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GUEST EDITOR for the SEVENTEENTH ANNUAL ENGLISH GRADUATE  
SYMPOSIUM and ROBERT PENN WARREN MATERIALS

**H. R. Stoneback**

The *Shawangunk Review* is the journal of the English Graduate Program at the State University of New York, New Paltz. The *Review* publishes the proceedings of the annual English Graduate Symposium and literary articles by graduate students as well as poetry, fiction, and book reviews by students and faculty. The views expressed in the *Shawangunk Review* are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Department of English at SUNY New Paltz. Please address correspondence to *Shawangunk Review*, Department of English, SUNY New Paltz, New Paltz, NY 12561.

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## From the Editors

As we go to press with Volume XVII of the *Shawangunk Review*, Thomas Festa is completing preparations for the Eighteenth Annual English Graduate Symposium, “Shakespeare and the Paradoxes of Political Tragedy,” to be held on April 26<sup>th</sup>. Professor Festa has arranged an excellent program of graduate student papers and has invited Kimberly Benston, the William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of English at Haverford College, to give the keynote address, entitled “The Unbearable Learn-ness of Being, or: Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life?” Professor Benston is the author of numerous acclaimed books and articles on English Renaissance drama, performance theory, and African-American literature including *Performing Blackness: Enactments of African-American Modernism* (Routledge, 2000) and *Baraka: The Renegade and the Mask* (Yale, 1976).

For 2007 Christopher Link will direct the Symposium on the topic of “The Bible and Literature”; please get in touch with Professor Link if you would like to participate in the Symposium, and watch for his posting of a call for papers.

This year’s issue of the *Review* features the proceedings of the Seventeenth Annual Graduate Symposium, “The Robert Penn Warren Centennial Symposium,” directed by H. R. Stoneback. The editors would like to express their gratitude to John Burt and William Bedford Clark for granting us permission to publish their keynote addresses. In addition to the Symposium proceedings, which includes a selection of poems from the “Homage to RPW Poetry Reading,” Professor Stoneback has assembled and edited a remarkable collection of unpublished Warren materials for this issue, including an early story, letters, and drafts of a poem. I think you will agree that Volume XVII of the *Review* offers a compelling tribute to Warren and makes an important contribution to Warren scholarship.

Professor Stoneback has also edited a special section of poems from a reading at the Oasis Café to benefit victims of hurricanes Katrina and Rita. We are happy to announce that for the first time the *Review* contains a selection of literacy narratives from the students in the Modern Theories of Writing course. And, as always, the *Review* contains the best critical essays of the past year by students in our MA, MAT, and MS programs

For Volume XVIII of the *Review*, we encourage submissions of poetry, short

fiction, book reviews, and critical essays concerning any area of literary studies. Students writing theses (41590) should consult with their advisors and submit an abstract of approximately 150 words for the “Abstracts of MA Theses” section. Please see submission guidelines on page 253.

We ask readers to provide information regarding the many distinguished achievements of our current and former graduate students for our “News and Notes” column. For example, we would like to know the details of conference participation, publications, grants, and honors, as well as news regarding progress of our MA graduates in PhD programs and reports about teaching and employment activities.

Thanks to Jason Taylor for layout, typesetting, and production supervision; and to Jason Cring for the cover art.

—DANIEL KEMPTON



# I Introduction

## The Robert Penn Warren Centennial Symposium

*H. R. Stoneback*

The Seventeenth Annual SUNY New Paltz English Department Graduate Symposium—The Robert Penn Warren Centennial Symposium—under the direction of H. R. Stoneback, took place on May 2-3, 2005. Two keynote speakers, three visiting scholar-panelists, and nine New Paltz graduate students gave presentations at the academic sessions on May 3. The opening program of the symposium was the “Homage to RPW Poetry Reading” on May 2, an extraordinary event at which seventeen poets and writers read tributes to Warren. A total of twenty-four speakers participated in the symposium programs, including twelve visiting speakers and readers who came from afar to celebrate the Warren Centennial.

At the opening “Homage to RPW” program, hosted and moderated by Professor Stoneback, tributes to Warren were presented by a remarkable lineup of poets and writers of national and international reputation, including Chinua Achebe, Donald Junkins, Robert Kelly, Joan Murray, and Dave Smith, as well as a number of New Paltz faculty members and graduate students, and other poets from the Hudson Valley region. For a complete roster of the readers and details of that event see the separate introduction hereafter, “Homage: Poems for Robert Penn Warren,” which includes poems read at that program.

It should be noted that the New Paltz Warren Symposium was an integral part of the national and international Warren Centennial programs and celebrations. All over the world, Warren Centennial observances were held, from Oxford to the University of Paris to Yale to Vanderbilt—to New Paltz. In Kentucky there were Centennial celebrations with Warren’s family at his birthplace in Guthrie. Under a vast tent there in Warren’s hometown, the United States Postal Service unveiled its Robert Penn Warren Commemorative Stamp in a ceremony involving many dignitaries: politicians, a brass band, the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Honor Guard, a sheriff who sang a truly stirring “America the Beautiful,” and perhaps the most dignified celebrant of all—a red-tailed hawk who eyed the proceedings with magnificent disdain. That hawk served as a reminder to the assembled throng that at sundown on April 24, Warren’s 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, his widely beloved poem “Evening Hawk” was read around the world—in *every country*, they said, and in *every language* on earth. At Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green, the Warren Circle, a literary society devoted to the preservation and study of Warren’s legacy

and work, held its Centennial Conference, shortly before the New Paltz Warren Symposium. New Paltz was well represented at the latter two events, and seven of our graduate students—Michael Beilfuss, William Boyle, Nicole Camastra, Damian Carpenter, Noah Jampol, James Stamant, and Goretti Vianney-Benca—as well as Professor Stoneback presented papers at the Warren Centennial Conference in Kentucky. From there, very much like a traveling Warren theater troupe, these eight speakers, together with the two leading Warren scholars, William Bedford Clark and John Burt, who were our symposium keynote speakers, came to New Paltz for their New York opening. There, they were joined by two more New Paltz graduate students, Joshua Gran and Tiffany Wooten, and a panel of visiting scholars—Richard Davison, Donald Junkins, and Robert W. Lewis (see “Distinguished Guest Panelists”)—as well as a remarkable roster of writers and poets. This entire cast was featured in the New Paltz Symposium, and their contributions are published in the following pages.

