

**SOLITUDE AND SYMBOL:
ROBERT PENN WARREN'S
PSYCHOLOGICAL AND ARTISTIC AFFINITIES
WITH NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE**

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Solitude and Symbol:
Robert Penn Warren's Psychological and Artistic Affinities
with Nathaniel Hawthorne

An Abstract
Presented to the
Graduate and Research Council of
Austin Peay State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
of Master of Arts

By
Patricia L. Bradley
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ABSTRACT

The artistic influence exercised by Nathaniel Hawthorne's works over Robert Penn Warren's canon is a critical topic addressed by numerous Warren scholars. Warren's own analysis of Hawthorne's life and works speaks further to biographical and psychological affinities between the two authors.

Warren's introductory article on Nathaniel Hawthorne in *American Literature: The Makers and the Making* reveals that the strength of his artistic affinity with Hawthorne lies in the similarities of their themes and character structures. A biographical affinity between the two authors exists in their respective relationships with their mothers, strong-willed women who alternately inhibit and provoke a search for selfhood. Warren's and Hawthorne's psychological affinity is founded in their mutual use of symbol in their fictions. Paradoxically, symbols reveal and conceal the emerging self that they each need to know but fear apprehending in their respective works.

The novella "The Circus in the Attic," Warren's most Hawthornesque fiction, engages the artistic, biographical, and psychological affinities that Warren and Hawthorne share. Its conclusion reflects Warren's assessment of his personal, artistic, and psychological stances at that particular point in his career.

In *A Place to Come To*, written thirty years later, Warren readdresses the topic of his affinities with Hawthorne and attempts a more affirmational conclusion in this novelistic preparation for

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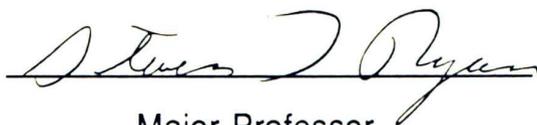
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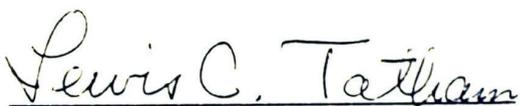
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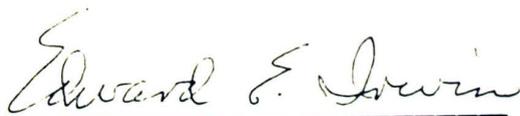


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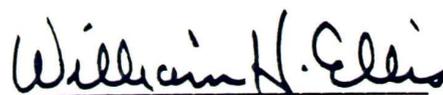


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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Although references to Nathaniel Hawthorne appear frequently in critical works dealing with Robert Penn Warren, the definitive statement of Hawthorne's influence on his twentieth-century successor has yet to be written. The validity of Warren's artistic hearkening to the Hawthornesque example is generally accepted among the community of Warren scholars, making tangential references to the existence of a link between the two fairly commonplace. Typical of these references would be Thomas Connelly's general definition of Warren's canon in terms of its attempted resolution of idea and fact, reality and idealism, or "the clash of values between a Nathaniel Hawthorne and a Ralph Waldo Emerson" (Connelly 2). When given critical expansion, the scope of such terse yet intriguing references varies from the topics of the writers' artistic affinities, to the comparisons of specific works of both authors, and finally to an awareness of Warren's artistic divergence from Hawthorne. Only one critic, R. W. B. Lewis, has moved beyond the aspects of their literary affinities to suggest the implications of deeper personal affinities between Nathaniel Hawthorne and Robert Penn Warren.

Those critics who note the artistic affinities between Warren and Hawthorne often do so in terms of the authors' similar uses of fictional elements, their choices of genre, and the comparable degrees of artistic involvement in their works. For example, Peter Wittveld writes of the similar symbolic use of "subterranean

passages, tombs, caves, . . . and watery depths . . . which [Warren and Hawthorne] identify with the human heart" (Wittveld 270-271A).

James Justus also notes a similar artistic involvement of self in the works of Warren and Hawthorne. Of that tendency on Warren's part, Justus writes that he is drawn to writers like Hawthorne who demonstrate:

. . . how configurations of one's life show up, sometimes in secret patterns, sometimes in obvious ones, as art. . . .Warren, uncommonly fascinated by figures whose real-life urgencies can be seen informing their work, is interested in the process--psychological, creative--by which the transformation occurs. (Justus 131-32)

According to John Burt, among the "real-life urgencies" which find expression in Hawthorne's works is a need for an "inwardness," which is evinced as both the promise and the threat of imaginative freedom and power. Warren, like Hawthorne, must transact a resolution between realism and romance, legalism and the higher law, realist and idealist (Burt 34-35). Additionally, the dichotomy between past and present influences Warren's and Hawthorne's choices of genre. Warren recognizes the historical romance as Hawthorne's "shadowy territory," "his own peculiar province" where he converts "the past into a myth for the present" (qtd. in *RPW: A Study of the Short Fiction* 5). Joseph Millichap adds that Warren's canon evokes its own use of the genre, and thus collectively it is "a romance of Southern history, a creative dialectic between imagination and memory" (*RPW: A Study of the Short Fiction* 4).

Katherine Snipes comments as well on the romantic elements of Warren's fiction which are similar to Hawthorne's. She observes, however, that a crucial divergence in Warren's development of "the darker, romantic consciousness" lies in his use of an "irony and self-consciousness that recognize illusion and myth as a necessary part of the human frame of mind" (Snipes 176).

Additional critics isolate specific works by Warren that demonstrate a Hawthornesque influence. For example, in her analysis of *The Cave*, Susan Donaldson explicates Warren's threefold literary inheritance from Hawthorne, which includes the religious framework of his ambiguous art, the "pervasive and massive" use of symbolism, and the influence of character and image (Donaldson 60). In a note to her article, Donaldson credits Professor Hyatt Waggoner's graduate seminar on Hawthorne and Warren for providing her with the necessary foundation for her study (Donaldson 59). Waggoner himself briefly analyzes the influence of Hawthorne on Warren's works, especially on the novel *Wilderness* (Waggoner 157-59). Marie Bell's comparison of *World Enough and Time* with *The Scarlet Letter* focuses on their similar use of the auctorial persona who, in each work, "dramatizes the limits of his knowledge in his struggle to recreate the past from his vantage point in the present (Bell 2659-2660A). Oak-Young Lee's study of Warren's and Hawthorne's tragic themes links *The Blithedale Romance* with *Meet Me in the Green Glen*, *The Scarlet Letter* with *World Enough and Time*, *The House of the Seven Gables* with *Flood*, and *The Marble Faun* with *All the King's Men* (Lee 6195-6196A).

One of the most interesting responses to Warren's affinity with Nathaniel Hawthorne is R. W. B. Lewis's reaction, not to any of his fictional or poetic works, but to Warren's own critical views of Hawthorne. In 1973, Warren published, in collaboration with Lewis and Cleanth Brooks, the ground-breaking anthology *American Literature: The Makers and the Making*. Warren's lengthy and detailed analysis of Nathaniel Hawthorne's life and artistry is included in the anthology. What Warren has to say about Hawthorne, however, proves to be of as much interest to Warren scholars as it is to Hawthorne scholars.

No fewer than three critics quote the important introductory paragraph of Warren's analysis of Hawthorne in its entirety with the purpose of explicating the artistry of Warren himself. R. W. B. Lewis, Joseph Millichap, and Katherine Snipes note the unmistakable artistic links between Warren and Hawthorne which Warren as critic unconsciously outlines in those paragraphs. R. W. B. Lewis carries this evidence of artistic affinity one step further to examine very briefly the level of personal affinity that links the two authors, explaining that "Warren's visit to American literature" was also his "visit to himself" (Lewis 587). Furthermore, for Lewis, there is no mistaking that Hawthorne was a personal hero to Warren (Lewis 588), thus explaining Lewis's sense of "the palpable passion of Warren's felt affinity *with* Hawthorne" (Lewis 587).

The purpose of this thesis is to further demonstrate Robert Penn Warren's artistic affinity with Nathaniel Hawthorne by making a close reading of Warren's introduction to Hawthorne, Warren's

novella "The Circus in the Attic," and his novel *A Place to Come To*. These three of Warren's works, one critical and the other two fictive, are further indicators of their psychological and personal kinship which Warren experienced in his study of Hawthorne.

Warren's introduction to Nathaniel Hawthorne for the textbook *American Literature: The Makers and the Making* is as meaningful to the Warren scholar for what it reveals of its author as it is for what he has to say of his subject; indeed, it would be quite easy in a study of the introduction to forget that Warren is writing about Hawthorne and not about himself. Warren's examination of Hawthorne is accomplished with depths of insight that illuminate his artistic, biographical, and psychological engagement with the nineteenth-century master.

Warren seems drawn to Hawthorne biographically in terms of his predecessor's relationship with his mother, the details of which are sketchily drawn but, for that very reason, are all the more compelling. Like Warren, whose relationship with his own mother remains a significantly undeveloped biographical area, Hawthorne appeared either unwilling or unable to speculate on the degree to which his mother influenced his personality, either artistically or otherwise.

In approaching the subject of Hawthorne as artist, Warren focuses primarily on "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" and *The Scarlet Letter*. Warren's artistic affinity with Hawthorne is made overwhelmingly evident as he writes of the thematic emphases of the short story and of Hawthorne's character development in the

novel. The multiple themes which Warren identifies in "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" are the very themes which are repeated throughout Warren's canon; furthermore, the ideologically based triangular character structure which Hawthorne utilizes in *The Scarlet Letter* is patterned several times over in Warren's own novels and short stories.

Warren's swift, sure movement from the biography and artistry of Hawthorne to the psychology of his subject speaks to a more than insightful familiarity with his topic. Warren's own belief that imaginative literature evinces the author's strivings to define himself is documented in the theory of his essays and lectures on poetry and the self and in the practice of his numerous fictive and poetic works that treat semi-autobiographical protagonists' searches for identity. Warren isolates Hawthorne's similar artistic and psychological impulses, complicated, however, by his use of pervasive symbol in his fictions. While the use of symbolism is artistically pleasing, Warren indicates that Hawthorne's reliance on it betrays his even more deeply rooted impulse to obscure the truths about himself which the symbols had originally been used to reveal. Hawthorne's instinctive knowledge of this fact created his corresponding "horror" of the use of symbol.

Warren brings his artistic, biographical, and psychological affinities with Hawthorne into focus in "The Circus in the Attic" (1947). In his novella, Warren skillfully blends all three relevant affinities into a seamless characterization in which it is difficult to know where similarities to Warren and Hawthorne leave off and

where the persona of his protagonist Bolton Lovehart begins.

Intriguingly, Bolton too is an artist whose created symbols are both necessary to his identity and prohibitive of his complete knowledge of self.

Warren leaves Bolton Lovehart at an artistic and psychological impasse at the end of "The Circus in the Attic," a conclusion made necessary by the tensions created by Warren's own Hawthornesque inability to resolve the personal and the artistic at that important time in his life. Thirty years later in *A Place to Come To* (1977), Warren, aware of approaching death and in need of affirmation, attempts to resolve the irreconcilable elements in the art of his novella and in his life. By reintroducing the same symbols that he had utilized in "The Circus in the Attic" and then removing their physical and psychic influence on the semi-autobiographical Jed Tewksbury, Warren attempts to move beyond the artistic and psychological limitations imposed on Nathaniel Hawthorne, thus permitting the protagonist and the author of *A Place to Come To* an unobstructed view of self.

Therefore, Robert Penn Warren's affinities with Nathaniel Hawthorne are much more inclusive than previous critical studies have indicated. The artistic affinities between the two writers have been addressed only in such a way as to indicate that they have been taken much for granted by Warren scholars. Meanwhile, the biographical and psychological affinities between Warren and Hawthorne are vistas which invite an initial critical exploration.

CHAPTER 2

Robert Penn Warren's "Nathaniel Hawthorne"

Robert Penn Warren's critical interest in Nathaniel Hawthorne has been demonstrated by the variety of his published treatments of his nineteenth-century forbear. As early as 1928, a certainly very youthful Warren wrote a review of a biography of Hawthorne which its author had interestingly subtitled *A Study in Solitude*. Warren speaks authoritatively to the topic of "Hawthorne as a recluse" as well as to "the remote, abstract quality of his treatment of character, and the preoccupation with symbol" ("Hawthorne, Anderson and Frost" 399), thus taking the opportunity of the book review to instruct the biography's author, a conventionally-minded Mr. Gorman, on the deficiencies of his work. Warren's admiration for Hawthorne was manifestly evident when at a much later time and for a different generation, whose language he adopts, Warren argued that "Hawthorne Was Relevant." The occasion was Warren's acceptance of the national Medal for Literature at the Library of Congress in 1970. His topic was whether or not poetry, his inclusive term for imaginative literature, was relevant to the present time. Warren's conclusion was a resounding affirmative, as one would imagine, with Hawthorne as his standard. Warren wrote that Hawthorne demonstrated "the writer's own grounding in his time, the relation of his sensibility to his time, and paradoxically enough, . . . his resistance to his time" ("Hawthorne Was Relevant" 87), all crucial elements of literary relevancy in Warren's eyes.

Warren's most lengthy and comprehensive treatment of

Hawthorne's life and fiction appeared three years later with the publication of the textbook anthology *American Literature: The Makers and the Making*. In his introduction to Nathaniel Hawthorne's works, which runs to almost thirty pages, Warren analyzes both the personal and artistic aspects of his subject, calling Hawthorne, again in the language of the decade in which Warren was writing, a "culture hero." To Warren, that term defined "the man discovering and enacting a role that changes the possibilities of a society, a role involving the deep sensibility by which experience may be newly grasped and values framed" ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 433).

Commenting on Warren's use of the term "culture hero," R. W. B. Lewis, who collaborated with Cleanth Brooks and Warren in preparing the anthology, further notes that "there is no mistaking that [Hawthorne] is a personal one" (Lewis 589) for Warren.

The extent to which Nathaniel Hawthorne was a "personal hero" to Robert Penn Warren is demonstrated as early as the first paragraph of Warren's lengthy introduction. In it Warren encapsulates Hawthorne the man and Hawthorne the artist in such a way as "to convey both Warren's sense of Hawthorne's creative passion, and the palpable passion of Warren's affinity *with* [him]" (Lewis 587). The passage that follows could just as well have been the occasion of Warren's speaking on Warren:

He lived in the right ratio--right for the fueling of his genius--between an attachment to his region and a detached assessment of it; between attraction to the world and contempt for its gifts; between a

powerful attraction to women and a sexual flinch; between a capacity for affection and an innate coldness; between aesthetic passion and moral concern; between a fascinated attentiveness to the realistic texture, forms, and characteristics of nature and human nature, and a compulsive flight from that welter of life toward abstract ideas; and between, most crucially of all, a deep knowledge of himself and an ignorance of himself instinctively cultivated in a fear of the darker potentialities of self.

The drama of such subjective tensions is played out objectively in the work. Hawthorne is the first American writer of fiction in whose work we can sense the inner relation of life to fiction. . . . Neither the tales of Irving nor the novels of Cooper carry, in Hawthorne's way, a sense of the involvement of the creating personality. ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 432-33)

Fortuitously for the Warren scholar, Warren's analysis of the involvement of Hawthorne as a "creating personality" occasions the involvement of Warren as a "critical personality." Warren's regard for Hawthorne, however, is as reflective of his personal reaction to Hawthorne's artistic abilities as it is a product of his objective judgment of them; therefore, Warren's analysis of Hawthorne's creative personality and artistry allows the reader to appreciate those very aspects of Robert Penn Warren and his fiction more fully.

Warren focuses primarily on three elements of Hawthorne's

fiction: its thematic interpretation, characterization, and the role of the artist, including Hawthorne himself as well as his fictional artists. These three areas of focus are natural springboards for Warren as he attempts to access Hawthorne as an artist because they are the very ways by which Warren's affinity with Hawthorne is most viable.

Warren treats several of Hawthorne's shorter fictions, namely "Alice Doane's Appeal" and "The Gentle Boy," with an eye toward the early indications of his important later themes. It is the story "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" (1832), however, which receives Warren's most lengthy thematic analysis. Artistically, of course, it is a more solidly-crafted story than the previously mentioned early stories. Thematically, because it bears a close resemblance to many of Warren's own short fictions, this interpretation of Hawthorne's story suggests artistic concerns which are apparent in Warren's own writings.

