romance. Warren thus sees Whittier's treatment of Livermore aligned with the ironic treatment of the Transcendentalists by Hawthorne and Melville.

Warren asserts that the poem resists its basic nostalgic appeal through various "perspectives." The poetry of the poem, to paraphrase Warren, depends not on the subject of the family and their visitors huddled in

their warm house, but on the way the subject is looked at. Structurally, the comfortable interior setting is but one perspective of the poem's main theme--a question about the problem of time. Warren sees Whittier's use of the "idyl" as an image in a dialectical process that plays Platonic memory against an active future. Thus Whittier's use of the past corresponds to Warren's definition of selfhood as a sense of continuum. In fact, "Snow-Bound" represents Whittier's change in thinking about the past and becomes thereby a record of Whittier's struggle for selfhood.

> He had to find a new way to make the past nourish the future.
>
> It could not be the old way. The old way had been, in a sense, merely a surrender. By it, Whittier had indeed found a future, a life of action. But the victory had been incomplete, and the costs great; for we must remember that the grinding headaches continued and that the solacing hands of Elizabeth Lloyd had been, in the end, impossible for him.
>
> The new way was more radical. That is, Whittier undertook to see the problem of the past and future as generalized rather than personal, as an issue confronting America, not only himself; furthermore, to see it sub specie aeternitatis, as an aspect of man's fate. And he came to see that man's fate is that he must learn to accept and use his past completely, knowingly, rather than to permit himself to be used, ignorantly by it.
>
> (N&SE 278-79)

Warren contends that "Snow-Bound" may be read as the "dynamic image of the very process by which" Whittier came to regard the problem of his own life (N&SE 279). But it may also be read, by the literary historian, for its prominent place in relation to a national theme. Warren's discussion of this theme in the essay is a central,

clarifying statement of his own engagement with American literature. He argues that the theme of the past is an important American theme because it identifies one school of thought which is exhibited in the works of Cooper, Melville, Hawthorne, and Faulkner. The theme of the past is itself an ironic theme given the predominant view of America as a land of future and the New Adam, but Warren sees the work of these writers collectively because all of these authors took an ironic view of the idea that America was a pastless land. The pastless men in Cooper, Hurry Harry of Deerslayer, for example, are close to Faulkner's Snopeses and other pastless characters such as Joe Christmas. Melville's great themes of a man's entrapment in the past in Pierre, or the Ambiguities and the theme of the irony of history in Battle-Pieces are related to the question of the past, as is Hawthorne's adoption and treatment of the history of New England. Whittier lacked the "sense of historical and philosophical irony" exhibited by these writers, but he had two powers in common with them: their "intuition of what it meant to be an American," which for all of them was something different from what it was for Emerson, and their "intuitive capacity to see personal fate as an image for a general cultural and philosophic situation" (N&SE 281).

The yoking of all these writers by the theme of the use of the past is an example of that "all-of-a-pieceness"

R.W.B. Lewis attributes to Warren's understanding of American literature (572). Lewis is correct in seeing that the wholeness is not schematic but an awareness of unity in diversity. Warren sees the writers as individuals writing out of their own experience; yet it is important for him--it might even be said to be a critical obsession--that each writer's life was a brand of American experience out of which each discovered the coexisting polarities that would allow him to know his life as he lived it, know it, moreover, as it related to life on a large scale, a national, universal scale.

In some ways, too, Warren's final published volume, New and Selected Essays, is evidence of that wholeness. It may appear to be a wholeness of exclusion, since it is centered on writers who, by Warren's own admission, constitute one school of thought. However, the polar opposite of that school of thought is included, is ever-present in fact, especially when the question of the past arises. Emerson, the Transcendentalists, Whitman, the Abolitionists--all represent the context, the polarity, that creates the special significance of Hawthorne, Melville, and the others, and, finally, of Warren himself. They are included in the context without which Warren's interpretation of American literature could not have been what it was.

Whittier was important for Warren's view that poetry is an act of knowledge won out of experience. Perhaps only Melville was more important among nineteenth century writers for him. What can be said from the evidence, finally, is not that either was a seminal influence on Warren's development as a writer himself, but that each, along with the others, posed a problem for him, the solving of which coalesced in an understanding of American literature that can be a very useful gloss on Warren's poems and novels. In talking of his own novels, Warren once said, "Individual personalities become mirrors of their times, or the times become a mirror of the personalities. Social tensions have a parallel in the personal world" (Talking 71-72). His readings of American writers discover the "mirror" aspect at work in them. However, these conclusions are drawn from a body of critical works; they are not first principles by which Warren set about reading these writers. Warren never backs away from the New Critical idea of the platonic perfect reading of a work and the platonic perfect reader, but his use of platonism in criticism is not intended as a means of reaching the perfect understanding of a work. The ideal is just one pole in a dialectic, the opposite pole being no meaning, no context, no universal. The American writers who drew Warren's critical interest are writers whose works reflect the dialectic of the personal experience and the

national mood, which served them as the objective subject for criticism. The art is thus born as an image of the sometimes destructive interplay between self and society. It is, thereby, as Warren said in Democracy and Poetry, diagnostic literature. It is also, in its various forms, a therapeutic literature. This dual function is achieved because the work is never merely confessional and never merely cultural indictment, but a complex expression of both processes.

CHAPTER 4

THE ARC OF WARREN'S POETRY

Warren's career as a poet is glaringly divisible into two distinct periods, the first dating from 1923 until 1943 and the second beginning in 1953 and continuing to his death. During the roughly ten years unaccounted for in these divisions, Warren published only in prose.

Among the early poems, "Bearded Oaks" is probably the best known and most often anthologized. The poem is representative of Warren's early efforts because it demonstrates his ability to work within tightly constructed, traditional forms. It also reveals the influence of the Metaphysical poets on his early work and the influence of Eliot. The line that compares the lovers to "Twin atolls on a shelf of shade" in "Bearded Oaks" echoes Donne's famous conceit in "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" (N&SP 307); and Warren's poem bears a thematic and tonal resemblance to other works by Donne and Marvell with its emphasis on the urgency of love within the confines of time.

> We live in time so little time
> And we learn all so painfully,
> That we may spare this hour's term
> To practice for eternity. (N&SP 307)

"Bearded Oaks" also contains images of submarine darkness which suggest something that often appears in Warren's work, a dream-state of existence in a timeless world.

> The oaks, how subtle and marine,
> Bearded, and all the layered light
> Above them swims; and thus the scene,
> Recessed, awaits the positive night.
> (N&SP 306)

Such images of murkiness help to suggest the overriding naturalistic vision in the world inherited by the two lovers in the poem, but they are also intended to suggest eternity, according to the last stanza. The time of peace, or actually the no-time of peace, spent by the lovers under the oaks is outside the movement of time and history. Tradition seems to have been eroded as "Passion and slaughter, ruth, decay" have "Silted down swaying streams" to produce a wasteland.

> All our debate is voiceless here,
> All our rage, the rage of stone;
> If hope is hopeless, then fearless is fear,
> And history is thus undone. (N&SP 306)

Warren often creates images of the blankness of nature. William Van O'Connor thought that Warren would never develop a vision of life because of this naturalistic strain in his writing (98), and John Crowe Ransom made something of the same objection to Warren's naturalism (211). It is true that naturalism became an important technique for Warren because he was a twentieth-century writer who, like the lovers in "Bearded Oaks," had inherited the crumblings of a defunct system of beliefs. If he never achieved what could be called a vision of life, however, it was not because of his naturalism. Even in an

early poem like "Bearded Oaks" he was affirming a kind of faith.

> I do not love you less that now
> The caged heart makes iron stroke,
> Or less that all that light once gave
> The graduate dark should now revoke. (N&SP 307)

This affirmation of love places human emotions back at the forefront of the poem. The poem is finally Warren's version of "Dover Beach," with a significant twist. If love is possible, it suggests, then so are rage, hope and fear. Then the human is not the same as the stone, and history is not completely undone.

For the human being to be at one with the stone would mean peace, but according to Warren's philosophy this peace would mean the end of identity because there would be no distinction between man and nature. Indeed, many of Warren's characters in both his poetry and his fiction try to achieve a unity with the world by existing in what may be called a dream state, and that condition is very often sought through a flight into the natural world--the West, the wilderness, the swamp. Such a unity with nature would end the agony of isolation; but to achieve it, they must deny their past and, ironically, the reality of the outside world. They must lay claim to an innocence which is delusory and which most often fails because it conditions another kind of isolation. That isolation is often an ultimate despair.

In another early poem entitled "Revelation," a man thinks back to a time when he had learned "Something important about love, and about love's grace."

> Because he had spoken harshly to his mother
> The day became astonishingly bright,
> The enormity of distance crept to him like a dog now
> And earth's own luminescence seemed to repel the night.
> (N&SP 304)

Warren follows a literary tradition here by having nature participate in the human world, and he strengthens the appeal to tradition by alluding to Augustine's account of Sulla and the Roman civil wars and the strange occurrences in nature on the night of Duncan's murder in Macbeth. While this sympathy in nature reinforces the idea that the world is all of one piece, the pathetic fallacy here is not so much the poet's as it is the guilt-ridden man's in the poem. It was the pain of being cut off from the mother that made the world seem paradoxically "astonishingly bright." It is remembering that pain now which makes it possible for him to learn something about the nature of love's grace. Warren has gone on in the poem to write that "In separateness only does love learn definition" (N&SP 304). Grace, the most cherishable attribute of love, and indeed, anything like love, could not exist in the case of total unity. Man's separateness from nature is, in this sense, a "fortunate fall" because it gives him a chance for love as well as identity in distinction.

These two early poems bring to light some of the issues to which Warren was to return: the interrelatedness of things in the world, the necessity of separateness, the tug of the past on the individual, and the nature of love. However, Warren's poetry was to undergo a change soon, one that would begin to be most noticeable in "The Ballad of Billie Potts." His penchant for storytelling would begin to exert itself in his poetic attempts, and he was to move more and more toward being an accomplished teller of tales in verse.

In fact, Justus has noted that even the early poems such as "Bearded Oaks" were derived "from the felt urgencies of narrative situations." Justus further writes, "By its very nature, the purely meditative lyric is too static to admit the exercise of a temperament such as Warren's given as it is to the interplay of excess, the dramatic clash of opposites conceived and drawn in large outline" (Achievement 53). "The Ballad of Billie Potts" and "Original Sin: A Short Story" are two poems which illustrate Warren's continuing development of his theme of the integrated self and the one world in a more narrative form.

"The Ballad of Billie Potts" tells the tale of a frontier Kentucky innkeeper and his family who supplement their income by informing highwaymen about "likely looking" travellers for a share of what can be stolen from them. On

one occasion, Big Billie, the innkeeper, sends his son, Little Billie, to tell one of the collaborating robbers that a wealthy man is about to depart from the inn; but Little Billie decides to surprise his parents by doing the job himself. In his unprofessional attempt, Little Billie is shot and subsequently has to flee westward. He returns ten years later, having made something of a fortune. Planning to have some fun, Little Billie does not reveal his identiy to his parents immediately (fat and a long beard have made him unrecognizable to them); and Big Billie and his wife, seeing only a wealthy stranger, plot to murder him for his money. They learn only after it is too late who he really was.

It is the kind of story that would appeal to Warren, given Justus' analysis of the poet's temperament. The basic irony of the story is one that allows for a development of some of the issues Warren was concerned with. Little Billie returns home feeling the tug of the past and expecting to find things as they were. Even after he is informed by Joe Drew, whom he meets on the way, that his father has been running short of luck, he jingles the money in his own pockets to signify that he is bringing luck back to his parents. This is the second time Little Billie has tried to surprise his family by doing something good for them; and, ironically of course, this time he succeeds.

The confusion over Little Billie's identity suggests the major problem Warren is trying to approach in the poem. For Little Billie not to be wary of returning to his parents' house with the appearance of a wealthy stranger reveals the fatal flaw in his character. He is, in a sense, the same bumbler who botched the robbery because of a lack of experience; but in this second instance it is his failure to see the significance of past events which leads to his problems. He returns home with a nostalgic illusion of what home is and runs headlong into reality in the form of an axe set into his head.

Knowledge is not, however, simply something that comes easily to people who are more intelligent than Little Billie. The problem of knowledge is suggested by Warren's use of two very distinct styles in the poem. The tale itself is told in the vernacular common to traditional folk ballads and tall tales, but it is interrupted regulary for lengthy commentary written in a style more suitable to philosophical meditation and clearly separated from the body of the tale by parentheses. The commentary is a variation on the same theme as that of the tale. In fact, Justus has compared the commentary passages with Coleridge's gloss in The Rime of the Ancient Mariner (Achievement 58). In the commentary passages Warren addresses a wanderer, someone like Little Billie; and he tries to analyze his motivations. These passages serve as

a way of interpreting the action of the tale and raising that action to a universal level, or to a mythological level. The dual styles also suggest an imaginative doubleness, a mutual criticism of the low style tale and the discourse of twentieth century man analyzing its implications. The method seems more effective than intrusive as Warren has handled it; and it allows the poet to achieve a high level of mental discourse without destroying the flow of the humorous, low style of the tale. Still, the styles' resistance to each other suggests the problem of the unintegregated self that drives Little Billie, as well as his mother and father, toward his tragic end.

What the tale suggests is that there is a continuity to life, an interrelatedness of the events of history. Neither Little Billie in his nostaligia nor Big Billie and his wife in their greed are able to recognize this fact until it is too late. In this way they are typical of Warren's characters who fall victim to tragedy because of a short-sightedness due to their ignorance or their preoccupations.

Because recognition of the significance of the past is necessary to self-identity, returning home has a special significance as a motif in Warren's work. In one of the commentary passages in the poem, Warren gives a reason for the return.

Though your luck held and the market was always
satisfactory,
Though the letter always came and your lovers were
always true
Though you always received the respect due to your
position,
Though your hand never failed of its cunning and your
glands always thoroughly knew their business,
Though your conscience was easy and you were assured of
your innocence
You became gradually aware that something was missing
from the picture,

And upon closer inspection exclaimed: "Why I'm not in
it at all!"
Which was perfectly true.
Therefore you tried to remember when you had last had
Whatever it was you had lost,
And you decided to retrace your steps from that point,
But it was a long way back.
It was, nevertheless, absolutely essential to make the
effort,
And since you had never been a man to be deterred by
difficult circumstances,

You came back.
For there is no place like home. (N&SP 295)

The urging that drives Little Billie back home is a memory of a prelapsarian innocence. His actions, though, have made that innocence impossible to recover, as it is for all men. Little Billie is not thoughtful enough to understand why he needs to return; he only feels the desire and knows it has something to do with the idea of home. The wanderer in the commentary, however, must return

back to the homeland of no-Time,
To ask forgiveness and the patrimony of your crime;
And kneel in the untutored night as to demand
What gift--oh, father, father--from that dissevering
hand? (N&SP 297)

The nature of the life of the Billie Potts family makes the gift a shocking, agonizing one, but Little Billie's

motivation to return seems the same as the wanderer's, some impulse toward an identity with the past.

Warren ends the poem with a meditation on the unity of nature and the separateness of man.

> The bee knows, and the eel's cold ganglia burn.
> And the sad head lifting to the long return,
> Through brumal deeps, in the great unsolsticed coil,
> Carries its knowledge, navigator without star,
> And under the stars, pure in its clamorous toil,
> The goose hoots north where the starlit marshes are.
> The salmon heaves at the fall, and, wanderer, you
> Heave at the great fall of Time, and gorgeous, gleam
> In the powerful arc, and anger and outrage like dew,
> In you plunge, fling, and plunge to the thunderous stream:
> Back to the silence, back to the pool, back
> To the high pool, motionless and unmurmuring dream.
> And you, wanderer, back,
> Brother to pinion and the pious fin that cleave
> Their innocence of air and the disinfectant flood
> And wing and welter and weave
> The long compulsion and the circuit hope
> Back,
>
> And bear through that limitless and devouring fluidity
> The itch and humble promise which is home. (N&SP 299)

The "devouring fluidity" here is another image of murkiness like those in "Bearded Oaks." The theme of naturalism rendered through the descriptions of the creatures who carry their knowledge with them is contrasted with the wanderer (Little Billie, the human being), who in the metaphor "Heave[s] at the great fall of Time" to reach the "high pool" of pre-fall innocence. The wanderer is clearly separated from the naturalistic state of the eel and the bee, the goose and the salmon, and the great serpent. While these have the perfect knowledge and peace of unity, the wanderer has "The itch and humble promise which is

home," a dream and a desire. This separateness of the wanderer from nature is precisely what makes him human; but so is the desire to return to a unity with nature; and some sort of a return, Warren seems to suggest, is possible. The successful return, unlike Little Billie's return, takes into account man's capacity for evil and his limitations of knowledge.

> And you, wanderer, back,
> After the striving and the wind's word,
> To kneel
> Here in the evening empty of wind or bird,
> To kneel in the sacramental silence of evening
> At the feet of the old man
> Who is evil and ignorant and old,
>
> To kneel
> With the little black mark under your heart,
> Which is your name. . . . (N&SP 300)

In "Original Sin: A Short Story," Warren addresses another wanderer struggling with the tug of the past. The tug of the past here, a "nightmare," is more a haunting than a longing, and Warren has given another account of how this connection with the past lends to identity.

> You thought you had lost it when you left Omaha,
> For it seemed connected then with your grandpa, who
> Had a wen on his forehead and sat on the veranda
> To finger the precious protuberance, as was his habit
> to do,
> Which glinted in the sun like rough garnet or the rich
> old brain bulging through.
>
> But you met it in Harvard Yard as the historic steeple
> Was confirming the midnight with its hideous racket,
> And you wondered how it had come, for it stood so
> imbecile,
> With empty hands, humble, and surly nothing in pocket:
> Riding the rods, perhaps--or Grandpa's will paid the
> ticket.

You were almost kindly then, in your first homesickness,
As it tortured its stiff face to speak, but scarcely
mewed.
Since then you have outlived all your homesickness,
But have met it in many another distempered latitude:
Oh, nothing is lost, ever lost! at last you
understood. (N&SP 301)

The "you" in the poem has tried to outrace the stain of Original Sin by fleeing the past and all that reminds him of it--"Omaha," "grandpa"; but Warren's utterance that "nothing is ever lost," a phrase repeated often in his writing, gives statement to the poet's idea of the significance of the past in the present. Original Sin is what has separated man from his innocent state and defined him in his separateness. Attempting to flee from the past and Original Sin, therefore, is actually a flight from selfhood. Though "you" exclaims, "There must be a new innocence for us to be stayed by," there is always that presence or stain from the past that has to be contended with (N&SP 303).

"You" has not physically returned as Little Billie did. There has been no need for him to return because he has been thoughtful enough to carry the "patrimony of [his] crime" with him. And that nightmare of the past has outlasted all attempts at a fresh start.

You have moved often and rarely left an address,
And hear of the deaths of friends with a sly
pleasure,
A sense of cleansing and hope which blooms from
distress;
But it has not died, it comes, its hand childish,
unsure,
Clutching the bribe of chocolate or a toy you used to
treasure. (N&SP 302)

Like Little Billie and the wanderer, "you" has known success in the world--Harvard, friends, family; but the assurances of a good life do not guarantee a vision by which to live. They can, in fact, be more a means of flight. The fact of separateness and the desire for flight are both emphasized in the "sly pleasure" taken from the news of the deaths of friends.

Often in Warren's writings, flight is an attempt at cleansing based on a desire for a new innocence beyond the reach of the past. Little Billie flees to escape hanging after the botched robbery and "you" in "Original Sin" flees to escape the "nightmare" of his own nature. Little Billie runs west and "you" toward what the poem's speaker calls the "fondled axiom" (N&SP 302). Both fail because being in the world means that they are in history, and the interrelatedness of things in the world extends backward into history. When Warren's protagonists undertake such flights into idea, as a rule they fail, except in the sense that some of them come to recognize the failure of the flight and learn something about the reality of being and the significance of the past in their lives, as "you" seems to do at the end of "Original Sin."

> It [the nightmare] tries the lock. You hear, but simply drowse:
> There is nothing remarkable in that sound at the door.
> Later you may hear it wander the house
> Like a mother who rises at night to seek a childhood picture;
> Or it goes to the backyard and stands like an old horse cold in the pasture. (N&SP 302)

In this attitude of acceptance, "you" has achieved something of the same return as the wanderer in "Billie Potts," who kneels before the evil old man. It is the acceptance of all experience which seems to allow for a relative peace with it. As will be seen in the next chapter, another of Warren's protagonists, Thomas Jefferson, must learn to come to the same sort of acceptance in Brother to Dragons.

Of course, wiping the slate clean and starting fresh has been an important part of the enigmatic ideal called the American dream. As Warren wrote in "The Ballad of Billie Potts," "There is always another country and always another place" (N&SP 292). Traditionally, the other place in American experience has been the West, and those who have gone there for a new beginning "have been dipped in the redeeming blood" and "dipped in Time" (N&SP 293).

> For Time is always the new place,
> And no-place.
> For Time is always the new name and the new face,
> And no-name and no-face.
>
> For Time is motion
> For Time is innocence
> For Time is West. (N&SP 293)

One might pause here to wonder how Time can be all these things. It would seem that Time as motion would negate Time as innocence, which seems synonomous with Time as West. Here, Time may be the false separator of man from his past. Hence, the motion of Time is an illusory, mental

motion away from experience. Those who would flee from the continuity of life that bridges time, perhaps even undoes time, in the end, do not succeed at finding a true peace in Warren's works. In a sense those characters who flee into abstract Time are also trying to deny time, which is real and connects all experience, as a force in life. They try to exist outside time in a dream state rather than to discover through struggle in the pain of isolation the continuity that bridges time. Such characters do not succeed at finding a satisfactory way of life, for to do so would require a death in existence, an absence of individual identity brought about by the "Great Sleep" of idealism or the "Great Twitch" of naturalism, to borrow Jack Burden's terms.

Man may achieve a return, however, by seeing the affirmation of his identity in the "osmosis of being." As Warren explained in "Knowledge and the Image of Man,"

> 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. (241)

The process of this self-creation means recognizing the spider web nature of the world and that "nothing is ever lost," but also that man is not a creature of "perfect adjustment," like the catfish in the Mississippi where fish and water intermingle and become inseparable (BD 61).

Warren's vision of man is not, finally, a naturalistic one; for man uses wisdom, such as he has, to distinguish himself from the other creatures around him and to achieve a new unity with nature based on a perception of his responsibility or his will. As Warren made more and more clear in his writing after 1943, such wisdom cannot be achieved through flight from the past or the world, but through a process that resembles the ingestion of these elements of life into a developing self.

In these early poems appear certain techniques which would continue, however--the Hawthornesque use of the past as a solid actuality juxtaposed against the flight into Emersonian idealism, or scientific positivism, or even a submersion into the conveniences of modern life, all in an attempt to escape the self. The differences between the stately diction and regular meter of "Bearded Oaks" and the humorous rhyme and colloquial jags of "Original Sin" and "Billie Potts," as well as the dual styles of "Billie Potts," point to an important early shift that was to remain in the later poetry. "Bearded Oaks" is, for all its technical proficiency, somewhat "theoretically" modern. It states the right dilemma for poetry after The Waste Land, but it lacks the dramatic tension that Warren needed to write his most powerful poems. There was something in Warren's temperament that demanded, like Melville's, a subject "urgently human." Melville had found his subject

in the Civil War. Warren found his in a mythological figure--the wanderer, the prodigal--whom he set in an American landscape to tell the story of flight and return. "Revelation," "Original Sin" and "The Ballad of Billie Potts," as well as other early poems like "Kentucky Mountain Farm" and "The Return: An Elegy" deal with this theme. The wanderer gave Warren the image and the situation he needed to explore his most urgent theme--the question of identity. The theme of home--its rejection, the need to return--surrounds the quest for selfhood that is inclusively individual and communal, and always difficult because of the double pull of fact and idea, past and future, love and separateness.

Warren wrote "The Ballad of Billie Potts" in 1943. He did not complete another poem for ten years. He did, however, write a large quantity of fiction during that time, including the two novels regarded by many as his best, All the King's Men and World Enough and Time; and he also wrote the essay "A Poem of Pure Imagination" on Coleridge's The Rime of the Ancient Mariner and the essay on Melville, "Melville the Poet." In addition, Warren wrote a number of short stories during those years, including his best: "Blackberry Winter." It is to this story that one must look for the bridge, or at least one bridge, between the poetry written up until 1943 and the poetry written after 1953, for it was both a "personal"

work in the way that Warren regarded writing poetry as a more personal endeavor than writing novels and it continued the treatment of the wanderer Warren had begun in the earlier poetry. (Coleridge's Mariner was, of course, just such a figure.)

Warren's comments on how he came to write "Blackberry Winter" reveal that he viewed it as a "poetic," personal effort:

> It was the fall or winter of 1945-46 just after the war, and even if one had had no hand in the blood-letting, there was the sense that the world, and one's own life, would never be the same again. [One notices that this is almost identical to Whittier's situation which led to the writing of his highly personal Snow-Bound.] I was then reading Herman Melville's poetry, and remember being profoundly impressed by "The Conflict of Convictions," a poem about the coming of the American Civil War. Whatever the rights and wrongs of the matter, the war, Melville said, would show "the slimed foundations" of the world. There was the sense in 1945, even with victory, that we had seen the slimed foundations, and as I now write this, the image that comes into my mind is the homely one from my story--the trash washed by storm from under Dellie's cabin to foul her pridefully clean yard. And I should not be surprised if the picture in the story had its roots in the line from Melville as well as in such a fact, seen a hundred times in my rural boyhood. So the mixed feelings I had in our moment of victory in 1945, Melville's poem, and not only the image of Dellie's cabin, but something of the whole import of my little story, belong, it seems, in the same package.
>
> For a less remote background, I had just finished two long pieces of work, a novel called All the King's Men and a critical study of Coleridge's poem The Ancient Mariner, both of which had been on my mind for years. Both those things were impersonal, about as impersonal as the work of any man's hand can be said to be. Even though much of my personal feeling had been drawn into both projects, they belonged to worlds very different from my own. At that time, too, I was living in a

> very cramped apartment over a garage, in a big, modern, blizzard-bit northern city, again a place very different from the world of my story.
>
> In my daily life, I certainly was not thinking about and remembering that world. I suppose I was living in some anxiety about the fate of the two forthcoming pieces of work, on which I had staked much, and in the unspoken, even denied, conviction that some sort of watershed of life and experience was being approached. For one thing, the fortieth birthday, lately passed, and the sense of let-down after the long period of intense work, could account, in part at least for the feeling. [Here another striking similarity to Whittier just before the composition of Snowbound.]
>
> Out of this situation the story began, but it began by a kind of accident. Some years earlier, I had written a story about a Tennessee sharecropper, a bad story that had never been published. Now I thought I saw a way to improve it. I don't know whether I actually sat down to rewrite the story that was to have the new avatar of "The Patented Gate and the Mean Hamburger," or whether I got sidetracked into "Blackberry Winter" first. In any case, I was going back into a primal world of recollection. I was fleeing, if you wish. Hunting old bearings and bench-marks, if you wish. Trying to make a fresh start, if you wish. Whatever people do in the doubleness of living in a present and a past. (Understanding Fiction 639-640)

The story's composition, as Warren describes it here, was a process very similar to a process dramatized in a number of poems written after 1953. In the story, a tramp comes onto a farm in the wake of a "gully washer" and seeks work. He has a confrontation with the father of the boy who tells the story, and as the tramp makes ready to leave the boy follows him. The tramp says to the boy: "Stop following me. You don't stop following me and I cut yore throat, you little son-of-a-bitch" (The Circus in the Attic, 86). The tramp then leaves, and the narrator summarizes what has happened in the intervening twenty-five years. My

summary, of course, does no justice to the story's skillful telling, but it is the final sentence of the story that is relevant here: "But I did follow [the tramp], all the years" (The Circus in the Attic, 87). This final sentence is strangely both prospective and retrospective. The narrator seems to meet the boy he had been in that sentence, a meeting which actually creates an image of the "doubleness of living in a present and a past." The wanderer is looking back at himself in his youthful innocence and finding himself even then staring at an image, the tramp, of what he was to become, or at least an image of a kind of life he feels an affinity with now that he is an adult. "Blackberry Winter" is a transitional piece precisely because it is a personal work, and what happens to the "wanderer" in the later poetry is what begins to happen to him here. He becomes a more personal poetic persona.

With Brother to Dragons Warren began a profuse production of poems, publishing four volumes of shorter poems, another book-length poem and two more Selected volumes between 1953 and 1975. Also, by including the character R.P.W. in Brother to Dragons, Warren had adopted a more personal perspective in his approach to poetry; and this approach became a tendency in the poems that followed. The poems should not, however, be taken as an autobiographical record of the poet's life. Warren's

poems, as alert critics such as Monroe K. Spears have seen, are personal, not confessional ("The Latest Poetry," 356). Warren himself cautioned against any strictly autobiographical reading of his poetry in an Afterthought to the volume Being Here. His comments are made specifically for Being Here, but they are generally applicable to most of his poetry after 1953.

> The thematic order--or better, structure--is played against, or with a shadowy narrative, a shadowy autobiography, if you will. But this is an autobiography which represents a fusion of fiction and fact in varying degrees and perspectives. . . . fiction may often be more deeply significant than fact. Indeed, it may be said that our lives are our own supreme fiction. (108)

This last sentence, obviously an echo of Wallace Stevens' "Poetry is the supreme fiction," echoes, too, Warren's statement in "Knowledge and the Image of Man" that man creates an image of himself that defines his life. The poems from this middle part of his career are evidence of the poet's struggle to create that image, that vision by which to live, out of experiences and relationships that are at once personal and universal.

The knowledge of a "texture of relations" is not only the subject of many of the poems from this period; the body of the poems also suggests interconnection in the way they relate to each other. As A. L. Clements has noted in his essay entitled "Sacramental Vision," Warren must be read in context; and "context" for Warren means not only the line

as it is related to the whole of the poem, but the poem as it is related to the sequence of poems, the sequence as it is related to the total volume, and the volume as it is related to the total body of Warren's work (312). Clements' comments show his valuable perception of how Warren successfully bound theme and form in his work.

In the poetry Warren wrote during the sixties and seventies, he demonstrated his concern not only with the idea of selfhood but also with the actual process by which the mind may attain a sense of selfhood. As we have seen, this interest had its equivalent in the works of non-fiction in Warren's focus on the knower (usually himself) as well as the known (Jefferson Davis, reaction to desegregation, the Civil Rights Movement). In this poetry Warren is very aware that he is practicing a form which reflects the philosophical theory set down in "Knowledge and the Image of Man" and elsewhere--Poetry is knowledge, or a form of knowledge. Several poems reveal a basic pattern of discovery. Perhaps none are more interesting, or more personal, than a cluster of poems which take the familial past for their subject. "Natural History"; "I am Dreaming of a White Christmas: The Natural History of a Vision"; and "The Interim," a poem from the "Tale of Time" sequence, are poems that may be read in a body as they chronicle a movement by a single protagonist toward a sustaining vision. Though Warren was from the beginning of

his career a poet concerned with self-knowledge, these poems do seem to focus more sharply on the actual dynamics of ontological discovery than earlier poems, a shift which followed the shift to a more personal kind of poetry in Warren's career. Three characters recur in the poems--the father and the mother, singly or together, and the son, whose voice emerges from the poems as the voice of a single persona trying to come to terms with the meaning of his relation to his parents. He is also as a figure a continuation of the wandering figure from Warren's earlier poetry. These three poems constitute a fiction of sorts when they are viewed in the order in which they are considered here, an order which benignly violates the chronology of their composition by following the more significant chronology of the speaker's developing imagination.

The first poem, "Natural History," is concerned with an issue which had appeared in Warren's work as early as the poem "Original Sin: A Short Story." The "nightmare" that creeps into the present life of the protagonist in that earlier poem is translated in "Natural History" into the image of two grotesque figures--the dead father dancing naked in the rain and singing the song of understanding and the dead and naked mother counting "her golden memories of love" as if she were counting pieces of money (N&SP 178). In this poem the son is separated from the perfect

knowledge of his parents in death and a state of timelessness. By envisioning them, however, he is drawn toward that timelessness, that perfect unity with nature which in the hyperbolic language of the poem stops clocks all over the continent and causes flights out of Kennedy Airport to be cancelled. Like the protagonist of "Original Sin," who moves often without leaving a forwarding address in his attempt to escape the stain of Omaha and his grandfather, the son tries to establish an order in his life which negates the past for him. Toward this end he calls on the police to check these grotesque figures from the grave who disrupt the order he clings to. Warren's fusion of symbols of social order with the nightmarish emblems of a fantastic, envisioned world suggests an uneasy connection between the past and the present. However, the son here resists the connection, declaring that the mother and father "must learn to stay in their graves" (N&SP 178). Yet, the process of "natural history" means that the parents are somehow involved in the present, a fact which is indicated clearly enough by the son's pain of alienation that makes him yearn for union. At the same time, he realizes that such a union would destroy his individual identity. In a way this poem is Warren's version of "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," for the desire for a final understanding and unity in love and peace with the parents must be foregone for the world of action. The son

must resist the easy peace that so many of Warren's characters in both his poetry and his fiction fall victims to. Life continues only with this resistance, but in this poem the son has little understanding of why he must resist. He does not seem to go beyond the fear-induced rationale implied when he says,

> As much as I hate to, I must summon the police.
> For their own good, as well as that of society, they must be put under surveillance.
>
> They must learn to stay in their graves. That is what graves are for. (N&SP 178)

Clearly linked to "Natural History" is "I Am Dreaming of a White Christmas: The Natural History of a Vision." In this second poem, Warren goes further to define the process by which past experience may be converted into vision. In this poem the son imaginatively creates or recreates three distinct mental pictures. The first and most sustained image is of a family Christmas scene remembered from his childhood. The details of this exercise in history illustrate the problems he faces with knowing the past. A sense of decay is suggested by the images of the once-again grotesque figures of the father and mother, both eyeless and motionless. They sit among pieces of faded family-room furniture, and a dying cedar Christmas tree is central in the image. The overall sense of decay and the particular grotesque features place this image in the same timeless state already observed in "Natural History," but there is once again a suggestion

that all is not dead in this past. A fresh, green sprig of holly intensifies the son's need to know what gift was wrapped for him beneath the Christmas tree. Perhaps, too, it is symbolic of the awakening imagination with which he is giving meaning to the image. The "gift," at any rate, achieves a symbolic level of meaning in the poem, for what the son really needs to know is what meaning there is in his relationship with his parents. One is reminded of the important question asked in "The Ballad of Billie Potts," a question which, in fact, is important in all of Warren, the question of what meaning there is in the past: "What gift --oh, father, father--from that dissevering hand?" (N&SP 297, emphasis added).

