

SOUTHERN HERITAGE, TOUCHSTONE FOR  
IDENTITY: A STUDY OF THE NOVELS  
OF ROBERT PENN WARREN

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

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

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by  
Joy Hill Tilley  
August, 1979

## ABSTRACT

Robert Penn Warren's novels consistently reveal his concern with the problem of identity. Identity for Warren, moreover, is revealed as each of his central characters confronts his Southern heritage. This heritage provides the background and the standards whereby Warren allows his characters to define their humanity--humanity that, first of all, includes a reverence for family and place. A realistically mature response to the Southern myths of pure womanhood, the idealized Southern gentleman, and the myths surrounding the Civil War also determines how well the characters have achieved a fully realized identity. Further complicating the question of selfhood is the Southern white's response to the Negro, and also the Negro's continued search for his own identity in the white man's world. Warren repeatedly asserts throughout the novels that a redemptive experience is necessary for a fully integrated personality. If an individual is to achieve a realized self, he must be reconciled to humanity and "reborn" to those feelings of love and selfless caring for others. Warren never completely relies on Southern orthodoxy for his own theology, however; his views include the region's strong moral voice, but incorporate his own formula for achieving and developing selfhood.



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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a Thesis written by Joy Tilley entitled "Southern Heritage: Touchstone for Identity: A Study of the Novels of Robert Penn Warren." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

Clarence Ward

Major Professor

We have read this thesis and  
recommend its acceptance:

James H. Beach

Second Committee Member

James H. Beach

Third Committee Member

Accepted for the Council:

William H. Ellis

Dean of the Graduate School

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## Introduction

Throughout his novels, beginning with Night Rider and concluding with A Place To Come To, Robert Penn Warren has searched for his own particular truth--a truth centered on identity and self-knowledge--against a backdrop of and in relation to his Southern heritage. His characters exist in relation to traditional Southern values of honor, family piety, love of the land, purity of Southern womanhood, and strong feelings of community. His characters have to deal with the reality and the myth of the Civil War. And like a sore that refuses to heal, there is always the Negro question to be confronted, the question that begs for the healing ointment of enlightenment.

Warren's idea of truth is a complex vision that somehow involves conversion and redemption but rejects the fundamentalist, even the orthodox religion of the South. His truth is a reaction against certain elements of the twentieth century such as industrialism, scientific emphasis, and concern with success, all of which he believes lead to isolation, abstraction, and fragmentation of the individual. Warren also reacts against the idea of oneness with or total dependency on nature, and sees the West as the world of nature and as a "region of license and as an escape from responsibility."<sup>1</sup> He rejects also the call of the ideal when it is divorced from reality and when it ignores the urgings of humanity. For Warren, anything that prevents the individual from achieving self-realization and self-knowledge should be rejected.

In his essay on William Faulkner, Warren relates the idea of Southern heritage with the struggle for truth and identity:

The old order /in the South/ . . . allowed the traditional man to define himself as human by setting up codes, concepts of virtue, obligations, and by accepting the risks of his humanity. Within the traditional order was a notion of truth, even if man in the flow of things did not succeed in realizing the truth.<sup>2</sup>

And in their inner struggles, as they deal with problems of selfhood and identity, there is always their unique position as Southerners and how they relate to that fact. Many of his characters "flee" from the rigid codes of Southern tradition--if not physically, then spiritually. Their flights, however, many times result only in isolation and alienation as they attempt to ignore these defining areas of their personalities. Warren seems to be saying, then, that only as his characters reconcile the facts of their Southern heritage--the "pieties" of family and place, the mythic Southern past, their unique religious background, and the question of the Negro--with their own identity, will they be able to achieve self-realization. It is ironic that on Warren's departure from the South in 1956, he says:

I know what the Southerner feels going out of the South, the relief, the expanding vistas. . . . I feel the surge of relief. But I know what the relief really is. It is the relief from responsibility. --Yes, you know what the relief is. It is the flight from the reality you were born with.

This thesis, then, proposes to deal with that reality--that particular Southern reality as it is revealed in Warren's novels--that exists as the constant by which Warren's characters can measure their selfhood. Warren's fictional characters, says Eisinger, aim at precisely what all men, according to Jung, must aim at: "everyone's ultimate aim and strongest desire lie in developing the fullness of human existence that is called personality, and one must learn to know oneself in order to know who one is."<sup>4</sup> Chapter one of this thesis deals with the Southern "pieties" of

family and place that, for Warren, enforce the character's sense of identity and contrasts these stabilizing influences with twentieth-century disruptions that negate identity. Chapter two explores the Southern myths of honor, purity of Southern womanhood, and the Civil War mystique that have informed the Southern personality and shows how Warren's characters react and define themselves in relation to these myths. Chapter three traces Warren's treatment of the black man in the South, and in particular explores black-white relations as they exist in defining not only the Southern white but his black counterpart. Chapter four examines the Southern religious experience and contrasts it with Warren's own theology that encapsulates Warren's ideas of identity and self-knowledge. As Charles R. Anderson says, "Warren is not guilty in this of any nostalgic retreat into a romantic conception of the Old South; he is searching for modern meanings in its civilization, . . . and its efforts to avert collapse today. . . ."5 This thesis then proposes to show that Warren, by taking an intelligent, critical look at his Southern heritage, is able to test that vision as it relates to his own particular vision of identity and self-knowledge.



## NOTES

### Introduction

<sup>1</sup>Chester E. Eisinger, Fiction of the Forties (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 199.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Penn Warren, Selected Essays (New York: Random House, 1958), p. 25.

<sup>3</sup>Robert Penn Warren, Segregation: The Inner Conflict in the South (New York: Random House, 1956), p. 51.

<sup>4</sup>Eisinger, p. 201.

<sup>5</sup>Charles R. Anderson, "Violence and Order in the Novels of Robert Penn Warren," in Southern Renaissance: The Literature of the Modern South, eds. Louis D. Rubin, Jr. and Robert D. Jacobs (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1953), p. 224.

## Chapter I

### The Key: Family and Place

In each of his novels, Warren seems to be defending the old order of the South which allowed the "traditional man to define himself as human." In large measure the old order sanctioned certain "pieties," such as feeling for family and place. Leonard Casper says that "the South in Warren's novels--those arsenic green fields of Kentucky, Tennessee, Louisiana . . . still takes pride in its "piety," its feeling for kin and clan. . . ." He goes on to say that the advantage of "piety" is that its disciples feel less solitary in an otherwise comfortless world that seems to reject man's importance and sometimes his very presence.<sup>1</sup> Charles Bohner says that Warren, among other Southern writers, has a deep attachment to and a sense of place, which includes the importance of the small town in Southern life, the pride in family and region, and the sense of a rich and gallant past. These all combine to give the Southerner an "inherited sense of order, and a unity of feeling."<sup>2</sup>

Contrasted against these stabilizing influences of family and place, which Warren believes assist in defining a man as truly human, are the disruptive influences of the twentieth century--influences such as mechanization, urbanization, and science which tend to de-humanize and fragment the modern man leaving him alienated and isolated from himself and others. The modern age's idea of success based on materialism and power is also pictured oftentimes in Warren's novels as an empty, corrupting notion.

And success apart from a recognition and acceptance of family identity and place is often pictured as empty and unfulfilling. In his appraisal of Warren's philosophy, Chester E. Eisinger says that Warren rejects the heritage of nineteenth-century science " . . . which has bred the variety and multiplicity that contribute so heavily to the disintegration of society and of individual consciousness." He goes on to say that he rejects the industrialism and the metropolitanism of the twentieth century because they too stifle the human personality. Warren, aware that family and place are embodied in the past, believes also that the evils of the twentieth century cut man off from the past, which can establish the "continuity of human identity in the present and for the future."<sup>3</sup>

Warren rejects also the frontier myth and the West as the "home of hope" because he wishes to give man back his past so that he may claim his true self. For Warren, the man on the frontier--rootless, motherless, fatherless, without a past--is a lost soul. To claim his agrarian and patrician identities, man must return to the mother, the father, and the home place. Identity, then, is the key to Warren--identity that is bound up in the family and the region and identity that demands an acceptance of man's origins as a key to self-knowledge. In each successive novel, as each character confronts and reacts to his origins, either to accept or reject them, he is in some measure defining himself as human. Complicated by forces in the twentieth century aimed at eliminating the self, Warren's characters struggle to achieve some sense of who they really are, and, according to Warren, those who achieve some measure of success in this regard are those who arrive at a mature understanding and acceptance of family and home.



Warren's first novel, Night Rider, depicts a fatherless young man, Percy Munn, who is destroyed because he never achieves true identity. His relationship with his widowed mother is a painful, unfulfilling experience that denies him parental love and warmth and apparently influences his relationships with other people. In describing their relationship, he says:

A widow, she ran the farm competently, and prayed much. She was taciturn and cold, except for those rare moments when, with a kind of shameless unveiling of the spirit, she tried devouringly and terrifyingly to seize upon her son's love, or at least to establish some communication with him. At those moments, embarrassed, he could never respond, and so she would turn coldly again upon herself; and when he, in turn, would try to penetrate her, her withdrawal would be complete. (Night, p. 211)<sup>4</sup>

Rejected by his mother and denied a father, Percy, while he is in school at Philadelphia, seeks by meetings with Miss Ianthe Sprague, a distant cousin, some sense of his own identity as reflected in his past. To him:

His past seemed as valueless and as unstable as a puff of smoke, and his future meaningless, unless--and the thought was a flash quickly dissipated--he might by some unnamable, single, heroic stroke discover the unifying fulfillment. (Night, p. 8)

Instead, he receives only flashes of his mother's youth that bring only tears to his eyes--no fulfilling discovery, because Miss Sprague, herself empty and fixed, can offer Percy no clue to his past. Irene Hendry says that Miss Sprague represents "negation of personality in a more or less pure state." Her life has become "numb, isolated and devoid of memory and purpose. Her immersion in the sensory flux of the present is negation on the simplest, primary level of personality."<sup>5</sup> There is a chilling prediction for Mr. Munn's own "negation of personality," in the

lines, "She, too, represented something as cold and unrelenting as fate, for she and he had, in however small a proportion, the same blood in their veins" (Night, p. 213).

Denied a real father, Munn unfortunately chooses Senator Tolliver for a surrogate father. Irene Hendry describes him as a "self-made politician, descendant of a ruined pre-Civil War family, who sells out to the banking and tobacco interests, and who signifies negation on a higher level from Miss Sprague's--negation of the moral will."<sup>6</sup> Even though Munn rejects Tolliver's betrayal of the tobacco farmers, his own movement toward nothingness is assured because he has patterned his earlier steps after Tolliver's. Like Tolliver, Munn has been lured by the crowd, by the group, to mistakenly seek self-fulfillment and identity. "Both need rather than actually lead the masses," says Leonard Casper. And when Munn tries to achieve identity through the death of Tolliver, he fails, because, says Casper, "Munn cannot regenerate himself through the death of a man who is his alter ego."<sup>7</sup> The most he achieves is a hint of humanness when he hands a dying man a glass of water. And when he draws the fire of the soldiers, "his permissive suicide is the culmination of his gradual annihilation as a person."<sup>8</sup> Munn's annihilation, begun by the mutual rejection of mother and son, extended by the unfulfilled relationship with Miss Sprague, reaches its highest point as he appropriates the empty Tolliver for his father. Munn, therefore, is the extreme example of abstraction achieved through struggle for identity. Unable to come to a mature understanding of his mother's limitations, and accepting and incorporating the emptiness of Tolliver into his own personality, he descends into nothingness--the opposite of full humanity achieved

through self-knowledge. Thus, Warren seems to be saying that the man of self-knowledge is characterized by a "mature acceptance of the strengths and weaknesses of his father, and of the past. He is prepared to act free from the most serious errors of ignorance, delusion, and immaturity."<sup>9</sup> Munn, instead of acting free of them chooses to involve himself in them.

In Willie Proudfit's story, interpolated in Night Rider, Warren offers an alternative to Munn's nothingness and also affirms the agrarian sentiments as opposed to twentieth-century capitalism. Willie, who as a young man had gone West, hunted buffalo and lived with the Indians, returns to Kentucky to live the simple life of a farmer. In response to his dream of the "green country," he returns to the coolness and freshness, symbolized by the spring at the church, apparently living in harmony with the land. In sharp contrast is Munn, who has despoiled the land by violence, such as barn burnings. He and the men who have organized to raise tobacco prices, described by Irene Hendry as the "forerunners of Southern capitalism," are in opposition to those who revere the land as sacred.<sup>10</sup> Warren, among those Southern writers, who believe the really moral life is one lived in close relationship to the land, pictures Munn as changing gradually from a person identified with the land, to an abstract, violent being, who ends by committing acts without really knowing his motive for them, or even their nature.<sup>11</sup>

At Heaven's Gate, Warren's second novel, pictures a young man named Jerry Calhoun who rejects his father, all of his family, and his home. He is embarrassed by his father, who is almost cripplingly maladroit; he hates his Uncle Lew, who is club-footed, and he is repulsed by his Aunt Ursula, "helpless, dirty, and drooling" (Gate, p. 134).<sup>12</sup> He somehow



never manages to find enough money to "fix up" the home place, and sees it as a mere backdrop, someday, as a setting for his idea of gracious living.

Instead of patterning his life after his father, a kind and humane man who seems complete in his self-knowledge, he rejects him and opts for Bogan Murdock, who is the prototype for the modern capitalist. Bogan, who controls a large part of the banking, industrial and mining enterprises of the South in the middle 1920's, is dignified, polished, unfailingly courteous, and an accomplished equestrian, a symbol perhaps of his dominance over other people. Bogan, however, is empty says Duckfoot Blake:

Bogan Murdock ain't real. Bogan is a solar myth, he is a pixy, he is a poltergeist. When Bogan looks in the mirror, he don't see a thing. . . . Bogan Murdock is just a dream  
Bogan Murdock had, a great big wonderful dream. (Gate, p. 373)

Jerry Calhoun, however, never realizing that Bogan is poorer in spirit than he is, remolds himself completely in Bogan's image. Jerry, too, seeks non-involvement in personal emotion. Feelings, particularly open and deep ones, disgust him. Sue Murdock senses this incapacity in Jerry's rejection of the "cripples" in his family and elsewhere. At one point she tells him, "You'll die rich, Jerry. You've got what it takes. But . . . you're a cripple, too. You're an emotional cripple" (Gate, p. 99).

Sue Murdock also rejects her father because he considers her another piece of his property to be made to perform predictably according to his wishes. Sue, who craves identity through a man who is real, for a while mistakenly attaches the strength of Mr. Calhoun to Jerry. But when she realizes Jerry is empty, she leaves him for the Bohemian world of Slim Sarrett. Slim, who most explicitly portrays the division of modern man,

is a boxer-poet, a homosexual who yet poses as Sue's lover. Ashamed of his provincial, middleclass background, he invents a more lurid past, conceiving of his mother as a whore. Ironically, it is Slim who diagnoses the "disease of the age" in his essay on "the tragic flaw in the Shakespearean hero--self-knowledge" (Gate, p. 196). Upon learning of Slim's homosexuality, Sue turns to Jason Sweetwater--outwardly the strongest of her male partners. Jason has also rejected his heritage; he is the scion of a two-hundred-year-old tidewater Virginia family who has turned to Marxism. Sweetwater, however, realizes his structure for identity is precarious. If one brick is pulled, the whole house falls. When Sue becomes pregnant, he refuses to become entrapped in the "bourgeois" institution of marriage and denies true commitment and involvement, thus forcing Sue to have an abortion.

Of all these who reject their fathers, Jerry Calhoun is the only one who experiences a kind of reunion and implied hope for achieving some sense of identity. After Sue Murdock has been murdered by Slim Sarrett and Jerry lies in jail, a scapegoat for Bogan's corrupt financial empire which has just collapsed, he returns home to his own room. In spite of himself, he is touched by his father when he remembers a dream in which he envisions Uncle Lew, Aunt Ursula, and even his father eliminated from the house. Horrified that his rejection is tantamount to murdering them, he envisions a new meeting with his father:

Father, I wanted to sit by the fire, and they wouldn't be there . . . and--and you wouldn't be there--

Yes, son.

I wanted you dead--I wanted you dead, father. I wanted to sit by the fire--

Yes, son--

You, knew? Did you know?

Yes, son.

Oh, father--

Yes, son-- (Gate, p. 388-389).

Barnett Guttenberg suggests that Jerry's vision will come true and will prove redeeming. "In its admission of the void ('I wanted you dead'), in its acceptance of involvement ('Oh, father'), it indicates that Jerry has gained authentic being."<sup>13</sup>

Another character to achieve a form of authentic being after being implicated in Bogan's corruptness is Private Porsum, a kind of mountaineer patterned after Sergeant York, who gains fame as a hero in World War I. When Porsum returns from the war, Murdock seduces him with money and power and sets him up in his financial empire. He even forces Porsum to turn against his own mountain people, by urging them to go back to work during a strike. Porsum, after visiting with his cousin, Ashby Wyndham in jail, forcefully realizes he has violated the integrity of his family's good name and the tradition of his past by giving over to twentieth-century corruption. In an effort to vindicate himself, he dies a hero trying to keep a mob from breaking into the jail.

Of all the people in Bogan's orbit, only Duckfoot Blake succeeds in freeing himself from the corruption. Duckfoot, unlike Jerry Calhoun, accepts his "unfashionable" mother and father; indeed, he reveres them. He accepts his father's delusions about himself, and protects his mother's vulnerability. At first Duckfoot appears to be cynically uninvolved; he is, perhaps, a foreshadowing of the more fully developed Jack Burden. But, like Jack Burden, he realizes he must enter the stream of involvement and



announces in the end that " . . . things do matter, they really do" (Gate, p. 372).

In addition to corrupting people, Bogan Murdock also corrupts the land and the Southern heritage of his people. He stands by while a paid flunky tries to take over Jerry Calhoun's birthplace--an ancestral home built by a governor of the state. Murdock's agent plans to turn the "old home place" into a tourist attraction known as "Happy Valley." Murdock is also ready to sell the state a piece of worthless mountain property, and to compound his perfidy, he plans to name the property, to be turned into a park, after his dishonored father. Murdock's father, Lemuel Murdock, who dishonored himself and the family name by murdering in the name of "honor" a political rival, lives as a constant reminder of the false image upon which Bogan has patterned his identity. Bogan, deluded and corrupt, in a final appeal to the state, compares himself to the courageous Indian fighter, Andrew Jackson, never realizing he cannot approach this man of integrity.

At Heaven's Gate illustrates amply our original statement concerning family "pieties" of home and place disrupted by twentieth-century influences. Bogan Murdock, the epitome of a successful capitalist, is an abstract, empty being, devoid of either agrarian or patrician identity, who tries to corrupt people and place. Only as the characters in his orbit break free from this symbolic corruptness are they able to achieve true identity.

Jack Burden, modern man who represents the "terrible division" of the age, and assumes that there is no relation between what he thinks and what he does, is able to achieve a reconciliation of his division and an identity when he comes to accept the past. Jack sees the past as represented in his mother, whom he condemns as a vain, shallow woman, incapable

of love, who uses men for her selfish purposes. Jack rejects the past as he rejects his mother, her money, and all direction for his life, as he also rejects Burden's Landing, an aristocratic remnant of the gracious Southern past and comes to work for Willie Stark, who represents the "red-neck," modern South. Jerome Meckier suggests that Jack's split, in part, results from his inability to fuse his past with the present.<sup>14</sup> Jack, however, still feels an instinctive loyalty to his home he describes as "blood greed," which is the fate of a man--"a thing different from love, but which sometimes goes by the name of love" (King's, p. 39).<sup>15</sup>

Not until Jack realizes his mother is capable of love does he accept her and his past. Before that time he sees himself as only a member in the parade of men who admire her; there was the Scholarly Attorney, who he thinks is his father, and the Tycoon and the Count and the Young Executive. He even sees himself in similar abstract terms--"I was the thing that always came back"--instead of seeing himself as a beloved son (King's p. 123). The change comes when he hears the "wild silvery scream" of his mother when she learns that Judge Irwin has committed suicide. With that scream comes the admission that Judge Irwin is his father and that she, his mother, has always loved the judge. Shaken by the reality of this fact, Jack's mother leaves her present husband, gives him the house, and seems determined to start a new life for herself. Jack, aware of the truth of her decision, is able at last to accept her and feels the "peace and the relief and the new sense of the world" (King's, p. 459). And because he is able to accept her, he can accept himself and the past--secure in his identity in the world.

