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ROBERT PENN WARREN AND HIS READER

Rice University

Ph.D. 1984

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ROBERT PENN WARREN AND HIS READER

by

PETER MICHAEL RYDER

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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MAY, 1984
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1984
ABSTRACT

ROBERT PENN WARREN AND HIS READER

PETER MICHAEL RYDER

The relation between the individual and community is a crucial dynamic shaping the dominant philosophy of Robert Penn Warren's novels and poetry. Warren outlines the process leading to the discovery of this interrelation in "Knowledge and the Image of Man." It involves an initial fall from the innocent belief in union to an awareness of isolation. But this discovery of separation is crucial because out of it comes a new vision of communion that has its basis not only in innocent dream but in experience. Through isolation an individual finds the "courage and clarity of mind to envisage the tragic pathos of life" and this leads him to the realization that the tragic experience of separation is "universal and a corollary of man's place in nature." This dissertation argues that the doctrine outlined in "Knowledge and the Image of Man" is mirrored in the aesthetic process that governs much of Warren's work. The text represents a private "image of experience" that is validated in the reading process—that is, as it is tested in the experience of a community of readers. Two models are provided describing
the interaction: the first sees the "relation of the author to the work" as suggestive of the reader's role; and the second uses Warren's description of what he calls a "potential audience" which exists in the text as a paradigm for reader involvement. In keeping with Warren's formalist leanings, the arguments for reader participation never shift too far from text-centered criticism. But, as Warren has indicated, criticism "when it really functions . . . leads to a creative act in the sense of appreciating the work." With this in mind, this dissertation explores a fundamental phenomenological question involving the relation between what is perceived and perceiver—in aesthetic terms, the creative process which defines both literary object and reader.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to my teachers, Monroe Spears and Terry Doody, for their encouragement while I wrote this dissertation. Thanks to Moragh Orr for supporting me with her kindness. And heartfelt thanks to Marsha Lee Recknagel who listened to my grief along the way. Her care was sustaining.
FOR MY MOTHER AND FATHER
... but what is knowledge
Without the intrinsic mediation of
the heart?

-- Warren, *Brother to Dragons*
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INTRODUCTION

One thing separating most reader-response criticism from more formalist approaches is its rejection of special objective status for the text in favor of exploring a fundamental phenomenological question involving the relation between what is perceived and its perceiver—between literary object and reader. This dissertation examines Robert Penn Warren's conception of this relation; its theory is based, for the most part, on Warren's writings, but its emphasis is on the application of theory to specific novels and poems. It consciously avoids critical frameworks and terminology (with a few exceptions) advanced by the major advocates of reader-oriented discourse. This does not mean that Warren's aesthetic is entirely antithetical to these systems; on the contrary, despite certain leanings which mark his work as formalist (in "A Poem of Pure Imagination: An Experiment in Reading," Warren says that "the reader does not interpret the poem but the poem interprets the reader"¹), Warren is concerned, in his own way, with the need for reader participation in the realization of an artistic work. Warren has said that criticism

when it really functions in the full sense of the word, leads to a creative act in the sense of appreciating the work. You . . . rewrite the book . . . by going inside . . . . You are writing the book . . . you feel the whole process

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in you. This is clearly a creative act.² However, one reason to avoid critical approaches indicated by figures in the reader-response community such as Stanley Fish, Norman Holland, Wolfgang Iser or Jonathan Culler when discussing Warren is that the kinds of problems and solutions their theories suggest are, with the exception of Iser's, incompatible with Warren's practice. In the following chapters I have raised questions which Warren considers and have avoided the myriad of intriguing challenges these critics pose. But, in an effort to outline the critical boundaries of this project, let me preface the main body of this work with a sketch of those areas where Warren's theory of aesthetics intersects with the frameworks proposed by Fish, Holland, Culler and Iser.

For Warren, the reader is an interpretive, not a neutral, category whose function may be manipulated, in part, by the text or the author's intention but not entirely determined by it; that is to say Warren's focus remains primarily textual. He would feel somewhat uneasy with Fish's position as stated in "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics," for example, where the text is described not as "an object, a thing-in-itself, but an event, something that happens to and with the participation of the reader."³ But here, at least, Fish allows for the existence of a text; in "Interpreting the Variorum,"⁴ however, Fish's later position which conceives texts as wholly constituted by reader's
interpretive strategies would prove unacceptable to Warren. It moves the discussion of literature away from a poem or novel, the "thing-in-itself," to a study of underlying systems outside the text which form "interpretive communities" that determine meaning in the text. In a similar way, Warren might feel comfortable with Jonathan Culler's assertion that "to intend meaning is to postulate reactions of an imagined reader" but would break with the clause which follows asserting that this is a reader "who has assimilated relevant conventions." Culler stresses that to interpret something one brings socially determined "modes" of order to bear on it. This sense of community is not Warren's. Nor is Norman Holland's picture of the reader. He says that "all of us, as we read, use the literary object to replicate ourselves," and this replication is based on psychologically determined needs grounded in individual defenses, expectations, fantasies and transformations. Both Culler's and Holland's models are more complex than these examples imply; they are very different from one another, but each suggests that in the interpretive process either an interpretive community or an individual's psychology constitute the meaning of a text. In Culler's and Fish's approach, readers agree about meaning not because of the text but because of certain expectations that are determined by society; while Holland concludes that "interpretation is a function of identity" and varied responses are due to different readers' individual
defenses and fantasies. Warren's reader and community of readers are not so complexly or problematically considered because they are not conceived as producers of meaning. Warren proposes what these critics do not—a text that pre-arranges meaning; the "rightness" in a text ("rightness" is Warren's word), however, is realized in its relation to an audience.

Wolfgang Iser's phenomenological criticism begins to approximate Warren's conception of the relation between text and reader even if his rhetoric may seem foreign to Warren's more formalist language. What makes Iser compatible with Warren is his belief in the primary importance of the text. Iser believes that meaning is the product of a rather difficult interaction between text and reader, and "the interaction fails if . . . the reader's projections superimpose themselves unimpeded on the text."8 But "meaning is the referential totality which is implied by the aspects contained in the text and which must be assembled in the course of reading."9 Still, although the reader must participate in the assembling of meaning by realizing in himself the structure inherent in the text, for Warren, as well as for Iser, it must not be forgotten that the reader is outside the text; to be properly guided his position must therefore be manipulated by meanings contained in the text. The two critics I use in my discussion of Warren's theory in Chapter I, Wayne Booth and Walker Gibson, like Iser,
retain much that is formalist. Booth's "implied author," the "second self the author creates" who molds "the reader into the kind of person suited to appreciate . . . the book he is writing,"¹⁰ suggests that one model for the inter-action of text and reader concerns the relation between text and author. Gibson's "mock reader" who "assumes that set of attitudes and qualifies the language" the text asks him to accept¹¹ proposes another. Chapter I explores how both these frameworks shape the interpretation of Warren's work. In Democracy and Poetry, he admits that these structures are important in his work.

Even the work with the most objective and clearly delineated characters presented in action . . . exists only because there is a story behind the objective story; there is the story of the re-lation of the author to the work. It is not only the objective characters that serve as models of selfhood. As Rilke and Yeats put it, the making of the work represents a plunge into the "abyss of the self" . . . . But in the end as Henri Bergson once said, the work returns us--the readers, the spectators--"into our own presence." It wakes us to our own life.¹²

Chapters II through V examine various narrative and poetic strategies which engage text and reader in ways suggested by Warren's comment. These structures come from a selection of Warren's work because not all his novels and poetry openly demand reader involvement; Chapters III and V discuss those novels and poems which do not. Three of Warren's novels--Flood, All the King's Men, and The Cave--represent three different ways in which reader participation is sought. In Chapter II, I examine two novels whose
protagonists are storytellers. In *Flood*, Warren places a representative reader in the text to respond not only to the protagonist's writings but to the action in *Flood* itself; this "potential audience"\(^{13}\) indicates the kind of interaction expected between the reader and text. In *All the King's Men*, "telling" is a deliberate process performed by a first-person narrator not only to relate his experiences to an audience but through the confessional process to discover meaning. Chapter III discusses how the dialogue between the characters in *The Cave* exemplifies the interaction between text and reader defining the creative procedure and producing "right" interpretation. Chapter IV examines the role played by R. P. W. in Warren's narrative poem *Brother to Dragons*; R. P. W. provides the clearest example of Booth's "implied author" in Warren's work. And, in Chapter V, the association between lyrical and narrative impulses in Warren's poetry suggests a final way in which Warren sees "images of experience" represented in the text in relation to "experience"\(^{14}\) itself defined in the reading activity.

It is in this relation between image and experience that Warren's conception of self-knowledge and identity coincides with his aesthetic. Chapter I demonstrates that for Warren the interrelation between self and community involves the discovery of separation and isolation by an individual. But through this, one discovers, as Warren describes it in "Knowledge and the Image of Man," the "courage and clarity
of mind to envisage the tragic pathos of life" and this leads him to the realization that the tragic experience of separation is "universal and a corollary of man's place in nature."\(^{15}\) This provides a paradigm for Warren's aesthetic. He envisions a text as a private image of experience. It attempts to manipulate a reader into accepting its distinction as a representation of a universal process; in other words, the meaning of a work is determined by the isolated text, but its function concerns the audience's discovery of their complicity in this isolation. Ultimately, the difference between meaning and function places this discussion of Warren's work between strict formalist positions and the subjectively construed approaches of reader-oriented theorists. Iser makes a distinction between function and meaning which is applicable in this context.\(^{16}\) Iser believes that New Criticism represented a "turning point in literary interpretation" in that it rejected "the vital elements of the classical norm, namely, that the work is an object containing a hidden meaning of a prevailing truth." In place of the search for hidden meaning, New Criticism was concerned with "the elements of the work and their interaction,"--with what Iser calls the "function" operating in the text. But, in the discovery and eventual removal of ambiguities, New Criticism preserved the search for harmony that characterized the belief behind the concept of "hidden meaning." Many of these critics tried to define the function
of the literary text using interpretive notions governed solely by the belief in "prevailing truth." However, as Iser points out, "a function is not a meaning—it brings about an effect, and this effect cannot be measured by the same criteria as are used in evaluating the appearance of truth." This dissertation attempts to describe Warren's conception of the distinction between meaning and function, the relation between the "image of experience" and "experience," and its application in the study of Warren's work.
FOOTNOTES - INTRODUCTION


7 Holland, p. 816.


9 Iser, p. 151.


17 See Mailloux, pp. 50-51.
CHAPTER I

"THE HEART BUSINESS"

A discussion of the relationship Robert Penn Warren envisions between his audience and his work can begin with a brief look at the differences two of his characters make as readers of the same story. At one point in *Flood*, Warren's eighth novel, there is a conversation between Brad Tolliver, the novel's protagonist, and Leontine Purtle, Brad's fanciful lover for a time. They are discussing Brad's first book—a collection of stories entitled *I'm Telling You Now*—which chronicles Brad's experiences in his hometown of Fiddlersburg. He has just returned to Fiddlersburg after a long absence; Leontine has spent her entire life there. Because she is blind, Leontine has had to listen to a record of Brad's work from "Books for the Blind" and she tells him about its effect on her:

> When I played your record I didn't feel lost anymore, somehow. It was like I had never before known where I was . . . Your record, it sort of made me know where I was. I know you didn't call the place Fiddlersburg . . . but it was Fiddlersburg, and I knew where I was for the first time. Then everything felt different. It was like I knew people were alive and something was going on inside them. And inside me, too. I had always felt frozen inside . . . and all of a sudden I wasn't . . . . That record, that story—it made me want to reach out and touch the world."

1
Brad claims that the stories, specifically the one they are discussing (from which the title of the collection comes), were "just made . . . up" (231). But Leontine replies, "That doesn't matter. That you just made it up. What matters is that it was in your heart to make it up that way" (231). Brad reacts harshly to this.

Listen here, Leontine . . . . That is crap. You read it somewhere and it is crap. I've been in the business a long time, and the fact is when you are writing a story or doing a movie script, you hit some logic, and it is that logic, not the heart business, that drives you to a certain end. It is like chess . . . (231).

There are a number of ways to examine this exchange. The two reactions to "I'm Telling You Now" express the relative distance that each character feels from Fiddlersburg. And if we think of Fiddlersburg in a more universal way, as representative of the past in general or as the facts of one's existence, the passage can be seen as marking the relative degrees of difficulty Brad and Leontine are having in recognizing and dealing with the reality of their particular existences. What we say about them in this regard, however, depends on how they have responded to a text. That their responses do not correspond points out the unique quality of their characters; but in their differences we can also begin to understand correctly the role the reader plays in Warren's work.

Warren makes clear that Brad's misreading is characteristic of the confusion he experiences on all levels of his existence throughout the novel. Although Brad has
become a successful Hollywood scriptwriter, acclaimed by "millions," his perception of his own work does not line up with that of those readers whose specific responses are given in Flood. The critic, Barnett Guttenberg, traces Brad's progress as a "flight from the reality of involvement"; as a writer, Brad's books and movie scripts mirror this flight. In the early stories, such as "I'm Telling You Now," Brad's work shows a concern with integrating the individual with the community. In "I'm Telling You Now" this is reflected in the protagonist's attempt to integrate his past with his present; he returns home to bid farewell to a father figure--he has come back to tell him "now" what he did not tell him when he left. He is too late to make the connection, however, for the father figure has died in his absence. His attempt to find a bridge between past and present demonstrates, at least to one reader--Leontine--a sincere, heartfelt concern for humanity. Reactions to his later work show how Brad drifts from this concern.

His next work, The Dream of Jacob, is a movie script which takes its material from incidents in the history of Fiddlersburg. As with the stories in I'm Telling You Now, Brad alters the facts--the story is "made . . . up." But there remains a significant difference between Brad's first and second works. Maggie Tolliver, Brad's sister, describes her response to the movie: "A man like Jibby [the acquaintance of Brad's in Fiddlersburg from whom he draws his character] comes in and marries a girl like Rita
[Jibby's wife] ... and treats her badly and gets killed by an old colored man on the place who is devoted to the girl and won't say why he killed the husband--dear God, it was an awful movie" (250). The reason why it is "awful," as Guttenberg points out, is that Brad has replaced the human element with the melodramatic; in other words, what he "made ... up" has lost some fundamental contact with the reality of the actual incident. Maggie's description of what really happened to Jibby and Rita narrates a more human drama. He "wasn't killed. He just drifted to nothing. He didn't know anything about farming. He threw money around and mortgaged Rita's land, and ... lost the place and they moved. She looked like an old woman by then" (250).

Another important reader of Brad's work in Flood is Yasha Jones, the Hollywood producer who has brought Brad back to Fiddlersburg to make a movie of its final days. Yasha chose Brad not because of his success as a script writer but because "long ago he had written a little book"--I'm Telling You Now. This is reflected in his response to Brad's script for the movie. When he submits it, Brad believes that there is not one "bolt out of place or a nut loose" (304); Yasha agrees, saying, "You have done nothing more expert ... " (341). But Yasha rejects the script; the "logic" of it, he explains, is not enough: "... it is not you. It is only the you who is an expert ... .

What matters is the feeling. Where in this is the feeling
we want . . . Where is Fiddlersburg?" (342-3).

This question is a central one for Brad throughout the novel and because he cannot answer it, because he has not been able to resolve it in his life, he has been unable to work it into his art. Brad's difficulty with locating Fiddlersburg, with integrating his past and present, can be seen in his reaction to Yasha's criticism. He believes that he has been "defeated by the clamor of factuality" (392) which will not allow the machine-like structure of his script. But what he refuses to understanding by making this statement is the significance of the relationship between "factuality" and what is "made . . . up." He is not able to assimilate these two until he discovers the way to integrate himself, his own ideas of himself, with the world, with the facts that define his existence; this begins when he realizes, in the last few pages of Flood, a new relationship with his past. He stands on "the edge of the waters that would cover Fiddlersburg" and acknowledges that "this is his country" (440). His final thoughts, italicized in the text, suggest the importance of this awareness: he thinks, "there is no country but the heart" (440), and the reference to "heart" here is provocative. In his discussion with Leontine, Brad rejected "the heart business" as the logic in "I'm Telling You Now"; he rejects the human element as the driving force of any narrative. But the distance between Brad and Fiddlersburg, between the present and the past, is exactly the distance between the "logic" of "The
Dream of Jacob" and the "heart" of "I'm Telling You Now." We never see Brad bridge this distance in his writing, but the distance between his isolated self and the world is reduced in an almost mystical union with nature which he seems to achieve in the last paragraph of Flood when "for a moment he mistook the brightness of moisture in his eyes for the flicker of the sun . . ." (440).

Leontine's response to "I'm Telling You Now," her acceptance of the "heart" of the story, parallels Brad's response to the events of his life at the end of Flood. The difference between Leontine's and Brad's response to "I'm Telling You Now," however, shows the former's ability to identify with the attempt in the story to incorporate past with present; her response allows the story to represent her relationship to the world. For Leontine, the Fiddlersburg in the book becomes her actual Fiddlersburg. She has spent her entire life in the town but reading Brad's stories made her know "where I was for the first time." This lead her from a sense of herself as isolated, "frozen inside," to an awareness that she was "alive"--and that there was "something going on in" others around her. From a feeling of separateness, she desires "to reach out and touch the world." Leontine's response typifies the right relation between text and reader for Warren: the "heart" of a story comes when an author assimilates "factuality" with what his creative impulses imagine as appropriate, assimilates these in such a way that a reader can identify
with the text as if it represented his world fully and in that acceptance his own real world is transformed.

But the readings in Flood indicate only the perimeters of the relationship Warren conceives between reader and text—"the heart business." To fully appreciate the complexity of this interaction, we need first to see that the relationship between reader and texts is not unlike the association between man and nature, self and community, that characterizes much of his work. In "Knowledge and the Image of Man," Warren emphasizes the connection between art and knowledge; he says, "poetry . . . is knowledge" (244), and "knowledge is simply a way of saying man's right to exist, to be himself, to be a man" (237). "The right to exist . . . assumes the right to knowledge" and "assumes the right because only by knowledge does man achieve his identity" (241). But the method by which one obtains this knowledge, and thereby his identity, is an intricate and difficult one. "Knowledge and the Image of Man" serves as a treatise which outlines this procedure

. . . a man . . . is . . . in the world with continual and intimate interpenetration, an inevitable osmosis of being which in the end does not deny but affirms his identity. It affirms it, for out of this interpenetration, this texture of relations, man creates new perspectives, discovers new values—that is, a new self—and so identity is a continually emerging, an unfolding . . . (241).

But, as Warren points out, man's "interpenetration" with the world is not an easily realized one.
Despite this osmosis of being . . . a man's process of self-definition means that he distinguishes himself from the world and from other men. He distinguishes his primal instinctive sense of unity; he discovers separateness. In this process he discovers the pain of self-criticism and the pain of isolation (241).

But through "self-criticism," Warren continues, man achieves an "ideal of excellence" and this "implies a depersonalized communion"; through "Isolation" man attains a "courage and clarity of mind to envisage the tragic pathos of life" and this leads him to the realization that the tragic experience is "universal and a corollary of man's place in nature." Through an understanding of these, "a communion with man and nature" might be achieved. In many respects, Brad's development in *Flood* follows this outline.

Warren makes it clear that a procedure similar to the one outlined above characterizes the poetic process. He calls it "knowledge of form"; by this he means, on the strictly textual level, "the organic relation among all the elements of the work" (245). But he also stresses that form must include "those elements drawn from the actual world and charged with all the urgencies of actuality"; the form, he says, "is a vision of experience," experience that is "fulfilled and redeemed in knowledge" (245). And finally, "the form is known by creator or appreciator only by experiencing it . . ." (246). This last comment presumes that knowledge exists not only as an internal, text-centered, aspect in the poetic act itself, but that it might
be realized in the "experiencing" of that process. The text's formal validity as knowledge (for Warren, poetry is always a manifestation of the knowledge discussed above) begins with the work of art, but it is certified only as "creator or appreciator" undergo some type of involvement with it. In this respect, Leontine's "experience" with "I'm Telling You Now" parallels Brad's growth in Flood; her involvement with the story leads her to a "new Knowledge" and a "new self."

For Warren, the distinction between creator and appreciator is a muddled but significant one. At times, he seems to say that a creator has, at best, an ambivalent link with those who read him. In a recent interview, Marshall Walker asked Warren if he thinks "the writer might regard himself as a curer of souls in the twentieth century." Warren's response suggests a shying away from an association of this nature.

I think he had better not take himself too seriously in that role. The soul he ought to cure is his own, put it that way. Literature springs from the attempt to inspect one's own soul rather than from an attempt to cure the souls of others, although it happens that good literature may cure souls.  

Elsewhere, he has stated that a writer is someone "trying to order his world . . . make it comprehensible to himself in an emotional way, as well as in a philosophical way." These comments directed certain critics, some implicitly, others, such as Hillary Devries, more explicitly, to conclude that "Warren . . . writes poems only for himself, no
audience in mind." But, in a way that is similar to the program described in "Knowledge and the Image of Man," Warren says that the individuation an author feels in creating a work can, at times, shepherd him into a cooperative relationship with his audience. When asked if he finds that "audience response" shapes his delivery, Warren responded in an interview with William C. Forrest and Cornelius Novelli that:

It does indeed. One thing is really important to me. I'd like to sum it up like this: You know the poem--that is your poem--and you can tell what's wrong with the poem, what needs revision, before you get to the line, because of the response. Very often I've done a lot of little revision on the spot; once the poem is being read I feel that this movement is wrong or that word is wrong. And then I quickly scoot it down on the margin, and it will be corrected when it gets into book form or in the next edition. The sense of an audience is very important to a writer--how the response goes. Not how a friend says, "Oh, isn't that nice": I don't mean that. I mean a real impersonal audience.8

Here, Warren indicates that the writer's "sense of an audience" is both internalized and "real impersonal." Elsewhere in this interview he clarifies what he means, saying,

I think there's no such thing as a poem existing without a potential audience. I think that you make yourself an audience if you write the poem. You try to be a critical audience. You try to know how it would affect you if you weren't you . . . . Of course, the real central thing you are trying to do is make an object "right." But the only test of "rightness" is what your other self can make of it.9

In contrast to Devries' comment that Warren writes only for himself, there is the modification of what Warren calls "a
potential audience." For Warren, the literary object itself remains central and the important thing is to get it "right." Its "rightness," however, can only be measured through a response to it. That response, in this context, as it concerns the writing of a work, remains within the confines of the relationship between poet and poem, but there is the hint that a separation exists between literary object and its results. Certainly, Warren does not wish to be paired with Wimsatt's and Beardsley's "affective fallacy" which sees a confusion between the poem and its results; but Warren does take into account the effect on "a potential reader." That does not mean he abandons a formalist, text-centered position—only that he qualifies it in his own distinct way.

In his essay on Coleridge, "A Poem of Pure Imagination: An Experiment in Reading," Warren says that "the reader does not interpret the poem but the poem interprets the reader. We may say that the poem is the light and not the thing seen by the light." The "light," the poem itself, initiates the aesthetic process in Warren's view but the interaction between the "light" and the "thing" affected by it remains a complex one. For Warren, there is a proper relationship to the text—in Flood, Leontine's response to "I'm Telling You Now" was "right" and Brad's was not. Warren indicates that the appropriateness of a response to a poem involves, on the
one hand, the poet's success or failure "in the exercise of his creative control" and, on the other hand, the strengths or weaknesses in terms of experience, interest and intensity that a reader brings to a poem. But the "rightness" of Leontine's reaction suggests a more involved and active participation for "the thing seen by the light." She discovered in the text a relationship between herself and the world; it is this specific perception which deepens the association between text and audience.

In a discussion of Warren's later poetry, Monroe K. Spears has said that Warren "offers himself . . . as a representative man, accepting himself as part of the flesh of common humanity." The significance of this "representative" role for the reader of Warren can be seen in light of Wayne Booth's comments on the relationship between author and reader in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. About the author's representative function, Booth says,

As [an author] writes he creates not simply an ideal impersonal "man in general" but an implied version of "himself" that is different from the implied authors we meet in other men's works . . . whether we call this implied author an "official scribe" . . . it is clear that the picture the reader gets of this presence is one of the author's most important effects. However impersonal he may try to be, his reader will inevitably construct a picture of the official scribe who writes in this manner—and, of course, the official scribe will never be neutral toward all values. Our reactions to his various commit-ments will help determine our response to the work.
Booth's comments suggest that "man in general," "a representative man," displays a commitment to a set of principles. Elsewhere, Booth indicates that an "implied author" is "the sum of his own choices." A number of critics have seen Warren as an explicitly "moral writer," and his comments on Conrad in "The Great Mirage: Conrad and Nostromo" might well be cited as reflecting Warren's own aspirations as a writer. He says,

The philosophical novelist, or poet, is one for whom the documentation of the world is constantly striving to rise to the level of generalization about values, for whom the image strives to rise to symbol, for whom images fall into a dialectical configuration, for whom the urgency of experience, no matter how vividly and strongly experience may enchant, is the urgency to know the meaning of experience.

The representative role of Warren's narrators, then, is not merely in their depiction of experience but in their conscious urgency to know its meaning. "I'm Telling You Now" is representative; its action, its story-teller are "right," not because they describe historical, documented fact in Fiddlersburg, but because they reflect in some essential, even made up, way Fiddlersburg—the story, as Leontine said, "was Fiddlersburg."

Making the literary object "right" for Warren implies not only its formal correctness but its moral integrity.*

*In Understanding Fiction, Warren, along with Brooks, indicates that the two are never distinct. "The structure is not to be set over against the idea in any mechanical fashion. Rather, it is their first article of faith that the structure of a piece of fiction, in so far as the
Warren, as we have seen, believes that "rightness" in a text depends on what "your other self can make of it." In The Rhetoric of Fiction, Booth says that "every stroke" the author makes "implying his second self . . . will mold the reader into the kind of person suited to appreciate such a character and the book he is writing." The thrust of his comment indicates that the "second self," or "other self" as Warren calls it—the self that the author creates—defines the "rightness" of the work. Booth's comment, however, suggests that the end of this process affects not only the text but also the reader. Warren addresses this issue in "Pure and Impure Poetry." In the essay, his formalist position—"the good poem must, in some way, involve resistances"—is tempered. Warren implies that these resistances are, at least in part, created by the reader's inclusion in the poem's process.

... it [the poem] must carry something of the context of its own creation; it must come to terms with Mercutio.

This is another way of saying that a good poem involves the participation of the reader; it must, as Coleridge puts it, make the reader into "an active creative being."

Earlier in the essay Warren had referred to Mercutio as the necessary force of "reason, wit, complication" which provides context for the pure sentiment spoken by a Romeo or Juliet. Discussions of this passage generally acknowledge the fiction is successful, must involve a vital and functional relationship between the idea and other elements in the structure—plot, style, character and the like" (xvii).
that Mercutio is strictly textual. In his analysis, Hazard Adams says, "If the poet suppresses him [Mercutio] in the poem, it is likely that he will appear outside in the form of a literary critic and ridicule its [the poem's] single-minded sentimentality." But Warren's description of Mercutio as "another way of involving the participation of the reader" suggests that, although one Mercutio must exist in the text, the text itself demands another Mercutio outside it, not as a source of ridicule but as a means of validation.

In *Democracy and Poetry*, Warren claims that "the poetic act, whatever the content, represents an assertion of the self," and explains what he means by self as: "... in individuation, the felt principle of significant unity." With this as a basis he submits that the individual alone "can have no self ... . The self is possible only in the community" and further, "authenticity is merely one pole of action, and the other is a sense of objective standards, just as the individual is one pole of existence and the other is society." These comments parallel the relationship between the self and community we have noted in "Knowledge and the Image of Man." But in *Democracy and Poetry*, Warren positions this concept in the context of "the poetic act,"

The "made thing" becomes, then, a vital emblem of the struggle toward the achieving of the self, and that mark of struggle, the human signature, is what gives the aesthetic
organization its numinousness. It is what makes us feel that the "made thing" nods mysteriously at us, at the deepest personal inward self.21

What characterizes the text is "the human signature" and it is precisely this that relates the text to the reader. In a later passage, Warren explains how "the human signature" becomes incorporated in a work and the nature of its "mysterious" nod at the reader.

Even the work with the most objective and clearly delineated characters presented in action . . . exists only because there is a story behind the objective story; there is the story of the relation of the author to the work. It is not only the objective characters that serve as models of selfhood. As Rilke and Yeats put it, the making of the work represents a plunge into the "abyss of the self" . . . . But in the end as Henri Bergson once said, the work returns us—the readers, the spectators—"into our own presence." It wakes us to our own life.22

Warren's "adventure in selfhood" in much of his work, like Brad's in "I'm Telling You Now," serves as a model for the character's adventure—or in Booth's terms, for the "implied author." In a similar way, the reader confirms the action, justifies the text, through his response; Leontine recognizes the humanity in "I'm Telling You Now" because she sees that the individual action, characters and narrator serve a representative function—one that identifies a common humanity.

For Warren, poetry is "a sovereign antidote for passivity" and although the text remains the catalyst, he indicates that the reader's participation becomes necessary;
the reader validates the representative role of the text.

His identification with the medium allows "individuation"
to become the "felt principle of significant unity."

For the basic fact about poetry is that it
demands participation from the secret physical
echo in muscle and nerve that identifies us
with the medium, to an imaginative enactment
that stirs the deepest recesses where life-
will and value reside. 23

We find a similar statement in Homage to Theodore

Dreiser:

No fiction can, indeed, provide total
realization—and if it could do so it would
paradoxically fail as fiction—for the power
of fiction lies in the involvement of the
reader's imagination to fulfill the "untotal"
realization, to participate in the act of
creation. 24

But how exactly does the reader become engaged in the
"poetic act?" In Homage, Warren admits that "the passions
and curiosities" that keep "the reader going" in The Golden
Bowl are not the same ones that keep him going in Moby
Dick. 25 At the root of these various "passions and
curiosities," however, is the power of the different texts
to involve the reader in their system of values. Booth
says that "a successful reading . . . must eliminate all
distance between the essential norms of . . . [the] implied
author and the norms of . . . [the] postulated reader." 26

In Warren's terminology, the poem still "makes" the reader
but, as the reader accepts values contained in the text,
that text achieves a universality it did not have before
the reading process. One of Warren's pervasive moral
concerns, as we have seen in *Democracy and Poetry* and "Knowledge and the Image of Man," is with the relationship between self and community. Within an aesthetic context, Warren attempts to define this association by reducing the area between text and reader. As Warren suggests, this is done for the author through the projection of an "other self" separated from the real author; in the same way, in Warren's direct addresses to the reader, his use of the second personal pronoun "you," and other devices we will discuss, he attempts to create a reader which the real audience can accept as themselves. Walker Gibson calls this reader a "mock reader" who "assumes, for the sake of experience, that set of attitudes and qualities which the language asks you to assume, and, if . . . he cannot assume them . . . throws the book away." 27 Gibson continues that "a bad book is a book in whose mock reader we discover a person we refuse to become, a mask we refuse to put on, a role we will not play."* In Warren's use of direct

*Real readers, says Gibson, try on roles that are offered to them. Gibson gives an example of this in his essay. He asks us to "consider the mock reader" in the opening paragraph from a book review of Malcolm Cowley's *The Portable Hawthorne*; the book review reads,

> Our thin self-lacerating and discontinuous culture automatically produces such uneasy collaborations as this one between Mr. Cowley and the hard-working scribe and oddly impressionable cultural sounding board, and the publishing industry with its concept of the "Portable." The Hawthorne who emerges has had such a bad fall between . . . cliches, that he appears almost as giddy and shattered as we . . . .

Gibson suggests that a number of "assumptions are being
address the reader is asked, "for the sake of the experience," to put on the mask that the narrator has created in the text. In keeping with Warren's formalist assumptions--"the poem is the light and not the thing seen by the light"--"Gibson's mock reader," as Jane Tompkins points out, "is purely textual but also directs attention away from the text toward the effect it produces . . . ."\(^2\) In this way the text gives the reader's experience its shape, but the reader validates the material of the text. In the same way that "the self" was "possible only in the community" in *Democracy and Poetry*, the text becomes interesting only in its relation to an audience. Gibson contends that the "mock reader" allows a critic to listen to the speaker addressing the reader and, while listening to the discussion, come to know the author's strategies as well as the assumptions he wants the critic to accept. In another comment on Gibson's piece, Jane Tompkins summarizes the implications of this theory.

The concept of the mock reader allows the critic to dramatize the social attitudes implicit in the text by reconstructing the kinds of understandings and complicities passed back and forth between speaker and mock reader. He characterizes this conversation thus:

> You and I, in brave rebellion against the barbarousness of a business culture, can see this book for what of course it is--an "uneasy collaboration" and a defamation of that fine Hawthorne you and I know and love. We would not be content, would we, to be mere scribes"; how stupid other people are . . . .

Gibson says that the real reader of this review may not have
narrators and mock readers arrive at over the heads of characters and quite apart from the manifest content of the prose. 30

In Warren, the direct address is a textual matter; that is, we are asked to analyze it as an aspect of the literary object. But, while part of the text, it shifts attention away from the text toward the way it shapes the reader.

Warren's use of direct address is complex; in subsequent chapters we will see many of its manifestations. For the present, I would like to point out a few of the approaches critics of Warren have taken regarding his use of "you" and then suggest, through a few examples, an alternative to these which is in keeping with the theoretical procedure I have outlined above.

Few of Warren's critics have explored the interrelatedness between reader and text in any systematic way. John Edward Hardy, in his review of You, Emperors, and Others: Poems 1957-1960 entitled "You, Robert Penn Warren" represents a small number of critics who believe Warren's use of "you" awakens "a fatal antagonism in the reader who has any decent measure of personal vanity." 31 Hardy considers Warren's techniques for involving the reader in You, Emperors "Unconvincing posturings." 32 Another group of critics, best represented by Victor Strandberg in his two

seen The Portable Hawthorne, "and if he takes his own mock-reader-personality seriously enough, he probably never will." 28
book-length studies of Warren, *A Colder Fire: The Poetry of Robert Penn Warren* and *The Poetic Vision of Robert Penn Warren*, consider Warren's use of the second personal pronoun not primarily as an address to the reader but as a designation of one aspect of the speaker's psyche. In *A Colder Fire*, at one point, Strandberg compares what Warren is trying to do in *You, Emperors* with Thornton Wilder's drama--each, he says, tries to extend the playing area of his works into the audience's realm. But Strandberg does very little with this notion when he comes to analyze the individual poems. Instead, he sees, among other things, a division evident in much of the poetry between what he terms the "clean" and "dirty" selves. He believes that "in the running warfare between the conscious ego, usually designated 'you' and the shadow self" that Warren sides with the shadow self. In *The Poetic Vision*, Strandberg stresses Warren's interest, particularly in the later poetry, in two functions of the unconscious mind, intuition and dream, which aid in the discovery of a unified identity. Although Strandberg's approach cannot be overlooked, many of the uses of direct address in Warren's poetry and, for that matter, his novels do not fit his critical patterns.

Monroe K. Spears offers another alternative. He says, "Warren has always been fond of the second personal pronoun, his "you" being a way of declaring the common ground between reader and poet." Spears continues in his review,
"The Latest Poetry of Robert Penn Warren," that the poems in *You, Emperors* and *Incarnations* envision "all human flesh united in communion and accepted by the poet and reader."³⁵ But Spears's analysis concentrates primarily on the poet's acceptance; in the first sequence of poems in *Incarnations*, "Islands of Summer," for example, the poet, writes Spears, must discover the "ties of the flesh--of his parents and his past. Accepting his own fatherhood . . . he accepts the human condition, including the mystical relationship between fathers and children."³⁶ Implicit in this comment and throughout Spears's review is the notion that this personal struggle somehow represents one which Warren's audience might accept as their own. The inscription to *Incarnations*--"Yet now our flesh is the flesh of our brethren"--points to Warren's interest in interrelatedness. But that concern, expressed in many of the poems in this volume as well as poems in other books of Warren's poetry before and after *Incarnations*, asks for a more explicit acceptance on the reader's part; an acceptance that acknowledges the significance of the value that "our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren" as well as validating it by incorporating it, at least "for the sake of the experience," into the reader's own system of values outside the text. "Our flesh" refers to the flesh of both speaker and reader in *Incarnations*; the poetry asks the reader to acknowledge this union. When he does, each personal element
in the work takes on a more catholic function; it represents a battle both speaker and reader go through.