At the formal opening of the symposium, Professor Stoneback relayed greetings to the audience from Warren’s daughter, Rosanna, poet-scholar-translator-biographer, Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets, and Professor of Comparative Literature at Boston University. Stoneback conveyed Rosanna Warren’s regrets that she could not attend because she had to teach on the two symposium days—she is, as her father always was, a *teacher* with a passionate commitment to her students—and then he read these words from a letter Rosanna had sent: “My brother and I are moved at the continuing lively interest in our father’s work . . . the celebrations of his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday seem to show . . . that we are still trying to understand ourselves as darkly and as clearly as he did.” She concluded: “I think he tried to show both private and public darkness to a country that (on the whole) prefers entertainment and painkillers. So perhaps his poems and stories still have a lively purpose.”

That “lively purpose” was well illustrated over the course of two days by the wide range of topics (drawn from Warren’s fiction, poetry, and non-fiction works) that was treated in the papers and readings presented by our graduate students, faculty, and guest panelists and writers. The conference closed with keynote addresses by two leading Warren scholars. The first address, “Purity, Panic, and Pasiphaë in *Brother to Dragons*,” an acute analysis of Warren’s major book-length poem, was given by John Burt, Professor of English at Brandeis University, author of numerous works on Warren, and editor of the magisterial 830-page *Collected Poems of Robert Penn Warren*—a book aptly described in Harold Bloom’s Foreword as “this extraordinary volume, magnificently edited . . . Warren’s center, and his lasting glory.” The closing address, “Shadowing Old Red: The Editor as Gumshoe,” a compelling and entertaining account of the trials and tribulations of an editor, was given by William Bedford Clark, Professor of English at Texas A&M University, author of numerous works on Warren, and General Editor of the mas-

sive multi-volume Warren Correspondence Project. We are pleased to be able to print both of these keynote addresses in the following pages.

In sum, the symposium, from beginning to end, served as a vivid illustration of what Rosanna Warren called the “lively purpose” of her father’s work. And then there was this: another reverberation set in motion by the symposium. Some weeks afterward, I received an e-mail from an undergraduate student that I had never met. He said that he was deeply moved by what he heard at the symposium: “I had never heard of Warren before and I came just for the free food—I’m not even an English Major, but after hearing what I heard I might become one. Anyway, I have been haunted for three weeks now by what was said there and especially by one of the poems that was read.” He described the poem, the title he could not remember, and asked where he could get a copy of that poem. He also wondered which books of Warren he should read first. I sent him a copy of the poem that was haunting him, and a selective reading list drawn from Warren’s 46 books. That, too, I like to think, is a “lively purpose” that was fulfilled by our symposium.

Finally, I want to thank all of our speakers, all of our writers whose work is published in the following pages. Thanks are due also to my symposium assistants, William Boyle and Goretta Vianney-Benca, who worked assiduously on details ranging from symposium posters and programs to microphone placement, from table arrangement to wheelchair accessibility navigation for two speakers. And, for the opportunity to make this issue a truly extraordinary contribution to Warren studies—with a Warren short story never before published (see, hereafter, “Warren’s Unpublished Fiction: An Introduction to ‘Goodbye, Jake’”), facsimile manuscript pages of Warren’s poetry (see “The Craft of Warren’s Poetry: The Evolution of ‘Amazing Grace in the Back Country’”), and several previously unpublished Warren letters (see “Unpublished Warren Letters” and “A Tribute to Robert Penn Warren from New Paltz”)—my profound gratitude to Warren’s Literary Executor, John Burt, for granting the necessary permissions.

## II | Keynote Addresses

### Purity, Panic, and Pasiphaë in *Brother to Dragons*

*John Burt*

*Brother to Dragons* is a poem about fallenness, and its aim is to see that fallenness in a political and historical way. Its critique of human nature is also a critique of American culture and politics, specifically of the ways in which Americans have used the promise of human perfectibility to define their collective sense of mission in the world. So dark is the poem's vision of American history that it presents America's sense of itself as a redeemer nation opening the possibility of freedom for all peoples as not only mistaken but also as a hysterical delusion in the service of an unacknowledged collective inner darkness. But even as *Brother to Dragons* examines the primordial American crimes of slavery and racism, sometimes alluding as well to class exploitation and imperial conquest, the poem's attention obsessively returns to sex. Its obsession is not with the sexual aspects of slavery and racism, although these would seem to be ready made for this poem and indeed are certainly not ignored by it, but with sexual passion itself. While it is possible to argue that this repeated shift of focus reflects an attempt, conscious or unconscious, to evade the charged political subject matter of the poem by shifting from a political and public register to a psychological and private register, it is hard in context to see that shift as evasive. For *Brother to Dragons* never sees its sexual concerns as replacing or obviating its political ones; indeed, the characters repeatedly insist that sexual and political fallenness illuminate each other, and they always treat politics as the tenor and sex as the vehicle, rather than the other way around. *Brother to Dragons* is not a coded argument about sex; it is an account of human darkness, both generally and in the American political context, which uses sexual passion, and more important, sexual revulsion, to illuminate general features of human nature which are also in play in moral and political life.<sup>1</sup>

Sexual passion and sexual revulsion play roles in the poem that are so similar that they are hard to separate. The problem is not merely that revulsion and fascination so often keep each other company or seem to require each other. Nor is it even that sexual revulsion, in *Brother to Dragons* no less than in *World Enough and Time* (or for that matter *Measure for Measure* and *Hamlet*), seems under pressure to become not a horrified recoil against sexual passion but a dark version of it, not a flight from sex but an angry and sadistic sexual practice. The problem is more general. Revulsion seeks to purify the self through cruelty, and all attempts

to seek purity through cruelty inevitably become merely instances of what the self seeks to purify itself away from.