Paralleling an acceptance of his mother is an acceptance of his



father, or should we say "fathers," for as Jack says, "Each of us is the son of a million fathers" (King's p. 462). First there is Ellis Burden, the Scholarly Attorney, who leaves Jack when he is six years old. Carrying the burden of rejection into adult life, he also sees his "father" as a pious, old fool--a religious fanatic, who hands out pamphlets at a mission. After he experiences reconciliation with his mother and learns who his real father is, he brings Ellis Burden to his home and sympathetically cares for him until his death. Jack's second "father" is Willie Stark, father-surrogate, who appeals to Jack because of his dynamic, masterful qualities--traits that Jack himself lacks. Jack, who is Governor Stark's henchman, tries to ride above the level of personal involvement as he acts as Willie's hatchetman. Convinced of Willie's ability to make "good out of bad"--a pragmatic philosophy that says the ends justify the means--Jack winks at the corruption in Willie's administration until the Judge's death. Aware of his own guilt in the suicide, Jack tries to disassociate himself from Willie. At Willie's deathbed, Jack comes to hear the boss's last words, "If it hadn't happened, it might--have been different--even yet" (King's, p. 425). Jack senses in these words and in Lucy Stark's affirmation, ". . . he was a great man, . . ." that perhaps what Willie tried to do and maybe would have done somehow, in some measure, accounts and atones for his corrupt means (King's, p. 452). As Jack accepts his own burden of guilt and responsibility for these past crimes, he too is able to make atonement and assert a positive identity.

Lastly, Jack must as a measure of his true acceptance of himself come to terms with his newly found knowledge concerning his real father. Ironically, this process seems to be the easiest of all. After Ellis

Burden left, Jack says, the Judge was:

more of a father to me than those men who married my mother. He taught me to ride and to shoot, and read history to me from leather bound books in the big study in his house. (King's p. 44)

After the Judge's death, Jack comes to a realistic, sympathetic acceptance of his father when he says "My new father, however, had not been good. . . . But he had done good. He had been a just judge. And he had carried his head high . . ." (King's, p. 375). When Jack learns he is Judge Irwin's sole heir, he says it is "like the ice breaking up after a long winter" (King's p. 376). As he stands there weeping, he recognizes his long-standing non-involvement with life is at an end. And when he goes to live in his father's house, assuming the role of the son, his departure into the world will be more self-assured and self-accepting.

Warren portrays in this novel certain negative aspects of twentieth-century life--particularly the corruptness that comes from abusing political power. It is significant that Willie Stark is a man "without a past," who disregards the principles of his father, and unlike Jack Burden, refuses to "spend the night in his father's home." The isolation of life in the modern capital is also contrasted with the more stable, traditional existence at Burden's Landing. And when Jack Burden goes West to escape the past, he realizes he has to return home in order to achieve identity. Traditional Southern values, then, provide the secure basis for true self-acceptance and self-knowledge.

Another escape to the "West"--this time to the inner regions of a cave--involves Jasper Harrick, son of Old Jack Harrick, described as a "heller" who was as quick with the ladies in his time, as he was with the gun. Jasper, who has been to Korea and "earned him a medal," comes home

to the mountains of Tennessee trying to find a life for himself. He worries his mother because he seems unable "to take hold." Instead of getting a steady job, he earns just enough money for shotgun shells-- "sitting alone and singing his songs . . . drifting down the river for days and nights . . . off into the mountains, . . . crawling into caves . . ." (Cave, p. 19).<sup>16</sup> Trying to answer his mother's questions as to why he goes caving, he finally comes out with: "Well, in the ground at least a fellow has a chance of knowing who he is" (Cave, p. 241). His mother finally accuses Jasper's father of driving him away from home, because of the constant "dirty" jokes and leers and winks Old Jack inflicts on the boy. Perhaps, in a repudiation of the "chip off the old block" refrain, a refusal to conform to the town's legend of his father, Old Jack, he escapes to the cave to be alone and to sort out his own identity. One afternoon Jasper goes into a cave on Isaac Sumpter's property, however, and before he can be rescued he is "sealed forever in his tomb." Instead of working his way through to self-knowledge and identity, as Willie Proudfit and Jack Burden do after their flights West, Jasper's illumination, if indeed there is any, is sealed forever in the depths of eternity.

Leonard Casper says there is no easy answer to Jasper's preference for the "seasonless underground." When Jasper states that "a lot of things don't matter down there," Casper asks:

. . . is this a death-wish subtly stated, womb-longing . . . , a new Great Sleep (perhaps reminiscent of Jack Burden's escapes from the past)? . . . If his inward journeying earns him the name of new frontiersman, is his a search for sedatives (as it was for Western Dreamers, fugitive from guilt) or for steadfast truth, some midpoint unmoving?

Here as in previous novels, Warren seems to be saying that escape from the past, inability to reconcile one's own identity with family's, in this



case father's identity, can result in isolation and in Jasper's case self-entombment.

Another victim of self-entombment, spiritual this time instead of physical, is Isaac Sumpter, son of MacCarland Sumpter, a Baptist preacher. Isaac returns home from being disgracefully booted out of college in Nashville, and in an effort to redeem himself, takes Jasper as his partner in an enterprise that hopefully will turn a nearby cave located on Isaac's property into a tourist attraction. Isaac, like Jasper, cannot achieve a satisfactory relationship with his father. And like a refrain that reappears throughout the novel, he voices the rejection he feels toward his father and the past with these lines from Keats: "'No hungry generations tread thee down. . . .'" Then in angry denial he answers, "Oh, yes they do! They tread you down" (Cave, p. 99). Locked inside himself, estranged from even his father, he goes through school, making good grades, and getting a scholarship by telling everyone that he is going to be a preacher. While at school he rejects the "faith of his fathers," and reasons that there is no God and there is no self--only the "icy joy in the moment of achievement" (Cave, p. 101). Isaac prays with his father only for the sardonic pleasure it gives him, and when he receives a full scholarship he refuses to share this moment of triumph even with his father. After an abortive self-gratifying relationship with a wealthy Jewish girl, Goldie Goldstein, a relationship he destroys when he is mistakenly identified as Jewish himself, he loses his scholarship and his job, returning home to his father because there is nowhere else.

The father-son relationship here is complicated because Isaac's mother died in childbirth. Isaac takes "almost morbid pleasure," says



Casper, "from the thought that his father is guilty of his mother's death and like Abraham of old, is plotting Ike's as well--by implicating him in that childbirth as accomplice." Isaac has no inclination to forgive, "lest he lose that role as plaintiff and prosecutor which preserves him from acknowledging imperfections of his own."<sup>18</sup> The motif of Abraham's sacrifice reaches its climax at the mouth of the cave. To commercially exploit Jasper's plight, Isaac permits no one but an easily manipulated fool, Jebb Holloway, to enter the cave. Afraid to crawl through a dangerous passage in the cave to reach Jasper, Isaac rationalizes that Jasper is already dead and merely pretends to communicate with him. When MacCarland Sumpter breaks away to enter the cave himself, he finds Jasper's still warm body and realizes the enormity of his son's deceptions. In a mistaken act of kindness, he covers up his son's crime with a lie. Louise Gossett, says that at this point:

. . . the ancient sacrifice offered by Abraham becomes for MacCarland the sacrifice of his integrity. . . . Thus in his love MacCarland corrupts the ideal of moral duty which might have appealed to his son, who earlier had scoffed at the possibility of a modern enactment of Abraham's obedience.<sup>19</sup>

Casper says that "MacCarland Sumpter's corroborating lie sets the ultimate "knife" to his (Isaac's) sacrificed flesh."<sup>20</sup>

After his father's humiliating lie, Isaac flees the scene, and prepares himself to leave for New York where, for his recorded tapes at the scene of the tragedy, the network has deposited his money in the Dutch Trust. In a confrontation scene with his father, Isaac, aware of the enormity of his father's sacrifice of integrity, feels at first a "gush of gratitude, the welling of tears in his heart, the beginning of the self-betrayal which love is" (Cave, p. 358). He quickly suppresses the emotion

and leaves his father with a feeling of fiercely denied indebtedness which he describes "like a knife blade plunged between your shoulder blades" (a return to the Abraham-Isaac motif) (Cave, p. 359). Thus, Isaac leaves alone without forging any kind of loving relationship with his father. He leaves to enter the world of Big Media in New York, where he envisions his "success and Seconal, because he, Isaac Sumpster, . . . who wanted to be good, and had paid the price, could at last be totally himself" (Cave, p. 372).

Isaac Sumpster, apparently entombed forever in his spiritual cave, is without that "larger identity which love alone permits and extends."<sup>21</sup> His fatal coldness as he treats others around him as abstractions reflects itself in his own lack of self-knowledge. Louise Gossett says that his idea of himself is so untrue that it obscures and distorts even the "shadows of reality that flicker across the walls of the cave."<sup>22</sup> Compounded with his rejection of his father is also a rejection of his Southern heritage. Throughout the novel he has always spoken disparagingly of his "hillbilly" background and as he drives through Smyrna, Tennessee, on his way to Nashville to catch his plane, he scornfully dismisses the sign proclaiming Smyrna as the home of Sam Davis, hero of the Confederacy. He is touched somehow, however, by the sight of a new brick home with "an awkward jackleg imitation of the classic white pillars of Confederate graciousness" (Cave, p. 365). And as he sees an early light, probably from a shack up in the hills, the home of "people . . . caught up in their mess of living . . ." he feels a dry "entrapment of the heart, a clutch of terror and despair, unresolved . . .," because Isaac Sumpster, has left his home and heritage, his father and his past, and traded it for success

and money in the anonymity and isolation of the big city (Cave, p. 366).

Brad Tolliver, Warren's major character in Flood, trades a mature acceptance of his past and an involvement with humanity for success and money. After several years in Hollywood as a successful screen writer, Brad returns to his home town, Fiddlersburg, Tennessee, to write the script for a motion picture that will portray Fiddlersburg's last days before the flood. He has been chosen, he realizes, by director Yasha Jones, not for his "screen writers' award, two Oscars, and seventeen picture credits," but for a sensitivity he once revealed as a young man (Flood, p. 28).<sup>23</sup> Exhibiting a warmth of involvement, Brad once portrayed his home town and its only Jewish inhabitant, Israel Goldforb, in a deeply moving story, entitled "I'm Telling You Now." Rejecting his own father, Lank Tolliver, Brad sought companionship as a young boy in the simple tailor, who offered through his own humanity an image of maturity and self-realization Brad desperately needed.

Brad's own father was a brutal, insensitive man who failed to relate to his son. His rejection of his father stems not from his brutality, however, but from the fact of his humanity. Lank Tolliver, described as a "true-born muskrat-skinner . . . who came out of the town and started skinning the local townsfolk . . ." owned most of the town and had even foreclosed on the Methodist Church by the time Brad was born (Flood, p. 116). After the depression, he foreclosed on the owner of the town's only Southern mansion; Brad says he wanted the "rugs so he could track in swamp mud or cow dung . . . and the furniture so he could take out his frogsticker and whittle on the Chippendale . . ." (Flood, p. 117). As an indoor pastime, Lank even burned the household books leaf by leaf. Barnett



Guttenberg says that "Lank cannot adapt to Fiddlersburg and its modicum of culture," or more specifically he "cannot accept the version of himself which Fiddlersburg has created." When he is overwhelmed with his situation, Lank goes back to the swamp and lies weeping in the mud. Guttenberg says that he "longs for his old identity and the innocence of allegiance to objects and anger." He goes on to say that Brad can accept his father's brutality, in fact, "he had been held to the father by that very brutality. . . ." What Brad can't accept is the vision of his father weeping, and instead of accepting it, he repudiates it.<sup>24</sup>

Brad continues throughout his life, except for his relationship with Israel Goldforb and the subsequent story, to misinterpret humanity. When he enters the publishing world of New York, he meets an unfortunate father surrogate, Telford Lott, who takes Brad "from humanity to the idea of humanity." Lott makes Brad aware of having "no ideology, no self-image, no story, and . . . Brad decides to fight in Spain to remedy this deficiency." His experiences in Spain prove empty, however, and in his dream he recalls the faceless enemy of Lott and Spain, merging as faceless "humanity, abstraction, unreality."<sup>25</sup> Lost in his own unreality and lacking self-knowledge, Brad experiences only frustration and continued isolation as he goes through two marriages. His years in Hollywood as a writer prove to be equally unfulfilling, and he arrives in Fiddlersburg as a typical, twentieth-century man--alienated from his past attachment to family and place. His excursions to the "Big Media"--New York--and his years spent out West have served only to all but sever his ties to humanity and to render him empty and unrealized. Warren's answer for Brad, as it is for others, is to return to his home and family to claim his identity. In a last ditch effort to "re-establish the connection that had existed



before the weight of ice broke the wires," Brad returns to his home town (Flood, p. 438). And in an initial response, Brad wonders if he, too, like his father returning to the swamp, had had to come back to Fiddlersburg to lie in the mud and weep.

Of all the characters in Flood, however, only Brad fails to achieve a renewed identity. On the day of Fiddlersburg's memorial service, when the cranes are getting ready to destroy the church, Brad does reach a kind of self-knowledge--a knowledge that relates to Fiddlersburg and the world. He says that:

over the years he had run hither and yon, blaming Fiddlersburg because it was not the world, and, therefore, was not real, and blaming the world because it was not Fiddlersburg and, therefore, was not real. For he had not trusted in the secret and irrational life of man . . . when he had seen his father lying in the black swamp mud, asleep after weeping. . . . (Flood, p. 439)

When Brad can finally link the image of his father to the inner-connectedness of humanity there is hope for him. He knows that he has not found the "human necessity"--the connection between what he was and what he is--but he is now ready to try. The reality he had when he was with Israel Goldforb is what Brad must find again.

Fiddlersburg, even though it is doomed to be flooded, still possesses those qualities of Southern values Warren admires--feeling for family, for tradition, for the land. John Longley says, however, that the town itself is not sentimentalized. "The shabbiness of what might be called its cultural resources is documented." River Street, for example, is depicted as populated with almost empty stores, signs flaking to pieces--a town where "God forgot to wind his watch." Nonetheless, says Longley, there is a "blessedness which shines through the fabric of undistinguished mortality which is Fiddlersburg."<sup>26</sup> As Blanding Cottshill says, ". . . in

Fiddlersburg everything is different. Things are tied together different. There's some spooky interpenetration of things, a mystic osmos of being, you might say" (Flood, p. 423). Cottshill goes on to say that when Fiddlersburg is flooded they will be stateless persons without identity.

Contrast this idea of small town tradition and stability with the socially disintegrating features the new dam will bring. The narrator's contempt for the engineer Digby is apparent when Digby expounds on the benefits of the dam:

The dam was going to be great . . . Going to be near a hundred square miles underwater . . . Most of the land was not much but swamp or second growth. And what good land there was--hell, they didn't know how to farm it anyway. But with power and cheap transportation it would all be different . . . A real skyline on the river, plant after plant. Getting shoes on the swamp rats, too, teaching 'em to read and write and punch a time clock, and pull a switch. (Flood, p. 113)

In addition to future industrialism, there are already signs at the nearby Happy Dell and the Seven Dwarfs Motel that commercialism has perverted nature. As Brad approaches Fiddlersburg, he notes that the creek is still there but on a "boulder was a cement frog, the size of a young calf and the color of Paris Green . . ." (Flood, p. 4). On the last day of Fiddlersburg, the memorial service of Brother Potts is almost drowned out by the noise of motorboats buzzing across the river--a noise of the twentieth century as it seeks to silence the voices of the past. Even though Fiddlersburg will only be a memory, after today, it is this memory that must help Brad reactivate his sense of being and selfhood.

Cy Grinder is one of two characters in Meet Me in the Green Glenn whose sense of identity involves an adjustment to family and area values. Cy is the son of Old Budge Grinder, the biggest drunk in Spotwood Valley; his brother has been known to "borrow" from the wrong corn crib for his

operations "at the still up the cove," and his sister, Mabel, walks down the road to Nashville one day to earn her fame as a "hooker." Trying to free himself from all this degradation, Cy works hard in the local saw-mill and takes a correspondence course in engineering. When he is able to, he dates Cassie Killigrew whose mother considers him "pore white trash." Cy, however, will not violate Cassie until he becomes an engineer, until he is:

in fact, translated out of himself, no longer the son of Old Budge, but an untarnished Adam walking the new earth with the breath of the Worldwide Correspondence School blown into him. (Meet, p. 77)<sup>27</sup>

Unfortunately, he and Cassie have a car wreck and Cassie ends up in the hospital with broken ribs. Mrs. Killigrew delivers a merciless tongue-lashing to Cy, suggesting that what had happened could have been expected of the son of Old Budge. Cy, who moves out the hospital door like a man in a trance, knows that he has "lived among shadows and delusions and that the words were the blaze of truth" (Meet, p. 79). He cannot respond to Mrs. Killigrew; he merely accepts her verdict of him, throwing away his own efforts toward rebirth.

True to the Warren character escaping from his past and himself, Cy Grinder heads West into forgetfulness. When he returns to Spotwood Valley after eight years, he decides to fulfill the destiny of his "degenerate family." He marries Gladys Pegrum, a fat, placid, "clabber-smelling" girl, whom Mrs. Killigrew had decreed as being good enough for the likes of him. Cy, up until the Italian Angelo's trial, has been able to live in the present by a repudiation of the past. When he and Cassie stop at a roadside stand, after their failure to see the governor for a stay of execution for Angelo, Cy experiences a wrenching pain of discovery. When



Cassie muses over what "might have been" if she and Cy had married and had a son, Cy's response is a physical and mental jolting that forces him to acknowledge the past. This discovery, like a "hand tearing his heart out by the roots," makes him realize that the "now isn't enough; a man had to live through the backwards and the forwards" (Meet, p. 325).

After the trial, Cy is able to make some kind of accomodation with life. When Spotwood Valley is flooded, he becomes the game warden and the head of the rangers. Devoted to his daughter and to the outdoor life, Cy reimmersed himself in the present, without reflection or consideration of what has gone before. When he hears the news of lawyer Murray Guilfort's suicide, however, he suddenly is overcome by a terrible loneliness. He, "who had always been able to be alone all day and all night and not care," is shaken by the fact of another's estrangement from humanity (Meet, p. 374). Looking over at his wife, Cy realizes he has never cared to know her thoughts or feelings, and "the realization is an anguish to him" (Meet, p. 376). The novel closes with a sense of hope that Cy will establish some thread of humanity with his wife which will free him to accept that past self that was, that self that married Gladys Pegrum, then perhaps there is hope for more human involvement in his life.

Leroy Lancaster, a lawyer who calls himself the conscience of Parkerton, comes back home because, as he puts it "he needs to expiate something" (Meet, p. 265). He comes back to Parkerton after being in Richmond, Virginia, in a law firm to set up practice in his father's old law office on the Courthouse Square. When he asks himself years later why he had come back, he can only remember the "old surge of guilt and unworthiness" that he felt as a college boy when he saw the love and joy on his parents' faces when he would



arrive home for Christmas or summer vacations (Meet, p. 265). Unable to assuage the blankness in his life after college "that he had no name for," he brings his bride Corinne back home to the "shabby white house under the last cluster of forest oaks" (Meet, p. 271). Leroy, perhaps still in expiation for some unnamable debt, tries cases that are almost sure to end in failure. For some inexplicable reason he even blames Corinne, who spends her life in charitable works, for making him a failure. Only, he realizes, when he can escape his old feeling of guilt and unworthiness he felt as a son, and act out his own destiny as a mature individual can he achieve any kind of success. When he goes forward undeterred by the loss of a murder case, leaves off his bumbling, and wins two big cases, he is ready to achieve total manhood relieved of the childish burden of gratitude. Warren shows in this novel that a realistic accomodation must be made to the past in order to achieve a mature self-realization. Running away and accepting the unfavorable verdict of the town is surely not the answer; Cy Grinder realizes also that a wholesale repudiation of the past only results in isolation and estrangement. Only when he can live through the agony of what was and accept the present for what it is, can he achieve any kind of self-knowledge and identity. Leroy, inexplicably burdened with the past, must achieve the opposite feat; he must become fully aware to the potentialities of the present and achieve a realistic acceptance of the past.