A number of Warren's major works, in fiction as well as in poetry, lead the reader to an acceptance of universal complicity in this way. Just as his speakers and characters are asked to lose the sanctity of their individual selves, so the reader is requested to assume a role in this inclusive process. In essence, this defines "the heart business" that Leontine recognized in Brad's work; the ability to see reflected in the text one's own world in such a way that the values in that work give a new shape and meaning to the world. In Warren, this process, as "Knowledge and the Image of Man" and Democracy and Poetry point out, is a difficult and painful one. On one level Warren's creative career might be characterized as a working and reworking of this reshaping activity in an effort to find what Strandberg calls an "ultimate oneness" which leads to "bedrock identity." 37

Discovering this "oneness," however, involves, as we have seen, a fall from innocence and an acceptance of the often terrifying make-up of the individual psyche and the natural world. In "The Great Mirage," Warren's comments on Conrad's work again seem applicable to his own; he says, "man is precariously balanced in his humanity between the black inward abyss of himself and the black outward abyss of nature." 38 In much of Warren's work the fall occurs
with the knowledge of the transitoriness of nature and the fear of death which disrupts the continuity and unity of life; the awareness of the "black inward abyss of himself" involves man's discovery of a disconnected psyche and an unconscious, "shadow," self whose actions are, at times, uncontrollable and unsettling. These force man, as "Knowledge and the Image of Man" puts it, to "distinguish himself from the world and from other men. He disintegrates his primal instinctive sense of unity, he discovers separateness" (241). Although Warren's early poetry concerns itself more with division--with only desperate and external attempts to find solution through dreams of escape and false unions such as death wishes--much of the poetry after _Thirty-six Poems_ and virtually all of the novels, from _Night Rider_ through _A Place to Come to_, are equally concerned with the strenuous task of inching away from despairing isolation and toward some definition of communion and hence "bedrock identity" for the individual.

Not all of Warren's work follows the procedure I have outlined in this chapter, but a number of his poems, novels and plays do, and these are the subjects of the following chapters. But before providing a detailed analysis of how "the heart business" functions in these, a brief, specific study of the way discovering "oneness," not only within the text but outside it, involving the reader, shapes my readings is in order. An explication of one poem, "A

A significant aspect of "A Garland For You" involves its structure; it is one long poem composed of several shorter ones. Poetic sequences in verse and interpolated stories in novels are devices that Warren has used to undermine the sovereignty of meaning in any one part of the text. In his discussion of Warren's poetry, Monroe K. Spears says, "In terms of sequence . . . the poems are not autonomous but depend for part of their meaning on the context of surrounding poems or the place in the sequence and volume." On one level, these devices complement Warren's demand in "Pure and Impure Poetry" that "the poet proves his vision by submitting it to the fires of irony." But, on another level, while many of the poems that function in series or many of the novels in which two or more stories function to complement one another work through resistance and balance to provide a single unified effect, certain pieces, or at least aspects of these, are relatively loosely constructed. These works exist more as processes than clearly-defined entities, and they parallel the vision expressed at the end of Democracy and Poetry where Warren says "I suppose I see life, for all our yearning and struggle toward primal or supernatural unity as being a more or less oscillating process." The form of his work, the poetic sequence and interpolated story, which stresses interdependence parallels this process; it demands unity as an end
but without the strict adherence to the structural requirements that guide his more formal work.

The "oscillating process" includes not only the struggle back and forth between individual poems within a sequence but pushes beyond the restrictions of the text to include an oscillating between reader and text that Warren's rhetoric encourages. "R.P.W," one of the voices in *Brothers to Dragons*, attempts to define this oscillation when he explains to "Jefferson" what kind of problems he faced when he began assembling the material for "the tale in verse and voices." He intended to "make a ballad" of the incident but discovered that the form was not "adequate to the material." The difficulty was that the structure needed to be more inclusive; the fact, the ax murder, was explainable, he says,

... If explainable at all, by our most murderous Complicities, and our sad virtue, too.

No, the action is not self-contained, but contains Us too, and is contained by us, and is Only an image of the issue of our most distressful self-definition.

And so to put the story in a ballad Would be like shovelling a peck of red-hot coals In a croker sack to tote them down the road To start a fire in the neighbor's fireplace. You won't get far with them, even if you run No, the form was not adequate to the material. 41

In order "to start the fire in a neighbor's fireplace" the form had to open up in two ways: the ballad form had to give way to a poem of disembodied voices; and the tale had to be designed to include Warren's "neighbor," the reader.
In "A Garland for You," the interdependence of eight poems (five poems in Selected Poems: 1923-1975) is further enriched by an appeal for the reader's participation. As each poem in this sequence adjusts the meaning of "A Garland for You," the reader's relationship to the poem gets reshaped. The final lines of the last poem in the sequence suggest an intersecting point for all poems. The speaker of "The Self That Stares" is gazing into a mirror when a "dawning awareness" comes over him that "you may not live again" (p. 19). The lesson to be learned from this recognition of death's reality is contained in the last line: "to recognize / the human self naked in your own eyes" (p. 19). All poems in this sequence revolve around discovering the naked self; as Victor Strandberg points out, the poems are inter-textually related through an "impending identity crisis from which there is no escape." But, as the first poem in "A Garland for You," "Clearly About You," categorically states, this is a poem whose struggles are not only the speaker's but the reader's: "Whoever you are, this poem is clearly about you / For there's nothing else in the world it could be about" (p. 3). The headnote to "The Self That Stares," "John Henry said to the Captain, 'A Man ain't nothing but a man'," reemphasizes this concept that there is little or no distance between speaker and reader. This poem is clearly about the reader, about all men, because all must acknowledge that they "may not live
again" (p. 19). The opening line of "The Self That Stares" asks, "Have you seen that brute trapped in your eye . . ." (p. 19) and although "That brute" may be, as Strandberg points out, the unconscious part of the self that the speaker has tried to hide just as he has tried to avoid the acceptance of death, the address is also directed to an audience. It asks not only that the reader accept "That brute" in the speaker's eye but accept it in his own. The "mirror" that the speaker of the last poem commands us to "stare into," then, on one level at least, is the poem itself. We recognize in it, as Gibson had suggested, an image we can, for the experience of the poem, identify with; that image is a vision of our selves "naked." Making the same point, the first poem in the sequence uses a more active metaphor.

Burn this poem, though it wring its small hands and cry alack.
But no use, for in bed, into your pajama pocket,
It will creep, and sleep as snug as a field mouse in haystack,
And its heart to your heart all night make a feather-soft racket (p. 4).

The poems in between "Clearly About You" and "The Self That Stares," each in their own way, and each perhaps appealing differently to different readers, attempt, as Booth suggested, to "eliminate all distance between the essential norms" of the poem and the reader in order to get the audience "to recognize / the human self naked in your own eyes."
The headnote to the second poem in "A Garland for You," "Lullaby: Exercise in Human Charity and Self-knowledge," makes another attempt at inclusion; it is addressed to "Mr. and Mrs. North and South America . . . ." The first three stanzas continue in this vein; the first stanza begins, "Sleep, my dear, whatever your name is . . . ."; the second reads, "Sleep, my dear, whatever your face is . . . ."; and the third says, "Sleep, my dear, whatever your sex is . . . ." (p. 5). The first two stanzas indicate an identity intact: " . . . your sweet identity / Fills like vapor, pale in moonlight, all the infinite night sky" and "You are you, all will be clear" (p. 5). These early stanzas, while suggesting admission of an outside audience, read more like a monologue; the speaker, recognizing some division in his psyche, addresses the unfamiliar part of himself. The third stanza challenges the stability of the speaker's identity: "What need now to seek that contact / That shows self to itself as merely midnight's dearest artifact?" (p. 5). And the clarity of "you are you" dissolves, in the fourth stanza, into the question, "which are you?" At the same time the secure knowledge of self in the speaker seems to evaporate the voice in the poem reaches out to the reader. The question, "which are you," refers to these first four lines of the fourth stanza:

But are you she, pale hair wind-swept, Whose face night-glistened in sea fog? Or she, pronouncing joy, who wept In that desperate noontide by the cranberry bog? (p. 6)
On one level, the speaker is trying to discover which of these he is. But he conceives of his role as a representative one. In the fifth stanza he indicates where speaker's and reader's paths cross.

For I who bless can bless you only
For the fact our histories
Can have no common bond except the lonely
Fact of humanness we share
As now, in place and fate disparate, we breathe
the same dark pulsing air.
Where you lie now, far or near,
Sleep, my dear (p. 6).

His struggle is a personal one; in the final stanza he says, "Whoever I am, what I now bless / Is your namelessness" (p. 6). This "namelessness" is, on the one hand, the speaker's inability to answer the question "which are you"—to acquire self-knowledge. But, on the other hand, it is the recognition that this is a "Fact of humanness we share"—a fact both speaker and reader share. As Warren says in "Knowledge and the Image of Man," in separateness man achieves a "courage and clarity of mind to envisage the tragic pathos of life" and this leads him to the realization that the tragic experience is "universal." In "Lullaby" that universality is recognized by the inclusion of the reader into the speaker's personal struggle for identity. Here, self-knowledge is limited to merely the awareness of the difficulty of discerning identity; by accepting and blessing the namelessness with the speaker, the reader also acknowledges this burden.

"The man in the gray flannel suit" in the third poem
of the sequence, "Man in the Street," in some respects, represents an everyman. He sees "facts" he "can't refute" and "things that can't help but hurt" (p. 7); his voice is a universal one, listing the maladies of the world to the poem's speaker: "I see . . . Winners and losers, / Pickers and choosers, / Takers, refusers, / Users, abusers, / . . . Jolly good fellows, / Glad-handers of hellos, / Fat windbags and bellows, / Plumpers of pillows . . . / Backers and fillers, / Pipers and stealers, / Healers and killers, / Ticklers and feelers; / and I go to prepare a place for you, / For this location will never do" (pp. 7-8). The "you" here is an address to the speaker of the poem as well as the reader from the "man in the street." He rejects the "facts" of the world—"this location will never do"—and seeks another. Where that search takes speaker and audience is to "Switzerland," the fourth poem of "A Garland for You."

The headnote to this poem says, " . . . world-mecca for seekers of pleasure and health . . . ," suggesting an alternative location to the world of fact seen in the previous poem. But we soon learn that this escape is a dubious one. Here the "half-destroyed bodies . . . retire inside the appropriate head, / To fondle, like childhood's stuffed bear, the favorite fallacy" (p. 9). In the third stanza an address to "you" indicates that this is a place we know: "Here are many old friends you have known from long, long back, / Though of course under different names and with
different faces" (p. 9). The speaker suggests a stronger identification with the place after he lists several of those who have travelled to the place. He introduces the notion that we may have met them in "other resorts," perhaps even "In that high, highly advertised Switzerland of your own heart." Those travellers the speakers lists are those he has seen trying to escape.

The aging alcoholic you once knew in San Diego . . . 
There's the sweet young divorcee whose teacher once said she should write.
There's the athlete who stares in himself in the glass, by the hour.
There's the old man who can't forgive, and wakes in the night:

Forgive--forgive what? To remember is beyond his power (p. 9).

But these are only examples; the speaker indicates that we have seen them, or others like them, in ourselves. The benediction in the last stanza, then, serves as prayer for the "seekers of pleasure and health" listed in the poem, in the speaker's "heart," as well as those outside it in the "highly advertized Switzerland" of every reader's heart.

O God of the steinbock's great sun-leap--into Ice-spike in ice-chasm--
Let down thy strong hand to all who their fevers destroy
And past all their pain, need, greed, lip-biting, and spasm,
Deliver them all, young and old, to thy health, named joy (p. 10).

The fifth poem in the sequence, "A Real Question Calling for Solution," uses the second person pronoun in a way which recalls Booth's edict that "the author . . . creates an image of himself and another image of his reader."46
The speaker of the poem addresses a second self—a recollected self, a younger self—in a way that also makes the reader that second self. On one level, the content of the poem seems private—the memories of running a "mile before breakfast" and reading "Virgil two hours after lunch" are the speaker's personal thoughts. But their function is representative also; they are memories of a time when things were "much better" and they are touchstones in the poem for all who read it to identify with. The third and fourth and fifth stanzas of "A Real Question" illustrate the shifting sand between private and communal.

When you slept on a board you found your back much better.
When you took the mud baths you found that verse came easy.
When you slept with another woman you found that the letter
You owed your wife was a pleasure to write, gay now and teasy.

There once was a time when you thought you would understand
Many things, many things, including yourself, and learn Greek,
But light changes old landscape, and your own hand
Makes signs unseen in the dark, and lips move but do not speak.

For given that vulture and vector which is the stroke
Of the Clock absolute on the bias of midnight, memory
Is nothing, is nothing, not even the memory of smoke
Dispersed on windless ease in the great fuddled head of the sky (pp. 11-12).

There is a formal rhythm and conventional rhyme scheme in these lines balanced against a personal subject matter, open tone and direct address; the individual aspect of the speaker's recollections is balanced intellectually so that
"When you slept on a board you found your back much better" becomes "There once was a time when you thought you would understand / Many things . . . ." In a similar way, by the use of the personal "you," the speaker makes an image of his younger self and at the same time he asks the reader to identify with that image. "There once was a time when you thought you would understand many things . . . ." universalizes the private moments the speaker recalls. If "A Real Question" works as a poem, it works because it succeeds in creating an image the reader can accept as his own. The last stanza, which is a paradox of despair and playful hope, is heartfelt because we have recognized the split in the speaker's self as our own and

There is only one way, then, to make things hang together,
Which is to accept the logic of dream and avoid
Night air, politics, French sauces, autumn weather,
And the thought that, on your waking, identity
may be destroyed
(p. 12).

The sixth poem, "The Letter about Money, Love, or Other Comfort, If Any," follows the "logic of dream" that "A Real Question" has asked us to accept. The speaker explains that "the trust" of delivering a letter was "thrust" at him "so many years back" when he was at a more innocent stage in life, "before seven wars, nine coup d'etats, and the deaths of friends and friendships . . . ." (p. 13). It was also before he had discovered that he had a "passion, like a disease, for truth." On one level, "The Letter,"
like "Clearly About You" and "The Self That Stares," is explicitly concerned with the poetic process. The headnote to this poem comes from St. John's Gospel and reads, "In the beginning was the Word," suggesting the possibility that what was "thrust" at the speaker in his years of innocence was the task of writing. The frantic chasing of "you" that takes place in "The Letter" involves, on one hand, the speaker's search to become a poet; he follows his second self through his often grisly and amoral adventures because to deliver the letter, to become an artist, he must learn to accept this side of the natural order. On the other hand, delivering the letter also means presenting the poem to the reader—taking the audience through the same bestial side of things the speaker must go through. The nightmarish quality of this poem, evoked by its one long sentence, four pages long, may result from the fact that pursuer and pursued are one. The poem is both task and message for hunter and hunted; it involves the awareness of, and participation in, the natural state, "the high rubble of the world's rack." The letter is finally delivered—the speaker says, "though I've never seen your face and have fulfilled the trust . . . ," and we know that the poem the speaker has been writing and we have seen reading is completed. The speaker has found and accepted his second self and, in a similar way, the reader is presented with that fact in the poem. There is a fusion between
pursuer and pursued, between speaker's selves and reader, in the midst of "the high rubble of the world's rack."

Acquiring this knowledge of nature's condition means accepting the "logic of dream," the fall from innocence, but also a "new Knowledge." The speaker experiences a "kind of grace," as "Knowledge and the Image of Man" puts it, at the end of "The Letter."

I stand, bewildered, breath-bated and lame, at the edge of a clearing, to hear as first birds stir, life lift now night's hasp, then see, in first dawn's drench and drama, the snow peak go gory, and the eagle will unlatch crag-clasp, fall, and at breaking of wing-furl, bark glory, and by that new light I shall seek the way, and my peace with God . . . (p. 16).

"Arrogant Law," the seventh poem in "A Garland for You," like "The Letter," has a speaker concerned with facing "the high rubble of the world's rack," but here no blessed moment results. The definition of arrogant law is developed in the three stanzas of the poem by posing three different situations to "you." As in "A Real Question," the address to "you" functions on at least two levels: it recalls personal moments in the speaker's life—the events mentioned, hunting at dawn, standing on the gunwale of a ship, lying with a lover at night, standing beside the bed of a dying father, are quite specific; at the same time, the address asks the reader to either recall similar moments or accept these as paradigms for various activities on which the principle of arrogant law operates. The question in the
first stanza asks,

Have you stood on the gunwale and eyed blaze of sky,  
Then with blaze blazing black in your inner eye,  
Plunged--plunged to break the anchor's deep hold  
On rock, where undercurrents thrill cold? (p. 17).

The image here, although more abstract than in the two subsequent stanzas, suggests that one aspect of arrogant law involves division--the plunge from the "blaze of sky" to "Where undercurrents thrill cold." The second stanza characterizes the division as "desolate." Despite the idyllic setting presented in this stanza--"at night, by willows," two lovers listening to "the stream stumble, moon-drunk, at its shallows"--the speaker looks into his lover's eyes and senses "you'd never know what she then thought of." The final stanza sees this separation, this isolation, as more final; the arrogant law is the severing of time itself, past from present, characterized by the death of a father. "Arrogant Law" is the severest of the poems in "A Garland For You." Here, separation seems to remain absolute--except that there is an address to the reader, an address that suggests isolation is a fate shared by all. When this is acknowledged the despairing tone of the poem is assuaged, if only minimally.

As we can see from the discussion of "Arrogant Law," the inclusion of the reader into the poetic process can play a part in reshaping the poem's meaning. The harshness expressed in "Arrogant Law" is qualified by the admission of
"you" in the poem; the picture of separation is bleak but the way back, through an awareness that the tragic experience is universal, materializes as at least a possibility.

"The heart business" in "A Garland For You" involves this shared acceptance of the tragic experience. The personal trials of the speakers in the poem provide a text; they are, as Warren said in his essay on Coleridge, "the light." But the luminescence of the light expands as it radiates out from the text; its image becomes the image of the reader and its private function becomes a universal, representative one. Just as the Fiddlersburg of I'm Telling You Now becomes the world for Leontine, so the personal conflicts of the speakers in "A Garland For You" become collective struggles for its readers.

Warren courts this association in a number of his works. And it is these that we will explore in the following chapters.
FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER ONE


2 Barnett Guttenberg, Web of Being (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1975), p. 120.

3 Guttenberg, p. 125.


6 Hilary DeVries, Houston Post, 4 April 1982, pp. 1AA, 15AA.

7 DeVries, p. 15AA.


9 Forrest, 328.


14 Booth, p. 75.


17 Booth, p. 89.

18 Robert Penn Warren, "Pure and Impure Poetry (1942)," in Selected Essays, p. 27.


22 Warren, Democracy and Poetry, p. 69.

23 Warren, Democracy and Poetry, p. 89.


25 Warren, Homage to Theodore Dreiser, p. 87.

26 Booth, p. 57.


28 Gibson, p. 266.


30 Tompkins, p. xi.

32 Hardy, p. 58.


35 Spears, p. 355.

36 Spears, p. 350.

37 Strandberg, *Colder Fire*, p. 15.


39 Spears, p. 349.


46 Booth, p. 139.
CHAPTER II

THE PRIVATE AND PUBLIC WORLDS OF FLOOD
AND ALL THE KING'S MEN

... every man is an index to you and you are an index to every man. Index faces index. ¹

Near the end of Flood, Calvin Fiddler tells Brad Tolliver, "... there is no you except in relation to all the unthinkableness the world is" (p. 412). For Calvin, who is serving a life sentence for murder, the statement must have special meaning. A broader significance, however, underlies his words—a notion which characterizes most of Warren's work and is of particular interest when reading two of his novels, Flood and All the King's Men.

Central to Warren's writing in general and these novels in particular (and implicit in Calvin's statement) is Warren's concept in "Knowledge and the Image of Man" that a "continual and intimate interpenetration"² must be established with the world if individual identity is to be realized. In an essay on Flood, the critic Arthur Mizener, in his article "The Uncorrupted Consciousness," suggests how this idea is reflected in the novel. He comments:

One of the major points about the world Mr. Warren is making is that, however intimate a man becomes with the "black beast with the cold fur like hairy ice that drowse[s] in the deeper inner dark, or [wakes] to snuffle about" in his own nature, he
must accept--indeed love--the outer world where time moves.³

For Warren, this process kindles knowledge, living according neither to the half-truth that is the mind only with no reference to time (time usually meaning experience, the unavoidability of the past along with the bare facts of what is "now") nor the half-truth that Warren refers to, in aesthetic terms, as "naturalism"--experience without shape or form. A unique quality among Warren's work that is shared by Flood and All the King's Men is that, in each, a central figure involved in the quest to harmonize these "private and public worlds"⁴ is a writer. At one end of the spectrum, Brad Tolliver writes movie scripts in which the "logic" of form discounts experience and, at the other end, Jack Burden, who calls himself a "historian," at documenter, a disciple of facts, writes All the King's Men. The struggle both writers experience centers around an aesthetic balancing between idea and fact, form and content, and in each novel the relationships between writer and text/texts becomes a metaphor for the relationship he makes between himself and the world.

The progress they make toward knowledge is enacted through, or is at least contemporaneous with, their storytelling. The course they follow is outlined in Warren's poem, "Court-Martial," which Mizener discusses. In the poem a boy listens to his grandfather recount events from his past and the boy thinks,
... life is only a story
And death is only the glory
Of the telling of the story,
And the done and the to-be-done
In that timelessness were one,
Beyond the poor being done.

But after one particular "story," the hanging of some bush-whackers his grandfather had captured, the boy is shocked into the awareness that his grandfather's life did not, and does not, exist in a state of "timelessness." There is a vivid account of the gruesome hanging.

Each face outraged agape . . .
The heavy jaw askew,
Tongue out, out-staring eyes,
And the spittle not yet dry . . .

and the boy concludes that "the world is real. It is there."

The "glory" of the "done," the story with no relation to the experience, becomes, instead, the awareness that the "done" and the "being done" are not fictions to be played with but realities to be confronted. In this way, the poem demonstrates the relevance stories have for us: whatever their subject, they ask their audience to witness their own "being done"--their present situation--in the context of the story's "done"--to see the story as a reflection of the reality of their own world. In much more complex and various ways, the narratives of Flood and All the King's Men work to a similar effect. A struggle to harmonize the private "timelessness" of the "done" with the fact that "the world is there" is pursued by the writer-protagonist in each novel. Flood examines the limits of the timeless "glory" of the
story while *All the King's Men* examines the world as experience alone without a mind to shape it into the image of story. In each novel, the struggle forces the protagonists to abandon their hold on half-truths for a synthesis of the private world of story and the public world of time.

Much of the criticism surrounding these novels has focused on this unifying process, but the analyses have been almost entirely text-centered. Brad Tolliver and Jack Burden are usually seen attempting to discover their identity by either incorporating ideal visions of themselves (as Brad does) with the unavoidability that the past poses for them, or finding that the facts of the world can have no meaning from them unless (as in Jack's case) they envision a relation between events that has meaning. Such examinations trace what Warren refers to in *Democracy and Poetry* as the "plunge" into the "abyss of the self." Such plunges represent, says Warren, the author's struggle; it is presented, and should be explored, within the confines of the text. Still, he suggests, in the same passage, that " . . . in the end . . . the work returns us--the readers--into our own presence. It wakes us to our own life."  

Warren's comments in this passage indicate not only the importance of the text but the prominence of the effect it produces. And this recommends a critical strategy that can be applied to *Flood* and *All the King's Men*; it proposes an
interplay between text and reader. The relationship that Brad Tolliver and Jack Burden have with their texts parallels one their audiences can assume toward *Flood* and *All the King's Men*. The assimilations they make as writers between their private and public worlds, between idea and fact, are tested when the individual idea of each novel enters the public domain of an audience. The validity of the story then comes not only from the internal "logic" of the work--Brad's acceptance of Fiddlersburg or Jack's ability to see the "interrelatedness" of things--but how the story invites us to "assume for the sake of the experience that set of qualities which the language asks us to assume." In *Flood* we are asked to make quite different assumptions from those asked of us in *All the King's Men* but in each Warren makes plain the invitation.

The following chapter will attempt to analyze the difficult process of self-definition outlined in "Knowledge and the Image of Man" that Warren's characters go through in these two novels within the context of the audience's relationship to that procedure. Since, as we have seen in Chapter I, Warren is a "moral" writer who believes there is not only a right way to act but a proper aesthetic mode, one important aspect of analyzing *Flood* and *All the King's Men* will involve showing how the reader is guided to the right relationship with the text. For Warren, the text achieves its "rightness" through reader participation; he
asks his readers to accept the situation in the text as representative of their own. The narrative strategy of each novel might be characterized by the way each appeals for this involvement. In *Flood*, our complicity is probed through the relationship we develop with Brad as interpreted by another character in the novel, Yasha Jones; in *All the King's Men*, Jack Burden's use of the second-person pronoun relates what Warren referred to as "the potential audience," the "you" to the narrator.

I

The Indexes of Flood

Warren often creates two somewhat contradictory responses in his readers. On the one hand, he wants them to sympathize with the plight of a protagonist or protagonists within a given text—to sympathize, as I have suggested in Chapter I, so that they not only discover their own world represented in the text but feel that world transformed by the aesthetic experience. In this respect, Warren is not unlike many writers who, as Wayne Booth points out in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, attempt to "eliminate all distance between the essential norms of [their] implied author and the norms of the postulated reader." On the other hand, however, Warren wishes to establish a distance between his text and readers by indicating that the text is art and therefore separate from the audience. If we
consider Warren's comments about the "philosophical novelist" in his essay on Conrad in this light and as applicable to Warren's own work, we note that for him the presentation of "experience" in a story without the urge "to know the meaning of experience" places a work in the role of documentation. The compulsion "to know the meaning of experience" indicates, for Warren, the artistic role. Another comment from Booth in this context applies directly to Warren's aesthetic. Booth says,

... If an author wishes to take me on a long quest for the truth and finally presents it to me, I will feel the quest as boring triviality unless he gives me unambiguous signs of what quest I am on and the fact that I have found my goal when I get there ... for his purposes a direct comment, destroying the illusion that the story is telling itself, may be what will serve his desired effect rather than kill it.

In Flood, Warren presents us with "unambiguous signs" of his quest, "destroying the illusion" that it is "telling itself." But he does so in order that the reader may find a way to relate his "experience" to a more universal "meaning of experience" which the novel proposes. Like Brad Tolliver, who assimilates his private world of ideas with the public world of time, the audience must recognize themselves in Brad's plight, "for the sake of the experience," and accept the private vision of the text as representing their own world outside the text. In order to recognize this complicity, paradoxically, the reader need remain detached from the text, aware of it as art and able
to judge its appropriateness to his or her case.

Warren calls attention to *Flood* as art by subtitling it "A Romance of Our Time." Although some critics have equated the word "romance" with love story* and this connection should not be underestimated, at the same time, it also should not exclude the richer aesthetic connotations of the word. In this regard, Arthur Mizener argues that, in *Flood*, there is no use looking for "the vivid, detailed representative image of the everyday world; *Flood* has its own kind of vividness and relevance but it is not the realistic novel's." *Flood* is a "romance," continues Mizener, because it,

... documents a vision; it does not lose itself in the way things happen, in documenting the multiplicity of the world. That is why *Flood* is not a realistic novel with a carefully articulated plot and ... lifelike characters ... . You have to document the vision and therefore Mr. Warren provides the necessary amount of facts but he does not depend on the documentation.**

Mizener's analysis parallels more general comments made about "romance" by Richard Chase in *The American Novel and its

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* John L. Stewart's suggestion in *The Burden of Time* that the deepest need of Warren's principal characters "is for love of other adults, but they cannot face the responsibility it entails" seems applicable. And following Stewart's lead, Allen Shepherd equates "romance" with "love story" claiming that "all levels and kinds of love are represented ... ." Shepherd, as well as Marshall Walker, lists and analyzes the varieties of "romance" encountered in the novel--"sex without love" and "love without sex" as well as "sanctified union."**
Tradition. Arguing that "romance" is a major characteristic of American fiction and quoting Hawthorne, who sees the problem affecting the American author as the necessity of finding "a neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the actual and the imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other," Chase defines "romance" as,

. . . a kind of "border" fiction, whether the field of action is in the neutral territory between civilization and the wilderness, as in the adventure tales of Cooper and Simms, or whether, since Hawthorne and later romances, the field of action is concerned not so much with a place as a state of mind--the borderland of the human mind where the actual and the imaginary intermingle. Romance does not plot itself, like the novel, solidly in the midst of the actual. Nor when it is memorable does it escape into the purely imaginary.15

Without suggesting any direct influence by either Hawthorne or Chase on Warren, parallels between the "romance" writer of Hawthorne and Chase and the "philosophical novelist" of Warren are provocative. Warren's "philosophical novelist" does seem a "romance" writer in the sense that he "is one for whom the documentation of the world is constantly striving to rise to the level of generalization about values."16 The corollary to Hawthorne's "actual" and "imaginary" here is "documentation of the world" and "generalization about values."

Thinking about all this in terms of Flood, for Brad Tolliver the "borderland" has to do with the area between his private "imaginary" world and the "actual" public world
Fiddlersburg. The "country" of the "heart" that he
glimpses at the end of the novel is the point at which these
two worlds intersect. In his preface to The House of the
Seven Gables, Hawthorne uses similar terminology when he
indicates that a "romance" may not "swerve aside from the
truth of the human heart and Richard Chase, again using
Hawthorne as guide, suggests that "to keep in touch with
the human heart is to give it universal significance." In
addition, Chase says,

This cannot be done memorably in prose fiction,
even in a relatively loose form of romance,
without giving it local significance. The truth
of the heart as pictured in romance may be more
generic or archetypal than in the novel; but
it must still belong to a time and place.¹⁷

Again, Flood seems to conform to a pattern not unlike the
one Chase outlines. It is more "generic" than a strictly
"realistic" novel in at least the one sense that it, as
Walker says, tends toward "melodrama" and the character's
problems are presented as "synthetic" without a "trace of
irony."¹⁸ But it also remains located; Fiddlersburg is
real--rich in detail seen from numerous perspectives, both
past and present.

About Brad's book, I'm Telling You Now, Leontine
Purtle says at one point that the picture of the town "was
Fiddlersburg" and "was made up." This is suggestive of
Flood's own intentions. Its detail is full enough to be
memorable but, it is "made up," "imaginary," in an effort to
be "archetypal" and universal.
We begin to see the significance of this balancing when we examine Brad's struggle in *Flood*. Arthur Mizener shows that the intersection of the private and public worlds in *Flood* occurs when "consciousness" equals knowledge. At one point, Mizener indicates that "the country that is being overwhelmed by Mr. Warren's *Flood*, that is forever being lost under the irresistible flow of time, is the consciousness."\(^{19}\) The private individual consciousness is buried by the fact that past and future seem separate and disconnected; Mizener suggests that "the uncorrupted consciousness" can be realized when one recognizes "the past and the future in a present vision."\(^{20}\) He continues that,

> To live in this knowledge is to live so that the incommensurables of the imagination with its tempting promises, and of history with its recalcitrant actualities, become commensurable. \(^{21}\)

Brad's struggle culminates in his attempt to accept the reality of Fiddlersburg past and present, but, as a "romance," *Flood* tries to make Brad's struggle extend beyond the limits of his personal experience in the text so that while Brad's imaginary world and the "logic" of his scripts are tested against the "actuality" of his past and present situation in Fiddlersburg, the text of *Flood*--an imaginary, private world--asks to be tested against the experience of a public embodied in its readers. The "tempting promises" of the story must become "commensurable" with the "recalcitrant nature" of our experience.
The "made thing" must "nod mysteriously at us"—those quotes from Warren in *Democracy and Poetry*—and Yasha Jones' role in *Flood* plays a significant part in doing this. Yasha shapes the audience's reading; that is, we learn to see Brad's experience through Yasha. In fact, Yasha encounters Fiddlersburg in ways that resemble a reader's experience with the town. The written word informs him of Fiddlersburg: his first inkling that it exists comes from a newspaper account, and Brad's book, *I'm Telling You Now*, provides him with his first impressions of the town. When he arrives in Fiddlersburg he is continually put in the role of reading the town and people as if they were the material out of which a storyline for a script was to be created. For example, one of the first characters Brad tells Yasha about is Brother Potts eating cold beans in his kitchen because he has "No place to go. Nobody invited him to dinner. And his wife, she is dead" (p. 83). As Brad's description of Brother Potts continues, it is intriguing to see how his style and tone change; Brad's factual depiction suddenly acquires the tone of rich story. He says,

He [Brother Potts] will stand in those shadowy precincts and hold the open can in his right hand . . . then something will come over him. He sees the coal oil stove. He sees the tin matchholder on the wall. But all at once he will drop a stitch. He will, suddenly, fail to understand why it is the fate of man to stand alone in the nightdark kitchen . . . . He eats the beans. But he eats them cold, directly from the can, using two fingers to scoop them out . . . . Then he licks his fingers. He wipes the juice off his chin with his fingers, then
licks them all again. His jaw hangs a little slack now. He peers all around in the dusk of the kitchen, with a kind of heavy, bestial cunning. His eyes gleam in the shadow. He gives a great, slow, rumbling, deliberately uncontrolled fart. No, correct to belch (83-4).

Both Brad and Yasha are conscious that the description crosses a line between a factual account and a vision of Brother Potts as if he were in the script of a movie. When Brad finishes painting his picture of Brother Potts, he asks Yasha if he can see him standing on the imaginary canvas he has created. Yasha answers that he can and then Brad wants to know if Yasha can conceive what happens next. Yasha responds, "thus far ... I know that the story is mutatis mutandis, the story of us all" (p. 84). As a reader of the town, Yasha indicates that the lines between documentation of Brother Pott's existence and the tale of Brother Pott's life intersect when the story of man becomes the "story of us all."

For Yasha, this relation between art and life is central and it defines his place in the novel. He experiences events as other characters do but his interpretations are always filtered through an aesthetic glass. His response to Brad's description of Frog-eye, for example, comes not from Brad's factual account of the man, the "swamp-rat" who "scratches where and when he itches" but from his recollection of Brad's portrait of him in the story "Wings of an Angel" out of I'm Telling You Now. For Yasha, the meaning given to experience in the context of art is
more valid than the experience itself. And, at one point, after reading one of Brad's scripts for the movie about Fiddlersburg, Yasha tells him that "life is so logical—superficially at least—therefore so plotty." He then asks, "But don't . . . we have to violate life. To stylize it" (p. 127). Yasha's comments not only admonish Brad but they locate Yasha. Yasha's place in *Flood* violates Brad's "plotty" experience by giving it meaning. He makes the novel "nod mysteriously at us" by demonstrating how we are to interpret it. Brad's experience outlines life's "logic," it plottiness. Yasha's presence violates life in favor of art, in favor of imagination. The border between the actual and the imaginary, between experience and its meaning, is touched and the result is, for the characters in the novel, the knowledge of right and wrong, and, for the readers, the means to establish a right relation to the text. Yasha's criticism of Brad's scripts as too "logical" and lacking "heart," translates into the strategy we can use to judge Brad's experience in the text; his life follows the logic of separation, not the heart of commitment.