The son leaves off his meditation on the past for one on the present; and in his present condition as a resident of New York City, the image he creates runs to dereliction. The language in this part of the poem establishes a bond between the son and the characters he describes, all of whom long for an escape back into innocence. "All is not in vain" as "the heart / Of the taxidriver . . . / Leaps with hope" and old men coming from hard-core movies, "stare up at the sky" which "dies wide" above the artificial neon light of the city as though they wished somehow to enter that sky (N&SP 186). The dreamy-eyed gazes of the old men provoke a mental escape in the son himself; and he begins to imagine a third scene,

snowfall in the Nez Perce Pass and the paleness of the bear grass there. He is "dreaming" once again of a white Christmas; and whiteness becomes, as in Frost's famous poem, an alluring invitation to escape from identity and action.

Rather suddenly, though, perhaps because of a connection he has made between the snow and a remembered time of peace and relative innocence which could be associated with the poem's initial image, the son is once again interrupted in his meditation by the anguishing question about the past. "But tell me, tell me," he demands,

> Will I never know
> What present there was in that package for me,
> Under the Christmas tree? (N&SP 187)

Again, as in "Natural History," the mother and father will not stay in their graves where they belong because there is a part of them that is not dead. What that part is has something to do with the past as a determining factor in identity, and the problem is how to know just what significance the past has as such. The entire poem is an exercise as the son uses memory and imagination in an attempt to settle this important issue. That he has an understanding of the value of this process, though in the end he is unsuccessful at answering the important question, is demonstrated in the final lines of the poem.

> All items listed above belong in the world
> In which all things are continuous,

> And are parts of the original dream which
> I am now trying to discover the logic of. This
> Is the process whereby pain of the past in its pastness
> May be converted into the future tense
> Of joy. (N&SP 187)

In "The Interim," finally, the son takes the process even further, discovering something of what the "gift" is and how an acceptance of the past may be achieved which can lead to "joy," a word which appears more and more frequently in Warren's later poetry. "The Interim" is one of six shorter poems, all meditations on the mother, linked together to form the unified "Tale of Time." "The Interim" describes the impending death of the mother. Death, of course, is a reclaiming of innocence for it unites what has been human with nature, ending the agony of separateness, or, Original Sin. As in the two poems already discussed, Warren uses grotesque features to clarify the separation between the living and the dead, or in this case, the dying, and to heighten the sense of pain in the son. For the mother, life spins and spills out from

> The holes of the eyes: and the eyes are
> Burning with mud beneath a sky of nothing.
> The eyes bubble like hot mud with the expulsion
> of vision. (N&SP 247)

Certain familiar details--the blankness of the mother's eyes, the "sky of nothing"--suggest the mother's slipping toward that timelessness which has been noted in the other poems; and as he watches her dying, the son seems to be slipping with her. "I am the / Nothingness which she / Sees," he says (N&SP 247). A sudden and seemingly final

action by the mother, though, shocks the son into a recognition of the separation between them, which establishes his reality and answers the question about the meaning of the past.

> Her hand rises in the air.
> It rises like revelation.
> It moves but has not motion, and
> Around it the world flows like a dream of drowning
> The hand touches my cheek.
> The voice says: you.
> I am myself.
> The hand has brought me the gift of myself.
> (N&SP 247, emphasis added to "gift")

The term gift in this passage strengthens the connection with "I Am Dreaming of a White Christmas." In fact, this poem represents the culmination of the motif of the gift with definition, at last, for the son; it is identity, which means not an awareness on the son's part of his "roots," but an awareness of his own reality in his separateness from his mother as he continues to exist, in the language of "Natural History," in the world of clocks and airline schedules. This identity is achieved through the naming of the son "you" and the religious symbolism of the laying on of the hand, which although it creates a tangential union, is, nevertheless, a "dissevering" hand because it breaks the son's illusion that he is nothing, that he is inseparable.

These ritualistic actions provide the son with the awareness of his separateness from his mother and the innocence of nature she is reentering at the moment of her

death, but they are not in themselves healing actions for the pain of that separateness. Whatever is achieved of such healing is achieved by the interpreting imagination. As he recalls the death of the mother in the present time of the poem, the son achieves a deeper understanding of the importance of the past to his own identity than he was able to in the two preceding poems. His awareness becomes knowledge, by Warren's definition. There is a maturity of understanding in the protagonist of "The Interim" which is only developing in the "Natural History" poems and which makes it clear that the reveries which appear in those poems occur at a time before the revelation of the "The Interim" in the chronology of the son's developing use of imagination in interpreting the past. With his reality, his separatenesss, established for him, the son discovers another stage in the process by which his anxiety over meaning may lead to a vision by which life can be lived. Because "Truth is all and / Must be respected" and because "History / Gathers, condenses, crouches, breathes, waits" behind the mirror to stare back at man, which is a way of saying that all life is continuous and that the "osmosis of being" transcends temporal limitations, the only way to learn how to live is to "eat the dead."

> You must eat them completely, bone, blood,
> flesh, gristle, even
> Such hair as can be forced. You
> Must undertake this in the dark of the moon, but
> At your plenilune of anguish. (N&SP 249)

This ritualistic eating of the flesh and blood, along with all other parts, denotes an acceptance of the whole past, even those parts of it that are hard to take. Warren constantly reveals in his writing how a blind faith in any idea which seeks to negate the ugliness of the past can lead to the failure of an unearned vision, as it does for Jefferson, Meriwether, and Lilburn in Brother to Dragons, Adam Stanton in All the King's Men, and Jeremiah Beaumont in World Enough and Time, to name a few examples from other Warren titles.

A brief comparison of the son with Jefferson, to continue with one of these examples, should prove illuminating. For Thomas Jefferson in Brother to Dragons, the acceptance of the whole past means in the end that he must accept the capacity for evil in his own blood, which is characteristically acknowledged by his touching Lilburn Lewis, his nephew who was guilty of hacking a slave to death with a meat axe. Both the idealism of Jefferson, in whom Warren portrays as great a "brass bound Idealist" as Jack Burden declared himself to be in All the King's Men (33), and the dream of nothingness which the son has in "The Interim" are false dreams from which the protagonists are rudely awakened. Through the act of touching, Jefferson comes from the illusion that there is no connection and the son from the illusion that there is no distinction. Both recognize a bond between things in the

world; and this helps them repair the disunion of original sin, not by returning them to the innocence of the "original dream," but by revealing, to Jefferson, the existence of a universal complicity and, to the son, the continuity of human life which establishes his identity with the past and the limitations of his communion with the past. These experiences of Jefferson and the son may actually be the same thing, indicators that the most important "truth" in Warren's writing, the "osmosis of being," has implications for both aspects of a significant self--time and the world of interconnection.

It is important to note that in "The Interim" the solution for learning how to live can be gained only at the most anguishing moment, at least in Warren's ritualistic language. The pain of alienation is both a symptom of the problem and a necessary part of the process of correction. As Warren says over and over, to have vision one must be alive and in time; and to be alive and in time necessarily involves tragic experience, the anguish of separateness.

This series of poems probes into the complex relationship between experience and vision. The process whereby the son obtains his vision involves the working of his imagination on stark images called up by his memory from past experience, perhaps reflecting one version of what Warren has called "the movie in our heads" (Homage to Theordore Dreiser 118). The poems establish a pattern of

movement from a static image to an active one. In the first poem, the horrifying image from the past is denied by his mind's need for a simple order. In the second, the anguish is greater and the awareness of the process whereby the mind achieves meaning is established. In the final poem, that meaning or identity is achieved in part at least with a shock of recognition and the interpretation of the symbolic actions of naming and touching. Inclusively, out of the development of his consciousness over the course of his ruminations, the son creates a religious ritual which represents the mental "ingestion / digestion" process by which the past becomes a part of one's being and leads to a transcending of physical and temporal boundaries, but a transcending which does not deny the sometimes-ugly truth of the past. The son undergoes the process of envisioning and interpretation, the process of imagining, in other words, which leads him from the grotesque image of the haunting past to a knowledge of the possibility of simultaneous kinship and individual identity, a <u>felt</u> sense of his own viable self. Moreover, that process is as much Warren's method here as his ritualistic language. There is, in other words, a dramatic meaning as well as a ritualistic meaning. Or there is a fusion of the two kinds of meaning.

In <u>Altitudes and Extensions</u>, a book of poems that reflects in some ways a consciousness of its "finalness,"

one poem especially seems to carry on the important images and themes associated with the wanderer/son. In fact, all four of the poems of section V of the book are linked by the memory of boyhood in Kentucky. They also have in common an impulse which Strandberg has seen:

> Lost somewhere among those vanished voices and faces is the innermost identity of the octogenarian poet, who is a Poet of Youth most of all because of his unrelenting pursuit of that primal ego which is recoverable only through the medium of the remembered image, or poetry. ("Poet of Youth," 92)

The first of the four poems, "Old-Time Childhood in Kentucky," invokes the familiar image of the maternal grandfather and ends with the speaker as a child in a prospective moment of wondering about his future, most of which, in the poem's typical doublenss of perspective, has, of course, already occurred. The third poem evokes the image of the maternal grandfather yet again; and in the final poem of the four, "Last Meeting," the persona, on a return visit back home, meets an old woman who in a bitter-sweet conversation calls out "Ro-Penn, Ro-Penn." (It is interesting how often Warren refers to himself in muted or abbreviated forms in his poems.) The woman, in the frailty of age, seems an emblem of the goneness of the past.

In the second poem of the section, "Covered Bridge," Warren has again turned to his wandering "you" who faces the problem of how to connect the present with the past.

Another land, another age, another self
Before all had happened that has happened since
And is now arranged on the shelf
Of memory in a sequence that I call Myself.

How can you think back and know
Who was the boy, sleepless, who lay
In a moonless night of summer, but with star-glow
Gemming the dewy miles, and acres, you used to go?
(N&SP 47)

In the double perspective of future and past, the covered bridge referred to in the title becomes a symbol of separation.

Till you wondered what night, long off, you
would set hoof
On those loose boards and then proceed
To trot through the caverning dark beneath that
roof.
Going where? Just going. That would be enough.
(N&SP 47)

But in the penultimate stanza, this prospective separation, which obviously did, in time, occur, is followed by an uneasy return. There is a connection between then and now which is suggested by a dash in mid-line (a connecting bridge?) and which is also suggested by syntax with a relative clause that identifies the man with the boy he was. This connection, however, is made even as the persona asks the same question about his fate that he has asked in earlier poems.

Then silence would wrap that starlit land,
And you would sleep--who now do not sleep
As you wonder why you cannot understand
What pike, highway, or path has led you from land
to land,

From year to year, to lie in what strange room,
Where to prove identity you now lift up
Your own hand--scarcely visible in that gloom.
(N&SP 47-48)

The image of the lifted hand echoes images from "Mortmain" and "The Interim" (Warren's poems about the deaths of his father and mother), but the fact that it is his own hand which he now watches emphasizes the aloneness of the persona. The poem does not go further. There is no self-contained epiphany here, but in the gesture itself there is the connection with the other figures from the other poems. The language needs close attention, too. Though the hand is "scarcely visible in that gloom" the gesture is not a feeble attempt to prove identity; it does prove identity. At one level, in isolation, the affirmation of identity seems only a knowledge based on physical substance. However, read in connection with the earlier poems, the gesture becomes an affirming reenactment. It does not, of course, solve the mystery of how the speaker came to be in the strange room, but it does connect the present self with the former self almost ritualistically. The gesture is what the persona would do after he had "eat[en] the dead."

The theme of the imaginative recovery of the past is important in poems that do not have a familial subject as well. It is perhaps stronger in no poem than in "Old Nigger on One-Mule Cart Encountered Late at Night When Driving Home from Party in the Back Country." Collected with the poems of Can I See Arcturus from Where I Stand?, a group largely of personal or meditative poems on emerging

self-knowledge, this poem is perhaps the best and most ambitious of Warren's short poems on the complex relationship between experience and vision. The poem follows the pattern seen earlier in the "son" poems, the movement from a dream state to a state of heightened awareness; and the persona, now a poet, again accomplishes this movement in level of consciousness by meditating on a past experience called up as an image from memory.

The long title explains the central event from the past that provokes the meditation. The party the speaker is returning from is described in terms that place it in a world outside time, the effect of music, motion, and "booze."

> Flesh, of a sudden, gone nameless in music, flesh
> Of the dancer, under your hand, flowing to music, girl-
> Flesh sliding, flesh flowing, sweeter than
> Honey, slicker than Essolube, over
> The music-swayed, delicate trellis of bone
> That is white in secret flesh-darkness. What
> The music, it says: no name, no name!--only
> That movement under your hand, what
> It is, and no name, and you shut your eyes. (N&SP 170)

The unreality of the party is underscored by the fact that the speaker cannot recall the name of his dance partner as he remembers that night. The alliteration in this passage especially lends to the feeling of nothingness and indistinguishability. "Flesh flowing" sounds like a kind of unity itself; and "slicker," "sliding," and sweeter" all create a sense of the easy movement of a dream. The hyphenated "girl- / flesh" reduces the girl to

all flesh even as it contributes to the rhythm by its place in the run-on line. The dance here is rendered as a ritual of self-forgetting, and central to the process is the touch, which contributes to the indistinguishability, unlike the dissevering touch of the mother. Sexual touch often has the effect of self-negation in Warren.

In contrast, the encounter on the way home stands out as <u>something</u> that must be interpreted. Warren achieves a connection between the passages which contain the descriptions of the two central events--the dance and the near collision with the junk collector--by the consistency with which he uses images of contrasting darkness and light, something he has used effectively since the time of such an early poem as "Bearded Oaks." At the party, white bone is hidden in "secret flesh-darkness." In the Louisiana night, stars that are "whitely outrageous" because they are in a "blackness of velvet" and dust that is "whiter than star-dust" mark an even stronger clash between light and dark (<u>N&SP</u> 170). When the speaker's car nearly collides with the cart of collected junk on which the black man sits, the headlights of the car reveal out of the night darkness the image that strikes so harshly that it stays in the speaker's memory.

> the mule-head
> Thrusts at us, and ablaze in our headlights,
> Outstaring from primal bone-blankness and the
> arrogant
> Stupidity of skull snatched there
> From darkness and the saurian stew of pre-history

For an instant--the eyes. The eyes
They blaze from the incandescent magma
Of mule-brain. (N&SP 171)

Behind the mule's eyes appears another contrast, the "Man-eyes, not blazing, white bulging / In black face" (N&SP 171).

After skidding and barely missing the mule and cart, the speaker passes on, leaving the junk collector alone and "unmoving," and the

dust of the car's passage settles
White on the sweat-sticky skin, black, of the
forehead, and on
The already gray head. This
Of course, under the high stars. (N&SP 171)

The white stars and the white dust serve as a fringe between which is a blackness that is suddenly illuminated during the encounter by the car's headlights. Formed in the speaker's mind is an image which has the permanence, if certainly not the effect, of Keats's leaf-fringed Grecian Urn.

The meditation on this image is an elaborate perusal which demonstrates the speaker's need to wrest some meaning from life and the difficulty involved in achieving such a meaning. In a passage that clearly owes something to Frost, images of whiteness again play an important part, offering an escape from the problems of existence.

Have you ever,
At night, stared into the snow-filled forest and
felt
The impulse to flee there? Enter there? Be
There and plunge naked
Through snow, through drifts floundering, white

> Into whiteness, among
> Spectral great beech-boles, birch-whiteness, black
> jag
> Of shadow, black spruce-bulks snow-shouldered,
> floundering
> Upward and toward the glacial assertion that
> The mountain is? (N&SP 172)

Of course, to give in to such an impulse would mean surrendering to the nonhuman and forgetting identity. Carried too far it means to become one with the mule, for whom there is no history. It would mean to forfeit identity in separateness for the easy peace of a false innocence and unity with nature. But the impulse is strong, Warren suggests here.

> We are entitled to our fantasies, for life
> Is only the fantasy that has happened to us, and
>
> In God's name. (N&SP 172)

As so often happens for Warren's protagonist, though, the speaker is snatched from the easy dream of existence by the nagging need for meaning.

> In the lyrical logic and nightmare astutenss that
> Is God's name, by what magnet, I demand,
> Are the iron and out-flung filings of our lives, on
> A sheet of paper, blind-blank as Time, snapped
> Into a polarized pattern. (N&SP 172-173)

Several things are to be noted in these lines. First, the "lyrical logic" and "nightmare astuteness" draw together the two primary images of the poem, the lyricism of the dance and the starkness of the mule-cart-man image, and under God's name they represent the poles of experience. Then too the imagery used to describe the matrix of experience as scattered iron filings attracted,

as if by a boy's experiment, by a magnet placed under the sheet of paper that hold them contains a pun, a cleverness that illustrates all is certainly not pure in this poem, for while it suggests the culmination of vision it simultaneously suggests the particular method of arriving at it in this case--poetry, and the agon of the poet --"A Sheet of paper, blind-blank as Time." Beyond the tricks however, there is the same agony here that is detectable in the voice of the son asking what "gift" there was from his parents. Both questions reveal a desire for a confirmation of a "felt" unity of self. Here the demand is answered immediately by the speaker's own imagination, which creates a new image based on his experience. He sees the "old nigger" after the encounter arriving at his shack and stopping to urinate, his face "lifed into starlight, calm as prayer."

> He enters
> The dark shack, and I see
> A match spurt, then burn down, die
> The last glow is reflected on the petal-pink
> And dark horn-crust of the thumbnail. (N&SP 173)

While it is not always easy to pin down exactly what is accomplished by the play between light and dark in this poem, in this last image, which exudes an overriding sense of calm that contrasts with the frantic earlier image, the light, through its connection with the old man especially, seems to represent the possibility for vision, a way to have meaning in the seeming darkness of fate or the fantasy

that happens to man. All-important here is the fact that the old man carries his light with him. Equally important to note is the fact that there is continuous action in this second image. It is a moving image, the work of the imagination toward establishing meaning, juxtaposed here with the earlier static, stark image of terror; but also, in its insistence on awareness, on light, on sight as opposed to touch that reduces life to tactile sensation, it is functionally juxtaposed with the initial dream of nothingness that the dance represents. So the same kind of movement from an image to a discovery or a vision achieved by the son is reflected here.

The moving image of the imagination in "Old Nigger" leads the poet to address the junk man as "Brother, Rebuker, my Philosopher past all / Casuistry" (N&SP 173). His creation of the moving image has brought him to an acknowledgement of his kinship with the old man. The "old nigger" becomes a symbol of what vision man may attain. He is familiar as a "Rebuker" and may be likened to Warren's many fictional father figures in that he represents something that is hard to live up to. He also, as "Philosopher past all / Casuistry," reminds the poet that morality does not depend on a set of theories or "fondled axioms," as in "Original Sin," but on experience. From his final image of the old man the poet seems to learn at least the importance of striving for a communion that relieves

the primal terror but that is not based upon an illusion of flowing nothingness as represented by the dance. It is instead a communion that depends first upon "a name . . . / A hard-won something that may, while Time / Backward unblooms out of Time toward peace, utter / Its small, sober, and inestimable / Glow, trophy of truth" (N&SP 173). Such an identity is hard-won because it depends on the pain of isolation.

However, something else which is hard won is the recognition of the black man in the poem as a brother, and this recognition is associated with the self-knowledge achieved in the poem. The black man is transformed from the "old nigger" of the poet's past. It seems quite clear that he was at least associating the self he was then with the poet he was then, a poet struggling with form without the won knowledge of imagination. He had attempted a poem on the subject on the very night of the encounter:

> Get up, get paper and pencil, and whittle away at
> The poem. Give up. Back to bed. And remember
> Now only the couplet of what
> Had aimed to be--Jesus Christ--a sonnet. (N&SP 172)

The unsatisfactory form can be looked back on in irony now; and through the imagination, which requires a form that reflects the process of that imagination, a form marked by juxtaposed images, meditative passages, and the interplay of lyricism with jagged syntax and brutal diction, he comes to a state of knowledge in which the "old nigger" is transformed into his "Brother." But this

knowledge of external fact is self-knowledge as well, for the Brother is also a "Rebuker" and a "Philosopher past all / Casuistry." The idea of the sonnet and the idea of the "nigger" are inextricably linked in their association with the a priori assumptions of the speaker's earlier self, a time and self which are represented in the poem by the dream of the dance and the stark terror of the frozen image caught in the car's headlights; and these perhaps are representative respectively of the idealism and naturalism alternative to be worked through toward the state of imaginative knowledge. It is very interesting that after shocking the sensibilities of his modern reader with his title that Warren only uses the word "nigger" once in the text of the poem and that early on. Historical accuracy alone might explain Warren's use of the term, but nigger had a very particular connotation for Warren which fits very well with the process-toward-knowledge theme of the poem. The connotation is made clear by Warren's comments on Faulkner: "Faulkner . . . undercuts the official history and mythology of a whole society by indicating the 'nigger' is a creation of the white man" ("Faulkner: The South, the Negro, and Time" 259). In other words, the "nigger" exists only as a fulfillment of an a priori expectation, which is I believe, what the poet of "Old Nigger" learns, it is the result of his "encounter" with him, not then but now, through the poem. But the process

involves not only the recognition of a society's creation of the "nigger," but the individual's own recreation of the figure on the junk cart.

While one object of the central image is transformed from "nigger" into "Brother," there is another object within it that needs consideration: the mule. Again the object is historically accurate, but Warren uses the mule for more than historical accuracy. To return again to the description:

> the mule-head
> Thrusts at us, and ablaze in our headlights,
> Outstaring from primal bone-blankness and the arrogant
> Stupidity of skull snatched there
> From darkness and the saurian stew of pre-history
> For an instant--the eyes. The eyes
> They blaze from the incandescent magma
> Of mule-brain. (N&SP 171)

This passage is rendered in terms of naturalistic horror. It is intended to suggest the nightmare of animal existence, frozen in the moment of terror, and thus presents a contrast to the dream of nothingness of the earlier dance. Does the persona move from this fear in the poem? We do not see the mule again except when he is unhitched and staked near the poem's end, controlled, in other words; but we see the significant emblems of nature associated with the mule's primal significance at the moment of deepest reflection in the poem, namely, the snow-in-woods sections which strikes at the heart of the poet's agonizing need for meaning at the moment before the poetic vision of the junk collector arriving at his shack.

In the final line of the poem, the speaker asks, "Can I see Arcturus from where I stand?" This is an obvious reference to the image of the old man standing calmly gazing at the night sky; and Arcturus, the great star, is intended here as a symbol for vision, a lofty vision, with such an inestimable value suggested by the name. The poet has, however, moved through experience and pain to an earned knowledge of at least the need for self-identity. Warren leaves the question open. He is living, and so the question is unanswerable. But the question itself affirms his deep need for meaning. Like the "son," the poet has moved toward an identity in separateness; but he has also, again like the "son," moved toward a healing of the pain that comes with that separateness by realizing his bond with others through the figure of the old man. Both the son and the poet (or may we say the son/poet?) have undergone the process of envisoning which leads them from a stark image to a knowledge of kinship and the implications of selfhood.

During the last fifteen years of his life Warren's books of poems came hard and fast upon one another, continuing the profuse production that had begun in the early fifties. In Now and Then, Being Here, Rumor Verified, and Altitudes and Extensions, Warren demonstrated his continuing interest in the nature of time, the importance of history, and the personal quest for vision. The late

poems also continue in the more personal vein that began with Brother to Dragons. For subjects Warren turned to boyhood, the West, love, domestic and wild animals, American history and personal history, landscape and season; and there is even a long poem in the latest volume about the flight of the "Enola Gay."

An important aspect of this last poem, "New Dawn," is the vision of the characters from the plane in flight. Flight (as a term for elevation as opposed to a term for escape) has emerged from the recent poetry as an important symbol for Warren's vision, but there may be a pun in his use of the word and the image of flight. Most often the imagery is conveyed through the flight of hawks and other birds. Harold Bloom has written that in Warren's late poems "the ontological self is identified with, and as, the flight of wild birds" (78). Flight in these poems does represent a transcending; but as always for Warren, the movement toward identification with the wild birds is accomplished only after an opposite experience has been, in the familiar term, ingested.

In the 1975 poem "Evening Hawk," the sight of the hawk in flight leads to a state of acute attunement with the world.

> If there were no wind we might, we think, hear
> The earth grind on its axis, or history
> Drip in darkness like a leaking pipe in the
> cellar. (N&SP 167)

The metaphors in this passage are marvelously vivid images

and suggest a oneness with the universe, a strong sense of relationship to the one world; but it is also important to note the negative quality in the verse: "If there were no wind," "we might," "we think." Even the two activities, the grinding of the earth and the dripping of history, create a problem in exact interpretation because the first is placed solidly in the realm of nature and the second is the myth man makes by living, as Warren defined that myth in the Foreword to Brother to Dragons (xiii). So, even though man may be moved by sights in nature to a vision of life, Warren keeps that vision grounded, so to speak, by emphasizing man's inherent limitations.

The hawk has that perfect adjustment which is often associated with nature or God in Warren's poems.

> he . . .
> Who knows neither Time nor error, and under
> Whose eye, unforgiving, the world, unforgiven,
> swings
> Into shadow. (N&SP 167)

The movement from the sight of the hawk to a recognition or identity with him involves the same working of the imagination seen in "Old Nigger on One-Mule Cart." The hawk, oblivious to man in its perfect adjustment, provides an instance for man to reach for vision.

> His wing
> Scythes down another day, his motion
> Is that of the honed steel-edge, we hear
> The crashless fall of stalks of Time.
> The head of each stalk is heavy with the gold of
> our error. (N&SP 167)

Stirred by the sight of the hawk, the imagination supplies an image by which man can know his relationship to the world. This is an image rising to the level of symbol, which Warren in his essay on Conrad says is the mark of a philosophical writer. Man sees what is not there, the scythes, and hears what has no sound, "the crashless fall of stalks of Time." If there is a sort of redemption here, it comes through the knowledge that compensates for error and gives man an image of himself by which he can live.

In Audubon, Warren describes the flight of a bird as a "calligraphy." In "Evening Hawk," the bat replaces the hawk at night and "cruises in his sharp hieroglyphics" (N&SP 167). The terms calligraphy and hieroglyphics suggest both that man can "read" nature to learn something about himself and that this "reading" is difficult because it requires interpretation of what might be called the pictorial language of perfect adjustment. As Warren stated in "Knowledge and the Image of Man," "It might be said that reason shows us God, and imagination shows us how Nature participates in God" (211). The imagination must interpret the "language" of nature as best it can, and in this particular poem the process of interpretation leads to a recognition of a relationship between man's world of error and errorless nature and finally to an identification with nature. In the line "The star is steady, like Plato, over the mountain," the comparison between the light of nature

and the philosopher seems to serve the purpose of closing the breach that separates man from nature (N&SP 167). It is not the platonic view which is "steady" here, but Plato himself, perhaps because of the coherence of his illusion. And, finally, one must realize that Warren's vision cannot be identified with the flight of the hawk alone in the poem; it must include the darker image of the flight of the bat as well.

"Red-Tail Hawk and Pyre of Youth" is a poem that shows the continuing influence of Warren's work on the Audubon poem and his interest in Coleridge's Mariner as well as his own boyhood in the formulation of a poem's subject and meaning. The tale here is the familiar one of a fall from innocence and a struggle to regain what has been lost. The poem opens with the speaker, as a boy, making an effort to bind himself to the world of nature. Like Audubon, the instrument by which he would bind himself is a gun. Before the act of killing the hawk, he is clearly placed in a prelapsarian kind of purity.

> Breath clamber-short, face sun-peeled, stones
> Loose like untruth underfoot, I
> Had just made the ridge crest, and there,
> Opening like joy, the unapprehensible purity
> Of afternoon flooded, in silver,
> The sky. It was
> The hour of stainless silver just before
> The gold begins. (N&SP 196)

It is also a time of pre-identity idealism.

> Eyes, strangely heavy like lead,
> Drew down to the .30-30 hung on my hand
> As on a crooked stick, in growing wonder

> At what it might really be. It was as though
> I did not know its name. Nor mine. Nor yet had
> known
> That only is only
> All, and part of all. No wind
> Moved the silver light. No movement.
> (N&SP 146)

The stones that were "Loose like untruth" foreshadow the coming fall, and already the speaker is revealing the knowledge that he would later come to, that the world is all of one piece and includes him. With no idea about the "texture of relations" and the world of consequence, however, the boy shoots the hawk just as the Ancient Mariner shot the albatross, with "no decision" and "no choice" (N&SP 146). There is no will in the act. Blissfully, he attempts to commemorate both his deed and the beauty of the bird through taxidermy. His problem, though, is the same as Audubon's; he is forced to face the inherent contamination in the human effort.

> It was molded as though for that moment to take to
> the air--though
> In God's truth, the chunk of poor wingless red meat,
> The model from which all was molded, lay now
> Forever earthbound, fit only
> For dog tooth, not sky. (N&SP 148)

The irony of the failure of the effort becomes a reminder of original sin in the boy's, and later in the man's, agony of separation from innocence. As a symbol the hawk is tantamount, as we shall see in the next chapter, to the dead bird Audubon bends over in recognition and the bloody hands of Lilburn Lewis which Jefferson grasps. In his natural state, the hawk, too, like the one in "Evening

Hawk," is associated with God. He has "Gold eyes, unforgiving, for they, like God see all." When later the speaker wonders about the possibility of a reunion with nature, the artificial, merely yellow eyes of the preserved hawk seem to stare in vengeance.

> Or was it vengeance? What could I know?
> Could Nature forgive, like God? (N&SP 148)

Of course, the possibility of vengeance asserts the possibility of forgiveness in Warren's all-or-nothing way of seeing. This is the paradox of God, another name for which is the "fortunate fall." The important question to resolve is "What could I know?" The search for possibilities of meaning is the human activity performed out of the agony of alienation from God or nature. The sinner here is suffering the anguish necessary before any sort of redemption is possible. His perception of the "Meaningless motion of life" is comparable to the Mariner's experience with Death-in-Life, both conditions, interestingly, the result of the same sort of impiety toward nature (N&SP 148).

It is actually the fallen hawk rather than the hawk in flight which provides a chance for empathy and identification for Warren's sinner. He finds the hawk deteriorating with "one eye long gone--and [he] reckoned / [He] knew how it felt with one gone" (Warren, of course, lost an eye in an accident as a youth). The hawk has been transformed from albatross to sea snake here in terms of

its relation to the speaker's shifting attitude from impiety to pity.

After finding the bird among books he had as a youth, the speaker is moved to build a pyre for the hawk, a ritualistic purging, it seems, of the innocence of youth; but with the hawk burned there is still an emptiness.

> What left
> To do but walk in the dark, and no stars?
> (N&SP 149)

In the light of Warren's treatment of Audubon, who had to learn to "continue to walk in the world," this image is only frightening and not dismally so; for a kind of communion is still possible. In the imagination of the speaker there is the recurring image of the hawk in flight and his act with the .30-30 that binds them in their "commensurate fate / Whose name is a name beyond joy" (N&SP 149). That "name" might be truth, but the commensurate fate of man and hawk must be named so reluctantly because it is still being tested. Like the tale of the Ancient Mariner, it is played out over and over.

That there is some movement toward hope in the poem is borne out by the prayer with which it ends. The speaker has at least moved, like the Mariner, beyond the anguish of life, if only momentarily, to a point where prayer is possible.

> And I pray that in some last dream or delusion,
> While hospital wheels creak beneath
> And the nurse's soles make their squeak-squeak
> like mice,

I'll again see the first small silvery swirl
Spin outward and downward from sky-height
To bring me the truth in blood-marriage of earth and
air--
And all will be as it was
In that paradox of unjoyful joyousness,
Till the dazzling moment when I a last time, must
flinch
From the regally feathered gasoline flare
Of youth's poor, angry, slapdash and ignorant pyre.
(N&SP 150)

This transcending is perhaps Warren in his most religious mood. The image of the hawk and the imagined union with the hawk stay the speaker (hopefully) even at the moment of death. The details of the world of action, creaking wheels and squeaking shoes, are played against a sense of timelessness and reunion, "all will be as it was." Here Warren's speaker is for the first time in the position he has described for others many times in other poems. At this point it will be those around him who will have to continue the struggle of separateness. In this vision, life has come full circle so that the past is contained in the present and even the future; the imagination is undoing time. The dazzling moment is the moment of crossing over, death, or the moment when the world, represented by the "ignorant pyre," is unified by a vision of life through the creation of an image by the imagination, for here the emphasis is still on living, on finding a way to hang on to one's self while flinching.

CHAPTER 5

THE MAJOR POEMS

In 1953, after a decade of publishing only in prose, Warren wrote one of his most important works, Brother to Dragons: A Tale in Verse and Voices. In 1979, because of a "dissatisfaction with several features" in the original version, as he explained in a Foreword, Warren wrote a new version of the poem (xiv). This new version will be referred to in this discussion. Brother to Dragons was the first of three major poems, major in the sense that they were major undertakings as book-length poetic treatments of figures and events from American history. In these poems Warren demonstrates his career-long fascination with historical personages, but in his hands each becomes a subject through which to explore and test the nature of being in the spider-web world. Each of these poems makes a major contribution to Warren's question of what vision is possible for man.

In Brother to Dragons, as he had in "The Ballad of Billie Potts," Warren used for material a tale he had heard as a boy. The tale this time concerned another heinous crime, the murder in 1811 of a young slave by two brothers, Lilburn and Isham Lewis. The murder itself might have been enough to inspire Warren to write the poem; but coupled with the additional fact that the Lewises were nephews of Thomas Jefferson, the material must have been

absolutely irresistible to the poet. Here was an opportunity to explore the play of man's darkest impulses against his brightest. The murder of the slave becomes in the poem a symbol of the stain of Original Sin. Against this act and its repercussions, the figure of Jefferson provides the perfect example of the human ideal of all that has been associated with enlightment.

It is difficult to classify the poem any more neatly than Warren has by calling it "a tale in verse and voices." It is neither a strictly narrative poem nor a play. Warren's purpose for the peculiar form is stated in an explanatory note preceding the poem. The characters, all but one from the distant past, meet at an "unspecified place and unspecified time" for a dialogue on the central event which binds them all together--the murder. Warren further explains that the issues they discuss are, in his opinion, "a human constant" (xv).