Jediah Tewksbury, a classical scholar reviewing his life in Warren's last novel A Place To Come To, is yet another alienated, isolated Warren hero who exists in solitude because he has repudiated his past. Jediah's past revolves around the shameful story of the death of his father, Old

Buck, who in a drunken state falls out of his moving wagon as he leans over to "piss on the hindquarters of one of a span of mules . . ." (Place, p. 3).<sup>28</sup> The story is used to torment Jed throughout his childhood and is the primary thrust that removes him from his home, Dugton, Alabama. Jed's mother, afraid that he will grow up like his father, sacrifices herself to send him through school, and in a final self-denial, sends him away from home forever.

Symbolically, Jed becomes immersed in the histories of the past because he repudiates his own. In Dugton he learns from Old Miss McClatty all the Latin that she remembers and then goes on to Bechwell College to do advanced study in Latin and Greek. From there he goes to the University of Chicago and comes under the influence of the "great Dr. Stahlman," who becomes a father-surrogate for Jed. Stahlman, however, is no more able to handle the past than is Jed. Tormented because his Jewish wife died from anguish over the extermination of her people, Stahlman says he should have gone back to Germany "to . . . offer the public testimony of my curse upon what my land had become" (Place, p. 71). Instead of living through the war in his adopted country, he commits suicide.

Jed is always very aware of the price he is paying for his rejection of the past. Waiting to see Dr. Stahlman one afternoon, Jed occupies his mind by reading of Odysseus' longing for his rocky isle, and despairingly realizes that he "had nothing, nothing in the world, to be lonely for" (Place, p. 55). Jed, who as a classical scholar has substituted the far distant past which cannot disturb his calm, feels contempt for himself while he is teaching at Vanderbilt. He asks himself "if a man who was not afraid of reality would be hiding himself in the Middle Ages" (Place,

p. 137). In a tempestuous, ill-fated love affair with Dugton-born Rozelle Hardcastle, Jed attempts to submerge himself in sexuality. Later, he says that his own past was "nothing, a blankness, and it was the reality of the jealous pain at her past that, somehow, was the sanctuary I could flee to, to escape the unreality of my own" (Place, p. 238). After he leaves Nashville and Rozelle, Jed returns to the University of Chicago and enters a new period of existence based on pastlessness. In the "unnatural rigidities and angularities of the man-made world" he can experience a kind of happiness based on the blank fact of survival (Place, p. 319).

In an attempt to escape his solitude, Jed becomes involved in civic obligations and matrimony with a very "personable and successful lady photographer, Dauphine Finkel" (Place, p. 336). The marriage works out well at first, and he is overjoyed when a son, Ephraim, is born. In a very revealing scene, Jed, who enjoys caring for Ephraim at night, tiptoes into his room. As he looks at his own son, he wonders if there had been a time when "Young Buck crept at night . . . and stood to look at a dark-haired male infant, in an improvised cradle . . ." (Place, p. 340). Jediah's son soon appears to be the only permanent part of his marriage; convinced of its "emptiness," Dauphine dissolves the marriage, leaving Jed to wonder what went wrong. As a kind of providential compensation for his aloneness, Jed makes a friend, Stephen Mostoski, a Jewish refugee who shares Jed's feeling for solitude. In recounting to Stephen his own path to solitude, Jed says:

I . . . hating the South . . . had fled it and ever afterwards blamed my solitude on that fact. I had fled but had found nowhere to flee to . . . I felt isolated even . . . into Yankee virtue." (Place, p. 347)

Jed's flight from the South is contrasted with other characters' more



successful acceptance of their homeland. Cud Cudworth, living in prosperous luxury in New York, returns to Nashville, marries a local girl, and finds contentment and happiness farming the local homestead. He offers Jed the same opportunity, but Jed rejects "any temptation of entering the present communal dream inhabited by Cudworth and all the rest" (Place, p. 209). He realizes that their "joy sprang from their willed and full embracement of the process of their life in time, and I, God help me, was in flight from Time" (Place, p. 254). Mrs. Jones-Talbot, who herself has returned to the South to reestablish herself within her family tradition, relates to Jed the painful story of her young, dead Italian lover who was killed in the war. She remembers his devotion for "mia terra" as he closed his hand over the dirt and gravel, and describes it as "that piety for place and all the blood-experience that has gone into it over the years" (Place, p. 233). Jed, however, cannot benefit from these examples of successfully integrated people--people who have accepted their patrician and agrarian identities, content to live within their heritage. He, who has fled the South and repudiated his own heritage, can only live an isolated, rootless existence cut off from family and home.

After the death of his mother, Jed returns finally to Dugton. Unwilling to risk the test of humanity, however, he refuses Ephraim the opportunity of accompanying him. He senses that if his son had gone with him:

My life would be in one piece, somehow. Everything would come together. I would no longer wake up at night and ask where I was, ask why I had come here . . . Ask why nothing I did . . . seemed any more to have meaning . . . Ask why I literally could not bring myself to think of the past. . . . (Place, p. 378)

In an attempt to analyze Jed's refusal to ask Ephraim, Stephen Mostoski says that in so doing Jed would be deprived of "his essence of being . . . his

solitude"--that same solitude derived from his rootlessness (Place, p. 380).

When he arrives home, in an attempt to dispel some of his rootlessness, Jed examines each object that comes within his vision--the china bulldog, the crocheted antimacassar, the stereopticon viewer. And each object, says Jed, "seemed to glow with a special assertion of its being--of my being, too, as though only now, after all the years, I was returning to my final self, long lost" (Place, p. 390). In a reassertion of that final self, Jed pays a visit to the graves of his parents and experiences a wild impulse to "lie on the earth between the two graves . . . and stretch out a hand to each . . ." (Place, p. 399). But, Jed, characteristically afraid to take the risk of humanity, doesn't lie down, and nothing happens. Before he leaves Dugton, however, Jed experiences a compassionate vision of Buck leading a cavalry charge--a vision that enables Jed to forgive his father and frees him to seek a reconciliation with his wife and a redeeming hope for the future. Thus, Warren in his last novel is able to provide again an answer for modern, alienated man--an answer he has developed in his earlier novels. If modern twentieth-century man is to achieve a true sense of self, of identity, of humanity, he must exist in a true relationship to his family and his home, and in Warren's world this home and family are Southern.

## NOTES

### Chapter I

<sup>1</sup>Leonard Casper, The Dark and Bloody Ground (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1960), pp. 5-6.

<sup>2</sup>Charles H. Bohner, Robert Penn Warren (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1964), p. 20.

<sup>3</sup>Eisinger, p. 199.

<sup>4</sup>Robert Penn Warren, Night Rider (New York: Random House, 1939). This edition is the source of all parenthetical citations for Night Rider.

<sup>5</sup>Irene Hendry, "The Regional Novel: The Example of Robert Penn Warren," Sewanee Review, 53 (Winter, 1945), p. 90.

<sup>6</sup>Hendry, p. 90.

<sup>7</sup>Casper, Dark, p. 105.

<sup>8</sup>Casper, Dark, p. 105.

<sup>9</sup>Louise Y. Gossett, Violence in Recent Southern Fiction (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1965), p. 62.

<sup>10</sup>Hendry, p. 87.

<sup>11</sup>Frederick J. Hoffman, The Art of Southern Fiction: A Study of Some Modern Novelists (Carbondale and Edwardsville, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967), p. 10, 33.

<sup>12</sup>Robert Penn Warren, At Heaven's Gate (New York: Random House, 1943). This edition is the source of all parenthetical citations for At Heaven's Gate.

<sup>13</sup>Barnett Guttenberg, Web of Being: The Novels of Robert Penn Warren (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1975), p. 26.

<sup>14</sup>Jerome Meckier, "Burden's Complaint: The Disintegrated Personality as Theme and Style in Robert Penn Warren's All the King's Men" in Twentieth Century Interpretations of All the King's Men, ed. Robert H. Chambers (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1977), p. 57.

<sup>15</sup>Robert Penn Warren, All the King's Men (New York: Random House, 1953). This edition is the source of all parenthetical citations for All the King's Men.



<sup>16</sup>Robert Penn Warren, The Cave (New York: Random House, 1953). This edition is the source of all parenthetical citations for The Cave.

<sup>17</sup>Leonard Casper, "Journey to the Interior: The Cave," Modern Fiction Studies, 6 (Spring, 1960), p. 67.

<sup>18</sup>Casper, "Journey," p. 71.

<sup>19</sup>Gossett, p. 68.

<sup>20</sup>Casper, "Journey," p. 71.

<sup>21</sup>Casper, "Journey," p. 71.

<sup>22</sup>Gossett, p. 68.

<sup>23</sup>Robert Penn Warren, Flood: A Romance of Our Time (New York: Random House, 1963). This edition is the source of all parenthetical citations for Flood.

<sup>24</sup>Guttenberg, p. 122.

<sup>25</sup>Guttenberg, p. 123-124.

<sup>26</sup>John Lewis Longley, Robert Penn Warren (Austin, Texas: Steck-Vaughn Co., 1969), p. 31.

<sup>27</sup>Robert Penn Warren, Meet Me in the Green Glenn (New York: Random House, 1971). This edition is the source of all parenthetical citations for Meet Me in the Green Glenn.

<sup>28</sup>Robert Penn Warren, A Place To Come To (New York: Random House, 1977). This edition is the source of all parenthetical citations for A Place To Come To.

## Chapter II

### Redefinition: The Myths

Warren, as other Southern writers have done, has chosen to translate the Southern myths of the Southern gentleman, purity of Southern womanhood, and the peculiar mystique surrounding the Civil War into his own personal vision of identity and self-knowledge. Freed from the romantic notions of the Old South, he is able to sift through the nostalgia and the unreality that have clouded a closer look at these myths and has shown how they have affected the Southerner's search for self-hood. Warren has chosen, in his examination, to portray the falsity surrounding these myths and has also chosen to uncover attendant truths that reinforce his notions that the South is still a repository for human values. In a critical analysis of Warren's handling of Southern myths, Leonard Casper says that:

Nor has he /Warren/ declined to replace the myths found inadequate but has constantly urged formulation of new definitions, believing with Conrad in the necessity of myths, personal and public, when they are projects of the creative, not the destructive, will.<sup>1</sup>

Beginning with his first novel, Night Rider, and continuing through A Place To Come To, Warren has chosen to explore the myth of the Southern gentleman as a repository for all attendant virtues, predominant of which is "honor." In many instances he has chosen to contrast the false image, called by Bohner the magnolia-and-julep tradition with its insistence on the "code duello" as the only defense of honor, with a truer image based on principles and human values.<sup>2</sup> Frederick J. Hoffman describes this tradition as being based upon an "economy that was distinctive; this tradition

that included a complement of ceremony, belief, and dynastic observance . . . that were regionally distinctive." He goes on to say that:

the Southerner was not more fortunately born, but rather imagined he was, or that he exploited more fully than the Northerner the occasional slight evidence of a leisurely aristocratic world to which he thought himself entitled at birth . . .<sup>3</sup>

In Warren's first novel, Night Rider, Senator Edmund Tolliver has all the outward manifestations of the Southern gentleman. A strong handsome man, he is an accomplished orator who lives the good life on his country estate. He breeds blooded cattle, keeps blooded horses, and grows tobacco. He is a gracious host who treats his guests with generosity and warmth. Senator Tolliver, however, is an empty man, a man without principles, a man who betrays his fellow tobacco farmers for the promise of political power. He is contrasted with Captain Todd, who served as a cavalryman in the Civil War and is a man of high principles and inner convictions. Percy Munn, the novel's leading character:

would study Captain Todd's face, motionless or smiling behind the clipped gray beard, and wonder about his calmness, what appeared to be his deep, inner certainty of self, his caution and detachment and tolerance in regard to the world outside himself. (Night, p. 43)

Captain Todd, Munn discovers, possesses:

that ripe, secret security that he could count on . . . supported by a confidence different from the confidence in events and circumstances that would be subject to change and accident and the casual appetites and weaknesses of people . . . Captain Todd could be confident because he had no confidence in things and events; he knew things and events were blind. . . . (Night, p. 44)

Todd, at first a member of the tobacco farmers' association, withdraws his membership when the tactics turn to violence such as barn burnings and plant-bed scrapings and other forms of intimidation. Irene Hendry



says that Captain Todd represents Warren's closest approach to the eighteenth-century gentleman whose "personality resides in the balance he preserves between reason and the religious or imaginative faculty, himself and the world. . . ." Captain Todd, who is able to preserve that balance, also has that "moral certainty of self," valued by Warren as being the "vigor and the poetry" of the Southern system. Miss Hendry goes on to say that this "moral certainty" was, for Warren, self-knowledge--"a reference to an enduring and familiar unit of consciousness which serves to order impressions and both initiates and controls thought and action."<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, for Percy Munn, he is lured away from the conservative stability of Captain Todd and his moral certainty to the glamorous figure of Senator Tolliver and his subsequent uncertainty. This "Southern gentleman" of tradition becomes a hollow, abstract being without self-knowledge, while Warren's true man of principle is a repository for human values--honor, integrity, and moral certainty of self.

Warren's second novel, At Heaven's Gate, focuses on Bogan Murdock, a corrupt financier whose outward appearance suggests all the polish and accomplishment of a true Southern gentleman. He is a perfect host, unfailingly courteous, impeccable in speech and behavior, but he is as empty and devoid of principles as Senator Tolliver. In addition, Charles Bohner says that the house of Murdock is, like Faulkner's Sartoris clan, a family in decline.<sup>5</sup> Bogan's father, Major Lemuel Murdock "fought four bitter years for the defense and honor of his native state" (Gate, p. 133). Then in defense of his "honor," he shot and killed a rival gubernatorial candidate, who charged that Murdock held a Confederate commission and received wealth from his father's speculations in land with Yankees, both

of which things happened to be true. Because of his position in the community and the false code of "honor" that prevailed, Murdock was found not guilty of the crime of murder. In the current setting of the novel, Murdock is a ruined old man whose only reality is the day he shot Moxby Goodpasture at the train station. When an exposé of the past crime is revealed, old Murdock runs away from his home, and he is found at the train station re-enacting the painful episode. Later, when two young Negro boys learn of the shameful history, he is forced again to re-enact the tragedy. In a moving scene, Warren first pictures the physical decay of the old man which matches his moral decay--"The old man sat . . . sagging from the big maned head, the gray streaked yellowly by old rust stains, the whole mass sagging, as by long slip and erosion . . ." (Gate, p. 271). Thus is portrayed a distorted sense of Southern "honor"--an "honor" that kills an innocent man and reduces another one into a mountainous ruin. This falseness has perverted the self-knowledge of one man--Lemuel Murdock--and has helped to create the empty vacuity that is Bogan Murdock.

All the King's Men continues the examination of the Southern code of honor as it details the conflict between Adam Stanton and Willie Stark. Adam Stanton, a childhood friend of Jack Burden's, lives by absolute codes, the chivalric code of honor that is perpetuated in Southern tradition and the absolutes of his scientific world. Adam grows up in the slightly aristocratic world of Burden's Landing, where ideals and past tradition are considered important. His father, who was governor of the state, was the embodiment of all the lofty ideals of honor and Southern gallantry to Adam and his sister, Ann. Jack Burden in a moment of derision says that:

Just because your old man was Governor once and died  
in a mahogany tester bed with a couple of high-priced doctors

leaning over him and adding up the bill in their heads . . .  
 you think he was Jesus Christ in a black string tie. . . .  
 (King's, p. 113)

Elizabeth Kerr says that the Stanton family presented an idyllic picture, but the fine chivalric picture of the past that lives in Adam's mind makes him reject the present.<sup>6</sup>

Willie Stark, on the other hand, is a political realist--a pragmatist who believes that "good can be made out of the bad." Trying to describe his philosophy to Adam Stanton, after Adam has accepted the directorship of the new hospital, Willie says that:

When your great-great-grandpappy climbed down out of the tree, he didn't have any more notion of good or bad, . . . than that hoot owl. . . . Well, he climbed down and he began to make God up as he went along. He made up what he needed to do business . . . And what he made up and got everybody to mirate on as good and right was always just a couple of jumps short of what they need to do business. That's why things change, Doc. (King's p. 273)

As Adam listens to Willie's flexible notions of morality, he ponders on his own father's apparent rigid codes and at the same time he is recovering from the shock of learning of his father's one-time political expediency. When his father was governor, he protected his good friend, Judge Irwin, who had taken a bribe. When Adam learns of the deceit and cover-up, he is naturally devastated, and in a gesture of retaliation toward the memory of his father, he accepts the directorship of the hospital from Stark, a man whose own ambiguous morals he despises.

Just as Adam is deeply affected by the knowledge of his father's lapse in principles, so is his sister, Ann. When she learns that her father's memory is tarnished, she throws her deeply-entrenched morality to the wind and has an affair with Willie Stark. In their individual reactions to the shattering knowledge, each child, in a sense, rebels



against the iron-bound code learned from their father. Adam, however, is unable to shake loose completely from his rigid strictures, and in a final desperate attempt perhaps to revive the purity of the old ideals, he shoots Willie Stark. Trying to recapture the chivalric ideal in defense of his sister's honor, he destroys the symbol of the new morality he does not understand.

Carter Everett, in his article, "The 'Little Myth' of Robert Penn Warren," discusses the consequences of an encounter with an "idea" such as that espoused by Adam Stanton and the "world" as represented by Willie Stark. He says that such an encounter is almost always fatal and that Warren stresses the need for a fusion and synthesis of the "idea" and the "world." This encounter is seen on multiple levels, but in All the King's Men it is seen on the level of history as "the conflict between northern pragmatism and Southern absolute traditions and codes. . . ." He goes on to say that Jack Burden watches while his Southern friends spurn the modern world and attempt to impose an idea upon it--"the idea of a feudal chivalric responsibility." Willie, the man of the world, is contrasted with men like Judge Irwin who is "full of grace, dignity, and 'honor'" of the idealized old South, and Adam Stanton and his allegiance to absolute codes. Everett says that Adam lived all his life believing of a time when "everything was run by high-minded, handsome men." To give the reader a vivid picture of even the physical contrast between the two types, Warren describes Judge Irwin in his elegant dressing jacket and Willie in his sweat-stained shirt. Everett continues by saying that when the two types meet there is catastrophe, as illustrated by the Judge's suicide and by the assassination of Willie Stark. Warren is suggesting that these

two types cannot exist successfully independent of each other; in the character of Jack Burden, however, he has "fused" the "world" and the "idea." Jack, who has lived through the "world" of Willie Stark and the "idea" of his own past, says that he and Ann Stanton will "'go into the convulsion of the world, out of history into history and the awful responsibility of Time.'" <sup>7</sup> Jack's self-knowledge, apparently complete in its fusion, suggests Warren's unique synthesis, here in All the King's Men, as it embodies the Southern past, a repository for ideals, with the modern pragmatist's adaptation to reality. To achieve complete identity, Warren is suggesting the modern Southerner must be able to combine the past with the present.

