

THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY IN THE FICTION OF
CAROLINE GORDON AND ROBERT PENN WARREN

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The Search for Identity in the Fiction of
Caroline Gordon and Robert Penn Warren

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

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

by
Daniel Mark Pfohl
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ABSTRACT

As influential writers during the Southern Literary Renaissance, Gordon and Warren incorporated in their fiction themes generated by a rapidly changing society. This study, focusing on selected works by Gordon and Warren, traces themes dealing with resistance to societal changes, identity crisis as a result of societal changes, and the resultant search for meaning and re-establishment of identity. Their sense of an estranged southern identity is grounded in common concerns and experience. Their solutions to this modern malady, although arrived at independently and displaying disparate surface structures, also share a number of basic spiritual and structural similarities.

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To the Graduate and Research Council:

I am submitting herewith a Thesis written by Daniel Mark Pfohl entitled "The Search for Identity in the Fiction of Caroline Gordon and Robert Penn Warren." I have examined the final copy of this paper for form and content, and I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English Literature.

Steven J. Ryan
Major Professor

We have read this thesis,
and recommend its
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Chapter I

Introduction

Certainly the American South of the early twentieth century is not the only geographic and cultural area which has been intensely affected by change. The South's distinction, however, is the literary explosion ignited by that change and which has come to be called the Southern Renaissance.¹ A list of important writers who contributed to the surge of southern literature during this time includes but is not limited to writers such as John Crowe Ransom, Carson McCullers, Katherine Ann Porter, William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, and Caroline Gordon.² What these writers have in common is a peculiar historical perspective which grew out of the fact that they were "reared in one kind of world, [and] saw that world change into another kind. They were themselves of that new, changed world, and yet apart from it and conscious of the difference" (Rubin 151).

Because of a pervasive awakening in social, economic, and literary circles, the changes which transpired in the South were relatively abrupt, and all the more poignant because of their abruptness. As with any change, certain tensions occurred between societies, between societies and individuals, and within individuals themselves. The writers of the era recognized those tensions and harnessed their

energies into literary forms. Caroline Gordon and Robert Penn Warren, two writers who grew up on the Tennessee-Kentucky border, recognized these tensions of change in the South and carefully crafted those tensions into their fiction. Resistance to social change, the fragmentation of societal and individual identity, a reassessment of literary and social patterns, and an attempt to divine the meaning of man's existence and re-establish a viable identity pervade the works of these two writers.

Caroline Gordon and Robert Penn Warren are closely connected personally, artistically, and thematically. Both were born (Gordon in 1895, Warren in 1905) near and were schooled in Clarksville, Tennessee. At that time, the area's economy was still heavily based on tobacco farming. Their friendship began after Gordon's critically positive review of The Fugitive in 1923. Gordon was then drawn into a circle of writer/intellectuals which included her future husband, Allen Tate. The Tates associated with Warren in Europe as well as in America, visiting each other to compare work and ideas on art and literature. Gordon's and Warren's ideas on art and literature followed a common course and supplied the critical foundation to the Southern Renaissance as will become evident in the following chapters.

Major thematic concerns of the Southern Renaissance can be seen by comparing selected novels and short stories written by Gordon and Warren. A major theme which the two

writers share is the negative effects of the transition of the South from an agrarian society to an industrial society. Simply because of its size and momentum, society (or social progression) has a greater effect on individuals than individuals have on society. Thus, it is usually up to the individual to adjust to social pressures. And it is with individual characters that Gordon and Warren create their fiction.

One method of adjustment to social change, albeit a usually ineffective method, is resistance to the threatening change. Such resistance can be either passive or active. Caroline Gordon's portrayal of passive resistance in The Garden of Adonis (1937) and Robert Penn Warren's portrayal of active, militant resistance in Night Rider (1939) provide pessimistic views of the old southern traditions' vitality in the face of changing social patterns. Forces, both from societal pressures outside the South and human frailties within southern individuals, act to bulldoze not only the literal landscape but the mythical landscape as well. Automobiles and trains, corporations, the migration of people into urban centers, the ascendance of a paper exchange system, the introduction of factories: all become symbols of the insidious social changes which affect traditional structures and values.

Gordon's Ben Allard is somewhat myopic in his refusal to recognize a non-agricultural lifestyle. But he manages to the best of his ability to continue in the old ways at

Hanging Tree. He retreats and, from his land, draws the strength to continue. His is a passive resistance. Not so with Warren's militant, Percy Munn, who adopts an indefinable ideology and who strikes out in acts of violence to protect his version of the old agrarian system. The conviction and futility of each stance are sharpened by the murders of Allard and Munn. The steamroller of social change seems hardly impeded by the obstructions of mere individuals.

C. Vann Woodward, in "The Search for Southern Identity," calls the traditional southern identity (the identity which Gordon and Warren witnessed slipping away) ". . . a season's halt on the American caravan, a temporary encampment of an advancing society, eternally on the move toward some undefined goal of progress" (180). With the demise of the identifying southern myths³ came a sense of alienation, of being uprooted, in the individuals who made up that culture. No longer was the extended family a unified microcosm reflecting a larger social unity. No longer were the landed planters at the zenith of the social order. No longer was the economy based solely on agriculture. No longer did the established myths provide a common framework. The individual was faced with reconciling the obviously flawed myths with observable reality. Or, as was often the case, the individual southerner turned his back on the traditional myths and fell head-long into modern urban development and industrialization, a more transient life-

style, consumerism, and other aspects of the larger American culture.

Caroline Gordon and Robert Penn Warren address this estrangement of identity in much of their work. In particular, Gordon's "Old Red" and Warren's "Blackberry Winter" develop the theme of traditional structures and myths failing to maintain their positions as strong points of identification. Gordon's Aleck Maury appears as a man who can no longer identify with his family in the traditional manner or, in the end, with other central myths in the southern tradition. Warren's Seth witnesses a collision of societal forces and images and chooses to leave the traditional setting of family and farm for a newer, less rooted urban existence.

As Gordon and Warren developed the craft and the art of their writing, they also expanded and developed the themes within their fiction. John Bradbury, in discussing the whole of Gordon's work, stresses that "Miss Gordon . . . has been one of the most conscientious students of technique and has constantly sought to broaden the range of her subject matter and philosophical understanding" (58). Warren, too, from his early days in Nashville ". . . has shown a remarkable consistency in his development as a writer. In the . . . years since he published his first poem in The Fugitive, he has followed with integrity and singleness of purpose the bent of his genius" (Bohner 7). After having dealt with the passing of the traditions of the Old

South and the resulting alienated, rootless condition of man in the Modern South, Gordon and Warren, in their later novels, expanded their focus to include all of Western society and explored spiritual solutions to re-establish personal as well as social identity and to provide meaning to existence. Gordon's eighth novel, The Malefactors (1956), and Warren's tenth novel, A Place To Come To (1977), demonstrate the struggle both of these writers fought with world order, the meaning of existence, and identity.

Gordon, in particular, had sought some means by which man might transcend his mundane, temporal existence. She found the means in Catholicism. Greatly affected by the philosophic and artistic proposals of the Catholic French philosopher Jacques Maritain,⁴ Gordon found in Catholicism the tradition and social structure to provide order and meaning to life and which also provided man the means to rise beyond a stoic acceptance of the world and his place in that world. Maritain's writings, lectures, and conversations prompted Gordon to re-evaluate the writers of the Realist tradition⁵ from the perspective of Christianity. Gordon then brought to The Malefactors tightly crafted structural patterns which lend complementary support to new answers to her traditional thematic concerns.

The Malefactors and A Place To Come To portray central characters adrift in modern culture, alienated from their heritage, concerned with art in the form of literature but unfulfilled in that pursuit, and spiritually empty. Tom

Claiborne, Gordon's protagonist, hails from an established Nashville family but has left the South to achieve a prominent reputation as a writer/critic in America and abroad. Yet, he returns to the States (New England) because of a spiritual lack which he cannot identify and which hampers his creativity. Gordon's portrayal of Claiborne's spiritual malaise is echoed and reinforced in other characters and events throughout the novel. The Malefactors, however, is strikingly different from Gordon's earlier novels in that a unified solution, rather than a stoic stance or the promise of a solution, to the human personal and social condition is presented. Christianity, for Gordon, provides Claiborne, and by extension all humanity, a spiritual and social structure (the family of Christ) which incorporates and enhances the individual's identity.

A Place To Come To also focuses on an individual's struggle with his heritage, his outwardly successful but personally dissatisfying literary career, and his search for meaning and identity in an obviously flawed world. Jed Tewksbury is a Southerner (born in Claxford County, Alabama) who, from his earliest memory, resists identifying with his heritage, escapes the South to study literature in Chicago, extends his horizons to include Europe, and is thoroughly puzzled by the world and his place in it. His search for meaning and personal identity is central to his introspective telling of his life-story. Warren's vision, as presented through Tewksbury, is of a world basically and

obviously flawed, populated by people who are also basically and obviously flawed. The understanding of and solution to this condition as presented by Warren is not as founded in orthodoxy as Gordon's solution. For Warren, the solution is to be rendered through hard-won knowledge (both of the self and of the world) and with an elusive spiritual unity with other humans.

The chapters that follow, then, will explore and compare the vision and fictional representation of Caroline Gordon and Robert Penn Warren through their progression from chronicling the breakdown of southern society and the subsequent alienation of modern man to their individual solutions to the modern condition of man.

Notes

¹ Bradbury, Renaissance in the South (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), cites the inception of the literary movement from 1920 and considers the movement "still maturely vigorous in 1963" (7).

² Louis D. Rubin, Jr., The South and the Sectional Image, ed. Dewey W. Grantham, Jr. (New York: Harper & Row, 1967) 145-159, lists a core of important southern writers and their birthdates to show an underlying commonality of historical and societal experience which helped foster their peculiar approach to literature.

³ C. Vann Woodward and George B. Tindall, The South and the Sectional Image, ed. Dewey W. Grantham, Jr. (New York: Harper & Row, 1967) 173-186, 8-22, address such myths as the southern belle: beautiful, gracious, pure, staunch-hearted, socially accomplished; the southern gallant or cavalier: handsome, strong, romantic, honorable; slavery for the "good" of the Negro; the family unit; and numerous images rising out of the larger Plantation legend.

⁴ John M. Dunaway, Jacques Maritain (Boston: Twayne, 1978), establishes Maritain's influence on the American literary scene through direct quotes from both Tate and Gordon (153-154). Maritain's influence on other noted writers is also briefly tracked with the conclusion that "the complete list of writers whose life and art have been touched by Jacques Maritain would undoubtedly reach astonishingly far" (155).

⁵ John M. Bradbury, Renaissance in the South (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), states that looking back to the works of earlier writers for models and examples, Gordon, as well as Tate and Warren, considered Flaubert the "progenitor of modern fiction" and that for critics "Tate, Gordon, Warren, and Cleanth Brooks, . . . aesthetically conceived and executed fiction involves certain basic structural and textural elements in some proportion: a carefully detailed or 'naturalistic' surface, irony, symbolism, and a strict and consistent handling of point of view" (16).