Yasha's ambiguous role as both ideal reader, an index through which the novel can be successfully and correctly read, and participant in the novel can be illustrated through his relationship with Maggie Tolliver, Brad's sister. For
approximately one-third of the novel their association is developed marginally through conventional narrative devices; we hear their dialogue and the narrator of *Flood* tells us what thoughts each has. But, at one point, a breach in the third-person narrative occurs. The intruding voice is first-person; its tone is confessional, and, after a few paragraphs, we recognize it as Maggie's. She describes incidents the night of the party when she made love to Alfred O. Tuttle. The voice continues for two and a half pages and ends in mid-sentence. It picks up again ten pages later, but Maggie now is detailing a time before the party when Brad and Lettice Poindexter, Brad's first wife, moved to Fiddlersburg. Our first encounter with the voice leaves us with no clear indication as to its role in the narrative. It appears as if it had been taken from a transcript of a conversation, a taperecording or a letter and transplanted into the existing text in the way that, later in *Flood*, the records from Calvin Fiddler's trial were committed—without comment. But our second experience with the voice indicates that a specific audience is intended. Maggie addresses her portrait of Lettice's appearance this way:

... she was wearing a green robe, very bright, of light silk, I guess, with what looked like real metallic gold braiding and belt. That color was wonderful with her real-auburn hair and those big brown eyes with gold lights in them. Of course I'd have to tell you about the clothes before anything else (211-2).
It is uncertain who the "you" refers to, but, at this point, there are two possibilities. Because no direct reference is made to any character in the novel, the contingency that this is a direct address to an audience outside the text cannot be ruled out. On the other hand, the narrative strategy of most of *Flood* suggests a closed text, implying that some character in the novel is the audience for her confession.

This ambiguity remains for much of *Flood*; we encounter Maggie's voice several times again before we discover who her immediate confidant is. At the end of Chapter Nineteen, she explains how Brad and Lettice seem "to fit" into Fiddlersburg life. In Chapter Twenty-four, she indicates why she made love to Alfred O. Tuttle and a few pages later, in Chapter Twenty-five, she says, "Now I've told you how that happened and you seem to understand . . ." (p. 325). The third person voice interrupts her briefly and then her voice returns to explain how her husband found out about the infidelity and how he killed Tuttle. About the entire incident, she says,

I sat there on the floor with those . . . books on my lap in the big empty house in the middle of Fiddlersburg, where I felt like a stranger now and wanted to cry . . . . I sat there and thought that there was something worse even than being that gosling on the pond, and feeling that first sudden grasp of that snapping turtle under black water. The thing worse to feel was what I felt sitting there on the floor—not the blackness, the illogicality . . . -- [was] the crazy tied-togetherness of things . . . (p. 332).
Her narrative breaks off, surfacing again at the end of the chapter to reveal that, in fact, she has been confessing to another character in *Flood*—to Yasha. She says, "No—don't touch me," then,

Don't touch me, I might be awful. I'm nearly forty years old, and I've lived half my life this way, by myself. And sometimes I think all my recollections are false or are . . . something I dream up because of what I am am—

"No, don't touch me, I might be awful, like a starved cat smelling fish, and I don't want to be awful like that. Or maybe worse, just blank. Like a rag doll, nothing but old rags inside. Old rags and lies, and I couldn't bear that, oh—"

"—oh, hold my hand.

"Oh, Yasha, Yasha, please hold my hand (p. 338).

The uncertainty about Maggie's audience leaves the reader confused about his/her relation to the text, and, in a way, this complements the difficulty characters in the novel have of reconciling their inner and outer worlds. Brad, particularly, but Maggie, Yasha, Calvin, Brother Potts and others have all fallen from states of innocence and have come to recognize, in the terminology of "Knowledge and the Image of Man," "separation." Brad feels it in time as separation from his past, and he must confront this division between his past and present life through his relationship to Fiddlersburg. Yasha and Maggie also feel a separation in time; Yasha lives in the past as a result of his wife's death and his present takes shape, until he meets Maggie, as a "dream" or as a script for a movie. In a similar way, Maggie lives only in the memory of her marriage to Calvin,
the night she ruined it and the day Calvin killed Tuttle. Brother Potts feels a sense of estrangement from his congregation; his sense of himself is tied to his relation to the community that is his church, and when he is forced out of the community, forced to be alone, his identity is shaken. In ways that parallel these struggles, Flood wants its audience to recognize the unique status of the text, existing as art separate from any reader's world, while making them aware of their association with it. Our reading experience of Flood requires us to recognize two "you[s]," two selves, in a way that coincides with Brad's, or Yasha's, or Maggie's, or Brother Pott's experience. Within the text we are asked to understand "the crazy tied-togetherness of things" that Maggie feels and confesses to Yasha, but we are also asked to undergo this sensation as part of the reading process. In the case of Maggie's confession to Yasha, the confusion of the address suggests that the reader imaginatively participates in reaching out and holding Maggie's hand. The participation demands an acceptance of the "tied-togetherness" principle; we recognize a corollary to Yasha's reception of the principle in the text to our own life. Through Maggie's confession, Yasha has become fully aware of his "isolation" but that has led him (again using language from "Knowledge and the Image of Man") to the "courage and clarity of mind to envisage the tragic pathos of life" and this leads him to the understanding that the tragic experience is "universal and a
corollary of man's place in nature." In a similar way, Maggie's confession in \textit{Flood}, while reminding us that his admissions come from within a text and the actions in this text are separate from our own outside it, asks that we see in them an archetype that is "universal" and a "corollary" to our place in nature. We are asked to note the uniqueness of the text but still embrace it as a reflection of our position.

Yasha bridges the gap between the reader and the text, allowing for the text's autonomy by remaining a character in it but also serving as "potential audience." In Chapter I, I quoted from an interview with Warren in which he said,

\begin{quote}
I think there's no such thing as a poem existing without a potential audience . . . . Of course, the real central thing you are trying to do is make an object "right." But the only test of "rightness" is what your other self can make of it. \footnote{24}
\end{quote}

Yasha makes Brad's experience right by determining the proper response. In the following example, Yasha indicates that, while Brad's experience in the novel may be separate from the reader's, we must also see it in a representative role. At the beginning of Chapter Twenty, the narrator describes Brad's actions:

\begin{quote}
Bradwell Tolliver got up from the table, and looked at his watch. It was 1:50 A.M. . . . . He cut off the light and felt his way out of the dark house. Standing in the road, which River Street became this far out, he looked up at the bulk of the house. Then he faced northward toward town and began to walk . . . .
\end{quote}
He stared up the road and moved . . . . He moved up the road, past the abandoned Tomwit place . . . past the vacant lots . . . . He stood in the road and looked at the cemetery . . . . He moved on toward town, up River Street. He stood at Perkins Dry Goods, where the iron awning hung over the pavement and saw the wax dummy in the window smile devotedly at him. He stared at the Post Office, at the You'll Never Regret It Cafe, at the old pool room with the broken glass door, at the window of the abandoned store where warped and decaying cardboard announced old basketball games, at the Lyceum Moving Picture Theater, where shreds of the poster announcing the last attraction ever to be shown there, the colors bleached out, still hung from the board by the ticket booth . . . . He saw the moonlight on the river. He thought of the water rising. It would cover River Street. River Street would not be here anymore . . . . He moved down the street. He saw ahead of him the confederate monument . . . . He moved toward the monument. Somebody was sitting at the base, in the shadow.

It was Yasha Jones (pp. 252-4).

The conversation between Yasha and Brad which follows this description indicates that Yasha interprets Brad's walk in a way that attempts to give meaning to the experience.

Yasha says,

Forgive me, . . . All I was doing was spying on you. I was looking at Fiddlersburg, in the blackness of moonlight. Then I saw a human figure approaching."

"Yeah," Brad said, "I'm human."

"And I thought of a man who would rise in the night, just before the flood began, and go look at Fiddlersburg once more in the moonlight."

"You are right," Brad said. "That was what I was doing."

"But," Yasha said, "I was thinking of a man in what you call our beautiful moving pictures. I was thinking of M-A-N--a man--any man who rises in the night before the water comes" (pp. 254-5).
Like the reader, Yasha observes the fact of Brad's walk, but he sees in it more than one man's walk; he universalizes the walk, seeing Brad as archetypal "M-A-N." As I have indicated in Chapter I, the appropriateness of representation has less to do with resemblance to reality when reality equals bare fact and more to do with a commitment to discovering a set of principles which identify and provide meaning to mere event. Yasha's comments suggest that, in *Flood*, this commitment can be made through art. He translates Brad's midnight stroll into a scene from a movie.

At first, the camera would show only the night. Then only the feet in the moonlit dust of summer. We would never show his face. He would not be recognizable. We would not know what man of all Fiddlersburg had risen. We should see, simply, the figure. The man would stare upward at the old highwater mark on the corner of Lorton's Hardware, and the camera would zoom in on the date, now nearly obliterated, April 12, 1924, and we could see the pores of the disintegrating old brick (255).

Yasha's translation provides a key to the reading of *Flood*. He "stylizes" the straightforward description that plots Brad's walk from his house to town. In this way, the reader is presented with a "documentation" of Brad's experience through the novel's narrative--Brad remains a character distinctly situated and fully described in a "time and place"--but, beyond this, Yasha's reading of Brad's actions discovers the "imaginary" in the "actual," finds in one man's experience a relation to "any man['s]."
At one point, Yasha says, "science is the right telling. And . . . art is the right not-telling" (p. 118). *Flood* avoids the "right-telling" by sacrificing the mere depiction of events in favor of a picture of plot seen in the context of interpretation. To do so, it places an audience, Yasha, in the text to read meaning into the event.

Most analyses of Yasha have agreed with the critic Barnett Guttenberg that Yasha is an "artifact . . . like some piece of precious china that has been shattered then painfully and scrupulously reassembled and glued." In this respect, Yasha is a "chief supportive victim" in the false being which Brad so fully demonstrates in the novel. Or, as the critic Allen Shepherd puts it, after the death of his wife and his feeling of separation, Yasha develops a "depersonalized idea of artistic success." Shepherd continues that, while Brad represents the man of the world, a man of facts, Yasha illustrates the man of intellect, of ideas and vision. On a strictly textual level, Yasha fits such descriptions, but, as I have tried to indicate, Yasha's place in the narrative's strategy extends beyond this. Yasha's actions in *Flood*, as well as his addresses to Brad, comment on Brad's experience. His union with Maggie shows the indirect way in which his actions gloss Brad's struggle. We realize the impact their affair has on Brad when he reads the letter Maggie has left him telling
that she and Yasha have gone away together: he "lifted his head and felt an elation seize him. For a moment, it felt like joy in her joy, and this fact in itself was a joy, a repudiation in a sudden bright clarity, like a mirror. He stood and marveled at that fact of his joy in her joy" (p. 387). For a moment, Brad recognizes something other than "separation"; he feels "interpenetration," "joy in her joy." His feeling, however, almost immediately disappears and does not surface again until the end of the novel when he realizes that he must find "the connection between what I was and what I am" (439). The importance of this "interpenetration," though, is not lost on the reader and it becomes the measure we use to judge Brad's actions. For example, towards the end of the novel, after the shooting and after Brad is out of the hospital, he receives a letter from Yasha and Maggie who are now married and living in Greece. They thank him, but he cannot fathom where their gratitude comes from.

Brad looks up from the letter. So they were thanking him again. They had come to the hospital, after it was certain that everything would be all right, to say goodbye, and Yasha had thanked him, and cried. He had managed to say something in a confusion that they, no doubt, took to be manly embarrassment. But the confusion had been something else. You do not know what to say when somebody thanks you for an act you have performed but do not know the motive or the meaning of (p. 421).

The text here indicates that Brad does not know the meaning of their appreciation, but the reader is prepared to
evaluate it; we know why Yasha and Maggie are thanking him even though our direct experience with the narrative at this point does not help us. We know that Yasha and Maggie believe that Brad brought them together; it was through contact with him that they became aware of the relatedness of their separate tragedies. They came to judge their lives in light of his: Yasha saw the lack of "heart" in Brad's scripts and realized that his own life was equally barren; Maggie reviewed her relation to her past, specifically to Calvin, when Brad arrived in Fiddlersburg, and discovered, in her confession to Yasha, an unbearable desolation. Out of their "isolation," they found a "courage and clarity" to accept this situation as a "universal" one, common to both of them, and so were able to reach out and find a place with one another. They saw in their relationship with Brad a representation of the common relationship between "anyman" and were capable of giving it a significance in their lives that he could not.

Through Yasha, the reader is provided with a similar means of interpreting Brad's experience. Like Yasha and Maggie, who discovered an index to interpret their own lives through their relationship with Brad, the reader finds a ruler to measure his life. Because we are provided with an understanding of his action in the text, we can see a meaning in his experience that he cannot--a meaning that Yasha's actions and comments, in the role of "potential
audience" have suggested. Our relation to the text and to Brad's experience parallel the affiliation Yasha and Maggie have with him in the text. We learn that his struggle represents ours; that is, it is a "universal" experience. Because of this recognition, we are able to validate his private experience by accepting it, at least, as Walker Gibson, advises, "for the sake of the experience," as our own. We reach out and "take hold" of the text, accept it and give it a significance it does not have itself by testing it in our lives.

II

All the King's Men: A Novel
of Pure and Impure Imagination

If we do not push the point too far, a discussion of the relationship between the private and public in _All the King's Men_ can be started by suggesting a parallel between these categories in Warren and two possibly related groupings, "fancy" and "imagination," in Coleridge. The connection may not be as far-fetched as it at first appears if we consider, as Warren points out in his Introduction to The Modern Library Edition of _All the King's Men_, that work on the novel "was constantly interrupted" by, among other things, "the study for and writing of a long essay on Coleridge."27 That writing became the essay, "A Poem of Pure Imagination: An Experiment in Reading," a discourse on Coleridge's _The Ancient Mariner_. This interruption, says
Warren, pushed the novel "to the back of the stove to simmer away at its own pace." There were other intrusions in his writing schedule—"teaching," "some travelling" and "the duties of a post in Washington" (viii)—but of these the most traceable and suggestive ingredient in the stewing pot was Warren's interest in Coleridge.

Coleridge makes the distinction between "imagination" and "fancy" in Chapter XIII of Biographia Literaria. He says,

The imagination then, I consider either as primary or secondary. The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I am. The secondary imagination I consider as an echo of the former, coexisting with the conscious will yet still as identical in the kind of its agency and differing only in degree, and in the whole of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.

Fancy, on the contrary, has no other counters to play with but fixities and definites. The fancy is indeed no other than a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space.

Warren quotes much of this passage in his essay on Coleridge and makes the following comment.

It is the primary imagination which creates our world, for nothing of which we are aware is given to the passive mind. By it we know the world, but for Coleridge knowing is making, for, "to know is in its very essence a verb active." We know by creating, and one of the things we create is the Self, for a subject is that which "becomes a subject by the act of constructing
itself objectively to itself; but which never is an object except for itself, and only so far as by the very same act it becomes a subject."30

Concern with Coleridge's philosophy in this passage centers on the dichotomy between subject and object (using Warren's terms, we might substitute the words "idea" and "fact"), and, following the above statement, Warren quotes a section from Coleridge which addresses this problem; "the imagination," he says, "is conceived as recognizing the inherent interdependence of subject and object."31 For Coleridge, as the critic Owen Barfield points out in his essay, "The Philosophy of Coleridge," a work whose conclusions parallel Warren's, "the idea . . . is something in which all distinction between subject and object disappear."32 For Warren, awareness of this principle requires employment of what Coleridge calls "Reason.

. . . the world of nature is to be read by the mind as a symbol of divinity, a symbol characterized by the "translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal," which "always partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in the unity of which it is representative." Reason, as opposed to the understanding, is, in Coleridge's system, the organ whereby man achieves the "intuition and spiritual consciousness of God," and the imagination operates to read Nature in the light of that consciousness, to read it as a symbol of God. It might be said that reason shows us God, and the imagination shows us how nature participates in God.33

Barfield comes to a similar conclusion. He states,

Reason for Coleridge is not something to be manifest in human beings; it is something in
which human beings—and the whole of nature—are manifest. It is not merely a part or function of the individual mind. Rather, it is a spiritual whole in which the individual mind—all individual minds—subsist. It is in fact as much an objective as a subjective reality.\textsuperscript{34}

On the philosophical level, Warren, like Barfield, sees Coleridge's use of "reason" and the "imagination" as those faculties capable of envisioning a relationship between subject and object; through the imagination, nature is perceived not as definite and fixed outside the subject but as participating in a dynamic relationship with the subject. For the individual consciousness this means that, as Coleridge indicates, "the essential duality of Nature arises out of its productive unity." For Barfield, Unity which is productive unity must strive to do two things. It must strive to reproduce itself, that is it must strive to detach from itself another being like itself and in the same act it must strive to overcome that detachment, to overcome that individuality, thus maintaining the unity.\textsuperscript{35}

The parallel between this process and Warren's in "Knowledge and the Image of Man," is unavoidable; Warren's concepts of "separation" and "interpenetration" correspond to the desire for detachment and the wish "to overcome that detachment" that characterize Coleridge's "productive unity."

As his essay on Coleridge continues, Warren indicates how Coleridge's epistemology shaped his aesthetic. Warren suggests that, for Coleridge, "the symbol serves to combine . . . the 'poet's heart and intellect' . . . . The
symbol affirms the unity of mind in the welter of experience."36 In his book *Critical Theory Since Plato*, Hazard Adams comes to a similar conclusion. He says,

In a world of art the universal dwells in the particular; the particular does not simply stand for the universal . . . . The mediator between universal and particular [is] in what [Coleridge] calls the symbol . . . . The symbol joins things held apart in discursive thought. It is the vehicle of the beautiful in that the beautiful joins "multeity in unity" . . . . He sees the artist joining subject and object in an act analogous to God’s creative act. Thus, man reconciles himself with nature. Art . . . becomes a special mode of knowledge.37

But Warren sees in Coleridge’s aesthetic more than simply the joining of the "poet's heart and intellect." In Warren's analysis, Coleridge's theory of the imagination stretches beyond the borders of the text.

So if we look at the phrase, a work of "pure imagination" in light of Coleridge's theory of imagination we see that such a work would be one which not only, to borrow from Coleridge’s portrait of the ideal poet, "brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other according to their relative worth and dignity," makes the reader himself a "creative being" in the image of God, but also gives us a revelation, for "all truth is a species of Revelation."38

Barfield expresses a similar, though again, more philosophical note, in an essay entitled "Coleridge's I and Thou":

Coleridge's world of thought may . . . be divided into two hemispheres—one which turns on the relation of the self to nature while the other turns on the relation of the self to other selves.39
And, supporting both Warren's aesthetic and Barfield's philosophical conclusions, Coleridge, in *Essay on Faith*, says,

> This is a deep meditation . . . namely that there can be no I without a thou, and that thou is only possible by an equation in which I is taken as to equal thou, and yet not the same . . . 40

I have cited these examinations of Coleridge not so much to stress a direct connection between his thought and a reflection of it in *All the King's Men* but to suggest a compatibility in approach. Warren's debt to Coleridge cannot be fully analyzed without further investigation, but, in light of Warren's comments quoted here, there are two aspects of his study of Coleridge that provide critical access to *All the King's Men*. First, in the novel, Warren may be said to have attempted to "combine . . . 'the poet's heart and intellect'"; in the guise of Willie Stark and Adam Stanton he tries to join subject and object through a "symbol"—Jack Burden's telling of *All the King's Men*. This "symbol" is Jack's way of relating the disconnected parts of his own life and discovering his identity; using Warren's interpretation of Coleridge, it is a means to bring "the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other according to their relative worth and dignity." A second point concerns the narrator's association with the text. Warren sees the imagination working through symbol not only to bring the "whole soul" of
the protagonist or narrator in the text into activity but also to make "the reader himself a 'creative being'" outside the text. The "symbol" provides "revelation," but, just as the "meaning of experience" in the text demands "interpenetration" between subject, the narrator's mind, and object, his experience, the meaning outside the text requires affiliation between the private idea of the text itself and the experiencing of it by the reader. Similarly, an analysis of All the King's Men need show that Jack Burden's first person narrative reveals the truth of "multeity in unity" while stimulating the reader's conception of that truth outside the text.

In his Introduction to the Modern Library Edition of All the King's Men, Warren indicates that the development of Jack Burden's relationship to the text was not categorically distinct from what he, at one point, calls "the spectator's" relation to the text. He comments,

... the idea that the politician ... would not simply be a man who by force or fraud rises to absolute power, offends the principles of decency and democracy, and then is struck down by a self-approved Brutus. There would be no drama to such a study--no "insides," no inner tension, no involvement of the spectator's deep division (p. viii).

Warren is describing the initial stages the story went through before becoming a novel. In order to satisfy the need for "involvement of the spectator's own deep division," the original form of the story, a verse play called Proud Flesh, used "choruses ... a chorus of
builders, a chorus of highway patrolmen, a chorus of surgeons, etc." (p. vii). Later, after the verse play had given way to the novel, Warren attests that a similar consideration lead to "the necessity for a character of a higher degree of self-consciousness than [the] politician, a character to serve as a kind of commentator and raisonneur and chorus . . . . So Jack Burden entered the scene" (pp. vii, viii). The association between narrator and reader suggested in Warren's Introduction plays an important role in All the King's Men; as we shall see, Jack feels his search for identity is intimately tied up with his confession to an audience. But before analyzing this connection the more obvious league between Jack and his story needs to be pursued.

Warren testifies that the germ for All the King's Men was "my politician."

My politician would be--or at least I was groping toward some such formulation--a man whose personal motivation had been in one sense, idealistic, who in many ways, was to serve the cause of social betterment, but who was corrupted by power . . . . That is, his means defile his ends (p. v).

There can be little doubt that, on one level, the dichotomy between subject and object, idea and fact, is represented in the Willie Stark of the finished version of All the King's Men. But the division may be more prominent elsewhere in the novel. In Dionysus and the City, Monroe K. Spears sees the split as the "psychological disassociation of the
sensibility" delineated not only in Willie Stark but in the antithetical natures of Willie Stark and Adam Stanton. Spears says that,

In All the King's Men this is very clearly implied: Humpty Dumpty is not just the precarious greatness of Willie Stark but the fragmented psyche of modern man, split between the abstract intellect of Adam Stanton and the concrete action of Willie Stark. 41

Striking a similar chord, Robert B. Heilman, in his essay, "All the King's Men as Tragedy," indicates that, "Adam cannot sufficiently accept the conditions of action and Willie cannot sufficiently escape them." 42 Both critics draw from Jack's own comments in the novel for their analyses. At one point, Jack considers Adam as "the man of idea" and Willie as "the man of action" (p. 462); he says that for Adam truth is the idea and for Willie truth is the world. Jack's certainty about the nature of the schism validates the above interpretations, but it also suggests one significant aspect about Jack's narration. There is no indication that his understanding of the difference between Adam and Willie comes while he participates in the events All the King's Men describes. Instead, we must assume it is only after his experience, when he writes the novel, that he comes to his conclusion. This is important for an understanding of Jack, his relation to his experience, and the importance of his writing. All the King's Men grows from a story about a politician to a story about the narrator's relation to the
politician. As a "raisonneur and chorus" with a "higher degree of self-consciousness" to interpret the politician's life, Jack attempts to find meaning in the politician's experience and discovers his experience is tied up with the politician's.

Jack's discovery of a principle we might characterize as the law of relation defines his narrative along lines that parallel the imagination's canon that Warren outlined in his essay on Coleridge. A section from All the King's Men where Jack describes what happened after Tom Stark's accident reveals an awareness on his part that an event does not exist in and of itself but coexists in a "pattern of events."

That day, there was a gradual piling up of events. Then the rush to the conclusion, as when a great weight that has been grinding and slipping suddenly breaks the last mooring and takes the plunge. As I experienced that day, there was at first an impression of the logic of events, caught flickering moments, but as they massed to the conclusion I was able to grasp, at the time, only the slightest hints as to the pattern that was taking shape. This lack of logic, the sense of people and events driven by impulses which I was never able to define, gave the whole occasion the sense of a dream-like unreality. It was only after the conclusion, after everything was over, that the sense of reality returned, long after, in fact, when I had been able to gather the pieces of the puzzle up and put them together to see the pattern. This is not remarkable for, as we know, reality is not a function of the event as event, but of the relationship of that event to past and future events. We seem here to have a paradox: that reality of an event, which is not real in itself, arises from other events which, likewise, in themselves, are not real. But this
only affirms what we must affirm: that direction is all. And only as we realize this do we live, for our own identity is dependent upon this principle (p. 406).

Jack's understanding of one event, Tom's accident, becomes real for him only after the event, after he discovers the "relationship of the event to past and future events"; in a similar way, the events depicted in the novel, particularly his awareness of the dichotomy between idea and action, become real to him only after they are over when he discovers, through his writing, their "direction." Jack's writing is a "mode of Knowing" through which he "gathers the pieces of the puzzle up and puts them together to see the pattern." The "primary imagination . . . creates the world," according to Warren's analysis of Coleridge, and All the King's Men can be said to trace the stages of the imaginative process.

Jack describes his life, at one point, as being directed by the "Great Twitch" where one event follows another without connection or meaning. After a time, he abandons the "Great Twitch" in favor of a new philosophy, one that Cass Mastern's history teaches him, and one he begins to study and embrace as the novel ends. The foundation of this notion lies in the interrelationship of events—Cass Mastern's "web" which weaves the many strands of life together. Jack's narrative mirrors this change in his life; he presents us with his experiences but attempts to discover the "reality" of these events by indicating a
"direction," a "symbol," which allies them. To find this relationship, as Warren says in his article on Coleridge, is to "know the world." Pressing the parallel between Jack's narrative and Coleridge's philosophy still further, "knowing is making," and, as Warren says, "We know by creating, and one of the things we create is the self."

In All the King's Men, Jack tries to "know the world" by finding the meaning of his experience; in his narrative, discerning the relationship between Adam, the man of idea, and Willie, the man of action, represents this knowledge. But as he pursues this wisdom, the process becomes internalized. As Jack states, "identity is dependent" on the principle of confirming that "direction is all"; as he perceives "direction," as he deduces the relationship between Willie and Adam, he locates his own identity.

From this standpoint, we might consider All the King's Men a novel of "pure imagination," a perfect "gathering" of events. But Jack's narrative which attempts to relate the "unity of mind" with the "welter of experience" is, at best, an imperfect balancing. Jack's voice is often at odds with itself representing, on the one hand, his state of mind at the time of the event when the individual act constituted the whole reality and, on the other hand, the affirmation of a reality that "arises from other events." This unevenness reflects a division in Jack that persists throughout the novel. Jack confirms this split in himself when he says,
near the end of the novel, that he was a man "who lived in the world and to him the world looked one way for a long time and then it looked another and very different way. The change did not happen all at once" (p. 461).

Arthur Mizener suggests one way that the different voices might be analyzed and what this indicates about Jack's struggle. For Mizener, *All the King's Men* poses what is, in Warren, the central problem of life: "the irrepressible conflict between the concept of life that gives action meaning and value and the act of living in the world in which meaning and value have to be realized."\(^43\) Jack's divided voice highlights this conflict according to Mizener. A rending has taken place between Jack Burden the idealist and Jack Burden the historian.

> Jack Burden the idealist . . . sardonically points out the plentiful evidence that life is grotesquely absurd . . . . At the same time the tone of his voice is almost hysterically extravagant . . . . His extravagance is really the expression of the second Jack Burden's feelings, his longing to reach beyond reason to the secret experience that he is debarred from by the refusal of Jack Burden the idealist to believe experience is real.\(^44\)

There is also a third "feeling" that Jack Burden's voice expresses. Mizener claims that it "ultimately resolves the conflict between these two," but it surfaces "only at the end of the novel."\(^45\) This voice is capable of making the same distinctions between art and life that the little boy performs in Warren's poem, "Court-Martial." Mizener
indicates that Jack learns,

. . . life . . . is not "only a story" in the timelessness of which "the done" and "the to-be-done" are one. But . . . he now knows "the being done" exists beyond any story man's reason invents about it, he also knows that story represents man's idea of it and determines the way he will act in it. 46

According to Mizener, Jack is capable of resolving the conflict between the historian's and idealist's perspective at the end of the novel. In the terms I have been using in this chapter, he is able to accept the "paradox" that "the reality of an event" (what the historian perceives) "which is not real in itself" (what the idealist conceives) "arises from other events . . . ." Jack reconciles the division in himself through writing All the King's Men; through the story, Jack discovers the significance of his past. Paradoxically, "the done" becomes a part of "the being done," an aspect of Jack's present reality, only as he writes the narrative. Jack sees the connection through art, and, in this way, the imagination serves as a "mode of Knowledge," a way of seeing the world correctly.

This paradoxical function of art to certify that "'the being done' exists beyond any story man's reason invents about it" extends outside the relationship between the text and narrator that Mizener shows. As Warren says, for the writer governed by the imagination, " . . . the world of nature is to be read by the mind as a symbol of divinity" and a work produced by such a writer "'brings the whole soul
of man into activity' . . . and makes the reader himself a 'creative being' . . ." Although *All the King's Men* does not fit the strict requirements of a work of "pure imagination" its procedure follows a pattern similar to the one Warren describes as Coleridge's. The reality Jack sees through his "symbol," the text, must be validated outside the novel. Just as he must realize "the being done" that exists "beyond" the story of his past, the audience must likewise accept *All the King's Men* as not only Jack Burden's account of his life but as a symbol of reality pertinent to their own life. As Jack's reality is reshaped through the imaginative act of writing, the audience is asked through the use of second person direct address to rethink their concept of the world through the act of reading.

Jack uses "you" in many ways throughout the novel, demonstrating a relationship not only between himself and the reader but between his present and past selves. This latter relationship provides evidence to support the split Mizener saw between Jack the historian and Jack the idealist. But some critics have analyzed this employment of "you" as simply a tough guy style that the cynical Jack Burden adopts as a result of the company he keeps. Walker Gibson expresses this view in his essay, "Tough, Sweet and Stuffy," when he states that Jack Burden is "a refined sensibility"
but also "an ex-newspaper reporter, a hard guy." This interpretation indicates a schism in Jack's psyche but stops short of recognizing Jack's awareness of this disjunction. But Jack is cognizant of the division and frequently talks about himself as if he were another person. When he begins his life history, for example, his first person narrative shifts to the third person almost as if he were describing someone other than himself.

Long ago, Jack Burden was a graduate student, working for his Ph.D. in American History.

. . . . This Jack Burden (of whom the present Jack Burden, me, is a legal, biological, and perhaps even metaphysical continuation) lived in an. . . apartment. . . (p. 168).

And later in that history, he says,

I have said that Jack Burden could not put down facts about Cass Mastern's world because he did not know Cass Mastern . . . . But I (who am what Jack Burden became) look back now years later. . . (p. 200).

An example of the use of the second person pronoun as an address to his former self occurs when Jack describes his trip on the train to Upton to see Willie give a speech during his first bid for the governorship. Jack says,

The local I rode puffed and yanked and stalled and yawned across the cotton country. I watched the cotton rows . . . then . . . we would stop beside some yellow boxlike station, and I could see up the alley behind the downtown and then, as the train pulled out again . . . the house didn't look as though they belonged there.

But as the train pulls away, a woman comes to the back door of one of the houses--just the figure of a woman for you cannot make out the face . . . .
The train pulls away faster now, and the woman is back there in the house, where she is going to stay . . . . And all at once you think that you are the one running away. The train is going pretty fast now but . . . the effort seems to be against an increasing and implacable magnetism of earth. You think that if the earth should twitch once . . . the train would be jerked over . . . .

But nothing happens, and you remember that the woman had not even looked up at the train. You forget her, and the train goes fast, and is going fast when it crosses a little trestle. You catch glint of the water between the little banks, and see the cow standing in the water upstream near the single lean willow. And all at once you feel like crying. But the train is going fast, and almost immediately whatever you felt is taken away from you, too.

You bloody fool, do you think you want to milk a cow?
   You do not want to milk a cow.
   Then you are at Upton.
   In Upton I went to the motel . . . (81-2).

Jack recalls the event but from a distance. He tries to distinguish his present personae from the person on the train by asking the "you" questions and telling it the answers. The distinction between the "I" and the "you" shows Jack's uncertainty of his identity.

And he does not establish the identity, he does not find the relationship between his past and present and his divided self, alone; Jack's narrative is also a confession to a confident outside the text. Neil Nakadate, in his essay, "Robert Penn Warren and the Confessional Novel," suggests that All the King's Men is the "confession and the reader its object" and "the reader is confessional man's alter ego." Nakadate indicates a connection between the division that Jack feels in himself and the separation he
senses between himself in the text and his audience outside of it, but Nakadate does not explain the intricacies of this association. Jack, however, does help clarify the revelation. He describes one night when he is driving away from his mother's house in Burden's Landing; in this passage, he stresses the impact of isolation on the individual's sense of himself.

There is nothing more alone than being in a car at night in the rain. I was in that car. And I was glad of it . . . . They say you are not you except in terms of relation to other people. If there weren't any other people there wouldn't be any you because what you do, which is what you are, only has meaning in relation to other people. That is a very comforting thought when you are in the rain at night alone, for then you are not you, and not being you or any thing, you can lie back and get some rest. It is a vacation from being you. There is only the flow of the water under your foot spinning that frail thread of sound out of its metal gut like a spider, that milament, that nexus, which isn't really there, between the you which you have just left in one place and the you will be when you get to the other place (pp. 136-7).

For Jack, the isolated individual is similar to the isolated event; the reality of a situation does not come from the experience itself but from the relation of that experience to others, and the individual's identity, defined as "that nexus . . . between the you which you have left in one place"--the past--"and the you which you will be when you get to the other place"--the present--"only has meaning in relation to other people." On one level, "that nexus" which Jack sees repairing the split between his past and present
selves is the text; in Warren's essay on Coleridge this is the "symbol" affirming the "unity of mind," the narrator's identity, in "the welter of experience." But, on another level, "that nexus" has no meaning without referring outside itself. Jack's comments implicitly suggest the need for the text to discover a relation to "other people."

Coleridge's comment, "There can be no I without a thou, and that is only possible by an equation in which I is taken as to equal thou, and yet not the same . . . ," seems appropriate in this context. Jack realizes this principle when he finds the connection between his past and present selves. A similar equation is made in All the King's Men between the text and reader. In this vein, the critic Norton R. Girault claims that Jack's withholding his father's identity "implies that he wants the discovery of the truth . . . to make the same shocking impact on the reader as it made on him."49 Girault is correct as far as he goes. But the "I" of the text must be "taken as to equal" the "thou" of the reader and yet it may not be the same. Jack wants the audience to experience what he has experienced, but he also wants them to not only identify with the particular event but see the "direction" of that event, to be aware of the "meaning of the experience." The discovery of his father's identity and of his past remains crucial for him and for the reader but the experiencing of it for Jack and for us proves slightly different. When
Jack writes *All the King's Men* he knows his father's identity but he does not understand the significance of this knowledge in his life. When we read the novel Jack shows us both the experience and his struggle to give that experience meaning. Ultimately, we are asked to see an equation not between his experience and ours—these remain unique and separate—but between his struggle to trace "that nexus" which gives meaning to his life and the "frail thread" that gives our own life meaning.

The interpretive process which makes this connection is a difficult one because Jack's narrative is not "pure"; that is, the relationships his imagination is capable of making between the various actions in his life are not complete. His direct address to his audience to make them into "creative being[s]" like himself is therefore deficient throughout much of the novel. For example, Jack, again in a car by himself, this time travelling west, asks his audience to identify with his situation by indicating the mistake he made and how to correct it.