The ironic transformation of the desire for sexual purity into sadism is in the poem taken as a pointed instance of the more general tendency of the longing for purity of any kind to transform itself into a form of the darkness it thought it opposed. Nothing is more liable to serve evil than a panicked and angry love of the good or a guilty but thrilled revulsion from evil. Lucy Jefferson Lewis, at the poem's climactic moment, insists to her brother that his horrified refusal to acknowledge his moral kinship with his murderous nephew Lilburn amounts to another version of Lilburn's crime. A similar destructive longing for purity also takes political form in the thinking of Jeremiah Beaumont in *World Enough and Time* and of Adam Amos in *Proud Flesh*, but in both of those cases that urgent longing for purity retains enough of its sexual character that it is still something of a question whether the political obsessions are merely disguised versions of sexual ones. Oddly it is in the revulsions of Thomas Jefferson in *Brother to Dragons*, which are if anything more explicitly sexual than anything in Warren's other books, that the connection between revulsion and fascination can be seen as a description not merely of a sexual predicament but as a description of idealism generally, so that the question becomes not why is it that the desire for sexual purity so often transforms itself into pleasure in cruelty, nor why desire for political purity seems so often to become a coded form of pleasure in sexual cruelty, but why every profound attempt to remake and purify human nature, from the Wars of Religion forward, has yielded only chaos, destruction, and despair.

Jefferson's thinking repeatedly veers, with the air of having finally discovered its true subject, from sex to something he calls *joy*, by which term he means the center of a dark transcendence which recruits and destroys those who come under its influence. Jefferson's panicked sexual thoughts lead him away from sexuality in two directions. First, it leads him to ask why it is that revolutions so often, in Hannah Arendt's phrase, eat their children, so that what begins in a crusading desire to redeem the human condition ends only by sowing death everywhere. Second, it leads him to ask why it is that the highest aims seem necessarily to bring with them all that is worst, and he answers that question not by adopting a chastened skepticism about human nature but by embracing a dark gnosticism about good and evil more thoroughgoing than anything in Hardy or Conrad and equalled only perhaps in Melville. The painful discovery, which *Brother to Dragons* struggles to assimilate, is that good is so often the occasion or origin of evil, that the two are nearly impossible to tell apart.

*Brother to Dragons*, a "Tale in Verse and Voices," which first appeared in 1953 and which Warren extensively revised in 1979, concerns the true story of how Lilburn and Isham Lewis, two nephews of Thomas Jefferson, murdered their slave George with an axe in December 1811, on Rocky Hill near Smithland, Ken-

tucky, on the day the Great New Madrid Earthquake shook the continent from the Rockies to Boston. The poem does not present the action directly, but has the poet and the shade of Jefferson, who is unable to rest because of the way Lilburn and Isham's crime seems to repeal both his vision of the promise of human nature and his vision of the promise of America, confront each other and argue about its meaning. The other principal characters—the Lewis brothers, their parents, Lilburn's wife, Laetitia, their cousin the explorer Meriwether Lewis, Lilburn's ambivalent and darkly possessive African-American Mammy, Aunt Cat, and, in one brief but moving passage, the murdered George himself—interrupt their colloquy as required, entering from an outer dark in which, until they speak, Jefferson and RPW are not aware of their presence, and in which it is not clear exactly how much of the colloquy they overhear.

The historical Jefferson apparently left no record of his thoughts about the tragedy, perhaps, as Warren surmises in the preface to the 1953 edition, because he was unable in life to face the facts Warren has him so obsessively brood upon in death. As Warren goes on, rather tartly, to remark: "If the moral shock to Jefferson caused by the discovery of what his own blood was capable of should turn out to be somewhat short of what is here represented, subsequent events in the history of America, of which Jefferson is the spiritual father, might still do the job."

In its immediate context in 1953 the book had two principal moral aims. Warren speaks first of all as an ethnically sensitive Southerner in the years immediately preceding the repeal of legal racial segregation by the Supreme Court in the *Brown* case. Not Twain, not Cable, not Warren himself in later works such as *Band of Angels*, not even Faulkner, presents quite so stark a picture of his region's and his nation's guilty racial past as Warren does in *Brother to Dragons*.

Indeed, the poet's feelings upon this subject seem to be so raw that the book seems to be always careering out of his control both emotionally and artistically. The poet's anguish on this subject may account for the poem's almost shapeless architectonic, in which new subjects and themes seem to burst into the action, propelled by their own urgencies, sometimes for reasons that remain partly opaque, as in the case of the poet's sudden recollection of how his friend Kent shot a Canada Goose, or his pang of guilt on being asked to describe his father, or the father's digression on how his own father would every spring make him drink a potion made of whiskey and bloodroot called "percoon." Even within single speeches, the characters are often ambushed by their own words, or tyrannized by metaphors they had seemed to adopt in an offhand way, and driven into making claims they had not set out to make so baldly.

The same tangle and jangle of feelings may account for those frequent moments in which the poet rounds upon himself and jeers at his poem, such as when he ridicules an earlier attempt to render the story in the form of a folk ballad like his 1943 "Ballad of Billie Potts," or when, having elaborately introduced Mr. Boyle,

the current owner of the property upon which the tragedy occurred, he rebukes himself for having worked so hard to make Mr. Boyle appear quaint. *Brother to Dragons* seems to have concerned Warren through the ten years of his poetic silence after 1943, and although there were certainly biographical issues other than the need to sort out his thinking about race that caused that silence, the poem repeatedly called him back to work on it, so that Warren revised it stem to stern in 1976 and 1979, and worked on yet another version of it as late as 1987.