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Chapter II

Ben Allard and Percy Munn:

Ineffectual Resistance

to the New South

Caroline Gordon's The Garden of Adonis (1937) and Robert Penn Warren's Night Rider (1939) present a pessimistic vision of the encroachment of modern technological society on the traditionally agrarian South. Gordon, on the fringe of the agrarian movement of the 1930's, and Warren, an avowed Agrarian,¹ both depict what they see as irreversible social decay. The viewpoint manifest in these two books reflects the basic dualistic vision of the Agrarians.² Virginia Rocks describes this fundamental dualism in Agrarian thought:

For these men of letters and of social sciences, the world consisted of two principles which they characterized variously as art vs. science, religious humanism vs. materialism, agrarianism vs. industrialism. The one principle was unmistakably good, the other evil. (80)

The Agrarians adamantly insisted on the mutual exclusivity of these polar opposites. An exchange of letters in early 1927 between several members of the Agrarians³ voiced the seriousness and the depth of their concerns. Tate wrote to Davidson ". . . the symptom of advance must be seen as a

symptom of decay . . . "(Fugitive Group 244). Ransom, having heard from Davidson, wrote to Tate that "Our fight is for survival; and it's got to be waged not so much against the Yankees as against the exponents of the New South" (245-6). As evident in the title I'll Take My Stand (1930), which formalized the Agrarian beliefs, the tenacity of the defenders and their tenuous position placed these men in a "no-compromise" attitude. Either the agrarian system would be maintained intact, or it would be lost completely. Gordon and Warren, in sympathy with these ideas, incorporated this no-compromise stance in their fiction and demonstrated the disastrous consequences of the social change wrought by the industrial modernization of the South. In both novels, representative agrarian characters attempt to defend their traditional way of life only to be brutally murdered. Gordon's Ben Allard, adopting a conservative traditional role and maintaining faith in the regenerative powers of the agrarian system, is brutally clubbed while protecting his clover crop. Warren's Percy Munn, donning the role of militant subversive to protect free tobacco farming, is ultimately shot down by government troops. Both murders can be seen as the looming death of the traditional agrarian system.

Mr. Ben Allard, the gentleman farmer in The Garden of Adonis, and Percy Munn, the gentleman farmer/lawyer in Night Rider, serve as standard-bearers of the Southern Agrarian tradition. Although they are far from identical characters,

they do have some important similarities which allow them to be seen as symbols of Southern tradition. In fact, Gordon presents an image designed to make the connection between the man and the tradition. It occurs as Jim Carter looks at Ben Allard as they sit on the Allard front porch. Upon hearing of a neighbor's death:

Allard said that Cobbett Moore was sixty-seven years old, two years older than he himself was. He leaned over and knocked his pipe out against the leg of his chair. His profile, hawklike, larger than life, was shadowed on the white pillar that upheld the porch. (Garden of Adonis 257)

The man and the mansion blend into a common identity, each part drawing strength from the other.

Although the stories occur at slightly different times in history, Ben Allard and Percy Munn are contemporaries. Ben Allard is sixty-five in the early 1930's, and Percy Munn is in his mid-thirties just after the beginning of the twentieth century. Both men have inherited established family names and large farms on which the traditional dark fired tobacco is grown. They both see themselves as farmers. Ben Allard is inextricably tied to the land; it is what sustains him. Ben's son, Frank, reacting to his father's aloof manner toward him because he did not want to shackle himself to a heavily mortgaged farm, realized that his father just ". . . could not see, he was so constituted that he could not see how a man could abandon his land"

(234). Percy Munn, in the beginning, had no grand aspirations. "'No,' he went on, shaking his head, 'I've got enough to do already with my farm and with my law practice'" (Night Rider 13). However, as he became politically active, he perceived his new-found excitement "sharpened his farmer's sense of the weather" (45). Both men are acutely aware of their family connections and spend much time recollecting many intricate relationships.

As owners of large tracts of farm land, Allard and Munn hold positions near the top of the Southern social hierarchy. They "make trades" with black and white sharecroppers as their families had done since the end of the Civil War. There are croppers on both farms who are cropping for their second generation of owners. Old Joe Mortimer, who had been born at "Hanging Tree," has seen Ben Allard take over the farming responsibilities and grow old. On Percy Munn's farm, Mr. Grimes had cropped for Munn's father. These old sharecroppers are examples of a type: they are uneducated, weatherwise, superstitious, expert in growing and curing dark fired tobacco, and loyal to the land. In the symbiotic relationship between owners and tenants, which was at times paternal toward the tenants, the tenant earned his meager living and the landowners took their profits (if there were any).⁴ The tenant usually received credit from the owner against his share of the crop. As industrial controls over the price of tobacco worked against the continuing costs of the farmers, the

tenants' credit was often carried over from one year to the next. Often the owner was forced to mortgage the family land in order to meet his financial obligations. Such is the case not only for Allard and Munn, but for all the farmers in these two novels. The banks which held the mortgages on these farms were becoming more powerful as they became the true landowners of the South. Thus, social flux threatened to displace the Allards and the Munns of the South.

Ben Allard and Percy Munn endure similar pressure from the banking system which increasingly supports the monied industrial powers. The banks' subtle but insidious pressure is felt throughout both novels. Early in The Garden of Adonis, Ben Allard muses over his recent discussion with two bank representatives who came to see him about an unpaid loan. As the two men grill him with unfarmer-like questions, he suddenly realizes how close he is to losing his land:

He had, of course, expected that always, or at least for the last ten years. But it had never been now, this spring. It had always been the next spring or the next. One crop away, anyhow . . . and in those few minutes . . . he had known what it was to lose the farm. Yes, he had seen it, felt it drop away from him acre by acre until he stood up a naked and landless man. . . . As if the man in the light gray overcoat had waved his hand and a sea

had crept up. He watched it spread. The north field first, the meadows adjoining, then the woods and last of all this field in which they sat. . . . he had been strangely occupied in wondering what would become of himself and Woodward and Simpson when the land was gone from under him. (15-16)

Allard managed to borrow another mere six hundred dollars to get out his crop of tobacco. It would stave off the sale of his farm, barely. But it was a bitter success, for Allard felt "it had got to the point nowadays where they felt if they lent you money they had a right to tell you how to run your farm" (14). Although Percy Munn subsidizes his farm income through his law practice, the agricultural drain on his finances is considerable. His obligations include his mother-in-law's farm and home, the mortgage of which he paid off by taking a mortgage on his own property. Thus, the bank has a controlling interest in his farming activities, too. He is also under direct pressure from the tobacco company that maintains a buyer's monopoly over his section. When pricing Munn's previous tobacco crop, the buyer had told Munn:

Mr. Munn, your place falls in my territory for buying and you won't get an offer from anybody else; for your convenience I'm telling you this so you can take my price and save yourself trouble, because when I come back again it's likely the price won't be so good, the price falling so sharp

the last few days. (Night Rider 56)

The tobacco companies and the banks, then, have their hands in the farmers' pockets, reaching deeply for every possible cent. For the tobacco industry, this is good business. For the banks, it increases their own financial standing and power. The resultant pressure on the farmers is interpreted by Gordon as a pervasive evil bent on displacing the traditional agrarian lifestyle. The manner in which Allard and Munn react to these social and economic pressures brings to light a basic and important difference between their characters.

Ben Allard is a product of and a staunch believer in the old agrarian way of life. When his financial troubles began, some ten years before the story takes place, he went to his son Frank for help with the expectation that Frank, now an insurance agent in town, felt the same loyalty to the family lands. Allard's entire relationship with his son became a shadow of what it had been after Ben learned that Frank had no aspirations to continue the farming tradition. Even when he spoke to Frank "the tone he used to Frank was polite, indulgent, the tone one used to women and children. Yes, Frank thought, that was it. His father, since Frank had left the farm, thought of him as only half a man" (Garden of Adonis 234). Yet, Ote Mortimer, although only a sharecropper, was spoken to "as if Ote were in some way his equal" (234). They are equals in a way, equal in their attitude toward the land and their partnership in its

cultivation.

Part of the older Allard's attitude is a suspicion and a reluctance toward industrial modernization. Gordon brings this side of Allard to view as he drives his automobile to the train station to pick up his daughter Letty:

After a few false starts the car lurched forward. Allard with a sigh settled himself behind the wheel. For a few minutes he drove carefully with the nervous concentration of a man who is more used to handling horses than machinery. After a little he relapsed into his abstracted mood. . . .

Approaching a gate he broke off. The car under his nervous manipulation veered to the left, then came to an abrupt halt. Allard looked down, saw that the left fender rested against the heavy oak king post. He backed the car, halted again, then climbed out. He spoke aloud: "Trouble with these damn things, you got to keep your eye on 'em every minute." (13-14)

Horses, he implies, are more reliable because they require less supervision. Allard also prefers the traditional methods of dealing with other farmers and merchants.

Allard's arrangement with Luther Owens to set up a saw mill, which becomes Ote's great hope for relief from his troubles, and mill some of Allard's timber to pay off a long-standing debt is an old fashioned, verbal agreement just as Allard's agreement to pay off his grocery debt with fall lambs is

old-fashioned. Such traditional gentlemen's agreements and barter are contrary to the new way the banks are doing business. The banks' insistence on paper and deadlines exacerbates Allard's ire. When Woodward comes out to the farm, Allard is affronted:

It would have been more businesslike, surely, to sit there in his bank until he, Ben Allard, came in to beg him to renew his note. He would have done it all right. . . . He had intended to do it next week and he hadn't really visualized the possibility that Woodward would refuse him. (15)

It is the same faith in and adherence to the old system that allows Allard, at first, to dispel any doubts about Jim Carter's intentions toward Letty. Allard dismisses his suspicions of a love affair. After all, he thinks:

Carter was a married man. He was, besides, an honorable fellow [because he came from an established local family]. He might have pursued Letty elsewhere but certainly he wouldn't have come down to Hanging Tree--with Frank--to do it. (270)

Allard is abruptly disillusioned, though, when he discovers that Letty has indeed run off with Jim Carter. Letty's choice of lovers is particularly poignant, for Jim Carter had moved into town to become a foreman in a local Northern-owned factory.

But as always, Allard's work around the farm rejuvenates him. It puts the spring into his step and provides

purpose for his life. It provides him with the power to exert his authority over Ote Mortimer when Ote threatens to prematurely harvest the experimental clover because he needs the money to marry Idelle Sheeler, who has become pregnant by him. Allard, on the second floor of his home:

leaned over to look at the poor white man and with his clenched fist he made a menacing gesture. "It may be your clover," he said, "but it's my land. You try cutting that clover and you'll regret it. To the longest day you live." (292)

Ote would regret it, but not in the way Allard proposes. The fatal confrontation which develops between Ben Allard and Ote Mortimer symbolizes the climactic breakdown of the old southern agrarian system. Allard, because of the tobacco industry's pricing policy and the bank's financial stranglehold on his farm, is unable to fulfill his paternal role of landowner when his tenant, Ote, needs financial assistance. And those same powers force Ben to restrain Ote from exercising the only option open to him--the harvest of his crop. But a premature harvest would be a wasteful squandering of an otherwise valuable crop (Ben's last hope for self-sufficiency). So when Ote bludgeons Ben in desperate frustration, it is the fatal blow to the old agrarian lifestyle. Although it is Ote who wields the club, much of the culpability in Allard's murder lies with the social and economic powers which assaulted the agrarian traditions.

Percy Munn is affected quite differently by these social and economic pressures. He develops a militant and idealistic zeal with which he strikes out against those he sees as oppressors. The character of Munn and his response to the changes in society have their beginnings in Warren's biography of John Brown. Warren came to see the type of idealism which motivated John Brown as counterproductive. He felt that this type of idealist "is a dangerous man, since he served a cause identifiable not with the common human lot, but with an abstract, pitiless idea" (Fugitive Group 247). In 1928 as the Agrarians were developing their concepts for the South:

Warren began to recognize this idealism as a tendency of modern secular man; this realization, combined with the naturally religious bent of his writings and his distrust of mechanization, spurred him into sharing the defence of the traditional society now being worked out by his friends. (247)

Seen by this attitude, Munn is already and unknowingly tainted by modernity. Though his intentions may be sound, his actions work, ultimately, toward the very ends he fears--the dissolution of the lifestyle he seeks to maintain. The character of Percy Munn demonstrates the ineffectiveness and futility of this overly zealous idealism as a defense of the traditional agrarian South.