Basic to the understanding of the thematic structure of "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" is the reader's recognition of it as an initiation story. Initiation was a theme with which Warren was certainly familiar, having written about initiatory experiences in several of the short fictions included in *The Circus in the Attic* (1947) such as "Blackberry Winter," "Christmas Gift," and "When the Light Gets Green," as well as in portions of his longer fictions such as *All the King's Men* (1946) and *A Place to Come To* (1977). What seems to interest Warren most, however, is the Freudian slant that he and other critics have observed in Hawthorne's initiation of

Robin, particularly in the tension between father figure and son. Warren makes little of the fact that Hawthorne's death preceded Freud's conclusions by more than a generation, his contention being that Freud himself recognized that his theories had been in use long before he had given them utterance. It is understandable, however, that Warren would identify an Oedipal conflict as the thematic force behind Hawthorne's short story since, once again, such conflicts are abundant in Warren's own work. One has only to consider the various mother-son and father-son (or surrogate father-son) struggles which repeatedly appear in Warren's fiction to see verification of that fact. Robin's Oedipal dilemma, like the dilemmas of Perse Munn, Jack Burden, Bolton Lovehart, and Jeremiah Beaumont, to name a few of Warren's relevant protagonists, is whether to prolong his search for a father with the intent of emulating him or to repudiate and displace the father figure and assert his own identity.

Warren then changes his perspective of Hawthorne's story to analyze it from the standpoint of "moral" theme, the basis of which can be found in what Warren considers to be Robin's "fundamental *moral* option: to go home. . . or to stay in the city." According to Warren, returning home would mean seeking refuge in "a dream of innocence, which would really be ignorance and cowardice" while remaining in the city would indicate a choice for experience, moral awareness, and coming to grips with "the hard terms of actuality" ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 442). Again, Warren's own works demonstrate a familiarity with this type of moral theme and may explain his predilection for seeing its use by Hawthorne. Witness,

for example, Jack Burden's many trips "home" before he finally realizes his moral necessity to "go out of the house and go into the convulsion of the world" (*All the King's Men* 438); Bolton Lovehart's adolescent urges to wander from home and finally to run away to the circus, at first physically and later imaginatively realized in "The Circus in the Attic"; Seth's assertion in "Blackberry Winter" that his real home-leaving had been occasioned by his family's encounter with a city-bred tramp, whom Seth claims to have followed symbolically "all the years" ("Blackberry Winter" 87); and Jed Tewksbury's inexplicable yet instinctive yearning for a "place" despite his compulsive world-wanderings in *A Place to Come To*. Home means safety and certainty, but only in their most insular and constricting forms. Hawthorne leaves Robin trembling on the brink of his moral decision; Warren's protagonists view their choices and, time and again, expose themselves to the vicissitudes of the world in which they must earn their moral awareness. In an interview which follows the publication of the Hawthorne introduction by only a few years, Warren is to reiterate the concept of the fundamental moral option: ". . . I do attach a significance to the way a man deals with the place God drops him in. His reasons for going or staying. And his piety or impiety" ("Interview with Eleanor Clark and Robert Penn Warren" 329).

Finally, Warren illuminates the theme of "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" in terms of the story's historical setting, and, once again, his use of this particular thematic approach to Hawthorne's story can be demonstrated in his own works. For example, Warren cites

the significance of the story's being set during the American Revolution, a fact that is especially appropriate in the light of his earlier Freudian interpretation. Robin, with his American brothers, is in rebellion, not only against the numerous father figures who appear in the course of the story, but also against the royal governor who is both his kinsman and the representative of the British crown. Warren further recognizes, however, Hawthorne's "strange inversion of the officially patriotic view" in which the "patriots" are pictured as "a dehumanized mob, a nightmare crew" ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 443) and not the nobly oppressed farmers of popular historical cant. Warren subscribes to the interpretation of Daniel Hoffman with respect to Hawthorne's iconoclastic presentation of his historical setting: the riotousness and violence of the mob can be taken as "a kind of Saturnalia," and, consistent with that image, one could be assured that "after the debauch, necessary to the rebirth of society, order will be restored and the roots of continuity rediscovered" ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 443).

Warren's interpretation of Hawthorne's story through its historical setting parallels the historical interpretations of his own works. Certainly, an awareness of history permeates Warren's canon; specifically, Warren's view of history as myth finds an echo in what he identifies as Hawthorne's deliberate debunking of patriotic motives in "My Kinsman, Major Molineux." Again, one could cite examples from Warren's works where history and its mythlike reconstruction by later generations are thematic concerns of the author, but none so relevant to our purpose here than the novella

"The Circus in the Attic," in which the chief metaphor for war, history, and rebellion exists in Warren's image of the circus. In actuality, the rag-tags of Bardsville's home guard were ill-trained, boastful "boys who could ride like circus performers and shoot anything that would hold powder and to whom the war was a gaudy picnic that their tyrannous mothers would not let them attend" ("Circus" 6), but after the war is over, the boy soldiers are creatively memorialized by the illusion-hungry community that they were sworn to preserve. Warren describes the soldiers in, at first, unobtrusive circus imagery, which gradually coalesces into this description of the circus world of Bolton Lovehart's fascinated adolescence:

. . . the tumult [was] like a flame-streaked Dionysiac revelry or like the terror-stricken confusion of a barbarous tribe, rich in colored cloths and jangling metals and garish tinsel and savage, symbolic beasts, making ready to flee before the cosmic threat of fire or flood. ("Circus" 24)

Bolton's vision of the Dionysiac "debauch," similar to the Saturnalian debauch that Warren identifies in Hawthorne's story, is the act of ultimate rebellion to which all young men must aspire in order to create a world consistent with their psychological, social, and spiritual needs. Warren's novella exists, in part, as a warning to those who would be blinded by the myth of history. Consequently, Warren defines "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" in terms of what it has to say about those who *do* subscribe to mythic history. For Warren,

the historical theme of the story is ultimately shaped by what he calls Hawthorne's "rebuke to the easy chauvinism, the democratic mystique, the doctrine of manifest destiny, the belief in automatic progress, and the moral complacency parading as philosophy which characterized much American life of Hawthorne's time and, it must be added, of our time too" ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 443).

Based solely on the similarities between Warren's own major themes and those he identifies as Hawthorne's, it is little wonder that Warren should choose to thematically explicate Hawthorne's story "My Kinsman, Major Molineux." All that Warren sees of thematic consequence in the story has been mirrored in the dialectics of Warren's own fiction. Rebellious sons struggle against tyrannous fathers, and Oedipal relationships develop; yearnings for innocence and home are juxtaposed with the necessary evil of worldly knowledge, and moral choices must be made as a result; and the use of historical fabrication as a vindication for human behavior is compared to a realistic acceptance of the past in order to make sense of the present and future, thus establishing the paradox of the artist whose aim to convert "the past into a myth for the present" ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 459) is both a curse and a blessing. Even if viewed simply in terms of similarities in theme, Warren's affinity with Nathaniel Hawthorne is indeed a vital one.

From his short stories, Warren then turns to Hawthorne's greatest novelistic achievement, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850). That novel brought Hawthorne both gain and loss: *The Scarlet Letter* was foremost a financial success, Hawthorne's first, and one in which he

had invested years of solitary apprenticeship. The losses which heralded Hawthorne's great burst of creative energy, however, were personal and irretrievable. The artistic energy that Hawthorne required to generate his writing stemmed from two devastating personal blows: the first, the loss of his post in the custom house, which, though a demanding position, nonetheless provided some financial security; and the second the death of his mother. To use Hawthorne's word, both events were crucial to his overcoming his "adamant"; Warren interprets Hawthorne's use of this word to mean that "before the death of his mother he had suffered from some stony inhibition of his emotional life, from which the shock of her death released him for its fullest expression" ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 445). If, however, Hawthorne was released to a freer expression of his true emotions, one must wonder if the benefits of such a release were not overcome by new restrictions. Hawthorne himself called his novel " 'positively a hell-fired story, into which I found it almost impossible to throw a cheering light' " ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 445). Family and friends reacted to *The Scarlet Letter* in ways that Hawthorne's son Julian seemed to echo in his reflection that "he found it impossible to reconcile the father he had known to the author of the fiction" ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 446). One is left to speculate whether Hawthorne revealed to himself an identity *he* had not known existed upon writing *The Scarlet Letter*.

Warren's treatment of *The Scarlet Letter* makes for fascinating reading, both in terms of his tone and style as well as in terms of his masterful handling of the complex and multifaceted

materials contained within the novel. What emerges as the primary element in Warren's treatment of the novel, however, and the element to which Warren himself shows the most affinity through his own works, is Hawthorne's use of characterization. With geometric precision, Warren outlines the triangular structure of the characters in the first scenes of the novel. Like the sides of a triangle, each of whose length is determined by the interdependence it experiences with the other sides, so too are the three main characters dependent upon each other for their identities within the novel. Such structuring is not unknown to Warren himself, in whose fiction one repeatedly finds similar character triangularization.

The classic "eternal triangle," which generates sexual momentum with the triangularization of the beautiful woman, her displaced lover, and her illicit lover, is one source of the identities for the three main characters of *The Scarlet Letter* and the basis for what Warren, early in his analysis, terms their "archetypal stances." Consistent with this formulation is the Oedipal triangle, whose frequent use by Warren was noted earlier. Warren, however, chooses to define Hawthorne's characters in a way more in keeping with his own. To him, Hawthorne's characters are revelatory of "the tension, in life and in man, between 'nature' and 'idea' " ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 449).

Hester, the character in the novel who embodies the natural, irrationally but inevitably yearns for some quality beyond her naturalness, thus explaining the attractions that men of ideas like

Chillingworth and Dimmesdale hold for her. The two male figures manifest their lives of ideas in their respective pursuits, Chillingworth in his love of books and intellectual studies and Dimmesdale in his love of God. Both see the service of mankind as the outcome of their veneration for abstract ideas; ultimately, however, the limitations inherent in living the inward life of ideas makes Hester's energizing naturalness not only attractive but also necessary to each of them. Ironically, Warren identifies their mutual needs for Hester and the invigoration of the natural as the one quality which throws the two male characters together and makes them "more important to each other than Hester is to either"; of Dimmesdale and Chillingworth, Warren points out "theirs is the truest 'marriage' " ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 451). A logical next step from Warren's conclusion would be that the true "marriage" of the primary male characters exists because they are in reality the two disparate halves of one personality.

Interestingly, it is that very device--the playing out of thematic tensions primarily between the males of the character triangle instead of between one of the males and the female--which is responsible for what Warren critics often identify as the one-dimensional quality of his fictional women (the quality which, by the way, most stymies feminist readings of Warren). In *All the King's Men*, for example, Anne Stanton, while an adequately geometric complement to both Jack Burden and Willie Stark in terms of the triangular characterization of the three, serves as little more than the catalyst of nature to the tensions that shape and reshape

Burden's thematic "marriage" to Stark. In Warren's fiction, men of ideas are no longer scientists like Chillingworth or religionists like Dimmesdale: instead, they are politicians, combining the best and worst qualities of the other two. Stark's politics of active participation neatly complement Jack Burden's politics of observant inactivity.

The Oedipal struggle and its consequent triangle is more overtly stated in Warren's novella "Prime Leaf," in which Edith Hardin tries to assert the naturalness in her personality on both her husband and father-in-law. Warren's symbolic use of the hearth, from which Edith holds sway, suggests her attempt to induce natural family feelings to the relationship of the elder and younger Hardins. Their tragedy is played out, however, under the stronger influence of politics and "ideas" as, in a reversal of the accepted Oedipal denouement and in a negation of nature itself, the older man survives the younger.

In another of Warren's short stories, "Blackberry Winter," the triangular configuration of character is again present, this time consisting of the tramp and the parents of the young boy Seth. Although Seth's mother is a strong, self-assured country woman, her dependence upon Seth's father is made evident by her death " 'of a broken heart' " ("Blackberry Winter" 86), in the prime of life, soon after the accidental death of her husband. Her domain is the natural realm of the farm, and she concerns herself with the chicks, turkey poults, and flowers which have been damaged or destroyed by the unseasonal "gully-washer." It is she who pronounces it "blackberry

winter" as Seth warms himself at the hearth, but Seth manages to escape shoeless from home and hearth to confront the ideological contrasts exemplified by the two primary male characters in the story. Seth's mother may take her role as the third side in the triangle of character, but the real thematic tension of the story is played out by Seth's father and the tramp, who represent good and evil, innocence and experience, and lifestyles old and new: once again, the two halves of one entity.

In the novella "The Circus in the Attic," the triangular configuration of the main characters is so basic to the theme that it continually forms and reforms itself during the story's course. Initially, Warren presents the reader with the triangularization of the Loveharts: Simon the father, Louise the mother, and Bolton the son. That triangular pattern is repeated in the crafted symbol of Bolton's circus, in which the images of the impresario, the girl acrobat, and the clown appear. Finally, the figures reassume flesh-and-blood identities as Jasper Parton, Mrs. Parton, and again Bolton Lovehart. Despite the care that Warren takes in his delineation of both Louise Lovehart and Mrs. Parton, the human types of the girl acrobat, it is clear to the reader that Bolton's real regard is directed toward Simon Lovehart and Jasper Parton, the impresario figures in his life. The strength of Bolton's regard has ultimately to do with his search for identity. At Simon Lovehart's death, for example, Bolton is filled with remorse for the questions that will forever remain unasked of his father and unanswered by him. In a sense, there is a part of Bolton's identity which will be

forever obscured because he cannot ask those questions of his dead father. Later, Bolton's marriage to Mrs. Parton reveals suspiciously little conjugal interaction between the two, as if to emphasize that the importance of their union lies primarily in providing Bolton with a surrogate son. Through Bolton Lovehart's relationship with Jasper, he achieves an even more important identity than that of Mrs. Parton's husband; he becomes, rather, the spiritual father of all the "brave boys" who fight and die in glorious battle and who are the successors to the Civil War "heroes" of Bardsville's collective imagination. Mrs. Parton's scandalous death causes scarcely a ripple in Bolton's placid life. Instead, he has truly mourned Jasper, who had made the escape into the world of active ideas that Bolton could not accomplish; the loss of his wife merely sends Bolton, relievedly, back to his attic, a place of illusion and ideas, where a spiritualized Jasper, the elusive other half of Bolton's total self, also "will be at home" ("Circus" 62).

A final example of Warren's use of the type of triangular characterization that he sees in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* is demonstrated in his novel *World Enough and Time* (1950), especially appropriate in this context because that novel has been called Warren's version of *The Scarlet Letter*. About his own novel, Warren admits "I was really thinking, I suppose, somewhere in the back of my mind about Hawthorne and some of his materials" (Baker 261). Warren's and Hawthorne's novels are similar, however, in ways that suggest more than a subliminal connection. The three main characters in Warren's novel correspond in an amazing way to

Hawthorne's characters. Rachel Jordan, in particular, bears a remarkable resemblance to Hawthornesque heroines, whom Warren describes as being "dark, passionate temptresses, perilous to have to do with--especially for a man of uneasy disposition" ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 444); these feminine qualities are foreboding to Warren's and Hawthorne's masculine characters, who are noted for their dispositions of unease, being obsessed of ideas as they are. Like Georgiana from Hawthorne's story "The Birth-mark," Rachel bears a slight skin discoloration on her face to which Jeremiah Beaumont, in an impulse identical to the desires of Georgiana's "swains," has no greater desire than to press his lips. Like Aylmer, Jeremiah's periodic reaction to the mark on Rachel's face acts as a barometer of his ability to feel love and compassion for his wife.

The physical resemblance, therefore, of Warren's heroine to Hawthorne's must have been a deliberate choice on Warren's part and compounds the symbolic similarities not only between Rachel Jordan and Georgiana, but between Warren's heroine and Hester Prynne as well. Rachel, like Hester, also demonstrates a "naturalness" in her personality. Even though her domain is one of neglected fields and a ruined rose garden, her marriage to Beaumont illustrates that the glories of nature may not be irretrievably lost. In fact, Jeremiah experiences simple joy and soul's satisfaction in seeing those natural domains respond to his care. Beaumont's near conversion to Rachel's naturalness is finally demonstrated by his fascination for the West. Like Dimmesdale, who, according to Warren, receives a burst of energy at the thought that he, Hester,

and Pearl could escape Boston to make a new life, Beaumont is also revitalized by his visits West and his visions of what life there with Rachel would be like. When Jeremiah experiences the forced migration west at the end of the novel, he accomplishes what Dimmesdale had been unable to achieve, but at a cost. According to Warren, when Hawthorne's character contemplates escape from Boston with Hester, he is courting a condition that would be even more psychologically crippling than his already existing feelings of guilt because "man, in seeking the freedom of nature. . . loses his identity, that is, his moral history" ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 449). Jeremiah is personally incapable of seeing his western plans through, however, and this incapability, coupled with his gradual emotional estrangement from Rachel, not only illustrates the truth of Warren's belief that Hester and Dimmesdale are to be forever separated because they represent "the doom of man's essential division of flesh and spirit" ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 449), but also makes that belief a tenet of Beaumont's own relationships with both Rachel and Wilkie Barron. If his wife represents naturalness, Beaumont represents the man of ideas, and as such is much more "married" to Wilkie Barron, the man who puts his ideas to work in a fashion that the world would approve. Long after his love for Rachel has diminished and all but died, Beaumont retains feeling enough for Wilkie to be alternately warmed by the evidences of his friendship and chilled by his duplicity.