To the hum and lull of the car the past unrolled in my hand like a film. It was like a showing of a family movie, the kind the advertisements tell you to keep so that you will have a record . . . . The picture on the advertisement always shows a dignified, gray-haired, kindly old gent, the kind you find on the whisky ad . . . looking at the home movie and dreaming gently back over the years. Well, I was not gray-haired or dignified or kindly or sweet-faced, but I did have a showing of my home movie and dreamed gently back over the years. Therefore, if you have any home movies, I earnestly advise you to
burn them and to be baptized to be born again (p. 288).

Although Jack explicitly advises against it, the "showing," featuring Anne Stanton, which follows the above admonition demonstrates the importance of "home movies." By rolling a film of Anne Stanton across the screen he is able to re-think his experience with her in light of later events, particularly his present situation, and slowly, painfully come closer to understanding the meaning of his past re- lationship with her. All the King's Men, a long "film" in the logic of the above quotation, follows this pattern.

There are passages in the novel, however, when Jack's address is more "perfect" than others. At those times his use of the second person pronoun acts as a salutation to both the reader outside the text and his former self within the text. The excerpt I quoted earlier where Jack travels on the train to Upton exemplifies this as do the opening pages of the novel.

To get there you follow Highway 58, going northeast out of the city, and it is a good highway and new . . . . You look up the highway and it is straight for miles, coming at you, with the black line down the center coming at you and at you, black and slick and tarry-shining against the white of the slab, and the heat dazzles up from the white slab so that only the black line is clear, coming at you with the whine of tires, and if you don't quit staring at that line and don't take a few deep breaths and slap yourself hard on the back of the neck you'll hypnotize yourself and you'll come to just at the moment when the right front wheel hooks over into the black dirt shoulder off the slab, and you'll try to
jerk her back on but you can't because the slab is high like a curb, and maybe you'll try to reach to turn off the ignition just as she starts to drive (p. 1).

There is an ambiguity in the address of both passages. Although, as I have shown, there can be little doubt that Jack is referring to his former self in the second person, the confessional tone also places the reader in the situation described. In the above quoted passage, the uncertain identity of "you" allows Jack to simultaneously relate his past and present selves in the text while presenting this search for identity in "relation to other people," an audience. The reader is positioned in the event as it happens--"To get there you follow Highway 58 . . ."--but he/she views the activity from a point of view that has completed the experience and is trying to imbue it with meaning. The reader's interpretation outside the text, in this way, parallels, "equals," the narrator's in the text, "and yet" is not "the same." The audience sees the text in much the same way the narrator does, but, while Jack's final interpretation involves the relationship he makes between his past and present, the audience's ultimate interpretive decision concerns the acceptance of this relationship in such a way that its meaning has a significance outside the text--in their own lives.

In this way All the King's Men, like Flood, questions where the authority for interpretation comes. Jack, like
Brad, must learn what authority--his own ideas about the world, or the "Great Twitch" of event--governs his life. The conclusion in both novels is that neither is complete in itself; no decision is resolved without the complex involvement of both. In a similar way, these novels show the difficulty of the interpretive process; each calls into question the book's supreme power to provide "revelation" and suggests a partial relinquishment of the authority of the text. The text remains central; as Warren says in his essay, "A Poem of Pure Imagination . . . ," "the reader does not interpret the poem but the poem interprets the reader. We may say that the poem is the light and not the thing seen by the light." 50 But the "creative" input of the reader validates the text. The interpenetration of private and public worlds in All the King's Men and Flood and the difficulty of achieving this synthesis serves as metaphor for the difficulty Warren envisions in the interpretive process. We might conclude that these novels insist that the text means, and perhaps means one thing, but that meaning need be negotiated with the reader. Jack's confession, for example, indicates such interpenetration. It is a "symbol" which discovers "direction"; that is, it relates Jack's past experience to his present and in that relation provides Jack with meaning in his life. But in order to do this, the confessional quality of All the King's Men develops an affiliation between itself and its audience. In the language
of Warren's *Homage to Theodore Dreiser*, the novel's "power" comes from the "involvement of the reader's imagination to fulfill the 'untotal realization'" of the text, "to participate in the act of creation."\(^{51}\) In this way, the interrelatedness which Jack finds in his life and which is represented in the text is mirrored outside it. The discovery an audience makes between itself and the text of *All the King's Men* parallels Jack's perception of his connection to those events which give his life meaning.
FOOTNOTES – CHAPTER TWO


4 Allen Shepherd, "Character and Theme in Robert Penn Warren's *Flood*," *Critique*, 9, no. iii (196 ), p. 97.


9 Booth, p. 136.


11 Shepherd, p. 95.


13 Shepherd, p. 95.
14Mizener, p. 110.


16Warren, "'The Great Mirage': Conrad and Nostromo, p. 258.


19Mizener, p. 106.

20Mizener, p. 100.

21Mizener, p. 110.

22Warren, Democracy and Poetry, p. 69.


26Shepherd, p. 96.


29Robert Penn Warren, "A Poem of Pure Imagination: An


34 Barfield, p. 154.

35 Barfield, p. 154.


37 Adams, p. 459.

38 Warren, "A Poem of Pure Imagination: An Experiment in Reading (1945-6)," p. 211.

39 Owen Barfield, "Coleridge's 'I and Thou'," in Romanticism Comes of Age, pp. 140-1.


43 Mizener, p. 61.
44 Mizener, pp. 62-3.

45 Mizener, p. 64.

46 Mizener, p. 63.


CHAPTER III

GETTING THE STORY RIGHT:
INTERPRETING THE CAVE

Man lives by images. They
Lean at us from the world's wall, and Time's . . . .
"Reading Late at Night
Thermometer Falling"

Warren is not content with naive truths, whether they
are based on the thin air of idealism or the myopic soil of
brute, unrelated facts. The two novels discussed in the
previous chapter show us characters who operate on these
easy assumptions: the impulses toward the creation of self
in the unrestricted world of idea which characterizes Flood
and the ill-conceived drive to discover identity in the
mechanism of disconnected events in All the King's Men
illustrate the opposing poles within which almost all of the
characters in Warren's fiction strive. Also, both Flood and
All the King's Men demonstrate a resistance to a type of un-
sophisticated realism which mires the text in a purely ob-
jective and determined reading. Instead, these novels ask
for the participation of an imagination outside themselves
for completion. The area in their narratives where private
and public meet has a corollary in the reading process; it
is defined by the interpretive crossroads where the
constraints of the text meet with the audience's ability to relate the experience in the novel to their own.

In various ways, other novels in Warren's canon pursue the goal of discovering a relationship between text and reader that mirrors the character's struggle in the book. However, all do not approach it as consciously as Flood and All the King's Men. Central to virtually all of Warren's novels is the overt quest on the part of his characters for identity, but, as I have pointed out in the two previous chapters, an understanding of oneself, in Warren's terms, requires knowledge of a relationship to a community. That community can be defined temporally through associations to the past or spatially through one's immediate connection with family and society. As James H. Justus has pointed out in The Achievement of Robert Penn Warren, "complicity is the earned vision of those who have struggled toward self-knowledge."¹ Laboring to discover the proper relationship between self and community remains the final hurdle for the characters in Warren's fiction, and, in his most successful work, his narratives suggest that the interpretive process parallels this struggle. But often the analogy is implicit in the text. In Flood and All the King's Men, as I have tried to show, this process is an intrinsic part of the narrative structure; in much of the other fiction, however, the importance an audience plays in the aesthetic procedure is not explicit. Direct address, as it was used in All the
King's Men, is severely limited in the other novels, and a "potential audience" within the text does not materialize in any other work with the same precision that we find in Flood. The relationship between storyteller and audience is a primary critical question in The Cave, but, with this exception, the place the reader plays in the creative process of Warren's seven other novels can be considered secondary. Strategies that demand less strenuous involvement on the reader's part, however, can serve to better understand those works by Warren which require active participation. In an effort to place those works where this participation is crucial in the context of Warren's fiction as a whole, a brief consideration of Night Rider, At Heaven's Gate, World Enough and Time, Band of Angels, Wilderness, Meet Me in the Green Glen, and A Place to Come To is in order.

In his preface to The Rhetoric of Fiction, Wayne Booth claims

The success of an author's rhetoric does not depend on whether he thought about his readers as he wrote; if 'mere calculation' cannot insure success, it is equally true that even the most unconscious and Dionysian of writers succeeds only if he makes us join in the dance. 2

Booth's comments characterize several of Warren's novels. What is implicit in his fiction, however, is specific in Warren's critical writing. In Chapter I, I quoted Warren from Democracy and Poetry; there he suggests that the quality of a work can be judged by the way in which the
"individuation" of a particular character's quest becomes a "felt principle of significant unity." I also quoted Warren from *Homage to Theodore Dreiser*: "No fiction," he says, can, indeed provide total realization—and if it could do so it would paradoxically fail as fiction—for the power of fiction lies in the involvement of the reader's imagination to fulfill the "untotal" realization, to participate in the act of creation.3

But, in much of Warren's fiction, "complicity" in this sense is richly displayed primarily within the text only and not through the reader's participation in "the act of creation." Warren offers his central figures as (in his terms) "models of selfhood," but these models are, to a large extent, interpreted by authoritative narrators. The result is "realization" with very little "involvement" from the "reader's imagination."

There is a structural device, however, that appears in many of his novels that provides us with a ruler for measuring the degree to which reader participation is demanded. Chapter II of this essay emphasized the significance that confession played in the structure of *All the King's Men*. In that novel "telling" was a deliberate attempt on the part of the narrator not only to relate his experience to an audience, but, through the confessional process, to discover its meaning; the right telling of the story depended not only on the narrator's conviction but on his ability to convince his audience of the accuracy of that
conviction. In *Confession and Community in the Novel*, Terrence Doody describes such an alliance as an "aesthetic relationship between the writer and his audience. Community . . . [is] a moral relationship" implying "mutual, personal responsibility."⁴ In this context, Justus suggests that the use of "interpolated storytellers" in many of Warren's novels functions as a "technique for widening and deepening thematic implications through the use of alternative points of view."⁵ Justus adopts the structure used in Coleridge's *The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner* to outline his thesis:

The primary narrative situation in Coleridge's poem is the overlay and constant impingement of two storytellers: the Mariner and the omniscient poet whose emotional alliance is with the wedding guest. What the Mariner tells his auditor is the substance of what the poet tells us.⁶

Warren's "Mariners," the interpolated storytellers, aesthetically reenact the process which the artist himself goes through in writing the poem. The description of this procedure recalls Warren's outline of the artist's course in *Democracy and Poetry*. He says that the writer's work plunges him "into the 'abyss of the self'" as well as re-turning "the readers, the spectators--'into . . . [their] own presence'." This connection does not necessarily pre-sume that the artist and "omniscient poet" are precisely the same (although Justus does not make a distinction between the two). But it implies they are on a similar quest--a journey which provides neither "omniscient poet" nor "wedding guest,"
narrator nor reader, with exclusive responsibility in the interpretive process. If we expand Justus' structure, we can say that the use of interpolated storytellers in Warren's novels requires an aesthetic and moral relationship similar to, though more limited than, the confessional model that *All the King's Men* supplies.

With this as our hypothesis, we can begin a brief examination of Warren's fiction. In his first two novels, *Night Rider* and *At Heaven's Gate*, "subordinate" figures play the chief role of Mariner. Willie Proudfit tells of "his past complicity in crimes on the western plain" and in the process of narration discovers that he shares a guilt common to all men. But this has "only a subliminal effect" on Percy Munn, the protagonist of *Night Rider*, whose vision is too limited to see that Proudfit's past parallels his own present. 7 What Percy is unable to see, the reader determines. No relationship between Willie's story and Percy's is made in the text; that is, the novel simply presents two stories and implies that they are relevant to one another. If nothing else, the reader should recognize that an interpretation relating the stories is demanded. But the association a reader makes can lead to certain judgements about the text and its characters. Similarly, Ashby Wyndham's "Statement" parallels Jerry Calhoun's plight in *At Heaven's Gate*. However, here the stories are more structurally interrelated because Ashby's part activates the
public confession of Private Porsum, his cousin who is immersed in Bogan Murdock's corrupt financial schemes. The text makes the connection between the stories and so demands less involvement from the reader than Night Rider. In both novels, however, the confession of the Mariners ally the interpretive power of the narrative with the reader's understanding to some degree.

But it is not until All the King's Men that the relationship between text and reader is fully realized through the Mariner structure. Here, Jack Burden's confession, like Ashby Wyndham's "Statement," attempts, through the writing process, to interpret those actions it narrates. Unlike this situation in the two previous novels, the interpolated story becomes central while the Cass Mastern tale (the history that in Night Rider and At Heaven's Gate would have been the main story) is secondary. A similar structure frames the narrative of World Enough and Time. Justus compares Warren's fourth novel to All the King's Men:

As with Jack Burden's story, World Enough and Time . . . is the long anguished telling of a Mariner figure. It is a more ambitious presentation than Burden's because of Warren's complex manipulation of perspective. A nameless but not-quite-effaced narrator (another student of history) slips into the background, as Jack Burden was not wont to do, to permit full play to his Cass Mastern.

The "manipulation of perspective" may make World Enough and Time a more "complex" work on one level, but it deprives it
of the kind of intricate relations that *All the King's Men*
creates with its audience. Jeremiah Beaumont's journal,
like Jack Burden's narrative, serves the cause of self-
knowledge—it recreates his experiences aesthetically and,
in this process, attempts to discover meaning in them. But
unlike Jack Burden's story, in Jeremiach Beaumont's case
an "omniscient poet" edits and interprets his journal and
so, to a large extent, removes the need for the reader's
direct involvement in the "act of creation." Although
"telling" in *World Enough and Time* becomes a major instru-
ment in satisfactory definition within the text, in terms
of the limited responsibility it asks from its reader for
"realization," it recalls the structures of *Night Rider* and
*At Heaven's Gate* rather than *All the King's Men*.

For different reasons, *Band of Angels*, Warren's fifth
novel, and *A Place to Come To*, his tenth and, thus far,
last novel, also require limited reader participation. Jed
Tewksbury's confessional narrative in *A Place to Come To*
functions as a "mode of knowing" in ways that are
reminiscent of Jack Burden's "telling." The novel is rich
with a theme reiterated in much of Warren's fiction: the
tormented and frequently unsuccessful attempt to escape from
history. Although it is structurally like *All the King's
Men*, *A Place to Come To*, in many ways, is an abridgement to
those possibilities for reader involvement we saw in Jack
Burden's confession. In *All the King's Men*, the tough-guy
style of the narrator softens as he discovers the importance of human relations; the stylistic modification orients the reader to those changes that Jack discovers in the process of telling. This shift both demands an audience (the confession, as well as the knowledge it affords, cannot exist without the reader) and creates one—it locates our interpretation of Jack's experience around an understanding that Jack himself determines in the process of confessing. In *A Place to Come To*, while the cocksure sarcasm of Jed's voice mellows to uncertainty, there is a bleak flatness to the transition; his confession does not so much recreate his experience—and in the process create a community of readers capable of understanding a vision behind that experience—as document it. The reader does not share the responsibility for interpretation but listens passively, discovering little relation between Jed's tale and his own life. Jed's exile in the world stemming from a separation from his old home and his inability to find another home, "a social matrix in which the self can be nourished," is only tenuously dealt with. His isolation persists and the structure of the novel mirrors his separation; it never adequately allows the reader to see in its "individuation" a "felt principle of significant unity."

Amantha Starr's first person confession in *Band of Angels* fails to engage the participation of the reader in another, less intriguing, way. Unlike Jack Burden or Jed
Tewksbury's stories, she lacks both the rhetorical and intellectual ability to tell it. There is Hamish Bond's tale--the last time Warren uses the interpolated story in his fiction--but neither Amantha's "overexercised sensibilities [nor] her ability as a Wedding Guest to learn from Bond's story" help her. Her regeneration also seems as un-engaging as her various trials, and, more than anything else, time alone reconciles her.11 Her inability to involve the audience in her plight is not so much a structural flaw, then, as the failure of her character to maintain our interest. Her personal mediocrity makes her confession, in the words of Walker Gibson, "a book in whose mock reader we discover a person we refuse to become, a mask we refuse to put on, a role we will not play."12

The remaining four novels following the final use of the interpolated story and preceding the return of the first person narrative in *A Place to Come To* use formal structures and shapes which "tend toward the emblematic."

To some extent, they all correspond to Justus' characterization of Warren's "later fiction" as

marked obviously by bold if not always successful manipulation of caricature and stereotype, artifice and rhetoric, of episodes that are more ceremonial and ritualistic, and of the author's own voice as authority.13

The effort to unearth a trapped man in *The Cave*, the private and national motivations and convictions behind the fighting of the Civil War in *Wilderness*, the submersion of
a small town beneath engulfing waters in *Flood*, and the attempt to emerge from a disintegrating farm that is slipping into the natural world of a small wooded valley in *Meet Me in the Green Glen* are all attempts to locate the "actual" world in a symbolically rich and imaginative one. But as I stressed in the discussion of *Flood* in Chapter II, such a strategy does not necessarily place complete "authority" in "the author's own voice." The "manipulation of caricature and stereotype, artifice and rhetoric" which calls attention to *Flood* as "made up" raises "to the level of generalization" the "documentation of the world." The "potential audience" becomes the structural device which involves the reader in the story while, simultaneously, making it both representative and real. In *Wilderness* and *Meet Me in the Green Glen* a similar "manipulation" is employed; the artificiality of the novels is obvious, but there is no indication in either narrative as to how the experiences in the stories are to be related to the experiences of a reader outside them. These novels consciously avoid determining such a relationship. We are presented, in *Wilderness*, with a "morality pageant" modeled on the spiritual journeys in *Everyman* and Dante's *Commedia*. And in *Meet Me in the Green Glen*, we have a novel that, as the reviewer Michael Cocke points out, subordinates "narrative to representation of evolving states." In both novels "generalization[s]" are made without direct requests for
"documentation" from an interaction with the "actual" world of the reader. Their richness comes from what Justus describes as their "grammatical precision and . . . lexical choices."

While tending toward the same imposing generalizations that typify *Wilderness* and *Meet Me in the Green Glen*, *The Cave* differs by undercutting its authority and offering an internal model for participation. In this latter way it is similar to *Flood* but, as we shall see in the rest of this chapter, the design this novel offers for reader involvement is distinct from both *All the King's Men* and *Flood*.

Emblematically, "the cave itself . . . becomes not only the unifying structural element but also the orienting thematic focus" yet the novel "has no real protagonist and no authoritative point of view; themes and patterns of action fall to several characters each of which is allowed independent ethical positions and devices for 'telling'." Although Justus does not consider the conflicting nature of these statements, his analyses of *The Cave* suggest the basic difficulty facing the reader of the novel: we have the sense of authority throughout it, a secure strategy for interpreting the narrative, but with each new voice encountered, like a shadow, that authority slips through our fingers.

In *The Cave* "what the poet tells us" does not come
through a Mariner or a first person confession; nor do we find interpretive direction in a "potential audience."
Instead, the story is told through multiple points of view; a narrator organizes these voices placing them, figuratively speaking, around "the cave itself," but ultimately his reliability becomes as questionable as theirs. Neither his organization nor his checkered comments about the other characters' points of view fashion a substantial basis for satisfying interpretation. The foundation for accurate judgment, in fact, is a central question posed by the novel. And because we do make decisions about the events of the novel, an examination of the way we arrive at our conclusions must be a prerequisite for any analysis of The Cave.

Recalling the relationship between private and public from Chapter II can help in this study. Central to that discussion was the way alliances between characters' private understandings of the world and the world itself were tenuously made. Justus describes this "search for self-knowledge" as "a response to two contradictory desires:

the searcher's need for a definition of his private being that will isolate him... and celebrate his uniqueness, and his need for immersion in... the spirit of community.

Equally important in Chapter II's argument was the way this understanding was mirrored in the narrative. If we think of the text as a private vision, we can consider its search for "definition," for meaning, as guided by the same "contradictory desires" Justus outlines: the need for
autonomy and "authority" from "the author's own voice," and the need for "immersion" in the public world of the reader. Most critical analyses of The Cave consider it with only the first half of this formula in mind. For example, Justus says that the "multiple protagonists" reduce the dramatic power of the work so that "rich meaning is forced to take up the slack"; and the lack of reliability from one "private" voice is made up through the use of a "conceptual shorthand"—"verbal and physical gesture" are used to "externalize individual dilemmas in accommodating private and public needs." Justus believes these "gestures" serve both to define the "private" vision of the text (providing an authoritative point of view) and to symbolize a universal, "public," condition which a reader can identify with. Justus claims that the "donnee" of The Cave requires . . . from the reader not natural identification with the things and peoples of a "natural" place but . . . [a] confirmation that physical truths still coil and recoil in a natural world that has been imaginatively shattered and reassembled.

In such an analysis meaning comes exclusively from the imposition of "gesture" on the reader. But the structure of The Cave suggests another way "immersion" in the public world of the reader is realized; it demands that interpretation begin within the text but not end there.

Wayne Booth again provides the theoretical setting for one of the ways readers become involved with texts. In The
Rhetoric of Fiction, he discusses "travelling" with narrators "unaccompanied by a helpful author": 22

If granting or withholding the privilege of being the central observer can control emotional distance, it can be equally effective in controlling the reader's intellectual path . . . . Many stories require confusion in the reader, and the most effective way to achieve it is to use an observer who is himself confused. 23

A few pages later, he says

The effects of deliberate confusion require nearly complete union of narrator and reader in communal endeavor, with the author silent and invisible but implicitly concurring, perhaps even sharing, his narrator's plight. 24

All of the voices in The Cave, including the narrator's, share a central problem: how do they know what they know is right--about Jasper Harrick's entrapment, about their relation to it and about themselves in general. In a moment, we will see this reflected in the indeterminacy of the stories they tell; this uncertainty is, in fact, what characterizes the narrator's story--The Cave. Therefore, the reader's, and "perhaps" author's, "plight" in determining meaning in the novel parallels the narrative's difficulty. As the text's authority is emasculated, our understanding of it is undercut. Paradoxically, as Booth's comments suggest, this can provide the basis for a new understanding; while scrupulously describing the inadequacy of a single voice as authority, The Cave requests a contextual determinacy that is ultimately defined by the "union" of narrator and reader.
At one point in *The Cave*, Celia Harrick recalls the words of her son, Jasper. She had asked what it was like in the ground and he replied, "It's a nice temperature down there . . . . It is not summer and it is not winter. There aren't any seasons to bother about down there . . . ." When Jasper goes underground he removes himself from the world of time and change characterized by Celia as a place "where the seasons never [come] and a lot of things [don't] matter" (p. 242). Sealed in caves, he also isolates himself from relations with others. Celia believes he "crawled in the ground . . . to get away from everything. To get away from the hands on him" (p. 298). Ultimately, Celia assumes he crawls caves to escape from his father—a paradigmatic connection in Celia's mind symbolizing the potential that all his relationships in time have.

But what we know about Jasper from these comments has less to do with his motivations for crawling in caves than with what this means to Celia; in other words, it is not a valid source of information about Jasper. And yet, this is how all our information comes in *The Cave*; Jasper's entrapment remains only an idea in the stories told by the characters in the novel. The epigraph to *The Cave* from Plato's *The Republic* is suggestive of the kinds of empirical and aesthetic difficulties such a narrative poses. The "strange prisoners" who can see "only their own shadows" in Plato's cave are like Celia whose vision of Jasper lacks
objectivity. And "telling" her vision to an audience removes it even further from the objective realm. This parallels Plato's aesthetic theory from The Republic: for Plato, art is twice removed from absolute reality; it is an image of the world which, itself, is nothing more than a copy of the ideal. In The Cave, the "act of creation" at its best is undocumented, as in Celia's case, and at its worst promotes self-delusion and lies.

In The Cave, as Bernard Guttenberg points out, an aesthetic that attempts "to view in isolation what can only be seen in context" resembles a "dream." The narrative structure criticizes an authoritative point of view as isolated and false. For this reason, arguments such as those from the critic Allen Shepherd that "In The Cave, the narrator's commentary is designed to supplement, explicate and tone down the often incomplete and sometimes incoherent perception of the characters" are misleading. The narrator's voice proves itself as incomplete and unreliable as those voices which Shepherd believes it supplements. For example, early in the novel the narrator describes the boots and guitar of Jack Harrick "set in the middle of a little glade" (p. 4). We are told that Jack is not in the glade but "two and one-half miles away . . . dying of cancer" (p. 5). Apart from this factual detail, however, the narrator disclaims further knowledge of Jack; he says, "Jack Harrick, whoever he is, is not here . . ."
(p. 5). A few pages later, the narrator relates the confused feelings of Jack's son, Monty, toward his girlfriend, Jo-Lea Bingham; Monty's irresolution is canvased in the narrator's own incertitude.

He couldn't lift his eyes to meet her. For shame? For shame at her shame? For shame in his uninnocence before her innocence—her innocence as she proclaimed her identity? For shame in some guilty anger that had been piling up in him? For shame of Old Jack and his cancer? For shame of Jasper, who was a pore cavecrawler, and wouldn't know what to do with ten thousand dollars? For shame of his own hillbillyness? No—for shame of something else, something more deeply himself?

Anyway, unable to lift his eyes for shame . . . (p. 31).

The indeterminacy of the narrative is further exacerbated when the narrator's voice becomes indistinguishable from a character's. In the following example, the certainty of the narrator's voice erodes and slowly becomes Monty's befuddled narrative.

Monty Harrick wished his nose were like his father's, a big jutty nose like the nose of the Indian on a nickel—folks said the Harricks had Indian blood, Cherokee blood, blood of a chief's daughter from the early times when . . . the folks said the Harricks had fought and fucked over the mountains into Tennessee. Well, even if Monty Harrick didn't have that nose, folks knew, the girls knew, that he was Old Jack's boy, a chip off the old block, the son of that Jack Harrick who had known every laurel-slick where a he-bear might lie easy and reach for his wild grapes, and every ivy-slick where a wild boar would wallow, and every likker trail and still track in East Tennessee, and had helled over half the ridges and up half the hoot-owl hollows from Chattanooga to Nashville and as far over as Abingdon, Virginia.

. . . But he knew he wasn't. Maybe his Big
Brother was a chip off the old block, but he wasn't.... He was nothing—that was what some deep part of him felt as he smiled down at the girl—face in the dappled shade, reaching out his hand to make her do again what they had done five times near a month ago, but she now kept putting him off from. Durn it, it looked like five times would give a fellow a sort of right, or at least the right to know why she kept putting him off. But she wouldn't even say why, and when he insisted the tears brimmed up in her eyes till he himself felt all torn up or, durn it, ready to run off and never see her again.

If it weren't for this girl, drat her, maybe he would be a real chip off the old block. Other girls looked at him, at Monty Harrick, and he knew durn well what they might be thinking. Being with some girls, a guy felt sort of free and easy. But with Jo-Lea a guy felt trapped (pp. 13-15).

In this passage, neither the narrator's voice nor Monty's explain the difficulties Monty is having with his father and Jo-Lea. Any interpretation we make about him based on it carries with it the same vagueness that marks the narrative.

The relationship between voices in the narrative, distinguished by this mutual uncertainty, characterizes the structure of The Cave. No character tells his own story completely, and no character's tale is entirely explained by the narrator. However, the less problematical characters, and in this novel these are the least interesting characters, are, in fact given less opportunity to tell their own story. In the case of Dorothy Cutlick, for example, the narrator mediates an interpretation of her character for the reader. After Nick Pappy makes love to her in the back of his
restaurant, we are told exactly how to judge her response to it:

What was transacted in the back room of the restaurant had . . . no relation to life. When it happened, the surface of life could close over it, like pond water over a stone—or better, like flesh healing over a wound, but healing at an incredible speed as when you see some such slow natural process photographed on film and the film then run off at a speed to compress all time (pp. 59-60).

The images in this passage determine our response; they are authoritative referents designed to aid in our understanding of Dorothy. Unlike the commentary on Monty's relationship with Jo-Lea, the narrator's voice remains certain, coming up with numerous and "better" metaphors that adequately describe her relations with Nick. The narrator offers similar judgements about the other minor characters in the novel—our responses to Gisselle Fontaine, Mrs. Bingham and Jebb Holloway are all outlined in the text. But this type of narrative does not define the central structure of The Cave. The engagement between narrator and major character's voices is less determined and our response to it becomes a much more complex procedure.

No character in The Cave is given more time to tell his story, and no story is more difficult to interpret, than Isaac Sumpter's. A separation between Isaac's voice and the narrator's accounts, in large part, for the trouble. Here is an example of how the two voices are juxtaposed in the narrative. First, Isaac's narration:
He said aloud: "Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!" And felt, in a kind of shyness, as tears grew under his closed lids, that something stirred now in his dew-dark inwardness. It was as though the bird woke in that inner darkness, as in a dark glade, and stirred, preparing the first note.

No, it couldn't be the bird stirring in that sweet, leafy darkness. But it was something like the bird. It was something which, he suddenly felt, was free and immortal, like the bird, and when its utterance came in the darkness it would be sweet to break the heart. But it wasn't the bird. It was his self.

No, it couldn't be his self, for his self was the self that knew that this being now stirred in the dew-darkness. But it had to be a self, for it was contained in the darkness which was himself (pp. 98-9).

Keats' text provides Isaac with the grist for speculating on his own "individuation" in the world. His thoughts, driving him toward separation from all of humanity (all mortals), have a structural counterpart in the way his story is told. His thinking is a maze of conjectures, but the narrator offers no comment to encourage or discourage our acceptance of Isaac's struggle for identity through isolation as appropriate. Instead, he merely presents an outline of Isaac's past, documenting Isaac's departure from his home in Johntown to the "University" in Nashville, his work there, his affair with Rachel (Goldie) Goldstein and its failure. All this is pertinent information if we are to understand Isaac, but it is satisfactory only as "documentation." It does not strive "to rise to the level of generalization," an act that would provide the basis for our gauging the worth of Isaac's values and attitudes. What we are left with in
this example is (using Warren's terminology) "experience"—the narrator's description of the events of Isaac's life without an encompassing vision to understand them, and Isaac's unedited thoughts; what we lack is the "urgency to know the meaning of experience."

The central narrator has a difficult time in the novel establishing authority. He not only fails in his efforts when he refuses to comment on a character's story but is equally unsuccessful when he does. The following passage, describing Isaac's feelings about Jasper's supposed death, is a perfect example of this. Isaac's heart overflowed "with gratitude to Jasper Harrick who had saved him," and the narrator concludes,

For Isaac Sumpter wanted to be innocent. He wanted to be good. He had always wanted to be good. And now, in some dark recess of the self where all bargains are debated, and all transactions are made, and all potions brewed and mysteries performed, he was promising... that he would be good for always.

He could be good now forever, for he was, he knew, entering upon that success which was his due, and for which the price had been paid (p. 287).

But subsequent events in the novel undermine the narrator's opinion. First, late in The Cave, we learn that Jasper had actually been alive the whole time Isaac thought him dead—the narrator mistakenly assumes Isaac was correct. And secondly, because Jasper was alive, Isaac is not "saved" and what "success" he has, an issue we will explore in a moment, is questionable. The action in the novel contradicts
the narrator. But as the narrative dismisses the voice of a lone narrator as authoritative, it simultaneously proposes another base on which to found reliable interpretation. In the examples we have seen so far, the various narrators of *The Cave* have invalidated one another's stories; they can, however, also provide a context capable of effecting the truth of a story.

The importance, as well as the limitations, of the relationship created between the various stories and how this determines meaning can be seen in the following example in which three voices describe the same event in different ways. While riding in Nick Pappy's Cadillac, Isaac becomes aware of the "cradle-like" motion of the car; a comparison floats into his mind between the luxury of the automobile and the humble austerity of his background. Further associations lead him to fashion a rambling account of his birth. "Well, what of it," he thinks in reference to his ride in the fancy car,

There has to be a first time for everything, and damn it, was it his fault that he had to be born in Johntown, got by a Bible-thumper out of some woman who, no doubt, was the kind would marry a Bible-thumper, and the Bible-thumper, no doubt, had had to work his way past eight or nine yards of the dry goods such a woman would swathe herself in and call a nightgown, and when he got there, he and his partner in the crime of begetting Little Ikey Sumpter had, no doubt, pretended they were doing something quite different from what they were doing, even pretending they were sound asleep so that everything was merely a guiltless and pleasureless somnambulism and---
No, he brought himself up, not somnabulism, for they hadn't been ambulating when they were working on Little Ikey. It would have to be somni—somni-what? Somnifornicating, you might say, and so little Ikey . . . was a sort of first cousin to an Immaculate Conception, first cousin being as good as the Baptists could do in a place like Johntown (p. 191).

This tale of Isaac's "begetting" contradicts two versions which were presented earlier in the novel. The narrator provides a history of the relations between Mary Tillyard, Isaac's mother, Jack Harrick, her lover, and MacCarland Sumpter, her husband. MacCarland, according to this story, married Mary after Jack had impregnated her and run off to Europe to fight in World War II. She miscarried Jack's baby (something MacCarland wanted to happen but feels guilty about for the rest of his life) and died, twenty years later, giving birth to MacCarland's child (pp. 84-8). This narrative presents information unknown to Isaac about Mary's affair with Jack and demands that we see some discrepancy between its portrait of Mary and Isaac's account of his mother as the kind of woman who "would marry a Bible-thumper." A more pronounced deficiency in Isaac's tale becomes evident when we recall MacCarland's version of the "begetting"; it is immediately apparent from his story that an account of his relationship with Mary as a "guiltless and pleasureless somnabulism" is inaccurate. Here is part of MacCarland's narrative:

That leap of the heart which was joy had passed so quickly into the leap of heart which was alarm
that he had never had the need to recognize it as joy. And if all was God's will—and if God had struck out that foulness from the body of Mary Tillyard—why should he question God's will? But whose will had conformed to whose? MacCarland Sumpter's to God's? Or God's to MacCarland Sumpter's?

Now standing in the water-green glimmer of vine-light, MacCarland Sumpter shook with his first knowledge of the dark deviousness of that God Who knows how to wait . . .

Now, nearly forty years after, MacCarland Sumpter shook, knowing that God had answered his every prayer. God had answered the unspoken prayer that the white body of the girl whose arm Jack Harrick had secretly rubbed in church would be laid before him and opened to him, to MacCarland Sumpter, who had swapped bottle-spit with Hell's high-stepper.

God had answered the unspoken prayer that the son of Jack Harrick should be cast forth as filth and not offend the eyes of MacCarland Sumpter. God had answered the prayer . . . that a son of MacCarland Sumpter's seed might rise up to redeem all.

To redeem what?

To redeem the fact that MacCarland Sumpter lived in the knowledge . . . that he had never truly had that white body that had lain down beside him for twenty years . . . . MacCarland Sumpter would never hear that sweet moan from the lips of Mary Tillyard when the strut busted . . . .

No, that was not true. He had heard it always: " . . . and give a moan-like, and it looked like a strut done busted in her . . . ."

But he had never heard it for him (pp. 91-2).

The accuracy of MacCarland's story depends on its relation to both the narrator and Isaac's accounts of the same incident. The compatibility of MacCarland's version with the narrator's excludes the adequacy of much of what Isaac says. In this way, the structure of The Cave indicates the importance of community in determining the truth. A single voice becomes valid only in the context of the related
stories of other voices.

But the narrative strategy of The Cave is not finally content with the strictness of inner-textual validity. Just as one voice alone in the text is not wholly capable of representing truth, the text itself must share some responsibility for determining meaning with the reader. This need for reader involvement can be seen in the problem The Cave has accurately presenting the basic event of the novel--Jasper Harrick's entrapment. There are many reactions to his internment, but information about his state in the cave comes from the same three voices we have just encountered in the above example. Throughout the novel, Isaac, the narrator and MacCarland offer disparate views of Jasper's condition. At the beginning of Chapter VII, the narrator tells us that

Jasper Harrick, according to Isaac Sumpter's report, was trapped just beyond the fourth chamber beyond the shelf leading around the pit. He had been coming back through a very constricted crawlway, and a stone caught in a fault in the ceiling, a big one, really a thin section of the ceiling, like a bulkhead door, Jasper said, had settled just enough to pin his leg below the waist. There was some injury to the right leg... (p. 226).