From the very beginning of the novel, Munn is borne along by a movement of events which seem outside his control

or beyond his understanding. Munn is as anti-modern, anti-progressive, and anti-industry as any of the Agrarians. Yet, his energies become misdirected. Arriving in Bardsville on the day of a farmers' rally, Munn is caught up in the mass of people:

The pressure behind now was not the dead weight of bodies flung foreward by the abrupt slowing of the train, but a pressure generated by the wills of all those people behind him, people who wanted to move down the aisle and get off the train and get into the streets of Bardsville, where more people, only God knew how many, would be today. And as the movement of the crowd pushed him toward the door, Mr. Munn again resented that pressure that was human because it was made by human beings, but was inhuman, too, because you could not isolate any one of those human beings who made it. (Night Rider 2-3)

As the novel progresses, Munn feels more monolithic pressures from antagonistic groups (the tobacco industry, banks, townspeople, etc.). Yet, no individual can be held accountable for the movement of society. Although he sympathizes with the farmers, sharing with them their tenuous situation, he has no desire to be the leader or organizer of a popular backlash. Nevertheless, he is pressured into just such a position. When called upon to ad lib a speech for the rally, Munn tells the farmers, "There

is nothing here in Bardsville for you . . . except what you have brought with you. . . . There is nothing here but an idea. . . . It does not exist unless you give it life by your own hope and loyalty" (26). The atmosphere of the crowd compels him; he feeds their desires, moved by some unnamable drive. As he finishes and sits down, "he felt like a somnambulist who is gradually recalled to himself" (27). This massive pressure, this force of zealous idealism, forces Munn into a corner from which there is no escape.

Munn is recruited to the board of directors for the Association of Growers of Dark Fired Tobacco. When more drastic action is planned, Munn joins the Free Farmers' Brotherhood of Protection and Control (the Night Riders). Yet for all his involvement, he remains unable to explain to his wife (and at times to himself) the meaning of it all. He is unable to put all his feelings into a coherent statement of purpose. And though Munn is sympathetic to the farmers' movement and believes he is working to improve their conditions, he never forms any concrete conceptions of the future. The images are always tantalizingly just out of reach. His involvement increases until he is performing acts which he would have thought abhorrent only a short time before. Acts such as crop destruction, beatings, and even murder become necessary for the cause. Munn rationalizes his activities shortly after joining the Brotherhood: "It was win or lose now . . . and no turning back" (171). He,

along with his fellows, feels backed into a corner by the tobacco and banking concerns.

The course of action Munn pursues proves just as disastrous as Ben Allard's. Both Allard and Munn die attempting to maintain control over the production, harvest, and sale of cash crops, the support of their agrarian lifestyles. The Brotherhood's military-like raids on the tobacco warehouses only succeed in bringing federal troops who are heartily received by the tobacco companies, the banks, and even the townspeople. As the Association collapses, its leaders are implicated in the wave of violence which had been directed against non-member farmers and tobacco companies. Although Munn flees Bardsville because of a false murder charge, he is guilty of a previous execution-style murder and other acts of subversion. Munn, formerly a leading citizen of the community, slinks out of town like a common criminal to hide. When he is finally cornered and shot down, it is by federal troops asserting the general will of the people they are empowered to protect. The troops are defending a society which is moving away from an agricultural, rural base toward an industrial, urban base. As with Ben Allard's murder, those interests which create the social and economic pressures Munn resists walk away with apparently clean hands. A significant step in the dismantling of the agrarian system is accomplished.

What appears, as these two standard-bearers of Southern tradition (Allard and Munn) are cut down by the expanding

sweep of urban migration and industrialization, is a bleak prognosis for the survival of the agrarian system. Neither novel presents a hopeful view of the Southern farmers' attempts to halt the incursion of modern industrial interests or the subsequent destruction of the traditional agrarian culture. Neither the strict adherence to traditional cultural values and farming practices, as exemplified by the character of Ben Allard, nor a zealous militant defense of the agrarian ideal, as exemplified by the character of Percy Munn, provides a viable defense.

In keeping with the "no-compromise" position of the agrarians, the insidious influence of the industrial powers appears more darkly in Night Rider. Percy Munn, although outwardly a traditional Southerner, has already been tainted by modern influences, influences of which neither he nor his contemporaries are conscious. He inwardly lacks the direction, the inner substance, or the conviction of a man such as Ben Allard and is easily swayed by abstract idealism, a characteristic (according to Warren) of modern secular man. Gordon, on the other hand, maintains her protagonist's integrity in the face of overwhelming pressures. Still, Ben Allard's integrity is little defense against the steamroller of society. Allard and Munn, as the South, become victims of social and economic mutability.

Notes

¹ Although Caroline Gordon was never a formal member of the Agrarians, her connections and sympathies with their ideas began as early as 1923 when her critically supportive review of The Fugitive appeared in the Chatanooga News. She became friends with Warren and married Allen Tate in 1924, both of whom were vital personalities in the Fugitive and the Agrarian group.

² The viewpoint of the Agrarians was formalized in a collection of scholarly essays compiled under the title I'll Take My Stand (1930).

³ Cowan, The Fugitive Group (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1959), lists the twelve Agrarians as John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, Andrew Lytle, Stark Young, John Gould Fletcher, Frank Lawrence Owsley, Lyle Lanier, H. C. Nixon, John Donald Wade, and Henry Blue Kline. Only four--Ransom, Davidson, Tate, and Warren--had also been members of the Fugitive group.

⁴ Dewey Grantham, Southern Progressivism (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), points to the share-cropping system itself as responsible for the "widespread poverty, itinerancy, and loss of independence experienced by millions of Southern farmers" (321). Coulter, "The Rural Life Problem of the South" (South Atlantic Quarterly January 1913: 61,63), agrees that the resulting consequences of this system included "poor agriculture, exhausted soils, small crops, poor roads, decaying bridges, unpainted homes, and

unkempt yards" (61). For Gordon, though, the system was viable if left unmolested by outside forces such as banking, commercialization, and industrialization.

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Chapter III

Alec Maury and Seth:

Southern Identity Crisis

The South's journey through time and experience from a traditional agrarian society to a developing industrial society created a problem of identity for both society as a whole and the individuals within that society. Writers during the Southern Literary Renaissance were not only concerned about the general movement of society, but also with society's constituent individuals. Alienated and displaced persons appear thematically in much of the literature of this time. Thus, the individual, as he is affected by and as he affects society, is an important element in southern fiction.

The disruptive effects of change and the subsequent searching for a new identity are clearly visible in the fiction of Caroline Gordon and Robert Penn Warren. Gordon's "Old Red" and Warren's "Blackberry Winter" are set in the early twentieth-century South and reflect the growing inability of individuals to identify with the myths and culture which had been major elements in the South's identity for so long.

In both stories, societal change is evidenced by personal identity struggle. The protagonists no longer identify with their respective families and, thus, find

themselves outside the larger society. Aleck Maury, in "Old Red," is such an individual. He pulls away from a social identity, which he views as untenable, and seeks to establish an individual identity consistent with the traditional values which closely link man to the land around him. His character is complex in that he displays a yearning for the agrarian commitment to the land, yet rejects many of the traditional southern trappings. Concern for "family," high regard for the Classics, loyalty to the homeplace are among the myths and traditions at which he scoffs. Yet, a very traditional fox hunt, which provides Maury with a very non-traditional resolution for his identity crisis, plays a central role in developing this theme. Maury's commitment to the land mirrors Ben Allard's commitment (in The Garden of Adonis) except Maury is a sportsman rather than a farmer, and as such, "preserves his traditional values by attaching their forms to sport . . . " (Bradbury 59). However, the unity between the land and culture is gone for Maury. The agrarian ties are splitting away, a fatal split according to Agrarian philosophy. Aleck Maury, in his struggle for identity, chooses a bond with nature rather than with southern heritage. From the southern family's point of view, Maury's rejection of tradition is his weakness. From his point of view (and perhaps Gordon wants the reader to accept this point of view), his fierce commitment to nature is his strength. Strength or weakness, the schism highlights the problem of identity faced by a region moving

away from its agrarian roots.

Prior to the breakdown of the South's agrarian lifestyle, the family, with its intricate relationships, provided a firm basis for an individual's identity. The collapse of the traditional southern culture is often correlated with the disintegration of the intricate familial ties which had been so important. So extended and convoluted were these ties that the appellation of "cousin" became a generic term covering a wide range of relationships. Robert Penn Warren, in his introduction to The Collected Stories of Caroline Gordon, stresses that:

It is true, at all levels of society in the South, the sense of kinship, of the clan, of the family, hung on long after it had died elsewhere, and hung on with so strong a sense of obligation that to the outsider it seems--or not too long ago seemed--nonsense or mystique. Caroline Gordon's stories are set just before the breakdown of the sense of family. (x-xi)

Indeed, in "Old Red," the foundation is already crumbling as Aleck Maury struggles against the confines of his family.

Aleck Maury's turning away from his family (a metaphor for society) may appear as a typical yearning to realize the myths of the agrarian-based antebellum southern culture, myths perpetuated by his family. However, Maury's direction is not in unison with his family's. He steps out of the family, out of his social tradition, to arrive at an indi-

vidual identity. Maury's identity is not that of a Twentieth-century man forming a New South or of a man fighting to maintain the old traditions intact. He clasps onto nature to provide a meaningful constant in his life.

Aleck Maury's hesitancy to enter fully into the family gathering at the homeplace immediately sets him apart from "his white-haired, shrunken mother-in-law; his tall sister-in-law who had the proud carriage of the head, the aquiline nose, but not the spirit of his dead wife; his lean, blond, new son-in-law; his black-eyed daughter who, but that she was thin, looked so much like him" (42-3). His bags remain packed and piled with his fishing gear, ready to leave at a moment's notice to retreat to his own world of fishing.

Maury relishes his distinctness from other members of the family. He recalls with delight that he is not a victim, as his father was, of an all-absorbing interest in the Classics (which he calls "the fatal germ cacoethes scribendi") which had been a mainstay in southern education and culture. He feels sorry for his son-in-law who has obviously been smitten with cacoethes scribendi. Maury watches Steve's abstracted gaze as they fish one afternoon and thinks pitifully to himself, "Poor boy, dead to the world and would probably be that way the rest of his life" (53). Maury, on the other hand, is closely attuned to the world around him. And he greatly values that communion with nature.

Maury's conception of time and its appropriate use

also conflicts with his family's. The typical contentment of merely existing in the bosom of the family and homeplace, which the others exude, frightens him. Their conception of time appears to Maury as:

. . . a dull, leaden-colored fabric depending from the old lady's hands, from the hands of all of them, a blanket that they pulled about between them, now here, now there, trying to cover up their nakedness. Or they would cast it upon the ground and creep in among the folds, finding one day a little more tightly rolled than another, but all of it everywhere the same dull gray substance. (44)

The social trappings of southern culture had become too cumbersome. Maury values his time too highly to waste it "sitting on the porch at Merry Point!" (44).

Aleck Maury is far from being a racial egalitarian. However, he seems just as far removed from the traditional southern-white attitudes concerning blacks. He readily admits enjoying the company of blacks, even if it is only to enhance a tall tale of an old Negress teaching him to smell out a good fishing hole. While trying to recover from his own social blunder of expressing his desire to take his son-in-law fishing instead of attending some "cousin's" funeral, Maury claims it is his need of white intellectual companionship which prompted his proposed fishing trip. His daughter quips scornfully, "As if you didn't prefer the society of niggers" (58). And his mother-in-law supports this state-

ment by reminding everyone of Maury's constant fishing companion of years earlier, a black man named Ben Hoosier. Maury admits to himself that Ben, indeed, was "a fine nigger . . . and on to a lot of tricks, the only man he ever cared to take fishing with him" (58).