Like Hester Prynne and the previously mentioned of Warren's women characters, Rachel's personality is defined by an ultimate

passivity and her outright inability to act; in fact, the historical model from whom she was drawn was actually the instigator of the plan to murder her former lover. Events from the novels consistently overwhelm Warren's female characters, however, and the thematic tensions of the novel must be played out primarily by the masculine sides of the character triangle. Furthermore, since the two masculine characters of each triangle are in reality the two sides of one identity struggling for psychic unity, the tension becomes even more an inward one, requiring that a personal resolution be accomplished before either male can relate to the feminine third side of the triangle. Since Warren's plots focus primarily on the masculine characters who are seeking such resolution, it is no wonder that Warren's women ultimately lack full substance and force.

Before leaving the topic of Hawthorne's premier novel, let us address Warren's views on Hawthorne's famous ambiguity, that which accounts for the "hell-firedness" of *The Scarlet Letter*. To this topic, Warren adds his own peculiar literary ideology and, in the process, hearkens to his earlier remarks on the historical theme of "My Kinsman, Major Molineux." Ambiguity exists, not only in Hawthorne's literary world but also in Warren's, because, according to Warren, "men must live by the logic of their illusions, as best they can" ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 453). Warren notes the truth of this statement with respect to Hawthorne's Hester, Dimmesdale, and Chillingworth; Warren's readers cannot ignore its validity for Warren's Perse Munn, Bolton Lovehart, Jeremiah Beaumont, and Jed

Tewksbury as well. Warren continues:

. . . what compensation is possible in such a world comes from the human capacity for achieving scale and grandeur even in illusion, one might say by insisting on the coherence of the illusion, and the capacity for giving pity. ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 453)

What may be tangentially true of Hawthorne's tortured threesome from *The Scarlet Letter*, however, is overwhelmingly true, time and again, of Warren's own triangulates. If, according to Warren, "people always believe what truth they have to believe to go on being the way they are" ("The Circus in the Attic" 8), then Warren's people are defined by their illusions, and to deprive them of their illusions is to strip them of their carefully constructed identities. Only when characters like Jack Burden, Jeremiah Beaumont, Bolton Lovehart, and Jed Tewksbury exercise the ability to forgive others for the illusions they too hold dear can they be allowed to keep *their* illusions and thus their identities. Only by extending such "pity" can Warren's characters expect validation for their illusions and their images of themselves.

We have illustrated thus far that an "affinity" between Nathaniel Hawthorne and Robert Penn Warren does exist, at least in terms of what Warren has to say about Hawthorne's use of theme and character and what can be correspondingly observed in Warren's own use of those fictional elements. Additionally, there remains a third aspect of that affinity between the two authors, and it is one which, in terms of its personal impact on Warren, would certainly

dominate the other two. That third aspect is illuminated by Warren's interpretation of Hawthorne's concept of the artist and how it is revealed in Warren's own fiction.

According to Warren, Nathaniel Hawthorne lived his life in a never-resolved artistic quandary, which had begun to formulate itself during his years at Bowdoin College. In contrast to his compulsiveness in diverging from the popular activities of his associates there, Hawthorne's journals revealed him to be a young man who yearned "to be 'a man in society,' to learn 'the deep, warm secret' by which other people seemed to live but which somehow eluded him" ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 434). Ironically, Hawthorne chose writing as his introduction to that society and lived the life of a recluse instead, honing his artistic talents with the hope that someday they would provide him entry into society and knowledge of the "deep, warm secret." Instead, Hawthorne developed an "increasing sense of being estranged from normal experience" and "began to feel himself a failure as a man" ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 436).

Warren further suggests that the sense of failure that Hawthorne felt, both early and late in his career, derived in part from his inability--or was it perhaps a disinclination?--to discover himself fully in his own writings. Warren intuits that, for Hawthorne, creation was "a process of discovery, ultimately self-discovery" ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 459). Inherent, however, in Hawthorne's creative method was his use of symbolism, and while Warren defends Hawthorne's use of "symbolic fictions" ("Nathaniel

Hawthorne" 459) as being appropriate to the contradictory and paradoxical implications contained within the best of his writings, he agrees with the conclusions of Charles Feidelson, Jr., who says that Hawthorne was ultimately horrified by his dependence on that literary tool. Warren postulates that symbolism was as close as Hawthorne's genius could carry him to self-revelation and self-discovery. While Hawthorne's masterful use of symbolism meant literary success, it also denoted personal failure because it was the process that obscured self-knowledge, the possession of which Hawthorne ultimately feared and avoided.

Warren asserts that Hawthorne's horror of symbolism is most naturally expressed in his many stories dealing with artists and artist figures. Naming as examples "The Artist of the Beautiful," "The Snow Image," "Ethan Brand," "The Birth-mark," and "Rappaccini's Daughter," Warren indicates that all of these stories, in some form or other, shows Hawthorne's contempt for and fear of his symbolic "art." Art betrays the "weakness and frustration" of the artist who is forced to choose illusion over reality, and thus it earns Hawthorne's contempt. More basic to Hawthorne's fear of symbolism, however, is the destructive nature of art which negates brotherhood and leads the artist to convert " 'man and woman to be his puppets.' " Warren then takes Hawthorne's statement from "Ethan Brand" one step further to add that one of the most terrible things that art reveals "is not that the artist converts man and woman into puppets, but that the artist may become a 'puppet' caught in a process that he has initiated but cannot control"

("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 460).

Warren's interpretation of Hawthorne's stylistic use of symbolism as well as his interpretation of Hawthorne's view of the artist are convincingly stated and, as one would expect from a literary critic of Warren's caliber, solidly supported by both Hawthorne's own words and works. Ultimately, however, whether Hawthorne did or did not harbor within his creative soul a horror of the symbolism which graces his works, it is enough for our purposes that *Warren believed* he did. In the light of Warren's conclusions about Hawthorne's concept of the artist and the symbolism which illustrates the concept and in view of what has previously been demonstrated in this chapter of Warren's felt artistic affinity with Hawthorne, a more basic question about Warren himself remains to be answered: how much of what Warren perceives as Nathaniel Hawthorne's horror of symbolism and fear for himself in the role of the artist does Robert Penn Warren share?

The answer to such a question lies in two of Warren's own fictional works: the novella "The Circus in the Attic" (1947) and his final novel *A Place to Come To* (1977). "The Circus in the Attic" is one of Robert Penn Warren's most genuinely Hawthornesque works and demonstrates that Warren did share the concerns of Hawthorne regarding his own role as artist and his artistic use of symbol. Warren's novella contains his comparable use of the elements of theme and character which Warren identifies in the greatest of Hawthorne's fiction. Additionally, "The Circus in the Attic" makes extensive use of symbol and at the same time comments on the role

of the artist in the real world. The fact that the novella immediately followed publication of Warren's novel, *All the King's Men*, which was a great literary success, but preceded by only a few years his divorce from his first wife, which Warren must have viewed as a personal failure, makes "The Circus in the Attic" even more of a statement of Warren's emotional affinity with Hawthorne. In a study of "The Circus in the Attic" the reader can escape neither the impact of Warren's profound artistic affinity with Hawthorne nor the force of his personal affinity with him.

Published thirty years later, *A Place to Come To* signals Warren's return, not to Hawthornesque fiction like "The Circus in the Attic," but a return nonetheless to the thematic and symbolic concerns of the novella and hence to Hawthorne's concerns. *A Place to Come To* bears striking similarities to "The Circus in the Attic" in theme and symbol, but its final progression in plot from the earlier work demonstrates it to be Warren's personal repudiation, whether conscious or unconscious, of the Hawthornesque horror of symbol and the distance that the artist creates between himself and reality. The following chapters will trace the strength of Robert Penn Warren's personal and literary affinity with Nathaniel Hawthorne by a thorough analysis of the plot, theme, and symbol of "The Circus in the Attic." A close study of similar fictional elements in *A Place to Come To* will demonstrate Warren's recognition of that affinity and his subsequent desire to escape it.

As the recipient of the National Medal for Literature in 1970, Robert Penn Warren argued in his acceptance speech that "Hawthorne

Was Relevant" because "we find in his work a complex, tangled, and revolutionary vision of the soul, which we recognize as our own" ("Hawthorne Was Relevant" 87). Although this statement was generally applicable to all the Americans whom Warren addressed, it was particularly applicable to Robert Penn Warren himself. Turning again to the opening paragraph of Warren's textbook introduction "Nathaniel Hawthorne," one is again struck by the assessment that Warren makes of Hawthorne's genius and its literary proximity to Warren's own. One notes that to Warren, "most crucially of all," the import of Hawthorne's "deep knowledge of himself and. . . ignorance of himself [was] instinctively cultivated in a fear of the darker potentialities of self" ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 432-33). According to Warren, it was this "right ratio" among others that fueled Hawthorne's genius. In "The Circus in the Attic" and *A Place to Come To*, the conflict between the desire for self-knowledge and the fear of it becomes the source of the internal dialogue that fires Robert Penn Warren's genius as well.

CHAPTER 3

"The Circus in the Attic": Evidences of Robert Penn Warren's Link with Nathaniel Hawthorne

When read in the light of his revealing introduction to Nathaniel Hawthorne in the anthology *American Literature: The Makers and the Making*, his novella "The Circus in the Attic" emerges as Robert Penn Warren's most essentially Hawthornesque work. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, parallels in characterization exist between Warren's novella and Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, primarily in the triangularization of the three main characters in both works. In Warren's novella, the one constant of the three triangular character structures is Bolton Lovehart. The integral identities of and relationships among the triangulates in each structure remain fixed even though their surface identities vary, thus elevating each character to a symbolic, almost archetypal, level.

Also, we have seen how "The Circus in the Attic" contains all the themes which Warren identifies in Hawthorne's story "My Kinsman, Major Molineux." Warren's novella is markedly Oedipal, shifting the father-son and mother-son relationships to fit the plot as needed. What Warren calls the "moral" theme, the internal struggle for personal growth usually resolved by one's remaining at home or leaving, is present as well. Additionally apparent is the view of history as myth, a uniquely Warrenesque theme which he also identifies in Hawthorne's work.

Warren's use of symbolism, the third quality of "The Circus in

the Attic" which illustrates his affinity with Nathaniel Hawthorne, is perhaps the most convincing element of kinship. As Warren himself explains in his analysis of Hawthorne's works, symbolism, while artistically pleasing, was the one element of his fiction which Hawthorne feared and finally repudiated because it demonstrated the artist's dichotomous desires to discover knowledge of himself and yet to shadow those aspects of himself which he feared knowing. Similarities of theme and characterization alone might be viewed as only the technical means by which Robert Penn Warren declares his artistic affinities with Nathaniel Hawthorne; Warren's use of symbol, however, represents his unconscious claim to a personal affinity with Hawthorne.

Ultimately, "The Circus in the Attic" is much more than Warren's exercise in writing Hawthornesque fiction. To argue that the novella's themes, characters, and symbols represent a mere rubber-stamp of Hawthorne's most memorable fiction limits both the novella as art and Warren as artist. Instead, Warren adds an intensely personal touch to the fictional elements of theme, character, and symbol in his story; ironically, the sense of the writer which pervades those elements only serves to intensify the affinities that the reader observes between Warren and Hawthorne.

To discuss the ways in which Warren's artistic and personal affinities with Hawthorne are demonstrated by "The Circus in the Attic," the element of characterization in the novella must be further examined, concentrating primarily on Warren's protagonist, Bolton Lovehart. If Warren's goal had been only to write a story that

resembles a Hawthorne tale, his portrayal of Bolton Lovehart as the artist who prefers illusion to reality would have been sufficient for that purpose. The characterization of Bolton, however, accomplishes more than establishing Warren's artistic kinship with Hawthorne; in many ways, while still maintaining his identity as an artistic entity, Bolton is both the Hawthorne whom Warren "creates" in his critical article and Warren himself.

Returning to the crucial passage from "Nathaniel Hawthorne" which so succinctly illustrates Warren's felt affinity with Nathaniel Hawthorne, we notice that Bolton Lovehart demonstrates those carefully phrased qualities as well, making him a type of the Hawthorne whom Warren observed and thus a type of Warren himself. To paraphrase Warren's previously quoted assessment of Hawthorne, Bolton Lovehart's artistic genius is also fueled by his ability to feel an attachment for his region and at the same time distance himself from it; Bolton likewise yearns to experience the "deep warm secret" of the world but is fundamentally inhibited from being able to discover it in his own life; he too is confounded by the discovery that the sexual experience is both "a victory and a betrayal" ("Circus" 37); he also has a fascinated awareness of the tumult and swirl of humanity around him but his accessibility to it comes only through abstraction; and, finally, Bolton Lovehart seeks identity, but his only tool in that search is his artistry, which, because it finds expression in dark symbols, conceals as much as it reveals.

The character of Bolton Lovehart has its origins in both

Warren's conscious and instinctive artistry. Bolton must certainly have been a modeling of John Wesley Venable, an actual citizen of Hopkinsville, Kentucky, whose own miniature circus was a life-long obsession (Boone 11). For all intents and purposes, however, Warren's protagonist is in reality a Hawthorne type whose roots, both psychically and physically, are sunk deeply into the Tennessee-Kentucky locale of Warren's boyhood. Bolton's hometown of Bardsville has been identified as Clarksville, Tennessee, a town that is very near the smaller Guthrie of Warren's birth (Boone 15).

Hawthorne, Warren, and Bolton Lovehart are men whom their communities considered scholars, admired for their intellectual pursuits, and consistently misunderstood. For example, when Bardsville's menfolk engage in understandably limited speculation on how Bolton occupies his time, their only conclusion reflects their rejection of the realm of ideas for which they have little appreciation: " 'He never did a damned thing else all his life. Me, I had to get out and chase the almighty dollar. Give me nothing else to do and I'd sit on my tail and read me some books' " ("Circus" 50). Salem society must have thought much the same of Hawthorne who, according to Warren, ". . . read widely, by one account every book in the library of the Salem Athenaeum--where he wouldn't go himself but sent his sister Elizabeth to fetch his reading matter" ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 435). One imagines that there must have been a time or two when residents of Guthrie, Kentucky, had similar thoughts on Robert Penn Warren's scholarly habits.

A further parallel between Bolton and Hawthorne is the

relationship each experienced with his mother. The details of Robert Penn Warren's relationship with his mother are tantalizingly vague, but perhaps what Warren recognizes critically about the maternal pressures on Hawthorne and what he voices artistically about Louise Bolton Lovehart can speak to that biographical omission. Both Hawthorne and Bolton Lovehart are emotionally inhibited by their mothers, whose deaths produce in them emotional releases countered by fears of similar mortality.

Finally, Hawthorne, Warren, and Bolton Lovehart are overwhelmingly aware of the past. To explain Hawthorne's preference for historical settings rather than contemporary ones, Warren writes:

. . . a complex of factors in his family history and in his psychological makeup forced him to turn from the present and seek certainties and compensations in the past, and those factors, in the end, defined the laws of his imagination.

("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 458)

Bolton too prefers the past, but his two finished chapters for his history of Carruthers County retell only the official stories of "The Coming of the Fathers" and "The Battle of Bardsville," the arrowheads which decorate the sagging shelves of his attic refuge have been "long since washed clean of whatever hot blood had stained them" ("Circus" 41-42), and the vivid colors of Simon Lovehart's regimental flag have softened with the passage of time. This is history which absolves him of passionate involvement and in

which "imaginative truth can be envisioned" ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 459). It is altogether appropriate that when Bardville imagines that Bolton is writing the objective history of the county, he is really creating imaginative truth, his circus in the attic.

Ultimately then, their shared identities as artists forge the strongest bonds of psychic kinship among Hawthorne, Warren, and Bolton Lovehart. As Warren was to comment in a 1970 speech of acceptance for one of his numerous awards and honors, Nathaniel Hawthorne, in his own time, was a man who "sat in an upper room, totally withdrawn from the real world, and wrote stories. No doubt writing stories was bad enough, but his stories were about the distant past." Paradoxically, the thrust of Warren's speech was to demonstrate the relevance of imaginative literature as a cure "for the disease of our time. . . the sense of being cut off from reality. Man feels that a screen has descended. . . between him and other men, between him and the self" ("Hawthorne Was Relevant" 87). Generally speaking, Warren states that "the process of composition is, in one degree or another, a movement toward meaning" (89). Some years later, Warren would write more specifically about Hawthorne's literary motive: "[Hawthorne] implies, therefore, that he writes not *from* a predetermined meaning. . . , but *toward* a meaning, creation thus being a process of discovery, ultimately of self-discovery" ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 459). In Hawthorne's case, as Warren was later to conclude, the result of his creative withdrawal was not a greater fellowship with the world but an increased feeling of alienation from it--not greater self-knowledge,

but a demonstration that self-knowledge was what he feared most of all.