World Enough and Time, Warren's fourth novel, is devoted almost entirely to the philosophical question of the conflict between the "idea" and the "world." For his historical background, Warren chose the diary of Jereboam Beauchamp in which Beauchamp details the events leading to the murder of Colonel Solomon P. Sharp, the trial in which he was convicted of the murder, and the subsequent imprisonment of Jereboam who was joined by his wife. In the novel, the main character is named Jeremiah Beaumont, a young man who lived through the violent frontier days of the 1820's in Kentucky and tried to establish for himself some code that would enable him to live above "the ruck of things." Young and impressionable, he remembers seeing a picture in one of his father's books of a young maiden who is lashed to a stake with the flames leaping up to engulf her. All of a sudden he has a desire to rescue her from the flames. Reinforcing and developing his sense of being able to live life on a higher plane, Dr. Leicester Burnham introduces Jeremiah to the lofty Platonic ideals of the

Romans. This same developing sense of idealism causes him to reject outright the estate of his maternal grandfather, Morton Marcher, when the offer is made on the condition that he take the old man's name. Identity, he realizes, is not that simple. After the deaths of both his father and mother, Jeremiah becomes the protege of Colonel Cassius Fort, an influential man of the times, who takes Jeremiah into his law office. Accepting Fort as a father-surrogate, he also makes friends with Wilkie Baron, who is wise in the "ways of the World." Wilkie tries to tempt Jeremiah into the temptations of the flesh and the world of "Sillie Sal," but Jeremiah refuses. Instead, he becomes involved with Rachel Jordan when he learns from Wilkie that Fort has seduced Rachel and betrayed her.

All his life seems to have led Jeremiah to this point. Jeremiah, who has wanted to live for something beyond the "bustle of the hour," has a ready-made situation in which to act out his idealism. Forcing Rachel to cry out for Fort's murder, Jeremiah marries her in order to avenge her honor--the honor of Southern womanhood that must be upheld by her chivalrous defender. In the time-honored tradition, Beaumont confronts Fort and challenges him to a duel; Fort, however, refuses to duel with his "son" and leaves the country instead. In an attempt to remind the reader of the duel's contemporary equivalent, the narrator says:

The code duello, for example, may seem to the sophisticate a quaint and rather fatuous contest between 'dunces,' but the modern equivalent is not to 'stand up at dawn, but to lie in a scooped-out hole in a tropical jungle and rot in the rain and wait for the steel pellet whipping through the fronds . . . ' (World, p. 118)<sup>8</sup>

In the novel, Warren pictures the ultimate extremity of the "code duello"



when he describes Percival Shrogg, a cold-minded, ruthless idealist, who forces men into duels and yet himself is found at his death to wear a chain-mail vest. Thus, Warren indicts the false Southern image of honor that would force a man into an idiotic contest.

When Jeremiah provokes Colonel Fort into the duel, he is trying to live by the "idea"--the idea of justice, the pure idea of honor. Charles Bohner says that Fort becomes an abstraction; to kill him is to commit "the perfect act, outside the world, pure and untarnished. . . . the perfect justice self-defining and since defining self, defining all else."<sup>9</sup> When this fails, he murders Fort and uses the ways of the world--lies, evasions--to justify the idea. Jeremiah, who would have spurned the world, is swept by its inexorable forces. He is caught up in a tangled web of truth and half-truth, lie and counter-lie.<sup>10</sup> At the end of the novel, Jeremiah ignores the idea completely; when Wilkie Baron engineers his escape to the degenerate pirate home of La Grand' Bosse, he sinks into bestiality through drunkenness and almost animal coupling with a syphillitic whore. Here Warren seems again to be saying as in All the King's Men that man cannot live by idea alone or by the world alone. There must be that fusion, that synthesis whereby man can incorporate both the world and the idea into his life. Chester E. Eisinger calls this problem the reality-idea dichotomy. Even though Jeremiah's idea encompasses justice and honor, he fails because the "validity of the idea is conditioned by the adjustment of the idea to the terms imposed on it by the world."<sup>11</sup>

Ironically, Colonel Fort appears to have achieved that synthesis of which Warren apparently approves. He is a man of "idea" who is willing to

put his idea into action. When he decides that the New Court party is wrong, he espouses the Old Court even though his own Relief faction has declared for the New Court, and he runs for office because "thought without action is a disease of the will."<sup>12</sup> Clearly Fort is also a man of principle--one of those "men of principle" who believe in what Charles Anderson says are "the general or accepted laws governing conduct that have come down through history."<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, Fort is aware of his own guilt in regard to Rachel Jordan. In his letter to her, he says, "I betrayed you and betrayed others who trusted me . . . and for months lived in a dream outside the hard world. . . . Then I came back into the world and hope to do my duty still . . . (World, p. 135). Chastened by guilt, he does not run from the world, but re-enters and hopes to do "good" in it.

In a final evaluation of Jeremiah Beaumont, Longley says that "stripped of his rhetoric, his manners, and his self-deception, he has only one problem: how to be."<sup>14</sup> Again we return to the theme of self-knowledge and identity that occupies Warren; this time the struggle is complicated by the traditional Southern ideal of "honor" and Warren's own particular dialectic that involves translating that "honor" into a workable realization in the world. Jeremiah, like Adam Stanton, lives by the absolute, and unlike Colonel Fort, a man of principle, he refuses to compromise that unyielding absolute. Presented with an example like Colonel Fort, Jeremiah cannot benefit from his principles, and only in the end, says Anderson, does Jerry's idealism, "which had rejected the limitations of humanity and spurned the demands of society, humble him enough to admire once more man's struggle to live by principles." The two lawyers who defended him

at the murder trial provide him with a composite example of high-principled man. "Hawgood, who lived selflessly for a high concept of truth, and Madison, a more experienced man, felt honor bound to help all those suffering from injustice."<sup>15</sup> Leonard Casper says of Jeremiah, however, that "he will not borrow any man's identity so thoroughly does he enjoy even the tribulations involved in searching for his own."<sup>16</sup>

Calvin Fiddler, remnant of the oldest family in Fiddlersburg, becomes involved in defending his wife's honor against the advance of a young engineer in the novel Flood. While Calvin practices his internship in Nashville, his young wife Maggie spends the summer with Brad, her brother, and his wife Lettice. Brad, oblivious to the mores of this small Southern town, invites to his house, a "fast-swinging" crowd that contrasts with the innocence and naïvete of Cal and Maggie. Cal, who has always felt inferior to Brad's bravado, says, "I was in medical school . . . and I read in the paper you'd gone to Spain to fight and I almost blew it that term . . . because it seemed like one more thing you would have and I wouldn't" (Flood, p. 409). When Cal watches the way Brad treats his wife Lettice, and notices the effect on Maggie, he doubts his own manhood--in fact refers to himself as the Johns Hopkins M.D. virgin. When Cal learns of the affair between Maggie and the young engineer, not only is he defending his honor when he shoots and kills his wife's lover, he is also defending his concept of his own manhood as he falsely measures it beside Brad Tolliver. Both concepts of honor and manhood, then, are a part of that Southern tradition that in this novel brings about the destruction of two people--both victims of an outmoded code of conduct.

In Warren's last novel, A Place To Come To, he offers the reader a



striking contrast between the false image of the Southern "gentleman" and the true image of the Southern man of principle. Jediah Tewksbury's first encounter with the image occurs during his train ride to Nashville, where he has gone to be a university professor. A young lady offering him her charms affirms the fact that a "Southern Gentleman sure knows how to make you feel like a lady" (Place, p. 118). Affirming still further their prowess with the women, Jed's soon-to-be-mistress, Rozelle Hardcastle, refers to the fact that "you good old Southern boys, you're supposed to like poontang, aren't you" (Place, p. 126). And in an expression of utter contempt for the idea of the "Southern Gentleman's" sense of honor, Rozelle remarks to Jed that more than "one Southern Gentleman she knew with names on request, quite regularly put knees under the same table with a host whose wife he had had that afternoon . . ." (Place, p. 210).

The clearest image of the Southern Gentleman, however, occurs in the person of Lawford Carrington, referred to as "Mr. Nashville." Lawford, second husband of Rozelle Hardcastle, is a socialite, an accomplished sculptor, and a member of an old Nashville family. Lawford, a charming host, an accomplished sportsman, and an elegant, handsome man, is the epitome of the stereotyped notion of the Southern gentleman. In reality, however, he is a hollow, empty façade like Bogan Murdock, and like Bogan, he is the symbol of a family in decline. Jed decides that Lawford does not exist:

He was simply the appurtenance of the expensive machine of the Carrington household. The graceful manners, the engaging modesty, the white-toothed smile, the careful attention to the opinions, tastes, comforts, and vanities of guests, the elegant bohemianism of huaraches, espadrilles, and Turkish slippers,

. . . of denim and suede jackets, . . . of commanding grace in the saddle and powerful strokes in the Olympic-size pool, of well-modulated anecdotes, of the schooled finish of his sculpture-- All, . . . were nothing but a facade, a mirage, a trompe de' oeil. (Place, p. 212)

In addition, there is the sense of corruption about Lawford carried over from his father, Nicholas Carrington, who made his money from less-than-honest business deals, and Lawford's own corruption, which involves sexual perversion and dope. There is also a "more than hint" in the novel that Lawford let Rozelle's first husband "accidentally" die. Lawford's own sad ending is a sordid affair involving a swami who had trafficked in dope and a "shop-worn" young lady; the details of his death are ambiguous, however, stating only that he died of an overdose of heroin.

Contrasted with this hollow, corrupt image is what we have referred to as a "man of principle"--David McInnis. McInnis, an older man, who has lived through the loneliness of a wife institutionalized for mental illness, is a man described as possessing "rectitude." He has made his wealth honestly, starting at a time before the depression when honesty was out of fashion. When Nicholas Carrington, who later died penniless and with a stack of indictments against him, tried to invest his sister Dee Dee's money in a desperate scheme, David "just blew up." As Dee Dee later describes it, "he made an awful fuss, and saved the inheritance, and got fired, and quietly went back to work on the family farm" (Place, p. 384). But when the depression came, his honesty became a valuable commodity and he was welcomed back to the bank. This honesty, or "rectitude," Dee Dee says, is definitely not the mint-julep variety nor the New South's, which she says wants to take on Yankee vices. David's "rectitude" is that high-principled variety that harkens back to Captain Todd's and Colonel Fort's

--a variety based on an inner certainty of self instead of on a code of impossible and rigid absolutes. In contrasting Lawford Carrington with David McInnis, Warren is suggesting that a valid identity can only be achieved through this moral certainty of self. The image of the "Southern gentleman" presented by Carrington can presumably, as it does in Senator Tolliver's case, lead to abstraction.

Exploring yet another myth that has influenced Southern literature and Southern life, Warren tackles the idea of the purity of Southern womanhood and the question of identity. This idea is vividly pictured by Carl Carmer in his book, Stars Fell on Alabama, as he describes a ritual enacted during intermissions at dances held in the 1930's at the University of Alabama:

The lights are turned out and . . . men march in carrying flaming brands. At the end of the procession four acolytes attend a long cake of ice . . . Then the leader . . . lifts up a glass cup of water and begins a toast. . . . 'To Woman, lovely woman of the Southland, as pure and chaste as this sparkling water, as cold as this gleaming ice, we lift this cup, and we pledge our hearts and our lives to the protection of her virtue and chastity.'<sup>17</sup>

As we have seen, men like Adam Stanton and Jeremiah Beaumont literally pledged their lives to defend her "honor" and in so doing defined their own roles as Southern gentlemen. As we examine this "purity" myth as it relates to the women themselves, we see that Ann Stanton, daughter of a traditional Southern gentleman, is placed on the pedestal of pure Southern womanhood by Jack Burden. Jack is incapable of reacting to her womanhood, only to that image of incorruptibility he carries in his head. In a revealing scene during their younger days, Jack refuses to consummate their love because he is unable to accept her as a complete woman, only as a false image. Ann, says William Wasserstrom, "doesn't want . . .



idolatry, and she knows that Jack Burden when we first meet him, is paralyzed. She longs for a man who will combine Willie Stark's vigor with her father's dignity, Willie's fire with patriarchal honor and responsibility.<sup>18</sup> As Ann says, "Love isn't . . . like jumping off a cliff. Or getting drowned. It's . . . a way to live." Wasserstrom goes on to say that, "Ann's virtue is not corrupted when she takes Willie as a sexual partner; rather her vigor is assured, and we recognize in her a woman who shows how men may live--she leads herself and her society to 'salvation' by taking her man into her bed."<sup>19</sup> This decision guarantees her worth as a sexual partner, and her identity as a complete woman.

Jeremiah Beaumont also reacts to Rachel Jordan not as a complete woman, but as a "vehicle" for his complicated idea of perfection. He sees in her seduction by Colonel Fort only a woman who was betrayed, not the reality of a lonely young girl who reacted to kindness and warmth in a natural, passionate manner. In the pathetic confrontation scene before Rachel's death, she denies Beaumont's assertion that all his agony and struggle toward justice was for her: "Not for me. For yourself. You came and you used me. You made me hate Fort and you used me. Oh, I didn't hate him, I loved him, and you used me to kill him . . ." (World, p. 452). Jeremiah's treatment of Rachel as a doomed woman is to "enslave her . . . because it is publicly known that she's had an illegitimate child."<sup>20</sup> And instead of accepting her capacity to "give herself completely" Jeremiah perverts their relationship because of his search after the "ideal." Jeremiah never accepts Rachel as a complete woman; in his initial quest for completion of the "ideal" he sees her as an example of defiled Southern womanhood. Later, in their mad coupling on the floor of

the jail, he uses her body only to act out his "death wish." In his rejection of her identity as a warm, giving human being, he denies his own unfulfilled identity.

In widely disparate time frames, Warren offers three heroines whose bodies are used to act out a search for their own identities. Beginning with Sue Murdock, the heroine of the 1930's At Heaven's Gate, Warren explores the woman who through a series of lovers completely disregards the myth of "pure" Southern womanhood. Jerry Calhoun's club-footed Uncle Lew sizes her up as he pictures her roaring around the countryside in a fancy car, her head "snuggled up beside some man" (Gate, p. 90). In a scene of rejection toward her father and his values, she forces Jerry Calhoun to take her in the library of her own house. Abandoning Jerry because of his inadequacy, she turns next to Slim Sarrett, whose outward poise leads her to believe he has inner security. Only after she has given her body to him does she learn of his divided nature symbolized by his homosexuality. In a last desperate attempt, she turns to labor organizer Sweetie Sweetwater for fulfillment and love, only to discover he cannot fit her pregnancy into his rigid framework of Marxist philosophy. Sue, who all her life has been running away from the unreality of her existence, comes close to escaping the "flood" of that unreality in her post-operative revery following her abortion: "she felt that she was rising slowly to a surface, like a driver who had gone down deep."<sup>21</sup> She is unable to build upon that new found reality, however, because Slim Sarrett murders her in a final repudiation of his "weaker" self. Sue Murdock, thus, is destroyed by her own sexuality, that one-sidedness she has used to define her world. Unlike the sexuality of either Ann Stanton

or Rachel Jordan, Sue's sexuality has thwarted her very attempts to define herself.

Rozelle Hardcastle, Warren's latest heroine in A Place To Come To, seeks through sexual contact a kind of self-definition. Raised by an unloving aunt, who wanted to marry her off to a good catch, Rozelle was the Belle of Dugton High School--beautiful and untouchable. Described by Jed Tewksbury's mother as "Miss Pritty Pants," she was not for the likes of Jed. After leaving Dugton, however, Rozelle, in an effort toward security and emotional stability, marries a self-made millionaire--an older man who violates her sensibilities by showing "blue movies" and encouraging "partner-swapping" in his lush Florida home. No longer the pure image of Southern womanhood, her own insecurity has betrayed her. Her second marriage proves to be equally unsatisfactory; her husband uses her for his sexual perversions and as a sounding board for his neurosis. Afraid that his threats of emotional blackmail will ruin her reputation, she refuses to leave him for her lover, Jed Tewksbury. Rozelle, lured by the image of the Southern Belle, seeks the outward signs of respectability by marrying two equally wealthy men, only to find their inward corruption negates any meaningful relationship. When she has a chance to establish such a relationship, her own inner resources are so shaky that she cannot accept the risk of being completely herself--freed from the trappings of wealth and respectability.

John Hardy suggests that Leotine Purtle, the blind prostitute in Flood, is a "savage caricature of sentimentalized Southern womanhood."<sup>22</sup> She initially is presented to the reader and to Brad Tolliver as the "Lady of Shalott . . . pale, pure and noble. Slightly touched by the refinement



of suffering . . ." (Flood, p. 87). Her sensitivity is portrayed as she reacts emotionally to her oft-played recording of Brad's story about Fiddlersburg: "That record, that story--it made me want to reach out and touch the world. . . ." Mesmerized by her aura of mystery and other-worldliness, Brad, intent on a "virginal remove from the world," whisks his Snow White away to the Seven Dwarfs Motel.<sup>23</sup> Leontine's purity and nobility soon vanish, however, when it is revealed that this experienced young lady is always prepared for bedtime pleasures. Neither a Lady of Shalott nor a Snow White, Leontine is a pathetic example of the image of "pure" Southern womanhood turned inside out.

Band of Angels concerns itself with a young Southern girl's definition of herself in relation to this myth of purity. Amantha Starr's definition becomes drastically complicated when she learns, at her father's death, that she is the daughter of a slave. Before that startling revelation, she has been content in believing that she is the young mistress of Starrwood, her father's plantation. Reared at Starrwood to be a Southern Belle, described by Wasserstrom as "Dear Miss Sugar-and-Spice," and later sent to Oberlin College to be a "household goddess," she cannot reconcile these images of purity with the image of the "ideal colored wench."<sup>24</sup> What horrifies her now is the awareness that she is desirable because men react to the lure of blackness. Amantha's struggle is a long painful one, but until she accepts her blackness--indeed harmonizes it with whiteness--she is unable to accept and define herself. In widely differing situations, then, Warren has explored the purity myth of Southern womanhood as it relates and defines women from the antebellum South to the contemporary Southern experience. Just as the mint-julep variety

of Southern gentleman is a false image on which to base a true identity, so is the unrealistic vision of the Southern woman.

Robert Penn Warren, writing at the beginning of the centennial observances of 1961-65, speaks of the Civil War as "our only 'felt' history-- history lived in the national imagination. . . . It is an overwhelming image of human, and national experience." He goes on by way of differentiating the Southern from the Northern reaction to say that "In defeat the Solid South was born--the mystique of prideful "difference," identity, and defensiveness."<sup>25</sup> In the following novels, Warren illustrates how the particular myth surrounding the Civil War is able to contribute either a positive or a negative element in defining the individual.

In an early Warren novel, At Heaven's Gate, the respected Episcopal bishop of an old Virginia congregation confuses his own theology with stories of the Civil War. His son says that "He's got everything so mixed up, he thinks Jesus Christ was killed in Pickett's charge. He thinks the Virgin Mary was a Confederate spy in Washington and carried documents through the Federal lines done up in her petticoats" (Gate, p. 287). The bishop's favorite story, a recitation involving Robert E. Lee's tenderness toward a young, dying Confederate soldier, is told to his congregation, as well as to U.D.C. meetings, at the dinner table, and at reunions. Having served as a chaplain in the Army of Virginia, Bishop Sweetwater refuses to relinquish his former identity, and his present reality is a confused jumble of orthodox Episcopal doctrine and Civil War heroics.

Another character whose identity is clouded by the Civil War myth is Buck Tewksbury, Jediah's historically misplaced father. Unable to crash



around the Alabama countryside with his sword flashing, he substitutes drinking sprees and skirt-chasing for the Rebel charge. Jediah pictures his father if he had been born in 1840, just ripe for sergeant in a troop of Alabama cavalry: "You could see him, high in stirrups, black mustaches parted to expose white teeth and emit the great yell . . . There was Buck leadin' the charge, Buck breveted rank by rank, Buck the darling of his tattered wolfish crew, Buck in some last action under Forrest . . . "(Place, p. 400). Jediah realizes, however, that this cavalier spirit that obsessed Buck was useless in the rural community of Dugton; the myth was a visionary obstacle that prevented Buck from successful adaptation to his own world.