Usually confident in his individual identification with the natural world (as opposed to the social world), Aleck Maury is not immune to the subtle social pressures exerted by the members of his family. He even feels somewhat tricked into his stay at Merry Point, hence the packed bags. He is aware of having allowed himself to be drawn back from his familiar Florida stomping grounds where he efficiently spends his time fishing. Maury's reverence for his fishing spots and the areas around them recalls a farmer's reverence for his lands. Both require an agrarian attitude, an attitude which was passing. Maury is uncomfortable at Merry Point where the only accessible fishing is a pond--the Willow Sink. "It was not much, but it was better than nothing" (48). Twice now since he has been back at Merry Point, Maury has been shaken by his distinctness from the rest of his family. The first instance occurs as he and Steve sit fishing, Steve appearing oblivious to the world around him. "A pang of pity shot through Maury and on the heels of it a gust of that black fear that occasionally shook him. It was he, not Steve, that was the queer one. The world was full of people like this boy . . ." (53), and Maury does not identify with those people. The second

instance occurs after his dinner-table blunder about the fishing trip. "Looking around the table he caught the same look in every eye; he had felt a gust of that same fright which had shaken him there on the pond" (57). Maury cannot identify with his family, nor does he really want to identify with them. Yet, at times, they pose an unspoken threat to the world and existence he identifies with and to the very existence of his identity.

Being in the bosom of his family unsettles Aleck Maury. Conversely, escaping to the fields reestablishes his equilibrium. For example, while breaking away for a little fishing at the Willow Sink,

he stopped under a wild cherry tree to light his pipe. . . . When he stooped to pick up his rod again it was with a feeling of sudden keen elation. An image had risen in his memory, an image that was familiar but came to him infrequently of late and that only in moments of elation: the wide field in front of his uncle's house in Albemarle, on one side the dark line of undergrowth that marked the Rivanna River, on the other the blue of Peter's Mountain. They would be waiting there in that broad plain when they had first sight of the fox.

(50)

The fox, known affectionately by the hunters as "Old Red," provides Maury with a symbol of cunning, craftiness, and independence.

Admiration for the fox and the fox's ability to survive despite all efforts to entrap him resurfaces during Maury's nocturnal contemplations on his own family's efforts to restrict his activities and mold him into an ideal "southern gentleman," which does not include his passion for fishing. Restlessly ensconced in the old house in a room where "he knew every flower in the pattern of the wallpaper," Maury takes stock of his situation. "The wallpaper in the room across the hall was like it too. The old lady slept there, and in the room next to his, Laura, his sister-in-law, and in the east bedroom downstairs, the young couple" (54). The prescribed sleeping arrangement follows a well-known and time-worn pattern, a precision which Maury finds stagnant. The only element missing is Maury's dead wife who had "never given up hope of changing him over into the man she thought he ought to be. Time and again she almost had him" (55). But he had finally been saved by her stroke and subsequent death. Not wishing to become mentally embroiled in complex and unpleasant memories,

he relaxed again upon his pillow, deliberately summoned up pictures before his mind's eye.

Landscapes--and streams. He observed their outlines, watched one flow into another. . . . He watched it take form slowly: the wide field in front of Hawkwood, the Rivanna River on one side, on the other Peter's Mountain. They would be waiting there until the fox showed himself on that

little rise by the river. (59)

Once again the hunt and the wily fox shape his contemplations. Lying in the dark, surrounded by the place and the people from whom he feels so distinct, Maury allows his thoughts to flow freely. His projected identity breaks away from the pack of hunters and joins with the fox:

he was down off his horse. He was coursing with the fox through the trees. He could hear the sharp, pointed feet padding on the dead leaves, see the quick head turn now and then over the shoulder. . . . a narrow stream curved between the ridges. The fox's feet were light in the water . . . he ran slowly past the big boulder, past the blasted pine to where the shadow of Pinnacle Rock was black across the path. He ran on and the shadow swayed and rose to meet him. Its cool touch was on his hot tongue, his heaving flanks. He had slipped in under it. (59)

The pull of the fox-hunt tradition is not strong enough to hold Maury. He dramatically splits from the tradition, as from the family, to a new position of strong personal identity in nature. Maury, in his mind, becomes the successfully elusive fox. This leap in identity soothes his familial anxieties. With new-found confidence, Maury drifts back to sleep planning the excuse by which he will make his morning escape back to his "Pinnacle Rock" in Florida.

Maury's resistance and escape are on one level, a

purely personal, individual assertion of his personality. On a broader level, however, he exemplifies a movement away from a society which is no longer viable. The myths and traditions perpetuated by his family seem hollow. Thus, in order to maintain his personal identity, Maury rejects his family and the society it exemplifies, taking isolated refuge in nature.

Gordon, in "Old Red," focuses on internal elements prompting change. Her depiction of the breakdown of the central social structure (the family) from within bodes ill for the larger, encompassing regional social structure. Warren, in "Blackberry Winter," introduces the theme of outside forces, as well as internal (personal) forces, acting upon the social structure. Warren's protagonist in "Blackberry Winter" witnesses the passing of the "old ways" and struggles toward an identity influenced by forces outside the traditions of his heritage. His family is unable to provide continuity in the face of mutable existence. Seth's identity reaches beyond the confines of his family and the farm when a tramp wanders onto the farm during blackberry winter. Blackberry winter--that southern phrase for the southern phenomenon of a sudden summer cold snap--signals both change in the agrarian lifestyle of the region and Seth's orientation to that lifestyle. This day signals an important shift in Seth's identity. Left behind is his childhood awareness of time as a "kind of climate in which things are, and when a thing happens it begins to live and

keeps on living and stands solid in time like the tree that you can walk around" (63-64). After this day, images and events will lose some of their distinctness and blur into the ever-moving procession of time. Also left behind is the certainty of youth when "you know there are things which you don't know, but you know that when you know something you know it" (64). Seth witnesses the beginning of a time when change, the flux of society, weakens even the most tenacious certainty.

Seth, looking back from the vantage point of adulthood, marks the beginning of his movement away from the childhood security of his family with the arrival of the tramp during blackberry winter. During that perception-heightened day, many of the comforting myths which Seth shared in common with other Southerners imposed themselves upon his consciousness. His attention focused on what he knew to be "certainties." The most obvious certainty for Seth was the weather:

You know a thing has been and you know that you can go barefoot in June. You do not understand that voice from back in the kitchen which says that you cannot go barefoot outdoors and run to see what has happened and run your feet over the wet shivery grass and make the perfect mark of your foot in the smooth, creamy, red mud and then muse upon it. (64)

Perhaps it was this change in the weather which perked his perceptions so that they recorded so many vivid images of

that day. And if he cannot rely on the weather, how can he rely on something as mutable as society?

The images burned into Seth's consciousness that day are images which depend on and grow out of the old tradition. Seth's image of his mother, for example, recalls aspects of the revered women of southern tradition. Seth proudly remembers his mother:

Many women would have been afraid with the strange man who they knew had that knife in his pocket. . . . But my mother wasn't afraid. She wasn't a big woman, but she was clever and brisk about everything she did and looked everybody and everything right in the eye from her own blue eyes. . . . and I have seen her snatch up a pump gun and go out and knock a chicken hawk out of the air like a busted skeet when he came over her chicken yard. She was a steady and self-reliant woman. (68)

Seth's father is likewise seen with admiration. As Seth approaches the crowd of men gathered near the flooded bridge, his father is clearly visible "sitting on his mare over the heads of the other men who were standing around" (72). Seth admits that he "was always proud to see him sit a horse, he was so quiet and straight" (73). This growing image of a strong, commanding military presence is confirmed when Seth and his father part company at the farm gate. Seth "watched him ride off. He was wearing cowhide boots and an old hunting coat, and I thought that made him look

very military, like a picture. That and the way he rode" (77). It is no surprise, then, when Seth's father, maintaining the civilized dignity of a southern gentleman, unarmed, faces down the tramp who carries a knife in his pocket. Other characters who inhabit Seth's known world include Dellie, the black cook "who would grumble and bustle about our kitchen, talking to herself, scolding me or little Jeb, clanking pans, making all sorts of unnecessary noises and mutterings like an old-fashioned black thrasher steam engine" (79); Old Jeb, Dellie's husband who was an elderly powerfully built hard-working black man with the "kindest and wisest old face in the world, the blunt, sad, wise face of an old animal peering tolerantly out on the goings on of the merely human creatures before him" (81); and little Jeb, their son and Seth's playmate.

It is difficult to distinguish which occurrence underscores the other: the tramp's presence or blackberry winter. In any event, the incursion of outside forces and the weather's assault on the agrarian lifestyle mark a significant intersection of forces which affected not only Seth's life but the life of the whole region. Blackberry winter, with its accompanying flood, strikes a severe blow to the entire farming community. Seth explains:

If it did ruin your crop [and it did affect everyone's crop to some extent], there wasn't anything to do except to try to take your mind off the mortgage, if you were rich enough to have a mort-

gage, and if you couldn't afford a mortgage you needed something to take your mind off how hungry you'd be by Christmas. (73)

Even Old Jeb takes blackberry winter as an omen for the passing of the agrarian lifestyle (the only way to live that he knows). He tells Seth that this cold snap is only the beginning of the end of life, that the earth is used up and will not produce anymore. This decline in the agrarian vitality is also evident in more subtle changes. Seth marks such a change in Dellie. Usually good-natured Dellie, sick in bed, turns weakly vicious and cruelly slaps little Jeb. This behavior is so out of character and so upsetting to Seth that he whisks out of the cabin as quickly as possible.

Seth soon finds himself again closely scrutinizing the tramp. His fascination with the tramp begins with his first glimpse of him on the trail by the edge of the woods.

"Engrossed by the strangeness of the sight" (64), Seth is never able to ascertain the man's origins other than that he is not local. The tramp's appearance on the remote woods trail, his clothes ("everything was wrong with his clothes" (69)), his shoes, and his disregard for proper manners mark him as an outsider, a non-southerner. He is the embodiment of societal incursions on the farm lifestyle. A major confrontation occurs when Seth's father refuses the tramp further work and attempts to pay him for the work he has already performed. As the two men, each from a different society, aggressively face each other, Seth

looked down and saw the bright glob [of the tramp's spit], and on one side of it my father's strong cowhide boots, with brass eyelets and leather thongs, heavy boots splashed with good red mud and set solid on the bricks, and on the other side the pointed-toe, broken, black shoes, on which the mud looked so sad and out of place. (85)

The tramp retreats, leaving Seth's father the apparent victor in the symbolic battle. But the tramp's influence on Seth is insidious. Seth follows the man up the road to the farm gate, still fascinated by the man. While Seth cannot physically follow the man away from the farm yet, his identity splits from his agrarian heritage, and he identifies with the tramp's movement away from the farm.

In the postscript or epilogue, Seth, now grown, quickly relates the realization of the significant changes which had been foreshadowed in his recollection of blackberry winter. A few short years after that significant day, Seth's formidable father has been killed by a bacterial infection induced into a minor wound, Seth's self-reliant mother subsequently has died of a broken heart, little Jeb has been jailed for murder, and even Old Jeb has transformed from a productive farmhand into a welfare recipient. And Seth, the youth of the South, has followed the fascinating outsider away from the Old South, allowing his heritage to slip into the warmly remembered past. Seth knows who he had been just as the South had an identity. However, Seth no longer lives

that identity. His identity in the present is left purposefully vague. For Robert Penn Warren, Seth, like the South, has been uprooted and pushed into the present without a clear identity.