Like *Piers Plowman* or *The Prelude*, *Brother to Dragons* is a text whose author could not cease worrying it, perhaps because the still-unsolved problems at its center run so deeply into the regional conscience of the South and the national conscience of the United States. That the problem of racial crime generalizes into the problem of human evil does not suffice to draw its special and personal sting by deemphasizing its specific instance, as generalizing treatments so often do, because the other instances which are drawn on to illustrate this generality—strikebreaking at Ford, the suppression of the Ghost Dance, the plunder of the West—are also specifically American and sting both author and reader in almost the same intimate and personal way. Even in its most general form, as a critique of human nature rather than as a critique of the South or of America, *Brother to Dragons* does not lose its specifically American and Southern focus, because the poet never fails to make this point without reminding the reader how much America's sense of itself has depended upon its denial of human fallenness and its sense of exemption from history.

*Brother to Dragons* is not only an intervention in Southern thinking during the early years of the struggle over desegregation, but is also an intervention in the international crises of midcentury, a reflection upon some of the urgent moral issues raised by the Second World War and the early phases of the Cold War. To insist that American history and contemporary American culture are not free from their own specific forms of horrifying darkness serves an important moral and political function in the postwar era. For one thing, it demands of American readers that they do not see themselves as morally different in kind from their recently defeated enemies, however much their acts may differ in degree. It motivates a forbearing political settlement with the ordinary people of the defeated Axis powers based upon a shared acknowledgment of human liability, arguing not that the two sides were morally equivalent but that the urgencies and obsessions which drove the ordinary people of those powers, people not especially or essentially more demonic than anyone else, to do abominable things, are recognizably akin to urgencies and obsessions to which those who put a stop to those abominations are also liable. Indeed, it argues that an angry insistence upon settling moral scores leaves one open to evils rather like those one wished to extirpate. It is a hard lesson for a victor to learn, particularly a victor over such an enemy, but it seems to be a necessary one. To insist that all sides have a share

in human depravity and must work out a forbearing habit of living based upon mutual acknowledgment of that fact is one way of making moral sense of and assimilating the horrible events of midcentury. Recent thinkers on these subjects may view this train of thought as sentimental or as lacking in moral clarity, but most of the available alternatives seem to have far worse problems.

The poem bears also on its immediate context in the early years of the Cold War, a conflict which, given the series of confrontations during the poem's composition in Greece, Berlin, and Korea, kept threatening, up to the death of Stalin in the year of its publication, to transform itself into a titanicly destructive global nuclear war. Anthony Szczesiul has shown that Warren studied Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* deeply during the composition of *Brother to Dragons*, and that he extracted passages from that book to help him clarify his own thoughts about the outbreak of metaphysical evil in political life. The poem is intended as a critique of the American sense of national innocence, which Warren fears may lead America, although legitimately in conflict with totalitarian powers, into a self-righteousness for which there is a high moral price to be paid in unreflecting brutality and in ends-justify-the-means expedience. The point is at best implicitly made, but it is hard to mistake.

Crucial as these themes are to Warren's sense of the poem and to our sense now of Warren as a poet with moral and political things to say, the sexual themes overrun the political ones, and they do so with the force of an urgent irruption of undesired thoughts. Consider for instance Jefferson's first outburst on the subject:

In Philadelphia first it came, my heart  
Shook, shamefast in glory, and I saw, I saw—  
But I'll tell you quietly, in order, what I saw.  
To Philadelphia we came, delegates by accident, in essence men:  
  
Marmosets in mantles, beasts in boots, parrots in pantaloons.  
That is to say, men. Like other men.  
No worse, no better. Only ourselves, in the end.  
Only ourselves, and what we then happened to be—  
Offal of history, tangents of our fathers' pitiful lust  
At midnight heat or dawnbed ease.  
Why should our fathers' longlost lust  
Seem pitiful? The twitch and gasp that was  
The fuddling glory of our begetting seem  
So pitiful? Is it not worthy of us?  
Or we of it?—Too much crowds in  
To break the thread of discourse and make me forget  
That irony is always, and only, a trick of light on the late landscape. (6–7)



Jefferson has begun to describe the redemptive ambition he invested in the great preamble to the Declaration of Independence as an example of both personal and impersonal spiritual pride. The personal pride is not only in his own eloquence as the author of that document, or in his power as a political agent changing the course of world history, but also in his transformative insight into the possibilities of a redeemed human nature, a vision of human possibility both embodied in and realized in action by means of Jefferson's own words. The impersonal spiritual pride belongs to humanity as a whole, whose highest ambitions are at stake in the project of American self-government, a project for which Jefferson himself serves as a representative man and his Declaration as the enabling instrument of freedom and self-culture. In the Declaration, Jefferson speaks for the possibilities of America, and America speaks for the possibilities of the world. The pride of the Declaration is the pride of the Enlightenment as a whole, humanity's pride in itself as a race of beings capable of perfecting themselves through reason, a pride which Jefferson's words not only invoke and express but translate into a concrete historical action that transforms the world. The Declaration is not only a key document of Enlightenment belief, but also a key act embodying Enlightenment values, a key instance of Enlightenment hubris.

Jefferson wonders how such a transformative vision and such a transformative act might ever have come to a body of delegates who were after all only human, and as human beings were at least in large measure animals. Almost involuntarily Jefferson's tirade slips from the thought that the delegates at Philadelphia (and by extension all Americans, perhaps all humans) are men, no worse, no better, to a horrified reflection that whatever we are we are still the tangents of paternal lust. He cannot keep himself from imagining, in a passage which emphasizes at once the grossness and the irrelevance of the act, the scene of our begetting. Jefferson asks how is it that anyone who might think the thought of human greatness might owe his origin to such an act, so pitiful in its physicality and even triviality, and so ludicrously disproportionate to the idea that what is created by that lust might become that creature to whom God gives certain inalienable rights and a portion of his own immortality. That our being is a consequence of a strained and even ridiculous sexual act gives the lie simultaneously to any glorious vision of the human possibility and to our own credibility as shapers of that vision.