Far from always being a negative influence, the Civil War mystique can contribute a sense of regional identity to a cynical, modern, alienated character such as Brad Tolliver. Brad calls this identity the "truth of the self" (Flood, p. 256). Trying to explain his meaning to Yankee Yasha Jones, he recalls an incident out in California involving a young lady. After a particularly intimate moment, Brad's companion begins to criticize and to imitate the Southern mannerisms and accents of a wealthy woman from Alabama. Although intellectually assenting with Prudence that the woman was "ghastly," "Southern," and "vulgar," Brad reacts emotionally to the caustic comments (Flood, p. 258). He explains his feelings this way:

It was as if all those hairy, flea-bit, underfed, iron-rumped and narrow-assted, whooping and caterwauling, doom-bit bastards, on hammerheaded nags gaunt as starvation, who rode with Gen'l Forrest, had broke loose, and there was fire, rape, and unmitigated disaster, all the way to the Canadian border. (Flood, p. 258-259)

As we recall Robert Penn Warren's words, the mystique of prideful 'difference,' 'identity,' and 'defensiveness,' we are reminded that even uninvolved



characters such as Brad Tolliver cannot escape the fate of their inheritance.

In addition to individual identity, the Civil War is able to reinforce communal identity as exemplified in the Confederate heritage of Fiddlersburg. Sitting at the base of the Johnny Reb monument, Brad Tolliver tries to explain this Southern symbol to Yasha Jones:

He is all that makes Fiddlersburg Southern. He is all that gives us the dignity of our defects. He is all that makes paranoid violence into philosophic virtue . . . . Take Johnny Reb away, and Fiddlersburg would be just another benighted ass-hole. . . . (Flood, p. 256)

Brad seems to be saying that the shared history of the Civil War gives small towns such as Fiddlersburg a kind of dignity, a kind of identity. That identity based on the defense of a lost way of life created a viable heritage, a legend that still exists as a unifying agent and as a means of self-definition. Frederick Hoffman says that "the literary record of the South's history since the Civil War is largely the history of a legend, the legend of a community and a way of life. The war threatened to destroy it, and in so doing made it more precious, more firmly a part of the aesthetic form that the legend retrospectively assumed."<sup>25</sup> So when the little old ladies in Fiddlersburg recount the story of how they were kissed by Robert E. Lee or goosed by Jefferson Davis, they are sharing in that unifying legend.

Even the fashionable "social circle" of a city such as Nashville partakes of that legend as a means of defining themselves. In A Place To Come To, after-dinner conversation often turns to serious discussions about tactics, such as the notion developed by theoreticians at West Point that Lee could have won at Gettysburg, or to comic tales about Nashville as the "clap capital of the Confederacy" (Place, p. 154). This last tale has to

do with Nashville's reputation of having the finest "fancy house" during the war. As legend has it the "Confederate patriot" who ran the house wouldn't have a girl who wasn't loaded with VD, and as a result an entire Yankee division was "out of active service for lack of officers" (Place, p. 154). Another tale concerns "the only surviving hero of Gallatin County, who had been in Pickett's charge at Gettysburg" (Place, p. 141). Honored at a dinner at the Elks Hall by the U.D.C., the hero regaled the assembled gathering with the gallant charge. Recalling in gruesome detail how the man next to him, asked for a "chaw of terbachy," then lost his head with the words "aching fer a chaw still hangin' in the air," our gallant hero "with both legs pumpin'" becomes the first one off Cemetery Ridge (Place, p. 141). Commenting on the unifying quality these tales give to the present company, Rozelle Hardcastle and Jediah Tewksbury, expatriates from Dugton, Alabama, enviously consider their own "homeless" condition. For those who will remember, there is a constant source of regional identity in the legends and the stories of the Civil War, and there is a definite awareness of the uniqueness and difference among those who cherish those legends. Warren cautions, however, against an unrealistic adaptation of the myth into the individual's consciousness.

Warren, choosing not to discard these uniquely Southern myths, has reexamined and redefined them instead. Underneath their romantic wrappings he has penetrated to the enduring and redeeming aspects that have helped to define the Southern personality. Affirming integrity and strength of character over artificial codes of honor, proclaiming the complete woman over "pure" Southern womanhood, and realistically assessing the Civil War legend as it weakens or strengthens selfhood, Warren provides his own interpretation and evaluation of these myths.

## NOTES

### Chapter II

<sup>1</sup>Casper, p. 176.

<sup>2</sup>Bohner, p. 33.

<sup>3</sup>Hoffman, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup>Hendry, p. 88,94.

<sup>5</sup>Bohner, p. 71.

<sup>6</sup>Elizabeth M. Kerr, "Polarity of Themes in All the King's Men," Modern Fiction Studies, 6 (Spring, 1960), p. 39.

<sup>7</sup>Carter Everett, "The 'Little Myth' of Robert Penn Warren," Modern Fiction Studies, 6 (Spring, 1960), p. 4, 8-9.

<sup>8</sup>World Enough and Time (New York: Random House, 1950). This edition is the source of all parenthetical citations of World Enough and Time.

<sup>9</sup>Bohner, p. 112.

<sup>10</sup>Bohner, p. 114.

<sup>11</sup>Eisinger, p. 225.

<sup>12</sup>Robert Berner, "The Required Past: World Enough and Time," Modern Fiction Studies, 6 (Spring, 1960), p. 60.

<sup>13</sup>Anderson, p. 208.

<sup>14</sup>Longley, Robert Penn Warren, p. 18.

<sup>15</sup>Anderson, p. 223.

<sup>16</sup>Casper, Dark, p. 138.

<sup>17</sup>Carl Carmer, Stars Fell on Alabama (New York, 1934), 14-15, in Heiress of All the Ages by William Wasserstrom (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1959), p. 149.

<sup>18</sup>William Wasserstrom, Heiress of All the Ages, (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1959), p. 116.

<sup>19</sup>Wasserstrom, p. 116.

<sup>20</sup>Wasserstrom, p. 119.



<sup>21</sup>Guttenberg, p. 30.

<sup>22</sup>John Edward Hardy, "Man in the Modern Novel," in Web of Being: The Novels of Robert Penn Warren, Barnett Guttenberg (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1975), p. 486.

<sup>23</sup>Guttenberg, p. 121.

<sup>24</sup>Wasserstrom, p. 119.

<sup>25</sup>Hoffman, p. 166.

<sup>26</sup>Hoffman, p. 11.

### Chapter III

#### Complication: The Negro

Warren's novels portray the complexity of the racial problem as it exists in the South today and as it has existed. Just as he has related the problem of identity to the Southern myths of honor, purity, and the Civil War mystique, and to the strong Southern feeling for family and place, so has he incorporated the race issue into his particular vision of being. Perhaps stated best in his long essay, Segregation: The Inner Conflict in the South, he says that, "I don't think the problem is to learn to live with the Negro. . . . It is to learn to live with ourselves. I don't think you can live with yourself when you are humiliating the man next to you."<sup>1</sup> In probing the motives for segregation in the South, Warren uncovered the irony of the Southerner's strong feeling for tradition--his resistance to change. As the Southerner, Warren says, "seeks to preserve individualism by taking refuge in the vision of a South redeemed in unity and antique virtue, he is fleeing from the burden of his own individuality. . . ." Individuality to Warren involves accepting the "rub which the flux of things provokes, to accept one's fate in time."<sup>2</sup> The moral or intellectual rub, for Warren, results in self-division, which is a failure to find identity. An example of this self-division in relation to the race question is the sense of democracy or idealism versus an ingrained attitude toward the Negro, a conflict we see in at least three of Warren's novels.<sup>3</sup> In a final summation of the problem, Warren concludes by saying that "If the South is really able to face up to itself and its situation, it may achieve identity, moral identity."<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the black-white situation, as it relates to the white Southern man's identity, Warren explores the identity of the Negro himself. His earlier novels reflect stereotyped portrayals, and it is not until Band of Angels that he deals with the Negro personality in depth. His later portrayals as they move into the contemporary world reflect the deepening complexities of the Negro as he has to adjust to the white man's world.

Warren's two earliest novels, Night Rider and At Heaven's Gate, portray the Negro in a shallow, stereotyped role as the scapegoat or victim--a far cry from his complicated unravelings of identity in Band of Angels and the portrayal of the complex race problem in Flood, a contemporary novel. Night Rider, set at the turn of the century, depicts the typical attitude of the day toward the Negro--one of condescension and dehumanization. Men are referred to as "Uncle," and going "coon hunting" means more than hunting for the small animal. Perse Munn, the central character, is able to free his client, the brutal Bunk Trevelyan, by shifting the blame to a "nigger." Not realizing the condemning items were planted in the Negro's cabin, Munn takes umbrage when someone remarks, "what I say is, just get you a good lawyer and he'll find you a good nigger to hang it on, all right" (Night, p. 81). A similar situation occurs in At Heaven's Gate when Bogan Murdock's houseboy, Anselm, is accused of murdering Murdock's daughter Sue. The young Negro, who has been "on the rise," is ridiculed by Murdock's friends for his aspirations toward education. Anselm, unable to assimilate the knowledge he has received at Bolin College, is portrayed as having ambivalent feelings toward leaving his father and mother's house. This half-realized character, however,



excites little reader sympathy, even when the mob gathers outside the jail to hang him. He appears as only a convenient scapegoat for the "unnatural" forces that have killed Sue--a flat stereotype to further the theme and plot of the story.

These two victims in Warren's earliest novels come to be symbols of typical Southern white treatment of Negroes--especially Negroes in trouble. As Warren would say, the white men in these two examples have failed to achieve moral identity; their humiliation and prejudiced mistreatment of the black man are symptomatic of their own unrealized personalities.

In Warren's next two novels, All the King's Men and World Enough and Time, this same flat portrayal continues. In All the King's Men, the Negro, again, is pictured as victim, this time of slavery. The victim, named Phoebe, is sold because of her knowledge of an affair between Cass Mastern, Jack Burden's resurrected hero, and Mrs. Duncan Trice, the wife of Mastern's friend. Mastern, already suffering from guilt over the affair, decides that he must buy Phoebe back, realizing she will be sold as a concubine because she's "yellow and comely and well-made" (King's p. 188). Unable to find Phoebe, Mastern suffers acute remorse which inevitably leads him to free his own slaves. Realizing the slaves will be no better off, that they will pass from "one misery to another and that the hopes they now carried would be blighted," he acknowledges that he had not done anything for them. He says that "What I had done I had done for myself, to relieve my spirit of a burden, the burden of their misery and their eyes upon me" (King's, p. 195). Cass compares himself with his brother Gilbert, a strong man who lives with the evil of slavery, contending, "It is a black land and will be watered with black sweat" (King's, p. 196).

In a perverted fashion, Cass sees something of his own motivations in a woman named Mrs. Turner, who flogged Negroes and led them many times to their deaths. Realizing that he, like Mrs. Trice and Mrs. Turner, cannot endure the burden of guilt for the Negro slave, he thinks that perhaps only a man like Gilbert can "in the midst of evil retain enough of innocence and strength to bear their eyes upon him and to do a little justice in the terms of the great injustice" (King's, p. 196). The themes of guilt and evil resulting from slavery in the Cass Mastern episode relate to the overall theme of the novel as expressed by Elizabeth Kerr, who says that "the total meaning centers around the necessity of assuming responsibility and acknowledging guilt, thereby accepting evil as an inevitable way of life."<sup>5</sup> The episode also suggests that Cass Mastern is seeking moral identity as he relates to the black man, but it is an identity to be selfishly realized, an identity seeking only to justify himself. He still sees the black man as a symbol--this time a symbol of his own guilt. He fails to view realistically, as does brother Gilbert, the slave's child-like dependence on his master, and consequently his actions have disastrous results. Unprepared for freedom, the freed men leave one life of misery for another.

The Negro in World Enough and Time, acting out his destiny in pre-Civil War times, receives a cursory treatment, serving as only background material for the violent times of the 1830's. The Negro in this novel, says Leonard Casper, is pictured as a "kinkyhead," hardly worth civil disorder or disturbance of local practices.<sup>6</sup> The fun-loving Negro is pictured at election time enjoying a game of thimble-rig, "Old Sledge," or "Brag," drinking whiskey from a gourd, and singing about "Cousin Sally"

and "Jim Crow." The faithful slave is pictured in the person of Josie who has "raised" Rachel Jordan and who cares for her through her tragedies. The handsome buck is described in the person of Gabbo, the Jordan's coachmen, who is sold when the Jordans are reduced to penury. This same Gabbo is later falsely accused of siring a child by Rachel--a child "born black" who died thereafter. When Jeremiah Beaumont avenges Rachel's dishonor, he disguises his face by means of a black cloth after killing his surrogate father, Colonel Fort, so that the slayer will seem to have been a Negro. These one-dimensional portrayals give us little clue as to the real personality and identity of the Negro. They only serve as another facet of discovering or unraveling the white man's identity. By treating the Negro as less than fully human, by assigning him "predictable roles" such a "faithful slave" or "fun-lovin' nigger," or assigning him the role of the villain, the white man of the period is reducing his own humanity--his own moral identity. It is not until Band of Angels that Warren deals with the Negro as an individual, as a distinct, human being dealing with the pre-eminent problem of identity.

"Oh, who am I?" are the words with which the novel opens, followed by a moment later with "If I could only be free . . ." (Angels, p. 21).<sup>7</sup> And there Amantha Starr defines her condition and her quest: "moral freedom, Warren says at the outset hinges on one's knowing who one is."<sup>8</sup> Secure in her own identity as the beloved daughter of a Kentucky planter, she has only one memory from childhood to disturb her vision. Shadrach, an old Negro retained by the family, is fond of jousting little Manty on his knee, until he is told by her Mammy that the child is too old for such fondling. Trapped and enraged by the innuendo and aware that Amantha is



the child of a mother who is neither white nor free, Shadrach pushes her contemptuously away, saying, "Yeah--what she?" (Angels, p. 16). When Amantha innocently relates the incident to her father, he sells the old Negro, but not before Shadrach attempts to escape and is brutally beaten by his captors. Bewildered by the event, Amantha has the first hint of the "giddy insubstantiality" of childhood innocence. She is guiltily aware that she has somehow betrayed Shadrach's love and spat on the "niggerness" in him. But as a legacy, Shadrach has left her with a question, "what she?"<sup>9</sup>

After Shadrach leaves, Manty's father spends more time with her--teaching her to read and spell and write, playing games with her, and taking her riding. But that period of her life comes to an end when he sends her into abolitionist territory--Oberlin College. There she falls in love with Seth Parton, an ascetic theology student who teaches her the pious cliches of Abolition--the argument from righteousness and self-interest. At Oberlin she also absorbs the pastoral vision of Negroes in their native Africa: "the sweet village where the flowers brilliantly bloomed and beloved faces lifted to greet them from the shadow of tiny bee-hive shaped grass huts" (Angels, p. 51). Charles Bohner says that Amantha, typically assuming the protective coloration of the environment into which she is thrust, is converted to Abolition and promptly challenges her father to free his slaves, oblivious to the irony that she is requiring of him her own freedom.<sup>12</sup> Her father asking in honest puzzlement, "where could the Negroes go?" echoes the realistic attitude of Gilbert Mastern.

While Manty is still at Oberlin, she learns of her father's death in Cincinnati, apparently in the arms of "Miss Idell," his best friend's wife.

When she returns to Kentucky to attend her father's funeral, she is arrested by the sheriff at the grave to satisfy the claims made against her father's estate. Her father, torn between his guilt-ridden need to set her free and his unwillingness to declare her less than his child, had never drawn up the manumission papers. As a result, the terms of her self-definition are enlarged by two other men: the sheriff who gives her a legal definition, "female property," and the slave trader who gives her a economic one, "a nigger is what you can sell" (Angels, p. 60). Bohner says that she is thus reduced to chattel, a "non-person . . . suspended in the vacuum of no identity."<sup>13</sup>

Enduring the indignities of the New Orleans slave market, Manty is bought by Hamish Bond, a middle-aged planter. At first he makes no sexual demands on her, but this "illusory freedom only serves to accentuate the peculiar hold he has on her and the ambiguity of her racial composition."<sup>14</sup> Amantha longs to have Bond decisively define her life, but he, like her father, cannot bring himself to free her for fear he will no longer possess her. One night during a storm when they turn to each other for comfort, Bond physically possesses her. Wasserstrom says that by giving herself to Bond, Manty "Will discover what love is, and love, in turn, will help her to achieve a freedom more actual than mere manumission could accomplish."<sup>15</sup> As the Confederacy topples, however, her life with Hamish Bond collapses. Bond sets Amantha "free" in war-torn New Orleans only to return after the city is under martial law to ask her to marry him. By this time, however, she is engaged to marry one of the "liberators," a Union officer named Tobias Sears.

The concluding section of the novel takes as its theme Amantha's efforts to find identity through her marriage to Tobias Sears. Sears is



yet another of the familiar Warren clan of uncompromising idealists which includes Adam Stanton, Jeremiah Beaumont, and Adam Rosensweig. He has, Amantha says, "nobility like a disease" (Angels, p. 225). Determined to devote his life to the cause of freeing the slaves, he insists on a Negro command during the Civil War, and after Appomattox accepts a post in the Freedman's Bureau. With Tobias, Amantha hopes to "start life over, to make our world of loving kindness" (Angels, p. 255). She believes that Tobias will set her free from her past and her old self and that she will be able to create a new self. Charles Bohner says that, "Her decision is a renewed affirmation of identity founded on the denial of her personal history. She will cancel the past with a resolution."<sup>16</sup>

She soon realizes, however, that the past has to be realistically accepted before she can gain either true identity or freedom. Her husband soon proves inadequate in providing either a sheltered existence for Amantha or a realistic existence for her true self. He, himself, is unable to reconcile the idealism of his great crusade for Negro rights with the reality of a wife whose mother was a slave. Failing even to provide economic stability for Manty, he moves further westward in futile attempts, ending finally as a failure and a drunkard in Halesburg, Kansas. Only when Tobias sees himself in the pitying and contemptuous glance of a rich Negro from Chicago, can he free himself of the delusions that have deceived himself and demeaned his wife. With Tobias' abdication of his role as "liberator," Amantha can now proclaim her own emancipation, for she has discovered that dependence is a trap and "nobody can set you free . . . except yourself" (Angels, p. 363-364).

Amantha's freedom involves true acceptance of herself, and that acceptance must include her blackness. Wasserstrom says that "In her mind,



'nigger' signifies both social, legal disqualification and the taint of passion. Her marriage protects her against society. What horrifies her is the awareness that she is desirable because men react to the lure of blackness." Sex involves repudiation, or as she says a denigration. Yet until she accepts denigration, she can't accept herself--not until she can harmonize whiteness with blackness will she be able to free herself. Her incapacity is a result of her sense that her father has rejected and betrayed her. This sense provides her with a kind of justification for passivity, for dependence.<sup>17</sup> Casper says that it is "Manty's insistent, self-pitying view of herself as victim that victimizes her more than society ever could."<sup>18</sup> Only at the end when she insists that her husband never call her "poor little Manty" again, does she gain what Paul Tillich calls the courage to be--the courage to accept oneself despite the fact that one feels unacceptable.<sup>19</sup> She learns that only through separateness is identity earned; only through identity is personal and social fulfillment possible. Between two absolutes, rejection and subjection, says Leonard Casper, does she achieve her station.<sup>20</sup>

Band of Angels explores differing types as they relate to the Negro. There is the humane planter, Hamish Bond, who has "kindness like a disease" --so described because his very kindness is invidious because it deprives his people of the will to be free (Angels, p. 110). What is left is their gratitude which reduces them to less than mature individuals--more like children. It is this feeling which causes Rau-Rau, his black adopted son to hate him and to demand his death. Ironically, Bond's earlier self represents another type--the slave trader. While the city of New Orleans burns, Bond unburdens himself to Manty of his own "fiery" past. After

he is driven from the wharves of Baltimore by his mother's airs, he steals both ship and name (his own was Alec Hinks) from the real Hamish Bond and takes his slaver to Africa. He is able to forgive himself every atrocity until one day something makes him rescue a child from brutal Amazon slave-hunters at the price of a disabled leg. This child, Rau-Rau, is described as Bond's secret-sharer or alter ego. This alter-ego prepares the rope for Bond's death which fulfills the promise Bond made to his mother that someday he would be "ass-deep in niggers" (Angels, p. 324). Acting out his complex destiny, Bond reflects the ambivalent attitude, the "moral rub" that describes the fractured identity--the self-division of the Southerner.