The only speaker in the poem who lives in the present is R.P.W. Identified as "The writer of this poem," he acts as auditor for the other speakers and as a commentator on what they say; but he also emerges, along with Jefferson, as one of the central characters who comes, through knowledge, to a greater understanding of the possibility of a meaningful life for man even if he is a "brother to dragons."

Jefferson, at the beginning of the poem, is bitter from his recognition of the truth of human evil, the

discovery that "doom is always domestic" and that "the absolute traitor lurks in some sweet corner of the blood" (BD 8). He has fallen from the dream he once had of a new innocence for man because the problem of evil, which he had seen but as something for man to overcome, has shown itself in his own blood. Jefferson had idealized man as an innocent; and, like Adam Stanton in All the King's Men and later characters in Warren's work as well, he fell hard when the facts of the world penetrated the bubble of a philosophy of man's innocence he had built around himself.

The specific events which led to the dissolution of Jefferson's dream were those that culminated in the murder of John, the young slave of Lilburn Lewis. After the death of his mother Lucy, Jefferson's sister, Lilburn sinks into despair and turns his hatred on those around him, especially his slaves, who seem to have forgotten their mistress. Lilburn's cruelty escalates as the story progresses. He beats John when the slave is sent to bring him home from a tavern. He forces his wife Letitia into an unnamed but "awful" sexual act. He denies the love of Aunt Cat, his black nurse, by spitting to signify his revulsion at having taken her milk. He verbally abuses the rest of the slaves and his younger brother Isham. Finally, in an act which seems trivial compared to those already mentioned but which is nonetheless revealing because of its senselessness, he kicks his favorite hound Nero. When his

world seems completely spoiled, he methodically murders John with a meat axe before the eyes of the other slaves, whom he has had assembled in the meat-house.

The reader learns none of this from Lilburn himself but from the other speakers involved with him: Lucy, Letitia, Isham and Aunt Cat; and R.P.W. has a voice in analyzing Lilburn's motives. Lilburn has only two short speeches early in the poem, and he returns later on to participate in a reenactment as Isham tells how the two of them faced each other over their mother's grave, intending to shoot one another. There is no need for Lilburn to speak more than he does, for his guilt is easily established. The others speak out of a desire to discover their own hand in the events.

Each character is allowed to tell his or her own story, as it were; and the major issue that arises from what they say, one after one, is the issue of complicity.

Both Lucy and Letitia are haunted by the idea that if they had acted differently, things might not have developed as they eventually did. Lucy is aware of the problem of human limitations:

> the human curse is simply to love and sometimes to love well,
> But never well enough. It's simple as that. (BD 18)

She is moved to ask Lilburn to forgive her for her failure to love him. The poem suggests, however, that such

failure is linked to being human, and Jefferson in his bitterness tells her,

> There's no forgiveness for our being human.
> It is the inexpungable error. It is,
> Dear Sister, the one thing we have overlooked
> In all our cunningest cointrivances. (BD 19)

Lucy feels the guilt of her imperfect love which has failed to sustain her son; and because the love was imperfect, as she sees it, he was moved to murder in her name. Here, the complex "texture of relations" Warren wrote of in "Knowledge and the Image of Man" comes into play. Certainly Lucy is not guilty of murder, but because she is Lilburn's mother there is for her some inescapable feeling of responsibility. Warren is not simply trying to point out that people who do not come from the "right" kind of environment, one in which love is plentiful, develop psychoses. He is, instead, saying something about the burden of human love which Lucy and Jefferson had overlooked. Lucy's human failure to love adequately prompts her need for Lilburn's forgiveness, and asking his forgiveness might be an act of love in itself. Near the end of the poem she is ready to accept the responsibility for her humanness.

> I must accept the responsibility of my love.
> Even though that love was infected by failure.
> Even if I tried to flee responsibility, and
> Died. (BD 116)

Lucy is not the only character in Warren's work who has died to escape the responsibility of selfhood (at least

one other example is Percy Munn of Night Rider). Whereas Lucy had sought to escape through death, Letitia had tried to escape responsibility by withdrawing from her life with Lilburn after the "awful" thing.

> Listen--you know how when the locust goes
> And his skin is left, a little shell of him,
> So thin and dry and like a little ghost,
> And light moves through it and the hollowness
> So hollow it is nothing. That was me. (BD 52)

This feeling of nothingness is actually what Letitia flees to in order to escape the reality of her own responsibility. It is similar to Jack Burden's being a "brassbound Idealist" (AKM 33). Nothing is real because the mind will not accept the world's actuality. Letitia, like Jack, finds herself wanting only to sleep and forget the world. She sinks towards the nonhuman in her desire to be nothing, unwilling to distinguish herself. Even before the perverse act, she had wanted to be indistinguishable.

> Oh, I was nothing--
> Just nothing when he [Lilburn] looked and I
> wanted to be
> Just nothing and him everything, but me
> A nothing that somehow was part of every
> Sweet part of him,
> Like air he breathed and didn't know or heed,
> Or maybe water he was swimming in,
> But I'd just hold him up, and be round him
> everywhere. (BD 45)

Letitia's dream of perfect unity with Lilburn is spoiled by the necessary separateness of being human. When Lilburn did the "awful" thing to her, even though she had never heard of it, it came upon her "just like an awful remembering" (BD 49), suggesting her own capacity for

depravity, her own fall from innocence. Her complicity in the act is emphasized when she cannot tell him to stop; and it is emphasized even further when she later admits, to herself and to Lilburn and, at last, to all those present, that she enjoyed it. This admission spoils Lilburn's image of Letitia as an "Angel," a false image that many of Warren's male lovers develop. Like Lucy, then, Letitia's failure lies in being human. Her feelings of nothingness cannot save her. In fact they lead her to anguish.

> Oh, God, even if You're God, you haven't got
> The right to make me not know anything,
> And what it means, and why,
> And not be nothing, God.
> I don't ask much, just to know what it all came to God.
> (BD 46)

As R.P.W. points out to her, however, what she asks here is really everything or the one thing God or no one else can give. What she asks for is definition, which depends on her willingness to see herself as a creature capable of making moral decisions on her own (BD 46). This is one passage in Warren in which a oneness with God is associated with nothingness. An identity with God is one that makes the self impossible. In such a case man's development would be arrested and he would be responsible for nothing. As long as he is among the living, any sense of such an easy oneness is illusory.

It is Isham Lewis who as eyewitness and unwary conspirator in the event tells of the murder. His narrative, especially, reveals the problem of complicity.

Isham's role in the murder is that of tool for Lilburn; and as he recalls his own actions, he tries to understand why he did what he did. He obeys Lilburn's commands in a dream of ignorance, for as he says,

> If I'd just known--
> And that's so God-durn queer,
> How knowing and not knowing are the same,
> And if what's going to happen
> Will happen anyway, then what's the use.
> (BD 80)

The problem Isham is faced with here is the subjugation of his own will to Lilburn's. Isham's reaction is much the same as Letitia's when she wanted to say "Stop" to Lilburn but couldn't in her desire to be nothing and Lucy's when she could not bring herself to touch John after he had been brutally beaten by Lilburn for fear that the blood might be real. When Lilburn tells him to hand him the meat-axe, Isham acts as though he has no choice in the matter. As he reports,

> And me, I did. (BD 82)

These four words, separated as they are in their own verse paragraph, ring with guilt and self-condemnation. At the time, however, Isham's actions were those of a little boy who understood only that he should obey his older brother. This quality is further suggested by Lilburn's calling him Ishey, so that the horror witnessed in the meat-house is juxtaposed with a feeling of innocence.

> "Hand me that meat-axe, Ishey."
> And me, I did. (BD 82)

Looking back on the episode, Isham is beginning to see that it was not his innocence so much that kept him from action on his own as it was the ease he found in letting Lilburn take responsibility. He, too, was denying the reality of the world. The unreality of the whole episode in Isham's perception is emphasized by his report that "you don't even hear it when the meat-axe / Gets in, get through, goes chunk, chunks on the wood" (BD 83). That "chunk" is the sound of reality Isham is not facing. Like Letitia and Lucy, he is denying the harshness in the world when it strikes close to him. Only after he nervously fires his gun prematurely and kills Lilburn over their mother's grave does he begin to recognize his own responsibility in the world. While he is awaiting trial for the murder of his brother, the jailor comes to him and offers him a chance to escape. At first Isham protests, "'But my brother, I killed him,'" acknowledging his own guilt (BD 122). Only after the jailor interrupts him with another harsh reality does Isham agree to flee: "'I seen 'em hang / You wouldn't lak it, son'" (BD 122). So, Isham runs, only to turn up again as one of the two men under Andrew Jackson's command to be killed at the Battle of New Orleans. Before this, though, he discovers the one thing he cannot escape from:

> Yeah, rode away, and threw my name away.
> I wasn't nothing, not nobody now.
> I said: "I'm nothing, nothing ever happened."

> And rode, but knew the one durn thing
> A man can't do is throw himself away.
> So everything was there, I rode with me,
> And in the dark I'd say: "Oh, Lord, I'm me!
> (BD 122)

Like other characters in this and other of Warren's poems and novels, Isham fails in his flight. However, he does come to acknowledge the burden of selfhood and the inevitable link between being and the past in a world where "nothing is ever lost."

By attempting to analyze their roles in the central event of the poem, Lucy, Letitia, and Isham all demonstrate a common guilt in man. It does not matter whether they intended "to brush the web of things" in the interconnected world, and that may be the greatest horror of being human. It is this necessary power that human beings have which makes a successful flight from responsibility for their own actions impossible. In one way or another, all three of these characters are haunted by their failure to accept responsibility for themselves when they should have, when they were literally in time. This is, given the basic premise of the poem, why they cannot die in peace.

If such characters as these have influence in the lives of others, then certainly a man like Jefferson has. He may not have been involved in the murder of the slave, except in that it has had a profound effect on him; but Warren implicates Jefferson in a universal complicity, especially through his father-son relationship with Meriwether Lewis.

In her book on Warren, Katherine Snipes argues that the role of Meriwether does not work in the poem for two reasons. First, the reader does not know from the poem itself what exactly led to Meriwether's suicide. Secondly, "we cannot understand how Jefferson can be held responsible for Meriwether's misfortune." "He strikes me as an interloper in this situation," she goes on to write, "introduced, perhaps, to reflect the father-son relationship, which receives some attention" (87).

Both of these criticisms appear to be invalid. Meriwether seems to tell all that a reader needs to know about the accusations made against him which led to his suicide. He had tried to live by the dream Jefferson, the father figure, had set up for him, the dream of man's innocence, of a new beginning in the new country of the West; but he learns, as Jefferson did, that there is a harsh side of life which has to be accounted for. Meriwether says that the "small lies gathered"

> And so I fled.
> Not westward as I should, but east,
> And took my papers for my proof.
> In Federal City, where you [Jefferson] had sat,
> There I'd find justice. (BD 113)

However, the slander that he, "who had slept under the big stars-- / Would peck at dollars as a sparrow at dung" proves strong enough to burst his dream of justice (BD 114); and in his despair he shoots himself before he reaches his destination. The same "lie," as Meriwether

calls Jefferson's idealization of man, that failed the father figure Jefferson and led to his bitterness, fails the son Meriwether and leads to his despair and suicide. The father-son motif is at work here, and the consequences of this patrimonial link are very important. Jefferson is responsible for Meriwether's demise in the same sense that Big Billie Potts is responsible for Little Billie's. Jefferson did not pull the trigger of the gun that killed Meriwether; he is not responsible in that sense, although Meriwether does accuse him of murdering him. Instead, Jefferson instigated the false vision which left Meriwether, as well as himself, unable to face the "tracklessness / Of the human heart" (BD 114). Meriwether's role in the poem is functional because his relationship with Jefferson suggests the theme of complicity and parallels the relationships between Lucy, Letitia, Isham, and Lilburn.

Warren pushes the theme of complicity to the brink in this poem; but he understands, too, that each man is responsible for his own actions. After going so far as to suggest that perhaps Lilburn is actually John's victim instead of the other way around, a theory which definitely seems to reach the outer limits of possibility and presses the question to try to discover the extent to which all are bonded in guilt, R.P.W. pulls back.

> I only nag the question. And if Lilburn
> Is John's victim, it's only a manner of speaking--

A way to say we're all each other's victim.
Potentially, at least. (BD 88)

Both Jefferson and R.P.W. enjoy some success at completing the paradigm of separation, crisis, and reunion which Warren outlined in "Knowledge and the Image of Man." For Jefferson to do so means a third turning in his outlook. The poem opens with Jefferson in the second turn, bitter and cynical after his high hopes in man have been dashed. At the end, however, as Cleanth Brooks has pointed out, he is a man who can accept the past even with its evil (20). Jefferson is able, finally, through the process of rehashing the old story, to come to some new hope, for he learns that, as Meriwether reiterates once again,

nothing we had,
Nothing we were,
Is lost.

And then he adds,

All is redeemed,
In knowledge. (BD 120)

Yet this redeeming knowledge is, paradoxically, based on loss. Jefferson comes to accept the "powerful cost" of knowledge (BD 120), which begins in the pain of facing up to the bloody facts which undermine his idealism. When he has done this, he can create a sense of joy by acknowledging his kinship with his bloody nephew, which he symbolically does by touching him. The scene in which he does this is a powerful one with nearly all the characters urging him to approach and take the hand of his nephew.

Their collaborative effort provides a climax for the poem and suggests their new bond. As Victor Strandberg wrote in The Poetic Vision of Robert Penn Warren, "a sense of complicity is finally the true cement of the human bond, ultimately binding all creatures into Warren's mystic Osmosis of Being" (128). However, it is not just the fact that Jefferson and the others are bound in their guilt at the moment when he takes Lilburn's bloody hand that creates the sense of affirmation at the poem's end. In fact, that would be rather perverse. A sense of a sacramental "One life," such as Warren saw in Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, may be a more adequate term for the poem's final vision. The human bond is sealed by a common yearning for a healing connection with the world as well as by complicity. By accepting the past deed in its reality and their responsibility for it, some of these characters have achieved the selfhood which Warren envisions.

For R.P.W., who has spent time interpreting, prodding and providing transition from one part of the tale to another, there is a new knowledge at the end of the poem which he is ready to take with him "into the world of action and liability" (BD 132). Unlike Jefferson, however, he has had no sweet dream of man's innocence to lose. As he tells Jefferson, "it is scarcely / The most fashionable delusion of my age" (BD 34).

For R.P.W. the problem of achieving vision is the same problem Frost spoke of as the modern man's dilemma: "what to make of a diminished thing." R.P.W.'s own age is largely initiated into the knowledge of a terrible division within man, a characteristic of his separateness from nature. The crisis in R.P.W.'s identity is indicative of the crisis in modern culture, the problem of "naturalistic considerations" which lead to a sense of nothingness (BD 21). What he is able to accomplish as "the writer of this poem" is the creation of a "little myth," as he labels poetry in the Foreword to the poem, by which to live (xiii). He, too, learns something of the importance of accepting the past, which is suggested by his trip to Rocky Hill, the site of the Lewis house, with his father at the end of the poem. He comes through the process of the writing and the trip to a knowledge of his own bond with others. Coming off Rocky Hill, he enters not only a world of action and liability but a world that is "Sweeter than hope in that confirmation of late light" (BD 132). He seems to have found a way to be a part of a "sweet society" through his own connection with the story and his own realization of self ("Knowledge" 242).

There has been some lively criticism of Brother to Dragons which has tended to focus on Warren's language and on the poem's structure. Leslie Fiedler's judgment that the language of the poem is "Bombast"--"a straining of

language and tone toward a scream which can no longer be heard, the absolute cry of bafflement and pain" (210)--is perhaps an approximate description of Warren's rhetoric, which reflects the anguishing need to know; but, as Calvin Bedient has countered, the poem is "too morally earnest to suggest a scream" (84). However, Bedient also says that "these characters cannot redeem what has happened; they can only talk" (84), a statement which characterizes some of the fairly common critical confusion over the poem's form. Such judgments stem from an attempt to lock Warren into a traditional genre, the tragedy, when, in fact, the work is not even a play in the sense that we normally think of one. In one sense Brother to Dragons unfolds, as if by lifting layers of cover, historical developments in dramatic form. It moves toward drama's core, its origin. It is, in short, a form of ritual. And one should remember that in primitive societies, rituals are performed for the sake of communal healing. The form is nearly perfect for Warren's theme. If the poem be thought of in relation to tragedy, it is perhaps best thought of as an expansive Exodus. The voices are choral voices that replay the action and find the meaning of that action in a restoration of harmony. Some critics have lamented the lack of drama, but to do so is to take a dim view of the capability of language and gesture to produce the sense of the dramatic.

In the late sixties Warren again made a book-length poem from the materials of history. If there is an overriding feeling that comes from reading Audubon: A Vision, it is that here is a poem about fulfillment; for it is about a man who, as Warren has stated, "has finally learned to accept his fate" (Talking 235). Here, once again, Warren is emphasizing the necessity of accepting experience in the process that leads to vision. The poem was published as a volume in itself, but its relatively short length has made possible its inclusion in the two subsequent volumes of Selected Poems.

From the very beginning, the poem is concerned with the problem of identity. Suggestively, the first word of the poem is a verb of being.

> Was not the lost dauphin.
> (N&SP 213, emphasis added)

Dispelling the most famous myth about the historical Audubon, the poem continues to trace the quest for identity with familiar ideas.

> what
> Is man but his passion? (N&SP 213)

Man is defined here in terms of what his mind works toward, again the image he makes of himself. And Audubon, with being established as a problem by the negative which follows Was in the first line of the poem, is quickly thrust for the reader into the world with an action verb that indicates a growth toward vision.

Saw,
Eastward and over the cypress swamp, the dawn,
Redder than meat, break;
And the large bird,
Long neck outthrust, wings crooked to scull air, moved
In a slow calligraphy, crank, flat, and black against
The color of God's blood spilt, as though
Pulled by a string.

Saw,
It proceed across the inflamed distance.
(N&SP, 213, emphasis added)

Warren's Audubon is usually bemused and contemplative, though. He is often passive, like a Whitmanesque "I." Even in the one instance when he is almost forced to act in order to save his own life, he is saved, from both death and action, by the intervention of others. In the section of the poem entitled "The Dream He Never Knew the End Of," Audubon is nearly murdered by an old hag and her two ruffian sons for his possessions, but he is providentially rescued by a group of three vigilantes. The entire incident, right through the subsequent hanging of the hag and her sons, takes place in a vacuum because Audubon sees it as a dream with a thwarted end. By contrast, the old woman seems actually to be a beneficiary because the hanging "was the dream that, life-long, she had dreamed toward" (N&SP 220). On the morning of the hanging "the sun is nothing / But a circular blue of no irradiation, somewhat paler / Than the general grayness" (N&SP 219). This surreal image helps to cast the event outside time. The description of the woman's face is similiar to descriptions in other Warren poems where the protagonist is

confronted with the problem of "reading" another's face for meaning.

> And in the gray light of morning, he sees her face. Under
> The troubled darkness of hair, the face
> Is white. Out of that whiteness
> The dark eyes stare at nothing, or at
> The nothingness that the gray sky, like Time, is, for
> There is no Time, and the face
> Is, he suddenly sees, beautiful as stone, and
> So becomes aware that he is in the manly state.
> (N&SP 220)

This naturalistic description of the face and eyes uses both the familiar contrast between light and dark and the eyes that see nothing, like the mother's eyes in the "Natural History" poems, symbolic of the total lack of identity as the hag returns to a natural state. The beauty Audubon sees in the woman's face, both just before and after she is hanged, may be taken at two levels. First, Audubon may admire the face simply for its peace. The simile that compares the face to the stone suggests a unity with nature, which comes here just before death as it seemed to for the mother in "The Interim." The face goes calm as the hag loses the agony of separation from nature. It is possible that the "new dimension of beauty" Audubon discovers in her dead face is an admiration for the osmosis in death (N&SP 220), for she has penetrated that thin "membrane between [man] and the world" (N&SP 214). The word membrane is a very effective choice here when one remembers Warren's term for interconnection--osmosis. Audubon has moments, because of this close study of the natural world,

when that separating membrane seems very thin indeed. It is always there, nevertheless, because man is separated from nature and must therefore establish his understanding of the osmosis of all life through vision. So, Audubon is necessarily absent when the three hanged people are symbolically taken back into a total unity with nature, but the scene can be imagined.

> He will not be here when snow
> Drifts into the open door of the cabin, or,
> Descending the chimney, mantles thinly
> Dead ashes on the hearth, nor when snow thatches
> These heads with white, like wisdom, nor ever will he
> Hear the infinitesimal stridor of the frozen rope
> As wind shifts its burden, or when
> The weight of the crow first comes to rest on a rigid
> shoulder. (N&SP 221)

It also seems correct to say that Audubon recognizes beauty in the old woman's face in much the same way that the Ancient Mariner recognized the beauty in the sea snakes. She becomes for him a symbol of the "One life." Audubon has been denied the perfect unity with nature he longed for; he cannot see the end of the dream and continue to live, as the section's title suggests. The sexual arousal of Audubon could stand in the way of such an interpretation, but the poem's language provides a clue to the meaning of the involuntary effect of the sight of the hanged woman's face ("beautiful as stone" [N&SP 220]) on Audubon. Earlier, at the point of Audubon's greatest passivity, when he delays acting even though he knows he is about to be murdered by the old woman and her sons, he is

in the grip of an inscrutable but sweet lassitude: "He cannot think what guilt unmans him" (N&SP 218, emphasis added). Seeing the face of the hanged woman, he finds himself in a "manly state." Juxtaposed as they are, the two conditions represent states of a seductive non-being and an active being. Full manhood would seem to require the latter condition, but it is perhaps preconditioned by the passivity. In the short section that follows the hanging, Audubon appears to have gained knowledge that is perhaps wisdom; and he is, in the familiar phrase, ready to take that knowledge into the world of action and liability.

> We never know what we have lost, or what we have found.
> We are only ourselves, and that promise,
> Continue to walk in the world. Yes, love it!
> He continued to walk in the world. (N&SP 222)

Audubon even learns something of blessedness and joy:

> His life, at the end, seemed--even the anguish--simple.
> Simple, at least, in that it had to be
> Simply, what it was, as he was,
> In the end, himself and not what
> He had known he ought to be. (N&SP 223)

This respect for the truth makes Audubon one of Warren's most successful protagonists in terms of finding a way to live, in establishing a self-identity. Audubon comes to recognize, as Coleridge's Mariner did, and even as Warren's Jefferson and the "son" did, the interconnectedness of all life: all these characters move through their stories to become "sadder and wiser" men, sadder because they must acknowledge the pain of their separateness and

wiser because they all come in some way to understand a bond with others and their responsibility as individuals within that bond. Audubon has mentally ingested both the good and evil in life and reached a point of fusion that is his vision. Warren's comments in his essay "Love and Separateness in Eudora Welty" on Welty's treatment of Audubon in her story, "A Still Moment," shed further light on the terms of the conflict which Audubon must mediate in Warren's poem.

> He [Audubon] loves the bird, innocently, in its fullness of being. But he must subject this love to knowledge; he must kill the bird if he is to commemorate its beauty, if he is to establish his communion with other men in terms of the bird's beauty. There is in the situation an irony of limit and contamination. (SE 162)

This is the central conflict which can and often does in the modern age lead to a terrible division of self. As the title of Warren's essay suggests, love in its purest form means a total unity, but the love man can have must be arrived at through processes that make it impure. Audubon's separateness, then, is clearly defined by his human qualities of limitation and contamination; but he is successful, eventually, in Warren's poem, in compensating, or perhaps accepting is a more accurate word, because he does what all humans must do in order to heal the pain of alienation, which is to "subject . . . love to knowledge." This is so important that, in the terms of this poem, love and knowledge become synonomous.

> He slew them, at surprising distances, with his gun.
> Over a body held in his hand, his head was bowed low,
> But not in grief. . . .
>
> What is love?
> One name for it is knowledge. (N&SP 229)

If the head is not bowed in grief, then what? Recognition? This last passage reminds one of other passages of ritualistic communion, such as the eating of the dead in "The Interim" or the building of the pyre in "Red-Tail Hawk and Pyre of Youth." Knowledge, which is the same as love because it means a recognition of kinship, helps man toward an acceptance of the taint of being human, the limitation, the contamination, the evil. The recognition Audubon comes to, it should be noted, is of his kinship with the fallen bird. Through this recognition of kinship, he realizes the connection of all life in a less absolute way than he has been seeking and begins to accept his own fate, and he begins to find some peace in the face of the agonizing question of what he, or any man, ought to be. Jefferson had gone through the same process essentially in Brother to Dragons. Audubon works through the problem of his alienation, first by accepting the "membrane" that separates him from the rest of the world, then by continuing to "walk in the world" in spite of that separateness. His love is based not solely on illusion, but is borne out by experience. His self is a developing self over time. By "continuing to walk in the world" he is accepting responsibility for his own life.

Warren's last book-length narrative poem is about the war between Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce Indians and the United States Government. The poem is a tribute to Joseph, but it is, of course, more than a simple monument. It is, as are all of Warren's undertakings in poetry, a meditation on being, and as always the narrative surrounds a crisis in selfhood. The vision by which Chief Joseph lives makes him one of Warren's most admirable characters; and the subtitle of the poem points toward the main reason for this: Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce: Who Called Themselves the Nimipu, The Real People. The qualities which allow Joseph and his followers to ascribe that title to themselves are their close ties to the earth and their dependence on things with an innate as opposed to a prescribed value. A sense of the interconnection and the continuity of all life constitutes their religion. Chief Joseph is perhaps the work in which Warren's closest thematic affinity to Faulkner is to be found. Faulkner had written in The Bear that once Ikkemotubbe realized that he could sell the land for money, it ceased to have ever been his (255). Joseph has a sense of the land as a reality and not an abstraction, and he refuses to sell the land of the fathers, not just out of a sense of nostalgia. He refuses to sell out of the sense he has that identity, for his people and for himself, comes from place.

According to Joseph, the truth which no white man can know is that the Great Spirit

> Had made the earth but had drawn no lines
> Of separation upon it, and all
> Must remain as He made, for to each man
> Earth is the Mother and Nurse, and to that spot
> Where he was nursed, he must,
> In love cling." (CJ 14)

As Joseph sees it, there is no separation between a man and the earth he is born upon:

> They [white men] spat upon our earth. It was like A man's spit on your face." (CJ 7)

The Nez Perce are also tied to their land because of their history, which along with their reverence for the earth makes the basic elements of their religion.

> It is their land, and the bones of their fathers
> Yet love them, and in that darkness, lynx like,
> See how their sons still thrive without fear,
> Not lying, not speaking with forked tongue.
> Men know, in night-darkness, what wisdom thrives with the fathers. (CJ 4)

Yet Joseph's relationship with his personal past is typical of Warren because it is one of anxiety. He feels always the eyes of the forefathers upon him and wonders, doubts, and frets about how he measures up against the standards by which the fathers would name him a man. It is this anxiety, however, which saves him, because he understands that the past is important in the present, that it has made him what he is now. Joseph tells most of his own story, and his narrative reveals his anxiety.

Joseph's self, of course, is linked with the land of his fathers, and the encroachment of the whites is not only an affront to basic human rights but an organized theft of

the way Joseph and the Nez Perce define themselves. However, the whites are not the only enemy. For Joseph, there is a complex problem with definition because his is a dual self. He is chief, which means, if he is a good one, that he has no self. Joseph is also a man whose pride leads him, like other men, to a desire to define himself through action. His problem is one readers of Warren have seen before: the conflict between the fact and the idea. Joseph is responsible for his people and he knows what hardship war would mean for them; and he wishes to live in peace himself; but he also realizes that that peace is a dream, like Jefferson's "lie" of man's innocence in the new land in Brother to Dragons. Joseph says,

> "You try to think: 'I lie here as always,
> In my own tepee, at peace with all men.'
>
> "But think of your father's eyes in his darkness."
> (CJ 12)

The conflict leads to an identity crisis, and the decision over whether to fight comes to be seen as a sort of measurement of Joseph's sense of self because a decision not to fight would mean a disowning of his tradition: "You stand in the sun. You think: 'Am I Joseph?'" (CJ 12).

Joseph's doubts about his identity within his tradition has a particular resonance; for if he is not what his name tells him he is, he is not one of the "real people." He is, if he denies the past or loses sight of the past, a false person. Joseph, then, must work through

this identity crisis by choosing between two sets of values. In his situation, reality, which may also be called knowledge, for it is an acceptance of truth, requires a shedding of blood by his people, which is the price, according to the maniacal John Brown, for the remission of sin, and also the price, according to another Warren protagonist, Jack Burden, of all knowledge worth having (AKM 455). At the very least the price of knowledge in Warren's work is the agony of experience. Joseph cannot be an integrated self, nor can his people exist in their tradition, if he believes in a peace not borne out by his experience and the knowledge of history and decides to move to the reservation.

Choosing to fight the whites for the land that gives identity to himself and his people does not solve Joseph's problem with selfhood. His particular problem, as with Percy Munn in the novel Night Rider, is his pride. Like Munn, he is proud to be initiated into a select group, but he is also torn because his vision demands a humility. When the Nez Perce are finally driven from their land, Joseph wonders whether the Great Spirit denied his people because of his own pride ("Because I was proud to sit in the council / With war-chiefs, the great ones, adept at blood skill?" [CJ 19-20]).

Whereas many of Warren's characters fail because of a similiar problem with their pride, especially in the

novels, Joseph's pride is tempered by his knowledge of worth and his acknowledgement of a moral responsibility to his people.

> "What right had I
> To die--to leave sick, old, young, women--merely to flatter
> My heart's pride?" (CJ 21)

Flattery of the heart's pride is also a problem for Joseph's two chief rivals in the field, General O. O. Howard and Colonel Miles, both of whom are politically motivated to defeat Joseph quickly. The ambition of the driven Howard cools, however, as he undergoes an experience that is somewhat like defeat even before the major engagement. Knowing that "He is the butt / Of every newspaper" already, he realizes that Miles might be the first to intercept Joseph and receive his surrender.

> What
> Then for him, for Howard! For his
> Long struggle, unflinching, over a thousand miles,
> For anguish, defeats, his dead lying under
> Unloving stars? His heart splits in prayer.
> He has stood before his regiments on Sunday morning
> To pray. Now, in darkness, he prays.
>
> His heart splits,
> Like a stone, red hot, into snow cast. (CJ 34)

This conversion experience or felt grace comes for Howard, familiarly, after a long struggle which has prepared him. When Howard prays, it is for the first time with humility; and obviously he is another of Warren's Mariner figures. Also, like the Mariner, he is able to feel something at last for others.

> He thinks of Miles. He thinks what all men know:
> A groveling hem-kisser of the draggled skirts of glory.
> He thinks of him. But,
> Suddenly, with sad pity. (CJ 35)

Miles himself is dizzy with ambition, and he cannot believe his luck when the converted Howard allows him to accept Joseph's surrender. Strangely, after Joseph's defeat, Miles becomes the warrior's greatest friend in Washington. The narrator can only guess at why: "In his rising success, did something make Miles / Wonder what was the price of a star" (CJ 49). Warren might have strengthened his theme with a greater development of Miles' character, as he did with Howard. Nevertheless, the question he asks about Miles reinforces the experience of both Joseph and Howard. All three men seem to discover the need for more than pride in action, and it is Joseph who gives voice to what that might be.

The image of Joseph in old age is of a man who has transcended separateness, or in Warren's terms, has discovered his lost unity, which was never quite as lost for him as it is for most of Warren's characters.

> "I only a dot in dimness--think
> Of my father and yearn only
> That he can think me a man
> Worthy the work in dark of his loins." (CJ 32)

As a "dot in dimness" Joseph pictures himself as a part of the one world, barely distinguishable, but still among the living he must hold on to his vision that will help him live.

> "But what is a man? An autumn-tossed aspen,
> Pony-fart in the wind, the melting of snow-slush?
> Yes, that is all. Unless--unless--
> We can learn to live the Great Spirit's meaning
> As the old and wise grope for it. (CJ 52)

The wise grope for it because the wise understand, as Joseph says here and Warren says in his essay on Conrad, that the Great Spirit's meaning, or man's illusions, is all there is to make a man. Joseph's place as one who has reached a knowledge of the Great Spirit's meaning is emphasized in the poem by the fact that his eyes appear to be mirrors that reflect distance and time (CJ 53). This ironic visionlessness of the eyes has been Warren's long-standing symbol of unity with nature. In Warren's personal poems it is always the condition of the mother's and father's eyes in their perfect adjustment to the world in their death, or their near-death condition.

Joseph is perhaps the most spiritually-minded of any of Warren's protagonists, and as such he thoroughly clashes with modern values. Warren makes the most of this clash, showing the reader Joseph riding alongside Buffalo Bill and his clowns in a show in which ketchup, "A favorite American condiment," replaces the real shed blood of the past (CJ 55). There can be little doubt about the disgust Warren feels toward the modern commercialization of the values Joseph lived by. Buffalo Bill has taken the "blood skills" that were once necessary for survival and made a fake, cheap show of them for profit. Warren satirically attacks

what his language suggests is a particularly American, a particularly modern, way of prescribing a value to ideas in an abstract or artificial sense.

Warren also juxtaposes Joseph's older world with the modern world by entering the story himself, as he had entered Brother to Dragons through the character of R.P.W. In fact, the parallels between these two poems are striking. In the final section of Chief Joseph the narrator travels with friends to Snake Creek, the site of Joseph's final battle, just as R.P.W. had traveled to Rocky Hill with his father. The narrator also separates from his friends, as R.P.W. had separated from his father (as, indeed, Warren had separated himself from his brother to stand before the monument to Jefferson Davis, alone, in Jefferson Davis Gets His Citizenship Back). The purpose of the journey in both the poems is to indicate a connection between the past of the main action of the tale and the present of the poet. The following passage presents the narrator's meditation, as he stares over the plains, on Joseph's life.

> He knew--could see afar, beyond all night--
> Those ancient eyes, in which love and judgement
> Hold equal glitter, and with no blink,
> Strove always toward him [the father]. And he--
> He strove to think of things outside
> Of Time, in some
> Great whirling sphere, like truth unnamable. Thus--
> Standing there, he might well,
> Already in such midnight, have foreknown
> The end.
>
> But could not know that, after

The end, his own manhood, burnished
Only in the glow of his endless pity, would shine.

I saw
Vastness of plains lifting in twilight for
Winter's cold kiss, its absoluteness. Thought
Of the squirming myriads far at
My back. Then thought of the mayor
Of Spokane--whoever the hell he may have been.