This narrative tells the reader what Isaac has told the crowd outside the cave and, using the criterion of the previous example, validates Isaac's vision a few pages earlier: riding in Nick's Cadillac, he sees in "the absolute darkness of his head--and the pit--. . . a body in the absolute darkness of the roiling water... . . . Whether it
was his own body or Jasper Harrick's, he couldn't tell. No, it was not Jasper's, it had to be his own" (p. 193). The accuracy of the narrator's conclusions coupled with Isaac's image of the pit, however, is challenged by the following new alliance between the two:

He stood there for a moment while the breathing subsided. Then he decided he had better do what he had come to do.

Over to one side, in the shadow, well hidden behind a stone, lay the accumulated packages of food which, presumably, he had brought in for Jasper Harrick, and the vacuum bottle of coffee which was always supposed to be left with him. Over to the other side, with the electric cord neatly coiled, was the heating pad, turned on, where he had placed it some thirty-odd hours back, warming the base of the stalagmite against which it was propped. He looked at it and wondered... why he hadn't simply laid the pad down and been done with it.

Then he burst out laughing. "For Christ's sake," he said, "I sure must have been in a state when I did that. That's a symbolic action if I ever saw one. Can't warm Jasper, then warm a rock."

He wanted to stop talking, but he didn't want to either. It made him feel good to talk. Nobody could hear you talk here. He realized that, and again laughed out loud (p. 279).

This dramatically reverses our view of Jasper and gives us, we think, the true picture of his condition. But, as we will explore in greater detail momentarily, telling the story when "Nobody [can] hear you talk," without an audience, undermines its truth. And it is only a short time later in the novel that MacCarland's depiction of Jasper's state throws yet another dramatic wrench into the mechanism response for our certainty.
Actually, we overhear a first version of his story through Monty; he is listening to two policemen recount MacCarland's tale after he had emerged from his clandestine expedition into the cave. (In Platonic terms, we are presented with an image of an image of his representation of the truth.) We learn that after MacCarland found Jasper deep underground Jasper told him that he had not "knocked-up" anybody. Isaac had claimed that Jasper said someone was carrying his baby; after Isaac's announcement, Jo-Lea Bingham confessed to being the mother. MacCarland's story denies Isaac's information about Jasper and, according to the two policemen's retelling, it is only after Jasper explains the truth about his sexual relations—he impregnated no one—that he dies. As the policemen point out, the differences between Isaac and MacCarland's stories leave the crowd outside the cave confused, and one of the officers explains how they resolve the conflict:

Sure, folks believed him [MacCarland] when he first come out and didn't say anything but that Jasper was dead. But as soon as he said Jo-Lea was not knocked-up, they would not believe that for pignuts. It is a lot more fun to believe that Jo-Lea is knocked-up. She is nookie-built, and it is fun to think of her getting it. Folks believe what they want to believe (p. 350).

To a degree, our position as interpreters of the text resembles the situation of the "folks" around the cave. Like them, we are situated so that whatever story we believe loses some credibility when tested against the dissenting version. We can suppose Isaac's story is right
because it has textual validity through its support from the narrator of The Cave, but we soon discover that this supposition, along with its textual verification, proves as inadequate as the crowd's confirmation by desire: believing "what they want to believe."

A few pages after the policemen's account, another version of MacCarland's story undercuts the accuracy of Isaac's tale. To do so, it establishes a model of representation that can reflect, as closely as possible, the truth. A conversation between MacCarland and Isaac, father and son, representatives of two versions of the same story, demonstrates how knowledge and identity can take root. The teller of the tale, in this case MacCarland, creates an audience in Isaac capable of understanding his complicity in the story and giving it a reality in his experience.

Here is an example of their conversation:

Then the old man said: "I had to go in the cave, son."
"All right, you went in," Isaac Sumpter said.
"You went in and you found the poor bastard where I said and --"
"Yes," the old man said humbly, "I found him where you said."
"-- and he was out of his head and told you a bloody lie, so why didn't you pray with him and get the grief over and come on out and keep your mouth shut? You would have been greatly admired. From coast to coast, I may say."
"He wasn't out of his head," the old man said.
"Who wouldn't be?" Isaac Sumpter demanded.
"Stuck in the ground."
"He wasn't out of his head, son. He was dead --"
"Dead! But you said --"
"Yes, I said it. But he was dead before I got there."
"Then you -- you -- lied? But you -- you couldn't lie. I thought you wouldn't tell a lie."

"Yes, I lied. I had to tell my lie to undo the lie you told."

"But what the hell made you? You heard what that girl said. She admitted it."

"I don't care what she admitted. That's between her and God. But Jasper Harrick never said that, or anything else to you. You never got near him -- and so don't you understand I had to lie -- for the sake of Jasper -- for the sake of the living -- for the sake of truth -- for the sake of..."

"For the sake of ruining me. That's what you tried to do." He took a step toward the old man.

"Well, you tried. But I am not ruined."

The old man's eyes had stopped blinking against the light. They were fixed on him now with that yearning which, all at once, he could not bear. I got to get out of here, he thought.

"You are my beloved son--" the old man was saying.

I got to get out of here, Isaac Sumpter thought. "--and you killed Jasper Harrick," the old man concluded.

For a moment Isaac Sumpter was frozen. Then he came unfrozen and took a step toward his father, speaking very fast. "Now, look here," he said. "I knew you would say something like that. I was just waiting for it. I tell you I thought he was dead."

"Your action prevented food from being carried to him."

"I tell you I thought he was dead" (pp. 354-5).

Not only can "complicity" lead to the "earned vision" of "those who have struggled toward self-knowledge" within a novel, but it can also afford a structural basis in a narrative for such knowledge to be passed from text to reader. The truth of MacCarland's story is grounded in Isaac's response. That is, Isaac discovers the relevancy of the tale in his life, and, in that discovery, a relationship develops between them that defines knowledge: they
mutually, albeit painfully, agree on Jasper's true state in the cave's belly. In a similar way, the truth of The Cave can "exist" only as it creates an audience (a "potential audience" in Warren's terminology) capable of discovering the applicability of its version of truth in their lives. "Earned" interpretation, for the reader, means that the text demonstrates its own unreliability in a way that requires an audience to recognize a similar inadequacy in themselves. But a reader's "complicity" implies that through the discernment of mutual indeterminacy—in the objectivity of the story and the subjectivity of the audience—there can be a shared responsibility for satisfactory interpretation. The understanding father and son reach through their exchange means that neither MacCarland nor Isaac is free to believe "whatever he wants to believe"; there is a foundation for right and wrong interpretations and actions once "mutual responsibility" for truth has been established. The exchange between author and audience establishes a similar basis for judgment. Right and wrong actions based on interpretations by characters of the events in the novel are not determined exclusively by either text or reader but agreed on as an integral part of the creative process.

The differences between MacCarland and Isaac's responses to their exchange furnishes an example of how this agreement is reached and the way in which it affects our
assessment of their characters. For Isaac, awareness of Jasper's "true" state is accompanied by the knowledge that his father "saved" him. (MacCarland moved the heating pad which Isaac had left against the rock to where Jasper really was so that the search party would eventually find everything in order.) Out of love, MacCarland chose to become an accomplice in Isaac's deception, and as Isaac recognizes this he knows it is something "he could never escape" (p. 359). Despite this awareness, instead of accepting the shared responsibility his father's love offers, Isaac shuns it. Here is his reaction after hearing what his father has done:

As the words came out, and their meaning grew in him, Isaac Sumpter felt growing in him, too, the weakness, the suffocating sweetness, the insidious fear of unmanment. He felt the gush of gratitude, the welling of tears in his heart, the beginning of the terrible self-betrayal which love is (p. 358).

What should serve as a basis for love—the fruits of those who "have struggled toward self-knowledge"—is, in Isaac's voice, viewed with suspicion. And in the following moments, instead of pursuing a course that could fulfill the relationship based on mutual understanding begun between them, Isaac thinks "I've got to get out of here" (p. 358).

There is no direct comment in the narrative to indicate how we are to interpret Isaac's response to his "earned vision." Our final picture of him comes through a mingling between his voice and the narrator's; it is a
vision of him in "a high spacious office. . . . Where he, Isaac Sumpter, Ikey, Little Ikey, who wanted to be good, and had paid the price, could at last be totally himself" (p. 372). Yet, critics of The Cave almost universally interpret him the way Bernard Guttenberg does as "caught up in false being. . . . and a reminder that false being is a flight from selfhood." \(^{28}\) Justus says he fulfills himself in "his particular image of a stereotype." \(^{29}\) And for Leonard Casper, Isaac "succeeds in becoming the very stereotype that he had pretended to resent--the stage-jew . . . a self-pitying imposter, killer-clown--we come later to an executive suite in some false-image fantasy equally dedicated to 'putting one over on the dumb shumucks.'" \(^{30}\) These critics, like most who read The Cave, never fully explore the way they arrive at their interpretations, but they assume the text is solely responsible.\(^*\) Yet, the

\(^*\)All three of the critics mentioned above discuss the difficulty that characters in the novel have in making interpretations but do not extend this to the reader. Guttenberg, for example, stresses that, like Plato, Warren does not allow any unchecked, unqualified "idealism" to function as a satisfactory guide for his characters. In this regard, he suggests that "Monty," a character driven by idealistic pursuits, "is hardly a reliable narrator." \(^{31}\) But, almost in the same breath, Guttenberg assumes the accuracy of a narrator we have seen to be equally unreliable when he says, "Ikey is correct in likening his father to Abraham." \(^{32}\) He never explains how he distinguishes reliability. Casper also acknowledges the character's interpretive difficulties and even implies that this burden may be shared by the reader. He states that Jasper's "deliberate removal from visible action and the equivocal nature of his own reasons for cave crawling prevent any assignment of simple meaning. . . ." \(^{33}\) to him. But he
strategy of the novel—the use of multiple voices to undermine the authority of one point of view—erodes such assumptions. Isaac's rejection of his father's love shows his lack of regard for the union that demanded his acceptance of the truth about himself. But we can conclude that Isaac's tendency toward total subjectivity—a belief that he can "at last be totally himself"—is inadequate not because the text imposes this meaning on us but because the model relationship between father and son has demonstrated the potential for shared involvement. To judge Isaac (as the critics mentioned above have judged him) demands that we not err on the side of objectivity the way that Isaac erred in favor of subjectivity; neither the text alone nor the reader alone, neither MacCarland alone nor Isaac alone, can make accurate judgments. The above analyses are not

de-emphasizes this statement when he concludes that "symbols speak for the inexpressible"34 in the novel. For Casper, the breadth of the "womb-tomb" image found in The Cave defines all characters through their desire "to be unborn or to be among the unconnected dead, to be relieved of both time and eternity."35 I have already mentioned Justus' view that "gesture" determines meaning in the novel. He says that Warren "uses verbal and physical gestures to externalize individual dilemmas in accommodating private and public needs."36 For example, "the touch of a hand . . . poses a residual value as a timeless symbol for the human condition." That is, "Warren extends the literal gesture to its traditional symbolic function."37 So, ultimately, "stylization . . . guides characters and shapes their action and knits both theme and structure into what is finally a cohesive and comprehensive work of art."
"wrong" but only half "right" because they do not assume their own participation as an aspect of the interpretive procedure. To comprehend Isaac's actions fully, we must apply the same interpretive strategy suggested by the text's model back onto its action. Denying "mutual responsibility" in the discovery of truth, as well as shunning the love that serves as the basis for understanding, then, is Isaac's mistake. Avoiding this indiscretion and acknowledging reciprocity between authorial intention in the text and response in the reader can lead to accurate assessment.

In The Cave, models for interactions based on profound, "earned," understanding can be found in those characters who realize the importance of finding and establishing, however briefly, a relationship with an audience capable of sympathizing in some way with the story they tell. They recognize an inadequacy in their identities defined in isolation and attempt to rectify them through the development of relations with others. For example, at one point Nick explains to Celia that "there's something--something I got to tell you"; he expresses his need to be called by his "right name"--not Nick Pappy or The Greek, but Nick Papadoupalous. Hearing his name from another validates it in some way; without this acknowledgment "it looks like sometimes you don't know who you are, maybe" (p. 304). Celia has a similar need; when she pronounces his name, when she becomes aware of Nick's
"twisting urgency to tell her," she recognizes a "sudden urgency" in herself.

She had to tell somebody how awful it still was... She heard her own voice: "He did it to me. He did it to Jasper... he ran away to Chattanooga and lay around with them, with those dirty women... and he left me and Jasper just born..." (p. 306).

Nick and Celia discover through their confessions a common need: they must learn to accept different, but compatible, insufficiencies in themselves. Nick has trouble coming to terms with the Greek heritage represented by his name and Celia wishes to hide the unforgettable pain her husband caused her. Through their confessions, they recognize a universality in their sufferings and this awareness of complicity in the beginning of a new understanding of themselves. Nick's reaction defines this knowledge as both sobering and joyous.

Then his mind said something it had never said before: I am old, I am old as her. **I am near getting old.**

Then she lifted up her face and looked at him, and he saw the crinkles in the skin at the sides of her eyes, and the lines of worry in her forehead and how much gray there was, and he was thinking, or knowing without thinking, that this was the first human face, it seemed, he had ever looked into. Really looked into, just for its humanness.

As that same bond-shaking happiness broke over him, so he said out loud, with breathless discovery: "Jeez, Jeez."

With that happiness, he felt his arms tightening, felt her softness being crushed against his chest, and leaned his face over her (p. 307).

This happiness is shortlived; she pushes him away and they
are, in a moment, again the separate identities they were before they talked. But despite the tentativeness of what they share, the model for understanding has been founded. And Celia's union with Jack at the end of the novel fulfills the potential only suggested in the relationship between her and Nick. For in Jack, Celia discovers an audience who is coping with the same inadequacies she must contend with; recognition of shared responsibility for discovering meaning in their lives defines the love between them. This complicity is realized in the last exchange of the novel.

She was looking up, studying his face.
"John T.," she said. "Oh John T. -- I never saw you before!"
"Hush," he said, "hush."
"Maybe it's because -- because I never was me before."
"Hush," he said, and his hand on her head. 
"Oh, John T.," she cried out, but the cry was almost joyful. "don't die -- don't ever die!"
He was patting her head.
After a while, he said: "Ceeley, you used to teach school. You taught the third grade, when you came to Johtown. It was the third grade, wasn't it?"
She nodded, under his hand.
"There was always some pore little slow scholar," he asked, "wasn't there?"
She nodded.
After a whole, he said: "That's me. Yeah, Ceeley, I was always a poor scholar. But I'm trying. I'm trying to learn, Ceeley."
She reached up and drew his hand from her head and laid her cheek against the back of it (pp. 402-3).

An equally significant exchange, this one between MacCarland and Jack, defines the appropriateness of
MacCarland's actions, as opposed to Isaac's, following their conversation. MacCarland requires an audience capable of accepting his story about Jasper in a way that Isaac was not completely able to do. In Jack Harrick, MacCarland seems almost to create the kind of listener he needs to unearth his identity. They share a similar guilt; they both want Jasper to die. Their reasoning is different: Jack wishes his son dead because he cannot face up to abandoning Celia when Jasper was born; MacCarland wants Jasper dead because he is unable to forgive Jack for the pain Jack's memory inflicted on his marriage. But it is only as MacCarland involves Jack in his story that they become aware of the similar horror in each other's thoughts; MacCarland's confession initiates a response from Jack that brings both of them to a truer understanding of themselves.

"Listen, MacCarland Sumpter said, "and spit on me. Here is how I compounded my guilt. I arranged things in the cave so it would seem that my son had been there. Did you hear what I said?"

He waited.
"Say something," he said.
Then: "Do you want to spit on me now?"
Then: "All right. Listen. And then you will do it."

He came closer, leaning a little. "I will tell you. Long ago, I saw a son of yours dead -- a bloody nothing, a piece of something like a dime's worth of cat meat from the butcher shop. That son of yours had come from the body of Mary Tillyard, my wife, and my heart leaped for joy that it was dead. But I denied that joy. Even in that moment, I denied it, in God's name and my vanity of virtue. But tonight -- "

He leaned closer. "Spit on me," he said.
Jack Harrick, not turning, said: "No."
"Spit on me, so I can live."
"Go on."
"Will you -- " MacCarland Sumpter demanded humbly, avidly, "will you then?" He waited, then said: "Tonight when that boy came forth and said that Jasper Harrick was dying, my heart leaped again. In the old joy. But now I recognized it as joy. I wanted your son to die. Because -- "
He leaned closer.
" -- because it was your son."

He waited, and against the night sounds his breath came with its slow role of expectation, as he held his face closer, the cheek turned, the eyes closed."
"Now -- " he said, whispering.
Jack Harrick turned and looked at the pale-fleshed, dust-smeared, sweat-blotched face that hung there in the air near him, with the eyes closed tight. "Now -- will you?" the mouth whispered.
"No," Jack Harrick said.
The eyes of that suspended face opened, the face turned slowly at him, the man straightened creakily up.
"Why?"
"Because -- " Jack Harrick said, and paused, then seemed to come to grips with himself. "Because," he said, "I wanted my son--my own son--to die."
"What do you mean?" MacCarland Sumpter demanded, almost fearfully.
"I don't know," he said. Then he cried out: "Oh, God, I loved my son--but -- "
The cry fell away to a whisper: "but I know it's true."

MacCarland Sumpter was staring at him. Slowly Jack Harrick leaned forward in his wheel chair, gripping the sides for balance, lifting his face. Then on that face the lips drew back, the folds of flesh convolved, and there was the old grin, triumphant, savagely gay, sardonic.
"Now, Ole Mac," Jack Harrick demanded, "do you want to spit on me?" (pp. 380-1).

Jack's response demands that MacCarland recognize his guilt as representative of mutual culpability. Particularizing Warren's formula for knowledge here, the "tragic pathos"
that MacCarland felt separated him from the community around the cave, particularly Jack, is made to be a "universal corollary of human nature," specifically his and Jack's. And, whereas Isaac's false notion of identity rests in his own invalidated opinion of himself, MacCarland's self-knowledge is confirmed through its relation to another.

This is suggestive of the kind of involvement The Cave demands between itself and its reader. The text achieves its identity, its "rightness," in a way that is similar to MacCarland's fulfillment; it creates an audience capable of participating in the process of telling--able to affectively duplicate the strategies in the text the way Jack Harrick reflected MacCarland's confession. The truth of MacCarland's story is attained only as both he and Jack recognize its relevance in their lives; the veracity of The Cave, focused on the difficulty of interpretation, acquires representativeness only as the reader recognizes its applicability in his own struggle to discover meaning in the novel. The text manipulates the audience; it initiates the aesthetic process. But it demands an awareness on the reader's part that those deficiencies which the text is guilty of--specifically, the unreliability of one definitive point of view--apply to the reader as well. Just as MacCarland's confession admits Jack into the confessional process, the multiplicity of voices telling the
story of *The Cave* involves the reader in the creative process; the novel offers no definition except that meaning the reader makes by finding relationships between these voices.

The audience of *The Cave*, then, does not necessarily acquire meaning from the text so much as extract and assemble it in the process of reading; this defines our participation in "the act of creation." Through the strategy of the narrative (despite the importance of "manipulation of caricature and stereotype, artifice and rhetoric," "gesture," and "symbol," *The Cave*’s democratic structure remains its dominant strategy) the reader becomes oriented with the author’s intentions. Indeed, the relationship between author and reader affords the essential alliance for constructing meaning in the novel. Warren himself, as I noted in Chapter I, traces an affinity between writer and reader in *Democracy and Poetry*. He says, "There is a story behind the objective story; there is the story of the relation of the author to the work." The intention of the "objective story" is known when the author’s "story" and the reader’s experience of it become one. That is, the narrative gains significance as a community is established between isolated author and reader. *The Cave* asks us to recognize our complicity in its story; to do so is to share responsibility for determining its meaning.
FOOTNOTES – CHAPTER III


5 Justus, p. 25.

6 Justus, p. 25.

7 Justus, p. 28.

8 Justus, p. 28.

9 Justus, p. 27.

10 Justus, p. 303.

11 Justus, p. 32.


13 Justus, p. 33.

14 Justus, p. 250.


22. Booth, p. 274.


32 Guttenberg, p. 92.
33 Casper, p. 67.
34 Casper, p. 69.
35 Casper, p. 65.
CHAPTER IV

"DOUBLE IMAGE": THE AESTHETICS
OF BROTHER TO DRAGONS

"We have to want to kill Duncan to enjoy Macbeth."

While meaning is constructed through the community that is established between the author of The Cave and his audience, there is a greater emphasis on the reader's role in this process than the writer's. Specifically, the "implied author" of The Cave—the narrator who manages the novel's varied voices—remains detached so that "the relations of the author to the work" are not easily assessed. Although the "objective" story becomes the point at which author and reader's experience meet, the writer's "story" remains obscured by the impersonal nature of the narrator's commentary. For this reason, the text as "image of experience" is validated as representative of experience itself more by our complicity than the author's. The ratio of difference between author and reader changes, however, when we turn to Warren's long narrative poem, Brother to Dragons. In it we find a narrator with much closer ties to the poet outside the text—one whose initials, R.P.W., are, in fact, Warren's own. While the association established between writer and reader through this narrator resembles
the alliance in *The Cave*, it is more direct. The personal nature of the implied voice, emphasizing the autobiographical role it plays, minimizes the difference not only between poet and text but between the "aesthetic relationship between writer and audience." By locating himself in the poem as an active participant, Warren suggests that his quest for knowledge resembles his characters' search. And his relationship to them becomes a model for the audience's involvement with the poem. The truth in *Brother to Dragons* comes when the "image of experience" that it presents "teases us"—both writer and reader—"out of thought toward truth as experience." The intricacy of this aesthetic is the subject of this chapter.

A critical aspect of the novels discussed in the previous chapters has been their narrative quality. The importance of telling in *The Cave*, *Flood*, and *All the King's Men* as a means of establishing community between speaker and listener is also significant in the narrative poem *Brother to Dragons*. In *The Cave*, the authority of a single voice is undercut so that meaning is contextually determined. The validity of a story is discovered only in its relation to another story; that is, when a reader or listener recognizes the story of his or her life in the teller's. Creating such a response is a crucial aspect lacking in Brad Tolliver's telling in *Flood*. The scripts he writes are possessed with a "logic" that keeps them isolated from the
experience of readers; they are images without location in the actual world. Brad's early stories in I'm Telling You Now, however, elicited responses which transformed them from representations of life to life itself in the form of reader's experience. These stories, as Leontine Purtle says, made an audience "want to reach out and touch the world." The text of Flood hopes to establish such a union between itself and its audience; by placing Yasha Jones in the text as respondent not only to Brad's scripts but to the novel's action in general, the narrative wishes to violate its "logic" and, in that process, suggest a model response for its readers. In a more direct way, Jack Burden's confession in All the King's Men parallels R.P.W.'s telling in Brother to Dragons. Jack attempts to discover meaning in the personal events of his past by creating a "symbol" capable of relating those events to his present situation. In a similar way, R.P.W., through the writing of Brother to Dragons, tries to find an image which relates his personal life with an historical event with no direct connection to him. And, just as in The Cave, the confessional dialogue between the characters in the poem represent the author's colloquy with the reader. (An important difference between the 1953 and 1979 versions of Brother to Dragons, in fact, involves an increased directness, a heightened drama, between the voices in the latter poem—but more about this later.)
And, again, in a way that parallels the structure of The Cave, the incident around which the work centers focuses these relations. The fact—the ax-murder of the slave, George (John in the 1979 version), by Lilburn Lewis (Lilburne Lewis in the 1979 version)—is experienced only as the other characters refer to it. In an interview with Ralph Ellison following the publication of the 1953 version of Brother to Dragons, Warren explains how he envisioned the role played by the slave.

I wanted him to be there all the time. I wanted his presence to speak, his existence to speak. I wanted the fact of his experience to ricochet off something. I wanted to make a bank shot like in billiards. The relation of George's experience to other people, not the experience itself, merely, was what I wanted to play up.\(^6\)

In the Forewords to both versions of the poem, Warren pushes the aesthetic implied in the interview further. Considering "the experience itself" in broader terms—as history in general rather than just the one incident of his poem—he states:

\[\ldots poetry is more than fantasy and is committed to the obligation of trying to say something about the human condition. Therefore, a poem dealing with history is no more at liberty to violate what the author takes to be the spirit of history than it is at liberty to violate what the writer takes to be the nature of the human heart. What he takes these things to be is, of course, his ultimate gamble.\(^7\)

For Warren, poetry becomes a way of discovering in "history" the "nature of the human heart." Knowing George's "experience" is not possible or, at least, not valuable in
terms of what it can say about the "human condition," unless an image is discovered, an idea, which supplies meaning to that experience. From this standpoint, Warren states, "I have stayed within the general outlines of the available record, but have altered certain details. . . . I have invented a story for Letitia [Laetitia in the 1953 version] and her husband and have invented two characters: Aunt Cat. . . . and the brother of Letitia" (1979, p. xii).

In the Preface to his dramatic version of *Brother to Dragons*, Warren elaborates on this by saying, "naturally I had to interpret—it may be said 'create' all the characters." In this context, he admonishes that Jefferson's validity in the poem "does not stand or fall by the fact" (1979, p. xii). The historical and created Jefferson are different and yet dependent on one another. Without the invention of Jefferson, involving an interpretation of his relation to the present, the historical figure can "say" little about "the human condition." And, likewise, a misrepresentation of the historical Jefferson can undermine "what the writer takes to be the nature of the human heart" and thereby invalidate the creation. The relation between fact and interpretation, in this way, is an interdependent one.

But how is this interrelatedness validated? Or, stated conversely: when does the teller of story violate what he/she takes "to be the spirit of history?" In an interview
with Floyd Watkins following the publication of the 1979
version, Warren states how the created image functions to
provide meaning to experience:

The poem is a fiction. It is all one long
metaphor. . . . I see no obligation when you
put a historical character into a poem or
novel to be bound by any fact. You say, I'm
doing this my way. Now, there's a bargain
that goes on very close to the reality or
actuality or as close as you want to get it,
to pure fantasy. But I see no principle in-
volved there. If a reader knows what you're
doing.9

In the telling of *Brother to Dragons*, the "bargain" Warren
hopes to achieve demands that "actuality" and "pure
fantasy" find a balance so that the interpretation of
history becomes meaningfully grounded in fact. That bar-
gain can only be struck, he argues, when a relationship
between audience and writer is achieved based on the
reader's understanding of the writer's motives. We can
think of this aspect of Warren's aesthetic process as the
third "level of action"10 in *Brother to Dragons*. But be-
fore we examine it, a discussion of the first two levels--
the text as completed image, isolated from the involvement
of both writer and reader, and the writer's relation to his
creation (in this poem, R. P. W.'s presence in the text)--
is in order.

Frederick P. W. McDowell's premier reading of the poem
is a character study; it examines the psychological make-
up of characters who distort the facts of their experience
by "assimilating them into... .self-generated
obsession[s]." Ultimately, this, says McDowell, is what "betrays Lilburn Lewis into committing the murder."¹¹ Victor Strandberg claims that while McDowell's study helps us understand Brother to Dragons "as a drama or play" it fails to examine it for what it truly is--"a dramatic poem." As poetry, Strandberg suggests analyzing its "finely-wrought pattern of images calculated to transmit Warren's theme to a reader in a subtle but convincing way."¹² Strandberg claims the "Beast image" and "two major subsidiary metaphors"--the "Lewis house (the house of psyche)" and "the twice-recurring winter settings"¹³ facilitate the understanding of the poem. While both of these analyses are helpful, they assume the text itself--its characters and metaphors--establishes absolute and determinate meaning. And such an assumption appears suspect with the presence of R. P. W. in the poem. For his inclusion suggests the possibility that an element outside the text may have some bearing on its meaning. This extrinsic component does not invalidate McDowell and Strandberg's interpretations; instead, it enriches Brother to Dragons so as to give a new feel to the entire poem.

The critic Dennis M. Dooley provides the first lengthy discussion of R. P. W.'s role in the poem, but he does so using assumptions similar to McDowell's and Strandberg's. He believes that the presentation of R. P. W.'s "spiritual history" parallels Jefferson's but assumes that R. P. W.
has a "superior wisdom" capable of supplying *Brother to Dragons* with meaning. His analysis, however, fails to take into account two important aspects: first, the nature of the creative process which R. P. W. is a part of; and secondly, certain explicit autobiographical qualities which ally him with the writer of the poem. As Charles Bohner points out, "The poet, R. P. W. . . . is, of course, a persona, yet there is evidently a large admixture of autobiography in the characterization." In the Watkins interview, Warren describes the importance of this "admixture." The two trips that R. P. W. makes, Warren says, resemble his own. "I went" on the visits to Rocky Hill, he says, to set the poem in the modern world. I don't want to set it as a historical poem, put it that way. I want modern man, myself, you see, and my father. I want such a relation, too, myself, in time, with my old father there.

In addition, he states that he wants "R. P. W. to make some commentary; he's supposed to make commentary. . . ." In the Preface to the publication of the dramatic version of the poem, Warren further elaborates on the character of R. P. W., calling him "the writer" who is "haunted by the shocking experience and, hoping to make sense of it, visits. . . the Lewis house. His presence forms the second level of action." The use of this persona as "part commentator and part participant" defines Warren's relationship to the poem as both intrinsic and extrinsic. Richard G. Law, in his essay "*Brother to Dragons*: The Fact
of Violence vs. the Possibility of Love," outlines this "level of action" as parallel to the action in the text.

The universality of the need to wrest meaning out of experience is suggested in an analogy implicit between the process of individual self-definition and an artist's act of creation: the individual's creation of a moral universe in which to act and the artist's shaping of his materials into a form manifest the same deep imaginative process. Out of both come the fragile human artifacts: order, meaning, value.20

In an effort to "wrest meaning out of experience," Warren puts himself into the experience of the poem; his wisdom is not superior to the experience but determined by it.

But this relationship to the text is a complex one. Through R. P. W., Warren attempts to discover an image which will provide the meaning necessary to understand the event outside the image, outside the text. In his essay, "Use of the Past," Warren has commented that this creative impulse is our only hope for discovering meaning.

"Inevitably," he says,

the past, so far as we know it, is an inference, a creation, and this, without being paradoxical, can be said to be its chief value for us. In creating the image of the past, we create ourselves and without that task of creating the past we might be scarcely said to exist.21

Earlier in the essay he had said, "If literature--and in another mode, history--does anything for us, it stirs up in us a sense of existential yearing. The truths it presents come in images of experience, and the images tease us out of thought toward truth as experience."22 The process
outlined in this passage explains, to a large extent, Warren's aesthetic and provides a framework for a discussion of *Brother to Dragons*. Experience itself—the tragedy at Rocky Hill and, for that matter, all history*—must be represented through an "image of experience" if it is to be understood. But, ultimately, this image has little value unless it "tease[s] us" out of thought which is comparable to the idea of experience, a creation of the past, back again to experience. In terms of *Brother to Dragons*, this aesthetic functions in the following way: Warren confronts the event in history, Lilburne's crime, the experience documented in the "outlines of [the] record" (1953, p. xi). He creates an image of that experience—the characters (including R. P. W.), the metaphors, etc., that comprise the text of the poem. These two levels of *Brother to Dragons*, however, require a third component to return the image to experience—to validate it. Without this element, the "self-generated obsession" that McDowell saw driving Lilburne into distorting "the facts of his experience" can be said to compromise the text, forcing

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*History, in this context, can be defined in the "paradoxical" terms used by Jack Burden in *All the King's Men*. . . . reality is not a function of the event as event, but of the relationship of that event to past and future events. We seem here to have a paradox: that reality of an event, which is not real in itself, arises from other events which, likewise, in themselves are not real.*
it into aesthetic narcissism; that is, a poem without reference.

To escape this, Brother to Dragons employs what Warren, in "Use of the Past," calls a "double image." Specifically, this suggests that the writer's relation to the text serves as a model for the reader's. Warren uses the term "double image" while discussing the reasons why we read literature. He says, "Ultimately, we read because it gives us an image of the human soul confronting its fate." But the process involved in this confrontation proves complex. He says, "there is a double image" involved.

There is the image of the content, the character in a story--Hamlet, for instance--confronting his fate. Then there is the image that is the literary work itself, a work that, in all its complexity, is an image of how the writer confronts the fate that is the work's content. The play Hamlet, for example, taken in its entirety, embodies Shakespeare's feeling for human fate, and this feeling is to be distinguished from Hamlet's own feeling. These two kinds of image, in their very doubleness, have a powerful appeal for us, first, because we are all (though often unconsciously) inevitably concerned about our fate, and second, because our concern is itself twofold: we confront our fate and we confront ourselves in the act of confronting our fate. Literature, as Henri Bergson suggests, returns us to ourselves.

One aspect of the creative process, as Warren indicates here, is obviously different for writer and reader: the artist produces the "image" and in the reading process his audience is presented with "the human soul confronting its fate." But following this, the relation to the image by the writer parallels the reader's relation. Both poet and
reader are teased "out of thought" (that is, out of image as idea without reference to experience) "toward truth as experience" in their own lives. Creating "ourselves," which is the ultimate goal of Warren's creative procedure (a goal affecting both the writing and reading of the poem), occurs when, on the one hand, "the writer confronts the image of fate that is the work's content," and, on the other hand, "we [the audience] confront ourselves in the act of confronting our fate." The text looks both ways, demanding recognition from both writer and reader that their experience validate its image.

The critic James H. Justus has stated that the brutal slaying of the slave is of secondary importance in Brother to Dragons; "of far greater importance than the melodrama of the historical story," he continues, "was the aesthetic problem of finding a form appropriate to its meaning."26 The discovery of an "appropriate" image is the primary objective of the poet, but the correctness of the image depends on its secondary function of turning "thought" away from image "toward truth as experience." R. P. W., in fact, calls attention to the structure of the poem at one point to comment on this issue.

. . . I have read the records, even intended
To make a ballad of them, long ago
The two brothers sat by the sagging fire,
Lilburne and Isham sat by the fire,
For it was lonesome weather.
"Isham," said Lilburne, "shove the jug nigher,"
For it is lonesome weather in Kentucky,

For Mammy's dead and the log burns low
And the wind is raw and it's coming snow
And the woods lean close and Virginia's far
And the night is dark and never a star.

It began like that, but the form
Was not adequate: the facile imitation
Of folk simplicity would scarcely serve.
First, any pleasure we take in folksiness
Is a pleasure of snobbish superiority or neurotic
yearning.

Second, the ballad-like action is not explained,
If explainable at all, by anything in the action.
If at all, it must be by a more complex form, by our
Complicities and our sad virtue, too.

And so to put the story in a ballad
Would be like shoveling a peck of red-hot coals
In a croker sack to tote them down the road
To start the fire in a neighbor's fireplace.
You won't get far with them, even if you run--
No, the form was not adequate to the material
(1979, p. 31).

This parallels the aesthetic found in "Use of the Past":
first, there are "the records" of the incident; then there
is the creation of an image to try to give meaning to that
event. The structure of the ballad, however, is incapable
of representing the complexities of the experience because
"the ballad-like action...is not explained in the action."
In the 1953 version of the poem the meaning of this line is
clearer. There, R. P. W. states that the action of the
ballad "is always and perfectly self-contained, / and is an
image that comes as its own perfect explanation" (1953, p.
43).