In both Gordon's and Warren's stories the reader feels the insistent but insufficient tug of the characters' heritage. The golden myths of their youth are unable to sustain the characters in their adult realities. Maury fondly remembers boyhood days in the field, hunting foxes. However, he has come to identify more with the fox than with the hunters. Seth identifies not with his family and the agrarian society he was born into, but with an old tramp who came from outside his community and from a different lifestyle. When these stories are viewed in this context, the reader becomes aware of the pervasive feeling underlying much of the literature of the South: the feeling that the Old South has surely slipped away and that the New South has not developed an integrated identity through which its people can form their personal identities.

Gordon and Warren bring personal insights into the changing southern condition. Only in Warren's "Blackberry Winter" does the pressure of non-southern social influences, in the guise of the tramp, play a significant role in the breakdown of the agrarian system. Gordon focuses more on the inability of the mythical foundations of society to continue to support its realities. Gordon provides her character with an inner strength, a strength of personality,

by which he establishes his own communion with nature and, thus, preserves, for himself at least, a modified agrarian lifestyle.

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Chapter IV

Tom Claiborne and Jed Tewksbury:
Re-establishing Identity and Meaning

Writers of the Southern Renaissance were not interested in merely imaging the local world they witnessed. While the regional aspects of their writing stand out and are excellent in and of themselves, the novelists and short story writers who comprise the core of the southern literary movement conceived of their work "not [merely] . . . as a medium of self-expression, nor [merely] as a vehicle for the promulgation of ideas, but as an art form" (Bradbury 15). And Gordon and Warren remained obsessed with tradition and structure in the art of fiction as well as in the themes of fiction.

Gordon and Warren began their literary careers relying heavily on the South for their themes and settings. However, as their personal lives and literary careers matured, they recognized that their themes transcended regional interest, and their settings, likewise, expanded beyond the South. For both writers, the social changes and supplanting of the old traditions, along with the subsequent alienation which they witnessed in the South, became central ills of Western culture. Gordon and Warren, in their later fiction, have not only gone beyond their regional beginnings, but they have explored answers to the questions surrounding

those larger social ills. It became apparent to both Gordon and Warren that the changes they witnessed were unavoidable, could not be stopped or reversed. It was also apparent that these changes had left a void both in society and in individuals. Gordon, in The Malefactors (1956), and Warren, in A Place To Come To (1977), explore solutions to the ills of the society in which they found themselves. Most specifically, they explore how man defines and places himself in the world and how he is to cope with his condition. The keen sense of the art of fiction in both of these writers makes the presentation of their themes all the more compelling.

The Malefactors presents a more unified vision of the Catholic answer to the ills of man and modern society than any of Gordon's previous novels. Although her pre-1940 novels give the reader a powerful and always sensitive vision of man and society, her characters attain only an individual stoic heroism in their acceptance of their flawed world. In these novels, Gordon found herself before the seemingly insurmountable wall of how man was to transcend, rather than merely stoically accept, his flawed mundane existence. It was through Catholicism that Gordon realized the solution to that problem. And it was largely through the teachings and example of Jacques Maritain that she realized the depth of the Catholic tradition.

Both Maritain and Gordon were traditionalists. That is, they sought out traditions to supply order and meaning

to life. Maritain, coming from a secular background, searched for and found the Catholic tradition as presented by St. Thomas Aquinas. Maritain maintained that the Thomist approach was, necessarily, an existential approach. That is, it took as its starting point observable, sensible existence. Maritain responded to and embraced first of all observable reality in his quest to understand the deeper aspects of existence, or being. To support his statement that "the work of Jacques Maritain is existential in the larger sense that it rises out of his own existential situation" (14), John Dunaway quotes a journal entry of Maritain's wife, Raissa. She wrote:

Everything that is in Jacques' work we have first lived in the form of a vital difficulty, in the form of experience--problems of art and morality, of philosophy, of faith, of contemplation. All this has been given to us first of all to live, each according to his nature and according to God's grace. (14)

And Maritain applied this Catholic existential approach to a variety of disciplines ranging from epistemology to the writing of novels.

Caroline Gordon, focusing her life on the art of fiction, found the Realist tradition to fulfill most readily her structural needs. Joseph Shipley broadly defines realism as that writing in which "the author assumes an objective attitude towards the events he relates; he claims

to report, to give the facts, to conduct an inquest over the situation" (226). Observable facts, then, become the voice of the author. Thus, both Maritain and Gordon base their explorations in observable reality. Because of her literary background, Gordon was able to combine literary realism with Maritain's Thomism.

Maritain's affinity for America blossomed because "American philosophy, political and social thought, and theology all offered him a chance to make the Thomist revival felt. But the American literary scene was an especially intriguing context in which Maritain wanted to express himself" (Dunaway 152-153). Maritain, indeed, succeeded in making his presence felt. John Dunaway quotes from a letter he received from Caroline Gordon pertaining to Maritain's influence. Gordon wrote:

One of the things which most impressed me about Jacques was that he read novels as if he were a novelist, read poetry as if he were a poet, and looked at pictures as if he were a painter. . . . Maritain knew more about the novel, I think, than anybody I have ever known. (154)

Maritain's Art and Scholasticism inspired Gordon to reassess some important nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers. Gordon evaluated these works according to Maritain's definition of Christian art. In her article "Some Readings and Misreadings," Gordon pinpoints Maritain's criteria:

The definition of Christian art is to be found in its subjects and its spirit; we talk of Christian art or the art of a Christian as we talk of the art of a bee or the art of a man. It is Christianity redeemed. . . . Wherever art, Egyptian, Greek, or Chinese, has attained a certain degree of grandeur and purity, it is already Christian. . . . Christian in hope, because every spiritual splendor is a promise and a symbol of the divine harmonies of the gospel. (384)

Applying these thoughts to significant novels, Gordon discerned that

the fiction writer's imagination often operates within a pattern of Christian symbolism rather than patterns of contemporary thought. The peculiarly Christian element of the great nineteenth century novels is their architecture. Many of them are based on the primal plot: the Christian Scheme of Redemption. (385)

Gordon became so enthusiastic about this plot pattern and its pervasiveness that later in "Letters to a Monk," she wrote, "I have come to believe that there is only plot (the scheme of redemption) and that any short story, or novel, any fiction . . . is a splinter, so to speak, of that plot--if it's good" (10). This Christian Scheme of Redemption informs the plot as well as the subject matter of The Malefactors.

The Women on the Porch (1944) and The Strange Children (1951) are transitional in that they suggest this scheme but do not fully realize its promise.¹ The Malefactors completes this plot pattern as Tom Claiborne, the central intelligence, progresses from dark stagnation through personal sacrifice to enlightenment. In fact, the novel's division into three parts underscores the scheme of redemption, a scheme which allows Gordon to take her characters past the individual stoic heroism of her earlier novels and stories to a transcendent spiritual plane which raises man above his morally corrupt, mundane existence.

Whereas many of the novels Gordon critically reconsidered, such as James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, display a surface action which seems to flow in an opposite direction from their deeper architecture, this is not the case with The Malefactors. The surface action depicting Claiborne's spiritual rebirth in Christianity exactly corresponds to the deeper subject of the novel--the promise of salvation through Christ. Claiborne's struggles with the realization of God's grace are mankind's struggles with the same process.

Claiborne is the characterization of man as he finds himself in decadent modern society. He, like all men, is faced with a choice. He may choose to follow the path away from God, away from humanity, into a self-centered, aspiritual existence. Cynthia Vail draws Claiborne down this path and he eagerly follows. He turns his back on his other

choice--the path toward selfless human interaction, harmony with nature, and spiritual union with God. Catherine Pollard offers this path to Claiborne early in the novel, but it is not until his world is in utter shambles that he seriously considers this alternative. The immolation of the self is wrenching for a man such as Claiborne, but he finally overcomes his resistance to the "powerful, smoothly rolling tide" (83) he first feels when confronted with the Christian message.

Much of the subject matter of The Malefactors deals with man's fallen condition and man's seeming willingness to continue in that condition. The title itself points to the evil propensities of man. Maritain states that the sins of man can rightly become "the subject of a work of art, from them art can draw aesthetic beauty--otherwise there would be no novelist. The experience of moral evil can even contribute to feed the virtue of art" (The Responsibility of the Artist 29). Gordon's depiction of the depravity of modern man is not limited to mere statement but fully demonstrated in character behavior. She depicts men and women in action. Vivienne Koch points out that Gordon's pervasive moral attack confronts a wide range of topics embodied in her characters. She lists

. . . not only Science but scientism; not only Freudians but neo-Freudians (like the "literary"-minded anthropologist Marcia Crenfrew); not only aesthetes but fake aestheticism (as in the figure

of Carlo Vincent, the expatriot painter who in his last madness paints the stage of decay in his own naked flesh, the symbol of man as his own corrupt authority seeking his image only in the mirror); not only anti-humanism but its by-product commercialism (as in the successful, hard-drinking Bucks County professional folks of one sort or another); not only Luciferian pride of intellect but its offspring, worldliness (as in the accomplished blue-stocking, Cynthia Vail, with her serpent-like glittering eyes and her avid nose for celebrities and the right dinner parties); not only "higher" education but "Progressive" higher education (as in Miss Golightly, Tom's secretary, graduate of Gertrude Newman College, who "could not punctuate a simple declarative sentence . . ."); and more.

(646-647)

But Gordon is not just pointing a moral finger and name-calling. She vividly portrays man and society as they appear to her: as moving through life devoid of spiritual guidance, each person following his own set of personal morals toward a strictly personal vision of worldly success. And this worldly success has already proved hollow for Claiborne. Thus, we can see the vital necessity of God's unifying grace which Claiborne so strongly resists.

A measure of corruption or, more accurately, moral unconsciousness surfaces throughout the novel as a lack or

loss of creativity. Spiritual fulfillment, on the other hand, is measured by creative activity. Maritain also links creativity with spirituality. In chapter two of Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry,² he writes:

Creativity, or the power of engendering, . . . is a mark and privilege of life in spiritual things. . . the intellect in us tries to engender. It is anxious to produce . . . a work at once material and spiritual, like ourselves and into which something of our soul flows. Through a natural superabundance the intellect tends to express utter "outward," it tends to sing, to manifest itself in a work. (54-55)

But a person has to be in touch with his spiritual source. Thus, the malefactors in the novel cannot create. They have turned away from God and have alienated themselves from the humanity around them. Maritain writes that "without God we can do nothingness, i.e., without God we can make the thing which is nothing, we can introduce into action and being the nothingness that . . . wounds and constitutes evil" (On the Philosophy of History 122).

Although Claiborne's loss of creativity is of major importance, other characters manifest this creative/spiritual polarity as well. Cynthia Vail enters Claiborne's life under the guise of poetic creativity. She has had a few poems published and brings for Claiborne's criticism several well-translated classical poems, but she does no

more creative work during the course of the novel; she works as an editorial assistant, a job Claiborne secures for her after they begin their love affair. It becomes apparent that her success is not based on creativity but on contacts. Her love affair with Claiborne is only a stepping-stone to someone more advantageous to her career to whom she can attach herself. Watching her weigh her words during an argument, Claiborne suddenly realizes, to his horror, that Cynthia "doesn't know how other people feel. She has to make it up. . . . She is a woman of movable ways! He felt again the prickling of the scalp" (268). With the realization of Cynthia's hollowness, Claiborne discovers his own hollowness. He leaves her, and she drops out of Claiborne's life and the novel. She melts back into the larger mass of the corrupt society.