So Bolton Lovehart's dilemma is similar to Nathaniel Hawthorne's. He too is compelled to serve an apprenticeship to his art while locked away in his attic, and although he feels "up there above the world, the peace and purity of spirit that comes when vision and cunning are commensurate" ("Circus" 42), his seemingly omniscient vantage point only serves to make him feel more withdrawn from the community. Bolton compounds the artistic mystique, not by writing stories or even the histories that the Bardsville residents have assumed are his subject, but by crafting circus figures from wood and cloth. Bardsville would have said, uncomprehendingly, that he was only playing with dolls. Perhaps the lack of comprehension that Hawthorne's society demonstrated toward his subjects and the wonder that Bardsville experienced toward Bolton Lovehart's creative efforts, which were not at all what they expected of those artists, also define Warren's perception of how *his* art was received.

Nevertheless, what may seem incomprehensible and even foolish to their respective communities has deep personal significance for both Hawthorne and Bolton Lovehart because their artistry embodies the symbols with which they attempt to define and identify themselves. When Bolton Lovehart begins to experience the natural urges to seek his own identity and give his being definition, only to have the urges thwarted, they do not disappear but are merely rechanneled to find expression in his circus. When

Nathaniel Hawthorne desired, more than anything, to experience the "deep warm secret" only to have that desire thwarted by the characteristic inwardness of his personality which was cultivated by the dark, repressive circumstances of his childhood, the desire does not disappear: he rechannels it, reaching out to the world through his fiction. If the world fails to comprehend or appreciate the gesture of fellowship extended to it by either man, that indeed is tragic. If, however, the artists discover truths about themselves in their art which make genuine fellowship with the world impossible, then the art meant as salvation becomes a curse.

Robert Penn Warren, like the two artists about whom he wrote, was aware of the paradox of artistic success and personal failure. As Allan Shepherd notes in his article on the relationship of *The Circus in the Attic* with others of Warren's works, the title novella of that story collection "was written in 1946 and published in September, 1947. Major rewriting of *All the King's Men* continued into March of 1946, and the novel was published in August of that year" (Shepherd 8). Since it is very likely that Warren's work on the novel and the novella overlapped chronologically, Warren must have been aware as he worked on "The Circus in the Attic" that his soon-to-be-published novel could bring him literary success, as indeed it did, winning him his first Pulitzer Prize. On the personal end of the spectrum, however, we must wonder about his relationship during the same period of time with his first wife Emma Brescia. The details of the relationship are shadowy, but the marriage must certainly have been troubled since it ended in divorce

only a few years later. Warren was to admit that "from 1944 to '54. . . . I had, I guess, more personal problems than I should have had" (Farrell 795).

According to Warren, Nathaniel Hawthorne's symbolic fiction was the product of his need for identity and self-knowledge, but conversely it was the means by which he escaped a self-awareness that he was unable to accept. The symbols that Bolton Lovehart creates--the circus, the ring master, the girl acrobat, and the clown--also reveal his need to understand aspects of his own personality while still allowing him to escape from a too-revealing personal awareness. One might reasonably conclude that, to the extent which Warren shares an affinity with Nathaniel Hawthorne and his semi-autobiographical protagonist in "The Circus in the Attic," Bolton's circus symbols are Warren's own, making Bolton's motives for creating them Warren's as well. Finally, these artistic symbols, like Hawthorne's symbolic fiction, become a great inescapable burden, inhibiting the self-awareness that their creators had hoped to achieve with them and creating at last a psychological impasse for the artist. To completely understand the protagonist of "The Circus in the Attic" and, by extension, the dynamics of Warren's own creative impulses, we would be well-served at this point to consider Warren's development of Bolton's circus and the three primary symbolic characters which comprise it.

Bolton's circus symbols are inextricably linked to the history of his hometown of Bardsville, so named, no doubt, to further

emphasize Bolton's artistic identity. The narrator tells the reader that Bardsville was not settled by men with noble and genteel motives (as the citizens of Bardsville would have liked to believe) but by men who were as brutal and uncultivated as the land they sought. The stories that the United Daughters of the Confederacy seek to perpetuate about the Civil War are similarly undercut by the narrator's omniscience and by the memories of men like Jake Velie. The grim, unromantic details of the fates of Seth Sykes and Cash Perkins are determinedly overlooked by the Bardsvillians whose truth--that which "they have to believe to go on being the way they are" ("Circus" 8)--demands heroes and monuments. From his birth, Bolton Lovehart is taught Bardsville's truths, which have provided him with a limited identity. As a direct descendent of Lem Lovehart, the town's early settler, whose "years of loneliness and compulsion and hardship and violence and death" ("Circus" 14) have been erased from Bardsville's consciousness by the passage of time, Bolton represents one of the first families of Bardsville. As the son of Simon Lovehart, former Confederate Army officer, Bolton provides a physical, human link to the glorious days of the Civil War. Additionally, as the bearer of his mother's family name, Bolton is Louise Lovehart's most significant expression of the egotism which drives her, and she possesses the child "with a thousand invisible threads controlling the slightest movement of his limbs and lips and spirit like a clever puppet" ("Circus" 16). These are identities which have been given to him by family and community, but they are not identities that he has earned. To Bolton, the circus

itself represents his rebellious struggle for that earned identity, and the circus figures symbolize not only his definition of his earned identity but also his need for a greater understanding of it.

Between the juxtaposed versions of objective and mythic history, Warren inserts early circus references, preparing the reader for the significance of Bolton's psychological need for his own identity. Years before Bolton is born there are other young men who chafe at motherly restraints: Bardsville's home guard are described as rowdies who "could ride like circus performers. . . to [whom] the war was a gaudy picnic that their tyrannous mothers would not let them attend" ("Circus" 6). Like those other young men, Bolton feels that his life is too rigidly structured by the maternal extreme of possessiveness, but the paternal extreme of aloofness provides him no emotional structure at all. Simon Lovehart has lived "past all passion" ("Circus" 18), and his own obsession with the "truth" imparted to him by his wound from the War renders him emotionally and probably sexually impotent.

This first triangular character structure in "The Circus in the Attic," made up of Bolton, his mother, and his father, certainly utilizes Oedipal elements, but demonstrates few of the qualities found in the triangular structures of Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and Warren's "Prime Leaf," "Blackberry Winter," *All the King's Men*, and *World Enough and Time*. Louise Lovehart asserts her personality much too forcefully to fit the passive role of the woman as the natural component of the character triangle. In fact, her character is distractingly intrusive, and she saps her son's psychic and sexual

energy with her assumed passivity.

The prominence of Louise Lovehart's character contrasts with the retiring quality of Simon Lovehart's; he is once again atypical of Hawthorne's and Warren's customary structuring of the character triangle. Bolton's father should provide a complement to his son's character, thus demonstrating the "marriage" of the two male components of the character triangle. We recall that the masculine characters often represent, for Warren as well as for Hawthorne, the bifurcation of the male, whose ideas demonstrate thematic tension in opposition to the natural female. One of the figures might, for example, represent the man whose ideas are put to action and the other the man who inactively observes ideas. Instead, Simon Lovehart is as ineffectual as his son in achieving a dominant presence over the feminine side of the triangle. Bolton and Simon Lovehart enact none of the tension normally present in the masculine characters who have a need for and vie for the invigoration of the natural feminine character. The father, as completely as it is possible for him, has removed himself emotionally from the Oedipal struggle enacted by Bolton and Louise Lovehart:

[Simon Lovehart] is, however, aware of them at times. . . aware of the powerful, vibrating, multitudinous web of life which binds the woman and child together, victor and victim. . . .When he brushes, by accident, against some single filmy strand of the web in his house, he stops dead and quivers in every nerve. ("Circus" 17)

Simon Lovehart should be the logical source of Bolton's deliverance from his mother's obsessive need for him. He, however, is as incapable of conclusive action as is his child.

Appropriately, Bolton the artist, in response to the deficiencies of the weakly realized life triangle in which he is reared, creates an imaginative triangle more consistent with the tensions of the same structure found in Hawthorne's and Warren's imaginative fictions. Through Bolton's artistic detachment, the emotionally unfulfilling nature of his life with Louise and Simon Lovehart is transformed into the symbolic perfection of his three circus characters, who also demonstrate the continued viability of Hawthorne's and Warren's triangles.

As a young boy, Bolton has an initial physical encounter with two of the three circus characters when he wanders from home, following the sound of singing voices to the deep spot in the creek where religious conversions are being marked by baptisms. To Bolton's childish eyes the preacher's coat drips and glitters in the sunshine as "to the shiny black cloth a few gold willow leaves [are] stuck, here and there, like spangles" ("Circus" 21). Bolton's ring master, or impresario, is beginning to take shape. The preacher's baptism of a young girl whose droopy white dress, as he pulls her into the river, "billow[s] about her like a dancer" ("Circus" 21) is described in terms comparable to a sexual domination of her; here Bolton's girl acrobat is dimly realized. More importantly, these characters successfully assume two of the sides of the triangular character structure. The forceful preacher *cum* ring master is the

active man of ideas. The young girl in whom Bolton envisions the girl acrobat reveals her natural identity by sweeping "a wild, wide, imploring look across the sky and field" ("Circus" 21). Her surrender to the baptismal plunge reveals her as the passive feminine side of the triangle. Bolton's own baptism, a strange mixture of accident and will, is in essence his pledging of himself to the circus images which are beginning to assume symbolic dimensions and his implicit acceptance of his own role in the character triangle. That role, at this point, has yet to be defined.

Bolton's assumption of his role as the third side of the triangle, the inactive man of ideas, is accomplished only after years of his experimenting with the character of the ring master. Armed with his vision of the ring master and the girl acrobat, as yet undeveloped symbols of his personhood, Bolton feels emotionally prepared for his flight with the circus when it visits Bardsville. As carefully planned as his escape is, however, Bolton's freedom lasts for less than two days, and he is returned to his parents, "for the moment, a kind of hero" ("Circus" 27) among his classmates. But try as he may, Bolton is not able to sustain what he falsely assumes is his identity as the heroic ring master. Years later, during his two-week idyll as the ticket-collector for Bardsville's first moving picture house, for example, he performs his tasks with "the air of an impresario" ("Circus" 38), obviously with the capable ring master in mind as his model, but once again his mother thwarts his search for an identity beyond the one Bardsville and she have permitted him and forces him to quit his job.

After his desperate and brief affair with Sara Darter, who leaves permanently for Nashville when Louise Lovehart outlasts her by sheer force of will, Bolton becomes resigned to the unlikelihood of his ever leaving his mother's house to pursue a life of circus excitement. Then he stumbles across a plan to bring the circus and its characters within his own limited sphere in such a way as to flout his mother's authority and, in the process, discovers his identity. Once again Bolton sees the circus in Bardsville, but this time it is not a real one but a toy. The three human figures in the hardware store window are "a ring master dressed in black cloth, a girl acrobat with a stiff little skirt and a painted smirk on her face and eyes far too large and blue, [and] a clown swathed in spotted cloth" ("Circus" 40). In this particular description of the circus, the triangular character structure is fully realized. The addition of the clown character to the cast of Bolton's original vision of the circus, which up to this point had included only the ring master and the acrobat, signals Bolton's final acceptance of the basic incompatibility between his own personality and that of the capable ring master; instead, he must assume the subordinate role of the clown.

Through the course of his life, Bolton's appearance becomes more and more clown-like. In the years after his young manhood which mark his growing knowledge that he is destined not to become involved in life the way his friends are, Bolton's physical appearance becomes strange-looking to his college friends, who see him as "a lanky young man with thinning black hair and very clean

unfashionable clothes that always looked awry on his nervous bones" ("Circus" 31); in fact, Bolton probably resembles a lean and gawky Red Warren at the same age. He is clearly more clown than impresario in the moving picture house as he stands "with his trousers too short on his bony shanks and his sleeves too short on his wrists" ("Circus" 36). Bolton's final metamorphosis into the clown is effected when he is pictured at age sixty-seven as having "no hair on his head. . . . no buttons on his wrinkled coat. . . [and] hands [with] liver spots" ("Circus" 16). Bolton's similarity to the storefront clown is complete, even to the spotted "garment" of his aging skin.

The death of his mother produces a curious change in Bolton's preoccupation with the attic circus as he becomes uncomfortably aware of his own mortality. He is especially mindful of the fact that Louise dies alone and at night, and the reality that "the hateful, painted eyes of the creatures he had made" ("Circus" 45) might be the only witnesses to his own death makes the circus suddenly repugnant to him. Bolton's reaction to his circus figures, once symbols of his freedom from his mother's tyranny, makes him the embodiment of the artist who, as Warren points out in his analysis of Hawthorne, has both contempt for the artist and fear of his symbolic creations. Bolton is like Ethan Brand, whom Warren identifies as one of Hawthorne's artist figures; by his literally "converting man and woman to be his puppets," Bolton himself has "become a 'puppet' caught in a process that he has initiated but cannot control" (qtd. in "Nathaniel Hawthorne" 460). According to

Warren, contempt and fear of symbols lead to repudiation of them, and Bolton *does* repudiate his circus creations, fearful for what he has lost in his desperate struggle to seek his own identity.

The advent of Mrs. Parton and her son Jasper, as well as the start of the Second World War, brings changes to Bolton's life that even he could never before have imagined. Bolton joins the real world just in time for his old pleasure in the circus illusions to be superceded by his pleasure in their corporeality. Bolton views life "with a sense of perpetual surprise" ("Circus" 49) when he becomes the husband of the acrobat and the surrogate father of the ring master, and all the while the circus of the Second World War draws nearer.

Mrs. Parton becomes the embodiment of Bolton's masterpiece, "the girl acrobat, with blue eyes and a skirt of silk" ("Circus" 41). Consistent with her assumed character, Mrs. Parton carries her head modestly and watches the people around her "out of the corner of her innocent, china-blue eyes" ("Circus" 47). Mrs. Parton wears her identity of circus acrobat not only outwardly but inwardly as well, recognizing that Bolton, the clown, is the key to her social success: he has received his social standing as his birthright and is like the clown in the hardware store display who balances "on top of a ladder, held there by a slot in his wooden feet" ("Circus" 40). Mrs. Parton, however, is aware that she must "never [take] a step before she [is] sure of her footing. . . . She [has] seen every rung of the ladder, every stage of the ascent" ("Circus" 47). Marriage to Bolton Lovehart is the triumph of her social acrobatics.

Jasper Parton, on the other hand, is the embodiment of the ring master and exudes self-assurance, a quality in which Bolton is singularly lacking. Curiously, he seems to provide the vital force in the Lovehart's marriage: his calling Bolton "Pop" gives the older man a fatherly identity with which he is quietly pleased, and the novella's one example of conjugal interchange between Bolton and Mrs. Parton involves Jasper as its topic. Furthermore, Jasper is not one to be a victim of his manipulative mother. He asserts himself in ways that Bolton had been unable to when first he runs off to marry Janie Murphy, whom Mrs. Parton considers inappropriate "and a Catholic to boot" ("Circus" 49) and when later he runs off to the circus of the War. Jasper's death, which Bolton and all of Bardsville perceive as a noble one, conflicts with what the reader knows to be his shallow and ignoble personality, just as Mrs. Parton's assumed modesty and self-effacement conflict with the social balancing act in which she is continually engaged. Bolton Lovehart remains happily unaware of these shortfalls in the characters of his ring master and acrobat.

In fact, it would appear that Bolton, after having been shut up for years with his circus figures, now views the world only in terms of their symbolic perfection. Through a freak of history, his circus in the attic has become the circus of the Second World War, and the similarities of one with the other are the only reasons that Bolton feels comfortable away from his inner creative world. The fact that the world of Bardsville at war is now so familiar a place for Bolton gives him the courage to reveal the truth about his attic occupation.

In response to Jasper's death, Bolton sells his circus, which represents over thirty years of his life, to raise money for the war effort; now it will be allowed "to live, to be enjoyed," yet Bolton the artist must recognize the darker fate of his art for it will also "be used and broken in the end" ("Circus" 55). Bolton's belief in the reality of the war circus, however, remains intact: "Whatever he had been waiting for all his life now seemed to be his. He was happy" ("Circus" 50).

Bolton's inability to distinguish one circus world from the other is the price he pays for his happiness. The ease with which Bolton moves from his attic circus, which is made up of his imaginative character triangle, to the second life triangle of the novella, composed this time of himself, Mrs. Parton, and Jasper, reveals Bolton's final inability to see the real world with objective eyes. He is incapable of realizing that the life triangle in which he participates with Mr. Parton and Jasper has deficiencies which are every bit as pronounced as the life triangle with his mother and father, which he had imaginatively abandoned many years earlier. Therefore, when the war circus draws to an end and when Mrs. Parton dies in such a way as to advertise her infidelity, and thus her true nature, not only to the reader but to all of Bardsville as well, Bolton returns grieflessly, automatically, and almost relievedly to his attic and his continued circus illusions. The narrator comments that "finally he had found his way back" ("Circus" 60) to the more appropriate setting for his illusions. One doubts, however, that Bolton had ever really left it.