Tobias Sears, representing the Northern reformer, almost gives his life to the cause of Negro rights. But his idealism is often founded on the unsubstantial motivation of spiting his father's wishes instead of a humane desire for the betterment of the race. Leonard Casper says that the Northern reformers, armed with righteousness and bayonets, do not constitute a "band of angels." Reform is a matter for the individual soul, he says, whose health or disease society merely reflects. It cannot be imposed, any more than freedom can be absolutely given or denied, or even defined absolutely from without.<sup>21</sup>

Contrasted with the "reformer" is the Northern exploiter, depicted in the novel as Colonel Morton, who grows rich on confiscated land and cheap Negro labor. Covering up his intentions with the pretense of providing economic security for the Negro, he only succeeds in introducing the Negro to another kind of misery and arousing the ire of the Southerner who resents Yankee Phariseesim.

Band of Angels as it treats the search for identity, for freedom, as it explores the complicated motivations and self-divisions that exist as man tries to define himself in relation to the Negro, also reflects and graphically symbolizes the modern Southerner's own complicated attitudes. The novel also symbolizes the Negro's complicated stance toward himself. John Longley says that Manty remains a "slave" so long because to free herself, she must give up her fondest delusions, what she was subjected to because of her father's indolence and what society has done to her because of her blood. To cling to these resentments is to remain enslaved. Thus, Amantha and "history" co-exist in this novel, and each becomes "allegory and exemplum for the other."<sup>22</sup>

Adam Rosensweig, the hero of Wilderness, is unable to reconcile his idealism toward freedom with his own inner conflicts. He, again, reflects Warren's fractured identity discussed in Segregation; his divided self cannot harmonize his ingrained feeling of repugnance and hostility toward the Negro with his idealistic notions of freedom. Adam's ideals are soon put to the test; when he arrives in New York from Bavaria, he encounters, hanging from a lamp post, the results of mob action. Gazing at the dead body, he shares the agony that "popped those eyes and darkened that face," until he realizes that the man is black--the first black man he had ever seen (Wilderness, p. 44). Adam reflects that:

in that moment of recognition, he realized that the sympathetic pain, felt at first to be a mark of the agony of strangulation, was now gone. With a gush of shame, even of desperation, he thought that as soon as he recognized the man as black, the deepest, instinctive blood-sympathy had begun to ebb. Can I be that vile? he demanded of himself. Oh, can I be? (Wilderness p. 44,45)

On his way South, Adam's ideals are tested further. After leaving



New York, he becomes the assistant to sutler Jed Hawksworth, the son of a planter from North Carolina. Hearing that Jed was run out of his home state because he stood up for a slave at his trial, Adam admires the man's courage. He quickly becomes disillusioned, however, when he hears the real story from Jed, who says that he's no "nigger-lover"; he stood up for the slave because he was ashamed of his daddy. His daddy "ass-kissed" "Cunnel" Johnston F. Harris, whose son supposedly was struck by the slave. Adam hears also from Mose Talbut, Jed's helper, his opinion of his employer. Mose describes him as "buckra"--"The kind of white folks ain't got time for nuthen but kicken niggers and ass-kissen rich folks . . . ." Mose goes on to say that they only know two words--"you black son-a-bitch and yassuh, cunnel" (Wilderness, p. 84). The phrase, in relation to Mose, becomes a kind of game--never uttered but "smelled" on Hawksworth--until one day at the site of the Battle of Gettysburg. While they are standing around with the grave "resettlers," the three men notice the body of a soldier from North Carolina, Jed's home state. Mose, hearing that the man's face had been disfigured, curiously tries to raise the jacket covering it. "Mose," Jed Hawksworth quietly says, "take your black son-of-a-bitching hands off that. . . ." (Wilderness, p. 155).

Through an accumulation of events, Adam himself, whose sense of decency and fairness toward the Negro is horrified at the abominable phrase, moves inexorably toward that epithet. Jed, who taunts Adam with the phrase, "nigger lover," arouses a defensive attitude in Adam that leads him to realistically examine his own attitudes toward the black man. When Adam returns to the cabin he shares with Mose, he is struck by the

"naked appeal" in the black man's eyes as he practices his letters. Inexplicably, Adam feels a kind of revulsion as he watches the man's straining to win his approval. Later on at the Army camp, however, Adam refuses to recognize that dark side of himself. When Molly the Mutton is being whipped for spreading venereal disease, Mose watches with a glitter in his eye, saying, "That doup, . . . it shore was a big doup" (Wilderness, p. 209). Adam, realizing that he hates Mose Talbut at that moment, pushes the feeling down, thinking that he has no right to hate anyone.

In the climactic scene of the novel, Mose, Jed, and Adam, who accidentally look in at the infirmary of the camp, notice a bandaged lieutenant cursing a dying black soldier, who happens to have saved his life in the war. The white man, who cannot reconcile gratitude with blackness, weeps obscenely when the man dies. Before the death, however, the white lieutenant recognizes Mose as a deserter from the Army, calling out his name --Mose Crawford. Jed, who covers up for Mose, returns to his own cabin only to humiliate Mose by exposing the branded "W" for deserter on his right thigh. Calling him a worthless "son-of-a-bitch," he tells him that now he'll have to take in "washin" to earn extra money. Alone with Adam, Mose tries to justify himself by saying that his stripes came from a planter in Georgia, not the Army. He goes on to say that instead of learning how to fight in the Army, he spent his time "diggen"--"diggen" up stumps, rocks, and "diggen fer them big privies" (Wilderness, p. 220). Adam, who cannot stand being alone with Mose and his shame, is only able to wish for silence. The final utterance that wrenches the abominable epithet from Adam, occurs when Mose says the only reason he saved his life

in New York was to keep others from disturbing their hiding place in the water. Adam, whose very identity is threatened, who feels his identity draining away by Mose's admission, thinks, " . . . is no man . . . more to any other man than a stir or voice, a sloshing in the dark?" (Wilderness, p. 224).

Finally forced to utter the phrase to Mose, incredibly Adam feels for the first time in his life totally himself. It is almost as if by uttering the phrase, "black son-of-a-bitch," he recognizes at last the dark side of himself, that while wanting rights and freedom for the Negro, he also is aware of an instinctive prejudice, a blood-loathing that has been there all the time. Something else arises out of all this, however; he recognizes Mose's humanity when he reflects that Mose could have cut his throat in New York as easily as he could have rescued him. Feeling better with this thought, he goes to sleep hoping Mose will forgive him. Mose, however, who was "humiliated past all manhood to this last justification of manhood," has killed Jed Hawksworth and taken all his money (Wilderness, p. 228). In a wave of tenderness, Adam realizes that before Mose fled, he paused to take the alphabet cards with him. Shaken by the horrible events, Adam is able to forgive Mose, who, he says, needs no forgiveness; only "history" does. Adam, realizing and conquering in some degree his natural antipathy toward the black man, is able to achieve a partial reconciliation between those alien parts of his nature. Armed with self-knowledge, his own identity is strengthened because he has shared in the humanity of a man of color.

Meet Me in the Green Glenn is set in the contemporary South and explores one small Southern town's reaction to "race-mixing" and its attitude toward the Negro in general. There is also depicted the degeneracy of



one family as it illustrates the theme of the "sins of the fathers"--sins specifically practiced on the Negro. Sunderland Spotwood is the last surviving member of the Spotwood family; the family's originator, the first Sunderland Spotwood, was a rapacious, aggressive man "who had grabbed the land, built the house, beat the niggers, and gone to Congress, and whose flat, painted arrogance of eye refused . . . to acknowledge what, over the years, had happened in his house" (Glenn, p. 35). This last Sunderland, distinguished only for his drinking, prowess with the women, and general "hellin," has come to pitiful circumstances as the novel opens. Lying immobile day after day, the victim of a stroke, in his falling-down family "mansion," he seems doomed to live out his days dying a little each day. Gradually we learn of his bestial treatment of a black woman named Arlita in their younger years when Arlita's family had been tenants on his property. Sunder had used Arlita, then a young girl, made her his mistress, and got her pregnant with a baby girl named Charlene. "Repaying" her for her services, he gave her forty acres, and Arlita and her daughter have lived alone, with Arlita having to work the land single-handedly, becoming a work-worn, broken down woman.

Sunder is cared for by his wife Cassie, a woman grown old without ever having been "young," who lives a miserable, drab existence without hope. One day, however, a young Italian named Angelo, who's in trouble with the law, magically appears and becomes both hired hand and lover to Cassie. Angelo, creating Cassie into his own image of what a mistress should be, appears satisfied, at least outwardly, until he sees Charlene, Arlita's daughter. He subsequently seduces Charlene, thereby incurring

Cassie's wrath and painful desperation. Cassie, hysterical with grief, reacts as the woman scorned and kills her husband Sunder, leaving condemning evidence that Angelo is the murderer.

At Angelo's trial all the elements of the town's prejudices come into play to condemn him. First there is the fact that he takes Charlene to the local movie theatre, thus breaking the Southern taboo toward race-mixing. Murray Guilfort, the town's respected prosecutor, repeats the sentiments of the town when he says:

And whatever the people in Washington, D.C., may do, Parkerton is not ready for race-mixing. There is one thing those people in Washington neglect, the very nature of law, I may say--how the folkways and mores of a society are related to--." (Glenn, p. 213)

In addition to his relationship to Charlene, Angelo is condemned because of his own "color"; as the prosecutor says, ". . . in the eyes of this jury, that Angelo fellow is not much more than a spit and a holler from being a nigger himself. . . ." (Glenn, p. 251). Angelo even insists, in fact, when Charlene and he are refused admittance to the theatre that he is a Negro, a fact that the townspeople find abominable. And when Cassie hysterically admits to the murder of Sunder, in an emotional outburst in the courtroom, in that instant as Angelo cries out: "Piccola mia--piccola mia!" everyone is made aware of their affair--an affair that is "unwholesome" in the eyes of the town (Glenn, p. 274). Angelo becomes a victim, then, of prejudice, and is convicted because he has violated the Southerner's inborn sense of racial purity and separateness.

Ironically, however, after Angelo's execution, the entire town suffers from a communal guilt at executing perhaps an innocent man. To atone for their sins, they elect Leroy Lancaster, Angelo's attorney. The narrator



puts it this way as he explains the town's feelings:

The thing was uncomfortable to talk about . . . You found yourself saying things you weren't too sure you believed . . . it was the loneliness that made people keep on remembering . . . So out of all this loneliness, nameless grief, unspecified guilt, and a need to atone for everything and to forget something, you voted for Leroy Lancaster. (Glenn, p. 344-345)

Perhaps, then, this is a picture of the entire South, Warren is saying, in microcosm. Recent efforts toward equality and humane treatment of the Negro perhaps are only attempts to atone in part for the guilt that dates back to the earliest settlers like the first Sunder Spotwood who beat his "niggers," down to men like the last Sunder who "whored" with the "wenches." Learning to live with your guilt, with your sins, is part of Warren's answer to the Negro problem. We don't have to be prisoners of "past hate," prisoners of history; the South can achieve moral identity as it faces up to its problem.

Warren's eighth novel, Flood, written in 1963, suggests possible answers to achieving moral identity for the Southerner. Brother Potts, an earnest man of God who is dying of cancer, prays that his life will be blessed before the flood waters come to cover his town. Part of his seeking after blessedness includes going to prison to pray with "Pretty Boy." Pretty Boy, a young Negro murderer, has captured the town's imagination because he refuses to "crack" and pray. Local citizens are even placing bets as to when the moment of supplication will come. Brother Potts, sincerely seeking the young man's salvation, is willing to risk rejection and humiliation in an attempt to reach him. And as the prayer begins from Brother Potts, on his knees on the prison floor, Pretty Boy spits in his face. As Brother Potts says:



But I didn't get off my knees. . . . Something held me down and I name it Glory. All of a sudden it was like I felt the spit on my cheek . . . and I let it run. I was praying for God to make me know that what happened was right because it was His Holy Will. (Flood, p. 239)

Later on Pretty Boy does crack and pray under the Negro minister's guidance, but Brother Pinckney says it is because a white man was willing to risk rejection and humiliation that his own effort succeeded.

Warren suggests that another way to achieve moral identity is to accept the Negro as an intellectual and a spiritual equal. Blanding Cottshill, a member of Fiddlersburg's oldest family, constantly seeks the company of Brother Pickney, who is a highly educated, highly intelligent man who can provide Cottshill with stimulating conversation. Cottshill, aware of the irony of the situation, says that "According to the mores and folkways of our time and place, we are not supposed to have conversation, at least not our kind of conversation . . ." (Flood, p. 294). Extending his brotherhood with the Negro further, to involve a true commitment, Cottshill also intends to take the school desegregation case which will be a big issue after Fiddlersburg is flooded.

Warren is suggesting, however, that there are no easy answers to black-white relations. In a revealing scene on the day of Fiddlersburg's memorial service, Cottshill, apparently Warren's raisonneur, comments on Brother Potts' move to go pray with the Negro church. He interprets this move as merely "cleaning out the system," and says that Brother Pickney left his own church that day because he wasn't going to make it that easy for the white folks. Brother Pinckney, says Cottshill, would not let them be relieved of their "nigger-constipation" and of everything else in their "colon-congested self by using the nigger-purge as a substitute

for other and more appropriate, and perhaps even more painful, cathartics" (Flood, p. 425).

Making a statement about black-white relations and the Southern black man's identity, Brad Tolliver, the main character, who is himself a victim of intense aloneness and abstraction, says that, "The only folks in the South who are not lonesome are the colored folks" (Flood, p. 166). He goes on to say that that is the heart of the race problem; the Southerner is disturbed to have people around who are not as lonesome as he is, especially black people. He suggests this is why the town is so caught up over "Pretty Boy's" outcome; they realize that only out of intense desperation and loneliness will he pray. Brother Pinckney, himself ambivalent about the matter of Pretty Boy's praying, says, after he has returned from the prison, knees soaked with tears having heard Pretty Boy pray, "I do not want to blaspheme, but I have removed something from him and given him nothing . . ." (Flood, p. 297).

Suggesting that apparently the Southern Negro has "something," never really saying what, perhaps an essential integrity of being, Warren portrays an isolated Negro from the North, Mortimer Spurlin. Mortimer, a student at Fisk University in Nashville, works at the Seven Dwarfs' Motel as "Jingle Bells," a service station attendant. He assumes the speech and manner of the Southern Negro in an attempt to take on a borrowed identity. His experiment fails, however, and he realizes he cannot escape what he is. After being in the South "for all these weeks, he realizes he still feels like himself," which he is not sure he can bear (Flood, p. 366). Barnett Guttenberg says that as he "presses his face into the bed sheets, apparently longing for union, and thinks of falling into blackness," he



experiences the intense isolation common to so many of the white characters in Flood.<sup>24</sup>

Warren's answer in Flood to the race problem, I feel, is ambivalent. He seems to favor an intense caring such as Brother Potts displays, a caring that can lead to rejection and humiliation, but he suggests that the white man cannot use the Negro to solve his own feelings of guilt and unworthiness. He implies that in trying to ease his own conscience, the white man cannot rob the Negro of his identity. In any event, Warren recognizes, as do many others, that there are no easy answers.

Warren's last novel, A Place To Come To, presents an interesting portrayal of a Negro who apparently has achieved all that the hero, a white man, Jed Tewksbury, has been denied. Most obviously, he is the husband of Rozelle Hardcastle, Jed's one-time great love, and as Rozelle says, he has "legal as well as literal access to all the apertures on the fair white body of the Beauty Queen of Dugton High" (Place, p. 363). The Negro here apparently is a man who is "self-defined," "self-contained," --a man who is very sure of himself and his identity--a quality that has eluded Jed all his life. When the black man needs to reaffirm his identity as "that colored boy" from Jackson, Mississippi, he yields to the moment, and Rozelle says she serves as his "Ole White Mammy" and cooks up something that approximates chitlings, collards, and corn pone. The young man from Mississippi, who jumped ship in India, learned the Hindi language and the knack of writing Indian poetry, appeared one night in Nashville at Lawford Carrington's house as a swami, was able to outfox the "best" of Southern society, and achieved the feat of seducing one of the fairest of Southern womanhood. And as Rozelle says, "in a sort of upside-down way, we have a



really good old-fashioned Southern marriage blessed by God and Jeff Davis" (Place, p. 366).

In this last Warren novel, the author seems to be enjoying himself as he depicts the "smart" Negro who is able to enjoy all the luxuries of the white man and is able to beat him at his own game. The "swami" is wealthy, respected, has a stable marriage with a white woman; in short, he has captured the highly prized baubles of the white man's society while still maintaining his own identity. What is Warren saying in this novel and in Flood? Does the black man have an innate sense of being, an inner feeling of being completely himself that frees him to achieve a true identity? Described by Dr. Stahlman as the perfect existential man, ". . . the American black man has no history but his blackness . . . He is the only free man" (Place, p. 76). Conversely he does not have to reconcile those elements of his past that weigh down such alienated men as Brad Tolliver and Jed Tewksbury--elements tied strongly to Southern heritage and tradition. The black man, Warren seems to be saying, can live out his identity freed from those elements.

NOTES

CHAPTER III

<sup>1</sup>Warren, Segregation, p. 63.

<sup>2</sup>Warren, Segregation, p. 55.

<sup>3</sup>Warren, Segregation, p. 53-54.

<sup>4</sup>Warren, Segregation, p. 65.

<sup>5</sup>Kerr, p. 30.

<sup>6</sup>Casper, Dark, p. 149.

<sup>7</sup>Robert Penn Warren, Band of Angels, (New York: Random House, 1955). This edition is the source of all parenthetical citations for Band of Angels.

<sup>8</sup>Wasserstrom, p. 118.

<sup>9</sup>Bohner, p. 130.

<sup>10</sup>Bohner, p. 131.

<sup>11</sup>Bohner, p. 131.

<sup>12</sup>Bohner, p. 132.

<sup>13</sup>Bohner, p. 131.

<sup>14</sup>Bohner, p. 132.

<sup>15</sup>Wasserstrom, p. 119.

<sup>16</sup>Bohner, p. 134.

<sup>17</sup>Wasserstrom, p. 119-121.

<sup>18</sup>Casper, Dark, p. 150.

<sup>19</sup>Wasserstrom, p. 121.

<sup>20</sup>Casper, Dark, p. 162.

<sup>21</sup>Casper, Dark, p. 161.

<sup>22</sup>Longley, Robert Penn Warren, p. 27.

<sup>23</sup>Robert Penn Warren, Wilderness, (New York: Random House, 1961). This edition is the source of all parenthetical citations for Wilderness.





## Chapter IV

### An Answer: Redemption

Warren, true to his Southern heritage, shares his region's concern with allegiance to authority outside the self. This authority, however, differs from that of typical Southern orthodoxy. Warren accepts, says Chester Eisinger, an "unorthodox orthodoxy which rests on the validity of religious myth and religious metaphor; out of the Christian conception of the communion of men will come unity to replace the [world's] present fragmentation."<sup>1</sup> Warren rejects the heritage of nineteenth-century science, Eisinger continues, because of the emphasis placed on the overconfidence in the individual, which, Warren says, leads to the "heresy of the self"--a self isolated from God and humanity.<sup>2</sup> Warren's religious attitudes were shaped by John Crowe Ransom's God Without Thunder, which affirms that the tragic spirit is the religious spirit, and also affirms the idea of evil in the world.<sup>3</sup> Warren also makes abundant use of the Christian terms "communion" and redemption" as they relate to his particular vision of the individual's right to self-knowledge and self-definition. And Warren uses the Christian avenue of love to achieve the cleansing that leads to redemption.