Max Shull also exemplifies the link between spirituality and creativity. Max, a close friend to Tom and Vera Claiborne, is a homosexual ex-painter who has been unproductive for a number of years. Although good-natured and likable, he is living off Vera's resources. He is an example of modern society's distortion of human order (according to Gordon), and his inability to continue painting underlines this distortion. In the course of the novel, Max joins Catherine Pollard in her work with the Bowery Mission and accepts Christianity. Through his conversion, he comes to accept his homosexuality, immerse himself in a church restoration project, and resurrect his

painting ability with a newly realized creativity.

Claiborne's own loss of creativity is the source of all his anxiety. He had attained prominence with his poetry and editorial skills during his years in Europe. An abrupt about-face brought him back to the United States to the stagnant life of a country gentleman, a life he comes to see as hollow and unproductive. During the twelve years since his return, Claiborne has been oblivious to the ambitions and anxieties of those around him. He takes no interest in Vera's enthusiastic farm work, nor is he concerned about Max Shall even though Max lives as a member of the family. Here again, we see a vision of family life corrupted, with the childless Claiborne household including a homosexual and an ailing aunt who has nothing physically wrong with her.

Claiborne becomes increasingly obsessed with his own stagnation. As his obsession grows, he covers his inability to write by locking himself in his study pretending to be working. Claiborne mistakenly sees the answer to his problems in Cynthia Vail. Her obsequious flattery feeds his vanity and pride. Her attentions spark a resurgence which Claiborne misinterprets as new creative energy. However, the spark never flames. By the time he discovers Cynthia's true motives, his marriage is breaking up, his colleagues have little esteem for him, and he is bored to distraction by his editorial duties. A series of nightmares sends Claiborne, depressed at the realization of emptiness and meaninglessness, first to his psychiatrist cousin, George

Crenfrew, and finally back to Catherine Pollard. Although Claiborne finally accepts Christianity, his problem of creative energy remains unresolved at the end of the novel. However, if contrasting examples of Cynthia Vail and Max Shull can be used to predict Claiborne's future, he will regain creative vitality as it grows out of his new-found spiritual convictions.

The characters who move in and out of Claiborne's consciousness, particularly those who become involved in works of charity as a means of realizing God's grace, do not merely provide background color or interesting accents. They form an important aspect of Caroline Gordon's art. They form what Maritain refers to as "harmonic expansion." As a writer concerned with the art of fiction, Gordon paid particular attention to what Maritain specifically had to say about the art of the novel. He distinguishes the art of the novel from other literary genres such as poetry and drama. The purpose of the novel, he wrote, is "making live, a host of human beings. This is the business of the poetry of the Novel" (Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry 389). He goes on to say that "the poetry of the Novel I would like to call the poetry of the picture of man" (395). In her "Letters to a Monk," Gordon passes on this assessment. "It is, indeed," she writes, "as Maritain points out, different from every other art in that it concerns the conduct of life itself" (6). For Maritain, the novel comes alive through "the number or harmonic expansion that fills the poetic

space with parts in mutual tension which are . . . characters or free agents, human persons" (Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry 395). Yet, this collection, this symphony of human beings--the work as a whole--"appears as a fruit of the slow process of revelation of the Self. . . . [the modern novel] has carried the narrative to a point of spiritual interiority" (398).

Gordon's use of Tom Claiborne as the novel's central intelligence, presented by an effaced narrator,³ provides a tightly controlled example of Maritain's theories of harmonic expansion and spiritual interiority. The reader, along with Claiborne, discovers what is at the depths of Claiborne's soul, how he looks at himself, how he looks at the world. The reader's reaction to Tom Claiborne and the other characters is carefully controlled by the effaced narrator. The effect is to create a slight critical distance without judgemental comments by the author. Maritain would call this "disinterested," a quality necessary to all good fiction as Gordon points out in "Some Readings and Misreadings." It is very close to the objectivity of Gordon's earlier work. The effaced narrator provides perspective on the central intelligence and the characters who interact with him. Thus, the reader is able to make judgements independent from Claiborne's consciousness. Long before Claiborne arrives at the point of judging himself "A son of a bitch" (268), the reader is well aware that Claiborne's alienation is a direct result of his self-

centeredness. The reader has already marked this as the cause of Claiborne's troubles, and is aware of the alternatives open to Claiborne before he is aware of them. The effaced narrator also carefully orchestrates the interactions of the other characters as they impinge upon Claiborne. Thus, as all the characters develop and react, Claiborne's deepest self is revealed.

Claiborne, although temporarily content to munch the delusive apple which Cynthia Vail holds out, cannot accept the spiritual and human emptiness he comes to see in both Cynthia and himself. It is when Claiborne finally interprets the corrupting force behind Cynthia Vail that he realizes his own misguided endeavors. While this realization does not trigger an immediate spiritual enlightenment, it does signify Claiborne's turning away from the path of Pride and Vanity toward the compelling path he felt before in Christianity as presented by Catherine Pollard. As the novel ends, the immolation of Claiborne's selfish self is complete. He sets aside his own obsession with creativity, his own interests, and humbly sits on a bench with the other bums waiting for Vera to pass by, waiting to be taken into the fold.

Claiborne's entrance into the community on the Pollard farm is intended as the solution to the rootlessness and spiritual bankruptcy of Western culture. This agrarian setting provides a worldly base (in fact, it already helps support Pollard's urban endeavors) for the spiritual needs

of mankind. The idea of a regenerated family structure is also presented by Claiborne's waiting to join his wife in this new community. While Claiborne's entrance into this new family/community is only anticipated at the novel's end, Gordon presents the reader with a sense of hope. The hope springs from the regeneration of family and society and from acceptance of God's grace within the tradition of Christianity. Thus, at the end of The Malefactors, Tom Claiborne identifies with the community of Christ which provides common comfort through human community and meaning to life through spiritual fulfillment.

Warren's solution to man's condition is not as easy or as universal as Gordon's "lightning bolt" approach. Basic to much of Warren's work is his "clear-eyed recognition of 'our times sad declension' . . . his acute sense of disillusionment, [and] his insistence that human nature is fundamentally perverse and endlessly paradoxical" (Bohner 136). Warren's skeptical approach to "one key" solution for man's condition was acquired at an early age. In an interview by Ralph Ellison and Eugene Walter, Warren discussed the impact of history and his early reading. Concerning Buckle's History of Civilization, Warren said:

Thing that interested me about Buckle was that he had one big answer to everything . . . I read Buckle and then I could explain everything. . . . he gave you one answer to everything, and the same dead-sure certainty. After I had my session with

Buckle and the one-answer system at the age of thirteen, or whatever it was, I was somewhat inoculated against Marx and his one-answer system when he and the depression hit me when I was about twenty-five. I'm not being frivolous about Marx; but when I began to hear some of my friends talk about him in 1930, I thought "Here we go again, boys." I had previously got hold of one key to the universe. Buckle. And somewhere along the way I had lost the notion that there was ever going to be just one key. (19-20)

Perhaps this skepticism is responsible, in part, for Warren's diverse approach to literature and to the problems of meaning and identity for man.

Similarly, to designate a major influence on the fiction of Warren, such as the influence of Jacques Maritain on the fiction of Gordon, also defies the "one-key" approach. As Bohner points out:

. . . influence hunting, a game fraught with the danger of mistaking the shadow for the substance, is especially perilous in the case of Warren. Few writers of our time have been more sensitive to the shaping power of the literary tradition and perhaps none has read more widely and deeply. (79)

This is not to imply that Warren was oblivious to the tremendous impact on the American literary scene of Maritain's philosophy and writings. However, Warren's work

can be viewed more appropriately in relation to naturalism and symbolism, two important literary traditions. Often used interchangeably with the term realism, naturalism is defined by Warren in "T. S. Stribling: A Paragraph in the History of Critical Realism." Warren states:

the naturalist novelist took science as the source of his method and philosophy. His method was, professedly, objective and transcriptive; he was concerned with fact, not value. Motivation of human conduct was to be understood in terms of biology, biochemistry, and such. (463)

Naturalism, with its insistence on a mechanistic view of nature and man's powerlessness in the face of nature and pressures of society, was too limiting for Warren to embrace exclusively. Symbolism, which also arose in the late nineteenth century, attempts to instill meaning in words which go beyond "their objective, representational or intellectual content" (Shipley 326). The Symbolists also tended "to stress an organic view of nature and the individuality of man" (Bohner 81). This allows for an exploration of man's inner, non-quantifiable characteristics. Thus, Warren vividly recorded the world as he saw it and, at the same time, attempted to provide meaning beyond the mere chain of observable history.

In A Place To Come To, Tewksbury continuously wrestles with the viewpoints basic to naturalism and symbolism. He questions whether man is locked into a mechanistic world

against which he is powerless in determining who he is and what it means or whether man is capable of making decisions, defining himself, finding some coherent, unifying meaning to his life. Characteristic of Warren, Tewksbury is unable to provide a simple, straight-forward answer. Tewksbury witnesses (and relates) numerous compelling examples of a seemingly mechanistic, chance-ridden world acting without regard to human life or meaning.

While numerous small occurrences which Tewksbury ascribes to fate appear throughout his story, several major instances are important not only because they demonstrate the Naturalistic viewpoint, but because they demonstrate Tewksbury's unwillingness to accept completely the inherent meaninglessness of naturalism. These examples include the analogy of the landslide, the analogy of the card game, and Tewksbury's affair with Rozelle Hardcastle.

Professor Stahlman provides Tewksbury with the account of a devastating landslide which turned a mountain side of meadow and woods into a slide area of bare rocks. Birds which had been roosting in the woods were evicted; a hare who had been living in the meadow met a terrifying end. This tremendous upheaval began as Stahlman ". . . saw a stone--not very large, probably not much larger than a soccer ball--detach itself, for no discernible reason, from the old heap of scree at the margin of the wood and roll into the bloom of the meadow" (61). The message to Tewksbury is the disastrous consequences of life caught in

the apparently random landslide of world events. Stahlman, despairing at his perceived betrayal of his native country and culture, identifies with the hare who was overrun by the sliding rocks. Stahlman completes his identity with the hare by shooting himself in his downstairs gymnasium, a victim of the landslide of world events and social upheaval. Tewksbury's reaction to Stahlman's suicide indicates an attempt on his part to deny the supremacy of fate, to control his own life. Tewksbury joins the army, rationalizing his action by saying, "The simplest way to put it, perhaps, is to say that in case of a landslide, I had discovered that I'd rather be a boulder than a rabbit" (65).

During the December of his year in Nashville, Tewksbury is once again oppressed by a feeling of powerlessness in the face of fate. He feels he has lost the ability to direct his own affairs. He feels helpless, that he is ". . . simply waiting outside great closed walnut doors of the room in which the decision was to be made. But a decision about what I did not know" (135). Tewksbury recalls a group of small boys playing cards to a not readily apparent set of rules. They call it poker. Thinking of the incident and of his current life in Nashville, he feels that "Even if I do know the rules of poker and know the value of the cards in that game, I do not know the rules of the values of the cards in the game I am now playing. All I know is that I have a lot of pictures in my head and I merely count them up" (144). He goes on to depict various "cards," pictures

of events, people, and interactions. While Tewksbury still (in the days of his recounting the happenings) is not sure of their significance, he refuses to dismiss the people and the happenings as meaningless. In fact, the last card he shows during this period is that of himself telling a party group of his heritage, his father's indecorous demise. When questioned on the story's authenticity, Tewksbury ". . . firmly and clearly asserted that it was indeed autobiography" (159). While not an overwhelming affirmation of his background, it is an assertion of who he is. Thus, Tewksbury, in a time of questionable meanings and indecipherable direction, relies, even if in a small way, on his past for stability.