But suddenly knew that for those sound
Of heart there is no ultimate
Irony. There is only
Process, which is one name for history. Often
Pitiful. But sometimes, under
The scrutinizing prism of Time,
Triumphant. (CJ 63)

Every detail here works toward the narrator's glimpse of Joseph's vision. He is in the West, facing west, thinking of the warrior and his vision which he sees as a triumph in history. The narrator here achieves a sort of transcending of himself through a vision that connects Warren's time with his own. He feels a oneness of all time. The obstacle of living in a modern world of "squirming myriads" in which even leaders are anonymous cannot finally obscure hope. The possibility of hope in the world has been confirmed for him. He must return to the present world, step back into history; but, through an imaginative construct, he wonders

. . .if when the traffic light
Rings green, some stranger may pause and thus miss
His own mob's rush to go when the light
Says go, and pausing, may look,
Not into a deepening shade of canyon,
Nor head now up, toward ice peak in moonlight white,
But standing paralyzed in his momentary eternity, into
His own heart look while he asks
From what undefinable distance, years, and direction,
Eyes of fathers are suddenly fixed on him. To know.
(CJ 64)

With the knowledge of this "momentary eternity," which is the best living man can hope to achieve in a sane accommodation with his separateness from nature, as an affirmation of the possibility for vision in his own time, it is time for the narrator to rejoin the "squirming myriads" in the East of action. The narrator calls to one of his friends, "'It's getting night, and a hell of way / To go'" (CJ 64). Indeed, it is a very long way back to the late twentieth century from the tale of the old time, but what better place for him to test the soundness of his own heart?

Nowhere more so than in these three major poems has Warren been "the guilty conscience of his time." In fact, he may be said to be operating as something of a guilty conscience antagonistic to a predominating view of American history that had led to a widespread moral complacency that Warren describes in The Legacy of the Civil War. It is quite an imaginative task to resurrect Thomas Jefferson and have him face the consequences of his idealism. The effort succeeds because the aspersions cast on Jefferson are, in the first place, aspersions he casts on himself; but they are also balanced by aspersions cast on R.P.W. and his "naturalistic considerations." Then there is Audubon, who, like Whitman, walks in the world inspecting the universe, seeking a way to unify the all, but who must come at last

to accept the mortal limits placed upon him. Joseph must reconcile his own duality through a final vision of pity, a vision to which later generations of thrill-seekers and "squirming myriads" seem oblivious. Each of the poems, despite the many and obvious differences between them, is an attempt to tell, not a cautionary tale, but at least one that may be diagnostic and therapeutic in the sense that Warren says poetry can be in Democracy and Poetry.

Like Warren's non-fiction and a great part of his criticism, these poems reflect his deep engagement with America and his concern for the damage done by the too great division between idea and fact in interpreting the country's history. It does no damage, it seems to me, to see in the poems a prescriptive intent beyond whatever personal impulse led Warren to write them in the first place. But whatever healing process may be going on in the poems is based on knowledge. In the major poems, Warren uses the dialectic of idea and fact, desire and limitation, ambition and sacrifice, past and present to frame his theme of interconnection and inclusiveness; he pushes an idea to the brink of a disastrous collapse of meaning before pulling rein, as he does with the idea of complicity in Brother to Dragons; he depends upon an intense rhetoric, freighted with ideas and complemented by gesture to the point of speechifying, leading critics to label his language bombastic (as Fiedler did) or to lament a lack of

quietness (Bedient 83). These techniques are indications of the great risks of Warren's poetry. The greatest of these risks is the risk to know through poetry. And Warren understood, as did Emily Dickinson, that poetry is itself a paradoxical undertaking that tries to reconcile the human need to know all with the human inability to face that all. It is a paradox that necessitates accomodation: "Tell all the Truth but tell it slant." The conclusion of Audubon, which strikes me as as "quiet" and as quietly powerful as some of Dickinson's best poetry, may serve well as a gloss on all three of the major poems in their impulse to know.

> Tell me a story.
>
> In this century, and moment, of mania
> Tell me a story.
>
> Make it a story of great distances, and starlight.
>
> The name of the story will be Time,
> But you must not pronounce its name.
>
> Tell me a story of deep delight. (N&SP 230)

CHAPTER 6

THE IDEA, THE TWITCH, AND THE KNOWLEDGE

Warren's novels, even those which are set in the nineteenth century, have at their center what Jack Burden calls "the terrible division" of the modern age. There is for most of his protagonists not only the problem of distinguishing what is real from what is illusory in their lives, but, to one degree or another, an even deeper problem of not recognizing the need for such distinction, of wishing to be the hollow shell Letitia speaks of in Brother to Dragons because the responsibility of self is frightening. Because of his idea that knowledge gives man an image by which he can live, Warren believes that any perceptive quest for a vision of life must confront the problem of illusion rather than fall blindly into it. This is not as simple as it sounds, for illusion is also necessary to sustain man in Warren's vision.

The need for awareness Warren has demonstrated in his poetry, but it is perhaps even more pertinent to his novels where the dramatization of the lives of men and women in the course of succeeding or failing at becoming aware of their conditions makes for some very powerful stories. Warren's protagonists typically suffer from a clouded perception of the way things are to some degree or other because they fall into periods during which they deny the reality of the external world and the significance of the

past. Because of the horror they discover in an existence in time, they attempt to flee into an existence in timelessness by living in an illusory dream. These dreams generally fall into two types. There is the dream of a new innocence in which they try to redeem themselves through idealistic actions, and there is the dream of nothingness in which they perceive themselves victims of a blind fate. Very often the protagonist's spiritual development follows a movement from the first type of dream into the second. A significant self-identity, as Warren uses the term, is impossible in either dream. In the first, the character does not recognize the importance of experience in defining the self and does not accept the pain of man's separation from innocence and nature. In the second dream, the character loses all sense of personal will and responsibility. It often follows the first dream when the character's idealism is crushed by a recognition of the world's destructive power, in nature or in society.

In Warren's first four novels, the central action in which these themes are dramatized is a young man's involvement, often initially a reluctant involvement, with a strong political or business organization. There is no suggestion that Warren was writing from a formula by this fact; each novel is highly individual in its technique. Night Rider, for example, is focused on a single center of consciousness while At Heaven's Gate shifts its center of

consciousness freely for a multiplicity of perspectives that allows Warren to emphasize the diversity of human experience at the same time he suggests a commonness of human experience. He would return to this technique in later novels (The Cave, Flood, and Meet Me in the Green Glen). In All the King's Men Jack Burden's narration controls the stories of Willie Stark, Judge Irwin, Cass Mastern (Burden's presumed nineteenth century ancestor), and finally of Jack himself. Burden's consciousness, reflected through his engaging and alternately reflective and piquant speaking voice, provides a perspective on the narrated material in the vein of Melville's Ishmael and Twain's Huck Finn; and it is an artistic achievement to rival both. World Enough and Time, in one sense, reverses a technique used in All the King's Men. Whereas Jack Burden had brought the story of Cass Mastern to bear on the modern story of his own relation to Willie Stark, in World Enough and Time another student of history provides a modern perspective on the nineteenth century story of Jeremiah Beaumont. The modern narrator tries to find meaning in the evidence of Beaumont's journal (which provides much of the novel's narrative), court transcripts, old newspapers and other sub-literary texts that constitute the insufficent "what is left" he describes in the novel's opening sentence. Such sub-literary documents, including the "Statement of Ashby Wyndham" in At Heaven's Gate and

"The Diary of Cass Mastern" in All the King's Men, along with oral personal histories like Willie Proudfit's in Night Rider and Munn Short's in World Enough and Time, are testimony of what Warren saw as a human constant: the urgent need to tell one's own story in order to discover its meaning. The telling itself becomes a drama of reliving in which the character tries to discover his own relationship to the events being narrated. In the novels of first-person narration--All the King's Men, Band of Angels, and A Place To Come To--the entire novel is evidence of the urgent need. In a sense all begin with Amantha Starr's opening words in Band of Angels: "Oh, who am I?" This great variety of "telling" within Warren's novels as well as the great variety of narrative techniques employed in the telling of the novels suggests what Warren has said in several contexts. History (the story) is not in the event, but in the telling of the event.

Even though Warren was not writing formulaic historical novels, or formulaic novels of any kind, something important can be learned by the fact that each of the first four novels follows a similar line of action and by the fact that each had an historical source. The events in Night Rider are based on the activities of the "Dark Tobacco District Planters' Protective Association of Kentucky and Tennessee," whose members held their first rally in Warren's boyhood hometown of Guthrie, Kentucky, in

1904, and on the sub-group of "night riders" who were led by Dr. David A. Amoss, who eventually went to trial for a murder committed subsequent to the dynamiting of tobacco warehouses in Hopkinsville, Kentucky (Bohner 61). Bogan Murdock was suggested by the scandal surrounding Colonel Luke Lea, whose manipulation of securities contributed to the failure of a Nashville bank (Cowley 258). Much, of course, has been written and said about Warren's use of Huey Long as the source for Willie Stark.[1] World Enough and Time was inspired by the life of Jeroboam Beauchamp and his involvement with the Old Court (Platonic) and New Court (pragmatic) debate over the authority of the Constitution that rocked Kentucky in the early nineteenth century and foreshadowed the escalation of regional differences that would lead to the Civil War. Warren first learned of Beauchamp's story from a pamphlet given to him by Katherine Anne Porter (Talking 72). The novel not only uses sub-literary texts to help establish its themes; it grew from Warren's need to make sense through fiction of what was contained in such a text. None of Warren's novels is historical in the sense that it sets out to dramatize historical events in order to come to some understanding of

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[1] In an interview Warren recalled that William Faulkner, who on one occassion had said that Warren should have abandoned the Willie Stark story to develop the Cass Mastern story, lamented Warren's aggrandisement of Huey Long. Warren said that Faulkner must have been drunk at the time (Olney 15).

the implications of that event. They are instead philosophical novels, in that the texture of the novels, the conflicts, are struggling "to rise to the level of generalization." These particular historical events or figures that suggested the first four novels gave Warren a chance to dramatize the plight of the individual who tried to find his identity, or, conversely, to hide himself, in the machinery of a political cause or interest.

A "political" world is perhaps the most obvious kind of world to depict the spider-web theme in fiction, but it is the impulse of the individual to know himself in relation to that world that is Warren's primary interest in the novels, not merely the realistic recreation or documentation of history, at which he excels, nevertheless. His interests can be related to the distinction Warren drew, in a panel discussion that took place at a meeting of the Southern Historical Association in 1968, between the knowledge of the historian and the knowledge of the fiction writer.

> . . . the big difference . . . between history and fiction is that the historian does not know his imagined world; he knows <u>about</u> it, and he must know all he can about it, because he wants to find the facts <u>behind</u> that world. But the fiction writer must claim to <u>know</u> the <u>inside</u> of his world for better or for worse. He mostly fails, but he claims to know the inside of his characters, the undocumentable inside. Historians are concerned with the truth <u>about</u>, with knowledge <u>about</u>; the fiction writer, with the knowledge <u>of</u>. And neither of these "knowledges" is to be achieved in any perfect form. But the kinds of "knowledge" <u>are</u>. This is a fundamental difference, it seems to me.
> (<u>Talking</u> 92-93)

The distinction Warren makes here has obvious relevance for anyone interested in his theme of knowledge, but what is particularly interesting is the way that, in his own practice, the distinction between the two kinds of knowledge is blurred. Warren's early biography of John Brown's life is clearly the work of an historian, as Warren characterizes the historian's business here. However, in the later biography of Jefferson Davis and in The Legacy of the Civil War, as well as in the two studies on race relations, it is more difficult to see how Warren is concerned with a knowledge about history rather than a knowledge of history. This blurring of the types of knowledge is a direct result of the "personal" nature of Warren's writing and an integral part of the idiosyncratic forms of Warren's historical writings.

In Warren's novels as well as in his histories, one way to present the knowledge of history would seem to be to dramatize the individual's inner division in the context of an historical socio-political division, which tries to become in the process of telling the story, a contextual symbol of the individual's duality. This is, at least, the result of much of Warren's use of American history at a national or regional level in his first four novels. The individual in relation to the event is the main story the novelist is really concerned with. As Bradwell Tolliver

discovers at the end of Flood, "There is no country but the heart" (440).

Warren's first novel, Night Rider, was published in 1939. Its protagonist, Percy Munn, serves as a good illustration of a character whose life is in a sense suspended because of his problem with distinguishing what is real from what is illusory. It is suspended because he never gets a grip on a "real" way to know what he is. He understands the need for something central in his life, something real and nameable by which to live. Unfortunately, he is never able to resolve the conflict between idea and fact because he is never able to give life to the idea, which, ironically, is what he tells the crowd gathered in Bardsville at the novel's opening they must do or else the idea they have all gathered for is nothing. This appraisal of their communal situation is a foreshadowing of Munn's subsequent development in the novel, for finally his vision is of nothingness. He cannot even recall the words he used in his speech to the crowd in Bardsville. Munn never sees the inner part of himself as a development in time. Instead, like John Brown, the historical figure Warren had treated ten years earlier, he tries to find meaning through single and increasingly more desperate acts.

The great idea that all the people gather for in Bardsville is justice, and the context within which Munn

and the others seek justice is the effort by tobacco farmers from Kentucky and Tennessee to band together in order to force buyers to pay a fair price for their crops. The Association of Growers of Dark Fired Tobacco begins with a sense of communion that Munn feels strongly, but that communion turns out to be false as the members of the Association turn more and more to terrorism to gain their ends. Dissension and dissatisfaction become key problems for the Association. Two important founders, Captain Todd and Senator Tolliver, resign, the first for reasons of personal integrity, the latter for personal gain. That their opposite motives lead to the same action is indicative of a doubleness in the individual's relation to the group which is inscrutable for Munn. There is attempted blackmail within the Association which leads to murder, and, eventually, the raids of the Night Riders escalate to the point of civil war.

The disintegration of the Association is a sign of the contamination that man, in his state of separatensss from the inocence of nature, always brings to an idea; but unlike some of Warren's later protagonists who are faced with similar situations as the machinery with which they have aligned themselves crumbles, Munn never learns to live by accepting his separateness, his own doubleness. He is a hollow man who can find no adequate way to fulfill himself. He has, as the following passage shows, moments

of acute insight, but never a sustaining vision:

> . . . he was to demand of himself: If I couldn't know myself, how could I know any of the rest of them? Or anything? Certainly he had not known himself, he would decide; if indeed the self of that time could claim any continuator in the self that was to look backward and speculate, and torture the question. Then, thinking that the self he remembered, and perhaps remembered but imperfectly, and the later self were nothing more than the superimposed exposures on the same film of a camera, he felt that all his actions had been as unaimed and meaningless as the blows of a blind man who strikes out at the undefined sounds which penetrate his private darkness. (114)

More than any other Warren protagonist, Munn is unable to see any connection between the past and the present. Other characters, like Jerry Calhoun and Sue Murdock of At Heaven's Gate, are discomfited by the constant encroachment of the personal past on the present, as is the wanderer/son in Warren's poetry. They fail to see the self as a development in time because no inner certainty is available with which to confront the disintegration and destructiveness of the natural and social world. Yet Munn's nihilism seems purer; it brings him toward the novel's end to a state in which it is impossible for him to imagine any future. He is totally without self as Warren defines it. Though he desperately longs for meaning, he has no perception of continuity, that sense that the past and the future are factors which must be acknowledged in the creation of Selfhood. Instead, he hopes to make himself something by acting in a world of important men, seeking through such action to give credence to the idea;

but his public life never fulfills his personal need. His failure is the same failure Warren had seen in John Brown. He never comes to a knowledge, the kind Captain Todd and Willie Proudfit have, the kind Jack Burden, Cy Grinder and Jed Tewksbury would all come to have in different ways in later novels, that would make him say, "Enough."

Munn is not an ignorant man but an intelligent, educated man who cannot make his private and public life match up because the world does not adhere to his dream and he can never make his dream of justice fit the world. He is not unlike Flannery O'Connor's Misfit in the story "A Good Man is Hard to Find," who suffers because he cannot balance ends with means, intentions with results (131). But Munn is also not unlike the grandmother in that same story who tries to go around the imbalance in the the world and impose on it an order that is quite artificial.

Barnett Guttenberg, in his book Web of Being, points to the importance of a passage in Night Rider spoken by Dr. MacDonald, one of the founders of the Night Riders, which illustrates the problem confronting Munn's knowledge of his own being: "'The things I've seen done. With my own eyes. . . . It looks like those things and gettting down on your knees don't belong in the same world'" (NR 318). Guttenberg says that the awareness Munn lacks is that those dark things do belong in the same world, that they are a part of being (12). They are part of the paradox Warren explores

which Alvin S. Ryan has called the paradox of communion and isolation (33), the paradox Warren himself has referred to as that of love and separateness in his essay on Eudora Welty. Munn is never able to resolve the question with any success because he is never able to accept this paradox. The naturalism he adheres to, though he could not probably name what he adheres to, does not allow for paradox. Oddly enough, even paradoxically enough, the chief proponent of that naturalism in the novel is named Mr. Christian, a man who has a propensity for calling all female creatures "Sukie," including his own daughter. This suggests Christian's failure to make a distinction between nature and man. It is to Mr. Christian that Munn becomes attached, especially after Captain Todd and Senator Tolliver resign from the Association. Whereas Captain Todd maintains that, human nature being what it is, some dissension within the Association is to be expected, Christian vows wildly to destroy anyone not altogether committed to the idea. He insists on a world that is understandable. He is the kind of man who is going to hold the world in his hand, so to speak, look at it, and cut off any parts that do not conform to his conception of it. He is a more volatile version of Adam Stanton who would appear in <u>All the King's Men</u> with his scalpel, and finally a gun, to rid the world of "evil." Christian denies the possiblity of betrayal, so he has difficulty accepting the

dissension within the Association. He is also unable to comprehend Munn's betrayal when Munn engages in an adulterous affair under Christian's roof with Christian's daughter Lucille. The discovery of the affair triggers the stroke which eventually kills Christian.

Munn is moved through the world by the voices of others and the forces of political happenings because he is devoid of any earned conviction, any center, any sense of his own will, that defines his life. He makes the fatal mistake, fatal to selfhood and in the end literally fatal, of trying to define his life through others by attaching himself to Mr. Christian's idea of justice, something which Cass Mastern articulates as his own mistake in All the King's Men. Captain Todd, Professor Ball, Doctor MacDonald, Lucille Christian and Munn's wife May all are sources Munn looks to at one time or another for articulation of some sort of meaning. From the beginning Munn listens to and does what he is told by others, even when he does not wish to. He succumbs to flattery, enjoying being initiated into the fellowship of important men. He admires the "deep, inner certainty of self" which he believes he sees in several other characters in the novel (43). Only Captain Todd and Willie Proudfit, who enters the novel near the end, however, have the integration of inner being, a sense that life is continuous and so the past matters. They have a center of being which

is based on their discovery of man's flawed nature and which allows them to act responsibly, with the knowledge that all actions bear consequences, and to act morally, with a sense of integrity. Munn has no such integrity of self because he dreams of an abstract justice. He attempts to negate past experience through new actions by which he tries to give life to his sense of justice. That this is not possible is clearly demonstrated by the fact that the actions themselves move farther and farther away from anything like the idea of justice Munn begins with.

Because he ignores experience and has no tested center of self which informs his actions, Munn bounces emotionally between two extremes, illustrated by his reaction to responses from farmers when he tries to recruit them into the Association. He is perturbed when the individualistic tobacco farmers of the region refuse to join the Association simply because they will not be told what they can do with their own crops by anyone. But like Christian, he is sometimes "rapt" in an idea; for whenever a new member agrees to place his crop under the control of the Association, he experiences a "grip of an absolute, throbless pleasure in which he seem[s] poised out of himself and, as it were, out of time" (37). He enjoys a feeling of "confidence and excitement," instigated primarily by Mr. Christian, that "made everything seem so easy, every difficulty so superficial, the future so clear.

. . . like the sustaining and transforming warmth of liquor in a man's stomach" (43). Juxtaposed with these moments of elation are times of stark, nihilistic terror during which he sees a blankness within himself and in the world.

> And then it came to him that all he knew was the blackness into which he stared and the swinging motion and the beat of the blood. But was he staring into blackness, a blackness external to him and circumambient, or was he the blackness, his own head of terrific circumference embracing, enclosing, defining the blackness, and the effort of staring inward into himself, into his own head which enclosed the blackness and everything? (109)

As Guttenberg has written, "Selfhood . . . requires that one perceive the void," which Munn does at such moments of insight (11); but in Warren's scheme of things, selfhood also requires that one "continue to walk in the world" with a hard-won knowledge despite the void, which Munn fails to do. He does not achieve a vision that will sustain him because he is a divided man, with a day self and a night self, separated and unrecognizable to each other. During the day he reads of the events he has been involved in the night before--the forcing of a farmer to scrape his own tobacco bed, the murder of Bunk Trevelyan, the burning of a barn--as though he has no association with the acts. There is no synthesis to heal the division within him. He clings, instead, to the unsubstantiated dream of justice and communion accomplished through the actions of men, even though the evidence denies both the dream and the means. Even his dream seems to fall away entirely by the end,

leaving only his desperate attempts to make himself something through action.

There are two characters in the novel whose lives demonstrate the possiblility for a sustaining vision and offer an alternative to the desperation of Munn. Captain Todd, with his "inner certainty of self," understands that morality is not dependent on public ideas, that actions do not justify an idea, or the other way around. He proves his inner certainty, his selfhood, in fact, when he resigns from the Association after the Night Riders begin their terrorist activities. Unlike Munn, Captain Todd is able to see connections between events; he understands that there is a continuity to life. Most particularly, his experience as a Confederate officer enables him to approach the Association with realistic expectations to begin with, bringing with him more caution and calmness than someone like Mr. Christian. Captain Todd has learned to live with his own limitations, even to have courage with his limitations, which he had demonstrated during the war by holding his position in the face of hopeless odds and again when he does the unpopular thing by resigning from the Association. Perhaps even more important is the fact that he has learned to live with the limitations of others, so the communion he feels is more realistic than the oath-bond of the Association. It is one that accepts man's failure, recognizes the importance of the individual, and enables

Todd to expect the dissension within the Assocation that so enrages Mr. Christian and perplexes Munn.

Willie Proudfit's character offers another example of a man with a fulfilling vision. He is inserted into the novel, almost too mechanically, for the explicit purpose of offering an alternative view to Munn's desperate sense of nothingness. Proudfit's narration of his own history is Warren's first interpolated story, a device he would return to in each of the first four novels to provide an index to the main storyline. Proudfit's experience in the West is one of several examples in Warren that shows that the new land does not redeem man in and of itself. The West is, like every other place men have been, a place for sin and death. There is even in Proudfit's experience an Indian war that rivals in terms of betrayal the main story of the novel. But Proudfit learned to take nourishment from sources which are synonomous with Conrad's destructive element. The following passage describes a desperate Proudfit finding a way to slake his physical thirst. The passage is something of a summation of Willie's inner life because it parallels his discovery of a way to fulfill his spiritual needs.

> "I lays in bed and I kin recollect the times out in the dry country I laid out somewheres a-nights and studied on water. In this country the Lord's done give a man water whichever way he turns, fer drinken and washen, hit looks lak, and a man don't know how hit is in the dry country, and the thirsten. I been two days without water and my tongue swole in my mouth. I shot me a buffalo,

> figgeren on the blood, and I seen they was mud caked on her legs--hit was a cow--and new-caked. I cut open her stomach, and thar was the water she'd drunk. And I supped ever drop. And hit give me strength to go on. The way she'd come from, whar the water was. The Canadian River, hit was, and nigh dry. A man don't know how the dry country is. But even here ain't ever man got him a spring come-en nigh outer the top of a hill, lak me, and fall-en so he kin hear hit. Nor ever man got him a cold-air cave to keep his milk sweet to his mouth. Hit's a feature." (375-376)

Proudfit has been led to his place of abundance by a vision which came to him during a severe illness he suffered while he was living among the Indians. Perhaps he is here saved by inexplicable grace, for it is not just the good fortune he discovers upon his return, leaving the illusory fulfillment of the West behind him, that has led to his real fulfillment. Indeed, there is the likelihood that he will lose his farm with all its "features" because of several bad seasons, but one feels that even so he will continue his walk in the world because, like Todd, he has discovered a feeling of self, an awareness of his place and his responsibility in the world.

Like Munn, Proudfit has known extremes emotionally, times when his thirst was great, and times, like that described in the following passage in which he tells about how he once shot a stand of buffalo, when he seemed to step outside of himself:

> "A man lays thar, the sun a-bearen down, and keeps on a pullen on the trigger. He ain't like his-self. Naw, he ain't. Lak he wasn't no man, nor nuthen. Lak hit ain't him has a-holt of the gun, but the gun had a-holt of him. Lak he mought

> git up and walk off and leave them buffalo down the rise, a-standen, and leave the gun lay, and the gun would be shooten and a-shooten, by hitself, and ne'er no end. And the buffalo, down the rise, standen and bawlen. Hit comes to a man that a-way." (408)

Remarkable for its similarity to this description is the description by Private Porsum, the war hero turned puppet of Bogan Murdock in At Heaven's Gate, of how he earned his fame as a killer of Germans.

> "It looked like I was not paying mind to anything going on. I knew I was looking across the cove and seeing some feller's head and shooting him and taking the gun Percy would give me and shooting again, but it was all slow-seeming and not real. I felt empty and floating like it was a dream, and my mouth was dry. I was praying. I was not praying with words. I was praying without words like I was praying all over and did not need any words, and I was lifted up. (AHG 330)

These temporary dream states that Proudfit and Porsum succumb to demonstrate the possibility of selfless destructiveness, an unacknowledged power. The condition parallels the nihilistic vision of Munn in the first novel and the passive existence of Jerry Calhoun in the brotherhood of business created by Bogan Murdock in the second. Unlike Munn, however, Proudfit comes to see the significance of the events in his life as they relate to one another, enabling him to, at last, occupy the space which is himself, as it were, to exist in time. (Porsum, too, at last returns to himself, like a prodigal, and brings on the collapse of the Murdock financial empire by confessing that he used his influence to help sell to the

state depleted lands held by Murdock's company.) Ironically, it is the illiterate or barely educated characters who are able to articulate the problems of the spiritual sickness they have in common with the educated protagonists of both novels. In At Heaven's Gate it is the "Statement of Ashby Wyndam," a cousin of Porsum, that moves Porsum to confess, and Porsum's confession, in domino effectiveness, moves Jerry Calhoun first into jail with Wyndham and Porsum for his role in the securities scandal and finally to an imaginary confession to his father that he had wanted his father dead to obliterate the past which stands in the way of his future. Willie Proudfit's discovery that "They's a hoggishness in man, and a hog-blindness" (NR 410) anticipates the opening words of Ashby Wyndham's statement in the later novel: "The pore human man, he ain't nuthin but a handful of dust, but the light of Gods face on him and he shines like a diamint, and blinds the eye of the un-uprightous congregation. . . . There ain't nothin in [man] but meanness and a hog hollerness and emptiness for the world's slop (AHG 35). Though the "hog-blindness" may be another term for Original Sin, its effect is comparable to Munn's and Christian's moments of rapture in an idea, times when the world simply stops and there is only the idea, but its darker side is manifested in blind violence either in action or as a permeating factor in language. Early in Night Rider, Mr.

Christian and Munn look out a hotel room window over the people who have gathered in Bardsville for the first Association meeting.

> There they were, the slow stream of bodies milling and dividing on the pavements and in the street, and the retarded movement of wagons and buggies and carriages between. On Mr. Christian's face grew a rapt and distant expression, that vanished suddently into an excitement as he straightened up and slapped Mr. Munn on the back and exclaimed: "By God, boy, we gonna do it, we gonna do it! They're here for it, and they'll do it. We'll show those bastards now, by God!" (8)

Proudfit's story offers a counter experience to Munn's and Christian's because he sees the animal in man, the "hog-blindness," but he has also learned how to rise above the animalism with a vision of a sweet life, which manifests itself for him in his abundance of good things on his farm, his "features" as he calls them. Besides his place, there is his wife to whom he is devoted; and even his healthy appetite for sweet milk suggests his fulfilled life. The world around him reflects a kind of inner sweetness he has discovered. That sweetness is paralleled in the substance of outer life, and his relations to other people are likewise substantial. When Munn is wanted for murder, Proudfit lets him hide out at his place at first out of loyalty to Doctor MacDonald but eventually out of an affection he feels for Munn. Proudfit, out of respect for his own wife's feelings, feels compelled to chastise Munn when Lucille Christian comes to see Munn and enters his room in the middle of the night. In each case Proudfit's

concern is with people, not with a morality based on abstract ideas.

Munn is so devoid of such moral awareness from earned conviction, so suspended from the reality of individual life by the adherence to the abstract, that he comes eventually to see murder as a justifiable way to give meaning to his own life instead of as an immoral act. Similarly, Jeremiah Beaumont of World Enough and Time, sinks downward from the bright world of idea to the dark world of men and finally into the even darker world of nature. At first he would protect the honor of Rachel Jordan, whom he sees not as a woman but as an idea made flesh, by dueling her seducer. When Cassius Fort, who had seduced Rachel, refuses the challenge, Jeremiah reasons that murder is a way to give meaning to the idea through action and stabs Fort in the dark of night. Afterward he escapes jail and flees to a western swamp where he and Rachel live for a time in an underworld headed by an invalid ex-pirate called the Gran Boz. In this underworld, class and race mean nothing, but open copulation breeds disease as well as children there. After Rachel goes mad and finally commits suicide, Jeremiah does come at last to an awareness of his "errors," his tendencies to think abstractly and to be too easily seduced by the world; but he articulates this knowledge with the coldness if not the lightness by which Ben Franklin explains his "errata."

Self-knowledge comes all too late for Jeremiah Beaumont. In Brother to Dragons, which immediately followed World Enough and Time, the character R. P. W. offers the same explanation for Lilburn's murder of the slave John. He wanted to define himself through action. The act that Munn plans to give himself meaning is the murder of Senator Tolliver, who, like Cassius Fort in World Enough and Time, is the father figure who has betrayed the idea.

Some critics have seen Warren's presentation of Munn as an artistic failure. Christopher Isherwood, for example, had the following to say in his review of the novel:

> Perse Munn is conceived as a figure of tremendous significance: he is the noble liberal gone astray in a world of power politics. Maneuvered by the logic of events from his democratic platform, he tries to use Force, and Force uses him. Such a man must be very vividly and subtly described by his creator--from the inside as well as from the out. He must be an individual, not a mere type. Perse Munn, as I read him, is the weakest character in this book. (26)

The first half of this passage reveals a fairly keen insight into Munn's situation, but the last half seems the result of a faulty conclusion.

Better interpretations have been offered by Richard Law and by Ryan, whose articles deal respectively with the pervasiveness of the naturalistic sense in the novel and Munn's resulting nihilism. Law points to the "calculated ironies" between Munn's intentions and his achievements (41). "It is clear," he goes on to write, "that the

obvious and severe limitations of Munn's awareness, rather than being the result of a defect in Warren's skill, are the point of the novel" (46). Ryan says that while Munn attempts to escape from his loneliness and isolation, he fails because "he embraces a false solidarity, and paradoxically, in so doing only increases his sense of isolation" (39). The point here is that Munn is represented exactly and purposely as Warren intended, as a man who fails, despite his initial good intentions, because he never realizes that method matters. Both he and Jeremiah Beaumont of the fourth novel are in some ways "modern" Macbeths, taking extreme measures to accomplish the "right," and never achieving a unified vision of life that could make all the tomorrows and yesterdays signify something. This lack of meaning is the result of "the terrible division," the inability to balance fact and idea, the basic conflict in modern man whose system of order has been undone (in Munn's case an agrarian order is undone by big business) and who turns to science or reason (in Munn's case naturalism) for an explanation of life. But science proves inadequate to explain being, as Law aptly explains in his article.

> Munn knows he is "selfless," knows he is a divided, alienated creature helplessly in the grip of forces beyond his understanding or control. There remains to be accounted for, however, the paradoxical "knower" of these things, the existential consciousness which, as it is hurried to annihilation, has power at least to recoil in disgust and nausea from what it cannot control.

> And that knower is, of course, left unaccounted for in the naturalistic hypothesis. (44)

With Munn, Warren presented a character whose experience reveals the worst spiritual crisis that can happen to modern man. Munn is a divided man who sees too late, if he ever sees at all, that the abstract Truth "devoured and blotted out" the individual (356). Had he maintained this insight he might have survived, for it is similar to the knowledge that Todd and Proudfit have which gives them self-identity. As it is, Munn's death seems an escape into oblivion when, after discovering that he cannot pull the trigger on Tolliver, all possibility for meaning in his life seems past recovery. It may be that he cannot kill Tolliver simply because he remembers the revulsion he felt earlier after he had murdered Bunk Trevelyan. Perhaps he has a final moment of insight into the tragic human condition. With Tolliver lying weakly in his sickbed, Munn's act, rather than to kill him, is to give him water. Immediately after this Munn is killed by soldiers who have pursued him for a murder he did not commit. He may have gained an "imperfect awareness," as Ryan claims (39); but he has several times before had similar moments of insight; and he dies without being able to articulate an overall sense of meaning to his life. Percy Munn has no self, a fact which makes his death after he raises the pistol to fire over the heads of the posse one of the most dismal in Warren's fiction. With no sense of the importance of past

experiences as they were related to what he was, he eventually loses all sense of the future. He was not connected with his former self, and he had come to perceive a similar nothingness, a lack of connection and meaning, in the world around him. His physical death is only the manifestation of his inner condition.

In All the King's Men Jack Burden articulates explicitly the conflict which Percy Munn is never able to resolve and which is the cental issue in Warren's novels. Jack's understanding of that conflict is revealed near the end of the novel after he has witnessed the deaths of his friends, Adam Stanton and Willie Stark. Jack speaks of himself in the third person in the passage, a suggestion that as a student of history he is treating himself as a subject of one of his historical excursions.

> He had seen his two friends, Willie Stark and Adam Stanton, live and die. Each had killed the other. Each had been the doom of the other. As a student of history, Jack Burden could see that Adam Stanton, whom he came to call the man of idea, and Willie Stark, whom he came to call the man of fact, were doomed to destroy each other, just as each was doomed to try to use the other and to yearn toward and try to become the other, because each was incomplete with the terrible division of their age. (462)

These two characters represent the two sides of the conflict in Jack's perceptive if simplified insight, and it is their story he is telling. Jack is deeply involved with each of them, having grown up with Adam and fallen in love with his sister and then being employed by Willie; and the

movement of the novel toward the common doom of Adam Stanton and Willie Stark is paralleled by the movement of Jack Burden toward a realization of self. The two friends represent the duality of Jack Burden; for he, too, feels the terrible division of the age.