Thematically, "The Circus in the Attic" addresses the role art plays in the artist's achieving self-knowledge and how art affects the artist's ability to interact with the real world. When Warren writes that Hawthorne retired to "the famous 'dismal chamber' under the eaves, where he isolated himself to discover his materials, his style, and his destiny" ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 435), he is saying that art and self drive and define each other; art needs the self to give it the stamp of human relevance, but the self needs art to give it a notion of its own identity. Once again we are reminded that Warren's Hawthorne ". . . writes not *from* a predetermined meaning. . . , but *toward* a meaning, creation thus being a process of discovery, ultimately of self-discovery" ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 459). When the artist chooses to use symbols in his art, however, the result, no matter how pleasing and intriguing artistically, is to screen both the artist and his public from a complete discovery of the full psychic implication behind the symbol. As far as Bolton Lovehart is concerned, his created circus is *his* world, but it is not *the* world. As long as Bardsville resembles the circus of Bolton's imagination, he is comfortable there. When forced to choose between post-War Bardsville and the circus in the attic, however, Bolton makes his decision without a struggle; his circus world is the one most easily accessible to him.

When the artistic similarities between Nathaniel Hawthorne and Bolton Lovehart are pursued to the ends of their respective stories, both "told" by Warren, a clearer picture of Warren's theme begins to emerge. Bolton is saved from the thought of his death,

witnessed only by "the hateful painted eyes of the creatures he had made" ("Circus" 45) by the world's miraculous transformation into the circus with which he was already familiar. Nathaniel Hawthorne was "saved" from an obscure life and death when the world outside his "dismal chamber" recognized worth in his novel *The Scarlet Letter* and his other works. Both men were to experience the fleeting nature of their compatibility with the world, however, sending Bolton back to his circus figures and Hawthorne back to his enigmatic words and symbols. But what fundamental changes--if any--had been granted them by their worldly sojourns? Bolton will create a new circus just like the old circus which had "circled about him, so his world constricted to that orbit" ("Circus" 43); the eyes of the new circus will be the same hateful eyes as the old; his fear of and dismay at the self that he sees reflected in those eyes will have the same intensity as before. Caught between the real world which he cannot rejoin and the created world for which he feels only fear, Bolton will be truly alone.

Ironically, Warren tells us that it was the nation involved in the dark struggle of the Civil War that Hawthorne felt incapable of rejoining, but his artistic effort during that time presented him with even darker personal forebodings. His novel *Septimius Felton*, begun during the early years of the Civil War, concerned a man who "felt himself strangely ajar with the human race" and who "would have given much either to be in full accord with it, or to be separated from it forever" (qtd. in "Nathaniel Hawthorne" 456). Warren comments on the implications of the theme that Hawthorne

must have seen emerging from his novel:

How could Hawthorne finish such a story? He did not. This was not a story laid in the past to be interpreted at leisure. It was the story that he was living and found intolerable.

("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 456)

With these observations in mind, it is interesting to return to Allan Shepherd's previously mentioned article relating "The Circus in the Attic" to *All the King's Men* and note what, according to Shepherd, constitutes one failure of the novella:

. . . it does not reach a conclusion, it ends. Warren does not impose a meaning on the characters' experience. . . . We are left instead with a sad little foetus of truth which has not had either proper conditions or sufficient time to develop. (Shepherd 10)

Despite the lack of meaning that Warren's novella may have demonstrated for his readers, however, it is very likely that Warren himself was able to glean a very significant personal meaning from Bolton Lovehart's experience. Bolton Lovehart illustrates not only the failure of the artist to blend his personal with his creative life but also the artist's fundamental fear of self-knowledge, as indicated by his use of artistic symbol. To paraphrase Warren's comment on Hawthorne's *Septimius Felton*, how could Warren bring "The Circus in the Attic" to a logical and artistically balanced conclusion? It embodied the personal and artistic impasse he was living and for which he, as yet, had no acceptable resolution. And to

those who find such a reading of "The Circus in the Attic" too dismal, let us remember that many of Nathaniel Hawthorne's readers also labored mightily under their misapprehension of his works as pleasant, moralistic tales. How could Warren's novella, obviously his literary effort in the Hawthornesque mode, fail to demonstrate its own ambiguity and "hell-firedness"?

Is there then to be no salvation for Bolton Lovehart? Or for Nathaniel Hawthorne and Robert Penn Warren, for that matter? What is to prevent Bolton's becoming a human monster like Hawthorne's Ethan Brand, who "was no longer a brother. . . [but]. . . a cold observer. . . converting man and woman to be his puppets" (qtd. in "Nathaniel Hawthorne" 460)? We can offer the artist who fears the loss of his humanity the same consolation which Warren himself offers the similarly illusion-wracked characters of *The Scarlet Letter* :

. . . men must live by the logic of their illusions, as best they can. . . . That is their last and darkest "necessity." What compensation is possible in such a world comes from the human capacity for achieving scale and grandeur even in illusion, one might say by insisting on the coherence of the illusion, and from the capacity for giving pity. ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 453)

When Bolton enters the world on the brink of war, he is given ample opportunities to demonstrate his capacity for giving pity, an emotion which he experiences as a painful "stab of life, a clean quickening and a dedication." He experiences brotherhood and it is

an "exquisite sensation in his bosom" ("Circus" 51). Furthermore, there is no denying the consistency of Bolton Lovehart's circus illusion for it is one that sustains him throughout his long life. The moment of death, however, for which Bolton has prepared no sustenance, is inevitable, and at that moment the eyes of his creations will reflect in their blankness his own lack of self-knowledge, which might have sustained him in death if he had only had the courage or ability to achieve it.

The reader who seeks critical illumination on Robert Penn Warren's novella "The Circus in the Attic" will encounter a variety of views. Warren himself dismissed the story collection in which it was included as "a kind of accident" (Fisher 9). Randolph Runyon voices some refreshingly positive views in his recognition of the artistic bonds which link the collection's stories together. Despite Runyon's pinpointing of the articulations which unite the separate works in *The Circus in the Attic* (Runyon 119ff), the title novella nevertheless has an enigmatic element which sets it off from the remaining stories, an element which seems to speak to the special quality of Warren's personal involvement with it.

Many critics are drawn to the introductory novella "The Circus in the Attic" but are nonetheless unwilling to grant it the acceptance given to stronger works in Warren's canon. Among such critics is Allen Shepherd, to whom "The Circus in the Attic" is merely a "byblow" of Warren's premier work, *All the King's Men*. According to Shepherd, since work on both the novella and the novel occurred during the same year, and given what he feels is the

obvious strength of the novel in comparison to the novella, "The Circus in the Attic" is merely a bastard child of *All the King's Men*, which is the work that contains the legitimate treatment of the characters, plot, and theme that Warren had in mind (Shepherd 8).

For Joseph Millichap, however, the "circus" of both the collection and the novella is a pivotal point, providing "a controlling metaphor within Warren's diverse artistic accomplishments" ("*CIA* and *RPW's Romance of Southern History*" 1) in the genres of the novel, poetry, literary criticism, and more. Thus, Warren's circus looks not only backward to the works that precede it but forward, anticipating the works that follow it. To further quote Millichap, the short fiction, including "The Circus in the Attic," "provides a matrix for these forms, but later is displaced by them" (4).

Specifically, the novella itself cannot be considered an accident or a byblow since it is "poised between Warren's earlier and later career, between the history of the Old and New South, and finally between Southern romance and history" (7).

One might also add that "The Circus in the Attic" stands poised between Warren's equally dichotomous desires to achieve personal self-knowledge and to shield himself from what he might learn during that process. While Allan Shepherd makes a good case for the ties of character, plot, and theme which unite *All the King's Men* with the story of Bolton Lovehart, "The Circus in the Attic" demonstrates even more readily discernible links with Warren's final novel, *A Place to Come To*, because of his repetition there of the circus symbols from the novella. Thirty years after the

composition of "The Circus in the Attic," during which time, incidentally, Warren was to write his insightful introduction to Nathaniel Hawthorne, Warren, in preparation for his own death, reveals his dissatisfaction with the lonely death to which he had consigned Bolton Lovehart. *A Place to Come To* is Robert Penn Warren's recapitulation of "The Circus in the Attic," and in the novel he attempts to rid his art of the symbols which had obstructed Bolton Lovehart's search for self-knowledge; they were, after all, the very symbols which hindered Warren's view of himself.

CHAPTER 4

Robert Penn Warren's Personal and Artistic Resolution in *A Place to Come To*

Robert Penn Warren has commented, somewhat inscrutably, that his final novel *A Place to Come To* is "autobiographical only in the deep way that all books are autobiographical" (Rubin 280). At other times Warren has stated even more emphatically that the novel is not his literary biography (Snipes 170), and who can blame him for such emphasis? Jediah Tewksbury, although a sympathetic and engaging protagonist, exhibits behaviors that even he is ashamed to admit, resorting often to the third person when his revelations are too discomfiting for the proximity of first-person confession. However, the reader's ability to identify Warren in the persona of Jed does not demand that *A Place to Come To* be read as a self-directed exposé. In his critical observations of Nathaniel Hawthorne from *American Literature: The Makers and the Making*, Warren suggests the extent to which his own art may mirror his life:

His stories are always stories of someone caught in delusions, obsessions, and compulsions and struggling, consciously or unconsciously, toward freedom and peace; and we may reasonably take it that the root story of a writer's work reflects, however indirectly, the root story of a writer's life. The work is, necessarily, part of the life.

("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 460)

Of course, the pronoun "his" refers to Hawthorne, but it could just as well refer to Warren, who, in the first clause of this statement, comments concisely, if indirectly, upon the thematic emphases of *A Place to Come To* and, indeed, all of his own fictional works. Therefore, as Warren himself has indicated, Jed Tewksbury's story is his own, at least psychically if not actually.

To further explore Warren's psychic identification with Jed Tewksbury, it becomes necessary to note the similarities between the novel *A Place to Come To* and the novella "The Circus in the Attic," in which, as we earlier observed, Warren's affinity with the artists, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Bolton Lovehart, is made evident. Despite the superficial dissimilarities of their protagonists, the plots of the novel and the novella run a surprisingly similar course. Additionally, Warren's incidental themes of the Oedipal struggle, the view of history as myth, and the moral theme exemplified by staying home or leaving are present in *A Place to Come To* as they are in "The Circus in the Attic"; ultimately, of course, both works concern themselves thematically with self-discovery and self-awareness. To that end, Warren utilizes in the novel the same circus images of the clown, the impresario, and the girl acrobat that he had used in the earlier novella. In "The Circus in the Attic," those images quickly generate themselves into a set of revealing, yet concealing, symbols. In *A Place to Come To*, however, Warren seems determined that Jed, his main character, as well as Jed's creator will confront truths about themselves and the world toward which Bolton Lovehart had maintained a fearful aloofness. In the novel, Warren

the artist kills the characters who reflect Bolton's circus images before they have an opportunity to develop into knowledge-obstructing symbols. They are removed either physically or psychically, often with Jed as Warren's "accomplice," thus leaving Jed (and the author himself) without the luxury of symbol to hide behind. Thus, awareness of self and of the world becomes a forced issue, and not merely because Warren has willed it so. Death is the inimical presence which claims Nathaniel Hawthorne and Bolton Lovehart at the heights of their alienation from the world. If they are to avoid a similar fate, death is the final reality for which Robert Penn Warren and Jed Tewksbury must make preparation.

Ostensibly, Bolton Lovehart and Jed Tewksbury are two very different characters, but several of the turns and twists of plot which shape them are quite similar. Bolton has the advantages of financial stability and community standing, while Jed is markedly lacking in both as he grows up in Dugton, Alabama; nevertheless, as children they experience a comparable family dynamic. Simon Lovehart and Buck Tewksbury are both absentee fathers, physically so after their deaths, but emotionally so even during their lives. Warren seems to play on the extremes of their differences from each other: Simon is a proper Episcopalian minister and Buck a shameless roisterer; Buck derives his sense of identity from his blatant sexuality while Simon is "a disappointment in the marriage bed" ("Circus" 16); Simon can legitimately claim Civil War heroism while Buck's claim to distinguished war service is distant and, as it happens, fabricated.

Both men, however, have relationships with their sons that equate fatherhood with the realm of unanswered questions, whose answers are the simple stuff of which a child's identity is made. After Simon's death, Bolton mourns the impossibility of ever receiving answers about his father's boyhood and Civil War experiences as much as he does the loss of Simon himself. Jed, of course, is haunted through his boyhood by the unanswerable questions concerning the details of his father's death; later, as an adult caring for his own infant son, he is brought to tears when he speculates about whether his father had had the same loving responses to him. Jed's grief comes full circle when he finds that he cannot bring himself to answer the questions that his son Ephraim might ask.

Of course, it is the motherly influence which more overtly affects Bolton Lovehart and Jed Tewksbury. The more youthful Warren created the clutching, possessive Louise Lovehart while the older Warren, himself a parent, created the memorable Elvira Tewksbury, a character of such force that the reader must be exposed to her primarily in a third-hand epistolary style. Ma Tewksbury's passion to see her son leave rural Dugton forever is matched in fervor only by Louise Lovehart's passion to possess her son completely. However pronounced their differences, it is their sons' reactions to their disparate mothering styles which call attention to the similarities between Louise and Ma: both Bolton and Jed become adept at keeping their true natures secret from their mothers.

Remarkably similar too are Bolton's brief affair with Sara Darter and Jed's marriage to Agnes Andresen in that both are further examples of their covert battles against maternal control from any source. Both Sara and Agnes seem to possess qualities that would influence Bolton and Jed toward an emotional liberation from their mothers, but when they are more closely analyzed, disturbing similarities between their personalities and those of Louise Lovehart and Elvira Tewksbury begin to emerge.

Bolton's relationship with Sara develops at the height of his psychological dissatisfaction with his restrictive life with his invalid mother and results in an inevitable physical and emotional showdown: when Bolton cannot bring himself to leave his mother for Sara, he is coldly seduced by that young woman the night before she leaves for Nashville and a new life. Jed's relationship with Agnes seems to offer him a refuge from his physical and spiritual questing for place, begun when Ma forces him from home and from Dugton. He too meets Agnes at a point of great dissatisfaction with his life and with himself. Whether consciously or unconsciously, both men manage to escape these emotional entanglements which are psychologically similar to their relationships with their mothers. Bolton's sexual encounter with Sara is merely an extension of his mother's obsessive hold over him; Sara's sexual triumph over him consummates the relationship that his mother has obsessively sought. To have married Sara would have meant handing himself over from one controlling woman to another. Jed, on the other hand, reenacts with Agnes the failure of his own parents'

marriage, and he takes a perverse pleasure in gradually asserting his dissolute, Buck-like ways before his wife's grieved Lutheran gaze.

Both sets of relationships constitute what Warren, in an enigmatic tone, refers to in "The Circus in the Attic" as "a victory and a betrayal" (37), as both Bolton and Jed move one step further away from the influences of their mothers. Their assertions of self are modeled psychically and physically after Hawthorne's own daily withdrawal from his family into the "dismal chamber" of his artistic apprenticeship, which Warren chronicles in his critical introduction to the author. The extended effect of Bolton's victory and betrayal is his first retreat behind the closed doors of the attic to begin the creation of his circus figures. Jed's victory and betrayal are demonstrated by his nightly retreat behind the latched door of his study to begin his dissertation entitled "Dante and the Metaphysics of Death," a work that parallels Bolton's circus because, to Jed, it is "a mysterious achievement, each word a self-generating miracle" (*APTCT* 87-88). Both endeavors, the circus and the dissertation, are undertaken in an attempt to create an emotional distance from life situations which have proven to be too demanding on both Bolton and Jed, who later exhibit Hawthornesque horror for the inevitable results of their "art." Bolton comes to realize that the loneliness of his mother's death may well prefigure his own eventual death. Jed also understands that Agnes's death, essentially a solitary one in terms of his emotional withdrawal from her into his work, has left him to live

and die alone as well.

In fact, the genesis of Jed's dissertation is one plot device which is a link between him and the artist figures in several of Hawthorne's fictions. Jed's dissertation, art-like in its similarity to what his mentor calls "carving cherrystones" (*APTCT* 60), flourishes, and its successful development, in Jed's eyes, is mystically connected to the progression of his wife's uterine cancer. At one low point, Agnes even suggests that Jed has planted the cancer in her through their conjugal contact, but Jed, by that time, already has a guilty awareness of his complicity in her coming death. Agnes's doom is painfully predictable, and at the moment of her death, Jed imagines the look of "muted outrage" (*APTCT* 93) in her dead eyes, a look that mirrors the "hateful painted eyes" of Bolton's circus after his mother's death. As if in confirmation of the terms of his survival, Jed assumes an academic reputation of growing proportions, and he realizes that "the essay had been, in the deepest sense of the word, [Agnes's] death warrant" (*APTCT* 98). Jed has reached the point in his life where he, like Bolton and like Hawthorne's Ethan Brand, fears becoming "a 'puppet' caught in a process that he has initiated but cannot control" ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 460).