Jefferson's critique of the folly of humanist pride stampedes him into a rhetoric so excessive that he is taken aback by it. He retreats first into a facile reversal of his original formulation: is the thought of our father's lust in the orgasmic act of begetting us pitiful because we would like to imagine a less grotesque origin for ourselves? Or is it we who are unworthy of that act? Jefferson's thinking is running ahead of him, and he can't quite flesh out what this last possibility means—it may prefigure the tie he is later to make between sex and that dark amoral transcendence RPW will call *glory*, *joy*, or *virtue*, but he drops that thread

here as soon as he lays it down, and rebukes himself for being so foolish as to imagine that bitterness against the human limitations of human beings might grant him a personal exemption from that limitation. The sexual outburst seems to scatter his thoughts, and he has to remind himself that irony is not redemption, not separation from the fallenness it rebukes, but only a trick of light on a late landscape (another metaphor that is opaque in context but perhaps looks forward to Warren's own sunset last soliloquy at the poem's end).

Jefferson's self-recovery lasts him only half a dozen lines. He begins to describe how each delegate, like each person generally, is lost in the dark mystery of his being, comparing our wanderings in the bewilderments of our nature and our time to those of Theseus in the labyrinth, except that unlike Theseus we have no Ariadne's thread to guide us:

But what I had meant to say, we were only ourselves,  
Packed with our own lusts and languors, lost,  
Each man lost, in some blind lobby, hall, enclave,  
Crank cul-de-sac, couloir, or corridor of Time.  
Of Time. Or self: and in that dark no thread,  
Airy as breath by Ariadne's fingers forged.  
No thread, and beyond some groped-at corner, hulked  
In the blind dark, hock-deep in ordure, its beard  
And shag foul-scabbed, and when the hoof heaves—  
Listen!—the foulness sucks like mire. (7)

The thought that human nature is labyrinthine leads Jefferson, in a paroxysm of joyfully vicious alliteration, to the figure of the labyrinth, which leads him in turn by a kind of rapid and almost dizzy associative logic to the predicament of Theseus in that labyrinth. But Theseus as the paradigmatic human being is immediately replaced, in a further rush of the same associative logic, by the Minotaur himself. Although we listen with Theseus to the sound made by the Minotaur's foot as it shifts, hock deep in ordure, our minds are focused on the Minotaur, and Theseus is no longer seen as the Minotaur's slayer but only as his unacknowledged double. And since the labyrinth is the labyrinth of self, the Minotaur is the image of what is at the center of the self. The image of the Minotaur is the involuntary byproduct of an apparently offhand metaphor run amok, but he is of course an apropos image of human nature as it actually is, since like the delegates at Philadelphia he is both beast and man. As the delegates are lost in the labyrinth of their own history, so Theseus is lost in the labyrinth of Minos, and so the Minotaur is lost in the foulness of his ineluctably dual nature.

The Minotaur is of course also the product of a sexual enormity, and still carries about him some of the horror of that enormity, both as its object (as the child of Pasiphaë and the bull) and, oddly, as its agent, since the image carries with

it an obscure but unmistakable tang of sexual aggression. The description of the sucking sound made by the Minotaur's hoof ties this passage to Jefferson's later description of what it feels like to slip on ordure in a dark alley, a figure he uses at least three times as a metaphor for human fallibility generally. (Warren himself uses this same figure repeatedly in other poems, some of them much later.) In some hard-to-place way this image also is shadowed with sexual disgust, as if to slip on ordure and to be liable to sexual desire were somehow versions of the same thing.

Not much later, for instance, when Jefferson argues to RPW that he had never had a naïvely positive view of human nature, only a hope that human nature could transcend itself, he notes:

I read the books, and know that all night long  
History drips in the dark, and if you should fumble  
Your way into that farther room where no  
Light is, the floor would be slick to your foot. (36)

This meditation on human fallenness, like the Minotaur and Pasiphaë speech, also immediately and involuntarily returns to the subject of sexual disgust, tying together three strains from the earlier passage: slipping in ordure, human beings as animals in disguise, and a grotesque vision of the human face at the moment of sexual climax:

For I was born in the shadow of the great forest,  
And though the slave's black hand bore me, an infant, forth  
From out that shadow, soft on the silken cushion,  
From Shadwell out to Tuckahoe, I always  
Carried the shadow of the forest, and therefore thought  
That Man must redeem Nature, after all,  
And if I held Man innocent, I yet knew  
Not all men innocent, of darkened mind,  
Ape's tickle and hog's slobber, and the shadow  
Of the old trees, for he whom I sent forth  
To redeem the wild world far to the Western shore,  
My nearson Meriwether, wrote in his papers  
How the savage man wallowed in the horror of the hogan,  
And lust was communal ceremony in the murk-filled lodge,  
And such the reek of sour bodies and the contortion and pathos of the bestial  
face  
That nausea was in your gut even as, for sympathy, your parts twitched. (37)

Many of these same features, Jefferson rushes to point out, are hardly unique to the forest and the *hogan*:

And I have traveled in fair France, in that land  
Of sunlight and the sunlit spirit that once  
Itself shed light on all our faces and whatever face  
Susceptive lifted to that genial ray,  
But there—even there—I saw the abominable relics  
Of carved stone mountain-high heaved up by what  
Bad energy in what bad time, as though  
Chaos had spewed her vomit up in stone  
And frozen bubbles of disaster and contorted and crazed  
Cairns of archetypal confusion, and from every  
Porch, pillar, and portal stared  
Beaked visage of unwordable evil or the snout  
Of rapine, and fat serpents fanged themselves  
To the genitals of women, whose stone eyes bulged out  
As to distribute sightlessness on all, and the hacked mouth  
Gave no scream you could hear across the long time, and  
Vile parodies and mock-shows of the human  
That might be beasts but yet were men,  
Ass-eared, hog-hocked, and buzzard-beaked, and yet  
With the human face of slack and idiotic malediction,  
Stood about,  
And approved all,  
Approved  
The sway of the world and knew, and were, our doom.  
I'll tell you a secret—I've met them in the street.  
I'll tell you another secret—it is a breed  
That does not decrease in number or in exercise  
Of significant influence in your own time. (37)