Adam Stanton, as the man of idea, a physician to the poor, lives in an illusory world of cleanness, a fact which places him among the prodigious list of characters which Victor Strandberg classifies as Warren's "clean" characters. The clean people in Warren do not accept passage into a fallen environment and may range from harmless recluses to murderous psychopaths. The "dirty" characters, after accepting "passage into the world's stew are empowered thereby to proceed to the subsequent stages of spiritual development" (The Poetic Vision 122-23). Stanton attempts to hold the reality of a dirty world at bay with an abstract theory of virtue. Jack sums up his ideal:

> "he is Adam Stanton, the son of Governor Stanton and the grandson of Judge Peyton Stanton and the great-grandson of General Morgan Stanton, and he has lived all his life in the idea that there was a time a long time back when everything was run by high-minded handsome men wearing knee breeches and silver buckles or Continental blue or frock coats, or even buckskin and coonskin caps, as the case may be--for Adam Stanton isn't any snob--who sat around a table and candidly debated the good of the public thing. . . . he is a romantic, and he has a picture of the world in his head, and when the world doesn't conform in any respect to the picture he wants to throw the world away. Even if that means throwing out the baby with the bath." (261-262)

Perhaps the great difference between Adam Stanton and other romantics Warren has created, notably Jeremiah Beaumont and Adam Rosenzweig of Wilderness, is that he does not actively search for the gratuitous act, the act removed from the world's normal social and political motives, to give life to his cherished idea. He wants to keep his hands clean, and the world sanctions his "good" work as a surgeon. When his sterile world is punctured, he becomes murderous and assasinates Willie Stark. In Warren's later novel Flood, the film director Yasha Jones says something that seems to echo Adam Stanton's condition: "the surgeon bending in his task of devoted mercy is the twin brother of Jack the Ripper" (44).

It is Stanton's romantic conception of an ideal governing body which accounts for his disgust when Governor Willie Stark offers to make him the director of what Willie refers to in his superlative-studded manner of speaking as the "God-damnedest, biggest, chromium-platedest, formaldehye-stinkingest free hospital and health center the All-Father ever let live" (139). It falls to Jack Burden to make his long-time friend accept the job. This he is able to do because as a student of history he has the "goods" to break into Stanton's illusion of a virtuous society. Jack has learned that Governor Stanton had covered for Judge Irwin when, as Attorney General, Irwin had averted his eyes to allow the American Power Electric

Company to operate without paying the required royalties to the state. In turn, Irwin's financial difficulties were cleared away, and he was further rewarded with a job with the company. Unfortunately, the man whose job he took, Mortimer L. Littlepaugh, committed suicide; but he left behind a letter to his sister which eventually gave Jack Burden the proof of what had happened. Both Governor Stanton and Judge Irwin were exemplary of that virtue which Adam, and even Jack at one time, clung to. When he learns about his father and Judge Irwin, Adam accepts the job of directing Stark's hospital with the promise of a free hand from Willie. He also accepts because, as Willie knows, he wants to do good. So, the man of fact has given the man of idea a way to fulfill himself. Adam now seemingly has a way to heal the terrible division by putting his idea to work in the factual world on a grand scale.

Adam, however, is also helping Willie to complete himself. There is even in the "Boss" the desire to do good, exemplified by his need to build the hospital without having "dirty" hands touch it. The idea comes to him, or at least he first reveals it, immediately after he has saved the political hide of the dishonest Byram B. White because it was the expedient thing to do. It seems that he is struck by an overwhelming need for something totally untainted in his life to counteract the complicated entanglements of politics. In one sense Willie is clinging

to an ideal in building the hospital, but the building of the hospital is also motivated subconsciously by Willie's pride. It will be the Willie Stark Hospital, his monument (later a monument to his invalid son); and it is this reason as much as any altruistic impulse which makes him want to see it a superlative hospital.

Willie acts almost always with the belief that good must be made from bad because badness is the only raw material left to man (257). His attitude is the most pragmatic in the novel toward the inevitable corruption of the ideal, though that theme is echoed through several other characters. Ellis Burden, Jack's supposed father, another man who refuses to submit himself to the corruption of being a political man, says that "the creation of good" is the "index of man's glory and power" (463). The noble Judge Irwin admits that one thing Willie understands is that "you don't make omelettes without breaking eggs" (132). But neither of these men would go so far as Willie does in saying that man has to make the good up as he goes along (272).

One way to view Willie is as something of a completer. In an age marked by a "terrible division," people look to a strong man to act for them, and they define themselves by their association with him. People do not gather around Willie simply out of curiosity. They gather around him because he inspires a heightened feeling

in them; he stirs them up. They get the feeling that they are important in the world by letting a man like Willie battle for them. Willie does not force himself upon the masses. They are all too ready to have him as their leader, as their other self who exhibits direction through action. In one of his speeches, while asking for public support to help him clear away his opposition in the state senate, Willie says, "Gimme that meat ax!" and Jack reports that "the crowd roared" (277-278). The similarity between this incident and the later one in Brother to Dragons should not be missed. About to kill the young slave, Lilburn Lewis says to Isham, "Hand me that meat-axe, Ishy" (BD 82). Isham complies as automatically as Willie's crowd roars in response to his words. In reporting his compliance Isham says, "And me, I did." The specific words and even the similarity of syntax and rhythm in both works indicate the impulse toward a complicity in violence. The crowd and even the individual find it easy to hand the meat axe over to the strong man when there is no integrated self. And perhaps the ultimate meaning to be taken from the comparison is that it is possible, even frighteningly easy, for a single individual to exhibit the same mindlessness typical of a mob. In much the same way, Percy Munn is stirred to violence by important men in Night Rider, and "all the king's men" and women have similar feelings toward Willie at some point in the novel. Warren

demonstrates again and again the danger of the senseless and selfless mentality which can make anything right by force or make anything meaningless in a dream of nothingness.

Besides Wilie's skill in stirring a crowd, his understanding of Original Sin gives him power. This knowledge is made evident in his most famous statement: "'Man is conceived in sin and born in corruption and he passeth from the stink of the didie to the stench of the shroud.'" Jack repeats what Willie says here several times over the course of the novel as if he were pondering the statement while he watches it come true. Articulated in the idiom of Willie's Presbyterian Sunday School upbringing combined with the slick, sarcastic tones of a politician behind closed doors, this is the same knowledge which Adam Stanton denies, as Jefferson would deny it in the later work Brother to Dragons. And Jack Burden denies it, too, for he keeps saying Judge Irwin might be an exception to Willie's theological/political statement about human corruption. All three of these men, to one degree or another, cling to a dream of man's ability to find a new innocence, to have a world where the past does not have meaning. Jack, however, while he would like to believe in the Judge's innocence, has seen too much to believe in the abstract virtue that both Jefferson and Adam Stanton live by, and so he cannot risk too much on his hope in the

Judge. Asked by Willie to find information that will discredit the Judge politically and to "make it stick," Jack, who loves the Judge and who, as it turns out, is the son of the Judge, begins his task with an easy conscience because he is able to tell himself that it all means nothing. Even in his narrative he distances himself from the project by labeling it "The Case of the Upright Judge." At this point in the development of his consciousness, Jack's perception is similar to Percy Munn's. He cannot comprehend that meaning depends on a perception of the self as a continuous development in time. Jack is not even very aware of any need for a redemption of himself; so, he is certainly not aware that redemption is not to be found in the dream nor the act that would justify the dream, but by an acceptance of responsibility in the interconnected world.

Jack goes through three stages of ontological development, actually, on his way to the state of knowledge which constitutes wisdom in Warren's vision. Each stage corresponds to a stage of spiritual development as he moves toward the sense of the "One life" or sacramental vision, which Warren identified as the primary theme of Coleridge's The Rime of the Ancient Mariner even as he wrote All the King's Men. In the first stage, which begins after his boyhood in Burden's Landing, Jack clings to an Idealism which dictates that nothing matters because nothing is real

if the mind does not charge it with reality. He explains this stage of his life as he describes himself standing in the barn lot at Old Man Stark's place.

> I heard somebody open and shut the gate to the barn lot, but I didn't look around. If I didn't look around it would not be true that somebody had opened the gate with the creaky hinges, and that is a wonderful principle for a man to get hold of. I had got hold of the principle out of a book when I was in college, and hung on to it for grim death. I owed my success in life to that principle. It had put me where I was. What you don't know don't hurt you, for it ain't real. They called that Idealism in my book I had when I was in college, and after I got hold of that principle I became an Idealist. I was a brassbound Idealist in those days. If you are an Idealist it does not matter what you do or what goes on around you because it isn't real anyway. (33)

The passage is, of course, ironic. It is ironic partly because Jack Burden is looking back on himself somewhat contemptuously for the mental tricks he played on himself. The language is duplicitous. Nothing outside the mind is real, but the principle that asserts the unreality is "got hold of" and "hung on to" as if the principle were as tangible as a physical object. The duplicity culminates in the oxymoron "brassbound Idealist." Here, however, the irony is impure, for as it combines the tangibility of fact Jack comes to see in Willie Stark and the Platonic virtue he comes to see in Adam Stanton, it foreshadows the only viable idealism, one that includes the actuality of the external world in its formulation of what is "real."

As the "brassbound Idealist" he was at the time, Jack can take the job of finding something to discredit Judge

Irwin without fear because the only meaning it will have will be that Willie will pay him for it. But his Idealism manifests itself in another way. Like Adam Stanton, he tends to view the past in static images. While Adam sees the past as an ideal order run by high-minded men, the strongest image of Jack's Idealism is a static image he has of Adam's sister, Anne Stanton, an image of absolute, inviolable beauty.

> The image I got in my head that day was the image of her face lying in the water, very smooth with the eyes closed, under the dark greenish-purple sky, with the white gull passing over. (126)

The image of absolute innocence removes Anne from the motion of the world. It is an image of nonmotion: and, as Jack comes to learn, "meaning is never in the event but in the motion through the event" (287), a statement which reveals his eventual understanding of life's continuity. When Jack comes to be alone with Anne at a time when the consummation of their love seems the natural thing to take place, he hesitates because it would not be "right." Like Adam, he is using an abstract notion of morality to preserve his image of her innocence, which at that point in his life was closely tied to his own. Also like Adam, he refrains from action because of his dream. He doesn't want to subject the dream to the "dirty" world. Intercourse would be a violation of the image of absolute innocence. Both Adam and Jack, as a young man, are like Percy Munn in

the way they cling to a dream; but Munn, like Jeremiah Beaumont, differs by trying to justify his dream through action, failing because he never learned from his experience that his dream was illusory. There is an interesting contrast between Warren's nineteenth century Idealists who are moved toward the gratuitous act that will give meaning to their idea, honor, justice, etc., and his twentieth century Idealists, who are more passive and withdrawn. I will return to this contrast in the next chapter.

Of course, Anne Stanton, the woman, cannot go on being a picture in Jack Burden's head. Even Jack is forced to devise more and more exercises in mental displacement to keep up the illusion of his own unreality--such as at one point imagining that he is something slow happening in the brain of a cow (53). Anne, in fact, as Jack is able to see much later, is one of those people like Captain Todd of Night Rider who has "a deep inner certitude of self which comes from being all of one piece." Jack uses the same words to describe her that he does to describe the spider web world, "all of one piece." Anne was not, as Jack goes on to say, made up of "shreds and patches and old cogwheels held together with pieces of barbed wire and spit and bits of string, like most of us" (220). She is capable of self-identity because her inner being reflects an interconnectedness in the external world. She knows her

place in the world, which can include such seemingly incongruous conditions as being a tireless charity worker and a mistress of Willie Stark. Jack will come to have this kind of knowledge for himself later, but his static image of Anne is something he clings to until he learns that she has become Stark's mistress.

The discovery of this fact catapults Jack into a new stage. He drives to California in order to escape, fleeing west, or as he says, "drowning in west." On the way back from California, Jack picks up an old hitchhiker with a nervous twitch in his left cheek. From this Jack formulates the idea of the Great Twitch, which is a way of ritualizing the subsumption of the individual into the mechanical motion of nature. With this belief in naturalistic determinism, Jack's philosophy is more in line with Willie's world of action or fact than with Adam's world of idea. Again, however, as in Night Rider, there is the problem Law has referred to of accounting for the knower. If the twitch is all there is in life, then what is it that knows that the twitch is all? The solution to the problem Jack finds is to exist in another dream which is helped along in his case by his trip to California, symbolic of illusion, where he can learn, or as it turns out, he can begin to pretend for a time, "That the twitch can know that the twitch is all." And he can feel "clean and free," and be "at one with the Great Twitch" (314).

This is not only a recognition on Jack's part but an acceptance of what Hemingway called nada, the sense of nothingness that comes when the world and the self are a chaos of nonconnected bits and pieces. The only comfort in a purely naturalistic order like that of the Great Twitch is a spiritual death. When there is not perception of order in the mind, when the Platonic idea, or something like it, is completely cast aside for pure naturalism, there is an ironic comfort in the face of the Great Nothing. But it is as false a comfort as the comfort of the pure idea. Jack learns, as his predecessor Duckfoot Blake had learned in At Heaven's Gate, that "everything mattered" (AHG 372).

The theory of the Great Twitch holds that everything is mechanical, a theory which relieves Jack of all responsibility in the world. Perhaps this new state of his perception is best illustrated by his description of the prefrontal lobectomy he watches Adam perform on a patient. The man on the table did not seem real, and the operation was "high-grade carpenter work" (337). The only time this aloofness becomes hard to maintain is when Adam begins the process of electrocautery and the smell of the burning flesh from the human brain reminds Jack of a time when some stables had burned in Burden's Landing when he was a boy and several horses had died in the fire. Much as Jack's past idealism is destroyed by the discovery that Anne

Stanton has gone on to become something very different, his naturalistic view of the present is challenged by a memory from the past. Connections between such events are what he has to ignore if he is going to hold on to his Great Twitch theory because such connections lead to meaning. Immediately after the operation he jokingly baptizes the new personality on the table "in the name of the Big Twitch, the Little Twitch, and the Holy Ghost. Who, no doubt, is a Twitch, too" (338). The hard-boiled humor is a defense mechanism as much as anything else.

Jack is able to cling to his Great Twitch theory until he is confronted with the overwhelming evidence of an interrelatedness of things in the world through a series of violent episodes. The reality of the world, which Warren often represents through violence, comes to shake Jack out of his dream. He confronts Judge Irwin with his past misdeed, and to his shock the Judge commits suicide rather than submitting to blackmail or public disgrace. The trouble with the Case of the Upright Judge is that it meant something (203); and it meant something because "nothing is ever lost" (242), Warren's oft-repeated truth which Jack grasps and utters. Jack is awakened during the afternoon (sleep is often his method of oblivion during periods he calls the Great Sleep) after he had confronted the Judge by his mother's scream, and in a state of hysteria she tells him that he has killed his own father. Jack must now face

the fact that he is a force in the world, and that the past is significant. He learns that he is not invulnerable, a condition which he had believed to be his curse, nor a piece of furniture arranged by hands other than his own, which he had tried to be too often.

Finally, he is able to see that there is meaning in the diary of Cass Mastern, which he had tried to edit as a graduate student of history. Mastern, a maternal uncle of Ellis Burden, had engaged in an affair with the wife of his best friend. When the friend discovered the affair, he shot himself. To the world the shooting appeared an accident, but the husband had removed his wedding ring before killing himself, so his wife and Mastern knew the truth. Tortured by guilt, Mastern enlists as a private in the Confederate ranks and waits for the bullet that will end his agony. Jack Burden, because of his own experience, can at last say what Cass Mastern had learned from his, "that the world is all of one piece. . . . that the world is like an enormous spider web and if you touch it, however lightly, at any point, the vibration ripples to the remotest perimeter" (200).

It is Jack Burden's imagination which completes the story of Cass Mastern, for it is he who articulates this knowledge Mastern came to. The knowledge that Jack Burden comes to have incorporates both the separateness of the individual and the osmosis of being which means that he is

a creature of power, that is, that his identity is affirmed rather than denied by the interpenetration of lives. Near the end of the novel, the dying Ellis Burden, whom Jack has taken into the house he ironically inherited from Judge Irwin, dictates to Jack that "Separateness is identity and the only way for God to create, truly create, man was to make him separate from God Himself, and to be separate from God is to be sinful" (462). At the time Jack agrees with the old man to pacify him, "but later," he goes on to say, "I was not certain but that in my own way I did believe what he had said" (463).

Jack, like the speaker in the poem "Revelation," has had the revelation that "In separateness only does love learn definition." His separateness from innocence is what he denied in his Idealism and in his belief in the Great Twitch. Also, not only does Jack come to see himself as a force in the world, he comes to feel that men are bound together in a common tragedy--Original Sin. But his knowledge, terrible on the one hand, brings meaning and an acknowledgement of responsibility to Jack. Perhaps only in Brother to Dragons and Audubon has Warren rivaled the power with which he writes in this novel about the necessary acceptance, in the full knowledge of the self's ambiguity, of man's tragic fate. The lives of the characters in All the King's Men are so intricately webbed together that all hands are stained in the deaths of Adam and Willie. Sadie

Burke, Willie's earlier lover, the one he had always come back to until he decided at last to go back to his wife, instructs Tiny Duffy to call Adam and tell him about the affair Willie has been having with Anne. Duffy, the lieutenant governor, seeing his chance to take power for himself, readily makes the call that sends Adam out to shoot Willie and then to be cut down himself by Willie's bodyguard Sugar-boy. When Jack first learns that it was Duffy who had made the call to Adam, he can for a time focus all the blame on Duffy; but when he has a chance to destroy Duffy by telling Sugar-Boy what he knows about Willie's death, knowing that Sugar-Boy would avenge Willie, he realizes that it would be "like touching the trigger." It would be the "perfect duplication of what Duffy had done," which seems very funny to Jack. But then, Jack reports, "I saw Duffy's face, large and lunar and sebaceous, nodding at me as at the covert and brotherly appreciation of a joke, and even as I opened my lips to speak the syllables of his name, he winked. He winked right at me like a brother" (445).

The vision here grows from an earlier incident in the novel. Jack could never be sure if Willie had given him a knowing wink the first time they met each other. The wink of the Boss would symbolically implicate Jack in all that the Boss does, of course; and Jack's unsureness may be a sign of his subconscious resistance to that knowledge. But

this animated image of Tiny Duffy's wink is similar in the way it works to the animated image at the end of "Old Nigger on One-Mule Cart," in which the speaker imaginatively creates a new image that gives the encounter with the old man meaning, makes him, in fact, a brother just as Tiny Duffy here winks "like a brother." The image of the wink also serves as a contrast to the static image of Anne Stanton Jack had earlier held. Jack's imagination is ordering the world at this point, despite the emotional wounds he has received, helping him to discover meaning in the world. In the face of this knowledge he accepts responsibility for himself, which means that he can no longer believe in the Great Twitch. He tells Sugar-Boy that there was no conspiracy behind the Boss's death. In effect, he is telling the good lie. Jack not only survives the violence of the world, he comes to have a knowledge that he can take with him back into that violence, and he is the only hero of the first four novels who is able to do this. What he has learned is a sense of the world that is like the definition of wisdom Warren saw working in Conrad and which bears repeating here:

> Wisdom, . . . is the recognition of man's condition, the condition of the creature made without gills or fins but dropped into the sea, the necessity of living with the ever renewing dilemma of idea as opposed to nature, morality to action, "utopianism" to "secular logic," . . . justice to material interests. Man must make his life somehow in the dialectical process of these terms, and in so far as he is to achieve redemption he must do so through an awareness of his condition that

> identifies him with the general human communion, not in abstraction, not in mere doctrine, but immediately. (N&SE 156-57)

Jack Burden seems to have achieved at least a recognition of man's condition. That condition is a separateness from nature's innocence, which Warren emphasizes by calling him a creature dropped in a sea without gills or fins. Jack has even gone so far as to synthesize the elements in the "dialectical process" that leads to vision. This then would be the vision Warren proclaims as a way of sustaining human life. Such wisdom is not the biblical wisdom of Solomon but a hard-won knowledge that gives one the "inner certainty of self" despite an awareness of his own division between virtue and vice. Jack exemplifies what Henry Rago calls Warren's "tragic choice between not-knowing and knowing." "Not knowing," according to Rago, "leaves us only the emptiness of the life lived under 'the godhead of the Great Twitch'; knowing brings us the anguish of incompleteness in that separation between 'idea' and 'fact' which is the definition of our age" (37). By choosing to know, Jack can accept the past. And he can also see that the doom of his two friends was not a naturalistic doom because they had both lived in the "agony of will" (462). On his death bed Willie tells Jack, "It might have been all different" (425). This assertion of will points to Jack's discovery of freedom, not the clean freedom of naturalism which

absolves him of responsibility, nor of Idealism in which nothing is real, but the frightening freedom of his own will and selfhood in the world of consequence.

At the end of Warren's first novel, Percy Munn steps easily out of the world into oblivion after having lost all sense of self-hood; even his own death is an ambiguous "suicide." But at the end of All the King's Men, Jack Burden is about to step back "into history and the awful responsibility of Time," having earned his identity by accepting the burden of living in a world of interconnection and meaning.

CHAPTER 7

THE NOVELS OF THE CIVIL WAR

Warren's two novels which are set during the Civil War are very different from each other. The protagonist of Band of Angels is a Kentucky belle who discovers at her father's graveside that she is a mulatto even as she is taken into slavery. The doubleness of her blood and her bondage within the institution of slavery intensify for her the problems of an ambiguous identity and the seeming loss of her own will. She faces the problems which Warren characters typically face but in untypical circumstances. The protagonist of Wilderness is a Bavarian Jew, a Romantic would-be freedom fighter cut in the mold of the nineteenth century European idealist, who comes to America during the war to fight for freedom as his father had fought for freedom in Germany.

The nature of freedom is more openly explored in these two novels than in any others Warren wrote. Amantha Starr is forever looking for someone to free her until at the end she learns that freedom, like identity, cannot be gotten through others. Adam Rosenzweig, on the other hand, seeks to free others. So their relation to freedom, the first as victim of slavery and the second as agent of freedom (roles which are determined primarily by the way each sees himself and herself), are opposite. For both, though, freedom is an absolute, and both come to learn that the line between

freedom and slavery is ambiguous. But they learn this from very different experiences in very different fictive worlds. One difference is in the amount of attention lavished on historical incident and cultural milieu. Band of Angels is as rich in texture as the four novels which preceded it, even if it has little of their power. Amantha's narrative provides many historical details about developments in the War and movements during Reconstruction, both events in which her Emersonian husband, Tobias Sears, is heavily involved. Wilderness, the shortest of Warren's novels, marks a clear break from Warren's previous novels in the way he handles naturalistic details. There is a fidelity to history in the texture of the novel, but there are not so many different perspectives, not so many interiors to be lavishly described for their thematic resonance with the action of the novel. There are no interpolated stories like the stories of Willie Proudfit, Ashby Wyndham, Cass Mastern and Munn Short for the protagonist to ingest with his own experience. In Band of Angels such a story appears when Hamish Bond reveals that he is a former slave trader and that his real name is Alec Hinks.

When Band of Angels appeared in 1955, the critical groan was immediate and almost without exception. Little has changed since then. The novel has been attacked especially for a too abrupt conclusion and for an

uninteresting central character: "Amantha Starr is a tiresome character whose frail sense of discrimination puts the trivial and the momentous on a single egocentric plane and whose rhetoric sometimes reflects her shallow personality and sometimes egregiously speaks for her homiletic creator" (Justus 237). Like Sue Murdock, the heroine of At Heaven's Gate, Amantha tries to find identity and freedom with a series of men after the betrayal of her father, a Kentucky planter who could never bring himself to draw up Amantha's manumission papers becauses it would be like admitting that she was something less than his daughter. Both women make the moral mistake of trying to live through others, but Sue's search is conducted with some self-awareness. She knows that she does things because she wants to do them. Amantha constantly sees herself as a victim.

Perhaps the most interesting criticism levied against Band of Angels in relation to Warren's interrelated themes of knowledge, identity, and freedom was made by Walter Sullivan in a 1970 article. Sullivan argues that Warren committed the most egregious kind of anachronism that the historical novelist can commit in Band of Angels by attributing the philosophical perspective of modern existentialism to a nineteenth century protagonist. "Credibility is a sine qua non," Sullivan writes,

> and I must confess that I find it difficult to believe that a teenaged girl on a plantation in

> ante-bellum Kentucky ever really wondered who she was and what it would take to make her free. Indeed, I doubt that very many people in the eighteen fifties of whatever age or sex or place of abode troubled themselves much about the problem of identity. Existentialism as a popular philosophical stance is a manifestation of the modern age, and to hold otherwise in a piece of fiction is to commit the most damaging kind of anachronism. (110)

A poll of all the Kentucky belles who discovered at their father's graveside that their mother was a black slave might counter Sullivan's supposition about what "troubled" antebellum teenagers. Less facetiously, however, one might also ask why an antebelleum Kentucky teenager (the word itself is an anachronism) should trouble herself any less, or any more for that matter, than a modern teenaged girl living in a Lexington suburb. In one sense, Sullivan's criticism denies Warren's fiction the "What if" quality that is germane to all fiction, historical or otherwise. It is precisely because Amantha Starr's experience is so different from the average Kentucky belle that she so stringently inquires about her identity. In another sense, Sullivan's criticism that a teenaged girl <u>does</u> trouble herself about identity can be challenged. Amantha does not as a youth articulate what troubles her; it is only as an older woman that she attempts to give voice to the ambiguous feelings she had. The tentativeness of her opening statements makes clear enough the fact that, like many of Warren's story tellers, she is trying to find meaning in the reliving of the experience and that she is

finding it only approximately: "Oh, who am I? For so long that was, you might say, the cry of my heart" (3, emphasis added). Amantha tells her story after she has lived through her private crises, which are reflected in the national crises of the Civil War and Reconstruction. In essence, she is a "modern" woman telling the story that began in an antebellum girlhood.

In the end, however, Sullivan's criticism does raise an important issue not only for Band of Angels but for all of Warren's historical fiction: What is the difference between nineteenth and twentieth century consciousness? It is an issue Warren approached, of course, in The Legacy of the Civil War and Jefferson Davis Gets His Citizenship Back. It is also a concern in the fiction in which a nineteenth century figure is juxtaposed against a modern one--Cass Mastern and Jack Burden, Jeremiah Beaumont and the narrator-historian of World Enough and Time. The difference for Warren, as has been suggested earlier, is primarily a difference between an age marked by the conviction that ideas might be realized through action and an age when even, as Yeats put it, "The best lack all conviction." The difference cannot be propounded as an absolute difference, however. By this formulation Willie Stark would be more a man of nineteenth century mentality while Adam Stanton would be more a twentieth century man. Actually, in many regards the very opposite is true.

Ultimately, Warren cannot live up to Sullivan's dictum that "the novelist is obligated by the demands of his craft to keep to the truth in its simplest form" (110). The idea that the truth is ever simple or has a simple form is completely foreign to Warren, and he does not believe there ever was a time when the truth was simple for thoughtful people. As Justus says in the conclusion of The Achievement of Robert Penn Warren,

> Warren casts doubts on the notion that there ever was . . . a moment of equilibrium [i.e. when the morally correct thing was certain without thinking]. What he sees in the literature of Hawthorne, Melville, Mark Twain and Dreiser reinforces the agony which constitutes the narrative lives of most of his protagonists. And although the personae in the mature poems can never be sure of right and wrong, they yet struggle with the question that is severely moral: how shall a man live? (329)

We also know, however, from his discursive statements like "Knowledge and the Image of Man" and Democracy and Poetry and from novels like All the King's Men that Warren equated identity with moral awareness. They are inseparable concepts for him. He did not conceive of identity in purely ontological or psychological terms but in the terms of a moralist. Who am I? and How may I live? are for Warren essentially the same question. Though Sullivan's criticism is levied against what he interprets to be a failure in technique, it seems to stem more from a misconception of Warren's theme of identity and is based on

a too strict identification of Warren with formal Existentialist philosophy.

Wilderness provides a unique example among Warren's novels of the oneness of identity and moral awareness. Wilderness has major themes in common with all of Warren's other novels: the spider web world, the tenuous and complex nature of freedom, the need for an unstained dream by which to live, complicity as the definer of man's sense of brotherhood, and the urgent need for such brotherhood in conflict with a need for a distinct sense of self.

Yet L. Hugh Moore has shown how the novel represents a maturing in Warren's novelistic style in that its themes are rendered more economically than was the case with previous novels, which depended on the piling up of detail on top of detail in a sometimes tedious process of accumulation (143). Charles Bohner sees a similar accomplishment in the way Warren scales down the Civil War to "the human scale" (158). There is not the aggregation of "historical" fact that there is in Band of Angels. Justus has explained the book's spareness by saying that "Warren's larger purpose [was] to write a narrative informed by the characteristics of the sketch, the parable, the apologue, the procession, the exemplum" (257). Leonard Casper has even said that Wilderness is "a kind of exemplum with the outer story peeled away" ("Warren's Later Novels," 81).

However, there are several other important distinctions that need to be made. Wilderness is the only one of Warren's novels in which the central figure is not a Southerner. Adam Rosenzweig is, in fact, a Bavarian immigrant who has come to the United States specifically to fight for freedom. He is, potentially, part of that unlimited supply of immmigrant manpower Grant could depend on for the "swap system" he employed against Lee. So Adam's character, to that extent, develops out of historical reality, but there are other good reasons for making the novel's protagonist an outsider. For one, Adam brings no historical baggage with him that could cloud the issue for which he fights. Patriotism does not figure in his estimation of the right side. Also, as the outsider, Adam sees with an outsider's vision. The issue of slavery is not viewed by him in its context, but as a romantic cause, and this view is important for the development of Warren's theme of freedom. Warren makes much of Adam's tendency to think abstractly in scenes such as the one in which Adam sees the first black man he has ever seen after coming to America. The fact that he has never seen a black man before suggests the gap between Adam's dream and the reality of the war's context. But, as always in Warren, the failings of the individual's dream are not exclusively outward failings. They are partly from within. If these failings are symbolized, as some have argued, by Adam's

club foot, a condition that keeps him out of the fighting and makes a sutler of him instead, it is a system of symbolic events in the novel that are associated with his failure that suggests Adam's ultimate achievement of a vision of interconnection.[1]

Much can be learned about Wilderness by comparing it with a novel with which it bears some striking similarities, Steven Crane's The Red Badge of Courage. There are certain similarities in technique that raise the question of direct influence. Both are rich in naturalistic texture even while both are scaled down to the human level. Warren, like Crane, depends on certain impressionistic techniques, particularly the use of labels for characters, to produce the effect of the mind's taking into account the texture of life that surrounds it. In certain scenes Warren's novel is particularly reminiscent of Crane's in its dialogue and descriptive detail. The description of the camp is a good example. Even the dicussions between veterans and youths sound very much like something out of Crane, such as when the men,

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[1] In At Heaven's Gate, on the other hand, the number of characters who are "crippled" is sufficient to suggest the theme of a broken world. Three characters have physical deformities. Jerry Calhoun's father is repeatedly shown to be physically inept. And Duckfoot Blake's constant complaints about his "bad feet" seem simultaneously to reinforce the motif of crippledness as a technique of characterization and to parody it.

after Grant has assumed command, realize that the fight is coming soon:

> "I don't never want to see no elephant bigger than Chancellorsville," the first man said, glumly.
>
> The corporal turned to another soldier. "Son,": he said, "you ain't never seen the elephant, have you?"
>
> The youth, shamefaced, said nothing. But another man said: "Naw. Jes come last fall. Conscripted." The man spat, put his foot on the post, then added: "Ain't seen nothing."
>
> The youth turned to the corporal. "Mister--" he asked. But he didn't go on.
>
> "Huh?" the corporal demanded.
>
> "I mean--" the youth again hesitated. "I mean what did you think about?" (200)

The youth in this passage behaves much like a Henry Fleming wondering about his own courage. There are also some panoramic descriptions in Warren's novel which are reminiscent of the imagery in The Red Badge of Courage, Warren's description of a camp breaking, for instance.

> Thus the inbound traffic was on the side of the road away from him--an interminable line of supply wagons, ammuniton trains, new ambulances with paint brightly untried and canvas white as snow. Beyond that movement he could see field after field filled with parked wagons mathematically disposed, waiting to be sucked into that movement southeastward. Meanwhile in the interstices of that as yet unbroken mathematical pattern, there was the same swirl and angry formication as in the camp behind him. . . . From these fields rose a nervous ululation, no work distinguishable in that confused distance. Above that area some last blue wisps of smoke from newly abandoned cork fires yet hung, raveling slowly into the brightness of air.
>
> Reluctantly, sadly, he brought his gaze to rest on the flow of traffic nearer him, the outbound traffic, that movement which he would soon join--all the nondescript traffic of the hangers-on moving northwestward; the hooded wagons of sutlers; carts, light four wheeler; here and there a local peddler with a pushcart; washerwomen with bundle on

> head--not somebody's laundry now but their own miserable possessions; small adventurers with, no doubt, a pack of greasy cards in pocket and a dilapidated valise in hand; the blank, undefinable, faceless ones whose purposes must have always been indecipherable and who now moved with the great mass, empty-handed as at birth or carrying some grotesquerie like a painted chamber pot, a carved clock, a large simpering portrait in oil of a child that could never have sprung from the loins of the carrier, or the Holy Bible in a size large enough for the pulpit.
>
> A great boot had, as it were, kicked over the winter camp like an ant hill, and the life was seething desperately forth. (233-34)

Warren's imagery is akin to Crane's in that it suggests the impression registered imaginatively on Adam's mind, but the details of Warren's particular exodus march are those which represent a combination of the Gilded Age that is coming hard upon the heels of the War and the grotesquerie of evangelical morality. The next sentence suggests the effect: "Adam averted his eyes from that sight" (234).

It is such differences between the two novels that reveal even more of Warren's purposes. Crane's is a novel about war itself, purposely removed from any specific political issues. Warren's novel is, despite its being scaled down, consciously a novel about the Civil War. The subtitle, "A Tale of the Civil War," is not a haphazard one. Part of the motivation in writing the novel is to reflect the process toward knowledge Adam Rozensweig undergoes. But another motivation is the same that prompted the writing of Legacy and Jefferson Davis. It was

a way to attempt to make sense of the War, to make sense of American experience.