Tewksbury's relationship with Rozelle contains numerous images of and references to fate. She may even be seen as representative of fate. In explaining his impression of Rozelle in high school, Tewksbury likens her inevitability to a huge breaking wave ". . . its tons of slick-sliding mottle of green-gray marble, icy but molten, for that is what it looks like. . . . The mass towers and teeters against the sky. . . You know if it catches you in its fall, it will break your back" (23-24). But disaster is not inevitable. You can ". . . dive under it. Enter it at its depth. Slide slick into its innermost quivering gloom. That is your only hope" (24). At once, Tewksbury sees the inevitability of Rozelle and the hope that that inevitability can be managed and survived. However, the management

of his affair with Rozelle (and his life) is not as simple as slipping under a breaker. When Rozelle and Tewksbury are about to enter the sexual part of their relationship, Tewksbury again recognizes fate. "I felt, too, that some massive concurrence of forces had been working, all my life, in darkness, to bring me to this spot and instant. All sense of my own force, even of identity seemed to flee from me" (163). And later in the affair, with Lawford Carrington away in New York, Tewksbury, invited to spend the night in Rozelle's bedroom,

hesitated at the edge of the woods and looked across the cloud-darkened pasture to the farmhouse where light shone dimly from a single window, it was not passion, nor lust for adventure, nor taste for intrigue which lured me on. It was, rather, the sense of a process to be completed, a doom to be fulfilled. (205)

Tewksbury is carried along with the increasing realization that his affair with Rozelle is a repudiation of his search for meaning and identity. Early in the relationship, Tewksbury sees Rozelle as the "archetypal ass, the unbolted breech so simplistically and brutally designed for its blank abstract function and the plunge into depersonalized, and depersonalizing, darkness . . . liberation into meaninglessness" (167). During another session, Tewksbury ". . . understood that the orgasm was like the 'black hole' of the physicists--a devouring

negativity into which all the nags and positives of life may disappear like dirty water when the plug is pulled at the bottom of the sink" (187). Tewksbury continues in the affair, using sex to escape, if only momentarily, his larger need for meaning and identity. The ultimate destructiveness of this affair becomes apparent in Tewksbury's tale of the man and woman entombed alive in early Rome and left to their own murderous and cannibalistic devices. Thus, Tewksbury predicts a parallel endpoint to his activity with Rozelle. Fate may have drawn Tewksbury to Nashville and into the relationship with Rozelle, but it is Tewksbury who decides the affair is over. Difficult as it is, Tewksbury leaves Rozelle and Nashville, making a clear choice to continue his journey toward self-knowledge and a meaningful life. Indeed, as Tewksbury moves into Book Three of the novel, he consciously begins activity designed to instill meaning in his life. He becomes more accepting of fate and determined, through action, to join the human race.

A major distinction between Tewksbury and Tom Claiborne and between Warren's vision of redemption and Gordon's has to do with the precarious balance between fate and self-determination (free will). Tewksbury seems acutely aware of the push of fate throughout his life. In fact, as Tewksbury is drawn into the affair with Rozelle and feels powerless to do any different, ". . . it seemed I was becoming identified with the very powers that had drained me of power. I knew, in other words, what hero, saint, Marxist, criminal, artist,

and madman must know: identity with fate" (163). Yet, he struggles constantly with fate to keep it from overpowering him completely and robbing what little meaning there was in his life. Claiborne, on the other hand, seems unaware of outside forces acting on his life until his flash of salvation. To be sure, he felt the compelling pull of Catherine Pollard's message. But Claiborne's salvation was more of an acquiescence, an enlightenment, a realization of which path to take, of whom to follow. Tewksbury's salvation, if it can be seen as such, is much more difficult for he has to search out and choose redemption. Tewksbury's choice is not a single moment, a single action. It is a series of choices, a progression toward redemption, attainable only through great extended effort.

A Place To Come To contains a number of other themes to which Warren has returned throughout his varied canon: "the problem of evil, the meaning of history, the human penchant for violence, the search for self-knowledge, and the need for self-fulfillment" (Bohner 7). While Warren expands his treatment of these themes, he also introduces new themes and concepts. In A Place To Come To, Jed Tewksbury, the protagonist, leaves his southern homeland to experience life in the northern United States and in Europe. Tewksbury's pilgrimage into the larger world expands the theme of modern alienation beyond the South. The redemptive powers of familial love are also explored. Warren's use of Tewksbury as the protagonist/narrator is also unique to his

novels. However, this seems particularly apt for this novel in light of Warren's stressing the importance of the self in providing meaning and identity. Also central to A Place To Come To is the "process by which a civilization internally renews itself, how the transmission of values works itself out from generation to generation, how--less grandly-- one man recovers and tries to redeem his life, to come to terms with father, mother, wives, lovers, sons and self" (Shepherd 93). Perhaps most important is the theme of regeneration of the self. Tewksbury struggles throughout the novel to overcome his sense of alienation and deracination by defining his self in a meaningful way. The difficulty of these struggles arises, in large part, from the lack of social support in the form of values and viable traditions. Tewksbury, in fact, divorces himself from any support his heritage may have provided.

Tewksbury's narrative is a "virtual anatomy of alienation viewed as the characteristic state of modern man. Most of the characters who affect the life of the narrator . . . are victims of deracination, the spiritual plague of the twentieth century" (Justus 394). Miss McClatty, the spinster, high school Latin teacher, frail old woman, sought something meaningful as she and Tewksbury leaned "over the book together, two deprived ones, two crippled ones, two wanderers in a world of shadows, each trying to set eye to a mystic peephole that may give on a bright reality beyond" (A Place To Come To 22-23). Professor Stahlman, German

expatriot, failed to reconcile his flight from his homeland and the German mission of developing Kultur, of which he was "the finest flower" (57). Stahlman's acceptance of United States citizenship became, in his mind, his ultimate betrayal. He envied Afro-Americans because ". . . the black man here has no history but his blackness" (64). Thus, according to Stahlman, Afro-Americans are not subject to the feelings of betrayal and alienation of someone with a deeper social history. Rozelle Hardcastle, another fugitive from Dugton, rationalizes her sometimes gold-digger, sometimes catty approach to life by telling Tewksbury, "It's just that a girl's on her own. You have to watch out for things, know things" (128). In a later moment of introspection after Maria McInnis has left Nashville, Rozelle bemoans that ". . . there's nobody here now . . . I'm all by myself" (170). And after Tewksbury walks out on her, she must reconcile her aloneness unaided. Mrs. Jones-Talbot, wealthy horsebreeder and Dante student, spent much of her life away from the homeplace in Nashville because ". . . she had been, as Rozelle put it, 'too restless for Nashville'--the phrase echoing, no doubt, what the female contemporaries of Mrs. Jones-Talbot still said of her" (124). Maria McInnis, in spite of being "institutionalized in her little world," in spite of Tewksbury's observation that "Her presence appeared to authorize them [those around her], bless them, give them a sense of their own identities, certify their little concerns as of worth" (122), carried a secret fear which set

her apart from those around her, forestalling any deep romantic attachments and also forestalling her personal development. Stephan Mostowski holds a unique relationship to Tewksbury. Mostowski, a Polish-Jewish immigrant and professor of physics, is one of the few characters, if not the only character, whom Tewksbury considers a true friend. However, their friendship flourished because of their shared sense of solitude. Mostowski recognized no country as his own and was "trying to learn to be happy in that condition" (296). He attributed any difficulty with this sense of alienation to the ". . . first pangs of modernity . . . the death of the self which has become placeless" (296). What Tewksbury discovers and the reader is led to through these characters is a society which makes no provision for or plays no role in the development or support of individual identity. Society, in effect, leaves the development of meaningful existence solely in the hands of the individual. The individual, then, must define his or her self.

The narrator himself is perhaps the most victimized by the modern plague of alienation. Tewksbury is, from the very beginning, at odds with his origins, with the people around him, and even with himself. He is constantly tormented by being outside the group (whichever group he is associated with), and, more poignantly, by being outside himself. Indeed, early in his narrative, Tewksbury relates the recurring image he carries in his mind of himself crying under a chinaberry tree during his father's funeral.

Tewksbury relates the scene vividly. Yet, he feels "the scene does not seem real to me, not even as something imagined seems real, for I have no connection to the weeping child, whose face I cannot see. I always regard the scene from a distance" (5). In fact, Tewksbury often slips into the third person voice when relating memories and scenes as if he is telling someone else's story.

That Tewksbury is different, that he has no part in southern small town life and culture is vigorously reinforced by his mother. In recounting his early life in Dugton, Tewksbury tells the reader, "It was my mother, I am sure, who, day by day, expunged all possibility of any memory of Dugton, who accounted for the fact that for years I could not even remember the life there" (20). Her method was blunt and effective. She regularly reminded him that "Ain't nothing here for you . . . Yores is waiting for you, somewheres . . . You git stuck here, I'll kill ye" (26). To make herself believable, she broke his nose when he came home drunk after trying on the mold of a carousing southern male. Even Nashville is too close (geographically as well as culturally) to Dugton. Writing to Tewksbury in Nashville, his mother states her case plainly:

Am glad you like Nashville, Tennessee, even if there ain't no good reason, but I wish it were further off like a thousand miles from Dugton, for coming back to Tennessee it looks like you are back tracked which is what you ought not to do, like I

told you to get out of Dugton and keep headed out. Nashville I bet my bottom dollar is like Montgomery, Ala. and them places full of high mucky mucks don't hold no time for you no more than you for them. Keep moving you don't belong in Dugton, Nashville neither. (134)

Tewksbury accepted that he did not belong in Dugton or the South. But he needed to belong somewhere and his searching did take him "further". However, whether it was Chicago or Italy or Ripley City, South Dakota or Nashville, Tewksbury always felt himself to be on the outside looking in. What adds poignancy to Tewksbury's alienation is his perception that those around him "all had a place to go" (45), no matter how frail or illusory their connection to that place.

Inclusion, places, were even offered to Tewksbury. Agnes Andresen's father tells him, ". . . after the dust and heat, you, my son, may want to come to this quietness. And a place will always be kept waiting by her side" (96). While Tewksbury is in Nashville, Cudworth invites him to buy an adjoining farm. Speaking for the Nashville group, Cudworth says, "You're a Southerner, why not come home like me, settle down? . . . it'd be great to have you all" (48). But whenever Tewksbury considers such a move, a move to settle, to become part of a place, a member of a group, he balks, excluded by his need for it to all mean something. "I would ask myself what their world meant: a charade of the

past" (123). Tewksbury cut off his own roots and resisted establishing new roots until he defined the final meaning of his life. The possibility that this resistance to establishing roots and his inability to provide meaning in his life were working against each other escaped Tewksbury.

For Warren, place and a past are necessary for a fully integrated self. In Democracy and Poetry (1975), Warren inextricably ties past, place, and self together, each one necessary and dependent upon the others:

. . . contempt for the past inevitably means that the self we have is more and more a fictive self, the self of a non-ideographic unit, for any true self is not only the result of a vital relation with a community but is also a development in time, and if there is no past there can be no self. (56)

Thus, it is apparent that as long as Tewksbury denies his past, devalues his past, refuses a place, he will fail in his search for a unified identity.

Tewksbury is not unaware of this link between past, self, and meaning. As he recalls his shock at hearing Rozelle's voice upon his arrival in Nashville, he raises what he terms a "vital" question by stating, ". . . we are all stuck with trying to find the meaning of our lives, and the only thing we have to work on, or with, is our past" (A Place To Come To 15). Tewksbury has arrived at this position with great difficulty, however. As already discussed, Tewksbury is very explicit during his early life

in his denial of his homeland and his heritage, feeling they hold no meaning for him. His realization that perhaps they do hold meaning is a slow process which takes years and is still not complete near the end of the novel as he stands between the graves of his parents, drawn to lie down between the graves but afraid of the emotional risk. But he can and does envision coming back during his retirement ". . . to sit by the fire and try to figure out why things had all turned out the way they had . . . to wander about with a dimming flashlight in my hand to touch familiar objects" (340).