What is stressed here about the structure of the poem
can be applied to its characters. The "perfection" of such
an explanation is precisely the error that Lilburne makes. His conception of love disallows the experience of it. He imagines his wife as an angel then forces her into an unmentionable sexual act which violates his idea of love; following this, he complains that when angels come to earth they step in the dung that is the world. In a similar way, the love he bears for his mother is based on the idea that he can transcend the limitations of time; that is, her death becomes another one of the world's natural experiences which he rejects to maintain his image of perfect love. Such devotion to an inappropriate image leads to his violent assault on the slave. On the other hand, Jefferson, at the beginning of the poem, rejects the notion that interpretation, idea, image can be achieved at all. In contrast to Lilburne's devotion, or, more precisely, as a result of it, Jefferson says, "All love... / Is but a mask to hide the brute face of fact, And that fact is the immitigable ferocity of self..." (1953, p. 47). His ideal of man's potential had been toppled after hearing what Lilburne, his own blood, was capable of doing. He rejects the image of man's essential goodness and embraces uninterpreted experience as man's definition. In his first long speech he says,

I tried to bring myself to say:
Knowledge is only incidental, hope is all--
Hope, a dry acorn, but some green germ
May split it yet, then joy and the summer shade.
Even after age and the tangle of experience
I still might--
Oh, grandeur green and murmuring instancy of leaf,
Beneath that shade we'll shelter. So, in senility
And moments of indulgent fiction I might try
To defend my old definition of man (1979, p. 5).

A few lines later, a more definitive rejection: "Language
betrays. / There are no words to tell the truth" (1979,
p. 7). And later, he says, "There is no form to hold /
Reality and its insufferable intransigence" (1979, p. 31).

R. P. W., as we have seen, rejects Jefferson's con-
tentions by attempting to create an image of experience--
by writing Brother to Dragons. But the creation of an image
is not enough; the poem must use a "complex form" capable
of involving "our complicities and our sad virtue." For
this reason, R. P. W. indicates, in various ways, that the
discovery of an appropriate form for the material of
Brother to Dragons is not a completed process; instead, it
is ongoing throughout the poem. For example, after the
death of Lilburne's mother, Lucy Lewis, R. P. W. provides
a descriptive as well as symbolic picture of the follow-
ing winter; there is an implicit parallel in it between
the character's struggle and R. P. W.'s own labor.

. . . the fabulous river is ice in starlight.
The ice is a foot thick, and beneath, the water
slides black like a dream,
And in the interior of that unpulsing blackness
and thrilled zero
The big channel-cat sleeps with eye lidless, and
the brute face
Is the face of the last torturer, and the white belly
Brushes the delicious and icy blackness of mud.
But there is no sensation. How can there be
Sensation when there is perfect adjustment? The
blood
Of the creature is but the temperature of the sustaining flow:
The catfish is in the Mississippi and
The Mississippi is in the catfish and
Under the ice both are at one with God.
Would that we were! (1953, p. 95).

The "dream" image of water and the "brute" fact of the catfish are in "perfect adjustment" in this description--a situation that "we" are not part of. The disconnection of idea and fact applies to the characters in the text, and the use of the first person plural pronoun suggests that, clearly, R. P. W. is one of them. Following this description, R. P. W. continues that the fascination with the balance and imbalance of idea and fact outlines the antithetical drives we have in our attempt to explain experience. He asks, "Why do we feel the necessity to linger on this scene?"

The answer, I hazard, is paradoxical.
We feel that the force now driving Lilburne on
Is but part of the unleashed and unhoused force of Nature,
Mindless, irreconcilable, absolute:
The swing of the year, the thrust of Time, the wind.
But we also feel a need to leave that house
On the dark headland, and lift up our eyes
To whatever liberating perspective,
Icy and pure, the wild heart may command,
To escape the house, escape the tightening coil
And mathematical constriction: and so the glimmering night scene and storm under
The incalculable and distant disdain of starlight,
serve, therefore,
As an image of lethal purity, the incessant
And whirling dream of desperate innocence,
The infatuate glitter of the land of Platonic ice.
It is an image to free us from the human trauma,
And the wind drives unremitting, and the oak will bend (1953, pp. 95–6).
While describing Lilburne's attempt to discover meaning following the event of his mother's death, R. P. W. indicates that his own desire to know meaning through the poem is similarly defined. The conflict between the "unleashed . . . force of nature" and "the image of lethal purity" is similar to the one Jefferson and Lilburne represent in the poem. But, while the characters merely "confront their fate," R. P. W., through the type of self-reflection indicated in the above passage, not only confronts his fate but feels himself in the act of confrontation. And, as Warren suggests in "Use of the Past," these "two kinds of image, in their very doublessness," distinguish the writer, Warren, and the persona, R. P. W.

In this context, the difficulties which R. P. W. had in creating an appropriate form to handle the materials of Brother to Dragons can be seen to plague Warren. In an article entitled "The Way it was Written" published in The New York Times Book Review following the publication of the 1953 version of the poem, Warren delineates the difficulty he had in discovering the correct image for Brother to Dragons. "First I thought of a novel," he says, "but this wouldn't do. The historical material doesn't have the structure of a novel. . . . A novel, too, couldn't bear the burden of comment probably necessary to interpret the material." 27 Like "a play," the "next" form he tried, the novel contained "a plot problem" which did not allow him
"to get out of the maze of mere chronology and incidental circumstantiality." 28 In other words, with these forms the experience itself could not be managed by the images these two structures afforded. The problem, he says, was "keeping episode[s] as sharp as possible in symbol as well as narrative:" 29 that is, in image as well as experience. The first use of a poetic structure failed, as R. P. W. indicates, by abandoning "narrative" in favor of pure "symbol." The ballad created an image that was its "own perfect explanation" but did nothing to explain the experience it represented. But in Warren's second attempt he achieves a balance. In an interview with Richard Sale, Warren describes how this came about. Following the publication of Selected Poems 1923-1943 and a ten year hiatus from the composition of poetry, he says he discovered a new personal relationship with his poems.

For ten years, every one of them died on me, During that period I reassessed my whole feeling. . . . I began to see that I had. . .too abstract a view of what constituted the germ of a poem for me. I mean when I went back to writing. . . poems, the poems were more directly tied to a realistic basis of facts. They were closer to me, closer to my observed and felt life. They had literal germs. That doesn't mean they were autobiographical in the rigid sense of the word. . . . But this decision somehow served to be related to the notion of a poem that is tied closer to the texture of casual life, incidental life, incidental observation, direct experience.

The "abstract view" referred to here recalls the "ballad-like" form not only of R. P. W.'s early version of Brother to Dragons, but to Warren's own successful poems such as
"The Ballad of Billy Potts." Warren's dissatisfaction leads him to develop a poetic form capable not only of interpreting experience in "abstract" image but of relating that image "to a realistic base of facts." In *Brother to Dragons*, then, we can see how Warren solved his difficulty of finding an appropriate form. "The Way it was Written" suggests two ways: by "slipping" in the "poet" as a kind of "interlocuter" and by "using the form of dramatic dialogue--not a play but a dialogue of characters." As it does in *The Cave*, telling becomes an essential part of the creative process leading to knowledge. But in *Brother to Dragons*, the "poet" becomes a participant in this procedure; in this way, the writing process--a type of telling between writer and reader--mirrors the dialogue between the voices in the text.

We can begin a study of this aesthetic by examining the differences in the telling of the 1953 and 1979 texts. Warren states that the later version is "no different philosophically" from the earlier. "But it is very different technically--in rhythm (the important thing) and in organization." Metrically, the 1979 *Brother to Dragons* has shortened the longer, "more stately lines" of the 1953 version, and the relaxed iambic rhythms of the earlier poem give way to tighter, more highly rhetorical emphasis. We can see this when we compare similar passages in the two
versions. Here is a selection from the 1953 text:

. . . He stares at the grass,
And each single, identifiable blade is intolerable,
And is an agony. He cannot bear
The sight of the grass. He knows that when the grass
Comes back with sweetness and vernal mitigation,
Then he will be deprived of something, something
He cannot name, of some essential reality.
He craves the sight of wounded earth. He craves
The pain, the sorrow, the oppression of breath,
the wound
And exacerbation of earth. Ah, that's reality!
If the grass comes back, then what, what, will be left?

Nothing, oh, nothing: emptiness (1953, pp. 102-3).

And here is the rewritten version:

Nor can he bear
The sight of the grass. He knows that when that vernal
Mitigation comes back, he
Will be deprived of something,
Of some essential reality. The sight
Of the wounded earth—he craves it, craves
Pain, sorrow, the opposition of breath.
Ah, that's reality!

If the grass comes back, then what, what will be left?
His heart
Floods with desolation (1979, p. 66).

But, in addition to the change in feel the shorter lines
give to the later version, there are significant narrative alterations.

In his Foreword to the 1979 version, Warren says that
"though the basic action and theme remain the same, there
is, I trust, an important difference in the feel" (1979, p.
xiv). Part of the change in "feel" has to do with structure.
As Justus suggests, with the division of the poem into seven parts, the pattern of the later Brother to Dragons resembles the poetic suites favored by Warren in the 1960s and 1970s.
Along with divisions indicating natural breaks in the narrative action, Warren sharpens "a number of dramatic effects" (1979, p. xiv). In the Watkins interview, Warren says that "the work on the play... changed my notion of the poem. It still remains a verse play. But when it got on the stage, it changed my sense of versification and lead to a tremendous lot of rewriting and reorganization." In this context, one of the "production values" cited by Warren in his Preface to the dramatic version of the poem as important is the "general involvement of the cast... All are caught in a nightmare." This affects R. P. W.'s role. In the Watkins interview, Warren states, "there's less commentary in the 1979 version," and, in terms of "rewriting and reorganization," this suggests a less authoritative position for R. P. W. as narrator. Or, as Justus puts it, "the telling... is not an episode in the action but the action itself, the major vehicle as well as the major theme."38

In this regard, there are changes in the 1979 version which stress R. P. W.'s participatory role. One of those modifications deemphasizes his position as teller of other character's stories and elevates his role as respondent. For example, in the 1953 version, R. P. W. describes Aunt Cat's feelings for Lilburn. He says, "But Aunt Cat still loved Lilburn--yes, that's true / In the way such things are true. She'd give him suck, / And was his black
Mammy..." (1953, pp. 57-8). But in the 1979 version,

Aunt Cat is allowed to express her own feelings.

I rocked him soft, his sotr and bouncen-glad,
And when his belly tight, I pat hit good,
So round and leettle, and I kiss him thar,
Sang, "Lil, my Lilly, Mammy's baby-bear."
And he done laugh to git me kiss and sing,
Sing fer the wind to blow and rock him soft,
Sing fer the moon to skeer the Bugaboo,
Sing fer the Cheer-kee never come not night
To skeer my pumpkin Little Baby-Bear,
And no Raw-Head-and-Bloody-Bones to come--
"Raw-head, Raw-Head, doan come my Honey nigh."
Him sleep by then, and knowed I loved him good,
Fer in Virginny fer, him sleepin sound (1979),
p. 40).

At another point in the 1953 version, Laetitia, coaxed by
R. P. W.'s questions, tells the story about the wrestling
match between Lilburn and Isham (1953, p. 71) which helped
characterize their relationship. But in the 1979 version,
Isham is allowed to tell the story and, as a result, his
awareness of the cruelty of his older brother affects him
as much as it affects his listeners.

Yeah, he was mean sometimes, but that was Lil.
Not mean when I was little and we'd wrestle,
But later, once when my strength was coming on,
I pestered him, and almost had him once, but he
Just squirmed like a cat, and grabbed
Me sly. No, not to throw--
To lift and fling me.
Then him just laughing,
Said: "You got to eat some more
Cornbread and buttermilk to be a man!"

I just lay there, my breath
All gone, and 'bout to cry.
Not from being hurt, but just he didn't
Love me, and Tishe ran toward me. He said:
"Don't touch the bugger, let him lie!
He'll learn."

And walked away (1979), p. 73).
In both examples, through their own telling, Aunt Cat and Isham relive their experiences, "confront their fate" as it were, in a more direct way. R. P. W.'s position as commentator, explaining their action is thus diminished. Ultimately, his role becomes more that of responder to them, a participant in the poem's dialogue. But in order to see this, we must examine the character who undergoes the greatest change between the 1953 and 1979 versions.

The significance of a character telling his own story as a means of coming to terms with his identity is displayed most explicitly in the case of Meriwether Lewis. In the 1979 Foreword, Warren states that Meriwether "is given a more significant role" (1979, p. xiv). In the 1953 version, he tells an interpolated story and its relation to the text resembles that of the Cass Mastern episode of All the King's Men. His tale is controlled by the narrator of Brother to Dragons; it is not integrated in the poem but parallels it, serving as an additional example of betrayed ideas and, in this way, universalizing the poem's theme. In this regard, it functions like the "Mariner" stories discussed in Chapter Three, mirroring the protagonist's struggle without participating in it. In the 1979 version, however, Meriwether appears as both "Mariner" and participant, telling his story and also crucially involved in the action—specifically in regard to his relation with Jefferson. He appears early in the later version of Brother to Dragons,
eliciting a paternal cry from Jefferson: "My cousin, my near-son--oh, son" (1979, p. 9). His involvement is deepened when, at one point, a suggestion is made through the dialogue between Jefferson, R. P. W. and Meriwether that Meriwether's relation to Jefferson parallels Lilburne's.

Jefferson: What I lack... is the dream
Of joy I once had, and that,
From the way you talk, I doubt
You ever had.

R. P. W.: All right--for it is scarcely
The most fashionable delusion of my age, and I--
I simply never had it.

Jefferson: I did,
And that was joy. Until--

Meriwether: Until?

Jefferson: Oh, Meriwether--oh, my son.

R. P. W.: You mean Lilburne--

Jefferson: Yes (1979, p. 34).

The intricacies of this association are dramatized throughout the text. Early in the 1979 version, Meriwether claims he shared Jefferson's hopes: "I knew that dream. Learned it from you..." (1979, p. 9). And Jefferson feels Meriwether's presence, along with Lilburne's, when he says, "We must always be betrayed by the most dear" (1979, p. 34). In fact, it is Meriwether who responds to these words by singing, "Are these the words I hear him say" (1979, p. 35).

For Jefferson, ideals are shattered by those experiences his vision cannot comprehend. In the 1953 version, Meriwether's interpolated story was a gloss to this. In the 1979 version,
Meriwether, as "near-son," is participant in the paradigmatic betrayal between father and son: father and son disillusion each other by failing to live up to each other's expectations. Jefferson can no more understand Meriwether's suicide than he can accept Lilburne's crime. And conversely, Meriwether feels murdered by Jefferson's ideals which he embraced even as his experience contradicted them. For this reason, Meriwether concludes his story by saying, "I knew who murdered me. / I knew who flung my body in the hole / Where hog might root or wolf scrabble..." (1979), p. 115). Jefferson denies it, but the indictment is made.

Meriwether's loss of innocence parallels Lilburne's, and his suicide, like Lilburne's crime, results from thwarted ideals. His "expanded" role intensifies Jefferson's own feeling of betrayal "by the most dear." But of equal importance for understanding R. P. W.'s transformed role is the change in Meriwether as storyteller. He relates his story, but, in the telling, he becomes an integral part of the poem itself, supplying commentary on the text while simultaneously being shaped and interpreted by it.

In other words, in the 1979 version his story is not only told but becomes a part of the experience that Brother to Dragons tells. This serves as a model for R. P. W.'s changed role as both narrator of and participant in the poem. Before examining this, however, we need to complete our strictly textual look at the poem. Meriwether's expanded
position can help in this, specifically in the analysis of the "touching" scene in which Jefferson finally accepts his complicity in Lilburne's crime. This scene shows an important difference between the two versions. While both occur following, even as a result of, Meriwether's interpolated story, the interaction between the characters—the way they "confront their fate" by establishing a community based on shared experience realized through confession—as well as Meriwether's involvement with them—is radically different. In his interview with Watkins, Warren says that there was "a lot of reworking toward the 'touching' scene toward the end."³⁹ In both versions, because Meriwether has an audience in Jefferson capable of understanding the extent of his lost ideas, he is open, even hostile. It elicits an immediate response from Jefferson which indicates that he shares Meriwether's tragic sadness.

. . . My son, be still a moment,
If what you call my lie was what undid you,
So be it, then. It has undone me, too.
For I, too, was unprepared for the nature of the world,
And unprepared, I confess for my own nature
(1953, p. 186).

But in the earlier version of the poem this is the extent of their dialogue; it leaves Meriwether out of the community which Jefferson goes on to establish with his sister, Lucy. Instead of a dialogue between Meriwether and Jefferson, the 1953 version supplies an exchange of concepts between Lucy and Jefferson that is more a poetry of ideas—statements of
intellectual position--than the dramatic interaction of confession.

In the 1953 version, Lucy blames Jefferson for his rejection of Lilburn and the "responsibility of love" (1953, p. 188). Jefferson responds, "I'll have no part, no matter / What responsibility you yourself wish" (1953, p. 188). She says, "I tried to flee responsibility once. / I died. And my death was index of my responsibility" (1953, p. 188), and claims that, like Lilburn, Jefferson rejects George as "All the possibility of dark that he feared" (1953, p. 189); by rejecting Lilburn's crime, he repeats it "over and over, and more monstrous still, / For what Lilburn did in exaltation of madness / You do in vanity" (1953, p. 189). Her statement continues a few pages later: "we had hoped to escape complicity / You and I, dear brother. But we have seen the unfolding / Of time and complicity, and I, even in my love, / And in the milk of my breast was in guilty involvement. . ." (1953, p. 191). Finally, she states, "You must take his hand, and recognize, at last / That his face is only a mirror of your possibilities. . . / For whatever hope we have is not by repudiation. . . / But in confronting the terror of our condition" (1953, pp. 191-2). Jefferson is uncertain whether he has the strength for such a confrontation. He claims that he once thought

that the dream of the future is better than the
dream of the past.

Now I should hope to find the courage to say
That the dream of the future is not
Better than the fact of the past. . . (1953, p. 193).
Still, he states, "I think I begin to see the forging of the future. / It will be forged beneath the hammer of truth / On the anvil of our anguish" (1953, p. 193). Finally, he speculates on what this new awareness suggests for his vision of America. He chants, "Dance back the buffalo, the shining land! / Our grander Ghost dance now. . . ." (1953, p. 195). In the Notes to Brother to Dragons, Warren explains that the "Ghost Dance" was given to the indians by Wovoka and involved the promise of a "Messiah who would restore their old way of life" (1979, p. 139). For Jefferson, this dance means a new interpretation of his old dream. Now, it is an image of the future that is qualified by the failures of the past. In this context, his final words exhibit a guarded joy: "For nothing we had, / Nothing we were, / Is lost. / All is redeemed, / In knowledge" (1953, p. 195).

I have quoted extensively from the 1953 version to show the basic philosophy of complicity that, as Warren states in the Watkins interview, remains the same in both versions of Brother to Dragons. But what is statistically represented in the 1953 version is dramatically realized in the 1979 version; the intellectual agreement made in the later poem is also experientially tested and verified between characters through statement and response. One important element in this regard is Meriwether's presence throughout the conversion scene. By remaining in the action
after he finishes telling his story, he dramatically corroborates the idea of complicity that Lucy and Jefferson accept. The entire "touching" scene, for this reason, reads quite differently. There are no long monologues in the 1979 version; instead, short exchanges between characters require that the concepts being discussed be immediately tested in a listener's experience. As they express their relations to Lilburne, Lucy, Jefferson and Meriwether develop a dialogue of statement and response that unites them in a community of shared experience. In the following example, as a character begins telling his or her story, another, in his or her response, completes it.

Lucy: Your dream, dear brother was noble. If there was vanity, fear, or deceit in its condition, What of that? For we are human, and must work In the shade of the human condition.

M: The dream remains? I see it -- yes. But see A nobler yet to dream!

Lucy: It will be nobler because more difficult And cold, in the face of the old cost Of our complicities. And --

M: -- knowledge of that cost is, In itself, a kind of redemption.

J: I think I know what you would say to me. One day I wrote to Adams, in our age -- so long ago -- To Adams my old enemy and friend, that gnarled greatness.

I wrote and said That the dream of the future is better than The dream of the past.

How could I hope to find courage to say That without the fact of the past, no matter
How terrible, we cannot dream the future?

Meriwether: I think I glimpse
The forging of the future --

Jefferson: Forged beneath the hammer of truth
On the anvil of our anguish!

Lucy: How terrible to think that the truth may be lost.
But worse to think that anguish is lost, ever
(1979, p. 118).

The long statement by Jefferson in the 1953 version has been divided into a series of statements and responses between the three participants of the 1979 version. Together, they realize a new dream, not through the image of isolation but through a community of shared experience. For this reason, the "Ghost Dance," introduced by Meriwether, not Jefferson, in the 1979 version, is sung by "All." And finally, the last lines of the scene are shared by Jefferson and Meriwether.

Meriwether: . . . All is redeemed
In knowledge.

Jefferson: But knowledge is the most powerful cost
It is bitter bread. . . (1979, p. 120).

In the process of statement and response, Jefferson and his "near-son" create an idea of the world that is checked and verified in each other's experience.

This defines the change in "feel" that Warren mentions in his interview with Watkins, and it can help characterize R. P. W., Warren and the reader's role in Brother to Dragons. In the "touching" scene, Jefferson dramatizes his notion of complicity by reaching out to the slave, John. As he does
he exclaims, "Yes, look! I've touched. Oh, may we hope to find -- / No, thus create --" (1979, p. 119), and Lucy responds, "the possibility of reason" (1979, p. 119). The concept of creativity is crucial not only within the text as characters validate their ideas about reality through dialogue with each other but outside it through the dialogue between writer and reader of Brother to Dragons. For R. P. W., who is the focal point for this relationship, creating is a way of knowing. He admits that he does not fully understand the event he depicts in the poem. At one point he says,

. . .I've got enough morbid curiosity
To want to know how Lilburne came to the hour
When stars sweat and the dear toad weeps in his hole.

But the word's not know. Guess will do better
(1979, p. 71).

Writing Brother to Dragons is a way for R. P. W. to understand "how Lilburne came" to commit his crime. His "morbid curiosity" encourages him, in Lucy's words, to "create. . . from [his] most evil despair." And, ultimately, R. P. W.'s rejection of a simplistic form in favor of "A Tale in Verse and Voices" parallels Jefferson's rejection of his hopeless isolation for complicit union. In a similar way, the text, as created image, must not become an isolated experience; that is, it must discover a reference outside itself. The most explicit reference made by Brother to Dragons in this regard is to Warren. Just as Meriwether is transformed from the narrator of an interpolated story to an active participant
in *Brother to Dragons*, by creating R. P. W., Warren integrates himself in the text. R. P. W. appears in the poem not only as an interpreter and creator of a community of voices but as participant who is acted on, interpreted and created through his relation—through his response—to the text. But he struggles, like Jefferson, in his attempt to achieve this interrelatedness.

R. P. W. travels the same road as his characters: from isolation to community. But it is marked aesthetically. His quest follows the aesthetic pattern outlined earlier in this chapter; it moves from factual experience to image and back to what R. P. W. at one point calls "created possibility"—a newly realized understanding of events. His first visit to the location of Lilburne's crime is, thus, reflected in R. P. W.'s factual account of it.

Smith. . . the town-site
Was noble where the Cumberland discovers
The sober magnificence of the Ohio, and into that sweep pours
All its own wash and wastage up from Tennessee,
And the bluff was noble, and the beech it bore
To guard that stately confluence where
The traffic yawed on westward, like a tide:
Broadhorn and keelboat and the boatman's hail
That shook the shallows while the fiddle skirled—
Half-horse, half-alligator, prodigal
Of blood, sweat, semen, and the God-damn world.
Haired hand on the sweep, and the haired lip lifts for song.
And even the leathery heart foreknows the end and knows
It will not be long, be long,
For a journey is only a journey and only Time is long,
And a river is only water, Time only will always flow (1979, pp. 13-14).
"A river is only water" when it is not provided with an image to give it meaning; "Time will always flow," event after event without connection, when no relation is discovered between them. The description of Elaphe obsoleta obsoleta is similar to the depiction of the river in its avowed naturalism:

Not Apophis that Egypt feared and the great god Ra, redemptive, at each dawn slew, but did not slay. Nor that Nidhogg whose cumbersome coils and cold dung chill

The root of the world's tree, nor even Eve's interlocutor by Eden's bough. No, none of these, nor more modestly in Kentucky The quintessential evil of that ruin, Nor spirit of the nigger boy named John, Whose anguish spangled midnight once like stars, Nor symbol of that black lust all men fear and long for.

No, none of these, no spirit, symbol, god, Or Freudian principle, but just a snake. . .

(1979, pp. 24-5).

R. P. W. consciously removes any imaginative trappings that might be associated with the fact of the snake itself. Like Jefferson, who at the poem's opening is without hope, R. P. W. refuses, in the earlier part of Brother to Dragons, to imbue the world with meaning.

And yet, he cannot rest in his pessimistic objectivism. While recalling his first trip to Rocky Hill, he remembers his father, who has accompanied him in the car and drowses while he explores the area. Seeing his father's faculties "dimming," his "life a story told," R. P. W. wonders what "wisdom" or "virtue" can counter the inevitable coming of death.
The failure of our fathers are failures we shall make, 
Their triumphs the triumphs we shall never have. 
But remembering even their failures, we are compelled to praise, 
And for their virtues hate them while we praise, 
And praising, wonder, caught in the sudden and corrosive glare 
Of speculation like the enemy rocket 
Exploding above the torn and terror-bit terrain 
Where darkness is the only comfort left-- 
We wonder, even as we consider their virtue: 
What is wisdom and what the dimming of faculty? 
What kindliness, and what the guttering of desire? 
What philosophic wisdom, and what the fatigue of the relaxed nerve?

But still, despite all naturalistic considerations, 
Or in the end because of naturalistic considerations, 
We must believe in the notion of virtue (1979, p. 21).

R. P. W.'s confrontation here with "naturalistic considerations" parallels the struggle Jefferson goes through after learning about Lilburne's crime. But unlike Jefferson, who believes "There is no form to hold / Reality," R. P. W., early in the poem, contends that through the invention of an appropriate image, "Reality" can be held and known. A conversation between Jefferson and R. P. W. bears this out:

Jefferson: . . . I had thought it exquisitely better 
To seize the hot coals of the human definition 
In bare hands, and scream, and run what steps 
I could before I fell, and the white 
Articulation of hand-bones trellised through 
Fire-black flesh.

R. P. W.: It was white bone through black flesh, 
Fire-black and nigger-black, that got the brothers 
Into their fix. White bone, and a dog that gnawed it. 
We do not know what dog -- 
Some frontier cur slinking the edge of forest, 
Or some great brute bred up for bear, or even 
One of Lilburne's hounds, perhaps 
That beloved Nero from Virginia he named to his father
In his will, the codicil he scribbled the last day
Before he cried aloud and clawed the sod
On his mother's grave.

We have to invent our dog (1979, p. 32).

In these lines R. P. W. moves from the purely "naturalistic"
realm to the inventive, and it is this creative desire that
transforms R. P. W. from a man of fact to a man of idea
(using Jack Burden's terminology from All the King's Men).
Inventing the dog is characteristic of the creation of
Brother to Dragons itself: it is an image that attempts to
form some meaning out of the endlessly random stream of
events.

But once this "image of the content" has been
created and fully elaborated (as in the "touching" scene)
it must be made to refer back to experience. R. P. W., in
a description of his final visit to the location of
Lilburne's crime following the "touching" scene, attempts to
show "the writer confronting the fate that is the work's
content"; that is, how the image, which R. P. W. is a
significant part of, relates Warren to the text. Returning
to Smith, R. P. W. encounters everything differently. He
says, "I had plain misremembered, / Or dreamed a world
appropriate for the tale" (1979, p. 128). The image he in-
vented for the story, at this point, confronts his actual
experience of the place. About the river, for example, he
realizes the extent to which it functions as an image.
River, who have on your broad bosom borne
Man and man's movement, and endured the oar,
Keel-pole and paddle, sweep and paddle-wheel.
And suffered the disturbance of the screw's bronze blade,
And tissued over the perpetual scarification
With instant sweetness and confident flow --
You who have suffered filth and the waste
Of human establishment,
Ordure of Louisville and the slick of oil,
The drowned cow, swollen, from the mountain cove,
And junk jammed on the sand bar in the sun --
I take you as an image
Of the deep flood that is our history,
And the flood that makes each new day possible
And bears us westward to the new land.
I take you as image and confirmation
Of some faith past consistent failure,
And the filth we strewn (1979, p. 130).

Recognition of the river as "image and confirmation" requires a double vision of both its symbolic and factual nature. R. P. W.'s ability to see in this way makes him both a representative man, carrying on the struggle imagined in the poem, and also a particular man, with a reference outside the text in the writer's own experience.

Creating such a double vision in the reader is R. P. W.'s ultimate function in the poem. On one level, "we confront our fate" by accepting the internal logic of Brother to Dragons. But beyond this, just as Meriwether becomes a model for Warren's participation in the poem through R. P. W., R. P. W. serves as a model for the reader's involvement. We must "confront ourselves in the act of confronting our fate"; that is, we have to recognize both the "image" in the text and its "confirmation" in ourselves. Toward the end of the poem, R. P. W. characterizes this involvement:
So years go by, but on some village bench, 
Or in some grog-shop where the candle stutters 
On shadowy foulness of fat fumes, 
The gaffer leans, befogged by drink or age, 
And strikes his knee, or table top.

And says: "God-durn, I seen it, I was thar!"
And they: "Hell, Pap, shut up, you're drunk again."

Yes, Pap, you saw it. We believe you, Pap. 
For we were there, too, and saw it, and heard 
The mountain, like a bell, 
Lonely, boom, though no geologist admits it possible. 
We have seen the great bear die. 
We have lifted the meat-axe in the elation of love 
and justice (1979, p. 131).

The poem has taken us "thar," has caused us to confront our fate by experiencing its characters' feelings, but it has also returned "us to ourselves." In this way, we come to participate in the story of Lilburne's crime—"we" lift "the meat-axe in the elation of love and justice." Like Jefferson, R. P. W. and Warren, we are made to recognize our "complicity" in the crime by accepting it as part of our experience; in so doing, we validate the poem's image.

At one point, R. P. W. asks, "but what is knowledge / Without the intrinsic mediation of the heart?" (1979, p. 130). In the context of the present discussion we might think of the knowledge referred to here as the partial understandings represented in the poem: the belief in fact without image characterized by Jefferson; and the devotion to image without reference to experience that was Lilburne's obsession. R. P. W.'s creation of Brother to Dragons units these and,
in doing so, defines the "intrinsic mediation of the heart." In a similar way, the audience's mediation relates the isolated image of the text with the community of experience outside it. The heart's mediation, in this way, is defined by sympathy which can recognize its closeness to the tragedy of another. For this reason, as R. P. W. concludes,

Fulfillment is only in the degree of recognition Of the common lot of our kind. And that is the death of vanity, And that is the beginning of virtue (1953, p. 214).
FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER IV


11 Frederick P. W. McDowell, "Psychology and Theme in Brother to Dragons," PMLA, LXX (September 1955), no. 4, p. 567.

13 Strandberg, p. 498.


16 Watkins, pp. 10-11.

17 Watkins, pp. 10-11.


19 Bohner, p. 97.


28 Warren, "The Way it was Written," p. 6.

29 Warren, "The Way it was Written," p. 6.


31 Warren, "The Way it was Written," p. 6.

32 Watkins, p. 2.

33 Justus, p. 331.

34 Justus, p. 336.

35 Watkins, p. 2.

36 Warren, Brother to Dragons: A Play in Two Acts, p. 69.

37 Watkins, p. 3.

38 Justus, p. 33.

39 Watkins, p. 3.

Chapter V

THE DRAMA OF REVELATION:
ROBERT PENN WARREN'S POETRY

"The metaphors will scream in the shared glory of their referents."

In *Brothers to Dragons*, characters in the text labor to create meaning out of the intransigences of their experience. And the form of the poem mirrors this process; that is, the poet grapples with the structure of the poem so that the creative activity will serve him, as well as his readers, in a mutual quest for identity and knowledge. The reflection of thematic material in formal construction functions, as we have seen, to no less a degree in the novels discussed in Chapters II and III: breaking away from the restrictive "logic" of plot to the mythic possibilities of "romance" involving the aid of an ideal reader parallels Brad Tolliver's growth from isolation to a new awareness of his connection with others; Jack Burden's confession helps him discover the alliance of his past and present selves as it solicits a relation to a community formed by his confessors—his readers; and the dialogue between characters in *The Cave* shows the model for interaction between text and reader which defines the creative procedure in the novel.
When we turn to Warren's poetry after *Brother to Dragons*, we find a similar, though more engaging, dynamic. In an interview with Ruth Fisher, Warren says, "I tend to think of a novel in the same spirit as I think of a poem. But there is one important difference . . . the novels are much more objective for me. The poems have a much more immediate personal reference. This does not necessarily mean autobiography."² What it does mean, however, is a shortened distance between writer and text, and this change in the association between extrinsic and intrinsic aspects of Warren's aesthetic alters the structure by which reader involvement can be gauged. The metaphor of reflection between theme and form must be replaced by a more dynamic framework when discussing the poetry. With this in mind, what I wish to explore in this final chapter is the dialectic that emerges in much of Warren's poetry between the lyrical impulses of the poet to create images of experience in formal constructions as well as abstract thought and the testing of these images against personal experience realized in a more open verse based in narrative and recollection. The interaction of these suggests a final way by which the reader's relation to Warren's creative process can be examined.

An overview of Warren's *oeuvre* suggests the outlines of this interaction. As Stanley Plumly has said, "Warren's entire career is written into the juxtapositions of the
formal assumptions of . . . [his] early metaphysical poem[s]" such as "Bearded Oaks" which "ruminates its position" with the "free-fall abilities" of such a poem as "Trying to Tell You Something" which directly dramatizes its position.\(^3\) The early poetry, with its emphasis on "clotted" syntax, strictly controlled line and meter and highly intellectualized and abstract content\(^4\) represents that aspect of Warren's "symbol"-making that is defined more by its "unity of mind" than its contact with "the welter of experience."\(^5\) In an interview with Peter Stitt, Warren says that the early verse is characterized by two "kinds of poem": one kind is "a sort of ballad," while the other tends "to start from a verbal and abstract plan."\(^6\) The "abstracted passion" of such poetry comes from its intrinsic predetermined meaning. In contrast, the aesthetic process in the later poetry is a means of discovery, each poem a "passionate inquiry"\(^7\) which finds significance in relationships--between itself and other poems and between its intent and the effect it produces. This latter alliance can be seen in Warren's perception of his involvement in the later poems. He indicates that "more and more the germ of . . . [a later] poem is an event in the natural world"\(^8\) and this leads, as he explains in his discussion of the writing of Promises, to a more personal encounter with his poems. "The poems in Promises," he says, were all written on an island in Italy while he was staying in a ruined fortress.
The poems . . . were all written there. Somehow all of this—the place, the objects there, the children, the other people, my new outlook—made possible a new grasp of the roots of poetry for me. There were memories and natural events. The poems wander back and forth from my boyhood to my children. Seeing a little gold-headed girl on that bloody spot of history is an event with the bay beyond . . . the white butterflies, that's all natural event. It could be made into a short story, but you would have to cook up a lot of stuff around it. All you have to cook up in the poem is to be honest with your feelings and your observations, somehow.