Adam's romanticism is almost immediately challenged for instance by an inscrutable circumstance. Warren has him arrive in New York on July 15, 1863, the day of the conscription riots. The first black man Adam sees in his life has been mutilated and hanged from a lamppost (43). There is confusion and irony as Adam thinks to himself that the rebels must have done it. Soon he is swept along by a violent mob bent on destroying the men he believes he has himself come to free. This confrontation with fact is the first step in the education of Adam's conscience. But Warren turns irony upon irony in the novel. Adam's action, his will to fight for freedom, is morally correct. What must be refined is his heart. He would do it all again, but with a different heart (310). Adam has more in common with protagonists like Chief Joseph and Audubon than with most of Warren's other protagonists. His conviction at the beginning of the novel is the morally "correct" one, but his relationship to his own belief is carried on only at an abstract level. His assumption of his father's idealism, which had led the older man to put his trust in mankind and to fight for freedom, sends Adam on a quest to America where his experiences are "a series of tests of his own conviction" (Justus 249). That Warren can bring him to the conclusion that he would do all again, but with a different

heart, suggests that the author's emphasis is on selfhood, moral awareness and responsibility rather than on a debate between the virtues of one side or the other during the war. Yet, there are other examples of the inwardness of irony that seem to stem from Warren's systematic thinking about the War.

Perhaps no scene in the novel illustrates its association with Warren's philosophical interpretation of the war more than the scene which takes place at Gettysburg a few weeks after the battle there. Three men are removing the dead from their hastily made graves for reinterment and the coming dedication ceremonies. Meeting them are Adam, Mose Talbot, the black man who saved Adam's life during the riots, and Jed Hawksworth, a sutler for whom both Adam and Mose work. In this episode, Warren brings into polar juxtaposition two views of man. One, though in a bastardized fashion, is a representative of Emersonian man, which is tested against an ironic view of man. Finally, the irony is submitted itself to irony by the discovery that the truth uttered by the Emersonian man is the truth after all, but it is a truth that cannot be arrived at except by experience. One of the men is a verbose, Micawberish Emerson quoter--labeled impressionistically, "the fat man." The other two are a "nondescript, middle-aged man" and a "young man." The tone of the scene can be illustrated in a few lines, beginning

with the "nondescript" man's comment on the "fat" man's past.

> "He quit doctoring," the nondescript man said, "because too many folks died. They got the habit. Quit embalming because all of a sudden they quit dying. If he had just hung on to his doctoring and mixed it with his embalming he would of been rich and no need to take up preaching. Now he quit preaching because--"
>
> "You vex me, varlet," the fat man said. "I have tried many things, it is true, and usually with no mean success. The sage of Concord says that the proper American tries many things, storekeeping, farming, schoolteaching and so on. And though my roster of occupations is different, I offer myself as that Emersonian American. I am a man of parts and--"
>
> "Yeah, and if you'd kept 'em in yore pants they wouldn't of got you out of the preaching business," the nondescript man said. (146-47)

Dr. Sulgrave, the Emersonian American, comically insists on his own dignity, but the ironic undercutting by the nondescript man reveals Sulgrave's grossness. Sulgrave is, of course, a flim-flam man, a pretender on the order of Twain's Duke and Dauphin. He is Warren's joke on Emerson. Dr. Sulgrave is a consciously created mutation. He represents a combination of Emersonianism fallen from the lofty heights of Concord and the justified materialism which marked the gilded age and Manifest Destiny. (Tobias Sears of Band of Angels is a much more sympathetic portrait of a man similarly divided.) Sulgrave is a combination of the two great mistakes Warren saw in the philosophical and cultural development of American values. But the mutation is humanized, for Warren's purpose is not totally satirical in the end. He puts both the "Emersonian American" and the

nondescript man of irony in the same place during the recent battle: under the bed. The wildly comic tone of the Gettysburg scene seems out of place with the rest of the novel, but the comedy is functional. The ironic turns the nondescript man serves on Dr. Sulgrave are in turn mollified by the testimony from the same "nondescript" man that the doctor had once "sucked the pus" from the "young man's" swollen throat when the "young man" had been a boy. That the gross Dr. Sulgrave is capable of heroism clouds the issue. It is an example of the inwardness he is incapable himself of understanding. It suggests the mystery of self and condition of man. That condition is underscored by the youth's simple and honest observation about his own conduct during the battle, when, as a participant, he had found a rock for cover: "I sure got me an acquaintance with that rock" (150). This self-irony is a refreshing self-knowledge, but the irony of interconnection deepens. The youth, whose name Sull suggests a link with Dr. Sulgrave (whose name, of course, suggests both his past and the present business of the three men) is sullen in his attitude toward Sulgrave and his efforts to save the boy's life.

Twisted as it is, the irony is central, for it, again, suggests the mystery of self that is the issue behind characterization in this novel. A similar motive is often the case in Warren's characterization techniques, but the

issues here are specific to the issues surrounding the war in each character's case.

The relation between self and history is first introduced in the novel by Aaron Blaustein, who becomes a surrogate father for Adam. Adam becomes a surrogate son for Blaustein, whose real son has died in battle. It is Blaustein who tells Adam that history has replaced God in man's thinking of himself in relation to the universe and other men. Blaustein's definition of history seems to suggest a sense of futility, but it is prophetic of the end Adam will come to: "[History] is the agony people have to go through . . . so that things will turn out as they would have turned out anyway" (77). Blaustein reinterprets the Eden myth, yet retains some elements of a religious temperament. Through his understanding of history, Blaustein has achieved the Warrenesque vision of pity. He understands that people always have a reason for doing what they do, even for the butchery of the riots (73-74). Like other of Warren's father figures, Blaustein expresses a principle which the "son" will have to come to see the truth of from his own experience and in his own terms. Such is a basic line of development of a Warren plot. In this case, Adam must learn a new kind of brotherhood to fulfill his surrogate role begun in this early section of the novel when he has a taste of what it would mean to be the rich Aaron Blaustein's son.

Blaustein is also an important character for the development of the theme of knowledge. Adam discovers that he has refused the knowledge of the pain of separateness that Blaustein exemplifies and that he has kept in the back of his mind the idea that he would return to Blaustein to live as his son (193).

Two other characters whose lives are interrelated and suggestive of the complexity of self are Jedeen Hawksworth and Mose Talbutt. Warren uses the two in polar juxtaposition, another technique of characterization common in Warren. But their lives also move toward a point of intersection, as do the lives of Adam Stanton and Willie Stark, and the moment when Talbutt, the former slave and deserter turned sutler, will kill Jed, the Southerner forced to flee the South after speaking in open court in defense of a black man. Each spends time trying to deny his past. Jed Hawksworth calls Mose a "black son of a bitch" and speaks disdainfully of Adam's romantic notions of freedom. Mose tries to learn to read and pleads, after it is discovered that he is a deserter, with Adam to believe that the stripes on his back are the result of a slave breaker's whip and not a cruel officer's discipline. Each man is a victim of experience that has made him aware of the "inwardness" of life, but neither is reconciled to that knowledge, so neither has the "felt sense of significant unity."

Both Jed and Mose are important in the novel's exploration of the self's relation to the individual's beliefs about the nature of freedom. Jed Hawksworth, on the one hand, grows angry at Adam for saying that blacks should be free. Aware of the irony of freedom because of his own experience, he asks the young romantic, "Do you think anybody is--is free?" (181). He offers an example of the irony of a man who can in one lifetime stand for a principle and seem by his own words to deny the validity of that principle. He is, in this way, a version of the complexity of self seen comically in Dr. Sulgrave. Mose Talbutt also clouds the idea of freedom for Adam. The central act of Mose's pulling Adam onto a cellar shelf as the cellar is flooded by rioters must be interpreted and reinterpreted by Adam for its meaning. Mose tells Adam that there had been no nobility in his pulling him out of the water to the safety of the shelf. He did it merely to keep Adam from thrashing in the water and attracting attention.

This revelation is one of several that instills a sense of devaluation in Adam. For instance, when he broke from the Elmyra, the ship on which he took passage to America to fight in the war and on which he was going to be forced to return because an accident at sea has revealed his deformity, freedom was suddenly devalued because no one pursued him. No one cared where he went, so freedom became

synonymous with alienation. As he thinks of what Mose has told him he suffers another pang of a sense of devaluation:

> His sadness enveloped him. He felt again, as he had felt on his unhindered flight from the Elmyra, and upon learning of the death of Aaron Blaustein, devalued. He felt his identity draining away. Was no man, in his simple humanity, more to any other man than a stir or voice, a sloshing in the dark?
>
> Then he thought that that nameless man on the shelf, reaching out in the dark to that sound, had had after all, a choice. He could more easily, and safely, have slipped a knife into a throat than drawn a man up to safety.
>
> With that thought, Adam Rosenzweig felt better. He felt, somehow, restored, however little, to hope.
>
> Then he thought that for himself drawn up in the blind lottery of that cellar to the shelf others had not been drawn up.
>
> He closed his eyes and he saw again, as in the dawn light in the backyard when he had crept from the house in New York, the bodies of those who had not been drawn up. It was all a blind lottery. Like your life. He lay there and thought of the price of his life. Others had paid the price of his life. Then he told himself that that was not logical. It was completely illogical. (224-25)

There is a similarity here to other passages in Warren's poetry and fiction which reveal the often anguishing need to know what meaning there is in the seeming illogic of experience. Along this line of thinking, Adam eventually develops the idea that Mose Talbutt is representative of existential man because he is the man who can be completely himself, outside history. Mose had conquered history (225-26). In Who Speaks for the Negro?, as noted above in chapter two, Warren does write that the black American is such an existential man, but here he seems to suggest that Adam is wrong. Mose cannot conquer that part of history

that is his personal past anyway. Mose murders Jedeen Hawksworth, even though it is Adam this time who calls him a "black son of a bitch." Earlier it was Jed who, at the Gettysburg cemetery, told Mose to get his "black son-of-a-bitching" hands off a dead Conferate soldier. The fact that Mose rises at night to kill Jed and not Adam can be logically explained by the fact that Jed's large money belt in which he keeps the receipts of the business is gone, but Adam connects the two incidents and sees in them Mose's motivation to kill Jed. And the fact that Mose took not only the money belt but the cards on which Adam had written the alphabet to help Mose learn how to read leads to the creation of an image in Adam's head that reveals the complexity of Mose's character and its development over time:

> Adam stood there and his mind leaped forward to an image of Mose . . . crouching in some shadowy undefined spot, ready to start up with guilty fear at any sound, leaning by a single candle flame while his big hand gripped a pencil and copied a letter from a card. Seeing that image, he felt an unmanning constriction in his chest. Something too complicated, too terrible, for him to give a name to was in him, was in the world. And he could not move. (231-32)

This complexity is further suggested by the revelation that Mose Talbutt's real name is Mose Crawfurd, and Mose is thereafter thought of in Adam's consciousness as "Mose Talbutt--Mose Crawfurd" as if he were two men. It is also emphasized by the circumstances in which Mose saves Adam's life for the second time, during a scene of cruelty that

closely parallels Warren's interpretation of the inwardness of the Civil War in Legacy. The flour-tub scene, during which Union soldiers stage a game in which blacks root with their mouths through a tub of flour for greenbacks, is interpreted by Moore as a symbol for Warren's theory of man's plight in history. Simms Purdew, the gamecock hero of the regiment, adds to the sport by grasping the heels of one of the black men and holding him head down in the flour. Then

> with sad indifference he had simply released the heels of the fellow and let him fall, like a half-full sack of potatoes, and moved off into the compulsion of his dance, whirling and hooting. The fellow rolled out of the tub and lay on his side, puffing flour and uttering small whimpers. A soldier stooped over him and cut the ropes on his wrists. The fellow sat up and wiped at his face, swiping off the flour, clumsily. His lips, Adam could see, were open, and he puffed painfully through them. But his teeth were clenched. He clenched something between his teeth.
>
> With his right hand the fellow took the thing from between his teeth. It was, clearly, not something you could simply spit out and be done with it. The fellow held it up, still puffing and wheezing. Beneath the streaks of flour the face was grinning. It was a wan sickly, distorted, flour-streaked grin, but a grin. (187)

Here is Moore's interpretation of the episode:

> This episode concretely reveals an aspect of army camp life, the fact that idle, bored men can easily become cruel men. Since Warren has Adam react to this scene, it also serves to characterize him as well as the participants. But, more significantly, this episode is profoundly symbolic, for the Negro's plight images the way Warren sees man in history. The historical process involves terrible and even senseless suffering for man, but if he, like the Negro, can grasp something of value, he can at least make brutal life a little more endurable. (157)

It seems unlikely that any such symbolic meaning was intended by Warren. For one thing, the tone taken toward the black man's plight is more pathetic than admiring, and given Warren's value system in the novel, and all else that he wrote as well, it is unlikely that he would use a "greenback" to suggest real value. And, finally, the point of the entire scene seems to lie squarely in the irony surrounding Adam's reaction, which seems the less significant to Moore. It is one more instance in which Adam must face the cruelty of mankind, not simply the cruelty of the foe who would deny freedom to a race. The irony lies in the fact that the cruelty is performed by a Union soldier, a hero no less, and in what the scene reveals of Mose Talbutt's character when he stops Adam from going to the aid of the man in Simms Purdew's grip. The scene between Adam and Mose is central, for it reveals the complexity of motivation and the irony of self. Mose, to save the white man, keeps the white man from helping a black man. Adam, in trying to free himself to save one black man, is forced in his enthusiasm to strike the black man who is trying to save him. The impulse is never simple, Warren shows.

The complexity of motivation is revealed through the character of Jedeen Hawksworth, too, and there are closer connections between his and Adam's own experience. Hawksworth's seemingly self-contradictory action of telling

Mose to get his "black son-of-a-bitching" hands off the dead Carolinian springs, as he later explains to Adam, from his recognition that it could have been Hawksworth himself lying there. And even more complex is his motivation for defending the black man which had gotten him run out of North Carolina to begin with. He had done it out of shame for his father, though he does not understand this until later. Hawksworth's father had publicly lauded Colonel Johnston F. Harris, who owned the accused slave, in a display that revealed to all the older Hawkworth's "ass kissin'" nature, as Jed puts it. When Jed's father asked the crowd before the court house to cheer for Johnston for refusing remuneration for his loss of property, some didn't, and what made Jed go inside the courthouse and speak for the black man was "knowing that them as didn't cheer, just couldn't because they was too ashamed. To see my pa. See him do it in public. . . . I hated them for being ashamed for my pa. . . . And because I hated my pa for making me ashamed of him" (160).

This shame of the father strikes at Adam's own past, for he was ashamed of his own father for his deathbed admission that he had been a sinner for leaving God and home to fight for freedom. And Jed's articulation of what he has learned of life has relevance for Adam, for it shows how one man is influenced by the actions of another in the spider web world:

> "You live yore years and time it looks like you never know who to thank. And what for. Maybe I ought to thank them men who didn't cheer. It was them not cheering made me ashamed to be the son of my pa. It was them not cheering made me go in that courthouse. It was them not cheering kept me from laying back yonder on that hill, tonight. Dead in the ground. I might of been kilt charging up that hill with Pettigrew." (161)

But the history of Jed's interconnected experience is not over yet, for he will be killed by Mose Talbott after echoing the words of his father back in North Carolina: "black son of a bitch." Repetition of experience is also emphasized by the fact that Jed again speaks in an attempt to save an accused black man--Mose Talbott.

The histories of Mose Talbutt--Mose Crawford and Jedeen Hawksworth play their part in the de-romanticizing of Adam's vision of life. Monmorancy Pugh is another character whose life affirms the illogic of existence that is an affront to Adam's abstractionism. Pugh is fleeing Confederate conscription, living with his wife in a shack in the Wilderness and surviving by murdering and stealing. When he tells Adam he can spend the night with them for the price of food from his sutler's wagon, Pugh wears a grin that reflects "some inwardness of humor," and his wife's expression changes to look as though she has just discovered Adam, though she and Adam have been waiting for Pugh to return to the shack (251). The doubleness of hospitality and murderous intent is not a new theme for

Warren; it appears in "The Ballad of Billie Potts" and would appear again in Audubon.

Pugh's "inwardness of humor" has grown out of his experience. Fleeing conscription as a godly man who refuses to kill, Pugh kills one of his pursuers. The incident is similar to Adam's striking Mose at the moment his impulse is to save the black man at the mercy of Simms Purdew. As is the case with several of Warren's characters, Thomas Jefferson in Brother to Dragons perhaps most notoroiously of all, Pugh's sudden brush with violence and inhumanity causes a total rejection of the idea formerly lived by, in Pugh's case a Christian sense of brotherhood. His wife tells Adam of the change:

> "It was runnen and hiden then, . . . worse'n a-fore. We lived lak a varmint and the dogs on him. One night I laid sleepen and I woke up. It was him busten out laughen that woke me. I ast him why." (261)

This laugh is the mark of Pugh's insight. Like Ashby Wyndham, he has been unable to pray for his dying son, and unable to cry after the son dies. The great joke God has played on him has revealed that the world is not a place for either of those emotional releases. The only appropriate response is the bitter laugh at the joke:

> "He said the Lawd God shor taken a pleasure to joke and prank. He said the Lawd God said thou shalt not kill and then put a fellow in a tight whar he had to kill to keep from killen. He said the Lawd God let a fellow grab holt of a hickory limb hung out over Hell-fahr and then taken a chicken feather and tickled the bottom of his bare feet till he bust out laughen and let go the hickory limb to scratch." (261-62)

The imagery is almost ludicrously pitiful to suggest man's littleness in the face of an absurd universe, and it seems to be drawn intentionally from Jonathan Edwards to clarify the terms of a specific transformation of man's understanding of his place in the universe from "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" to victims in the hands of a joking God.

Moreover, Pugh's insight into the loss of God is an analogue to Aaron Blaustein's, who also lost a son, but his reaction is very different. Like Flannery O'Connor's Misfit, Pugh finds pleasure only in meanness. He is unable to live with the doubleness that confronts him, just as Jed Hawksworth is unable. And the experience of both men parallels the experience of Adam. Pugh's awareness of the particular situation God has put him in grows out of an experience similar to Adam's being forced to strike one man, Mose, while trying to save another from torture. Adam is able to escape the murderous Pugh in one of the few moments of positive action the reader sees him take after coming to America. Eventually he is able to escape Pugh's fate; for in the end, when he does come to know something of battle, when he kills a man and takes his boots, Adam is forced to confront his own humanity. He learns that what binds humanity is the tragedy of experience, such as that suffered by Pugh. But how men are bound by it is a mystery, as he learns while trying to discover the logic of

Mose's murdering Jed Hawksworth. Jed had been a sacrifice for Adam, Adam decides, as he had earlier decided that the anonymous men thrashing in the dark of the cellar had been sacrifices in a blind lottery so that he could live. Mose couldn't kill Adam for calling him the insulting name because Mose had once saved Adam's life, and a man could not destroy what he had once raised up. But the mystery lies in whether there is meaning in the incident, for meaning is what Mose Talbutt, Jedeen Hawksworth and Monmorancy Pugh all fail to find.

> [H]e wondered if every man is, in the end, a sacrifice for every other man. He did not know. He could not read the depth of the thought, but stared down into it as into a deep well where a little light glimmers on the dark water. (302)

This affinity with Christ through sacrifice is the imagined divinity Warren allows to man, here as in Brother to Dragons. But it is his sense of betrayal, what Hawksworth, Talbutt, and Pugh all feel to an extent, which is finally the prelude to Adam's epiphany at the novel's end, as he feels the betrayal of the world. The betrayal began with his own father, who had in death denied the idealism he had lived by and who had also betrayed Adam genetically through the physical deformity. His experiences in America have further chastened his idealism. But finally, there is joy in knowledge of the world's taintedness. The novel's final scene takes place in a clearing in the Wilderness. There is a skirmish

between a few Confederate and Union soldiers, after which Adam is left alone with the dead, including the man he himself has shot. Within the scene Adam goes through several spritual turns so that the scene is actually a kind of replaying of the experiences and shifts in attitude that have occured over the course of the novel. Warren writes: "He felt the exaltation of one who discovers the great secret. He felt that if this was the way the world was it was a joy to know it. He rushed to the dead horse, to the foot propped there. There was a boot on the foot. It was a good boot. That was the way the world was, and he would put on the boot" (303). In this moment the past is obliterated, and even the face of the dead man is blank (306). In his reaction here, Adam is close to Pugh, but he reasserts something of his old self by removing the boots from his own feet placing them next to the dead man on the ground. After contemplating, he realizes that he will have to put the boots on and walk out of the Wilderness. This necessity thrusts upon him the awareness of the central human condition. Something of value may be taken from life lived in the flux of history, but in an echo of Aaron Blaustein's definition of history, he thinks to himself that all he had done he had had to do, and would do it all again. Warren shows Adam raising the question of the inevitability of particular fate at the level of individual life here as Aaron Blaustein had raised it earlier at a

racial level, and as Warren himself had raised it at the national level in The Legacy of the Civil War. The meaning seems to be that in a world of human limitation, the act is secondary. What is primary is the heart with which the act is performed:

> Yes, and if necessary, he would do it all again. . . .
>
> But then he cried, in his inwardness: But, oh, with a different heart!" (310)

Here the emphasis is on motive and awareness in action. However, Adam's consciousness of the need for a refined heart is not the same motive-first, inner conviction of "higher law" thinking, for "higher law" thinking is finally outwardness in thinking. It is not enough, Warren seems to say, to be willing to fight for freedom. One must be aware of what freedom means for human kind, that is, one must be aware of the obligation of selfhood, to try to discover meaning in life: "He knew . . . that he would have to try to know what a man must know to be a man. He knew that he would have to try to know that the truth is unbetrayable, and that only the betrayer is ever betrayed, and then only by his own betraying" (310). These summary statements on the novel's theme of betrayal and its relation to knowledge suggest that Adam fares far better than the novel's other characters in that the betrayal of the original dream is not the betrayal of the dream, but of man's attitude toward it. Being human means somehow learning to live with the

idealization and the taintedness that undermines the idealization. The other characters in the novel suffer the tragedy of succumbing to the taintedness. The meaning Adam seems to come to in the final sentences of the novel when he realizes that by wearing the boots he will be assuming the obligation of becoming worthy of the "namelessness" of the men who have worn them before as they changed ownership through the succeeding battles, men whose very namelessness increases Adam's sense of interconnection with them for it here suggests universality to his imagination rather than a void.

It is, indeed, Adam's imaginative effort which brings him to this point. An example occurs in this same final scene as Adam crouches at the edge of the woods, just out of the clearing where the skirmish has taken place and where the man he has killed lies with the boots beside him. He seems to be hiding from the world the clearing represents when he suddenly realizes that the Wilderness is on fire. In what seems a mental attempt to retain the image of himself he waits in a prospective moment for a scream. The scream would be his chance to act, to save a man by pulling him from fire as Mose Talbutt had earlier pulled him from water. The "dream" distinguishes Adam imaginatively in a moment of clean action, when what is true and right is certain and outward. The scream does not come, but when he closes his eyes, he hears multiple

screams. Whether they are real or only in his head is unclear, and perhaps, finally not really important. For what he feels is that he is part of the brotherhood which corresponds to the namelessness he has discovered in the glade. The real courage will be to act in the face of such a massive namelessness, and Warren suggests this by ending the novel with Adam on the verge of rising, putting on the boots, and hobbling out of the Wilderness. It is almost the simplest of acts to suggest his joining humanity, and it suggests the way Warren thinks man must be a part of history. The imagined heroic gesture is a frozen moment in time. Living is dynamic and ongoing. Adam's crouching just at the edge of the woods is symbolic of his having stepped out of history. Now he is about to reenter, as Jack Burden says at the end of All the King's Men, "history, and the awful responsibility of time."

The theme of freedom in Wilderness is tied to the dramatization of the relation of the self to history. The most prominent technique to reflect the imagination's working toward an apprehension of this knowledge is an "if" clause motif, a stream-of-consciousness rendering by which Warren suggests Adam's working toward a definition of himself within the actuality of his experience by imagining other possible contexts for his life. It is a method similar to that Warren uses in his historical studies to try to define the meaning of events, a negative approach to knowledge.

Moore writes that "In Wilderness Warren dramatizes the connections between all events and all times and the terror that this can hold for man by the repeated 'if theme.' This is a new and effective method of presenting the spider web theory, for it emphasizes better than Jack Burden's exposition the illogicality of these connections, the fact that they derive from chance not plan" (174). Much of this is an acute and accurate assessment of Warren's "if theme." However, while the "if" clause motif in an accumulative succession may be new, the "if" theme certainly is not. One remembers especially such passages as the description of Jack Burden's refusing to consummate his love with Anne Stanton and how he emphasizes the entire course of his life would have been different if he had (AKM 313). It is an enormous "if," and it suggests what is by revealing the importance of what is not. Similarly, in Band of Angels, Amantha Starr comes to discover that the "not-done," unlike the "done," cannot be escaped from, for it is always being enacted in its "not-doneness" (278). These are all imaginative acts toward meaning that depend on the "if" theme.

In Wilderness, however, the "if" theme is not just a way of stating the blindness and pain of history. The "if"-clause motif is dynamic in relation to the novel's plot and the growing awareness of its protagonist. In the early chapters the "if" motif reflects through stream of

consciousness Adam's feeling that outside forces blindly determine his fate. The novel's opening is typical of this treatment:

> If the mountain had not gleamed so white. If yonder, under the peaks, the snaggled line of the fir forest had not been so blue-black, against the white.
>
> If the sky above that glitter of snow on the Zelzsteinberg had not been heart-breaking with the innocence of new blue. If one puff of cloud, white as whipped cream, had not lounged high in that washed glitter of blue. If the world had not been absolute in beauty. (3)

The images of purity are responsible for Adam's not being able to go back into the house where his father lies dead. In their purity and aboluteness they correspond to the purity and absoluteness of the idea he decides to devote himself to, and they prevent him from resignedly turning back into the house, which would be a betrayal, he thinks, on the order of his father's betrayal.

Even after events have thrown him into the company of Mose and Jed, what happens to him is determined by the actions of others. An example occurs in the opening of chapter eight, after Adam has left the home of the dying Hans Meyerhoff, who had known and fought with Adam's father, where he has been helping Meyerhoff's wife (The situation anticipates the later novel Meet Me in the Green Glen.)

Jedeen Hawksworth and Mose Talbott are suspicious of Adam's motives in helping the wife, and Adam cannot bear the suspicion:

> If they had not said it. . . . If Jedeen Hawksowrth had not said what he had said. . . .If Mose Talbutt had not said what he had said. . . .
>
> If it had not been for Jedeen Hawksworth and Mose Talbutt he might have been able to stay there. (133)

He might have been able to stay and deny that his motive was a sexual attraction to Hans' wife if the others had not so perceptively seen the motives he had denied to himself. He could have believed that "nothing was his fault" (133).

Eventually, there is a shift in Warren's use of the "if" clauses. They are used more often to implicate Adam in his own responsibility for situations. The episode with Pugh, during which Adam forces Pugh at gunpoint to take him across the river so he can join the army again, reveals this. The first "if" clause in the episode, which significantly trails off without completion, is similar to the earlier ones in its emphasis on the outside world:

> If the night were not so beautiful--
> But the thought did not complete itself. He was afraid he might weep. He had not made the world the way it was. (271)

The next "if" clause is spoken by Pugh and concerns an act of Adam's--his having left some supplies from his wagon for Pugh and his wife in the cabin. It marks a shift after the significant trailing off of the previous one to an implication of Adam as an active agent in the world: "If'n you hadn't left that stuff in the cabin, wouldn't nuthen been on my mind. I could of been easy in my mind" (273).

Adam's kindness has ironically complicated things for Pugh. But the significance of Adam's action is further suggested when Adam realizes his actions have consequences for the future. This is dramatized when Pugh asks Adam to return his rifle to him before he departs: "if'n you don't give me that-air Spencer I'm gonna have to find me another sodjer boy somewhar with one of them things, and he ain't gonna thank you" (277).

And then, finally, there is a series of *if*'s which implicate Adam in his own fate, and help to bring about the knowledge that he must face his own fate. He comes finally to a knowledge of his own motives in a way similar to the way that Jed Hawksworth had come to a knowledge of his.

> But he thought how, if he had stayed with Aaron Blaustein, Aaron Blaustein would not have died.
>
> I had to come, he thought in rebuttal and defense. Even Aaron Blaustein had admitted that.
>
> But coming, he knew now in sudden painfulness, he had come in hardness of heart. Oh, if--
>
> His mind slid away from that if.
>
> He thought how Jedeen Hawksworth would not have died if--
>
> His mind refused it.
>
> He thought how Mose Talbutt--Mose Crawfurd would not have been driven forth, with crammed money belt, greasy alphabet cards, and bloody hands, if--
>
> He could not think that if. But he had to. He knew that, in the end, he would have to think every if--every if which was life.
>
> If he Adam Rosenzweig, had not told the black man to shut up, to stop talking. If he had not called him the name he had called him, the name of insult which, it seemed now in absolute clarity, he had always been doomed to call Mose Talbutt, Mose Crawfurd. (301-302)

Every *if* bears in on Adam now. The technique, following the line of the plot and Adam's spiritual development, narrows gradually toward Adam's responsibility for the action in the novel. He must concentrate on the "if which was life" because that is the way to have meaning. In the end the "if" clause technique, because it reflects Adam's mental processes toward discovery, lyrically narrates his growing awareness of his responsibility for self in the spider web world.

Wilderness is "A Tale of the Civil War" in Warren's specific terms. The experience of the protagonist as the outsider is determined largely by his brush with the doubleness, the inwardness of experience that the War represented for Warren. There is a parallel between the development of the "different heart" of Adam Rosenzweig and the development of a new America out of that war. The events of history may be inevitable, as Aaron Blaustein says, but Adam Rosenzweig comes to discover in his own terms the truth of what Jack Burden had said. Meaning lies in motion through the event.

CHAPTER 8

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HOME

Neil Nakadate has explained that with the writing of Flood in 1964 a change began to be noticeable in Warren's fiction. "In the later fiction. . . .," he writes, "Warren's chief concern is less with self knowledge per se--the need for it is not discovered here, but assumed--than with the manner and mood of man's conscious pursuit of understanding and verification of the meaning of life" (175). This difference parallels a similar change in Warren's poetry. In the "bird poetry"--Audubon, "Evening Hawk," etc.--Original Sin is the starting point in consciousness, not just the condition discovered. This is not a great difference from what Warren was doing earlier but a subtle one; and in the end the two questions which seem most significant for Warren's characters--"Who am I?" and "How can I live?"--may actually, as I suggested in the previous chapter, call for the same answer, or answers. Warren, in his later fiction, is still a writer "given . . . to the interplay of excess, the dramatic clash of opposites conceived and drawn in large outline." Illusion and reality remain the poles between which men struggle in a "dialectical process." And his major theme is still the self and its dependence on a sense of continuity and responsibility. A change at the level of thematic realization may be that more and more the possibility for

individual fulfillment emerges from the conflict of the "terrible division."

However, in terms of technique there is as much difference collectively between Warren's last five novels and his first five as there is singly from novel to novel. The novels from The Cave up to A Place to Come To are markedly different in their contextual focuses, in their rendered worlds. In The Cave, Flood, and Meet Me in the Green Glen, protagonists are no longer defined, or ill defined, by their willing or reluctant embroilment in political organizations. Instead their uneasy relationship to a specific place figures significantly in their motivation. Place, of course, is significant in any fiction; and in the works of a writer like Warren, whose genius thrives on the functional description of the minutest details of interiors and landscapes, it is especially important. Yet in The Cave, Flood, Meet Me in the Green Glen, and A Place to Come To, place rises to a special significance in relation to Warren's technique as a philosophical novelist: it is place which strives to rise to the level of a massive living symbol.

There is something particularly Southern about Warren's special treatment of place, too. It might be said that a sense of a loss of "home" may be the great theme of that massive literary output we have come to call the Southern Renaissance. This theme certainly figures in

Warren's handling of place in these latter novels. Johnstown (The Cave), Fiddlersburg (Flood), and Dugton (A Place to Come To) are places which become closely associated with the primal being of the protagonists. They are places to flee from and to return to in compulsory action. Spottwood Valley (Meet Me in the Green Glen) becomes for a time a place out of time, like the spot beneath the oaks the lovers in "Bearded Oaks" occupy. The protagonist's relationship to home becomes his most telling definer. Except for A Place to Come To the world of the novels is scaled down in comparison to the earlier novels, and that scaling down makes the world, paradoxically, more inscrutable. It is more inscrutable because the scaled-down world forces the protagonist to confront himself more immediately in a context recognizable to him. Issac Sumpter in The Cave is forced to flee Johnstown, Tennessee, as he was planning to do anyway, when his father's lie to save him proves an unbearable kindness, a defining act of love Issac is incapable of accepting because of his own narcissism and his fear of his own fate. Bradwell Tolliver returns to soon-to-be flooded Fiddlersburg ostensibly to prepare a movie script and piously to find the grave of his father-figure Issac Goldfarb. Yet he has an imperfect understanding of his compulsion to return because, as his sister tells him, he is himself in Fiddlersburg. Small-town life, in the

novels, offers an opportunity for a more direct impingement of one character upon another, and Warren exploits the size of his community by employing a multiple point of view which both increases the awareness of existential distinction and creates the possibility for a wider dispersion of each novel's central vision. The Cave, especially, has no clear single protagonist, but a number of characters come to a state of reconciliation with their fates through knowledge. Similar multiple "redemptions" occur in Flood and Meet Me in the Green Glen.

Many critics have seen a weakening of Warren's powers in the last five novels. Justus argues, for example, that the later fiction "suffers as its worlds grow less political . . . . [C]ompared to the resonanaces of the political contexts of the first three novels, [it is] thin" (162). Calvin Bedient sees the fiction as antagonistic to Warren's poetry, arguing that Warren's writing of fiction delayed his creative fulfillment (17). There may be validity in both criticism insofar as they point to a significant difference in Warren's later fiction, differences which, Justus is careful to point out, disappoint our "conventional expectations" (162). It would be overstating the case to say that Warren finally rejected history (as Sullivan argues, [106]), but in less absolute terms it can be said that there was an important evolution in Warren's technique marked by a de-emphasis of history

and an emerging emphasis on knowledge through myth, myth as a complement of history, however, as Moore has said, an accommodation of history to man (20). The most obvious example of the change in emphasis is the absence of the exemplum, the interpolated story, in most of the later fiction. Instead Warren relies on repetition of experience within the individual life or a unity-in-diversity realized through the several experiences of central characters. Often the pattern suggests a cyclical movement akin to Yeatsian mythic theory. Nick Pappy of The Cave is a repetitive failure, spiralling downward geographically and spiritually. In the same novel the guitar of Jack Harrick, which becomes something of an Orphean lyre as Monty Harrick plays it and sings before the mouth of the cave in which his brother Jasper is trapped, becomes the center of another myth created by the twice redeemed and dying father of the boys. The guitar, called in the idiom of the hill folk the "box," an appellation that suggests emptiness but also the mysterious gift which figures significantly in Warren's poetry, is passed from Jack to Jasper to Monty. But what Jack Harrick discovers is that all men are not like him: "Every man's got to make his own kind, his own kind of song" (401). With the realization that the boy Monty has gone into the ground to be with his dead brother, Jack Harrick begins to play the guitar and sing the same song Monty had improvised earlier at the mouth of the

cave. Inheritance flows backward from son to father. The repetition of a pattern creates a unity in time.