Warren re-emphasizes, in Democracy and Poetry, that "the true self . . . can develop only in a vital relationship between the unitary person and the group" (25). Tewksbury relates numerous episodes where the opportunity for human interaction, human community was available to him. Yet, almost as a matter of course, he fails to enter fully into these human groups. Influenced by his mother, ostracized by school mates, required to work after school, Tewksbury had little opportunity, and less inclination, to join the community in Dugton. Even as a member of the football team, his interaction is confined to the mechanics of the game. As a graduate student, Tewksbury holes up in the Castle of Otranto, aloof from the main body of graduate students. Even his war experience affords him no close human attachments. While he is aware of his Italian comrades' shared sense of patria, Tewksbury feels no

identity worth dying for. Back in the United States, his marriage to Agnes Andresen makes available to him the community of Ripley City, South Dakota, which ". . . was perfectly self-contained, self-fulfilling, complete. Not isolated" (80). Rather than join that community, he and Agnes return to Chicago. Even his relationship with Agnes ends with his realization that ". . . if Agnes had lived I would never have loved her--would, in fact, have killed what love she had for me" (101).

Tewksbury's year in Nashville provided ample opportunity to develop a community identity. He was welcomed open-armed by Rozelle and her circle of Nashville friends. There was never any commitment on his part, however. In fact, he often felt a contempt for the Nashville crowd who were always "so goddamned charming" to him. Tewksbury did see instances of human attachment, seeming completeness. The Cudworths particularly evoked his envy for ". . . the simple completeness of their life, their obvious and unashamed satisfaction with each other, their energy, with Cud putting in a twelve-hour day and Sally as ready as he to mount a tractor for fall plowing or deliver a calf, their total absorption in the world of their creation" (123). On the occasion of a Sunday dinner at the Cudworths', Tewksbury is struck by a sense of communal happiness:

All the faces, smiling and bright, seem, in that moment, to float in a tide of happiness, and I,

with a strange, uncertain awe, feel the tide lapping at me, too. I feel like a child who has wandered out knee-deep into the sea and feels the sand going fluid and slipping underfoot, and . . . sees, out where it is deep, the other people, the big people who can swim . . . calling for you to come on out, they'll take care of you. (144-145)

Tewksbury does not give them the opportunity. Later in the year, at the New Year's Eve party, Tewksbury once again sees the "unselfconscious gaiety and willingness to live in the innocent flow in which to ask for nothing was to receive all" (153). And when he ". . . lustily raised his voice to blend with all the other voices in praise of fulfillment to be found in the cherished flow of time; . . . his heart was, to his surprise, swollen with sweetness. He really did not know what to make of that fact" (154). Without the "final meaning of it all," Tewksbury is not able to maintain this sense of unity with others. Any feeling of or commitment to human community deteriorates quickly after Tewksbury begins his incestuous affair with Rozelle.

Tewksbury is not finished with human commitment, however. After immersing himself in his work, first in Paris then in Chicago, Tewksbury receives word that the Cudworth family has increased by one greatly-loved baby. He realizes that he loves the Cudworths, his heart ". . . swelling with their happiness" (273). Yet, he did not write back to them when he had left Nashville, and he does not

write back now and ends wondering "What the hell is my life?" (273).

Tewksbury shortly learns that Maria McInnis is finding happiness and fulfillment in marriage, and he is visited by Dee Dee Jones-Talbott (now Mrs. David McInnis) and David McInnis who are also happily married. In his own search for meaning and fulfillment, all of these seemingly happy and fulfilling marriages are too much for Tewksbury to ignore. Finally ready to make the human commitment, he turns his life toward more meaningful endeavors. Tewksbury relates that "... high on the list had been to take my civic and political duties more seriously. Other people lived together in a great seething club or society or something, and found it a rewarding life. Why couldn't I?" (284).

Tewksbury does enter the flow of the human race. He marries Dauphine Finkel (a previous romance), attracted again to her because she "... could become fleetingly aware of a nameless truth deeper than any iron-clad opinion, a truth that we might learn to share" (286) and because he saw in her "... an allegorical figure of Flesh Yearning for the Beyond the Flesh" (287). When their son is born, Tewksbury believes he has moved "more directly into a sense of the general human destiny" (287). The marriage does not last, but his fascination and infatuation with his son become a permanent fulfillment in his life. Tewksbury notes in passing that he had really loved Dauphine, "... if I had ever loved anybody" (294). His relationship with

his son, Ephraim, was not in the least bit questionable: "I loved Ephraim with a greater passion, the kind that made me wake up in the night and want to pray. Even though I did not know how to pray" (294).

Yet, Tewksbury is not able to pass on to Ephraim, or share with him, his experience of Dugton. Tewksbury yearns to bring Ephraim to Dugton to show and explain his heritage. But he balks. When he confides this bit of trouble to his friend, Stephan Mostowski, his friend replies insightfully:

I think you did not ask your son to go with you to Alabama for the same reason that in your deepest heart you knew his presence there on such an occasion . . . would deprive you, in your essence of being, of something, not easily namable, but necessary to your identity. It would deprive you of your solitude. (323)

The marriage that has, perhaps, the most significant impact on Tewksbury is that between his mother and Perk Simms. The mutual love and support, elegant in its simplicity, transcends the merely physical fact of their living together. His mother and Perk Simms display the spiritual connection which gives each of them the strength to stand against the hardships and meaninglessness of life. Tewksbury's experience visiting his parents' graves and talking with Perk Simms inspires him, once again, to make the human commitment. Tewksbury writes a straight-forward and hopeful letter to Dauphine with that end in mind.

The reader may be somewhat skeptical at the promise of fulfillment in the novel's ending because of what Westendorp, in his article entitled "A Place To Come To," has identified as the ". . . alternating pattern of joy and depression, hope and despair, promise and frustration" (128). Certainly Warren depicts Tewksbury's struggles as difficult, fraught with many discouraging traps. But such is life. The dogged progression, however, is toward the positive, toward hope, toward meaning, so that the alternating pattern can be seen as one of depression and joy, despair and hope, frustration and promise. At the end of the novel, Tewksbury may not have the ultimate meaning of his life or anybody else's, but he is convinced there is meaning. He may not have attained the most fulfilling human bond, but he has sensed that fulfillment and knows it exists and is seeking it out. He may not have completely embraced his heritage or have a strong identity in "place," but he does have a piercing perception of who he is and how he became that person.

Caroline Gordon and Robert Penn Warren both end their novels with an intended message of hope, a redemption from the purely mechanical, indifferent society of everyday life. For both writers, the hope is made more difficult by the flawed nature of mankind and by each writer's insistence that it be an individual struggle more often impeded rather than helped by Western society. The characters of Tom Claiborne and Jed Tewksbury struggle against the same

meaninglessness and alienation with similar, yet different, results. Both realize the need for spiritual answers to the question of meaning in human life. Claiborne is struck by and accepts a more orthodox spiritualism in the form of the Catholic tradition. Tewksbury, on the other hand, remains more secular in his search for transcendent meaning, relying more heavily on joint human endeavors, human community with its required commitment and responsibility. For Gordon, human community is the temporal reflection of the spiritual family. For both characters and writers, the family remains the basic human social structure and provider of identity. Gordon, however, seems to modify the makeup of the family. Marriage remains a significant link between a man and woman, but the family includes anyone who has entered the spiritual family of Christ. Warren recognizes that the extended family of the Old South is long past. But he maintains the basic family unit as the basic fulfilling social structure, portraying the establishment of familial love as a necessary and large step toward self-unity and redemption. Thus, both writers have portrayed solutions to man's sense of alienation and meaninglessness in an impersonal, changing society.

Notes

¹Andrew Lytle, The Hero With the Private Parts (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1966), writes that when the Chapmans finally draw together at the conclusion of Women on the Porch, he "is not quite clear about their relationship . . . The vision here is a little clouded" (169-170). He is not clear as to what pulled them together again--their faith or their fear of being alone. Brainard Cheney, "Caroline Gordon's Ontological Quest" (3-12), calls The Strange Children "prefatory" and "her slightest work" because "the final comment on the action is the father's voice. He seems moved by a Christian premonition, if not conviction. But here the story ends" (10). Robert Brinkmeyer, Three Catholic Writers of the Modern South (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985), also finds these two works transitional. They lack the definite comment of The Malefactors. "We find, rather, at the end of these two works, only a sense of some kind of order and sanctity available to man, and that it lies waiting to be discovered out there in the whirling confusion of life" (90).

²This chapter recapitulates Maritain's articulations of the Thomist doctrine of art as laid out in his earlier Art and Scholasticism.

³In Chapter 6 of How to Read a Novel (New York: Viking, 1957), Gordon defines an effaced narrator as one who is speaking from the third-person stance with the immediacy of the first person.

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Chapter v

Conclusion

Caroline Gordon and Robert Penn Warren shared a common geographic and social background as well as an intense interest in the art of fiction. As seen in the previous chapters, they lived and wrote at a time which allowed a unique perspective on society and on society's effect on its constituent individuals. Gordon and Warren also shared a common progression of thematic concerns in their fiction.

Beginning with what was closest to their experiences, Gordon and Warren were concerned with the breakdown of the traditional agrarian culture which had been prevalent in the South. In both The Garden of Adonis and Night Rider, the indisputable passing of the agrarian culture is chronicled. Assaulted by economic and social pressures originating outside the region, the indigenous structure collapsed, crushing individuals such as Ben Allard and Percy Munn. The violent deaths of both protagonists underscore the seriousness of the social upheaval portrayed in each novel.

Both Gordon and Warren believed social identity to be a securing foundation for personal identity. Thus, as a social identity breaks down, so, too, does a large part of personal identity. Alienation is the resultant common ailment. For southern identity, the family stood as symbol of the larger social order. Hence, when Gordon and Warren

portray the breakdown of the southern family, it is a reflection of the insidious crumbling of southern culture. Gordon's demonstration of the breakdown of familial unity in "Old Red" centers on the formation of Alec Maury's distinct and individual (yet alienated) identity. The implication is that he could no longer identify with the family structure or, by extension, the ineffectual social structure. While Maury is only an individual disruption in the social order, he heralds an ever-widening crack in the social foundation. Warren's depiction in "Blackberry Winter" of the breakup of the family and agrarian structure focuses on non-southern social influences which effectively rob the protagonist of his identity. When Alec Maury and Seth distance themselves from their families, they must deal with the attendant sense of alienation.

Gordon and Warren, in the course of their personal and professional maturation, grew beyond their regional confines. Their peculiar stance of being of the southern culture but also outside it allowed Gordon and Warren to realize that the problems of social flux, alienation, and meaninglessness which they first saw in the South were also problems central to Western civilization.

As seen in the discussion of The Malefactors and A Place To Come To, both writers progress toward spiritual solutions to man's mundane woes. Basic to both solutions is a sense of human community, most readily apparent in the re-establishment of the family as the basic social structure.

The idea of family is slightly different for each writer, though. Gordon offers a spiritual family incorporating the individual into the family of Christ. A revived corporeal family is suggested by Claiborne waiting to join Vera on the pollard farm. Warren re-establishes the family on a smaller scale (smaller than the extended families of the agrarian South) consisting of husband, wife, and children. But the spiritual union and common identity is there for both writers. Gordon's solution is more religiously orthodox, adopting the Christian tradition. Warren remains more secular in his insistence on meaning derived from self-knowledge and a common human identity.

In both writers the inevitable passing of the traditional South with its values and social structure and the spiritual displacement become the plight of modern Western man. Both writers share a common background and follow a common progression toward very similar spiritual solutions to account for man's place and meaning in the world.