The deaths of Louise Lovehart and Agnes propel Bolton and Jed into two similarly artificial worlds: Bolton enters the "Dionysiac tumult" of the Second World War, and Jed is initiated into Nashville's social scene and from there to the timelessness of his affair with Rozelle Hardcastle, both of which are not without their

own Dionysian elements. The two men feel that they are approaching the revelation of "the deep, warm secret" which would mean redemption from their denial of their brotherhood to the world. When Bolton realizes, however, that the end of the war is a certainty and when Jed is convinced of the futility of his continued association with Rozelle and the shallowness of his life in Nashville, both men retreat, Bolton to his attic and Jed again to Chicago, the University, and the attic room he has rented there. Bolton's return to his circus marks the end of his story, probably because Warren could not then implement the means by which his own personal and artistic impasse was to be overcome. Jed, however, will experience several further excursions from and retreats to his attic before *A Place to Come To* achieves a resolution.

The primary theme of *A Place to Come To* deals with achieving identity through knowledge of self. Three other themes, present also in "The Circus in the Attic" and described by Warren in his analysis of Hawthorne's "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," are also evident in the novel. To a significant extent, Ma Tewksbury is the fictional instrument through whom these incidental, secondary themes of *A Place to Come To* are revealed.

First of all, Ma provides Jed with crucial information about his father's prized cavalry saber which Buck had touted as a family heirloom; in actuality, Buck could make no familial claims to Civil War heroism, having bought the saber in a weak, self-aggrandizing moment at an auction. Ma permits Jed no luxuries of mythic history

in which to seek security and from which to claim identity.

Secondly, Ma speaks in her customarily direct fashion to the morality of leaving home or staying when she tells Jed, " 'You get stuck here, and I'll kill ye' " (*APTCT* 26). She is the single most powerful force preventing his return to Dugton throughout his life, but ironically, her refusal to let him return has the same psychological impact on Jed that Louise Lovehart's refusal to let Bolton leave Bardsville has on him. Both men must struggle throughout their lives with the morality of their attitudes toward home, Bolton believing that an escape from Bardsville will help him discover and define himself and Jed learning, at long last, that his self-discovery and self-definition depend on his return to his hometown of Dugton.

Warren's personal views of his own home parallel Bolton Lovehart's and Jed Tewksbury's to a remarkable degree. On one hand, Warren has said of Guthrie, Kentucky, as Bolton might of Bardsville, " 'I never felt much at home there' " (*Snipes* 4). On the other hand, in words that are comparable to what Jed might say about Dugton, Warren has admitted:

. . . I'm a refugee from the South, driven out, as it were. The place I wanted to live, the place I thought was heaven to me, after my years of wandering, was middle Tennessee, which is a beautiful country. . . . But I couldn't make it work. . . . I felt I wasn't wanted. I felt pressure to leave. It wasn't a choice. . . I. . . didn't make a choice of living outside the South. I always felt

myself somehow squeezed out of the South. . . .

(Rubin 280)

Finally, Jed's gradual awareness of his mother's sexuality plays upon one aspect of the Oedipal theme in *A Place to Come To*. When Jed is a child, it is Elvira's disillusionment with her marriage and her sexual domination by the alcoholic Buck Tewksbury that bind mother and son more closely together. Later, her relationship with Perk Simms makes Jed realize that his mother has achieved something that has displaced him in her life, thus reinforcing the effect that the loss of his family has on Jed's search for a place. All of the incidental themes, then, have a bearing on the novel's primary theme: Jed's need for self-awareness and self-knowledge. Jed mistakenly limits his search for identity to a search for physical "place." He later comes to realize that the spiritual and temporal are elements which must also figure into his properly defined sense of self.

While the similarities of plot and theme between "The Circus in the Attic" and *A Place to Come To* are of some interest to the reader, linking both the novella and the novel to ideas which Warren had formulated in his critical writings on Nathaniel Hawthorne, it is Warren's artistic statement on symbol in the novel which speaks to his personal involvement with his protagonists' identity searches. In "The Circus in the Attic," Warren, by way of Bolton Lovehart, indicates his need to attain self-definition by developing an intricately realized set of symbols from lifeless circus images. These symbols, which demonstrate the desire of author and

protagonist alike to achieve self-knowledge, also reveal their respective fears of what they may learn of themselves in gaining such knowledge because the very symbol that reveals also conceals.

In *A Place to Come To*, the novella's three circus images--the clown, the ring master or impresario, and the girl acrobat--reappear. Interestingly, Warren, the artist in whom Jed Tewksbury's "artistry" finds its source, never permits the circus images to assume the ambiguous force of symbol; instead, Warren resolutely commits the artistic "murder" of the characters who might symbolically have represented the circus figures, and Jed is required to attempt what Bolton Lovehart had been unable to accomplish: to achieve self-awareness without a shadowy screen of symbol behind which to hide.

Because of the authorially enforced deaths of circus figures in *A Place to Come To*, death is a theme frequently replayed throughout its course. The novel derives its unity from Jed's awareness of the implications of his father's death at the beginning of the novel and his awareness of the certainty of his own death, for which he is making preparation, at the end of the novel. Jed recounts the events from his life retrospectively from the point at which the reality of his own eventual death has become unavoidable, and his perspective colors the retelling.

The fact that Jed tells his own story--Warren's use of first-person narration--additionally places Jed in the role of the artist, and as he "creates" the story of his life for the reader, it is with that instinctive awareness of the influence that death has had

on his life. Each time Jed "casts" an individual in his life as a replica of the ring master or the girl acrobat, that individual meets with either physical or psychic death; it is as if Warren, the artist behind Jed's "art," refuses to allow the character to assume symbolic proportions and thus obscure Jed's, and Warren's own, view of emerging self. Jed's doctoral dissertation is entitled "Dante and the Metaphysics of Death," and Jed's every life turn is dogged by death, in some form or another. He is constantly forced to contemplate its effect on how he views the world and himself.

A Place to Come To opens with Jed Tewksbury's attention-demanding account of his father's death, an account which Jed admits is written in an "angry, hard, bantering tone" (*APTCT* 6). The purpose of the tone in Jed's retelling of one of the most significant episodes in his childhood is threefold. First of all, it duplicates the emotional tone with which Jed is later to perform the graduate school version of Buck's death before the appreciative eyes of his fellow students at the University. Secondly, Jed's very performance of that incident is an artistic recreation in itself, emphasizing his role as an artist figure in the novel. Most importantly, his tone bespeaks his emotional reaction to his father's death, a loss which Jed defines in terms of his "unfended weakness in the face of the way the world was" (*APTCT* 6).

Buck is, for Jed, a ring master figure, and his qualifications for that role are his shiny black mustaches, like the "ferocious black mustache" ("Circus" 41) of Bolton's circus character, and his "heroically" wielded Civil War saber, phallicly suggestive of his

sexually dominating personality. Buck's saber duplicates the saber which Simon Lovehart had used in the War and later uses to lesser sexual effect. Both sabers, and the respective degrees of sexuality which they suggest, are behests from fathers to sons. Buck retains the glamour of his ring master identity only briefly, however, and his failure to maintain that idealized role in the eyes of his young son results in Jed's being literally dis-illusioned as the ring master symbol dies before it has become fully formed. But because Buck's assumption of that role had figured significantly in Jed's own childlike formulations of what his own identity is to be, Jed carries throughout his life the image of a small child--himself--weeping under the chinaberry tree, and cautions the reader that his tears are "not because of the death of my father--certainly not for that as such--but because of some unformulable sense of the way the world is" (*APTCT* 7). In other words, Jed is realizing at an early age the discomfort of facing the world of reality without the buffering effect of an illusion similar to the circus illusions of Bolton Lovehart. Jed's process of self-discovery has begun.

Buck's death and the circumstances surrounding it create in Jed the need for some role to play, and, understandably, he accepts the role of the clown. Having learned his part from the taunts of children in the schoolyard years before, Jed achieves a perverted social standing in graduate school--a warped version of "the deep, warm secret" for which Hawthorne had yearned--when he drunkenly reenacts, in broad slapstick style, Buck's ignominious death. Jed's dramatization of the fateful night serves two purposes: first of all,

Jed is reinforcing for himself the fact that the ring master figure has no place in reality and cannot be depended upon for psychic direction; secondly, however, Jed is tentatively asserting his own identity as he compulsively reenacts his father's death, killing old Buck off on a regular basis. What emerges, of course, is an identity in which the two roles are blended as the distinctions between the clown and the ring master become blurred. With ironic inevitability, the more forcefully Jed demonstrates Buck's death, the more certain aspects of the father's personality become indelibly imprinted on the son. Jed, after all, is his father's son, and what identity he could achieve more than that is yet to be discovered.

One reason Jed continues to experience such difficulty discovering his own identity is the fact that he has not totally eradicated the ring master figure from his life. Buck Tewksbury is relatively easily disposed of, but Professor Stahlmann, whose cultivation of Jed is the first critical step in the younger man's journey to academic recognition and possible selfhood is a ring master type of particular stature. Stahlmann gives Jed "an image of what life could be" (*APTCT* 49) and encourages him once again to think of the world in terms of its symbolic perfection, not unlike the circus perfection of Bolton Lovehart's world.

Stahlmann's personality provides a sharp contrast to Buck Tewksbury, and the professor surpasses Buck in his suitability to be cast in the ring master role. The academic's appearance is dramatically impresario-like, his most distinctive accoutrements

being his pince-nez, his flowing cape, and his cane which hides a rapier. The cane is in especially vivid contrast to Buck's ineffectual, phallic brandishing of the family "heirloom." Furthermore, Stahlmann has a seeming willingness to share mysterious knowledge with Jed, significant because both Bolton Lovehart and Jed alike share a disappointment in their relationships with their fathers which seems to stem from their inability to question them and receive answers which may enhance their searches for identity. Stahlmann shares with Jed his dream of the *imperium intellectūs*, and his revelation of this ideal world takes all of the random and disconnected miseries of Jed's life and redeems them "into a perfected meaning of life" (*APTCT* 58). Ultimately, however, Jed's relationship with Professor Stahlmann proves as disappointingly incomplete as his relationship with his father when Stahlmann's suicide reduces a situation "generous with mysterious meaning" (*APTCT* 52) to the level of half-answered questions and inadequately founded truths.

When Jed discovers the body of the suicide, Stahlmann has literally stripped himself of his ring master trappings; indeed, Warren's description of Jed's mentor is reminiscent of that of an abandoned puppet, possibly one of the figures from Bolton Lovehart's circus collection. The image left with the reader is of a man as helpless and ineffectual as even Buck Tewksbury at his drunken worst. Furthermore, Jed is left with undefinable feelings of complicity in the professor's death. He ponders over Stahlmann's last evening, spent in Jed's company:

Suppose I had taken the coffee with him, and a ritual brandy and then excused myself? . . . Perhaps he would have sunk himself routinely into his own work, or gone for a late walk and then routinely to bed.

But I was there. (*APTCT* 56-57)

The issue of Jed's responsibility for Stahlmann's death is another unanswered question, but Jed feels instinctively that it is connected in some way to his need for self-definition. Jed remembers further that earlier in the evening he had used the word "nigger" in answer to Stahlmann's uncharacteristically personal questions about his childhood. Jed tries to explain his use of the shameful word:

. . . I knew that I had used it as an act of aggression against him.

And as a way of asserting myself.

Whatever my self was. (*APTCT* 55)

While Bolton Lovehart's psychological stability required his creation of the lifelike circus figures, the converse is true of Jed, who is beginning to realize that his struggle for identity will make use of the physical or psychological deaths of the same figures in his life.

Then, as if to reinforce Stahlmann's diminishing impresario image and the vigorous reality of his own identity and his own *patria*, which the professor calls "the country of the young" (*APTCT* 63) Jed describes the image of himself that he inadvertently glimpses in the mirror before the two men part:

In the big mirror behind him I caught my reflection:

a large, carelessly contrived face, flushed, heavy lips and pale gray eyes now bloodshot from drink and a slightly flattened, slightly twisted nose--these features under an unkempt mass of black hair. The figure. . . was wearing a nondescript and unpressed dark jacket, somewhat too small, and a black knit tie toward one ear, and a once-white shirt, with the top button missing. (*APTCT* 63-64)

Jed's description of himself is decidedly clown-like and reminiscent of Warren's description of Bolton Lovehart's similar metamorphosis. And with Stahlmann's death, Jed is left, once again, with the inadequacies of his clownish identity, tinged with what he has learned from the defunct impresario figure. For Jed has taken to heart Stahlmann's parable of the boulder and the rabbit, and in the cosmic landslide of the war which mirrors Jed's psychic restructuring, Jed has determined that his identity will be what survives. The anguish that Stahlmann feels over the death of his wife is a detail of his evening with Jed that the younger man fails to appreciate at that moment, but which will have greater meaning for him upon Agnes's death. Stahlmann, in addition to his ring master identity, is also a Hawthornesque figure of intellectual pride whose striving for the Absolute results in the death of the one closest to him who cannot live up to that ideal.

In "The Circus in the Attic," Jasper Parton, Bolton Lovehart's impresario figure, escapes Bardsville and his mother to fight and die heroically in World War II Italy. Appropriately, with the death

of Professor Stahlmann, Jed's current impresario-figure, it remains for Jed to assume the role that Jasper Parton had played in the novel, not he adds from "sudden access of patriotism" or the "sentimental impulse" (*APTCT* 65) to avenge the death of his benefactor, but because the one thing he has carried away with him from his association with Stahlmann is an appreciation for action over inaction.

In the company of Italian desperadoes, deep behind Nazi lines, Jed experiences a further recognition of the influence of death over life, contemplating that "anything. . . can become a way of life. Even death. Even the question why death should become a way of life could itself become a way of life" (*APTCT* 69). Jed's war duty is in stark contrast to what little is told of Jasper Parton's heroism in Italy and perhaps explains how shallow, ignoble Jasper had won the Congressional Medal of Honor. Jed's final conclusion is that "it is more blessed to kill than to be killed" (*APTCT* 71), with an awareness that one might, nevertheless, "get stuck," that is, forced into some action that might be construed as heroic despite one's survival philosophies. Finally, as Jed prays for the historical blessedness to be the boulder instead of the rabbit, he finds that he cannot achieve "the pure and self-contained perfection of the boulder" (*APTCT* 71). His inability to do so can be partially attributed to his daily reading matter, his copy of the *Divina Commedia*, in which the vision of "all-embracing meaningfulness" (*APTCT* 70) is an ironic reminder of a living world beyond the world of death in which he finds himself. Even there, Jed's search for self

must continue.

After the irony of Professor Stahlmann's rejection of Jed, dramatized by his eleventh-hour revelations and ultimate suicide, it is no wonder that Jed's fascination for impresario-like images should take on a cynical edge. Jed's wartime experience with the German SS officer, in whose classically-trained professorial image Jed sees a reflection of what the youthful Stahlmann must have been and what he himself might have been, is an emotional indicator of his final, complete disillusionment with the concept of the impresario. Jed's hatred for the officer stems, admittedly, from his envy of him and for the simplistic perfection of his Geneva Convention complacency. Jed calls forward his witnesses to "the way the world is," two of the Italian desperadoes with whom he is in forced comradeship, who bear the disfiguring marks of their own interrogations by the German SS. Jed's final words to the officer are voiced as a bitter, ironic question, " ' . . . *dulce et decorum est* ?' " (*APTCT* 69). In an act that speaks to his grief over the unanswered questions of his father and Stahlmann as much as to his distrust of the image of the impresario, Jed fires his pistol into the brain of the hapless German before he can fully answer the query put to him. So much for unanswered questions.

Jed's wartime experiences, coupled with his later guilt over Agnes's death, leave him "with a grinding pain and a new vision of the way the world was" (*APTCT* 101), the lesson he has been forced to learn in the absence of the circus images which had shielded Bolton Lovehart from a similar knowledge. To escape the validity of

the pain and the vision, Jed leaves Chicago for Nashville, where he meets Lawford Carrington, in whom the dissolution of the impresario figure is completed. Initially, not much is revealed about Carrington other than the necessary superficial details on which his identity as impresario depends: his dramatic clothing, his "theatrically handsome" (APTCT 107) good looks, his prominence in the Nashville society which he uses to draw interesting people together in seemingly appreciative adulation of his artistic talents as a sculptor, and last but not least his sexual and emotional domination of Rozelle Hardcastle all combine to make Lawford Carrington a man whom Jed might envy and wish to emulate if he had not already become convinced of the inefficacy of the impresario figure. Carrington is doubly ineffectual in that he poses a vivid reversal of the traditional Hawthornesque artist figure. Instead of sacrificing humankind to the ideal of his art, he sacrifices his art to satisfy his obsession with his wife Rozelle. The example of his downfall is one that finally provokes Jed to look to the effects that his own obsessions have on him. Even before the artist's actual death from a drug overdose, however, Jed realizes that Carrington is "nothing but a facade, a mirage, a *trompe d'oeil*. There was no Lawford Carrington. . . he did not exist" (APTCT 179). The fading impact of Carrington as a person further indicates the fading power of the impresario figure over Jed's psyche. A later report of Carrington's drug-induced death after Jed's departure from Nashville is merely the physical manifestation of the psychic dissolution of the impresario figure which has already been

accomplished. For Jed, Carrington's significance as an impresario figure has long since been eliminated.