Warren, although affirming the importance of higher law outside the self, has not however, agree most critics, accepted the orthodox view of God. Eisinger says that Warren cannot bring himself to make an "outward act of faith and acceptance."<sup>4</sup> Charles R. Anderson suggests that" . . . Warren may find the Christian scheme of things close to the facts of experience, but he is too much of an empiricist to trust the adequacy of

an idealized Christianity to cope with the chaos of contemporary life."<sup>5</sup> In many cases Warren has even satirized those custodians of Christian orthodoxy--the ministry--because of their dogmatic and doctrinaire approach to salvation. Salvation, to Warren, says Charles Bohner, lies in man's capacity to love and to achieve integration of self. And when man accepts the paradox of identity--that "knowledge of self consists in a recognition not only of man's isolation but also of the burden of sin which binds all men"--then he can achieve that spiritual wholeness.<sup>6</sup>

Night Rider, Warren's first novel, depicts Percy Munn, who is aware of his isolation, but can never achieve self-knowledge which would allow him to break through that heresy of the self and achieve communion with other people. Percy is incapable of mature love; never knowing himself, he never really knows other people either. In a revealing comment he says about his wife: "Those things, and perhaps a thousand things like them were what he knew about May. But they were not May. And . . . he could not penetrate her world . . . only guess" (Night, p. 55). In an effort to achieve some kind of communion, he has an affair with Lucille Christian, who discovers, ironically, that Munn is as cold and empty as she is herself. When Munn makes his first speech to the tobacco association, he is filled with despair, because he recognizes that his words have not come from a man who fully understands the "common tie of humanity."<sup>7</sup> Munn, isolated to the end, dies never knowing who he was.

At one point in the narrative when he is accused of murder, Munn hides out in the home of Willie Proudfit, one in a series of minor Warren characters who find salvation. Living as a simple dirt farmer, who has forsaken adventure in the West, he holds himself aloof from the conflict and



turmoil of the farmers' association. He lives pure and uncorrupted, but Munn cannot find a lesson in Willie's life to mend his own. Munn, instead, has given himself over to the likes of Professor Ball, a minister of the gospel who advocates plant scrapings and barn burnings. Professor Ball's theology, which evolved as he wrestled "the angel in sweat and prayer," envisioned God as the "meat-ax" wielding deity who literally means that "vengeance is mine" (Night, p. 142). Instead of leading Munn toward salvation, Professor Ball betrays him, implicating Munn in a murder he himself committed. Clearly, then, Warren's agent of salvation in this novel lies not in the hands of the ministry, who directs the Lord to "smite those who would rise against our face," but in the hands of an illiterate searcher after selfhood (Night, p. 316).

Barnett Guttenberg says that, in relating his tale to Munn, Willie Proudfit defines the basis of selfhood. Willie begins his spiritual journey in a world of turbulent darkness in which Indian and buffalo are systematically annihilated. From this world Willie withdraws into the mountains to live a life of innocence with the Indians. Finally, however, a vision leads Willie home to the world. Willie's vision leads him down from his mountain innocence which is "suprahuman and heavenly, but at the same time subhuman and damned." It leads him into a valley haven which is both "fertile and communal and as such, thirst-quenching, life giving, sacramental." This vision, says Guttenberg, of a world redeemed suggests that selfhood involves the "harmonious integration of all things; the dream's improbably coming true suggests that the vision is itself redeeming."<sup>8</sup> Mr. Munn has no such redeeming vision of selfhood, and instead of being reborn like Willie, who comes home after a serious illness, Mr. Munn falls



away into spiritual death that leads to his eventual physical destruction.

Ashby Wyndham, a violent mountain man whose story appears in At Heaven's Gate, is a true seeker after selfhood. His pilgrimage leads him to atone for the evil perpetrated against his brother Jacob. Ashby, in a sworn statement to the police, relives his experiences first as a "hell-raisin" hillbilly, then as an itinerant preacher. Ashby, drunk on "panther-piss," kills the mule belonging to his girl friend Marie, curses his brother Jacob, and leaves his childhood home for the mining town of Cashville. After he gets Marie pregnant, Ashby goes to Jacob asking him to sell the old home place and give him his share of the money so he and Marie can be married. When Jacob refuses, Ashby bloodies his head twice, leaving him lying on the road. A few weeks later, however, Ashby receives all of the money from the sale of the home and learns that Jacob has gone out to make his way in the world.

It is not until after Ashby and Marie marry and have a son named Frank, who dies from a childhood illness, that Ashby has a redeeming experience similar to Willie Proudfit's. When his son dies, Ashby runs out on his wife, leaves for the mountains, and there alone with his anguish, he hears Frank calling his name: "Oh, Pappy, he said, I couldn't thrive none and it the vittles of wickedness . . . and so taken in blood wrath . . . from Jacob . . ." (Gate, p. 216). When Ashby recognizes his guilt and is ready to accept responsibility for it, both requirements for salvation in Warren's "theology," Frank tells him to go out into the world, being led by the Lord, and to give his testimony to others and to search for Jacob. When Ashby returns home to Marie, cleansed of his burden of guilt, he is able to reunite with her and experience true communion because he has established a proper relationship with the divinity. Eisinger says that

Warren's dialectic of selfhood is a "heritage of the emphasis of Christianity upon the value of every soul in the sight of God." When man has an image of himself he suffers separateness, (just as Ashby did on the mountain). That discovery leads him to a knowledge of the pain of isolation and self-criticism. With this recognition of the tragedy of life, man can return to a communion with other men and nature, having accepted love and law, that is, having achieved moral awareness which makes his redemption possible.<sup>9</sup>

After Ashby's redemption, he and Marie do go out into the world, living as they can, with Ashby preaching, testifying, and calling on others to repent. Ashby Wyndham is Warren's moral voice in the novel; he sees the evil in the world, evil that is portrayed in Bogan Murdock's world, the evil of twentieth-century capitalism which corrupts humanity and despoils the land. In Ashby's words, "Folks has got one eye cocked hot after lewdness and the other on the almighty dollar . . ." (Gate, p. 61). Ironically, however, Ashby cannot recognize his own sin; he, who is lulled by the "peace in his heart," cannot recognize his own sins of pride and self-satisfaction in the Lord (Gate, p. 235). Lured by a former prostitute, Pearl, who wears a "yeller dress, has yeller hair, and is sweet smellin," he invites her to be saved and also to join him and the others on their boat (Gate, p. 260). Pearl evidently is intended by Warren to symbolize the sin in Ashby that he fails to recognize. When they reach the "city" and continue in their naïvete, to preach in the "marketplace," they are run off from place to place by the police. In a climactic scene, the police chase some of the members back to the boat, and Pearl, under stress of the situation, picks up a rifle and kills one of the policemen. John



Longley, in attempting to analyze the confrontation, suggests an allegorical significance:

As long as Ashby and his group live on the houseboat in the middle of the river isolated from the world, their attempt to live the tenets of Christianity holds up very well. As soon as they descend the gangplank into the Babylonian city they are arrested in a public market place by the agents of Caesar and the pure attempt fails.<sup>10</sup>

Pearl, who is also a symbol for the pus of human imperfection, is the element of evil Ashby had not allowed for.

Ashby, himself, at the end of the novel, recognizes that his salvation has been incomplete and that he has searched, sometimes in vain, to learn the will of God. He says, "Oh Lord yore salvation it moves lak the wind . . . Oh Lord yore will has run lak the fox and sly . . ." (Gate, p. 328). He also realizes that he was unable to reconcile the world and its ways with his own ideal of pure living. Longley sees Ashby as an authentically tragic figure whose fall is brought on by virtue pursued too far. He says, though, that at the end Ashby sees "the pattern whole and accepts it, achieving complete self-knowledge and self revelation." Longley repeats Warren's words spoken at a literary symposium:

The story of every soul is the story of its self-definition for good and evil, salvation or damnation . . . And Warren goes on to say that each of us longs for full balance and responsibility in self-knowledge, in a recognition and harmonious acceptance of our destiny.

Even though Ashby lacks perfect union with the Godhead, says Longley, he accepts his destiny and nowhere in his agonized journey does Ashby or the author seem to think that the effort should not have been made.<sup>11</sup>

Ashby Wyndham, then, is a complex Warren figure, a man whose fanatic attempts at salvation, attempts typical of the true Southern revivalist, Warren finds naïve. He is a man, however, whose efforts and integrity,



whose dedication, we are made to admire, because of his agonized seeking after selfhood and because of his final acceptance of God's will. He is a man who is able to reactivate the conscience of his kinsman Private Porsum and in turn be the moral agent that causes the corrupt Murdock financial empire to crumble. Wyndham has experienced isolation and a true awareness of evil that has led to his own redemption and attendant communion with mankind.

All the King's Men explores those same themes of recognition of evil, acceptance of guilt, responsibility and atonement, and the search for self-knowledge that we explored in At Heaven's Gate. In addition, Warren views man and his actions as part of the organic whole, a part of the "web of being" that includes all of the natural world. This world, says Warren, is also where we must find salvation, and only when the hero, Jack Burden, is ready to go out into the present moment and find meaning in "the convulsion of the world, out of history into history, and the awful responsibility of Time," will he be redeemed (King's, p. 464).

Redemption for Jack is a slow process because his existence centers first around his non-involvement with humanity. Unable to finish his doctoral dissertation in history, he enters upon one of his periods of the Great Sleep. He lays aside the journal of Cass Mastern, upon which his dissertation is to be based, and comes home and sleeps up to fifteen hours a day. Afraid to face the truth found in the journal, he submerges himself into a world of almost animal existence. The truth in the journal can be found in the lesson Cass Mastern learns as he accepts responsibility for adultery with Mrs. Duncan Trice. His sin, which resulted in the suicide of Mr. Trice and the selling and debauching of a female

slave, makes him realize that no man's actions are isolated but are all a part of everything else that happens in the world. As he says:

. . . the world is like an enormous spider web and if you touch it, however lightly, at any point, the vibration ripples to the remotest perimeter and the drowsy spider feels the tingle and is drowsy no more but springs out to fling the gossamer coils about you who have touched the web . . . . (King's, p. 200)

Truly repentant for his ripple in the "web of things" he tries to atone for his sin by finding the female slave, selling his own slaves, and giving his life as a soldier in the Civil War. Cass Mastern dies receiving salvation because he has accepted his own guilt and responsibility for the evil in the world and is willing to atone for that evil.

Jack, ignoring the lesson to be found in Cass's life, enters upon a new career as political henchman to Willie Stark, governor of Louisiana. Willie's philosophy centers around the Calvinist philosophy of original sin, says Elizabeth Kerr, and this philosophy enables him to see man as inherently evil and also excuses Willie from responsibility for the corruption of his political machine.<sup>12</sup> Willie, never hesitant to ruin a man by uncovering "dirt" in his past, excuses himself by saying, "There is always something. . . . Man is conceived in sin and born in corruption and he passeth from the stink of the didie to the stench of the shroud . . ." (King's, p. 167). Jack, who performs the "shovel" work for the uncovering of "dirt," adopts Willie's philosophy of pragmatic irresponsibility for consequences and continues his own non-involvement until his historical research uncovers facts about his own father.

Unaware at first that the judge is his father, Jack accepts the job of trying to find something on him, and like Cass Mastern he sets into motion the vibration of the web that causes other things to happen.



Unwittingly, at first, but gradually becoming absorbed in his task, Jack uncovers facts that implicate the Judge in bribery and also facts that involve then Governor Stanton in a cover-up of the bribery. Jack's research speeds Ann Stanton into Willie Stark's arms, and when Ann's brother, Adam, learns of this affair he murders Willie. Judge Irwin, meanwhile, who has learned from Jack that his earlier corruption is to be revealed, goes to his room and calmly shoots himself. Thus, Jack, who has set in motion disastrous events, can no longer remain uninvolved; he is forced to accept his own responsibility for the death of his real father and the death of his surrogate father.

Faced with his own responsibility for the evil around him, Jack finally accepts his guilt and seeks atonement as he tries to right some of the wrongs his father caused. In addition to acknowledgement of guilt and atonement, he also experiences a "rebirth," an emotional regeneration that cracks his neutral facade, when he learns of the suicide of Judge Irwin. His rebirth results in reconciliation with those around him--his mother, Ann, the Scholarly Attorney--a reconciliation that draws Jack back into the involved community of mankind. Jack proves Warren's previously mentioned "paradox of identity"; when he accepts his own isolation and also the guilt that binds all men, Jack experiences a redemptive self-knowledge. This paradox reflects the insight of Ellis Burden, the Scholarly Attorney, who says that:

Separateness is identity and the only way for God to create, truly create, man was to make him separate from God himself, and to be separate from God is to be sinful. The creation of evil is therefore the index of God's glory and His power. That had to be so that the creation of good might be the index of man's glory and power. But by God's help. (King's, p. 462)

In All the King's Men, Warren comes very close to accepting traditional Christian orthodoxy, as evidenced in the "rebirth" of Jack Burden, in the



guilt and expiation of Cass Mastern, and in the philosophy of Ellis Burden. He rejects, however, the sacrificial Christian life as lived by Burden, who humbles himself physically and devotes himself completely to helping others. He is pictured as weak and inept, unfit to live in the modern world of practical realities. Burden is reminiscent of Ashby Wyndham and his struggle for spiritual perfection, a perfection too idealized for living in the world. Charles Bohner echoes Warren's beliefs that life has to be lived out in the world in the "concreteness of the present moment." Jack's immersion in the past has shown him that "meaning is never in the event but in the motion through event." Life is motion, a process not of being but of becoming.<sup>13</sup> Jack Burden has discovered that his becoming can be fulfilled as he accepts his own place in the great scheme of things, and lives out his life involved with humanity.

Jeremiah Beaumont, hero of World Enough and Time, who struggles to achieve a perfect realization of his idealized conception of justice, never achieves salvation in the true Warren sense of the word. Jeremiah, never able to reconcile the pure idea of the "word" with the way of the world, experiences knowledge and suffering instead of redemption. In his own words he says:

There must be a way whereby the word becomes flesh. There must be a way whereby the flesh becomes word. Whereby loneliness becomes communion without contamination. Whereby contamination becomes purity without exile. There must be a way, but I may not have it now. All I can have now is knowledge . . . That is not redemption, but is almost better than redemption . . . I no longer seek to justify. I seek only to suffer. . . . (World, p. 460)

Looking back on his agonized journey for perfection, Jeremiah realizes he has imperfectly understood how to live in the world; he has been betrayed by Wilkie Baron, who is completely at one with the world. Jeremiah,

in turn, has betrayed Rachel Jordan and deluded himself--thus committing what Warren calls the heresy of the self--heresy that separates Jeremiah from God and humanity as he seeks nobility "born in vanity and nursed in pride" (World, p. 465). Left with only the agony of his delusion, Jeremiah, denied rebirth, can seek only expiation for his vanity and pride. Armed with the full knowledge of his own sin of murder, he heads back to Frankfort to fulfill his appointment with the hangman. Denied even the satisfaction of attempted expiation, he is beheaded by a cohort of Wilkie Baron's, and his body is left to the wild hogs.

Through Jeremiah, Warren makes several theological statements. During Jeremiah's younger days on the frontier, he is lured by the glamour of the frontier revivalist, Corinthian McClardy, who is able to transport his hearers into emotional ecstasy. Jeremiah recalls one night when "many were taken by the various exercises, many shouted and fell down, many embraced and kissed, and some ran howling"; overcome with joy, himself, he runs into the woods, confronts a haggard creature and experiences his first copulation (World, p. 30). Robert Berner says that for McClardy the body seems to be the way to the soul; but this is not Warren's way. He believes that man must resist nature with his will, not accept it passively as Jeremiah does the depravity on Big Hump's island, which Berner says is:

A kind of upside-down Eden which is a frightening parody of the related notions of the noble savage, human perfectability, and the Golden Age. The 'innocence' which Jeremiah achieves is not of men but of animals and vegetables.

It recalls an earlier pantheistic feeling he had as a boy when he "seemed to become the tree, and knew how it was to be rooted in the deep dark of



the earth and hear with . . . his boughs the weight of glittering ice like joy" (World, p. 29). Forgetting his earlier teaching from Brother Trotter, who was "learned in doctrine" and warned him that the saved "should not enter into nature, for the Kingdom is not of this world. . . ." Jeremiah succumbs to the natural world for a time (World, p. 29).

Rejecting pantheism and the emotional appeal of revivalists like Corinthian McClardy, "who were a terror and blessing across the land, . . . who got their hot prides and cold lusts short-circuited into obsessed hosannas and a ferocious striving for God's sake," Warren seems to present the theological statements of Thomas Barron and Munn Short as possible answers (World, p. 25). Thomas Barron's acceptance of evil and misfortune recalls the "tragic spirit" mentioned earlier formulated by John Crowe Ransom. Barron, a simple farmer, has lived through grief and failure; but he is aware of the world order, and like Willie Proudfit he turns to the land for his redemptive source. He explains to Jeremiah why he plants:

It came to me long back that all for a man like me was to set his strength to whatever come to his hand. . . . I have seen days I cried out against God for the grief laid on me. But what I learned I learned. . . . And son, I aim to take me one more crop. It may be the best I ever made. Under God's hand. (World, p. 123)

Munn Short, Jeremiah's jailer, attempts to comfort Jeremiah before his scheduled execution with his own story of rebirth. Munn tells him how once long ago he had betrayed a fellow backwoodsman and lain with his much younger wife. Caught in the fields by the Indians, she was killed and Short was knifed. Lying unconscious, more dead than alive, Munn is rescued from the Indians and nursed back to health by the woman's husband Perk. Suffering from guilt, and the "mark" put on him by Perk, Short



tells Jeremiah how afterwards he died inwardly everyday and "cried out for mercy." His prayers were answered and he received Jesus, experiencing forgiveness and redemption. To atone for his sins, Munn Short tells everyone he meets about Jesus. Jeremiah, an unbeliever, receives no comfort or answers from Munn, but seeks only to justify himself by recording everything in his diary. Jeremiah dies, never accepting the faith of Thomas Barron or Munn Short, but he dies having suffered and having understood--which, says Casper, "Warren values far above peace."<sup>15</sup>

If a way of salvation is revealed to Jeremiah through Barron and then Short, why does Jeremiah reject these ways? Are these views too simplistic for a man of Jeremiah's intelligence and introspection. Barnett Guttenberg suggests that the very inappropriateness of the metaphor, "'Jesus hung on my heart lak a cowbell,'" is too simple-minded for Jeremiah.<sup>16</sup> Charles Bohner agrees that Munn Short's affirmation makes no impression on Jeremiah. Nor, he says, is it singled out by the narrator for special emphasis.<sup>17</sup> Yearning for an answer, for a synthesis of the word and the flesh, perhaps Warren and Jeremiah have to settle for the "almost better"--for knowledge.

Continuing his rejection of the ministry for providing meaningful answers, Warren portrays Seth Parton in Band of Angels as a sanctimonious, hypocritical cleric whose attempt at self-denial is betrayed by his own lustful desires. Preaching a powerful sermon at Oberlin on the possibility of sanctification, Seth drags Amantha Starr to a spot in the woods which had previously been defiled. Using Amantha as a temptation, he resists her and declares that the spot is sanctified. Continuing the way of self-abnegation, Seth marries an unattractive, lumpish woman and continues his search for "perfection in the Lord." All his reserves

are shattered, however, when he encounters Miss Idell, a worldly woman and former prostitute, who lures him into the temptations of the flesh. Beginning by "praying with her," Seth ends by taking her to his bed, leaving his wife and becoming a millionaire. Leaving no doubt as to his own views, Warren satirizes the rigid clergyman whose denial of the flesh becomes a testing ground for his own purity.

Whatever redemption occurs in Band of Angels is the secular variety and is achieved when Amantha is able to accept her father's love and in turn accept herself. Tobias Sears, her husband, is also able to experience a kind of salvation when he "falls" from his lofty height as liberator and accepts, instead, brotherhood with the Negro. Irene Hendry suggests that for Warren salvation comes from within, not from God or the state, and depends upon individual effort and responsibility.<sup>18</sup>

Wilderness, as it uncovers the humanity and the yearning toward communal ties of its main character, Adam Rosensweig, provides us with a convincing redemption scene. At the edge of battle, Adam is surrounded by a handful of ragged, starving Confederate soldiers who take his boots and his supplies. Watching these "defenders of slavery" devouring his food, he feels a warm gush of pity toward them and blesses them unawares. Abruptly, Union soldiers charge into the glade, and in the confusion, Adam picks up a rifle and kills one of the Confederates. Ending as quickly as it began, the violence subsides, and the soldiers rush off into the woods leaving Adam alone with the victim.