The distinctions between the more lyrical qualities of the metaphysical verse and the narrative elements—what "could be made into a short story"—in the poems after Brother to Dragons do not necessarily separate Warren's poetry in the strict way that the terms early and later might imply. Instead, they define the aesthetic boundaries within which the quest for meaning and identity is carried out in his verse. It is, in fact, the continued and varied interaction of Warren's "abstract passion" and "passionate inquiry"—his romantic belief in the mind's ability to unify coupled with a great almost crippling skepticism—that defines the tumultuous texture of fierce, unending struggle in his poetry. The drama of rendering experience in image and, conversey, image through experience typifies the body of Warren's poetry; the various books of poems, the interaction of poems and sequences of poems within a volume, and individual poems themselves all participate in this dynamic in diverse ways. And, as we can begin to see, a crucial part of this process includes elements outside the text; as
Warren begins tracing his connection to the poem, he generalizes the dialectic the text is engaged in and implicates the reader in its struggle.

Before examining this structure in more detail, it should be noted that the intertwining dynamic it suggests is represented formally. In a poem like "Bearded Oaks," for example, the strict tetrameter line, rhyming quatrains and tightly-wrought imagery and syntax imply a lyric impulse, but its power, as James H. Justus indicates, derives as much from its metaphysical conventions as the felt urgency of its "narrative" situation—a situation condensed to a scene "in which meditation replaces action." In other poems, specifically the early poetic suites—"Kentucky Mountain Farm" and "Mexico is a Foreign Country: Four Studies in Naturalism"—the authority of the individual poem is decentered so that meaning develops, to some degree, through the relationship of various poems in the sequences. In The Ballad of Billie Potts, the parenthetical reflective voice is joined with the long-lined telling of story, and in "Original Sin: A Short Story" the formal conventions of the poem are, in a direct way, again joined with the narrative impulse. When we turn to the later poetry this impetus becomes more defined, and we see a greater emphasis of narrative in two ways. As Plumly indicates, Warren not only explodes
the idea of the familiar pentameter line, he
. . . also alter[s] the position of the speaker
in such poetry. The line simply will not quit;
the speaker will not stay on the sidelines,
looking on, commenting, essaying. The speaker
here is also the primary participant . . . 'at
the center of what he creates.' The decisions
of language are those of discovery, of per-
ception as opposed to conception.11

But, within this aesthetic of "discovery," the lyric
formality of "conception" remains. Abstract diction is
juxtaposed with prosy colloquial lines, impersonal voice
(the influence of modernists such as Eliot and Pound) is en-
cased in autobiographical sketches and direct address, and
the tightly-related images in individual poems are set in
contrast to similar imagery in other poems in a volume whose
jagged syntax unravels and complicates the meaning of the
image. The formalities of the early poetry "take their place
in the context of casual form whose line lengths are
governed by natural synthetic units . . . ."12

Warren outlines this interconnecting aesthetic in
"Pure and Impure Poetry." In this essay he says, "'Formal
control' and 'personal emphasis' are the two poles of pure
and impure."13 The "pure poem" wants to be of "one piece,"
and it is "evident . . . that the kinds of impurity which
are admitted or excluded are different in different poems."14
In "Pure and Impure Poetry," Warren is mainly concerned with
admitting "elements of prose" which define situation into
the poetic experience. But the pure and impure dichotomy
suggests, in a general way, the dynamic which characterizes
the structure of Warren's poetry—specifically the later verse. "Different" individual poems, as well as the various volumes on a grander scale, struggle for a sense of unity; what typifies a particular endeavor, both formally and thematically, is based on the kind and degree of impurity "admitted or excluded." And if we broaden Warren's terms somewhat, they correspond to the aesthetic structure explored in the discussion of *Brother to Dragons* in Chapter IV. Pure image attempts to reconstitute event into "one piece" and impure experience is "admitted or excluded" to test that image. Tracing this structure in a detailed way through Warren's poetry is the subject of the rest of this chapter.

From innocent hope and dream-image to the brutal awakening of experience to a new, qualified, tested image of experience and back "out of thought toward truth as experience"15—that is the aesthetic form followed in *Brother to Dragons*. And it shapes the lyric poetry, although the absence of the continuous narrative that governs *Brother to Dragons* alters its application. The juxtaposition of individual poems in a volume with the book as "one" connected "piece" creates a dynamic relationship between Warren's strongest poetic sequences and volumes which fully explore this aesthetic framework and the single poem within one of the volumes or suites of poems which emphasizes only one part
of this creative procedure.* The extent to which a volume engages in this interaction typifies the poetry from Promises to Rumor Verified. But before examining these books, a look at two individual poems can provide a model of this aesthetic process which the volumes follow albeit in more complex ways. The first poem, "Passers-By on Snowy Night," represents the culmination of Warren's aesthetic; coming at the end of Being Here, it demonstrates how the images of experience in this volume tease the writer and reader "out of thought" and out of the text "toward truth" in their unique experiences. The second poem, "The Day Dr. Knox Did It" from the volume Tale of Time, chronicles how these images of experience are arrived at following a temporal movement from childhood innocence to experience as a rite of passage to a more mature perspective from which meaning can be envisioned.

In the midst of his essay on the admission and exclusion of impurities in poetry, Warren makes the cryptic

*A personal note in this regard. Throughout his later career, Warren uses the shifting relationship between the parts and whole of a volume to represent the struggle to create meaning out of experience. I have found that my response to a book of poems in its entirety—that is, the work as "one piece"—is usually greater than the sum of the parts, or, more precisely, the individual poems as I read them. Placing this response in the categories I have suggested above, I find the image that I come away with after reading a volume of poems is both a product of and greater than the experience of each poem.
comment that a poem "must carry something of the context of its 'creation'." In an effort to explain this he states in the next paragraph that this "is another way of saying that a good poem involves the participation of the reader; it must, as Coleridge puts it, make the reader into 'an active creative being'." In an interview with Ruth Fisher, he expresses a similar view in the context of a discussion about the nature of criticism.

Criticism, when it really functions in the full sense of the word, leads to a creative act in the sense of appreciating the work. You repaint the picture, rewrite the book, recompose the music, by going inside . . . . You are writing the book . . . you feel the whole process in you. This is clearly a creative act.

Warren describes the interaction between text and reader as part of "the drama of structure" for it includes, as Brother to Dragons puts it, "our / Complicities and our sad virtue, too." The "creative act" implies a fusion of the "work" itself and its appreciation. "Passers-By on Snowy Night" suggests such a fusion; it carries the "context of its 'creation'" by placing the writer of the poem "at the center of what he creates" and by asking the reader to accept the same positioning.

As Warren indicates in his Afterthought following the poems in Being Here, "Passers-By on Snowy Night" was conceived as "a sort of coda," or better, as a bracket" along with "October Picnic Long Ago," the first poem in the volume, "to enclose the dimly envisaged tangles and complications of
the main body." Both poems are printed in italics, a further indication that, in some sense, they are outside the formal structure of Being Here; a designation that they do not fit into the conception of the volume as "one piece." The poem describes a night when "The moon, skull-white in its starkness / . . . regards with the same distant stare / . . . . How your breath goes white in steel air / As you trudge to whither from whence" (p. 105). There is some confusion in the poem as to whom is being addressed at this point, but a switch from the second-person pronoun to the first-person in the middle of the poem indicates that the poet has been talking to himself. The autobiographical "I" now passes "someone" who is staring out of a window. Then there is another pronoun shift: this time the third-person "someone" is changed and referred to as the second-person "you." The poet says, "I wish you well in your night / As I pass you in my own." (p. 105) The address acknowledges the reader—"someone" who has been watching him through the pages of Being Here—as a fellow searcher in the "night." The final stanza discloses the differences as well as the similarities that separate

*It is rarely possible to totally separate any one poem in a volume from the others in Warren's later poetry. For example, the imagery in "Passers-By On Snowy Night"—"Black the coniferous darkness, / White the snow track between" (p. 105)—recalls similar and contrasting images of light and dark in the "main body" of poems. Here, I am only saying that what distances "Passers-By" from the rest of the volume is more prominent.
and unite the writer and his audience.

We each hear the distant friction,
The crack of bough burdened with snow,
And each takes the owl's benediction,
And each goes the way he will go (p. 105).

The "distant friction," in a general way, refers to the individual struggles of poet and reader, but it is grounded in the "tangles and complications" presented in Being Here. The "owl's benediction" is not a prayer but a question; the first-person plural pronoun indicates that the answer to this question—who does "the distant friction" apply to—is both the "I" of the writer and the "you" of the reader. As Warren suggests in Afterthought, "meaning is . . . often more fruitfully found in the question asked than in any answer given." (p. 107) This dynamic between question and answer, in fact, describes the relation between extrinsic and intrinsic elements in "Passers-By On Snowy Night" as well as the whole of Being Here. In Afterthought, Warren continues that

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

For those of us who read Being Here, "Passers-By on Snowy Night" hints that the "creative act" we are engaged in includes applying the fictions of the text to the fact of
our lives. In this, we form a new image of ourselves, a "supreme fiction" in the world of experience.

This is the end of Warren's aesthetic—an earned vision of union represented in the relation between text and writer/reader that he describes in "Knowledge and the Image of Man" as "universal and a corollary of man's place in nature." When we move from an individual poem to a poetic sequence, however, we begin to see the dramatic process through which much of Warren's poetry works to achieve this end. In this regard, "The Day Dr. Knox Did It," recalls the progress followed in Brother to Dragons. In Chapter Four, we saw how Jefferson's innocent image of man's possibilities was destroyed after his encounter with the brutal realities of experience represented in the incidents at Rocky Hill. Mirroring this loss was R. P. W.'s attempt to create an image of experience first in ballad form and later in the more complex tale "in Verse and Voices." The five poems which together constitute "The Day Dr. Knox Did It" trace this pattern. The sequence of poems describes an early experience of the poet as a boy in which he learns about the suicide of a prominent doctor in his town. He is unable to understand the event until years later when he recognizes in his own feelings of isolation a parallel to Dr. Knox's despair. The poem shifts from the voice of the poet as a boy to the older poet who remembers these events. Tested by the world's experience, he hopes to
find meaning in the present by recreating his past in poetic form.

The titles of the first two poems in this poetic suite—"Place and Time" and "The Event"—describe the situation when the boy finds out about the suicide. The third poem, "A Confederate Veteran Tries to Explain the Event," proposes an interpretation which the boy cannot comprehend, while the fourth and fifth poems—"The Place Where the Boy Pointed" and "And All That Came After"—show how subsequent personal experiences in the poet's life cause him to reevaluate and reshape this image of the event. Because "The Day Dr. Knox Did It" is told from the perspective of the older poet, however, its power comes from the meshing of the boy's relation to the death in the past with the mature poet's attempt to make sense of it in the present. While lying in the loft where Dr. Knox killed himself, for example, the boy in "The Event" wonders "how long he had lain there" (p. 60). Ten days later in "The Place Where the Boy Pointed," after hearing "how a 12-gauge will make an awful mess / if you put the muzzle in your mouth," the boy speculates on "how the place looked so clean" (p. 63). And, in "A Confederate Veteran Tries to Explain the Event," it is the boy's voice again who asks "'But why did he do it, Grandpa?'" (p. 62). When the old man replies that "'For some folks the world gets too much'" (p. 62), however, it is the older poet who experiments with
this explication by describing his later life in the subsequent poems. In "And All That Came After" he describes how he would escape to a "stream that was silent . . .

and I would lie
with my eyes shut tight and let water flow
over me as I lay, and like water, the world
would flow, flow away, on forever. (p. 64)

His desire for isolation is a reaction to his inability to cope with the suicide and, in this way, it parallels Jefferson's response in Brother to Dragons to the ax-murder. The poet's separation leads him to a new image of union; in isolation, the poet begins to understand Dr. Knox's reason for suicide. He presents two events which propel him toward this knowledge. The first pictures the poet alone in San Francisco where fog "star by star" blotted "the sky out" and then insulated him "from all relation"; this segregation steals away his identity and he says, "I did not know my name" (p. 64). The second event ties the reflections of isolation to the poet's present state of mind. After recalling a time when he made love to a woman somewhere on Telegraph Hill, the poet remembers hearing "the sea-sway and secret grind / of shingle down the glimmering shore." The image of change gives the moment of union, of "poised energy." a "hollow" feeling so that "Now," the poet says, "I sometimes cannot remember her face" (p. 65). With the events of the poem updated in this way, a new relation to the past is forged. It is expressed in two ways. First, it is represented in the relation implied;
in an address to the reader to share in the complicity the poet realizes in the text. In the final quatrains of "And All That Came After," the poet says, "I . . . am, like you, the perfect image, and if Once through the blaze of that August I fled, but toward myself I fled, for there is no water to wash the world away. We are the world, and it is too late to pretend we are children at dusk watching fireflies. We must frame, then more firmly the idea of good (p. 66).

And second, the discovery of connection between past and present forces the poet to realize that a similar continuity ties him to the future. The final lines of the poem, for this reason, are about his daughter.

My small daughter's dog has been killed on the road. It is night. In the next room she weeps (p. 66).

R. P. W.'s understanding of complicity and the quality of knowledge guided by "the mediation of the human heart" comes at the end of the text in the final image of experience leading to resolution. A similar understanding is reached at the conclusion of "The Day Dr. Knox Did It," but because this poem is only part of the "single unit"—Tale of Time as a whole—what is resolved within this individual poem and between writer/reader and text must be tested against the experience of the poems around it. In other words, one poem does not end the aesthetic process; a new poetic sequence, a representation of another event in time, reexamines, from a new perspective, what has been earned in the previous poem. The final sequence in Tale of
Time entitled "Delight," for example, takes up where "The Day Dr. Knox Did It" leaves off. The first poem in the suite begins with the advice given in "And All That Came After" to "frame . . . firmly the idea of good." In "Into Broad Daylight," with a secure hold on a notion of "good," the poet exclaims "I have met delight at dawn-crest" in a "moment of surprise" (p. 81). But the rest of the poems in the sequence undercut this idea of "delight." In "Not to be trusted" the poet announces that the joy revealed in the moment of epiphany "will betray you" (p. 90). In the final poem, "Finisterre," which is also the final poem of the volume, the resolute community of understanding in "The Day Dr. Knox Did It" is reconstituted as wonder. The poem describes the end of day but like many of the images in Tale of Time the perception of this may be reversed. Through "a new shift of mist," the poet says,

The light may break through yonder
To stab gold to the gray sea, and twist
Your heart to a last delight—or at least, to wonder
(p. 91).

In contrast to the gradual unfolding of aesthetic structure that characterizes a work like Brother to Dragons, Warren's lyrical poetry, in general, chugs in fits and starts, realizing successes and failures in lucid moments of "surprise" followed by times of dark shock; images are created only to be tortured and transformed by experience in time. This suggests the dramatic interaction between
lyric and narrative and provides a dynamic framework which can be used to examine Warren's verse. He has described his later poetry as tending toward "moralized anecdote." And a brief analysis of all the volumes will show how each book of poems falls within the dual impulse this implies; to generalize a narrative so that the intrinsic qualities of the text serve the writer and reader in their experience outside it.

In Promises, a personalized account of the poet's relation to his children as well as his own childhood focuses the volume on the loss of innocence over time and through contact with the world and suggests how a re-juvenated image of hope and promise might be constituted in the face of such experience. The volume is divided into two sections, "To a Little Girl, One Year Old, in a Ruined Fortress" and "Promises," to Warren's daughter and son, respectively. In the first section, he describes the "place of ruined stone" where he and his wife bring their young daughter; in the second, his memories of his own childhood are intertwined with reflections on his son's youth. And together, the fusion of "natural event" and "memory" shape the volume.

The range of poems in Promises examined within the aesthetic structure I have outlined in this chapter can be seen in "Boy's Will, Joyful Labor Without Pay, and Harvest Home (1918)." The opening poem in this poetic suite,
"Morning," recounts the poet's unqualified hope when he was a child.

You bolt your oatmeal, up and go.
The world is panting, the world won't wait.
All energy's unregenerate.
Blood can't abide the status quo.
You run as far as the front gate,

Then stop. For when your hope is displayed
To wait you, you must feast the eye
An instant on possibility,
Before finite constriction is made
To our pathos of rapacity (p. 76).

In "The Snake," the sense of "finite constriction" is represented in the killing of "a black snake" and the matter of fact way in which this is accepted.

Against the wounded evening matched,
Snagged high on a pitchfork tine, he will make
Slow arabesque till the bullbats wake.
An old man, standing stooped, detached,
Spits once, says, "Hell, just another snake"
(p. 79).

In the final poem, "Hands are Paid," the poet narrates his inability to accept experience at face value. He recalls the events of the poem saying, "I shut my eyes and I see that scene, / And name each item, but cannot think / What in their urgency, they mean . . ." (p. 81). But then, relating the incidents of this past to his immediate present, transforming the fact of the poem into his own personal experience, he senses a revitalized "instant" of "possibility."

He says that he knows, "even now, on this foreign shore," where he lives with his wife, son and daughter and writes Promises
In blaze of sun and the sea's stare
A heart-stab blessed past joy or despair,
As I see, in the mind's dark, once more,
That field, pale, even under starlit air
(p. 81).

In "Gull's Cry," from the first section, a similar "moment of possibility" is portrayed; in this poem, however, the new image presented includes not only the writer but the reader's experience. The poet describes the motionless world beneath the "astonishing statement of sun" which he lives in. In it, a "gull extends motionless on the shelf of air," a "defective child" next door cries, the "wife of gobbo sits under vine leaves, she suffers, her eyes glare."
In the midst of this "anguish" of meaningless fact, the poet hears the laughter of his little girl and exclaims,

\[
\text{. . . let the molecular dance of the stone-dark glimmer like joy in the stone's dream.}
\]
\[
\text{And in that moment of possibility, let gobbo, gobbo's wife, and us, and all, take hands and sing: redeem, redeem!}
\]
\[
\text{(p. 4).}
\]

This vision of union amidst tragic separation comes in the second poem of the volume; its hope for redemption is severely modified by the experience of subsequent poems. The quality of this tempering is expressed in "Colder Fire," the last poem in "To a Little Girl, One Year Old, in a Ruined Fortress." In this poem the flame of hope is not snuffed out but expressed in paradox.

\[
\text{For fire flames but in the heart of a colder fire.}
\]
\[
\text{All voice is but echo caught from a soundless voice.}
\]
\[
\text{Height is not deprivation of valley, nor defect of desire,}
\]
\[
\text{But defines, for the fortunate, that joy in which}
\]
all joys should rejoice.
(p. 13)

You, Emperors, and Others\textsuperscript{25} recalls the desire in Promises to reconstitute the past in the present. The recognition in "In the Turpitude of Time: N.D." of how "cause flows backward from effect" (p. 30) again suggests that "joy" is possible in "the heart's last knowledge" when "only the old are young" (p. 31). But this volume does not so much trace the flow "backward" as moralize on what this means in the present for writer and reader. In "Apology for Domitian," for example, the poet says, "Let's stop horsing around--it's not Domitian, it's you / We mean" (p. 21). The poem describes the emperor's attempt to escape the inevitability of death, and the direct address to the reader generalizes this experience. This aesthetic is most fully realized in this volume in the first sequence of poems, "Garland for You," which I have discussed in Chapter I. A second successful poetic suite, "Mortmain," balances the more moralizing impulses of "Garland for You" with a personal narrative about the death of the poet's father. In the first three poems of this sequence the poet tells how he experiences the fact of his father's death, recollects his father's past, his own past with his father, and describes himself between his dead father and his newborn son. In the final two poems he attempts to make sense of these facts. In "In the Turpitude of Time: N.D." he says,
for "us, and all . . . Time's tongue lifts only to tell, / Minute by minute, what truth the brave heart will ful-
fill" (p. 30). And in "A Vision: Circa 1880," the poet tries to find fulfillment in loss by staring down "the tube and darkening corridor of Time"; he attempts to re-
create the past in his imagination by picturing his father as a boy out "of the woods where pollen is a powder of gold" (p. 32). In this recreation, he confronts the knowledge that "Time's tongue" has told him; in this vision of the past, he learns to accept his present. He sees his father as he,

With imperial calm, crosses a space, rejoins The shadow of woods, but pauses, turns, grins once And is gone. And one high oak leaf stirs gray, and the air, Stirring, freshens to the far favor of rain (p. 33).

The power of "Mortmain" comes from the intertwining of this visionary quality with the poet's personal anguish. The "drama of structure" that defines it, however, is lack-
ing in the general construction of the volume as a whole. The intense immediacy of "Mortmain" is offset by the extensive generalizing in "Garland for You," but the inter-
actions between the rest of the poems in You, Emperors, and Others lack this directness.

As we have seen, this connection is not missing in Warren's next volume, Tale of Time. The poems in this book refer to each other: one group of poems describes an ex-
perience and attempts to fashion an image of that experience
giving it meaning only to have another poetic sequence chip away at that image with new descriptions of experience. Using the metaphor of time to describe this process, the volume displays the ongoing procedure from past experience to present image toward future testing of that image in new events. The poem "The Interim" describes the operation: "Between the middle and the end, we must learn / The nature of being . . . " (p. 24). In this vein, the title poem of *Tale of Time*, like "Mortmain," attempts to come to terms with the death of a family member, the poet's mother. Accepting her loss is placed in the larger context of this question from "The Interim": "Is / Existence the adequate and only target / For the total reverence of the heart?" (p. 24). The answer to this question comes in the ghoulish image that "You / Must eat the dead. / . . . At your plenilune of anguish" (p. 32). Internalizing the past acknowledges its place in the present and serves as an image of time's brutal continuity. In this acceptance, however, "Immortality is not impossible, / Even joy" (p. 32). But, as is characteristic of this volume, the anguished rapture of this assent is severely muted in the following sequence of poems. "Homage to Emerson, On Night Flight to New York" inverts the structure of "Tale of Time" and begins with an image of resolution, then demonstrates is inadequacy. From Emerson's "thought that significance shines through everything," from this abstract belief at "38,000 feet" (p. 40)
in the air and ungrounded in the world, from this, experience works its way into the poet's thoughts "like a small white worm" (p. 45). In contrast to the truth that Emerson conceives, the poet, in "Does the Wild Rose?", wonders whether there is a "way by which the process of living can become Truth" (p. 48). And in "Shoes in the Jungle," the only significance that shines through the "rotting" that is death and war is "the lesson of history" (p. 50) and history "is what you can't / Resign from" (p. 51). This resignation recalls the question that "Tale of Time" began with, indicating that existence is, indeed, the only "target" for the "reverence of the heart."

The dynamic between "the lesson of history" and the vision of "significance" defines the dramatic relation between narrative and lyric in Tale of Time. The connections between poems like "Tale of Time" and "Homage to Emerson" and between "The Day Dr. Knox Did It" and "Delight" describe the struggle to place time's ceaseless narrative in a form which gives it meaning. This interrelated structure of the volume itself implies a shape and "significance" to event. But the form of Tale of Time consciously demonstrates its limits; experience is allowed to pound tenaciously at its structure.

At the core of Incarnations a similar dynamic is at work although not at the same intensity as Tale of Time. It is expressed in the contrast between this line, "the world
means only itself" (p. 7), from "Riddle in the Garden" and this, "The world / Is a parable and we are / The meaning" (p. 52), from "The World is a Parable." Incarnations is divided into three parts: Island of Summer, Internal Injuries which consists of the two sequences "Penological Study: Southern Exposure" and "Internal Injuries," and Enclaves divided into "The True Nature of Time" and "In the Mountains." The poems in all the sections share the conviction expressed in "Masts at Dawn" to "try / To love so well the world that we may in the end believe in God" (p. 23), and there is an internal dialectic between the description of the world and the way to love it—to discover significance in it—in each section. The poems in Island of Summer and Internal Injuries are characterized, to a large extent, by the line from "Riddle in the Garden" with their picture of an intractable world of nature and flesh. Many of the representations in Island of Summer, for example, are of a "world of dense, constituent actuality" and "Mediterranean lushness." 26 In "Where the Slow Fig's Purple Sloth" the "air

Is motionless, and the fig,
Motionless in that imperial and blunt
Languor of glut, swells, and inward
The fibers relax like a sigh in that
Hot darkness, go soft, the air
Is gold.

When you
Split the fig, you will see
Lifting from the coarse and purple seed, its
Flesh like flame, purer
Than blood (p. 19).
This passage is alive with alliteration and rich in consonants portraying in form the vitality of the natural world. In "Myth on Mediterranean Beach: Aphrodite as Logos," however, the poet attempts to do more than simply picture the world, he tries to give it shape and meaning. This poem offsets rhyming couplets in iambic tetrameter with single unrhymed iambic tetrameter lines. And, although the title of the poem indicates a desire to generalize from event to myth, its sing-song rhythm suggests that such an effort may be in for trouble. On the one hand, the Aphrodite described is symbolized by language itself as "one word" wandering "across the blank / Page of the world," and, on the other hand, for "what she is! Old hunchback in bikini" (p. 12). She is both metaphor and fact: when she enters the "perfection that we call the sea" "where no time may subsist" she is a vision of abstraction, but, "in the end," she will rise from the ocean and "re-enact / The miracle of fact" (p. 14). The attempt to mythologize in the poem is undermined by the unavoidable humanness of the woman the poet describes; the poem's formal construction, its attempt to create an image, for this reason, becomes parody. This is clear when the poet begins describing his relation to her.

She moves toward us, abstract and slow,  
And watching, we feel, the slow knowledge grow --

How from the breasts the sea recedes,
How the great-gashed navel's cup
Pours forth the ichor that had filled it up.

How the wavelets ink to seek, and seek,
Then languishing, sink to lave the knees,
And lower, to kiss the feet, as these

Find the firm ground where they must go.

The last foam crisps about the feet.
She shivers, smiles. She stands complete

In Botticellian parody (p. 15).

In the final couplet she passes lovers in the sand, "And passing, draws their dreams away, / And leaves them naked to the day." (p. 16) The tone set in this poem characterizes the first section of Incarnations; the yearning to find an image—in "Myth on Mediterranean Beach" this is a definition of love—that will give meaning to experience. In contrast to the poems in Tale of Time, the inability to make this image work is born with somber lightness.

Internal Injuries is more personal than Island of Summer and its structure more anecdotal. The first sequence of poems, "Penological Study: Southern Exposure," tells the story of a prisoner suffering from cancer who is about to be executed; most of the poems in the sequence, however, see a parallel between the convict's anguish and the writer's own struggle and, in this way, as in "Myth on Mediterranean Beach," attempt to generalize the tale and locate meaning in the experience. In "Keep that Morphine Moving, Cap," the first poem in the sequence, this universalizing impulse can
be felt as the poet asks "us" to listen "to that

    Small sound, and let us, too keep pulling
For him, like we all ought to, who,
When truth at last is true, must try,
Like him, to tough it through . . . (p. 32).

In "Wet Hair: If Now his Mother Should Come" and "Night: The Motel Down the Road from the Pen" the poet adopts this advice, but becoming complicit in the prisoner's effort to accept the malevolence of his death as natural is not easy. In the last poem, "Dawn," the image of resurrection after the long agonizing night describes a qualified resolve.

    Dawn will, it
Is logical to postulate, though not
Certain, come, and the sun then
Above the horizon, burst
Like a blast of buckshot through
A stained-glass window, for

It is summer, it is summer.

Forgive us, this day, our joy.

Far off, a red tractor is crossing the black field.
Iron crushes the last dawn-tangle of ground mist.

Forgive us -- oh, give us! -- our joy (p. 42).

The final section of *Incarnations* sets "abstract, spiritual transcendence" in contrast to the "constituent actuality" of *Internal Injuries* and alpine "austerity" in opposition to mediterranean "lushness." In "The Enclave" there is also a suggestion as to how the more lyrical impulses of *Enclaves* can be balanced with the narrative strategies of *Internal Injuries*. The poet asks "How / May I know the true nature of Time" (p. 59); another way of asking how can meaning be created out of the intransigences of
experience. The possibility of an answer is suggested at the beginning of "The Enclave."

Out of the silence, the saying, into
The silence, the said, thus
Silence, in timelessness, gives forth
Time, and receives it again . . . (p. 59).

From "silence" which is timelessness issues "the saying," the cry of experience in time. But back into the silent image of mind "the said" which is past experience becomes reconstituted. This defines the ebb and flow of time in terms of Warren's aesthetic. From the silence before Incarnations to the description of the natural world and the nature of flesh in Island of Summer and Internal Injuries to the silent image of mind in Enclaves. But the "luminous but / Blind" landscape of Enclaves is "context-less" and so, in the continuous flux of giving and receiving that circumscribes Warren's aesthetic, must turn back to the natural world. In the last poem of the volume entitled "Fog," the final lines desire a return to the world of voice.

What, in such absoluteness,
Can be prayed for? Oh, crow,
Come back, I would hear your voice:

That much, at least, in this whiteness (p. 64).

The attempt to understand "the nature of Time" in Audubon involves more directly the question of aesthetics. The structure of this volume follows the story of Jean Jacques Audubon's search for self-knowledge. He thinks how
"thin is the membrane between himself and the world" (p. 4) in "Was not the Lost Dauphin," the first poem in the volume, and it is this belief that sets him on his travels to study the birds of North America. What he discovers, however, is that in establishing his relation to nature through his recreation of it on canvas he must violate it. In a similar way, Warren finds that in telling Audubon's story he has to violate the fact of Audubon's life. He fictionalizes it according to his needs; he generalizes it. As he says, in "the end the poem is about Audubon and me."29

"The Dream He Never Knew the End of" tells how Audubon was nearly murdered by a frontier woman and her sons. Three armed men happen into the house and prevent the killing, then hang the woman and her sons. The experience serves as a rite of passage for Audubon; his relation to the world as an object outside him, as externally real, is transformed. He clutches a gold watch which the woman was going to kill him for and thinks, "The magic of that object had been, / In the secret order of the world, denied her who now hangs there. / He thinks: 'What has been denied me?'" (p. 17). In "The Sign Whereby He Knew" he asks what truth can be found between subject and object.

The world declares itself. That voice
Is vaulted in -- on, arch on arch -- redundancy of joy, its end

Is its beginning, necessity
Blooms like a rose. Why,
Therefore, is truth the only thing that cannot be spoken? (p. 24)

He concludes that it must be "enacted . . . in dream"; that is, created out of the "world . . . itself" (p. 24). In this regard, at one point in the first poem of the volume Audubon sees a heron flying in the sky. He thinks "On the sky it is black" then "In my mind it is white" (p. 3). In "Love and Knowledge," the sixth poem of Audubon, he is described as slaying birds "at surprising distances with his gun"; he destroys nature, he kills the birds, in order to "put them where they are, and there we see them: / In our imagination" (p. 30). This new relation to nature is created by Audubon, not dictated by natural event, and it suggests the structure of Warren's poem. Its form is a reconstruction of Audubon's life. As Louis L. Martz has pointed out, Warren modifies Audubon's own records of his life in Ornithological Biography; in "The Dream He Never Knew the End of," for example, he transforms the threatened violence documented in the "Prairie" section of the biography into the violent "untidy" hanging of the woman and her sons. 30

Audubon also transforms its material structurally. Following the central narrative in the poem told in "The Dream He Never Knew the End of," there is the short lyric "We Are Only Ourselves." Warren breaks into the narrative to explain the nature of Audubon's loss as if it were the writer and reader's own dispossession.
We never know what we have lost, or what we have found.
We are only ourselves, and that promise.
Continue to walk in the world. Yes, love it!
(p. 19)

As Justus indicates, poems like "We are only Ourselves" are "interspersed, abstract segments in which Warren involves himself and the reader in explicit application of what Audubon learns and, as a life made myth, of what Audubon is."31 The form of the poem which Warren describes as "in fragments, sort of snapshots"32 is a broken narrative, a mingling of fact and fiction fusing intrinsic and extrinsic elements in an effort to find meaning, to describe the "membrane" between oneself and the world. The final poem of the volume is a personal appeal for such a joining.

Tell me a story.

In this century, and moment, of mania,
Tell me a story.

Make it a story of great distances, and starlight.
The name of the story will be Time,
But you must not pronounce the name.

Tell me a story of deep delight (p. 32).

The subtitle of Or Else,33 Warren's next volume, is Poem / Poems, and it reinterprets the dialogue between narrative and lyrical. Plumly points out that the book's "twenty-four parts do compel the complications of plot, not just by repeating certain themes and images but by creating a continuum of their relatedness."34 Juxtaposed to the "Poem" as a whole, however, there are eight "interjections,"
"Poems," which give the volume a philosophical tone. The long, loose, prosy lines of those poems which "compel the complications of plot" describe event; in succession, they tell the story of the natural world's continuity. In "Forever O'clock," for example, a "little two-year-old Negro girl-baby, with hair tied up in spindly little tits with strings of red rag" is described as she sits in the "red dust" (p. 38). The poet discloses many particulars about the child's activity until, near the end of the poem, the poet says, "I have now put on record one thing that is not important but simply is" (p. 39). The interjections attempt to discover relations between the events, between "one thing" and another. As "Interjection #2: Caveat" says, "Necessarily, we must think of the / World as continuous" but "only

in discontinuity, do we know that we exist, or that in the deepest sense, the existence of anything signifies more than the fact that it is continuous with the world (p. 11).

As the interweaving of "Silence" with "the said" indicated the form of Incarnations, the relation between the continuity of the "Poem" and the discontinuity of "Poems" gives Or Else its shape.

The final poem of this volume recounts this relationship. In "A Problem of Spatial Composition" the temporal flow of the "twenty-four parts" of Or Else ends with a static picture of the world recalling the abstract qualities of the
interjections. "We" see a forest of "green interstices and shambling glory" through a "high window, upright rectangle" (p. 101). The window frames the view the way the vision of the poem freezes the event; it is not the experience alone but the relation between what "we" see and what is seen. This representation is confirmed not by the object alone but by acceptance of the perspective—the first-person plural pronoun perspective which includes writer and reader. The description of the view reads, "Beyond the distance of forest, hangs that which is blue: / Which is, in knowledge, a tall scarp of stone, gray, but now is, / In the truth of perception, stacked like a mass of blue cumulus" (p. 101). As in Audubon, "perception" alters the fact, and the fact here involves the picture of a great tree in the composition with a hawk that "perches on the topmost, indicative tip of / The bough's sharp black and skinny jag skyward" (p. 102). The imagery in the picture implies more than fact. The sky presented elsewhere in the poem as "pure, pure and forever" (p. 101), the "jag" of the tree branch is tied to "the shambling glory" of earth and the "lalling and lounging daylong" (p. 101) of the brook beneath the window indicate a particular vision of the scene. What the poet knows when the hawk from the timelessness of sky makes "contact" with the world of changing seasons and continual movement "confirms what the heart knows: beyond is forever / and nothing moves . . ." (p. 101). But that
knowledge lasts only an instant and vanishes as the "hawk, in an eyelink, is gone" (p. 102). "A Problem in Spatial Composition" describes the difficulty of creating an image which provides lasting meaning. Coming at the end of a volume of poems that has emphasized the continuity of event after event, "A Problem in Spatial Composition" envisions a definition of "forever" that will make sense of this flow. But this image, too, is an event that, "in an eyelink," is gone. The "perception" in this poem, like the interjections in Or Else, suggest the possibility that meaning can be created, but like the interjections any vision that is imagined must be submitted again and again to the next experience.

Following the poems published under the title Can I See Arcturus from Where I Stand* in Selected Poems 1923-1975, Warren's next major volume, Now and Then, is

*This collection is very short--ten poems--but displays in miniature a structure similar to the one I have been describing in the other volumes. "A Way to Love God" and "Loss, of Perhaps Love, in Our World of Contingency," in their use of direct address to the reader, for example, generalizes in ways that recall the interjections in Or Else, while "Answer to Prayer," subtitled "A Short Story that Could be longer," is narrative as well as personal. "Old Nigger on One-Mule Cart Encountered Late at Night When Driving Home from Party in Back Country," one of Warren's most powerful poems, combines these tendencies. The poet moves from a description of the world of "flesh" to the "lyrical logic" that attempts to interpret event. He narrates an incident which happened one hot, dark, drunken Louisiana night when he almost ran over an old black man whom he describes as a "death-trap" (p. 14). Part way through the poem he explains that what he tells is a recollection that has haunted him for years. His "imagination," at first, tried to recreate it in sonnet-form. But, as in Brother to
divided into two parts—Nostalgia and Speculation—which compare to the factoring of experience and reflection that made up the structure of Or Else. The interrelatedness of these two modes, however, is more integrated in Now and Then than in its predecessor. In this regard, in Nostalgia reconstituting past experience is done in the hopes of finding a relation between those events and the present; conversely, the visions in Speculation are rooted to specific experience. In this way, in both sections the poet's personal past and present are intertwined.