In addition to meeting the last of his dwindling impresario figures, Jed also becomes reacquainted in Nashville with Rozelle Hardcastle, another refugee from Jed's hometown of Dugton. As the reader follows Jed's first-hand accounts of his life after Dugton, Elvira Tewksbury treats Jed in her letters to a second-hand account of Rozelle's progress through the world so that by the time she is reintroduced to the novel, Jed and his reader are already familiar with Rozelle's first marriage to and widowhood by a rich Florida tycoon as well as with her second marriage to Lawford Carrington.

Warren's description of the moments before Jed finally gives himself over to the Nashville society in which Rozelle is to play an integral part is distinctly similar to Bolton's epiphany before the "hateful painted eyes" of his circus in the attic before he enters the world of Bardsville at war. After Rozelle calls to invite him to the first of the parties which will become a way of life to him, Jed describes a "crucial disorientation" of his sense of time:

All the things that had ever happened to me in the flow of time had now an absolute and fixed existence outside of time and were standing there in the room. . . staring down at me. . . . It was as though, somehow, the events themselves were existences, and had eyes, and the enormous eyes were fixed on me. The eyes knew what I was going to do. They were going to watch me do what I did

not know I would do." (*APTCT* 103-04)

Jed's awareness of a disorientation of time is a foreshadowing of his desire for the timelessness which he finds in his relationship with Rozelle and by which he hopes to escape a frightening self-awareness and the knowledge of the way the world is. The significance of all that Jed has learned in his gradual understanding of the true nature of the impresario figure will be tested as he encounters the final circus figure, the girl acrobat, embodied by Rozelle Hardcastle.

Rozelle's identity as the girl acrobat is established early in the novel. As Rozelle intrudes herself gradually into Jed's adolescent awareness, Warren describes her demeanor in much the same way as he had described Mrs. Parton, Bolton Lovehart's incarnate girl acrobat. Rozelle, too, walks "with her head slightly bowed," her thick lashes guarding "the lowered eyes" (*APTCT* 23). Rozelle must, indeed, watch her steps carefully, for she, like the social-climbing Mrs. Parton, is being groomed to marry above herself by an aunt who has realized that "Rozelle was born to be a star, in more ways than one" (*APTCT* 24). The key to Rozelle's personality is "the troubling doubleness" (*APTCT* 25) which she demonstrates to Jed, described as "a sick mixture of Counter-Reformation religiosity and the hint of goings-on in incestuous sheets--exercised on the Salem-bred gonads of Nathaniel Hawthorne" (*APTCT* 26). The shock-effect of Jed's insightful remark is twofold: first, it links Jed with the Hawthornesque heroes who are men of "uneasy disposition" ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 444) and who see peril in such

women as Hawthorne's Hester Prynne and Warren's Rachel Jordan, not to mention Rozelle Hardcastle; secondly, Rozelle is a powerful psychosexual reminder of Jed's coming of age in Dugton--the very name of his hometown suggests the mother fixation which he has never quite overcome. Part of the titillation of his affair with Rozelle is Jed's speculation on how his mother would react if she knew about his relationship with "Miss Pritty-Pants." But even without the reminders of home and Ma which Rozelle brings, Jed is aware of a psychic kinship between himself and her, strong enough to suggest that theirs would be an incestuous relationship. Rozelle is seeking her self-hood as desperately as Jed is seeking to define his own, and it is inevitable that their crossed paths should result in conflict.

The conflict that Jed and Rozelle experience is not unlike the conflict demonstrated by Hawthorne's Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale, in which nature struggles with idea and illustrates "the doom of man's essential division of flesh and spirit" ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 449). Jed's idyll with Rozelle resembles Dimmesdale's brief breaking away from what Warren calls the "dark necessity" ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 450) of his penance. Just as Dimmesdale is doomed to penitence, so also is Jed doomed to a dark necessity of his own: he cannot dwell in eternal, mindless, timeless sexuality with Rozelle as a co-victim of their pasts, even though "the past, with all its errors, follies, despairs, and fleeting triumphs, is precisely what love will, in its redemptive act, expunge" (*APTCT* 175). Instead, Jed must seek atonement, becoming literally "at one"

with the events in the past that have shaped him, using them, not timelessness, to define his moral history and thus his identity.

As if to demonstrate the desperation with which Rozelle desires her identity, she assumes an ideality and a separate identity for each of the men with whom she becomes involved. Like Bolton Lovehart's blue-eyed acrobat in general and Mrs. Parton in particular, Rozelle's social climbing instincts equip her to remake herself in the image which each man needs most to perpetuate beliefs he has about himself. For her first husband Michael Butler, another impresario type whose predilection for showing "blue" movies to his assembled guests is sordidly similar to Bolton Lovehart's taking tickets at the Bardsville premier of "Ben Hur," Rozelle is a tribute to sexual and economic power; ironically, it is his particular cultivation of the image of the impresario which finally persuades Rozelle into her affair with Carrington. For Lawford Carrington, whose sculptured images of his wife are again sordidly reminiscent of Bolton Lovehart's carvings of the girl acrobat for his circus, Rozelle is the muse who inspires what he thinks is art; ironically, what Rozelle does inspire is a clever but somewhat pornographic self-indulgence, and Carrington's artistic failure, stemming as it does from his obsession with Rozelle, culminates in his eventual loss of her. For Jed, Rozelle is the *corps charmant*, and as such is equivalent again to Bolton Lovehart's circus figure of the girl acrobat, a creation which Jed, like Bolton, invests with a one-dimensional personality that is suitable for his own needs. For example, on the occasion of their

first act of intercourse, Jed remains dangerously unaware of the implications behind Rozelle's death-like passivity and indifference, giving himself over to the "blankly abstract function and the plunge into depersonalized, and depersonalizing, darkness" (*APTCT* 167). Instead, Jed imagines Rozelle to be in willing and complete surrender to him, ready to be the woman he most needs in his life. What Jed fails to realize is that despite the seeming amorphous quality of Rozelle's personality, she cannot be created anew at the instant of his particular need for her. She has been shaped as much as Jed by a childhood filled with disappointment and disillusion and has become expert in being what the men in her life need her to be as she pursues her ill-defined goals.

Jed's relationship with Rozelle, in which time is "flowing back upon itself" (*APTCT* 103), is a regression as well in his search for self. As their relationship stagnates, Jed becomes aware of the fact that Rozelle maintains her carefully amorphous personality with the purpose of holding the men in her life at bay--" 'trying to keep the peace. . . . trying to keep the lid on' " (*APTCT* 222)--so that she can avoid the sure disaster that would result when the empty perfection of the girl acrobat is revealed. When he is finally and fatalistically aware that there is no hope in establishing a stable and meaningful relationship with her of the type that Sally and Cud Cudworth have, Jed allegorically describes to Rozelle the nature of her relationship with Lawford Carrington. With a grim clarity of vision, he compares the Carringtons to human sacrifices who are condemned to living entombment, and who, in Jed's imagination, find

the need for the sexual act to be as compelling and as necessary as the need for one to kill the other and thus conserve the small amount of air left in the breathless chamber. Even as he completes his allegory, however, Rozelle extends her hand to him in an intimate sexual gesture, and Jed realizes, not with surprise, that such is also the nature of his own relationship with her: they are mutually destructive of each other. To put it even more bluntly, Jed tells the reader that "Rozelle Hardcastle Carrington was, as of the instant, dead to me. . . ." (*APTCT* 267). He has, in effect, committed her psychological murder as the ultimate act of self-defense.

At this point in the novel, Jed's psychological condition and Bolton Lovehart's condition at the end of "The Circus in the Attic" must be compared and contrasted. Interestingly, and possibly not accidentally, both return to lives of seclusion, Bolton to the timelessness of the attic in his parents' house and Jed to Chicago, the University, and the attic room which he has rented. Bolton's choice of seclusion in the attic marks his psychological dependence on his circus symbols, and the deaths of Jasper and Mrs. Parton become incidental compared to his return to "the sinister ring master and the girl acrobat with the frivolous skirt and round painted blue eyes, and all the things by which Bardsville had lived, and found life worth living, and died" ("Circus" 62). By retreating to his attic, Bolton accepts the limitations of having a truth that is merely what he has to believe in order to go on being the way he is, and Warren offers him only the dubious compensations of a consistent illusion and the ability to feel pity for his incarnate

circus figures.

When Jed returns to his attic, however, he has been stripped of his comforting yet psyche-crippling symbols, having done away with the impresario and girl acrobat images as well as his own clownishness. Jed enacts the comic death of his father for the final time during his Nashville sojourn, thus leaving the identity of the clown behind him. Jed's decision to free himself of the clown symbol is a response to the singularly compassionate reaction of Maria McInnes to the pain and abandonment she senses in his burlesque of his father's death. When her reaction permits her to make the decision to confront issues from her own past, Jed is unable to view his slapsick portrayal of that painful moment in his own past in quite the same way.

There are no illusions, therefore, to facilitate Jed's lengthy seclusion in his attic but only his knowledge of the way the world is, a knowledge which offers him only partial redemption, and that experienced only in solitude. But Jed is appalled by the psychic effect that such knowledge has had on him when he realizes that he " 'cannot find an idea charged with passion. . . . the kind of idea that touches life at the root' " (*APTCT* 282). His solitary passionlessness reflects his kinship with Bolton Lovehart and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Bolton's partial redemption, a complement to Jed's, comes from his ability to achieve "scale and grandeur even in illusion. . . . and from the capacity for giving pity" ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 453). But because Jed has been forced to eliminate the illusionary figures which had obstructed his path toward

self-definition, he cannot aspire to that scale and grandeur of illusion. Furthermore, because he has achieved the condition of solitude, the only identity left to him in the absence of the circus figures, he has no one toward whom to extend the pity which Bolton had redemptively exercised. So Jed finds himself at a different sort of impasse from the one Bolton Lovehart had reached, and it is one that Professor Stahlmann had described to him the night before his suicide: " ' . . . some dream is necessary. . . . If a man is to go on at all. Even, as a last resort, the dream that man can live without a dream' " (*APTCT* 58). Jed lives that dream as, stripped of illusion in his attic room in Chicago, he discovers a kind of happiness in "pastlessness" and in having "only one obligation, or doom--that of survival" (*APTCT* 271). Jed has reached the point in his life at which Warren's epigraph from Gerard Manley Hopkins's "Carrion Comfort" becomes appropriate:

No, I'll not, carrion comfort, Despair,

not feast on thee;

Not untwist--slack they may be--

these last strands of man

In me or, most weary, cry, *I can no*

more. I can;

Can something, hope, wish day come,

not choose not to be.

(qtd. in *APTCT* vi)

Jed soon discovers the limitations inherent in a happiness defined by pastlessness and mere survival when his continued

association with the friends he had made in Nashville gives him a hunger for the images of happiness which they have achieved. News of Sally and Cud Cudworth's baby, Maria McInnes's hard-won emotional stability and consequent marriage, and the subsequent liberation of David McInnes and Rebecca Carrington to marry prompt in Jed a desire "to join. . . the human race" (*APTCT* 285). Fittingly, at this point, Jed again meets Dauphine Finkel, with whom he had had a momentous affair as a graduate student.

Dauphine evinces, like Jed, some indication of growth during the years that separate their first relationship from their current one. Jed's first descriptions of her had focused primarily on the beauties of her body, with a slightly condescending note for the "political acrobatics" (*APTCT* 52) in which she had inexpertly engaged and by which she had initially intrigued him. By the time Jed meets her again, however, these earlier descriptions, which equated her with the similarly patterned Rozelle as another girl acrobat, become secondary to the qualities which identify her as a potentially fitting psychic companion for Jed. Dauphine, too, lives in essential solitude, characterized by her "withdrawnness in the midst of the crowd." Like Jed, she is "striving to find the answer to all questions that life had proposed to her but left unanswered" (*APTCT* 287).

Sadly, but inevitably, Jed's marriage to Dauphine ends in divorce because, as he correctly surmises, the "everything" which Dauphine cites as the weakness of their marriage is really the "nothing" which they share. Jed has certainly brought nothing in the

way of his own identity to their marriage other than his passion for solitude and for "the blessed oblivion of work" (*APTCT* 291). The fact of their son Ephraim, however, is the inescapable reality of their marriage from which, nonetheless, Jed wishes to run. In a reversion to the method of escape which has proven so effective before, Jed tries to persuade himself that Ephraim is not real: "How much simpler things would be if he did not exist!" (*APTCT* 290). But Ephraim *is* real, and Jed must eventually contend with his reality. Ironically, when Jed returns once more to his attic apartment, his "natural place to return to" (*APTCT* 294), Ephraim is his frequent visitor, apparently as much "at home there" ("Circus" 62) as was Jasper in Bolton Lovehart's attic. Jasper, however, is merely a conveniently spiritualized echo of circus illusion; Ephraim is a real little boy.

After his divorce and the years of solitary work to fill up time, Jed's places to come to slowly dwindle in number, and with their diminishment, he begins to identify what it is that he had lacked in his search for self. On the anniversary of Agnes's death, Jed returns to Ripley, South Dakota, in essence to relive the moment of his tragic lack of self-redemptive pity for her which had resulted in his achieving an ephemeral professional identity. Unsure of why, Jed realizes that that place is no longer his to return to, the former invitation to return there having been mystically withdrawn. Jed's return to Italy prompts him to contact the desperadoes of his wartime experiences, "his only friends" (*APTCT* 300), but he finds them greatly changed, not only physically, but also in the nature of

the new political illusions to which they now cling. The world of his young manhood is another "place" to which he cannot return, and he further knows that "every man has to lead his own life and has little chance of knowing what it means" (*APTCT* 303). In Rome, Jed meets Rozelle again and is made guiltily aware of his former lack of pity for her and the desperation of her illusions during their affair in Nashville. He is finally moved to experience that pity as well as a hope that the illusion of her happiness with the black "swami" whom she had married would be enough to dissuade her from giving in to the "garroting of age" (*APTCT* 306) which is beginning to mar her beauty. And if not that, Jed hopes that Rozelle will find a man who will create for her "all the illusions that we live for, even if illusions are only illusions" (*APTCT* 318). Timeless sexuality with Rozelle is still another place to which Jed cannot return because he realizes "if things had happened and had turned out all right, how could I bear not having had the years I had thrown away?" (*APTCT* 315). Finally, with the death of his mother, Jed realizes that his childhood is yet another place that is forever closed to him.

Like Bolton Lovehart, it would seem that the only place to which Jed can return is his attic, but he is beginning to understand the psychological limitations of that "place" and asks himself "why sometimes I literally could not bring myself to think of the past or speculate about the future, when I had locked myself into my attic room" (*APTCT* 322). Secretly, he constructs a fantasy in which he asks his son Ephraim to return with him to Dugton, but he lacks the courage to make the fantasy a reality. When his old friend Stephan

Mostoski reveals to Jed that the reason behind his lack of courage is a fear of being deprived of his solitude, which is necessary to his self-conceived identity, the reader begins to understand that Jed Tewksbury, in his illusion-less solitude, is as badly off as Bolton Lovehart, whose solitude is filled with illusion. When Jed's dramatic involvement in a street mugging provokes the pity necessary to create his compliance in an old Italian woman's dying illusion that he is her convict son, he finally realizes that his place and his identity as part of the real world are to be found in Dugton. Jed leaves the solitary pastlessness of his attic to contemplate his past there.

Jed finds his past intact in Dugton, thanks to Ma's loving attention to all the scraps of the past that he had let slip by him. He also finds Perk Simms, who in simple, folksy terms describes Elvira's similar loving attention to the illusion which had made their years together so fulfilling:

"A man gets old, he ain't what he was. Ain't worth powder and lead to perish. . . . But living with a woman like yore ma. . . it is like you was living in a--a dream--and time ain't gone by, the way she could make you feel that everything kept on being the truth." (*APTCT* 335)

In his time with Perk, Jed not only begins to understand the necessity (albeit a dark one) of the illusions which people hold dear, but he also recognizes the worth of pity exercised toward those who pursue illusion. His own relinquishing of illusion had resulted in his

loss of "the blessedness of knowing that men were real, and brothers in their reality" (*APTCT* 339); in other words, his sin has been the sin of Nathaniel Hawthorne's Ethan Brand.

As if to reinforce the validity of what he has learned, Jed resists the urge to lie on the earth between the two graves of his parents, fearful that his embracing of death now would be as unproductive of any knowledge of self as it had proven during all the long years of his life when illusion had been denied him. Instead, Jed consciously puts his new knowledge to work, "resurrecting" his father in fantasized incarnation and honoring the grandeur of Buck's own illusion, "Buck leading the charge, Buck breveted rank by rank, Buck the darling of his tattered wolfish crew" (*APTCT* 340). Then, as he completes the process with the words "poor Buck" (*APTCT* 341), Jed is filled with redemptive pity.