The killing has a profound psychological effect on Adam; he at first feels a pride and manliness in doing what he intended to do--to come to America and fight and kill, if need be, for freedom. His elation subsides,



however, as guilt overcomes him, and he soon realizes that his vanity and idealism have deluded him into accepting what are really selfish motivations. Next, Adam relives all the "ifs" of his life, finally realizing that one man, Jed Hawksworth, would not be dead, and another, Mose Crawford, would not have been driven out with "crammed money belt, greasy alphabet cards, and bloody hands," if he hadn't called Mose "the name of insult which, it seemed now in absolute clarity, he had always been doomed to call Mose Tallbutt, Mose Crawford" (Wilderness, p. 302). His guilt subsides next to self-pity as he thinks of how everyone has betrayed him --even his father who gave him his twisted foot. Self-pity giving away to rage, which finally explodes into a startling awareness, Adam experiences a revelation that rearranges all his former thinking. Suddenly, he realizes that he has killed the man because "his foot was not like mine" (Wilderness, p. 304). Uncovering his unconscious reason at last for wanting to fight, Adam knows that he has always wanted to be avenged for his clubfoot.

Finally, stripped of all pretense and delusions, with this new self-knowledge Adam is able to shed his past obligation to his father who died disillusioned in the fight for freedom. Adam, who feels young and pure, is able to pray to his Hebraic God, asking for mercy and forgiveness. With this sense of regeneration, of rebirth, come attendant feelings of humanity. He remembers the maid servant who carefully dried and pressed the wet pages of his prayer book and wished he had thanked her properly. He is also able to accept his own humanity, forgiving himself for what he had to do. He decides he would have to kill again, but with a different heart.

As he walks out of the Wilderness, hobbling in the boots of the dead man,



he knows that he will "have to try to know what a man must know to be a man" (Wilderness, p. 310). He knows also that" . . . the truth is unbetrayable, and that only the betrayer is ever betrayed, and then only by his own betraying" (Wilderness, p. 310). Adam realizes also that he will never know the names of those dead men, Confederate and Union, who have worn his boots but that he can try to be worthy of their namelessness and of what they have endured.

In Wilderness, Warren has clearly detailed one character's struggle toward redemption and self-knowledge. And after the pain of guilt and isolation, the character is able also to experience feelings of humanity toward others and himself and to sense his own involvement in mankind's eternal struggle. Adam's coming back to God occurs only after his own consciousness has accepted these new insights and translated them into useable terms.

Warren's novel, The Cave, presents a richly symbolic study of man trapped in the darkness which is himself. Jasper Harrick, who is trapped in a cave in Tennessee, takes on the guilt of everyone who waits at the mouth of the cave. Redemption in this novel implies escape from the darkness of the self and a search for self-knowledge that leads to a reaching-out to others. Charles Bohner suggests that the epigraph from Plato's Republic gives a clue to the meaning; the inhabitants of a cave have been obliged to live out their lives chained with their backs to the mouth of the cave, unable to see the light of truth burning above and behind them. Only by being dragged to the mouth of the cave can they be persuaded that their world of shadows is not real. "In the novel each character is committed to his own version of the shadow world and, in being compelled by

circumstances to face reality, each must leave the dark cavern of his own nature to face the light of self-knowledge." For Isaac Sumpter, the knowledge of self is too painful to accept, and he clings to the familiar illusory world. For others, "emergence is a kind of rebirth, a recognition and acceptance of the essential self."<sup>19</sup>

Jack Harrick, Jasper's father, who is dying from cancer, cannot accept his illness and his approaching death because he is trapped in the legend of his former self. Unable even to take a pill that will ease his pain, he is trapped by the "strength which is his weakness." He resents his much younger wife and refuses her the comfort she can give him. Unable to pray when Jasper is trapped in the cave, he arrives at self-awareness only after his son's death. He painfully realizes that he does not want his son to come out of the ground, because "somebody always has to go in the ground. If he was there I would not have to go" (Cave, p. 385). From that agonized thought, he experiences the recognition of his own weakness that has allowed the legend of the "hell-raisin' womanizer" to continue and flourish. In a moment of insight, he thinks: "I am an old, nigh-illiterate, broke-down blacksmith, sitting here in the middle of the night, and my boy is dead" (Cave, p. 389). Released from his own "shadows of illusion," he is able to face death and to reach out in love to his wife.

Jack Harrick's boyhood friend, the Reverend MacCarland Sumpter, experiences a similar kind of self-revelation. Confessing to Jack that he wanted Jasper to die because he was Jack's son, he relives an earlier experience. When both Harrick and Sumpter were young men, Harrick got a young girl, Mary Tillyard, pregnant. Refusing to marry the girl, Harrick



leaves for the war, and Sumpter marries her. When Mary aborts Jack Harrick's child, MacCarland Sumpter denies the joy he feels, but in confessing that joy and a similar joy in Jasper's death to Ole Jack, he is at last willing to humble himself, face possible rejection, and gradually find his way back to God. He is even able to face the possibility that God changes--that God conforms Himself to man's will. As Sumpter says:

The terror of God is that He bends ear to man's prayer. Knock, and it shall be opened unto you. And when it is opened, who can withstand the horror of that vision of prayer fulfilled? (Cave, p. 91)

Leonard Casper suggests that "God is not their scapegoat; that would be supreme self-pity." In order that consequences may remain men's responsibility, they consider the possibility that God adjusts His will to theirs. "Such responsibility is the terrible price of self--since possession of free will without absolute knowledge must sometimes be terrifying."<sup>20</sup>

Nick Papodoupalous, a Greek restaurant owner who has known failure and loneliness, also experiences rebirth. Living in a kind of void, Nick marries his wife, a dancer in a burlesque show, because she reminds him of Jean Harlow. Fearful of his debt at the bank, pouring all his money into the care of his wife who has tuberculosis, his only comfort is in driving his big yellow Cadillac. When he offers to show Celia Harrick how to make waffles for Ole Jack, he experiences for the first time, he says, ever really looking into a human face, just for its "humanness." Open to the possibility of such humanity, he is ready to accept his own wife's humanness. When she refuses to perform an abortion on a little girl, he reaches out to her across the bedclothes holding her hand and thinking of a possible hopeful future for them.

Another character who can face her delusions and experience a new self



is Celia Harrick, who must acknowledge the fact that she has never forgiven Ole Jack for running off to Chattanooga for three weeks when Jasper was a baby. She, too, must also overcome the legend surrounding her husband, the legend that lured her with its scent of masculinity and strength. After Jasper's death she says, "Oh, John T.--I never saw you before! . . . Maybe it's because--because I never was me before" (Cave, p. 402). The cave, then, which begins as a symbol of communal guilt, the guilt of the self trapped in darkness, comes to be the symbol of rebirth as the characters face away from the shadows and toward the reality of the self.

God, says Barnett Guttenberg, hearkening back to MacCarland Sumpter's statement, is immanent rather than transcendent in The Cave and changes with the web of being, a philosophy espoused in All the King's Men. Jack Harrick, he says, however, likens God to Truth and argues that Truth is no more than the shape of man's needs: that man will believe what he wants to believe, even if his beliefs are contradictory. The Cave, then, says Guttenberg, "seems still more qualified in its religious affirmation than All the King's Men."<sup>21</sup>

In addition to rejecting traditional theology, Warren also rejects the traditional evangelism as practiced by Brother Sumpter at the mouth of the cave. Capitalizing on the emotionalism engendered by the situation, Brother Sumpter is able to "win souls" for the Lord. The carnival atmosphere and emotionalism of this situation is reminiscent of the revivalism of Corinthian McClardy. Both, simplistic in their approach, play on the fears and guilt of their prospective converts. Warren's "theology," as opposed to fundamental Southern orthodoxy, is a positive redemptive experience achieved when the individual gains new insights about his own identity and

reaches out to humanity as a result of his own renewal.

Of all the major characters in Flood, Brad Tolliver, alone, experiences failure to achieve salvation, or redemption. The key to redemption here involves the Christian concept of losing oneself to a more noble or worthy cause, such as art, humanity, or Christianity. John Longley says that Brad has lived through many of the same experiences as director Yasha Jones, such as losing a wife and experiencing combat; yet Yasha's art is pure, and Brad's is not, because Yasha, who has experienced the death of the self, can focus his sole attention on perfecting his art. Longley says that Yasha no longer needs the gratification or the "spasm of envy in others."<sup>22</sup> Brad does; in fact, he can define himself and his art only in the reaction he produces in others, attraction, admiration, envy. Praise may be insincere, and silence implies reproach. Longley says that this "kink in his vision cuts both ways. The defect is a failure of apprehension, an inability to see what he is looking at."<sup>23</sup> At Fiddlersburg's memorial service, Brad stands looking at the people across the road from him. He denies their reality, however, because to recognize their reality would permit them to become real, and if they were real, Brad Tolliver would be no more important than they are. Brad is as blind as Leontine Purtle, the blind girl in the novel, because he is locked in himself. He is never able to allow others genuine identity, because he never really "sees" them. Never allowing others genuine identity, he fails to achieve true identity for himself and also the complete objectivity that he needs for his art.

Brad's former wife, Lettice, has been able to lose herself in Christian service to others. When she and Brad were married, she spent hours pampering



her body--lying in the sun, bathing herself in expensive creams and perfumes, slimming down her figure. Now she is a lay worker for an old people's home in Chicago, and her bodily neglect and mortification have been an avenue to wisdom and grace. Writing in a letter to Brad's sister Maggie, she says:

I'm a big, heavy, slow-footed dame . . . and my hair is mostly gray, and cut short, . . . and I have varicose veins on my legs and have to wear elastic bandages, . . . and my hands are raw from scrubbing things. . . . (Flood, p. 429)

In giving herself to others, Lettice has experienced a sacrificial loss of the self which has led to her own salvation. Describing her redemptive experience, she says she was "goosed to God" because of her wickedness and triviality (Flood, p. 432). Her theology recalls a maturity, however, expressed earlier in All the King's Men and The Cave--the theology of God's immanence. As she puts it: "Here is where you have to pray. To know the nowness of God's will" (Flood, p. 432).

Brad's sister Maggie, who has spent most of her adult life caring for an invalid mother-in-law, experiences personal joy when she loses herself in a harmonious marriage with Yasha Jones. Maggie's former husband, Cal Fiddler, in jail for murder, has been able to come out on the other side of the nightmare of solitary confinement and find some kind of life for himself in the prison infirmary. As he says to Brad:

After all the unthinkableness of things, which is what makes you want to die, suddenly you feel different. It was like knowing that life, . . . is beautiful . . . if you yourself haven't had that beautifulness but you know it is there, and you are happy about the mere fact that it exists. . . . (Flood, p. 413)

Of all the characters, Brad, alone on the verge of awareness, is left at the end to search for some key that will complete his humanity. If



he can learn the lesson of self relinquishment learned by the others, perhaps he will be able to arrive at self-knowledge and a redemptive existence.

In Flood Warren presents two contrasting pictures of the ministry--an older, uneducated white man, and an intelligent, highly educated young black man. Brother Potts, the older man, is described by Blanding Cottshill as "merely a good man, full of suffering and befuddlement, doing his best to walk in the steps of the Master" (Flood, p. 294). If we accept Cottshill as Warren's raisonneur, it becomes apparent that Potts' theology is too simplistic for the author, but it is obvious that he admires his courage. Brother Pinckney's theology, however, comes fairly close to expressing earlier statements apparently endorsed by the author. His God is described as "merely a Purity of Being in which, according to him, we must believe in order to be . . ." (Flood, p. 295). After Pretty Boy "cracks" and prays, Brother Pinckney experiences an ambivalence of feeling which causes him to reexamine his own theology. He tells others that the condemned man has found the "peace of God which passeth understanding"; he, however, goes home to pray for his own understanding. As he says, "I can scarcely hope for the greater gift of the peace that passeth that" (Flood, p. 297). The statement about understanding recalls Jeremiah Beaumont's recognition that he may not have the peace of redemption, but he does have knowledge, which is almost better.

Warren's last two novels, Meet Me in the Green Glenn and A Place To Come To, offer no theological statements or interpretations but present the church as merely another symbol for strong home and family ties. Leroy Lancaster's wife Corinne, active in the Baptist church in Parkerton, is an orthodox Christian who prays regularly and is busy with good works.

The church for Leroy is simply part of his home town and one of the elements unique to the Parkerton experience. Leroy's redemption is of the secular variety and occurs when he accepts the idea of his own assertiveness and competence. A Place To Come To adopts a similar attitude toward religion and the church; Jediah Tewksbury's home church in Dugton, Alabama, now collapsed and rotting, and only inhabited by the birds, serves as a reminder of his childhood and his heritage. Its only reality for him now becomes the reminder that his body will be buried there in the graveyard between his mother and father. The idea of the church tied up with home and family occurs elsewhere in the novel; when Jediah's first wife, Agnes, is dying, she renounces her belief in God. Jediah, anguished and guilty, feels that he despoiled Agnes' faith which was rooted in her father's church in Ripley, South Dakota. When Jediah returns to Agnes' home for the funeral, in a kind of expiation for his guilt, he kneels and prays when her own father, a minister, cannot. Jediah, isolated and faithless, achieves a kind of redemption only at the end when he experiences a hope for renewed ties with humanity.

Warren, finally, then, though never orthodox, acknowledges Christian concepts of redemption and salvation, sin, guilt, and atonement; and he seems to accept a Being, even though we may not call it God, that is responsible for an organic wholeness and interdependence in the world. He values knowledge and understanding above an easy peace, suggesting there are no easy answers, and rejects the absolute, doctrinal statements of most Southern theologies. His own theology is also tied in with the individual's constant search for identity and self-knowledge.

## NOTES

### Chapter IV

<sup>1</sup>Eisinger, p. 199.

<sup>2</sup>Eisinger, p. 198.

<sup>3</sup>Eisinger, p. 200.

<sup>4</sup>Eisinger, p. 200.

<sup>5</sup>Anderson, p. 218.

<sup>6</sup>Bohner, p. 97.

<sup>7</sup>Eisinger, p. 208.

<sup>8</sup>Guttenberg, p. 5-6.

<sup>9</sup>Eisinger, p. 203.

<sup>10</sup>John Lewis Longley, "The Major Themes: At Heaven's Gate,"  
Modern Fiction Studies, 6 (Spring, 1960), p. 23.

<sup>11</sup>Longley, "The Major Themes," p. 23.

<sup>12</sup>Kerr, p. 33.

<sup>13</sup>Bohner, p. 98.

<sup>14</sup>Berner, p. 58.

<sup>15</sup>Casper, Dark, p. 174.

<sup>16</sup>Guttenberg, p. 65.

<sup>17</sup>Bohner, p. 116.

<sup>18</sup>Hendry, p. 101.

<sup>19</sup>Bohner, p. 149.

<sup>20</sup>Casper, "Journey," p. 72.

<sup>21</sup>Guttenberg, p. 96.

<sup>22</sup>John Lewis Longley, Jr., "Robert Penn Warren: The Deeper Rub,"  
Southern Review, 1 (Autumn, 1965), p. 977.



<sup>23</sup>Longley, Robert Penn Warren, p. 33.

## Conclusion

Through many voices and many circumstances, Robert Penn Warren has translated his particular vision of identity as it relates to his Southern tradition and heritage. With a career spanning a period of almost forty years, he still sees the Southern experience as valid to man's search for self-knowledge. The "pieties" of family and place still exist as the key to the individual's achievement of a fully realized personality. Warren still sees the value of an examination of those myths that have helped to inform the unique Southern character. He has continued to examine the Negro's own position and identity in his Southern environment, and he has investigated the Southern white's treatment of the black man as it relates to his own personhood. Finally, Warren, affirming his region's moral voice and recognizing the importance of Southern orthodoxy in strengthening that voice, continues to develop his own "theology" apart from rigid doctrinal statements--a theology that incorporates his constant concern with identity.

Warren, affirming again and again the agrarian and patrician identities as the key to selfhood, portrays his last fictional character, Jed Tewksbury, as standing alienated and alone, separated from his heritage--the prototype of the successful twentieth-century man, rootless and estranged. Just as characters such as Jerry Calhoun, Jack Burden, and Brad Tolliver have had to recognize the importance of their regional and familial past in shaping their identities, so has Jed Tewksbury. Warren also continues his notion in this last novel that twentieth-century values such as power, money, and success can rob a man of his identity. Jed Tewksbury, attempting to fulfill himself through his successful career as a classical scholar,

sees himself as empty and his life as meaningless. In varying degrees, he recalls characters such as Bogan Murdock, Isaac Sumpter, and Brad Tolliver who have attempted to substitute success and money for a realistic self-acceptance and awareness. Rejecting their Southern heritage and attempting to fill the void with these tangibles, they exemplify Warren's dialectic that only when a man truly accepts his Southern background and reconciles it with his own identity, can he achieve true selfhood.

Continuing throughout his novels an examination of the myths of honor, purity, and the myths surrounding the Civil War, Warren seems to arrive at similar statements. Men such as Captain Todd in Night Rider, Colonel Fort in World Enough and Time, and David McInnis in A Place To Come To constitute Warren's idea of the admirable "man of principle," as contrasted with such shallow "Southern gentlemen" as Senator Tolliver and Lawford Carrington. Principles, we find, also count for more in Warren's world than do the abstract ideals of honor practiced by people such as Jeremiah Beaumont and Adam Stanton. Warren's evaluation of the myth of the "pure Southern gentlewoman" also suggests a realistic examination that allows for the development of the whole woman, such as Ann Stanton, who is willing to accept sex as a part of her selfhood. He refutes, however, the idea that identity can be achieved through sexual coupling, as exemplified in Sue Murdock's and Rozelle Hardcastle's lives. Identity through the myth or mystique of the Civil War, Warren shows, can have a positive effect, as it does for Brad Tolliver and Fiddlersburg, or it can have a negative effect as it does for "old Buck Tewksbury." He seems to be calling again for a realistic examination of this myth, as he does the others, as they relate to the lives of his characters.

Warren's exploration of the Negro question is a two-pronged approach.



He examines the white man's relations with the Negro as it has to do with the white man's identity, and he examines the Negro himself as he develops his own identity. Warren, while deploring such cruel or insensitive treatment of the Negro as is depicted in Night Rider, At Heaven's Gate, World Enough and Time, and Meet Me in the Green Glenn, however, suggests in All the King's Men and Flood that the white man cannot "use" the Negro to assuage his own guilt feelings. There must be a realistic acceptance of the black man and his problem made in an effort to ease the tension. After only sketchy earlier portrayals of the Negro, Warren achieves in Band of Angels a complicated character study of a woman who must accept her blackness to achieve true identity. In Warren's last novel, Rozelle's swami not only accepts his blackness but achieves a more fully realized identity than the novel's leading character.

Using the terms employed by Southern orthodoxy, terms such as "atonement," "communion," and "redemption," Warren fuses his own particular "unorthodox orthodoxy" as it relates to his vision of identity and selfhood. Characters such as Willie Proudfit, Jack Burden, Ashby Wyndham, Adam Rosensweig, and Jack Harrick experience redemption or salvation as they reconcile those disruptive forces within themselves in their struggle toward selfhood. While accepting such basic Christian tenets as love and forgiveness as crucial steps in self-realization, Warren cannot accept traditional Southern theology and even satirizes such fundamentalists as Professor Ball, Corinthian McClardy, and Seth Parton for their simplistic answers to the complex problem of life.

Realizing all the while the unique value of his Southern heritage, Warren still insists on a critical view as it relates particularly to the

individual's own struggle toward identity. Warren also insists on the individual's translation of these tenets of his Southern background as they relate to modern man's existence. He does not underestimate the Southern experience and tradition, however, as providing the basis for a meaningful and fulfilling existence.

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