In the opening tirade, the Minotaur and Pasiphaë speech, Jefferson goes rather further than this. Just after introducing the Minotaur, Jefferson goes on to note, rather twisting the myth, that the Minotaur and Theseus are brothers. (Of course, the Minotaur is in fact the brother of one character in this scene, Ariadne, but Jefferson's thoughts have entered this scene through Theseus, not Ariadne, since it is Theseus, not Ariadne, who is lost in the labyrinth.) Immediately Jefferson's imagination again overruns his metaphor as he is in the midst of deploying it, shifting his focus (with nothing more than an "and" to cover the shift) to Pasiphaë, and treating her, not Theseus the monstrous monster-slayer, nor the Minotaur, who is both monster and man, as the emblematic instance of the human being:

The beast waits. He is the infamy of Crete.

He is the midnight's enormity. He is  
 Our brother, our darling brother. And Pasiphaë—  
 Pasiphaë, huddled and hunched in the cow's hide,  
 Laced, latched, thonged up, and humped for joy,  
 What was the silence then before the stroke?  
 And then your scream.  
 And through the pain then, like a curtain rent,  
 In your mind you saw some meadow green, or some grove,  
 Some childhood haven, water and birdsong, and you a child.  
 The bull plunged. You screamed like a girl, and strove.  
 But the infatuate machine of your invention held.  
 Later, they lifted you out and wiped your lips in the dark palace.

We have not loved you less, poor Pasiphaë. (7–8)

The subject of Pasiphaë seems to burst involuntarily into the poem. And the turn the poem takes over the next few lines is quite odd, because Pasiphaë's act does not resemble the other sexual transgressions in the poem. For one thing, every other sexual transgressor described in this poem is male, and every other sexual transgression involves aggression in some straightforward way. This scene looks forward to that one later in the poem in which Lilburn's wife Laetitia, under coercion, forgives him after some obscure act of sexual violence against her, and, again under coercion, confesses to him, probably falsely, that she enjoyed it. The rape of Laetitia episode even shares with the Pasiphaë episode an odd, involuntary return to a childhood memory of a nature scene. But the parallel inheres not in Laetitia's situation—Laetitia is motivated by fear, not by perverse lust—so much as in Lilburn's bitter remark, hearing her words, that

But now I see when angels  
 Come down to earth, they step in dung, like us.  
 And like it. (80)

What Lilburn means by this is that if he is a Minotaur-like monster (down even to stepping in dung), then Laetitia is a kind of Pasiphaë, and that her willingness to forgive him testifies to an inner perversity all the more shocking for her apparent innocence. Poor Laetitia cannot win. If she does not forgive Lilburn she is (in the words of his last will) "fair but cruel Laetitia whose coldness unto me has brought on all," a *belle dame sans merci* who drives men to madness through her distant perfection, a kind of standing and repetitive rebuke of obsessive desire by sadistic purity, a sexually charged escape from sexual feeling different only from Lilburn's sexual revulsion in expressing itself in magnetic remoteness rather than violence. But if on the other hand Laetitia does forgive Lilburn, then she is complicit in everything he does to her, so that her apparent purity only gives

spice to her corruption, as Pasiphaë's worldly cultivation, not to mention the odd innocence of her mid-sex memory flash of "some meadow green, some grove, / Some childhood haven" does for her. To desire a beast when one is not one is to be more beastly than that beast. To feel sexual desire is to step in dung (as both Laetitia and the Minotaur do). To be female and feel sexual desire is worse still, because it represents a perverse desire of the pure to become impure. To be male and to escape from sexual impurity, as Lilburn apparently seeks to do here, is to engage in sexual violence, which obviously does not purify sexuality away and indeed darkens it and makes it more horrifying.

The oddest thing about Lilburn's rape of Laetitia is that it is not an expression of sexual desire nor even an expression of desire for power but an the expression of revulsion against sexuality as a whole, an act of revulsion and disgust with self which only confronts the one who does it more sharply with that revulsion. Lilburn's violence against Laetitia has a similar logic to his escalating violence against George, for George's presence reminds him of his guilt for having beaten him, and Lilburn responds to that guilt by administering further violence. In both cases Lilburn's revulsion against his own inner darkness as a man and as a master motivates aggression which confronts him with that darkness ever more starkly than before. (This perhaps explains why the murder scene is itself invested with an out-of-place sadomasochist thrill.)

Lilburn's speech here to Laetitia is intended to assert that some intimacy of horror links victimizer and victim (a thought that will also occur to RPW's character in the poem) binding them into one identity, as if the victim's own nightmare side drags her into involuntary complicity in her own destruction. The character RPW will make a similar surmise about George at the moment he realizes that Lilburn is about to kill him. This surmise is in ordinary ethical terms hard to defend, and one which certainly gets those who make it into hot water. Jefferson is disgusted by it when RPW makes it, and RPW himself repudiates the claim but can't help but keep being drawn back to it. Probably underneath it all is what Ricoeur described in *The Symbolism of Evil* as an almost primordial, pre-ethical version of evil, which sees it not as a transgression by an agent who must be held responsible but as an eruption of unclean *mana* that soils perpetrator and victim alike. It is a primitive view of evil—the characters of the *Oresteia* seem to labor to work free of it—but one still with us involuntarily whenever we find ourselves in the presence of truly horrific crime.