Warren has been criticized for what some critics view as the cobbled-together, happily-ever-after quality of the conclusion to *A Place to Come To*. Any such interpretation is far from the mark; instead, what is foremost in Jed's letter to Dauphine is not the "happy ending" that might be implied--for Dauphine's answer is not apparent at the end of the novel--but Jed's willingness to strip himself of his solitude by reentering the world, prepared to respect the illusions of those around him and thus to forge his bond with humanity. Regardless of his ex-wife's response, Jed further speculates on the possibility of returning to Dugton with his son, for whom he plans to answer all the questions that were never answered for him. If not left until too late, Jed's plan is

commendable and will, in some way for him, correct his father's omissions.

Jed's letter to his ex-wife, which is his extension of himself into the real world of real people and an abandonment of the "attic" of his solitude, has a further significance as Warren's artistic return to the character triangularization which he had identified in *The Scarlet Letter* and which had figured so effectively in "The Circus in the Attic." The triangular structuring of such characters as Dimmesdale, Hester Prynne, and Chillingworth in Hawthorne's novel and Bolton, Mrs. Parton, and Jasper in Warren's novella serves to illustrate the great gulf that exists between nature, the feminine leg of the triangle, and ideas, the two masculine legs of the triangle. Additionally, the two males of Warren's triangle are just as distant from one another in their portrayals of the ways that ideas are put to use, whether actively or inactively. In his search for self, Warren's male protagonist endeavors to unite himself psychically with the other male of the triangle, but is generally unable to establish the necessary degree of psychic rapport or personal integration to do so.

Because Warren, through Jed, is consumed with the eradication of the circus figures from his life, the corresponding triangular character structure is given little chance to formulate itself in the novel. Jed's own family life is in a constant state of dissolution, first with his father's death and then with Elvira's forcing him from home both literally and emotionally when she meets Perk Simms; little opportunity exists for Warren to form a triangular structure

with these disparate components. Jed's marriage with Agnes is productive not of a child but of her cancer and death; that triangular structure is also left unfulfilled. Professor Stahlmann's suicide not only removes him as a possibility for revelation in Jed's search for self, but it also speaks to his personal grief over the illusionary family triangle of which he was a part, one in which he was taught to believe in the German *Kultur* and in his personal destiny as the product of a couple who "embodied the best of their time and world" (*APTCT* 57). Nor could Jed's affair with Rozelle constitute any kind of triangular structure through which the tension of nature and idea inherent in humankind could be demonstrated and from which a unity of self could be possible. If anything, Jed's timelessness with Rozelle proves to be too crowded with the ghosts of her past lives to permit that triangular structure to form.

Not until Jed meets Dauphine Finkel do the elements that constitute a viable character triangle begin to surface. Dauphine is probably too much like Jed in her essential solitariness and in her search for the answers to her as yet unanswered questions: those qualities shared by Jed and her prove to be more of an obstacle than either is prepared at the moment of their divorce to overcome for the sake of their marriage. However, to Jed, Dauphine is additionally "an allegorical figure of Flesh Yearning for the Beyond of Flesh" (*APTCT* 287) and as such provides a psychic echo to Hawthorne's Hester Prynne, who, according to Warren, is "the natural woman yearning. . . toward a condition beyond her

'naturalness' " ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 452). The distinction of Dauphine as an "allegorical" figure instead of as a "symbolic" figure is one that Warren must consciously have made: Warren points out that Hawthorne might have found allegory more congenial than symbolism, "in that allegory involves rather mechanically point-to-point equations of meaning" ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 459) while symbolism has an obscuring effect on meaning. Dauphine's character, therefore, is intended to be allegorical and thus to be more artistically accessible than if it had been obscuringly portrayed in symbol. In such a case she is the perfect feminine component in a viable character triangle.

Ephraim's birth draws Jed and Dauphine together, seemingly in answer to their unvoiced questions as, during his infancy, "a less shadowy music . . . flowed over [Dauphine's] face" and Jed feels "enraptured to have a hand in the sacred process by which life went on" (*APTCT* 288). Jed, inevitably, has nothing of himself to extend to Dauphine, nor she to him, and once again, the triangular structure falls apart although it does maintain certain possibilities. Ephraim develops into the scientific complement of his more metaphysical father and occasionally draws him out of his solitude for canoeing trips or philosophical arguments, in which he disagrees with his father's "absurd notion of the nature of scientific belief" (*APTCT* 295), playing Emerson to Jed's Hawthorne.

Interestingly, Stephan Mostoski is a shadowy reflection of Jed's solitude and fatherhood. He has distanced himself from the world even more aggressively than Jed, steeling himself against

both pity and illusion. Furthermore, not ever having seen his son and aware of him as only a "grain of pollen shaken from the poplar bough" (*APTCT* 325), Mostoski experiences that bond and that responsibility only as an abstraction, not as a reality. Mostoski knows a type of fatherhood for Ephraim only vicariously through Jed, and while the reality of his godson gives him only a glimpse of the salvation that such a relationship might offer, Ephraim's reality as Jed's son offers them the hope of their mutual redemption.

Thus, Jed's fate is the fate of many who look to disappointing father figures for the sources of their own inadequately defined identities: they themselves become fathers to whom their sons' own disillusionments can be traced. It is Jed's awareness of this fact in the reality of Ephraim--Ephraim who is not an illusion or an abstraction to be resolutely ignored, whose own questions remain unanswered by Jed, and whose integration with Jed in the character triangle may mean heightened self-definition for both--that propels him toward Dugton again. There he learns that, in the presence of unanswered and unanswerable questions about his identity, his hope for salvation lies in his ability to generate a loving tolerance of the illusions of others and to willingly rejoin the world in spite of the knowledge of it that he possesses. This affirmation may be the impetus necessary to provoke Jed's final emergence from his attic, not in the pursuit of the imaginative character triangle with which Bolton Lovehart ended his days, but in a participation in a viable life triangle with Dauphine and Ephraim, in which the inevitable tensions

of nature with idea would extenuate his search for identity and
make possible some further resolution.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Robert Penn Warren's personal and artistic affinity with Nathaniel Hawthorne is demonstrated in both his critical and fictional writings. In his introduction to Hawthorne in *American Literature: The Makers and the Making*, Warren focuses on Hawthorne's use of the very themes and character structures that he himself uses in his own fiction, indicating a technical kinship between himself and his nineteenth-century predecessor. There is, however, another fact which speaks to a personal affinity between Warren and Hawthorne, and it involves their parallel concepts of the role of the artist. Warren's critical interest in Hawthorne's view of the artist bespeaks a personal interest in Hawthorne's conclusions as well, demonstrated by Warren's own focus on the personality of the artist in two of his most autobiographical works. His portrayal of the artist in the novella "A Circus in the Attic" is patterned after Hawthorne's artistic protagonists, and, indeed, Hawthorne himself. In his final novel, *A Place to Come To*, Warren portrays a similarly Hawthornesque artist through whom he hopes to achieve a reconciliation of the artistic tensions.

For Hawthorne, the role of the artist was one that held an initial attraction. Warren tells us that Hawthorne hoped to create an artistic identity through which the "deep, warm secret" of life would be his and consequently through which he would be able to define himself as a man among other men. Hawthorne's method of entry into that fellowship was unfortunate, however, because to

write successfully about the world required that Hawthorne talk his own dark perceptions of it out on paper. Having used the description of that world in his fictions as a means of possessing the "deep, warm secret," Hawthorne grew less and less inclined to join it. The more Hawthorne wrote, the more he knew of himself, the world, and his troubled relationship with it. His possession of those three areas of knowledge resulted not in his heightened communion with the world, as he had hoped, but in his feeling of alienation from it, which manifested itself in his increasingly intense need for solitude.

In his empathetic reading of Hawthorne, Warren has a sense of him as "a man working against the inner logic of his materials--and of himself" ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 457). This sense of his subject causes Warren to react, critically and emotionally, to his awareness of Hawthorne's pervasive involvement as a "creating personality" ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 433) in his fictions. Because of Warren's own deeply personal involvement with the identity of Hawthorne, his critical introduction is also, in a sense, a creative rendering of the artist with whom Warren feels an affinity. As he focuses on the aspects of irreconcilability in Hawthorne's artistic personality, demonstrated by Warren's use of such words as "tensions," "paradox," "ambiguity," and "symbol," he indicates his fascination for Hawthorne, not only as a fellow artist, but also as a persona in whom the eternal artistic verities remain unresolved.

Thus, Hawthorne the artist becomes, to Warren, a symbol of the essential division of flesh and spirit. The flesh, of course, is

representative of the world which Hawthorne knows too well and yet not enough. The spirit is best typified by the artistic temperament, which Warren sees demonstrated by any of Hawthorne's protagonists who are searching for the Ideal, the Absolute--and by Hawthorne himself. Contact with the flesh is revivifying in its fellowship, but defiling in its acquiescence to baseness and commonality. Artistic aspirations to the spirit offer the transcendence of the mortal, during which the role of creator offers brief divinity, but the lure of divinity can corrupt the artist to the extent that he will sacrifice his human companions to his hopes for a continuation of the transcendent artistic experience.

Warren sees *The Scarlet Letter* as the novelistic indication of Hawthorne's own personal struggle with the flesh and the spirit. To Warren, the tensions inherent in such a struggle are embodied in the three main characters: Hester Prynne, Arthur Dimmesdale, and Roger Chillingworth. He is further struck by the triangular configuration that Hawthorne's characters assume, with Hester representing nature and with Dimmesdale and Chillingworth representing the differing aspects of the spirit in their religious and scientific ideologies. As Hawthorne was to note, the novel was "positively a hell-fired story" (qtd. in "Nathaniel Hawthorne" 445), causing discomfort not only for those close to him who saw reflected in it a man whose existence they had never suspected, but for Hawthorne as well, whose image of himself was forever changed by the evidences of himself--by way of what Warren called the "involvement of the creating personality"--which he saw therein.

Warren sees Hawthorne's personal focus narrow even further in his stories that deal with that aspect of human nature which he feels is most consistent with his own personality: the striving for solitude in which the artist seeks his definition. Warren cites such stories as "The Artist of the Beautiful," "The Snow Image," and "Ethan Brand" as examples of Hawthorne's examination of the subtle paradoxes at work in the personality of the artist. Such examinations are initially insightful and ultimately fearful because Hawthorne's primary artistic model is himself. The sin of his protagonists, and the sin that Hawthorne himself fears most to commit, is their failure to draw closer to humankind in brotherhood. Instead, they have used their insights into human nature to create their personal moments of divine transcendence. Accomplished in solitude, the result of artistic transcendence is greater solitude. Such, therefore, is the nature of the involvement of the creating personality which Warren senses in Hawthorne's works. To that extent, the life reflects the work and the work the life.

The fictional works, to Warren, are also symbolic of the life. Hawthorne calls his own fictions "blasted allegories," but Warren refers to them as "symbolic fictions" ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 459), explaining that allegories are more easily accessible in terms of their point-to-point correspondence to life while symbolic fictions can never totally be reconciled with their life models on a point-to-point basis. Perhaps Hawthorne's use of the term "allegory" was a deliberate circumlocution, a further indication of what Warren calls his "horror" of the symbolic nature of his art. At

any rate, that horror, both of his need to write and of his symbolic mode of writing, was indicative of Hawthorne's paradoxical desire to know his true nature and the fear of what he might learn if his personality were to be completely revealed. Thus, solitude and symbol become, in Warren's eyes, the manifestations of the paradoxes inherent in the personality of the artist that proved most troubling for Hawthorne.

"The Circus in the Attic" is Robert Penn Warren's literary biography of Nathaniel Hawthorne for in it Bolton Lovehart's identity as an artist is paralleled with Hawthorne's own. Bolton, too, requires solitude to create the symbols by which he hopes to forge a link with the world around him and, in his likeness to Hawthorne, is Warren's artistic rendering of the disparate attractions of flesh and spirit. Additionally, Bolton, like Hawthorne, finds joy in his ability to create the symbols of his selfhood but horror in their inadequacy to give him complete knowledge of himself. Finally, Warren's intermingling of autobiographical material with the fictional Bolton and the biographical Hawthorne adds a further dimension to the novella which points to the validity of Warren's personal and artistic affinity with Hawthorne.

Further evidence of this intricate triple affinity lies in the details of Warren's personal and professional lives. At the time of his writing of "The Circus in the Attic," Warren was also making his final preparations for the publication of *All the King's Men*, which would bring him success and acclaim. Personally, Warren was involved in the decline and eventual failure of his marriage, against

which his artistic success must have seemed in bitter, ironic opposition. At the end of *All the King's Men*, Warren writes hopefully and almost with a sense of sacrifice of Jack Burden's entering "the convulsion of the world" and assuming "the awful responsibility of Time" (ATKM 438). Bolton Lovehart, however, a type of Hawthorne and of Warren, is finally incapable of such an action, returning to his attic, his solitude, and his circus symbols. For Bolton, and no doubt for Warren at that time in his life, such must have seemed the surest course.

His novel *A Place to Come To* presents Warren with an artistic opportunity to prepare for his own death by moving beyond the artistic impasse at which he had left Bolton Lovehart and to which his critical introduction had consigned Nathaniel Hawthorne. In it, Warren, through Jed Tewksbury, his alter ego and protagonist, endeavors to overcome the artistic burdens of solitude and symbol. Warren accomplishes the diminishment of his artistic dependence on symbol by introducing the same circus images which occupied Bolton Lovehart in "The Circus in the Attic." Then he methodically and purposefully eliminates their physical and psychic influences before they can reach the level of full-blown symbol. The elimination of these characters in the novel speaks to Warren's recognition of Hawthorne's, and thus his own, fear of symbol. By destroying the shadowy circus images which could easily have escalated into symbol, Warren is discarding one of the obstacles to his hopeful, artistic integration of the flesh and spirit. Even with the dispelling of the overtly symbolic in his novel, however,

Warren's protagonist Jed Tewksbury maintains an essential artistic solitude which must additionally be overcome. Paradoxically, Warren's resolute avoidance of symbolism is his means of venturing closer to self-knowledge, but the greater revelation of self that has been made possible is that of the artistic self who innately seeks solitude from, or only passionless involvement with, the world.

At the end of *A Place to Come To*, Warren returns to a triangular character structure, illustrating the essentially paradoxical nature of the artistic task he set for himself. The character triangle takes Warren back to Bolton Lovehart's circus triangle in which is reflected Hawthorne's trio of characters from *The Scarlet Letter*, and while it is true that the triangular structure to which Jed returns is a life-triangle and Bolton's an imaginative triangle, the tensions represented by the two structures are constants. Like the triangle comprised of Bolton, Mrs. Parton, and Jasper, the life triangle of Jed, Dauphine, and Ephraim is illustrative of "the tensions between the demands of spirit and those of nature" ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 453). Jed and his companions may compose a more congenial threesome than Hawthorne's triangle, but the tensions of flesh and spirit which they exhibit are just as viable and remain just as unresolved. Robert Penn Warren's need for affirmation in this, his final fictional work, is strongly indicated, but affirmation can only be achieved within the bounds of the same tensions, paradoxes, ambiguities, and symbols that occupied Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Not surprisingly, Jed seeks the same compensations that Bolton

Lovehart found in his inability to reconcile nature and spirit. It is, incidentally, the same compensation which Warren postulated for Hawthorne's characters in *The Scarlet Letter*: "what compensation is possible. . . comes from the human capacity for achieving scale and grandeur even in illusion . . . by insisting on the coherence of the illusion, and from the capacity for giving pity" ("Nathaniel Hawthorne" 453). Of course, Jed's illusion is that he can live without illusion, but he is consistent in observing it, especially to the diminishment of the symbols that people his life. But because of the restrictive quality of his own illusions, Jed is required to honor the illusions of others, even to create illusions for others, his final artistic feat. In doing so, he also demonstrates a compensatory pity. In a way, the pairing of the consistency of his illusion with his extension of pity is the only integration of the otherwise irreconcilable flesh and spirit which is available to the artist.

Warren's critical summation of Nathaniel Hawthorne as an artist offers final testimony to his affinity with the man whom he terms a "culture hero." In it, Warren delineates the glories of Hawthorne's art, unconsciously praising, in his admiration for Hawthorne, what he himself had accomplished over a long and productive career. A paraphrase of the final paragraphs of his analysis of Nathaniel Hawthorne is equally reflective of Robert Penn Warren's artistry: Warren too can claim kinship to the Hawthorne whose art imaged the process of self-knowledge, whose characters reveal the reader to himself through a masterful blending of

typicality and individuality, and whose works portrayed the fundamental drama of self. Ultimately, however, Warren's brief, cryptic coda to Hawthorne's fictional accomplishment confirms the glory of Warren's own: for "it is art."

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