A majority of the poems in Nostalgia represent a loss of early images, untested in the world of experience, that the poet as boy lived by. In "Orphanage Boy," for example, the poet describes an incident involving a hired boy from the orphanage whose pet bulldog is bit by a copperhead. The boy has to kill the dog and the young poet accompanies him into the woods where the episode will take place. After the killing, the orphanage boy "lay on the dead leaves crying" (p. 16) and tells the poet to leave him. The boy is

Dragons, this form proved inadequate. In the present poem, he recognizes his relation to the old man:

Brother, Rebuker, my Philosopher past all Casuistry, will you be with me when I arrive and leave my own cart of junk Unfended from the storm of starlight and The howl, like wind of the world's monstrous blessedness, To enter, by a bare field, a shack unlit? (p. 17)
never seen again and the last part of the poem describes
the poet returning to the place months later. "It was six
months," he says,

Before I went back in the woods
To the place. There was a real grave
There. There was a wood cross on the
Grave. He must have come back to the
Barn for the shovel and hammer,
And back again to hang them up.

It must have taken nigh moonset (p. 16).

This poem lacks the lyrical impulse that we have seen
generalize incident in other volumes. The grave and the dis-
appearance of the boy suggest an essential loss in the poet
himself, but it is nowhere stated. The poem indicates one
pattern that characterizes the poems in Nostalgia, but
another dynamic is advocated by "Red-Tail Hawk and Pyre of
Youth." Here the poet describes how, as a young boy again,
he kills a hawk, cleans and stuffs it making it into a
model, and places it on his shelf forever "earthbound."
Within this descriptive narrative, however, there are
moments of reflection. He explains, for example, that all
this happened before he understood his connection to nature:
"It was as though / I did not know its name. Nor mine. Nor
yet had known / That all is only / All, and part of all" (p.
17). After his description of the event—the killing and
stuffing of the bird—in fact, the rest of the poem meditates
on the act. Later, through the years of experience, he
senses that "All" is not "part of all" "when," as he says,
"my mother was dead, father bankrupt, and whiskey / Hot in
my throat" (p. 19). He tells how he returned to his room where the hawk sat on the shelf to understand how his image of perfection as a child and his later experience could again bring him happiness; he wonders how "to bind us in air-blood and earth-blood together / In our commensurate fate / Whose name is a name beyond joy" (p. 21). As a child he knew this connection, but it did not have a name; as an adult he names it in this poem and hopes that in creating this new image the reflective quality of "air-blood" and the on-going narrative of "earth-blood" in his life will again be bound in "the truth in blood-marriage of earth and air / And all will be as it was / In that paradox of unjoyful joyousness" (p. 21).

In contrast to the poems in Nostalgia, the structure of the poems in Speculation tends to begin in abstraction and move toward validation in story. "Ah, Anima!," for instance, begins with the admonition to watch "the great bough lashed by wind and rain. It is / A metaphor for your soul—or Man's—or even / Mine in the hurricane of Time?" p. 33) In "How to Tell a Love Story" the difficulty of proceeding from this realm of image to narrative is detailed. The poet says, there "is a story I must tell, but / The feeling in my chest is too tight... If only? I could say just the first word with breath / As sweet as a babe's and with no history—but, Christ, / If there is no history there is no story. / And no time, no word. / For then there
is nothing for a word to be about, a word / Being frozen
time only . . . .

If only the first word would come and untwist my
tongue!
Then the story would grow like Truth, or a tree,
and your face
Would lean at me. If only the story could begin
when Time truly began,
White surf and a storm of sunlight, you running
ahead and a smile
Back-flung--but then, how go on? For what would
it mean?

Perhaps I can't say the first word till I know
what it all means.
Perhaps I can't know till finally the doctor
comes in and leans
(p. 55).

The desire to find calm in the "hurricane of Time" typifies
the poems in this section. The poems in Speculation wonder
"what can you do to make Time real again"; that is, what
"word," what image, can be created to adequately relate
past and present, event and event in experience. In other
words, what can freeze time so that it will "grow like
Truth." The answer is suggested in "When the Tooth cracks---
Zing!" where the poet says that a "dream . . . must have a
name" (p. 46), image must be fused with experience.

"Identity and Argument for Prayer" places this dynamic in
terms of self-knowledge. The poem recalls the "old I" who
"is not I anymore" and yet is necessary for the "I here now
. . . . This / Is the joke you must live with" (p. 67).
Whatever "vision" or "truth" that swells in "the heart to be
uttered"--specifically, the urge to think "now that at least
you are you" for "Now now is all, and you you"--is, in the
minute following, tested against a new experience and by "wind crammed in the throat back" (p. 68). The conclusion reached is that "Man's mind, his heart, live only by piece-meal," from experience to image ("at least for a minute" when we feel our identity "now" (p. 68) to experience. From Nostalgia to Speculation, the aesthetic structure of Now and Then flows, but glides in a circular returning motion that represents "serpentine Time at the instant it swallowed its tail . . ." (p. 67).

In Now and Then the intertwining of narrative and lyrical impulses can be seen in the relation of its sections. The sinewy texture of Being Here, Warren's next volume, demands a more detailed discussion of the interrelatedness of experience and image of experience on a poem by poem basis. Related patterns of imagery, thematic repetition and variation as well as the interplay of numerous formal constructions transform the meaning of individual poems into complicated arcs of intention; an individual poem looks beyond its borders to poems that have preceded it and ahead to poems which will redefine it. As in The Cave, the grappling for meaning is carried on as much by the poetic unit as by the relation of the writer and reader to that unit. Being Here represents both the intricacies of the intrinsic relation between poems and the fusion of extrinsic and intrinsic characteristics—the experience of the reader who, following the model relation proposed by the
writer, validates the image defined in the text.

There are many glimpses of "truth" in Being Here. As we have seen in the previous volumes, however, these "instants of possibility" vanish beneath the onslaught of new experience. The visions in Being Here suffer a similar fate; the experience in the next line of a poem or a following poem and always a later poem transforms the epiphanous image. The overall structure of the volume--divided into five sections and tracing the poet's life from childhood through middle age and into old age--temporally accommodates this constant change. The innocence of youth, again, falls to the experience of the man and the scraps of understanding, the images of experience, which the man can muster are severely qualified. One of the central metaphors for this process involves a self-conscious look at the poet's work and the aspirations of language. At one point, he says, "I have written whole books telling truth" (p. 43), but elsewhere he concludes that "truth is what you cannot tell. Truth is for the grave" (p. 63). In Being Here, truth is identified as outside experience where "voice / Speaks, since here no voice knows / The language in which a tongue might now re-joice" (p. 70). The correlative in nature for this place of abstraction, as it has been in most of Warren's poetry since Audubon, is the sky. In contrast to this in the poem "What is the Voice that Speaks?" we have the "tongue / Of the laurel leaf" (p. 71). This analogue for language's limitation
leads the poet to ask what "tongue knows the name of Truth? Or Truth to come? / All we can do is strive to learn the cost of experience" (p. 71). The difference in these two views underlies the yearning Being Here has for finding truth through its structure as well as the acknowledgment of that structure's limitations, and it defines the "fusion of fact and fiction" that Warren mentions in his Afterthought to the volume.

The first section of Being Here (following "October Picnic Long Ago" which, as I indicated earlier, is a recollection of a timeless golden past before the poet's experience and outside the main body of poems) describes the loss of the image and dream of childhood. In the first poem, "Speleology," the metaphor for innocence is the inside of a cave where there is only "darkness and depth and no Time." The poet rests in the cave, "lulled as by song in a dream, knowing," as he says, "I dared not move in darkness so absolute." He feels a union with the absolute, his heart "beating as though to a pulse of darkness and earth . . ." (p. 7). But, later, he senses another darkness "past dreams":

I have lain
In darkness and heard the depth of that unending song,
And hand laid to heart, have once again thought: This is me.

And thought: Who am I? And hand on heart, wondered
What would it be like to be, in the end, part of all.

And in darkness have even asked: Is this all? What is all? (p. 8)
In the second poem of this section the transformation from the timeless world of childhood to the world of movement and experience is expressed formally. "When Life Begins" opens with a static image of the poet's grandfather in "dark cedar shade." The erect "old Hellenistic head" captivates the boy, and its "silence" seems to him "to have substantial life / That was the death of the pulse of Time." He feels that "all reality / Had been cupboarded in that high head" and "was absorbed into the abstractness / Of that blue gaze." The boy waits for his grandfather to tell a story from his past on the theory that in that "voice" was "passionate" substantial life; he thinks that "all things that ever lived / Had gone to live behind that brow" (p. 9).

All this is presented in iambic tetrameter organized into five and six-line stanzas. However, when the old man begins his story of a military engagement this formal structure representing the boy's untested belief becomes a juxtaposition of long and short lines, a rhetoric of the jagged, irregular rhythms of experience. Following the old man's tale his old "eyelids shut the horizon out," and the regularity of a five-line stanza returns. The boy still wonders innocently "when life would begin for him"; he does not know, as the older poet does, that "beyond the horizon's heave, / Time crouched, like a great cat, motionless / But for tail's switch" (p. 10). The subject of death figures prominently in this section in poems such as "Filling Night with the
Name: Funeral as Local Color" and "Recollection in Upper Ontario, From Long Before," and the importance of recognizing and accepting it is explained in "Grackles Goodbye":

Grackles, goodbye! The sky will be vacant and lonely
Till again I hear your horde's rusty creak high above,
Confirming the year's turn and the fact that only,
only,
In the name of Death do we learn the name of love
(p. 21).

The structure of the poems in the second section of Being Here reverses the relation of image (the "true name of love") and experience (the "name of death") from image / experience to experience / image. This section is full of representations of nature—sea, sun, cliffs, snow, mountain, birds—and an attempt on the poet's part to discover his relation to the natural world. In the first poem of this section, "Youthful Truth-Seeker, Half-Naked, At Night, Running Down Beach South of San Francisco," "the grind of breath and of sand is all one knows / Of Truth" (p. 26). Instead of the abstract images we saw in the first section, the poems here begin in the world of fact. It is only near the conclusion of this poem that the question of meaning beyond event is raised: "No word? No sign? Or is there a time and place — / Ice-peak or heat-simmered distance — where heart, like eye / May open?" (p. 26). The next poem, "Snowshoeing Back to Camp in Gloaming," confronts these questions. High on a mountain, the poet is in contact with both sky and earth, the " terrain of unnamed whiteness under / The be-nimbed and frozen sun" and the world of
"deeds unleafed" where "Dead leaves lost are only / Old words forgotten in snowdrifts" (p. 27). There is an instant when he feels "sun-nimb" make "contact with jag-heave of mountain"; he looks skyward to the "unnamed void" and then descends into the dark of the forest to a house where someone waits who "will lift and smile with sudden sheen / Of a source far other than firelight -- or even / Imagined star-glint" (p. 28). Reconciliation of the unnamed abstraction of the sky with "spruce-blackness" leads to an acceptance of the natural world, even charges it with the potency only imagined in the sky. The next poem, however, examines this question from a different perspective; from the question of "Youthful Truth-Seeker" to the acceptance in "Snowshoeing Back to Camp in Gloaming" to a new query in "Why have I wandered the Asphalt of Midnight?" where the poet asks, why, "all the years and places, and nights, have I / Wandered and not known the question I carried" (p. 29). The answer here lies only in the resigned faces of those he sees who do not ask: the "farmer" who sets "bright steel share to the earth" and the "old workman" on a streetcar bound for the city leaning "over his lunchbox" (p. 30) and yawning. In "Preternaturally Early Snowfall in Mating Season" this form of acceptance is praised: "this is one name for happiness: the act" (p. 36). But in the narrative poem, "Sila," the final poem in this section, the strain of assenting to this model of
action is brutally represented as a never-ending struggle. "Sila" is about a boy forced to kill out of mercy, but, in the act, he discovers a new and dreadful knowledge. After slitting the throat of a doe that his dog (whose name is Sila) has attacked and injured, the boy raises the knife to his lips and tastes "sweet warmness and wetness" (p. 39), and suddenly knows he knows "something at last / That he" (p. 40) never knew before. The final stanza of the poem wonders if the boy's understanding will help him when, as an old man, he confronts his own death. This acceptance in "Sila" suggests the temporally defined resolution of the poems in this section. Just as the boy must test his knowledge, the meaning the poems in this section discover must be examined within the context of future poems.

In this vein, sections III and IV continue the search for images of experience which will give meaning. And the writer and reader's relation to the text becomes a more consistent aspect of the quest in these middle parts. The emphasis in these poems, for this reason, tends toward generalization and away from the more anecdotal quality of the poems in the first two sections. The first poem in the third section, entitled "Empty White Blotch on Map of Universe: A Possible View," indicates this shift.

I have written whole books, with a stone-honed reed on the sand, Telling truth that should never be told, and what such truths mean. But who cared? For truth must accept its reprimand
When the tide comes in like Christ's blood, to wash all clean,
Including the truth that Truth's only a shout, or clapped hand,
At the steel-heeled stomp, steel-throated bark, or a lifted wand (p. 43).

In "Function of Blizzard," the next poem in this section, truth's "reprimand" is represented by urban "ruins of arson in the Bronx," the needle "plunging into pinched vein," the lonesomeness of the man who is "drunk by the frosted window of / The Oak Room bar in the Plaza" (p. 45). The poet prays to let snow fall and cover up this blight and then, as in "Empty White Blotch," moralizes about his place and his reader's in all this.

And bless me, even
With no glass in my hand, and far from New York, as I rise
From bed, feet bare, heart freezing, to stare out at
The whitening fields and forest, and wonder what

Item of the past I'd most like God to let
Snow fall on, keep falling on, and never

Met, for I, like you, am only a man, after all (p. 45).

In the following poem, "Dream, Dump-Heap, and Civilization," the impulse toward mutual acceptance of natural limitation indicated by the harshness of the city in "Function of Blizzard" is further stressed. The poet says, "we must probe more deeply the nature of complicity" (p. 46), and in "Deep -- Deeper Down" he offers his relation to evil in the world as a model for this participation. He recalls how he and a friend would "purge the earth of evil" by shooting cotton-mouths. "In our wordless friendship," the poet says,
"we'd stare at the cleansing beauty / Of the dark arabesque waveri

ging down, belly white as it dried." That was "Long back" and now he recognizes a relation to what he once con-
sidered separate; he says, "a dream once showed my own body glimmer down / Past the slick, slimy brush of a form that yet twisted in pain, / Its belly paling in darkness -- deep -- deeper down" (p. 55).

In the third section recognition of complicity is not regenerative; in the fourth section, however, many of the poems move from isolation to communion and do provide at least the desire for resolution. "No Bird Does Call" is a lyric describing isolation. The poet says, "I, in despair, fled deeper, and deeper, / To avoid the sight of mankind and bustle of men" (p. 66). But out of such separation in "Tires on Wet Asphalt at Night" comes the image of union. Asleep in his house, the poet in this poem hears an automobile pass and leave him alone to "lie and wonder what is left." He imagines a man and woman in the car and then, at their home,

How after the first shake and shudder at sheet-cold, they
Will huddle for warmth in the old
Mechanic hope of finding identity in
The very moment of paradox when
There is always none (p. 68).

The "hiss" of the tires on the wet asphalt reminds him of "wavelets" near the sea. He climbs to near a cove and throws himself on the ground to clutch "old clumps of summer-burned grass" and wonders if this represents his desire to embrace
"the world" (p. 69). He does not understand the need for communion, does not understand the events and imaginings he has recounted. But he has the desire to know the relation between man and woman: "I wish I could think what makes them come together . . ." (p. 69). This wish is stated another way, again from an isolated perspective, in "Prairie Harvest," the final poem in section IV. At the end of the day, the poet describes the sun setting and the world as empty.

Your heart is the only sound. The sun
It is gone. Can it be that you, for an instant, forget
And blink your eyes as it goes? Another day done,
And the star the Kiowa once stared at will requite

Man's effort by lust, and lust by the lead-weighted eyes.
So you stand in the infinite circle, star after star,
And standing alone in starlight, can you devise
An adequate definition of self, whatever you are?

The previous poems from sections III and IV suggest that the answer to this question is no; only in relation can such a definition be formed. And the generalizing implications of the direct address in "Prairie Harvest" suggest such a connection.

Despite this impulse toward interrelatedness, the first four sections of Being Here, in terms of the aesthetic framework I have set up in this chapter, can be said to progress from abstract innocence to isolated experience. In "Prairie Harvest" we are ultimately left with a picture of separation and the desire for communion. In the fifth and final section, the poet, from the perspective of age,
attempts to discover a new relation to the past and to nature based as much on his earlier passion for image as on the isolation that experience has taught him. The first poem of this section, "Eagle Descending," acknowledges a separation from truth but recognizes this as a universal condition. "Alone in glory," the eagle is described as it "uncoils / The wind to sing with joy of truth fulfilled." The poem is addressed to a "dead friend" suggesting that fulfillment is out of reach of those living. In contrast to the isolated eagle soaring, there is the community of those of "us, / who downward sink" (p. 77). In "Antinomy: Time and Identity" the poet, through an encounter in the natural world, again presents the paradox how out of isolation relation is discovered. "Alone, alone, I lie." the poet says describing himself floating in a canoe, "slow / As a dream, no ripple at keel." In "silent" isolation, he suddenly wonders: "Do I hear stars speak in a whisper as gentle as breath / To the few reflections caught pale in the blackness beneath?" (p. 81). Slowly he becomes aware that as "consciousness outward seeps, the dark seeps in" (p. 82). And, as this communion with nature is disclosed, the pronouns in the poem change from the isolate "I" to a picture of dawn bursting "like the birth pangs of your, and the world's, existence" (p. 82). Identity is realized in relation to the world's existence. In "Aspen Leaf in Windless World" this aesthetic is more directly felt
in the relation established between poet and audience.

Look how sea-foam thin and white, makes its Arabic
scrawl
On the unruffled sand of the beach's faint-tilted
plane.

Is there a message there for you to decipher?
Or only the joy of its sunlit intricate rhythm?

Is there a sign of Truth that we recognize?
Can we fix our eyes on the flight of birds for answer?
(p. 87)

The first-person plural pronoun suggests the mutuality of the
search for an answer. But, as Warren says in Afterthought,
"as in life, meaning is, I should say, often more fruitfully
found in the question asked than in any answer given." In
"Aspen Leaf in Windless World," there is nothing except the
implication of complicity in the search that answers these
questions. And, in this way, the relation between poet and
reader that the questions solicit serves as a fruitful
approach to the discovery of "meaning" in Being Here. But,
in the final poem of this section, "Night Walking," the poet
explains that, although the struggle for answers is shared,
it is pursued individually. In "Night Walking" the poet
pictures his relation to his son as an example. The
connection is portrayed touchingly and comically as the old
man, aroused from sleep by what he thinks at first is a bear
then realizes is his son, follows him secretly on his moonlit
walk. His son's walk reminds the poet of his own "moon-
walking on sea-cliffs" (p. 104), and this provides the final
picture of relation in the volume. On his walk, the poet
says, "once I
Had dreamed to a wisdom I almost could name.  
But could not.  I waited.  
But heard no voice in the heart.  
Just the hum of wires.

But that is my luck.  Not yours.

At any rate, you must swear never,  
Not even in secret, the utmost, to be ashamed  
To have lifted bare arms to that icy  
Blaze and redeeming white light of the world (p. 104).

Here is a picture of acceptance based on the "shadowy autobiography" that Warren describes in *Afterthought*. It is generalized to include the reader and yet the relationships in the poem are independent: the son alone on his walk, the poet with his "luck," not ours. But all sharing the need to reach out and touch the world and be redeemed in that action.

This image from "Night Walking" defines the aesthetic procedure in *Being Here*; the poems in this volume describe distinct emotional states each with their own special, independent intensity, yet all participate in the desire to reach out--often in anguish or rage, sometimes in joy--and accept the "redeeming white light of the world." It also outlines the approach of all the volumes examined in this chapter. The aesthetic process parallels the pursuit of identity and understanding in "Knowledge and the Image of Man." The "continual and intimate interpenetration," the "inevitable osmosis of being," that one poem imagines in Warren's books is tested (in "man's process of self-definition") by another poem--a poem which records
experience. And, in the relation between the poems, a
distinction between a "primal instinctive sense of unity"
and "separateness" is discovered. But, in isolation, a
"courage and clarity of mind to envisage the tragic pathos
of life" as "universal and a corollary of man's place in
nature" is fashioned. As we have seen, the construction
of Warren's individual poems, his poetic sequences, and his
volumes works in the context of this philosophy. The
innocent "primal" image of childhood, the representation of
the detection of "separateness" through experience, the
new image of experience--an image of acceptance and com-
plicity on both intrinsic and extrinsic levels--this pattern
functions in tandem with Warren's paradigm of knowledge.
Central to both the aesthetic and philosophical processes is
the relation between the isolated self and the community of
experience; ultimately, this characterizes the dramatic
intertwining between lyrical and narrative.

This relation is temporally defined by Plumly in a
general discussion of these impulses. He says that when
thinking about narrative values in the lyric, one must be
concerned with how the poet treats the moment. When think-
ing about lyricism one considers "the moment itself enlarged
in space, and therefore in time, so that one is allowed to
move around in it, to block within space." At some point,
however, Plumly continues, one must think of moving into the
next moment. "Lyricism describes emotional intensity and
emotional values, the penetration or depth of the poem. Narrative describes the linear forces ... Lyricism is the intelligence, the power, the energy that holds the storyline in place, that withholds the forward-motion from simply spilling into amorphous future." Lyricism needs to be considered as it addresses the interior--"or what we could call the silence." And the narrative assertion, the narrative organization or structure, permits one to bring that "interior tacit information into the actual, real, objective, particular, horizontal world, in which things ... do tend to move in, through time." Warren follows this dynamic, structuring his poetry in cooperation with the philosophical formulations I have cited from "Knowledge and the Image of Man." The lyrical moralizing that "holds the storyline in place," for Warren, describes the "inter-penetration" of the separate image with the narrative presentation of the "actual, real, objective, particular" world of communal experience; it is a fusion of fiction and fact.

Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce, Warren's most recently published poem in book form, follows this compositional form. Its general structure incorporates fact--excerpts from historical and government documents, journals, letters, and speeches transcribed verbatim and italicized in the text--with the creation of an image--the poem itself--in an effort to discover meaning. In Rumor Verified, Warren's latest
collection of poems, the titles of the eight sections which the volume is divided into indicate the continued use of the dynamic framework. In Prologue and Paradox of Time, the first two sections, the poet learns the "law of attrition" (p. 14); in Events, the next part, he recognizes that it is experience, "the agony of Time," (p. 7) that has undone his "primal" image of a "perfect universe" (p. 8). What is verified here—that "you are a man, with a man's dead reasoning, nothing more" (p. 30)—focuses the poems in the next two sections, A Point North and If This is the Way it is. In But Also and Fear and Trembling a new, yet formidable, possibility, an image of acceptance and complicity, is suggested. In "Snow out of Season" this reads: "We / Are old enough to know that the world / Is only the world, and the heart / Is like fingers idly outspread while, slowly, / The gray seeds of Time, or gold grain, / Trickle through" (p. 74). "Fear and Trembling," the single poem which comprises Coda, the final section of Rumor Verified, concludes with a question about the "heart['s]" relation to the world. It offers an appropriate finale to this discussion of Warren's poetry not because it proposes a definitive resolution to the problems we have seen his verse wrestle with but because it questions the source that fashions conclusive meaning. It asks who "defines the relation between the word sun and the sun?" The answer given reads as a question, inviting the reader and writer, "us,"
to serve as the connection between the images in the text and the world of experience.

Can one, in fact, meditate in the heart, rapt and wordless?
Or find his own voice in the towering gust from northward?
When boughs toss—is it in joy or pain and madness?
The gold leaf—is it whirled in anguish or ecstasy skyward?

Can the heart's meditation wake us from life's long sleep,
And instruct us how foolish and fond was our labor spent--
Us who now know that only at death of ambition does the deep
Energy crack crust, spurt forth, and leap

From grottoes, dark—and from the caverned enchainment?

The relation between the meditative heart and the "towering gust" of experience are cause for fear and trembling. Here, as in the greater part of Warren's poetry, the relation between the lyrical urge to know and the narrative test of that knowledge is revealed in the uncertainty their "interpenetration" germinates. Questioning is inevitable as long as image must be tested in experience—as long as one lives; it is down this ongoing road that Warren's poetry takes us.
FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER V


7Plumly, p. 133.

8Stitt, p. 229.

9Stitt, p. 230.

10Justus, p. 53.

11Plumly, p. 136.

12Justus, p. 112.


16 Warren, *Selected Essays*, p. 27.


23 Stitt, p. 231.


26 Justus, p. 82.

27 Justus, p. 82.


32. Stitt, p. 235.


34. Plumly, p. 140.


CONCLUSION

Furthermore, in our moments of victory it is hard for us to remember the full implications of William James' remark that "the victory to be philosophically prayed for is that of the more inclusive side -- of the side which even in the hour of triumph will to some degree do justice to the ideals in which the vanquished interests lay."1

In The Legacy of the Civil War, Warren concludes that for the American imagination the Civil War provides "an image of the powerful, painful grinding process by which an ideal emerges out of history" (p. 108). It can be said that Warren's aesthetic procedure, in a general way, is defined by a similar struggle. In my discussion of his poetry and fiction I have described the dialectic suggested in the relationship between "an ideal" and "history" in various ways: as the lyrical and narrative impulses of his poetics, as "image" and "experience" in a discussion of his aesthetics, as private and public, as answer and question, and as idea and fact. Warren refers to the division as the "two halves of the world . . . the Emersonian and the Hawthornian."2 One aspect of this dialectic which I have focused on concerns the interdependence of self and community. Warren argues that, on the one hand, "to be, man must dream"; in "Night Walking" we saw the self imagining a wisdom that is known individually but cannot be named and shared. On the
other hand, however, as many of Warren's critics have pointed out, to survive, man must submit his "private image to public experience." The previous chapters demonstrate that the "powerful, painful, grinding process" by which self-knowledge and identity emerge out of community is mirrored in Warren's aesthetic. The reading activity becomes a way that the emergence of an ideal out of history can be "felt"; for the author, this means submitting his private image to the text of experience in the world represented by his audience, and, for the reader, it involves the creation, the transformation, of his world based on the private image of the text, at least for the sake of the reading experience. Making the reader into an "active creative being," a central goal of Warren's work, means fashioning a relation between the audience's experience and the image represented in the text.

The model for this relation comes from Warren's picture of his connection to his work. The text exists, he says, "only because there is a story behind the objective story; there is the story of the relation of the author to the work." In Brother to Dragons, we saw the complex way in which the text and author were allied—how Warren's "double image" related them. In "Use of the Past," Warren defines the isolation which typifies the writer confronting "the image of fate that is the work's content," and the validation of this private experience in the audience's confrontation
with themselves "in the act of confronting [their] fate." For Warren, this interaction is not an arbitrary one; it plays a crucial part in the interpretation of much of his work. Without Yasha Jones as a "potential audience" in Flood, for example, we can judge Brad Tolliver's moral narcissism only as the "image of fate that is the work's content"; in other words, like Brad, who separates himself from others, the text remains isolated from the reader or, conversely, the reader is not complicit in the attitudes represented by the work. We do not confront ourselves in the act of confronting our fate which is precisely the sin Brad commits in the novel. Or, in a different way, in The Cave, the narrative becomes a mere collection of contradictory facts without the reader's participation. MacCarland Sumpter's story is validated only as both he and Jack Harrick recognize its relevance in their lives; the veracity of The Cave, focused on the difficulty of interpretation, also acquires representativeness only as the reader recognizes its applicability in his struggle to discover meaning in the novel.

Warren's work attempts to resolve the Emersonian/Hawthornian dialectic not only within the text—that is, through the author's creation of an "implied version" of the conflict represented in an objective story and a narrative voice—but by reducing the distance between the isolated text and the reader's experience which, I have argued,
presents another version of the dilemma. In The Legacy of the Civil War, Warren suggests that there is a parallel between this creative activity and the study of history providing us with a final context for examining his aesthetic. As we discovered in All the King's Men, historical reflection is synonymous with the way we encounter and shape all experience. In All the King's Men, Jack Burden refers to two kinds of "reality": "event as event" and "the relationship of that event to past, and future, events." In Jefferson Davis Gets His Citizenship Back, Warren refers to this as "two kinds of memory. One is narrative, the unspooling in the head of what has happened, like a movie film with no voices. The other is symbolic—the image, say, of a dead friend of long ago, with a characteristic expression of face, which may be called up by a name." The association between fact and the relation of facts marks the paradoxical nature of Warren's epistemology. In this vein, Jack Burden confesses that reality is not a function of the event as event, but of the relationship of that event to past, and future, events. We seem here to have a paradox: that the reality of an event, which is not real in itself, arises from other events which, likewise, in themselves are not real. But this only affirms what we must affirm: that direction is all. And only as we realize this do we live, for our own identity is dependent upon this principle.

In aesthetic terms, the "event," or the text, lacks validity in itself; its truth, its "reality," is relative, is in its "direction." Jack Burden discovers a relation between the
past events of his life and his present situation by writing _All the King's Men_ and out of his experience meaning emerges; in a similar way, Warren's texts often ask to be viewed as objects whose truths are revealed only as the reader discovers a relation between himself and the object, as he assumes the "set of attitudes and qualities" suggested by the language of the text.

Warren's "meditation" on the Civil War offers an understanding of the past that sheds light on this aesthetic and offers an apt conclusion to this study of his work as a novelist and poet. In _The Legacy of the Civil War_, Warren says that this event "is our 'felt' history--history lived in the national imagination" (p. 4). Prior to it, "the vision" of the founding fathers had not been earned, had not been lived, had not been "submitted to the test of history" (p. 3). As we have seen in characters such as Brad Tolliver, Isaac Sumpter, Jefferson, and R. P. W. untested vision leads to inflexible positions held only through psychological and physical violence. In his study, Warren contends that an essential context for many of the causes behind the Civil War involved the clash of two "opposing absolutes"--"'higher law' and 'legalism'" (p. 20). His description of these mark the poles in which we have seen Warren's characters and personas operate.

In the North, "divine revelation" was the justification used by one school of Transcendentalists and Abolitionists
in the war against slavery; it lead, according to Warren, to a fanatical reform that denied "the very concept of society" (p. 26). John Brown's homily that "without the shedding of blood there was no remission of sins" (p. 24) spoke for a movement that believed it better for all to die in an effort to abolish injustice than to live with it. Such a belief came from a self-righteous faith in "the infinitude of the individual" (p. 29) -- man as "a total abstraction, in the pure blinding light of total isolation, alone with the alone, narcissism raised to the infinite power" (p. 30). This description fits Isaac Sumpter escaping from his responsibilities to family and community to live by himself in New York or Jefferson's barbed dejection at the beginning of Brother to Dragons. But, as Warren says, if in the North "the critic repudiated society, in the South society had repudiated the critic" (p. 36). In defending slavery, the "egregious logicians" of the South denied "the very concept of life" (p. 34) -- such a charge indicates the "logic" that Brad Tolliver used to justify his aesthetic.

More important than these attitudes which Warren sees as providing the background to the reasons for the war between the states is the legacy the war leaves us. He suggests two alternatives in this regard. The first he divides into the two attitudes he calls the "Great Alibi" and the "Treasury of Virtue." For the South the Great Alibi is a way of explaining away the race problem; it presumes a
"doom defined by history" (p. 55). Jack Burden calls this the "Great Twitch," in "Mortmain" it is existence as "the adequate and only target / For the total reverence of the heart. . . ." for Jefferson in Brother to Dragons it is the belief that there "is no form to hold / Reality and its insufferable intransigences." It is the belief, as Warren puts it in The Legacy of the Civil War, that "we all seem to be doomed to reenact, in painful automatism, the errors of our common past" (p. 59). However, says Warren, while the Southerner may feel trapped by history, "the Northerner, with his treasury of virtue, feels redeemed, automatically redeemed" (p. 59). This is the sort of denial of complicity that poems such as "Apology for Domitian" resist in their direct addresses to the reader: "Let's stop horsing around--it's not Domitian, it's you / We mean." Such exclusion can lead to the notions of "universal rehabilitation for others" (p. 72) but not for oneself and an ethics of irresponsibility. An alternative legacy, however, moves toward an awareness of complicity in which an assurance of one's ideas, one's "virtue," is checked by the consequences of one's actions. Such an ethic does not deny ideals but sees them grounded in fact--emerging from history, not prior to it. Warren sees this principle grounded in pragmatism, and his description of it characterizes the aesthetic I have described directing much of his work.
The "revusion" from the two absolutes of "revelation" (higher law) and "deduction" (legalism) which drenched the country in blood conditioned many (Warren cites Justice Holmes) for a "tentative, experimental, "open" approach to the life process which was given the name of pragmatism" (p. 41); that is, as Lincoln expressed it, to "be principled without being fanatical, and flexible without being opportunistic . . . " (p. 18). Such a philosophy represents what Warren sees as an "attempt to establish the right relation between intellect and society--the relation which had been violated by the Transcendentalists' repudiation of society, and Southern Society's repudiation of criticism" (p. 40). As Warren describes this pragmatism growing out of historic incident, his rhetoric applies as much to historical study as to the study of narrative or poetics. He makes a comparison between the examinations of literature and history when he says that we reflect on the Civil War as a "way of understanding our own deeper selves, and that need to understand ourselves is what takes us, always, to the deeper contemplation of art, literature, religion, and history" (p. 81). He describes the historical procedure in a way which applies directly to this study of his aesthetics.

The asking and answering which history provokes may help us to understand, even to frame, the logic of experience to which we shall submit. History cannot give us a program for the future, but it can give us a fuller understanding of ourselves and of our common humanity, so that we can better face the future (100).
If we substitute the word *text* for *history* here, Warren could be describing his own creative process. While history is pure event, text is pure image—a representation of experience; the relation we find between ourselves and the past or between ourselves and the text defines "our common humanity"—creates the "right relation between intellect and society"—and this characterizes for Warren both the creative act and the act of interpretation. When Warren asks about the role "the readers of history" play in *The Legacy of the Civil War*, his language evokes the course outlined in "Use of the Past." He says,

What happens if, by the act of historical imagination—the historian's and our own—we are transported into the documented, re-created moment of the past and, in a double vision, see the problems and values of that moment and those of our own, set against each other in mutual criticism and clarification? What happens if, in innocence, we can accept this process without trying to justify the present by the past or the past by the present? We might, then, ask the question about inevitability in the only way that is fruitful—in the recognition that there can never be a yes-or-no answer, but that the framing of perspectives of causality and context, as rigorously as possible even though provisionally, fulfills our urgent need to try to determine the limits of responsibility in experience (99-100).

The dialectic between "an ideal" and "history" based on the relation that we discover between ourselves and the text demands the kind of interaction outlined above; the "responsibility" which we have seen Warren's aesthetic ask for can be defined by a demand for inclusiveness. For the author, this means trying to "mold the reader into the kind
of person suited
image presented
of the reader; a
Dreiser, from the
fulfill[s] the "
But it is the de
that defines the
"victory to be a
more to do with
"history" or
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readers of histo
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relation" here in
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reading activity
FOOTNOTES - CONCLUSION


10 Warren, All the King's Men, p. 406.


15 Booth, p. 89.

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