That Jefferson insists on describing the Pasiphaë's coupling with the bull from Pasiphaë's point of view is part of the point: she, not Theseus, the minotaur, or for that matter the bull, is the emblematic human being, driven by some inner compulsion and necessity to horrific abasement. (Perhaps the only thing more humiliating than to be the tangent of a father's pitiful lust is to be the tangent of a mother's horrifying one.) Even as the account is centered upon Pasiphaë, Jeffer-

son recoils from the act in delicious and entranced horror at it (which is of course his version of her crime). It is hard not to hear as much excitement as disgust in the phonemic play of “huddled and hunched in the cow’s hide,” and in the rhythmic energy, radiating out from alliterating monosyllables into the little tattoo at the end of the line in “laced, latched, thonged up, and humped for joy.”

Pasiphaë is emblematic in that she combines both the noble and the base, the vulnerable and the gross. She is to the bull, or to her desire for the bull, as human beings’ image of themselves is to their own inner nature, for clearly the point is not that we merely contain our own animal nature nor that we remain vulnerable to it but that our higher and lower aspects are somehow identical, that the one desires the other, that the beastly behavior is somehow the real meaning of the higher ambition. This is why Jefferson describes the artificial bull in which Pasiphaë awaits the bull’s stroke as “the infatuate machine of your invention.” Jefferson’s language is finicky and Latinate, sneering a bit in its distance, and yet despite everything torn by his unaccountable sympathy with her. “Infatuate” is a great eighteenth-century term of abuse, more appropriate to enthusiasm, God-filledness, than to perversion, here implying in the extremity of the action a kind of gnostic truth about what humans are and what their lives mean. Infatuate enthusiasm embodied in an elaborate contraption is close to Jefferson’s own language about his fashioning of the Declaration. Jefferson means to see the entire elaborate superstructure of the Enlightenment’s intellectual and spiritual life as an instance of just such an “infatuate machine.” (Napoleon famously described Parisian high society as “a silk stocking stuffed with shit.”) This is perhaps why there is an unmistakable undertone of pity, for all the horror and disgust, in “Later, they lifted you out and wiped your lips in the dark palace.” That pity is itself hard to account for, or at least hard to see the end of, which is why it immediately modulates into an irony in which pity and contempt are nicely balanced: “We have not loved you less, poor Pasiphaë.”

Jefferson almost physically pulls himself back from his own thought again, saying that he had well understood human nature when in Philadelphia he penned the Declaration, but that he had thought, not through wisdom or Enlightenment but through romantic genius, to transcend that nature:

I had not meant to speak thus. Language betrays.  
What I mean is, words are always the truth, and always the lie,  
For what I say of Philadelphia now  
Is true, but true now only, not true then.  
But this much then: We knew we were only men  
Caught in our errors and interests. But I, a man,  
Suddenly saw in every face, face after face,  
The bleared, the puffed, the lank, the lean, all,

On all saw the brightness blaze, and I knew my own days,  
Times, hopes, books, horsemanship, the praise of peers,  
Delight, desire, and even my love, but straw  
Fit for the flame, and in that fierce combustion I—  
Why, I was dead, I was nothing, nothing but joy,  
And my heart cried out, “Oh, this is Man!” (8–9)

This proclamation represents not the Enlightenment ideal of critical rationality but the romantic one of transformational destruction, which not only spurns men as they are but indeed derives its energy from a sense of just how large a leap that destruction makes possible. In imagining a fierce combustion in which all of the unstable and transitory elements of the speaker’s personal pride are incinerated, Jefferson’s rhetoric looks forward to the pyre of the books and talismanic objects of his youth that Warren, in an act at once of self-purgation and fierce pride, commits to the flames in “Red-Tail Hawk and Pyre of Youth,” published more than a quarter of a century later. To behold man is at once to destroy and to inflate the self, to be nothing and to be nothing but “joy,” always in Warren’s lexicon a charged but ambiguous term, conveying as much transgression as promise.

It only takes the space of a stanza break for Jefferson to undercut that joy, and to tie it to a personal urgency, the necessity of responding to the sense of flagging vitality that goes with middle age. Yet even here the excitement of the destructive and transformative moment persists past the later attempt to minimize it, as the rhythmic energy of Jefferson’s chant, underlined by alliteration, shines through its ostensibly skeptical rhetoric:

And thus my minotaur. There at the blind  
Blank labyrinthine turn of my personal time,  
I met the beast. And the time I met it was—  
At least, it seems so now—that first moment  
When the alacrity of blood stumbles and all natural joy  
Sees Nature but as mirror for its fear,  
And therefore, to be joy, must deny Nature  
And leap beyond man’s natural bourne and constriction  
To find some justification for the natural.  
Yes, then I met the beast. Well, better, indeed,  
Had it been the manifest beast and the circumstantial  
Avatar of destruction. But no beast then: the towering  
Definition, angelic, arrogant, abstract,  
Greaved in glory, thewed with light, the bright  
Brow tall as dawn. I could not see the eyes.  
  
So seized the pen, and in the upper room,



With the excited consciousness that I was somehow  
Purged, rectified, and annealed, and my past annulled  
And fate confirmed, wrote. And the bell struck  
Far off in darkness, and the watch called out.  
Time came, we signed the document, went home.

Slept, and I woke to the new self, and new doom.

I had not seen the eyes of that bright apparition.  
I had been blind with light. That was my doom.  
I did not know its eyes were blind.

Therefore all followed: the fat was in the fire.  
Therefore all followed: and I who once had said  
All liberty is bought with blood, now must say  
All truth is bought with blood, and the blood is ours  
Or we shall have no truth, and only the truth can make us free,  
And doom is always domestic, it purrs like a cat,  
And the only traitor lurks in some sweet corner of the blood.  
Therefore I walk and wake, and I cannot die. (9-10)

The key to Jefferson's disillusionment is not that his idealization was merely mistaken, that mankind is still more beast than angel; the key is that idealization is the instrument of beastliness and that the beastliness and the idealization share the same charisma. If the point were merely that Jefferson has discovered that he was mistaken about human nature, the angelic apparition would be unequal to some grim reality, Theseus would be unequal to the Minotaur; but in Jefferson's view the apparition is itself the Minotaur, and the promise of human perfection is the occasion and the energizing power of human darkness, which always seeks to free men's minds by cutting off their heads.