The plot of Flood is based on a repetition of action similar to the ritualistic repetiton Yeats employed in his verse drama. Brad Tolliver had brought the young engineer Alfred O. Tuttle to the old Fiddler house where Tuttle raped or seduced Brad's sister Maggie. Maggie's husband, the physician Calvin Fiddler, kills Alfred Tuttle, but only because he has been goaded by the talk of townspeople. Fiddlersburg then becomes a place that is associated with an almost absolute stasis. In the nearby penitentiary, Calvin Fiddler looks like a boy gone gray; and living in the old Fiddler house, where she takes care of Calvin's mother, Maggie feels like a girl gone gray. Now twenty years later Brad returns with Yasha Jones, who after listening to Maggie's compulsive, Mariner-like telling of the story, falls in love with her. Calvin Fiddler escapes from the penitentiary (the escape itself is a repeated act) and shows up at the Fiddler house to kill Yasha Jones. This time Brad, who during the earlier episode had passed out after brutalizing his wife Lettice during the Dionysian debauchery which had created the atmosphere that led to the act of infidelity, prevents the murder and is himself shot by Calvin Fiddler. Calvin immediately takes steps to save Brad's life. The acts of responsible selflessness initiate both men back into life. Calvin Fiddler returns to

prison where he becomes an active physician. Yasha Jones and Maggie Fiddler marry, have a child, and move to Greece to make Yasha's new film. Brad Tolliver, in the novel's final scenes, returns again to the penitentiary to visit Calvin Fiddler and then attends a final church service held to bid a communal farewell to Fiddlersburg. He cannot understand the tears which flood his eyes at the novel's end, but the reader sees it as yet another repetition in the novel: Brad's swamp-rat father had, during times of oppressive loneliness, returned to the swamp to get drunk and weep. There is no Jack Burden to synthesize and articulate the meaning of all this experience. The meaning lies more in the ritualized repetition of a pattern than in analysis.

The evolution of narrative method is closely associated with the evolution of Warren's use of place in fiction. Fiddlersburg is dead long before the flood waters come. As Maggie Fiddler says, Fiddlersburg is the place where when something falls down, no one bothers to pick it up again. A communal listlessness makes Fiddlersburg an image of impotence much like Camelot after the betrayal. The only change in Fiddlersburg is the slow change of decay, and it becomes associated in Bradwell Tolliver's mind, as home often does for Warren's protagonists, with a repulsive paternity. However, it is simultaneously associated with a primal unity to which Bradwell longs to

return. Place becomes a metaphor for self, but it is paradoxically only after one accepts the place of origin that he can transcend it in any way to achieve a spritual vision. To deny one's origin is a fatal flaw to selfhood.

The titles of Warren's last two novels, Meet Me in the Green Glen and A Place to Come To, suggest in themselves a movement toward a satisfying relationship with the world, but in each book the characters are still confronted with a world where they must make the tragic choice between knowing and not knowing. In Meet Me in the Green Glen Warren retained his focus on a specific community of floundering souls that he had established in The Cave and Flood. In A Place to Come To he returned to the broader world he had rendered in the earlier novels, and the consciousness of Jed Tewkesbury provides a perspective which also makes it more like the realistic earlier fiction. Yet, like the novels which precede it, A Place to Come To dramatizes the problem of a loneliness which reaches the state of a soul sickness and explores the nature of selfhood which goes beyond knowledge to love.

Meet Me in the Green Glen uses an omniscient point of view to tell the story of the interrelated lives of Cassie Spottwood and four men. Cassie lives on a dilapidated West Tennessee farm where she sees to the physical needs of her husband Sunderland who has been left a complete invalid by a stroke. Sunderland is, like Jack Harrick of The Cave,

yet another man of legendary prowess brought down by disease. The four men are Murray Guilfort, a lawyer with his eye on an appointment to the state supreme court and an old "friend" of Sunder Spottwood; Cy Grinder, Cassie's first lover; Angelo Passeto, a Sicilian hiding from mob revenge; and Leroy Lancaster, who gets involved with Cassie indirectly by defending Angelo when he is accused of murdering Sunder.

What all these people have in common besides their geographic location is the fact that they have all fled in one way or another into an illusory way of life, and as a result each has a divided self. None can make the idea of the way life should be fit the world they have discovered and fled from. There is no one in this novel, in the beginning at least, who has earned that "inner certitude of self" which was almost a given in the earlier novels. There are, instead, several characters of almost equal concern who suffer from a similar inner incompleteness.

The novel's opening anticipates the turn Cassie's life is about to take even as it dramatizes the difficulty of her secluded life. Walking along the big road that passes Cassie's house, Angelo Passeto enters her life through a confrontation with Cy Grinder, a confrontation which succinctly dramatizes the conflict between Cassie's past and her future. Angelo lies about the circumstances under which Cy Grinder had shot a deer with his bow, saying that

he had shot it on Cassie's land; and with a gun Cassie forces Cy to abandon the large buck. Then, she enlists Angelo's help in dressing the deer. Angelo stays.

The key word Warren uses to describe Angelo's activities is ritual. Work becomes a ritual as he puts the farm back into shape. Sex, too, is a ritual, as the first episodes of Angelo's intercourse with Cassie seem totally mechanical actions. She does not seem real to him at first, and then he realizes that it is more like his not being real (113). In his ritualistic performance of tasks, Angelo is not unlike Jack Burden during his Great Twitch period. In fact, the "twitch" metaphor reappears in Meet Me in the Green Glen. Angelo remembers that the right foot of his dying father "had always been twitching . . . with a rhythmic regularity. The old man sat with eyes fixed on a the floor, and everything, everything in the world, was just that twitch that you waited for" (124). Angelo flees the sense of nothingness represented by the twitching foot by concentrating on physical activities. He resembles a psychically wounded Hemingway hero in the way he seeks out and carefully attends to the tasks that require some skill--dressing the deer, raising chickens, repairing the tractor, plumbing the house.

When he steps into the life of Cassie Spottwood, Angelo enters a world that is particularly suited for fostering illusions that hold the world he has come from at

bay. For twelve years Cassie has lived in the realm of "no-Time," through "years which, in one sense, had not been time at all, had merely existed and then were gone" (94). Angelo Passeto's arrival in Spottwood Valley, though it appears to give him a chance to hide in a dream of nothingness (he winds up seeking the comfort of the Great Twitch just as Jack Burden did), is actually the action which punctures the world of the dream. It is a change which is unacknowledged as change by either Cassie or Angelo, but eventually it is a change which is restorative. Angelo's work takes on a new meaning because he begins to imaginatively see himself in different terms. He "began to create a Time of which the days would be a part, a Time in which things could exist and change, a Time that would stretch backward and forward and that you could think about. There were things you could do that would help make a picture of yourself in Time, and therefore make you real" (170). D. G. Kehl sees Angelo's growing awareness as an important contrast to Cy Grinder's sense of unreality (121). He notes Cy's advice to Cassie: "If you could just live now, no backwards and forwards, you could live through anything. But a man can't. He was finding out that a man can't" (324). It is difficult to say with certainty, however, that Angelo has a "truer" view of reality than Cy. Angelo's created Time is one of the most convoluted treatments of time in Warren's canon. Angelo

does come to conceive of time as past and future, which is a conception requisite to vision in Warren, but that conception grows only within the vacuum of the "green glen." Even as he creates one Time, he denies another; and the other time he denies, his own past, will intrude upon the new Time. Angelo's discovery has its antecedant in Warren's fiction in Jermiah's Beaumont's discovery of the "sweetness" of life as he devotes himself similarly to daily tasks just after he has married Rachel. But for that sweetness he has had to deny the past, his sworn oath to kill Fort.

One of the ironies in the novel is that it is Angelo's enemy, Murray Guilfort, who is responsible for a positive change in the relationship between Angelo and Cassie. Murray is also a man who indulges in ritualistic activities, but in the outside world of social approval rather than within the seclusion of Spottwood Valley. Murray has for some time been supporting Cassie financially while letting her believe that the money was coming from investments he was handling for her. When Murray tells Cassie that Angelo is an ex-convict, thinking that she will then have to send him away, he unwittingly allows them to come closer together. Cassie is perceptive enough to realize that she is like Angelo, having been imprisoned by her tie to the breathing corpse of Sunder Spottwood and her own sense of nothingness. Before Angelo came, life had

been for her a "going awayness" of things, but that seemed to be over (99). In an act which shows her capacity for pity and love, she tells Angelo that she does not want him ever to feel imprisoned in her house. She tells him that he must feel free to leave whenever he needs to. Angelo, given this freedom, feels some hardness within himself melt; and for the first time he and Cassie begin to live in a relative happiness of seclusion.

Jack Burden says of his first wife Lois, whom he loves as a machine, that she kept talking, and when something keeps talking, sooner or later one is bound to start listening and realize that there is a human being behind the voice (AKM 322). Until now there has been no recognition between Angelo and Cassie of each other's reality as human beings. Angelo has been "him" and Cassie has been "the woman." During their spasmodic but emotionless episodes of sex, no words have been spoken; and Cassie has always kept her eyes closed. Murray Guilfort has helped to make the relationship between them a reality in much the same way that Jack Burden had handed Anne Stanton over to Willie Stark by telling her the truth about her father's having covered for Judge Irwin. The women in both cases are able to make connections that allow them to grasp some real meaning in their relationships with the men. Both Murray and Jack are using a kind of knowledge that leaves unaccounted for the complexity of human love.

Cy Grinder, too, has had an effect on Cassie. He had left her years before to go west, giving up his idea of becoming an engineer to "act out his destiny" (80). He had left her after Cassie's mother pointed out to him in no subtle terms that he was nothing more than the son of the low and disreputable Old Budge Grinder. Cy had turned and left the hospital room where Cassie was recuperating after an automobile accident, and he had done so without even looking at Cassie.

When Cy walked out of the room, Cassie made the correct assessment that "He loves something better than me" (79). What Cy loves better than her is his Jeffersonian dream of his own perfectibility. Just as Jack Burden hesitated to consummate his love with Anne Stanton because it would have destroyed his image of her, Cy cannot bring himself to a point of physical consummation with Cassie.

> In an obscure way he felt that that was something he could not have until he got the certificate with the gold seal to say that he is an engineer; until he was, in fact, translated out of himself, no longer the son of Old Budge, but an untarnished Adam walking the new earth with the breath of Worldwide Correspondence School blown into him. (77)

Like many others in Warren's work, Cy has sought a "new innocence" to be "stayed by." Having been tonque-lashed by Cassie's mother, however, he feels possessed by a "blaze of truth." His destiny "was to need nothing" (80). The crowning touch to his destiny is to marry Gladys Peegrum,

whom he does not love, as a joke on himself and on his dream of being translated out of himself.

Cy's "blaze of truth" and his reaction to it echo Jefferson's discovery of the fact of human evil in Brother to Dragons. Both men overreact to their discoveries; both suffer the cynicism that often comes to the self-betrayed; and both, at last, have a third stage in their spiritual development which may save them from despair.

All of the central characters in Meet Me in the Green Glen have a past they are trying to escape. With Cassie, it is frustrated love and mental illness. With Angelo, it is association with a murderer and the memory of his dying father with the twitching foot. With Murray, it is a former weakness he was made to feel by Sunder Spottwood who had humiliated him by being superior at riding, drinking, and womanizing. With Cy, it was first his family name, then his idealism. It is in trying to escape these pasts that all of them seek peace in a dream state of existence. They are all denying the continuity of movement through experience that defines the self. Life in the "green glen" is an index of all their experiences; it is a metaphor for the way they all try to make the world stop mattering.

Whatever illusion man makes to give himself reality by validating his life must, to be truly valid, recognize the Warren truism that "nothing is ever lost." The evidence of the past's reality is always in the converted dining room

of Cassie's house in the form of Sunder Spottwood's shell; it is in the knife Angelo carries; and it is just over the hill from Cassie's house where the black woman Arlita lives with her daughter Charlene, who had been fathered by Sunder before his stroke.[1] It is only a matter of time before the world makes its demands on these who have, to use Jack Burden's phrase, stepped out of history into the communityless and timeless world of illusion. The world always comes to get Warren's characters sooner or later, whether they recognize the fact or not; for man is not only a creature who develops through past experience, he is also always in now; and that fact means he is connected with others and is himself a force in the world as well as a victim of the universal tragic experience Warren described in "Knowledge and the Image of Man."

When Cassie learns from Murray and Arlita that Angelo is seeing Charlene, a case of history repeating itself akin to the repetition of events in The Cave and Flood, she performs two acts of release. First, she gives Angelo money and tells him to take Charlene away and be happy with

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[1]The most interesting consideration of Warren's black characters is William Bedford Clark's "'Secret Sharers' in Warren's Later Fiction" (Grimshaw, Time's Glory, 65-76). Clark demonstrates how Arlita in Meet Me in the Green Glen and "Jingle Bells" in Flood are fully realized characters whose experiences parallel those of their white counterparts--Cassie Spottwood and Bradwell Tolliver. Clark's article reveals yet another kind of evidence of Warren's belief that the fates of the two races were inseparable and that beneath the surface of race problems lay essential and common human problems.

her. Then she releases herself by killing Sunder with Angelo's knife. The second act, of course, is not purely distinct from the first, for Angelo is accused of the murder and suddenly the outside world penetrates the seclusion of Spottwood Valley. The dream, to use Warren's repeated metaphor from the novel, begins to leak out.

To emphasize this change, Warren moves the action away from Cassie's house for the first time in the novel. The events that occurred in Spottwood Valley are now exposed to the prejudices of a larger world in which Angelo is condemned for being "Eye-tal-yun" and for his open relationship with a black woman. There is an undercurrent of resentment and envy within the community for the suspected relationship Angelo has had with Cassie. Through Warren's roving omniscient narration, the ambigious feelings of Murry, Leroy Lancaster and others are revealed as this underlying resentment creates the force that destroys Angelo. In this novel, as in Night Rider, All the King's Men, World Enough and Time, and The Cave, truth gets tangled in the desires and biases of people. When Angelo is found guilty, Cassie stands up in the courtroom and admits to the murder, but by that time truth is in the hands of larger forces. Truth gets tossed around by men who do not realize the danger of their own irresponsibility, who do not realize that what they do will have consequences in the lives of real people, even in their own

lives. In the complicated struggle to win the case, facts can even change sides. Both Jack Farhill, who handles the prosecution of Angelo, and Murray Guilfort, who would be prosecuting were he not a witness, want Cassie to be seen as a sane person during her testimony at the trial; but when she admits her own guilt, she is whisked away to the sanitarium by the efforts of these same two. Farhill laughs at this fact as he discusses the case with Angelo's defender, Leroy Lancaster. Farhill assumes the comic tone of a winking Tiny Duffy. To him the facts are not a part of life. Facts are more like objects to be used in the game they are playing.

Leroy Lancaster is similar to earlier Warren characters such as Willie Proudfit and Cass Mastern whose stories are outside the main line of the novels they appear in but which are examples of parallelism in the structure of the novels introduced to reinforce Warren's themes. Where Leroy differs from these earlier characters is in the fact that he does get involved in the main line of action in this novel and the reader sees him coming to knowlege rather than hears him tell the story of how he came to it as had been the case with Proudfit and Mastern. Madison Jones has seen the shift in focus from Cassie's plight to Lancaster's as a "damaging switch virtually in midstream of one protagonist for another" (46). Such a judgement fails to account adequately for how interrelated are Warren's

formal structure and his theme. The world of the "green glen" is a world, but it is by no means the world. The many references to the "big" road running by Cassie's house foreshadow the change. The new world demands a consciousness more astute than Cassie's to be set against the consciousness of Murray Guilfort and Jack Farhill. Rendering that world at least in part through Leroy Lancaster's consciousness leads to the fullfillment of the novel's total meaning. Perhaps the introduction of Leroy Lancaster in "midstream" violates an expectation based on convention, but it gives Meet Me in the Green Glen its logical form.

For Leroy, who sees himself as a failure, the trial becomes his last chance to save himself. He has suffered a blankness in his life which he has no name for and which gives him a common ground with the other characters in the story; and he has, like other Warren characters in other works, held onto a dream of justice. Cassie's act of standing up in open court to confess that she had killed Sunder comes to Leroy like a dream:

> This had to be a dream because it was what he had so often dreamed--the dream in which, miraculously, the guilty declared themselves, the innocent were saved and did not have to suffer, the crooked way was made straight, and justice was redeemed.
>
> The dream, too, in which--at last--Leroy Lancaster was victorious. (273)

To a certain extent, the characterization of Leroy Lancaster and Murray Guilfort realizes a dialectic similar

to that created by the juxtapostion of Adam Stanton and Willie Stark. Leroy sees himself in the light of an idealization of justice. Murray tries to define himself through actions approved by the public; his lewd experiences with Chicago prostitutes as well as his financial sacrifice for his friend Sunder are equally applauded when they are revealed during the trial. Both Leroy and Murray fail to find love, a mark of "the terrible division" within them. Both have had marriages that were loveless. Leroy, though, comes to ask himself, "When will I be done with illusions?" (272). A pivotal moment comes when he realizes that he has "blasphemed" against his own life, and he learns to feel pity for the comic Farhill, who is playing the game of law. This is the same sort of pity Howard comes to feel for the ambitious Miles in Chief Joseph, and in Meet Me in the Green Glen it is a capacity also displayed by Cassie. Again, it may represent the moment when, like the Ancient Mariner, the character comes to a recognition of his flawed condition which causes him to see it in others as a condition of the fallen state of existence they have in common. It is the moment when Jefferson takes the bloody hand of Lilburn Lewis and Jack Burden sees Tiny Duffy wink conspiratorily. It is what Angelo feels when Cassie gives him his freedom, and it is what Cassie feels when she so gives it. And it may be what Willie Stark feels when, dying, he tells Jack that things

might have been different. It is the moment of grace in Warren's work when the heart melts because of a recognition of kinship with others and, if the awareness is taken far enough, of responsibility, or what one might call an inevitable agency, within that kinship.

Eventually, the illusion of knowing himself solely through his own public deeds leaves little comfort for Murray Guilfort. After his trial, he keeps the reminders of the sexual nature of the relationship between Angelo and Cassie--a red dress, a pair of shoes, and some black lace underwear Angelo had bought for her. Murray removed these items from the wood stove in the house in Spottwood Valley where they had been thrown but only partially burned. Though these items are evidence, in one way, of Angelo's somewhat perverse need for illusion, they are also evidence of the truth of the sexual relationship between Angelo and Cassie, a truth Murray jealously ignored in his effort to destroy Angelo. He understands finally that what Cassie admitted to was true and that he has had a heavy hand in the destruction of a man for a crime he did not commit. Surveying his life, he realizes that he missed his chance at love by failing to return the love of his wife Bessie, whom he had married, in a way, as the crown in his own "destiny" because her family was important socially and politically, just as Cy had married Gladys Peegrum, whose name suggests the corn pone and buttermilk and shack

dwelling he saw as his destiny. Murray condemns both Bessie and Cassie for their dreams of love; but he also thinks, "The dream is a lie, but the dreaming is truth" (370). This last thought echoes the wisdom Warren identified in his essay on Conrad:

> the last wisdom is for man to realize that though his values are illusions, the illusion is necessary, is infinitely precious, is the mark of his human achievement, and is, in the end, his only truth (N&SE 149)

It is important to realize that this "last wisdom" is achieved only after man has recognized the "dialectical process" that life is, which is another way of saying that he recognizes his separateness from the perfect adjustment of nature. He must realize that illusions are illusions, but he must not allow himself to become nothing by believing in nothing. He must distinguish between an illusion of escape and an illusion which is, as Warren's says, man's only truth. In the illusion of escape man adheres to a belief in nothingness, believing that nothing matters. Or perhaps he clings blindly to the Jeffersonian idea of justice, ignoring his own darker impulses or finding justification for them through public sanctions. By contrast, in a final wisdom, man creates an image of life which allows him to go on living in the world with the acknowledgement of his own condition of separatenss from the innocence of nature. Murray realizes the importance of this continuing too late--after he has taken a fatal dose

of sleeping pills--thinking to enter the peace of the Great Sleep which had lured Percy Munn and, for a time, Jack Burden.

Similarly, by waiting too late to act, Cassie causes the death of Angelo as surely as she caused the death of Sunder. She has a sudden realization of the enormity of the crime she is committing when Angelo is pronounced guilty of the murder. When no one will believe her truth (reminiscent of the plight of Cassandra with whom her nickname implies Cassie's affinity), she takes the only course left open to expiate her guilt. Enlisting the aid of Cy Grinder, the only person who is willing to believe she is telling the truth, she tries to tell her story to the Governor so that he will stay Angelo's execution. Failing in that effort, she becomes for a time an Ancient Mariner figure, vowing to tell her sin to any who will listen. Eventually, though, she falls back into the world of illusion and forgets. It is ironic that when Murray visits her at the hospital and tells her that he knows the truth, the truth has changed again. Cassie is clinging to her dream of love. She believes Angelo has gone away and that Sunder died naturally. Her psychotic delusions accomplish the same sort of escape that, through suicide, Percy Munn had earlier sought and Murray Guilfort seeks in this novel. The delusions save Cassie from the horrible

responsibility for herself she would have to face if she lived by acknowledging reality.

The novel ends, however, with Cy Grinder reentering the world after he has discovered three important things: his loneliness, a sense of continuity in life, and his own failure to find love.

The discovery of his loneliness comes to him suddenly just after he has learned of Murray's suicide. By this time, Spottwood Valley is under water and Cy has become a game warden. It seems to him that "everything that had ever happened had fallen away and had never even happened" (374). The lonesome feeling is strange because he has always been a man who thrived on being alone. He goes to his daughter's room; and though in the darkness he can see nothing of her face, he remembers what the face looks like. Then, in his own room he observes for the very first time how much the face of his wife is like the face of his daughter. With his painful loneliness and this beginning sense of a connection between his wife and his daughter, Cy begins to make further connections similar to Jack Burden's seeing Tiny Duffy wink, or the poet's seeing the "old nigger" staring up at the stars and then entering his cabin in "Old Nigger on One-Mule Cart." Lying in bed again beside Gladys Peegrum,

> he was wondering if there would ever come a time when the little girl in the other room would be heavy and slow-footed and short of breath and would lie sleeping in a room where moonlight seeped, in a

> bed beside a stranger who, wakeful, was listening to her breath and did not know or care who she was. (375)

It is essential here to see that Cy is in effect discovering that continuity Warren spoke of in the foreword to Democracy and Poetry as a definer of selfhood. He is discovering that the experience of the past is important in the present, that his marriage has meant something in spite of his perception of it as simply part of his destiny. That meaning, whatever it is, is evidenced by the resemblance between his wife and his daughter. It is also important to remember that Percy Munn is doomed, or so it seems, when all sense of the future is gone from him. Here, Cy is actually discovering the future. It is painful, but it has not gone out of him.

One can hardly overstate the symbolic importance of the empty hulk of Sunder Spottwood as it relates to this description of the sleeping Gladys Peegrum. Sunder is simply a noisemaker, and in Cy's perception that is all Gladys Peegrum has been. Both she and Sunder are symbols of the nothingness that permeates the perceptions of the characters in this novel; the meaningless drawing of breath for both is a sign of the Great Twitch, which has meant for Cy that he needs nothing. Tortured by the thought of his daughter's future, Cy goes outside in the moonlight. He stands, symbolically, in the shadow of a tree until the memory of his wife's sleeping face makes him wonder,

and once again for the first time ever, "what she thought, what she felt" (376). She is becoming more at this moment than the crown in the pursuit of his destiny. She is becoming real for him. Cy does not discover that he really loves her, of course. What he does discover is that he, too, has "blasphemed" against his own life. Like Leroy Lancaster he has lived by a dream of his own insignificance. He realizes in the end that he does need love and that he has missed it because of his cynicism and disgust at himself which led him to escape himself by denying the continuity and responsibility that give one selfhood.

> The realization was, all at once, an anguish to him. But that was, he somehow knew, what he had to stand there and suffer. (376)

Meet Me in the Green Glen is more intensely focused on the complex nature of love and its value than any other Warren novel. Guttenberg says that the novel is concerned with the difference beween true and false love. True love, which he says Warren first introduced in All the King's Men, "arises only with selfhood." False love is the "green glen," the "romantic dream of love" (139). The lives of the characters in this novel bear this out. The only two who end with a chance for real love are Cy Grinder and Leroy Lancaster, though they do not find it within the story, because they have each had the false dream peeled away from them to reveal a self. All of this is in keeping

with Warren's belief that the truth must be respected before anything resembling a fulfilled life can be lived. One must accept the past as a continuous interconnection of events which leads to selfhood. To deny the reality and significance of the past means that there is no self-identity and, in turn, no real love; for "In separateness only does love learn definition." There is no love or identity in nature, nor any need for it, and if man does not go through the pain of distinguishing himself, which he must, Warren insists, then he has no love or identity either.

Ultimately, Meet Me in the Green Glen is about the inevitable movement of time and the destruction which can result from denying the fact of time. The world must be faced; the responsibility to the truth, which is a responsibility to the self and to the community, must be accepted. Disasters cannot be prevented thereby because actions have consequences, intended or not. But denial of the world's reality or of the self's responsibility is spiritual death. The horrible truth must be faced because men live, ultimately, in a single, continuous world. This seems to be what Cy Grinder feels, out of his anguish, and perhaps he is on his way to something better than he has had before. The final passage of the novel suggests hope.

> When the time came, he stepped out of the shadow of the tree. He looked up. There was the moon, with the sky, and the whole world, in its light. (376)

This image is similar to the situation of the lovers in "Bearded Oaks" who are submerged in the submarine darkness under the trees. Cy is, in a sense, stepping out of the dream of nothingness, represented by the shadow. Like Jack Burden, he is stepping back into history. Another key in the passage is the phrase "whole world." The world is made all of one piece by Cy's feeling of continuous movement, captured symbolically by the moonlight's broad luminescence. The past is not dormant. The "green glen" of Spottwood Valley is under water now, but the force of the events there on Cy's life, his love for Cassie, he can no longer deny. By denying that love for all these years, he has harmed himself because he has made any love impossible. Life must be taken as the whole process which it is, not divided into disconnected chunks. It is a world of interconnection and meaning which Cy steps back into. This time, though, the painful knowledge of self seems more something to take with him than something to flee from.

Just as in his late poetry the flight of wild birds comes to be an emblem of identification with achieved selfhood, in Warren's last novel the concept of home becomes an idea associated with the self's relation to the world, not as a new concept, but as a reaffirmation and a new exploration of an idea Warren had put forth as early as "Original Sin" and "The Ballad of Billie Potts." The place one comes from leaves an undeniable and lasting

impression on self, and may be, as Victor Strandburg has argued, associated with a sense of the primal self which is recoverable "only through the medium of the remembered image, or poetry" ("Poet of Youth" 92). Home, however, has been defined by Warren as "not a place, it's a state of spirit, it's a state of feeling, a state of mind, a proper relationship to a world" (Talking 102). Bradwell Tolliver mentally shouts essentially the same thing at the end of Flood: "There is no country but the heart."

Coming home, then, is synonomous with coming to a point of vision. For one does not truly come home until he can achieve an imaginative integration of the past he associates with home, be it a past of mental anguish or nostalgic comfort, with the present. In this sense one achieves "home" in nearly the same way one achieves vision. One does not go home again; one, in a sense, remakes home. In the context of Warren's last novels, especially the last novel, home is the "place to come to."

It is appropriate that the portion of this study devoted to analysis of Warren's works end with a discussion of the last novel, for it suggests a circular movement which sends the reader back to some of Warren's earliest writing. The return home is in the last novel still an important pattern, and as always it involves a coming to terms with the past. Warren's last fictional protagonist is still, in one sense, the same wanderer/son first

introduced in the early poetry. In the novel the wanderer, Jed Tewksbury, tells the story of his life into middle age. As always the emphasis is on finding a way to live; so the place to come to is not the grave, as Richard Howard suggests (73). The place is "home," and the guiding question for this novel, if it has one, is "How does one achieve a home?" or in the terms of "Billie Potts," "how does one put himself into the picture of his own life?"

A Place to Come To is a large novel in the sense that it involves so many facets of human experience. It is in this way more like the early novels than those which immediately precede it. Jed Tewksbury travels, studies Dante, writes, teaches, fights in a war, searches for love and friendship, marries, suffers the loss of his wife to cancer, has an adulterous affair, remarries, fathers a son, and gets stabbed by a mugger. He is not, to say the least, lacking in worldly experience; and, unlike much of the rendering of events in the individual lives of characters in some of the other late novels, all of this experience is rendered with a fullness and immediacy as Jed speaks directly to the reader in the fashion of a Jack Burden.

The fact that the novel is so rich in human experience may be partly responsible for the misreading of it by critics other than Howard. Katherine Snipes wishes that Warren had provided more elaboration on Jed's career as a scholar. She says that Jed "might almost as well be a

businessman as a professor" (154). If this is true, it is to Warren's credit. Jed has ambivalent feelings toward his profession because he senses his success in life is made by a bargain with the Prince of this World rather than something achieved by his own power and agency. He discovers what both Amantha Starr and Issac Sumpter come to think of as the "inner logic" of the world, a mysterious and dangerous force (actually a dangerous illusion as it is revealed in each case) which seems to make events conform to the individual's will without the individual's effort. Jed, furthermore, often views his work as a way to anesthestize himself. For Jed to embrace his profession as a means of salvation (which is not what Snipes suggests) would mean that ultimately he would have to accept Dr. Stahlmann's dream of the imperium intellectus. Stahlmann, who becomes Jed's professional mentor, tells Jed,

> I dreamed of a world not of nations. Of a timeless and placeless, sunlit lawn, like that of Dante's vision, where the poets and philosophers and sages sit, and where we who are none of those things may come to make obeisance and listen. We may even, if a little grace is vouchsafed, report something of what we have heard. That others may come. (69)

Stahlmann's dream is a vision of a future utopia as Adam Stanton's dream had been a vision of a past utopia. The dream is attractive, and Jed latches on to it; the University of Chicago becomes his "Harvard yard" and the imperium intellectus his "fondled axiom" by which he tries to escape the difficulty of an earned knowledge. But it is

a dream that takes responsibility for knowledge away from the individual, so if Jed is to achieve selfhood he must first discover that he does not believe in it anymore, as Jack Burden had abandoned his Great Twitch theory. Stahlman must eventually give up the dream himself as the cruelty of the Nazis forces its way into his consciousness. Being German, his feelings of complicity in the actions of the Fatherland lead him to suicide. He cannot escape his past in a dream of innocence based on a utopia of reason, just as Jefferson could not, for there is blood, literally, on the hands of their kinsmen. If anything in the novel, however, suggests the invalidity of the imperium intellectus, it is Jed's killing of an S. S. officer during the war who in civilian life happened to be a classical scholar, hardly the way for one member of an elite intellectual group to treat another. This act represents the culmination of Jed's fall. The intellect cannot by itself heal the problem of man's separate state. Jed killed the S. S. officer for pragmatic reasons, to gain the respect of his men, and for some fairly horrible selfishness: he envies the young officer for his courage and composure.

Charles Bohner sees an important break in Warren's pattern of handling his protagonist in A Place to Come To.

> Jed says he knows Chicago better than any place in the world, an observation impossible for any other Warren character to make. The freshness and power of the scenes in Chicago and Italy are sufficient

> to make the reader wish that Warren had emancipated his characters long ago. A Place to Come To, with its appealing breadth and amplitude, is Warren's most engaging fiction since All the King's Men. (154)

Warren did not, however, strike a more cosmopolitan attitude simply to be more interesting to the reading public. In fact, A Place to Come To is probably Warren's most regionally minded novel. Everywhere he goes there are reflections on Jed's South. The Chicago he lives in is, despite the presence of Dr. Stahlmann, the same Chicago as that in Walker Percy's The Moviegoer, a place where the midwestern sky "is the nakedest loneliest sky in America" (203). Ripley City, South Dakota, where Jed's first wife Agnes hails from and where the two of them are married and where, soon after, she is buried, is, despite its provincialism, the same for Jed as Chicago. Although he is accepted as family by the people there, he can only for a short time believe that the spot of ground beside Agnes is his place to come to. For some reason Jed cannot have the peaceful life represented by his first wife and Ripley City. Eventually, the spot where Agnes is buried becomes the place in darkness, under a blanket of snow, where his loved one lies buried. It assumes other-worldly qualities.

In Europe, as a soldier and later as a scholar, Jed is directly confronted by the problem of "home." The Italian partisans he fights with are fighting for their terra rather than for their country. The problem of reconciling

his own history is made clear by the fact that Jed has a difficult time finding the English equivalent of terra.

Even the Nashville Warren writes about in this novel is not Southern. The people there, except for the Cudsworths perhaps, play very hard at being cosmopolites. It may be that they are playing very hard at being not Southern.

Jed's travels through these places are attempts to escape the contamination of Dugton. The contamination of home is signified for Jed, as it is for Cy Grinder of Meet Me in the Green Glen and Bradwell Tolliver of Flood, by an embarrassing paternity. The story of A Place to Come To is the story of Jed Tewksbury's acceptance of and return to Dugton as a corollary to his acceptance of his own fate and his own responsibility in that fate.

It is easy enough for Jed to see himself as pure victim of his fate. The novel opens with a description of the death of Buck Tewksbury, Jed's father, whose reputed sexual prowess and drunkenness make him larger than life in Dugton. He is a figure of local lore much like Jack Harrick of The Cave. Here is the novel's opening:

> I was the only boy, or girl either, in the public school of the town of Dugton, Claxford County, Alabama, whose father had ever got killed in the middle of the night standing up in the front of his wagon to piss on the hindquarters of one of a span of mules, and being drunk, pitching forward on his head, still hanging on to his dong, and hitting the pike in such a position and condition that both the left front and the left rear wheels of the wagon rolled, with perfect precision, over

> his unconscious neck, his having passed out being, no doubt, the reason he took the fatal plunge in the first place. Throughout, he was still holding on to his dong. (3)

The shame and anxiety caused by this paternity make Jed a self-conscious alien in Dugton as he grows up. Eventually, however, he achieves the kind of distance suggested by the amused perspective of the novel's opening passage. After he leaves home and wins recognition as a scholar, he even entertains friends with a comic version of the story of his father's death, complete with grotesque gestures for illustration. The story strikes his audiences as wildly funny, and, of course, too absurd to be true, even for most of the circle of acquaintances in Nashville, where the past, especially the Southern past, can be discussed only as a joke. Lawford Carrington, called Mr. Nashville for his popularity as an artist and his fame for being the perfect host, offers another example through his ancestor who made a fortune by running a "fancy house" for Yankee officers. Lawford maintains that he was a Confederate compatriot, however, for all of his girls were infected with venereal disease (154).

Jed's complete rejection of his past means a rejection of another significant part of it--his mother--a proud woman who is determined to survive the indignity cast upon her by her husband and to give her son an opportunity for a better life. She is so determined that he will escape the stain of Dugton, in fact, that she will not let him return

there while she is alive. Jed never sees his mother after he leaves Dugton. He and the reader keep up with her life through her letters. The letters are marvelously funny, partly because of the mother's idiom but also because she has a sense of humor. They reveal the love she finds with Perk Simms and the contempt she always feels for "Miss Pritty Pants." Jed's mother is, along with Celia Harrick, one of the strongest and most fully realized women in Warren's fiction.

"Miss Pritty Pants" is the third connection Jed has with Dugton. She is Rozelle Hardcastle, the beauty queen of Dugton, who turns up in Nashville as Mrs. Lawford Carrington. Eventually, she becomes Jed's lover, which seems natural enough for two lonely people who have a past in common; but Jed comes to see that Rozelle is his lover because

> the orgasm was like the "black hole" . . . a devouring negativity into which all the nags and positives of life may simply disappear like dirty water when the plug is pulled at the bottom of the sink. It was the death in life-beyond-Time without which life-in-Time might not be endurable, or even possible. (220-21)

Similarly, Jed survives for a time by becoming a man of pure action. He even perverts Cartesian law by saying debatuo ergo sum, which he translates as "I fuck, therefore I am" (218).

As Jed comes to see, though, "the world survives all contempt, even that of lovers" (209), a statement that

applies as well to the lovers in Meet Me in the Green Glen, whose affair closely resembles Jed and Rozelle's. What Jed discovers is that there is meaning and interconnection in the world. Maria McInnis, who might have become Jed's lover had things gone differently, finds a way to live with her own past. Her mother's long suffering from a psychotic condition has been a source of pain for Maria just as Jed's father has been a source of pain for him. Maria says that Jed's story of his father's death saved her. The past is not a joke, then, but a force. Maybe, after all, even the Southern experience is less a joke than most of these characters think. By the end of the novel, Rozelle has married a black man who had earlier posed as a swami in Nashville, one more example of a Southerner who purposely sheds the skin of his past in the novel; Rozelle becomes, as she says, "his Old White Mammy"; and, as she also says, it is her duty to find ways to remind him from time to time of a shack in Jackson, Mississippi.

> "We've been married a long time," she said then. "Not old exactly, but definitely slowed down. So, instead of ripping something off, sometimes we just get to talking about some special time in the past. Or we talk 'Ole-Timey down home' talk, about Dugton High and what happened or nigger patois of what he, my husband, says white folks used to call Possum Prick Alley, which was where he lived. And the longer we live with Wops and Dagos and Wogs and Greasers and Frogs--and even Limeys--the more we have a real Ole-Timey Confederate marriage, with the Stars and Bars tacked on the wall above our bed." (367)

After hearing this, Jed sings the first line of "Dixie" and

jokes about the Lost Cause, but there is no joke when Rozelle says, "the inner reality is. . . . I am the Lost Cause" (367). Like Jed, she has sought a way to fulfill her inner self and has finally found her "Confederate marriage," which seems to mean, really, that she and her husband have found a way to stay themselves against the world. The freedom she found to do this she attributes to Jed for walking out on their relationship in Nashville, just as earlier Maria attributed to him her freedom to leave the Nashville circle and make a life for herself, even to marry eventually. Jed, like Jack Burden and Murray Guilfort before him, comes to discover the fact of inevitable agency which gives all actions meaning in the spider-web world.

The fulfillment that Jed's mother finds back in Dugton with Perk Simms is paralleled by the Cudworths in Nashville, a couple who attend the Carrington parties. Cud Cudsworth and his wife are farmers (horse breeders) and prospective parents, both of which conditions give them a great deal of pleasure. Cud had been in an important law firm in the North after attending the Yale Law School. He was, as he says, "out for blood," in the world of law, a figure of speech which connects him with such characters as Willie Proudfit and Private Porsum, who literally drew blood in earlier novels. But like other Warren characters who seek to make a name for themselves by public deeds, he

discovers a certain emptiness or blankness, finds that he is not in the picture of his life at all, as Warren phrased the problem in "Billie Potts." After winning an important case, Cudsworth had woken up with ambiguous feelings toward his profession. He resigned from the firm, admitting that the enticement of a promotion almost caused him to stay simply because of the kindness of his boss, who misunderstood his motives for quiting.

> " But I didn't stay. . . . I walked out of the Old Man's office, and in that very split instant I felt real." (174)

Warren's use of Cud's story is a return to the interpolated story, the exemplum. The Cudworths' life of stability and fertility contrasts with the chaotic and essentially sterile lives, including Jed's, revolving around them. Jed sees the Cudsworths as a dangerous force as they try to pull him into close friendship with them, but he is also quite capable of self-analysis. "At their place," he says,

> I had felt, now and then, a sense of unreality in their world, but now . . . the awareness struck me that I had clung to that notion of the unreality of their world simply because I could not face the painful reality of their joy. The joy sprang from their willed and full embracement of the process of their life in time, and I, God help me, was in flight from Time. I could not stand the reproach of the sight they provided. (252)

Snipes' judgment that Jed might just have well have been a salesman as a scholar takes on a whole new resonance, unintended, of course, when one considers how much Jed's plight here resembles the plight of Eudora

Welty's traveling salesman R. J. Bowman in her first published story, "Death of a Traveling Salesman." Bowman, whose career as a "traveling salesman" is symbolic of his own "flight from time," feels rebuked by the fertility and pride he discovers in the poor and backward couple who have something so simple as a fertile marriage. For him, as for Jed, profession is equated with identity, and both works implicitly criticize the abstract nature of work in modern times and thereby echo a concern expressed in I'll Take My Stand.

What Jed has in place of the "willed and full embracement" of life in time is an "identity with fate." For Jed, the knowledge of identity with fate comes when he finds Rozelle waiting for him in his bedroom the day after the New Year's Eve party at the Carrington house. Jed feels a kind of mystic knowledge about life.

> I felt . . . that some massive concurrence of forces had been working, all my life, in darkness, to bring me to this spot and instant. All sense of my own force, even of identity, seemed to flee from me. (193)

Jed is describing the same feeling Isham Lewis has when he talks about knowing and not-knowing being the same thing. This is the condition of the subsumed will. The mind participates in what appears to be life as an observer, without resistance, like the mind of Isham in Brother to Dragons, like the common mind of the crowd and the mind of Jack Burden in All the King's Men, and like the mind of

nearly every character at one time or another in Meet Me in the Green Glen. The mind does not recognize itself outside the darkness of naturalistic forces. The identity with fate is hence a false identity because it is not an identity that distinguishes the individual as a moral being. Dr. Stahlmann, on one occasion, tells Jed how he once watched a trapped hare's reaction to an avalanche that crushed him. Jed comes to equate this story with his own feelings about history, what he calls the Great Landslide, his name for the naturalistic, mechanical ongoingness which Jack Burden had called the Great Twitch. For Jed, who like Jack Burden is a student of history, history is the blind force that rushes men along. But over and over Warren has asserted the necessity for man to proclaim himself through an assertion of his will. The idea expressed in All the King's Men holds true again here: "'History is blind, but man is not'" (462). The tenuous relationship between man and history Jed explains in the following way:

> Something is going on and will not stop. Your are outside the going on, and you are, at the same time, inside the going on. In fact, the going on is what you are. Until you can understand that these things are different but are the same, you know nothing about the nature of life. I proclaim this. (5)

Strong evidence that Jed is arriving at this knowledge of an interconnection of events in the "something" that is "going on" comes after his mother's death. By this time he has long been divorced from his second wife; his son,

Ephraim, whom he loves to spend time with, has grown; and he has developed the first friendship of his life with the boy's maternal uncle. Jed, in Chicago again after his Nashville period, attempts to rescue an elderly woman who is being attacked by two youths. The woman is fatally wounded, and Jed receives a stab wound. Later, Jed sits by the woman's hospital bed, holding her hand while she dies (he had gone through the same experience earlier with his first wife); and he pretends to be her son, for whom she is calling in her delirium. The entire episode is replete with meaningful associations. At one level it is obviously intended to represent Jed's acceptance of responsibility for his own mother, his own past, through a surrogate; but one is also reminded of Jack Burden's declaration that "each of us is the son of a million fathers" and of the fact that he assumed responsibility for the dying Ellis Burden (AKM 462). Jed is also assuming a responsibility which constitutes an act of moral awareness. He might have aided the woman as she was being attacked out of a rush of excitement, but he makes a conscious decision to assume responsibilty for her afterward. He seems to be becoming aware of the fusion of all life into one world, and his telling the old woman that he is her son is yet another instance in Warren of the Conradian "true lie."

An even stronger suggestion of Jed's acknowledgement of kinship with others is revealed in his description of the young mugger:

> Then I was lying on the pavement, and my last vision, before fading out, just at the moment when traffic was halted by a light ahead, was of the taller of the two assailants--a youth of, say fourteen or fifteen--as he leaped, rather as he seemed to drift with ineffable, slow, floating godlike grace--godlike, truly, it seemed--to the hood of the nearest halted automobile, to stand beautifully balanced there with the purse--like Medusa's head hanging from the hand of Cellini's Perseus in Florence--but his pale yellow face lifted to the high stars, his lips open in a wildly beautiful, lyric birdlike cry of triumph, an angelic, gratuitous and beautiful cry to the stars.
>
> I remember thinking how beautiful, how redemptive, all seemed. It was as though I loved him. I thought how beautifully he had moved, like Ephraim, like a hawk in sunset flight. I thought how all the world was justified in that moment. (387)

The staring up at the stars, the comparison with the hawk in sunset flight, and the godlike grace in the youth's movement link this passage with other moments of vision, especially in Warren's poetry. The comparison to Perseus, or rather to a sculpture of Perseus, suggests mythmaking by imaginative connection. And finally, the discovery of beauty in the mugger is similar to the Mariner's discovery of the beauty of the sea snakes (and is the allusion to Medusa's head intended to reinforce that connection?). The comparison with his son establishes a sense of connection between the youth and Jed. In the world of continuity, man is not only the son of a million fathers, he is the father of a million sons, a link in the "something" that is "going on." What Jed undergoes here in a state of grogginess is a "momentary eternity" like that described at the end of

Chief Joseph. Jed, too, must return to the world of action to test his vision.

Jed's physical wound parallels a spiritual one; and in a state of exhaustion he pleads guilty to sonhood. This acknowledgement of his parentage and his past is the beginning of his acceptance of his own particular terra, which gives him identiy. He returns to Dugton where he meets the humble Perk Simms, the man who had given his mother love for so many years and who is eager to love Jed, too. When Jed enters the house of his boyhood, objects seem "to glow with a special assertion of [their] being" and of his own. It seems as though he is returning to a "final self, long lost" (390). It is a sort of redemption Jed finds by returning home, the recovery of a lost self. His understanding of life, at least as much as human beings are granted, comes to him in the graveyard where, perhaps as another act of reconciliation with the past, his mother has been buried next to the long-dead Buck Tewksbury. Jed is remembering what Dr. Stahlmann had told him about how out of his anger and innocence, he might write something worthy; the anger was the anger at being Jed Tewksbury of Dugton, Alabama, but the innocence has been changed.

> The mysterious anger was there, and unannealed, God knew. But my simplicitas was not sancta. My simplicitas had lost the blessedness of knowing that men were real, and brothers in their reality. And all I had in place of that was a vast number of cards that measured three by five inches, with notes in my large and legible script. But could not a man pray?

> Was all too late? Was all too late, after all? I had a wild impulse to lie on the earth between the two graves, the old and the new, and stretch out a hand to each. I thought that if I could do that, I might be able to weep, and if I could weep, something warm and blessed might happen. But I did not lie down. The trouble was, I was afraid that nothing might happen, and I was afraid to take the risk. (399)

Jed convicts himself here of the same sin committed by Hawthorne's Ethan Brand, but the unpardonability of that sin is not as certain for Jed as is for Hawthorne's character. The very urgency of his questioning here asserts hope. Still among the living, Jed cannot hope for the perfect peace of his dead parents. And he is still in a world where the idea of nothingness is frightening. The fact that he refrains from attempting a mystic union with the parents is perhaps a mark of Warren's fearful wisdom. Jed's physical return and reconciliation with the past (he is able at last even to say, "Poor Buck") suggest the knowledge he has of the common pain of human experience. He understands that Buck, too, had suffered because he had never been able to adjust himself to his own time. He had tried to live in the dream of glory of 1861-1865 in much the same way Jed has tried to escape his own time by his immersion in medieval literature. Jed has made a connection between his own life and that of his father. Because he realizes his own failure--his murder of the S. S. officer out of envy for his composure, his attributing of his own success to his bargain with the Prince of this

World--he comes to see his father's life was tragic. He has had that moment of understanding in which the heart melts and he understands universal tragic experience.

Jed, at the end of the novel, is not a believer in the imperium intellectus nor in an "identity with fate," this novel's equivalents of Idealism and the Great Twitch. He is, instead, a man whose lost will is regained and who is, at last, like Jack Burden, ready to enter the human community. His restoration of self is suggested by his return to Dugton, his acceptance of responsibility for the old woman in Chicago, his Mariner-like recognition of beauty of the young mugger, and finally, the letter he sends to his second wife asking her to rejoin him. "It is not that I cannot stand solitude," he writes. "I ask for your company for what blessedness it is" (400-401). The novel ends with Jed's vision in which he understands the continuity that bridges time and understands, too, his place within the framework of the world as a son and a father.

> I fell into the fantasy that someday--perhaps on the mission to put the ashes of Pore Ole Perk in the ground, unmarked, but not too unhandy to the spot where Ma lay [as Perk Simms had shyly requested]--I would be accompanied by Ephraim, and I could point out to him all the spots that I had dreamed of pointing out to him. (401)

What Jed has achieved is "home," a "proper relationship" to the world. He has, as some of Warren's divided characters before him, discovered that the past always

matters and that the terra, which is best defined as all experience impending on the individual consciousness, must be accepted and respected; for the past has its influence on identity; and without a sense of the past's reality, man cannot have a sense of the future. Jed has discovered that men must live in time, because the illusion of no-Time is the death of identity. Finally, he has recognized that a life of awareness is a dialectical process in which abstractions such as the imperium intellectus must be weighed against experience for validity, but in a process that requires the moral courage not to submit to its polar antithesis, an "identity in fate." The "place" Jed Tewksbury "comes to" is a vision that acknowledges his own limitations, his own separation from an original innocence, but also a vision that he is not alone, that even within the great complicity of the human community love is possible. His search leads him to a valid, hard-won way to live by knowledge of and acceptance of the great conflict between the idea and the fact. He has selfhood, that sense of inner unity which parallels the order in an outside world and makes life possible. Whereas Warren's first novel chronicled the total destruction of one man's selfhood, his last shows a man's achievement of the integration of a sense of continuity and responsibility. It records a triumph in history.

CHAPTER 9

THE NATURE OF THE TRIUMPH

To say that Warren has been a neglected artist is a strange truth. How could anyone who received three Pulitzers and became the first poet laureate of the United States be considered a neglected figure? Yet it is only within the last decade that anything like a burgeoning critical interest in Warren can be said to have developed. At the time Leonard Casper published his pioneering book on Warren in 1960, the experience described by Allen Shepherd was not unusual for a Warren student:

> . . . I was busily flying around the country to job interviews, carrying with me my almost completed dissertation on the fiction of Robert Penn Warren, which very few people wanted to look at. Although I was never asked who he might be, I was, with what seemed to me surprising frequency, asked why I had chosen to write on Warren's novels. (53)

Indeed, "Times have changed," as Shepherd goes on to write. Since 1975, fifteen full-length studies devoted exclusively to Warren have been published (most of them since 1981) in addition to numerous articles and treatments in other volumes. Warren's papers have been acquired by the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale, and Joseph Blotner is at work on a biography. One can name Warrenites, scholars whose careers have not been made but have certainly been forwarded by their work on Warren. James H. Justus, Victor Strandberg, William Bedford Clark, James A. Grimshaw, Floyd Watkins and others have built upon

the work of Casper and Charles Bohner (whose own book was updated in 1981) to raise Warren criticism to an exciting level. One wonders if the critical interest will escalate to a point comparable to the interest in Faulkner.

The assessment of Warren's work inevitably leads to comparisons with contemporaries and near-contemporaries, of course; but it is a little difficult to say exactly what writers are Warren's contemporaries. As Leonard Casper pointed out years ago, one of the problems with defining Warren's place among modern American writers is that he fell through the crack between the two periods literary historians most often depend on in their surveys of twentieth century American literature. Still an apprentice when Hemingway, Faulkner, Eliot and Ransom produced their most significant work after the First World War, after the Second World War Warren could not be counted among the newcomers (Casper viii). Eventually something happened which, paradoxically, may have obscured Warren's place even more. Warren became "our most distinguished man of letters." We might think of Faulkner as our greatest novelist and of Stevens as our greatest poet, but we would never think of either as "our most distinguished man of letters." Of course, neither of them was a man of letters in the same sense that Warren was--a prolific and proficient writer in multiple genres; but the phrase has connotations beyond this dennotative distinction. The

appelation promotes a stasis of critical understanding. There is a tendency to feel that we already know everything there is to know about "our most distinguished man of letters" and need not bother with him anymore. Even Justus was moved to write that Warren's theme of self-knowledge has been so thoroughly treated that it is "questionable" that it "can yield new critical discoveries" (xiii). Such a view could be a dangerous one in the hands of critics less able and less sensitive than Justus. We have, in short, tended to see Warren much the way we see William Dean Howells, as a figure important in establishing a literary climate but whose own art need not concern us on a large scale.

Warren, however, refused to submit himself to critical taxidermy too early, refused to be just "our most distinguished man of letters," and kept on writing (as, indeed, did Howells). Much of Warren's later work appeared in The New Yorker alongside the work of younger contemporaries heralded as America's best writers. Some of his latest writing is some of his richest; and, as Allen Shepherd indicated in the article quoted from above, the burgeoning of critical interest that began to develop earnestly in the early eighties was (until Warren's death in 1989) largely an effort to keep up with the poet (53). And much of that effort has been devoted--by Watkins, Strandberg, and others--to showing how Warren's poetry

creates its own terms for its meaning and how he cannot be thought of as a poet (or as a critic) whose work is passé. One can also add the astute if overstated explanation by Frank Graziano for a collective failure to understand Warren: "If America is short on trumpeteers hailing appreciation and debt to Robert Penn Warren, it is because we live among readers who lack what I.A. Richards dubbed 'sensuous apprehension,' readers who cannot hear the Warren poem, who do not know what to do with the mind's senses, who do not, as it is vogue to say, understand the poem's grammar." Graziano goes on to write, "Warren's genius . . . is in his ear" (31). One might say essentially the same thing of a good many other Southern writers, Eudora Welty and William Faulkner especially. To the extent that Graziano's explanation of a lack of critical interest in Warren is true, it must be coupled with an assessment closer to that of Louis Rubin, who wrote that "From the standpoint of the insurgents, what is really wrong with the New Criticism is . . . the fact that it was developed and practiced by the academic literary generation immediately antecedent to that which is now engaged in attempting to run the show" (29).

The body of Warren's criticism of his contemporaries may not be the least among the tools for assessing Warren's own place. It is a criticism which, to some extent, is concerned with who is "running the show" at a given time.

The essays on modern Americans in New and Selected Essays offer an interesting parallel to those on nineteenth-century Americans. Warren characteristically sets out to define the poles employed in each writer's work; and he still considers the "personal" impulse lying behind the work, though that word still means for him a complex interrelation between writer, milieu, and work of art that can be usefully explored but never known. In fact, in writing of Katherine Anne Porter in his introduction to the Collection of Critical Essays he edited, Warren looked forward sadly to the time when her journals and correspondence would be published (7) and praised the "untopical" nature of her work (8). Yet Porter is exemplary to Warren's mind of what he sees still in the modern writers: the artist is the rebuker of his society.

Warren's essays on modern Americans are unified by, among other things, a concern with what he called the "downhill drag of Western Civilization" (Katherine Anne Porter 6); and the writers he wrote most about were those who dealt with this theme in one way or another on a stage smaller than the world stage of Eliot and Pound (N&SE 310). The world writers choose to write about is all important. Hemingway's special world, in one sense, gives him common ground with regionalist writers like Frost, Ransom, and Faulkner. In fact, what Warren wrote in his

essay on Hemingway about the writer's choice of world could apply to all the subjects of Warren's essays:

> A writer may write about his special world merely because he happens to know that world, but he may also write about that special world because it best dramatizes for him the issues and questions that are his fundamental concerns--because, in other words, that special world has a kind of symbolic significance for him. There is often . . . . an inner and necessary reason for the writer's choice of his characters and situations. (N&SE 168)

This may all seem very obvious, but the significance of Warren's emphasis on the writer's "world" should not be missed. Faulkner's work presents another case of the symbolic significance of a writer's special "world." Faulkner "reported" one South, Warren wrote, while he "created" another (N&SE 197). What Warren wrote of modern Southern writers in his introduction to A Southern Harvest is also important here. Most Southern writers have abjured the straight realistic approach; their preference for creating character from the inside out has given a pervasive poetic quality to Southern fiction (xvi). Yet in another sense the Southerner is only a more intense version of the modern man who must create his special world if he is to have value. He can neither fully accept nor fully reject the old world with its morality. In fact, he cannot even know it fully, a predicament Warren sees realized in Katherine Anne Porter's Miranda. The old world may be "an old bitch gone in the teeth" (and perhaps the portrait of Gabriel of "Old Mortality" represents some such decline),

but the difficulty of knowing the past is a parallel to the difficulty of knowing the self. Porter seems to mean something like this when she calls Miranda both "ignorant" and "hopeful" when the heroine comes to declare that she can at least know her own truth (Porter 221). Miranda's character illustrates both the need for the individual to distinguish himself and the impossibility of doing so in any absolute way.

The special world of the writer is a very important donée to grant, for it reveals the issues important to the writer through his own special terms. It is also related to two other discernible criteria in Warren's criticism of modern American writers--area and relevance.

Area is an important criterion because, as Warren says, "An artist's basic ideas do not operate in splendid isolation; to a greater or lesser degree, they prove themselves by their conquest of other ideas" (N&SE 196). Although Warren finds Hemingway's work intense, he also finds that the basic idea in his work--"the scruple of honor"--is applied to a small area of experience: "[W]e never see a story in which the issue involves the problem of definition of the scruple, nor do we ever see a story in which honor calls for a slow, grinding, day-to-day conquest of nagging difficulties" (N&SE 196). Porter, on the other hand, tested her basic idea--a tension between involvement and apartness similar to the love and separateness theme

Warren identified in Eudora Welty's stories--in a wider area of experience. For Warren this enhances her standing as a writer, though what he says of her accomplishment otherwise might be said of Hemingway as well. Porter achieved a "thematic integration of a body of stories, the mark of the masters, the thing that makes us think first of the central significance of a writer rather than some incidental and individual triumph" (Katherine Anne Porter 107-08).

The question of relevance is more important. It is also more "thorny and debatable" (N&SE 195). It is a question Warren returns to time and time again in the essays, usually in the process of defending the writers against complaints made by critics who expect an obvious and prescriptive social relevance in their literature. In addressing the issue, Warren follows the distinction made by Thomas De Quincey between a Literature of Knowledge and a Literature of Power, though in the way Warren uses the term knowledge--as in "Knowledge and the Image of Man," for example--it is synonomous with De Quincey's power rather than with his knowledge:

> Is the kind of instruction expected of fiction in direct competition, at the same level, with the kind of instruction offered in Political Science I or Economics II? If that is the case, then out with Shakespeare and Keats and in with Upton Sinclair. (N&SE 195)

Defending Hemingway against a line of criticism that says his work has no social relevance, Warren insists that

it is the task of fiction to provide a "powerful image of human nature trying to fulfill itself, and not instruction in the abstract sense" (N&SE 195). Yet the "created" world of the artist is often a special way to rebuke the factual world, as Warren shows in the case of Faulkner. In answer to Norman Podhertz's criticism that Faulkner did not understand the rationalism of the modern world, Warren responds by identifying yet another example of the form rebuke may take. It may be "literal and direct," but it "is more apt to be 'mythic' and 'radical'--that is, to take a form which, because of its distance from the literal, may give drama at once more strangely focussed than life ordinarily affords, and more deeply suggestive" (Faulkner 254). This "social" relevance through mythic and radical form seems no less true of the works of James Joyce than of those of William Faulkner, and one might add the works of Flannery O'Connor with her "large and startling figures," and even of Warren himself, whose work became less "naturalistic" and more "mythic" after 1950. Warren even saw a similar literature of rebuke in the realistic fiction of Dreiser, who gave a "mythic and root drama of the rebuke of values implicit in American society, in the worship of the 'bitch goddess' Success, and in the admiration of Horatio Alger" (Faulkner 255). Warren goes on to write a sentence that cuts at the heart of what he calls the dominant "mythology of justification," which the artist's

"mythology of the drama of rebuke" sets itself against: "Horatio Alger would, in a pinch, drown Roberta, and in the end would be just as befuddled as Clyde Griffith was" (Faulkner 255). It is the contrast between the two myths--the society's dominant myth and the artist's myth of rebuke--which is the important contrast, and not the contrast between the artist's myth of the drama of rebuke and the literalness of a society. Both myths create images by which to live; they become competing systems of reality, competing systems of self-validation. For Warren and the writers he admires, the dominant myth leads to depersonalization and moral complacency, treasuries of virtue, great alibis or a too blind faith in modern rationalism.

Toward much the same conclusion, Warren's introduction to the Collection of Critical Essays on Faulkner surveys critical treatment of Faulkner through shifting political climates. With the criticism of the Depression era, Faulkner fell victim to para-Marxist criticism that called for a return to naturalism. The criticism was doctrinal, and its doctrine was "art-as-illustration" (Faulkner 7). The war years saw the rise of "patriot" criticism, and Faulkner suffered because he neither offered a quick cure for the evils he dramatized, as did Steinbeck and Caldwell, nor "hymned" America as another Southerner, Thomas Wolfe, was said to do (Faulkner 9) .

Later, after the work of Malcolm Cowley brought Faulkner back from the death of irrelevance he had been consigned to, adverse criticism tended to point out Faulkner's confused thought and unclear style. Warren siezes primarily upon the criticism of Alfred Kazin, who saw, as Warren put it, a distressing "gap between the talent . . . and the meaning" in Faulkner (Faulkner 14). On this point Warren appeals to the relativity of critical temperament, but on another--Kazin's criticism that Faulkner's work does not "spring from a conscious and procreative criticism of society . . . from some absolute knowledge" (Kazin 457)--Warren reveals that his is a totally different conception of art from Kazin's. Art arises from need, not a program; and the unsettled forces in Faulkner are actually (as Warren also says of Melville's poetry) a sign of that need in Faulkner. The need is the need for meaning and self-definition, but meaning and self-definition can only be painfully and partially won and only from the inside. Faulkner's A Fable fails precisely because it is "abstractly conceived" and it is "an idea deductively worked out." Faulkner's successes depended on working toward meaning "through the complexity and specificity of a literal world in which he knew his way about" (Faulkner 17).

The knowledge available to the critic is a relative knowledge, a fact which a critic should not forget:

> . . . a critic, like a writer, must finally take the risk of his own formulations--this, despite the favorite delusion of all critics, who are after all human beings, that their formulations are somehow exempt from the vicissitudes of life which the novel or poem must endure. As a matter of fact, the moment a critic sets pen to paper, or finger to keyboard, the novel or poem itself becomes the silent and sleepless critic of the critic, and it is just possible that the split which Kazin sees between talent and achievement in Faulkner, between furious expression and meaningless content, indicates not so much a split in the thing criticized as in the critic--a split in the critic himself between a mind, with the laudable appetite for "absolute knowledge," and an artistic sensibility which allows for the sincere but troubling appreciation of "talent," "technique," and "effects," and for isolated instances of pathos and drama. (Faulkner 15)

So we come back to Warren's idea of the dynamic relation between critic and "thing criticized" which makes it difficult for the critic to be faithful to his label, or, at least, should make it difficult. Warren seems almost always aware of this relativity in his criticism. The survey of criticism on Faulkner testifies to that awareness and also to something else. The artist who works for reputation is in deep trouble, for what critics like today may not be what critics like tomorrow. Or, as Warren wrote in a letter, "[W]ho wants 'justice' . . ..? What poet ever knows what another generation wants?" Then with characteristic humor and self-reflection he added, "A great alibi, anyway" (Letter to the author, 19 September 1985). In his essay on John Crowe Ransom Warren recalls how Ranson explained to him why he was going to stop writing poetry. Ransom knew he could write poems that were as good as any

he had written before, but he did not want to go on writing just for reputation. He wanted to be an "amateur" (N&SE 327). One recalls, too, Warren's assessment of Whittier, who gave up professional poetry for personal poetry, or, in a sense, became an "amateur" poet. This view of poetry, which Warren defines most clearly in the essay on Ransom equates poetry with self-knowledge: "man to be fully man must in some way or another fulfill himself as poet, as a maker" (N&SE 315). Evil might be said to be any force which stands in the way of this making, but evil might also be the extreme case of fulfillment, the making of the self through abstraction and manipulation as illusted by John Brown, Bogan Murdock, Willie Stark and Jeremiah Beaumont.

In writing of the American Romantic period for American Literature: The Makers and the Making, Warren made much of the Transcendentalists' dislike of the doctrines of Locke and Hume which could give no "certain knowledge." The Transcendentalists' desire for "certain knowledge" (which resembles Kazin's desire for an "absolute knowledge" for a "procreative criticism" of society) seemed to have been fulfilled by the philosophy of Kant. Warren's works provide a gallery of confused characters who, in driving toward their ends, are perpetually torn between these two ways of knowing, neither of which seems capable of giving man his reality on its own. The knowledge by which man creates an image of himself is not a Lockean

empiricism; but, if he renounces the world and his own senses, he distorts an external reality that will have its day. This is the Warrenesque predicament. It is, of course, not a view of man's lot which he invented; but his life-long struggle through art, social criticism, history and literary criticism constitutes one of the most massive and important responses to that dilemma in American literature.

Abundance, of course, is not to be equated with greatness, but neither is sparsity for that matter. And it not unreasonable to see Warren's prolificacy in several genres as at least one way to measure his special genius. At one level the abundance of writing is a sign of his enormous mental (and physical) energy, an energy his close friend and associate Cleanth Brooks witnessed and has described for readers ("Robert Penn Warren and American Idealism" 591). But the abundance is also a sign of the urgent need for knowledge: knowledge of man's place, knowledge of the limits of his responsibility, knowledge of the terms on which he can be a moral being even as he is forced more and more to rely on his own consciousness in searching for those terms. The abundance is one sign of Warren's willingness to risk much in the pursuit of a sustaining knowledge. Within that abundance there is another kind of abundance in the very multifariousness of forms: of the novels, of the poems, and even of the

biographies and social histories. The need is to test the characteristic vision of the spider-web world in as many situations as possible. Perhaps the ultimate "relevance" of Warren's work is that he keeps pressing the issue: how can one live separately from a society and also in identification with it? The abundance finally testifies to the belief that human beings live by the constant process of knowing themselves, not by formula or by an isolating antinomianism, but by a willed and full embracing of life in time that demands at once a recognition of context and individualism.

Warren is, therefore, neither a moral relativist nor a sceptic in the sense that T.S. Eliot is a sceptic--that is, one who conforms to tradition because knowledge is ultimately unobtainable (Csengari 33). This may be what John Burt is telling us when he writes that Warren's characteristic movement is toward an absolute understanding from which he draws back just on the brink, that Warren "negotiates between romance and the necessity of restraint" (125). I would add that the negotiation is the work of the imagination, predominantly a Coleridgean imagination, but strained through Hawthorne, Melville, and Conrad. Warren's is an imagination grounded in experience (the Southern past, the American past, the personal past). Man must try to know what he can never know. The struggle is, of course, Sisyphean, but not meaningless. The meaning is

the meaning of all tragedy, whether the story of Oedipus, Macbeth, Clyde Griffith, Willie Loman, or Willie Stark: man's potential greatness and man's inevitable failure are ineluctably and inextricably joined in one life.

After absorbing any substantial amount of the Warren oeuvre, a reader is liable to recall before anything else some of the questions: "Who am I?" "What gift, oh father, father, from that dissevering hand?" "Who Speaks for the Negro?" "Can I See Arturus from Where I Stand?" "Was all for naught?" Perhaps it is fitting that the questions are uppermost in that reader's mind. They are gleanings from a body of work that arose from the special genius of its creator's experience and vision, but which can also be viewed reasonably as a response to two great dictums: the Greek "Know thyself" and the American/Emersonian "Trust thyself." Only by self-knowledge, the body of Warren's work says, does man become a truly moral agent. In self-reflection, however, he may learn that his values are illusions. The danger of such knowledge is that man may feel alienated. He may become inactive, withdrawn from society, and almost always in Warren this condition is a sign of flight from the self. Warren believed what he saw as a central issue in Conrad, Melville, and Dreiser: the heroic thing is to "continue to walk in the world." The unillusioned must finally come to trust himself and the values he makes for himself, and he must realize that life,

like history, means the continuous revision of values. The unillusioned knows, then, that he is a constant "failure," and his greatest value may be pity for the illusions of others. And relevant too are the words describing the agony of Audubon, the Warren protagonist who seems to come closest to fullfilling both commands of "Know thyself" and "Trust thyself":

> He thinks: "What has been denied me?"
> Thinks: "There is never an answer."
>
> Thinks: "The question is the only answer."
>
> He yearns to be able to frame a definition of joy.
> (N&SP 221)

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