Jefferson's sexual revulsion is a revulsion not only against physical sexuality but against love, and it is the fact that sexuality has something to do with love, not the reverse, which offends him. For love is vexed with what he refers to as "the essential polarity of possibility," which is to say, that it is bound not by paralyzing ambivalences but by extravagant acts which serve opposite purposes. Aunt Cat (surely the most horribly Mammy in Southern literature and a kind of counter-example to the idealization of that figure white people have sometimes consoled themselves with the memory of whenever they have wished to extenuate their racial complicities) loves Lilburn, but that love is contaminated by jealousy of Lucy, and it is that love which at last leads her, ambiguously, twice to betray Lilburn to the authorities, and then, unambiguously, to grieve over his death. Lucy Jefferson loves Lilburn, but can't forgive him for beating George, and indeed is so shocked by that first beating that it seems to cause her death almost imme-

diately afterwards, a death which her shade interprets as a dark punishment of her son. Lilburn murders poor George as a kind of proof of his love of the dead Lucy—George has been stealing her spoons and breaking her pitchers, and only by taking hyperbolic revenge can Lilburn shout down his doubt about whether he loved his mother, since his beating George in the first place seems to have caused her death. And Lilburn tricks Isham into murdering him as a way of proving his, Isham's, love for his brother.

Later, when Jefferson reflects on the way Lilburn's love for his mother had led him to murder, RPW rebukes him for bringing up the sentimental term. Jefferson's reply articulates one of the motivating claims of the poem:

Love!

I apologize for introducing that word  
Unthinking in some automatic and old-fashioned way.  
No, I'm now ironical at your expense,  
Or try to be—which is a way of saying—  
Of saying what? Of saying what I cannot say,  
Or bear to say. Well, God help me, I'll say it:  
I have long since come to the firm and considered conclusion  
That love, all love, all kinds, descriptions, and shapes,  
Is but a mask to hide the brute face of fact,  
And that fact is the immitigable ferocity of self,  
And once you find it in your blood, and find even  
That the face of love beneath your face at the first  
Budding of the definitive delight—  
That every face, even that one, is but a mirror  
For your own ferocity, a mirror blurred  
And breathed upon and slicked and slimed with love,  
And through the interstices and gouts of that  
Hypocritical moisture, the cold eyes spy out  
From the mirror's cold heart, and thus self spies on self  
In that unsummerable arctic of the human alienation. (46–47)

Notice here again that disgust about love embodies itself as disgust for the human face at sexual climax. What resolves the essential polarity of possibility seems to be some violent rending of the Gordian knot of the human condition which strains the human in the direction of the non-human. Warren's terms for this are various, and for the most part misleading, sometimes "joy," or sometimes "virtue," but almost never joy or virtue in senses of that word other users might recognize. Both Jefferson and RPW use these words, and they are staples of Warren's later poetry. One of RPW's first uses of "virtue" in the poem is telling, for it sparks a flurry of metaphors that are in wild disproportion to their occasion. He

has been reflecting upon a fraught subject, one which will later form the basis for his later sequence “Mortmain,” his father’s ability to reconcile himself to the limitations of the role he has been asked to play by life, and the honorable, indeed noble way he did his duty by those who loved him in the light of that limitation. This leads RPW, in language that seems to parody the poems of *Eleven Poems on the Same Theme*, to reflect about his father’s virtue in the traditional sense of that word, but his meditations veer in an unanticipated direction:

But still, despite all naturalistic considerations,  
Or in the end because of naturalistic considerations,  
We must believe in virtue. There is no  
Escape. No inland path around that rocky  
And spume-nagged promontory. There is no  
Escape: deadfall on trail, noose on track, bear-trap  
Under the carefully rearranged twigs. There is no  
Escape, for virtue is  
More dogged than Pinkerton, more scientific than the F.B.I.,  
And that is why you wake sweating toward dawn.  
More remorseless than the mortgage or glitter of the banker’s pince-nez,  
And that is why you wake sweating toward dawn.  
More insidious than the cancer for which millions in research have not yet  
paid off,  
And that is why you wake sweating toward day  
And finger the cold spot in your side with no fantasy now for the matutinal  
erection.

For past all appetite and alibi,  
And after your discourse and most honest deliberations, and after  
The odor of fresh hay on the night wind

Like the perfume of a woman’s parts, and past  
Your various studies and most reasonable ambitions,  
You know that virtue, like a syllogism,  
Waits, has waited, and will wait, as on  
The green leaf the lethal mantis at his prayer,  
And under those great hands, spiked, Gothic, barbed,  
Clasped high to arch the summer blue of heaven,  
You pass, like an ant or aphid in the season’s joy,  
In browse or frolic, and that beast,  
That green, crank nightmare of the dear green world,  
All day, all day in sun and shade, maintains

His murderous devotion. He can wait

Can wait, for you will come. For virtue is  
Only the irremediable logic of all the anguish  
Your cunning could invent or heart devise. (29)

Under pressure, “virtue,” “joy,” “glory,” and their congeners turn into a kind of dark gnosis, which solves the problem of the duality of good and evil by transcending it. It is the concept of virtue which links the sexual and political themes of *Brother to Dragons*. The reason sexual thinking provides an entry into thinking about politics is that it presents the central duality of Warren’s thinking about both subjects in a stark and immediate form, for in it the highest and lowest, kindest and cruelest, most angelic and most vicious parts of human nature are so intimately intertwined that they are not only inextricable but indeed are hard to tell from each other. Prophetic and transformative political idealism, like that Jefferson describes in himself in his opening tirade, likewise has in it opposite but indissoluble tendencies.

Warren turns to sexuality first because he wishes to head off a plausible but to his mind mistaken view of the political theme. Certainly at first glance the easiest use one might wish to make of the Rocky Hill tragedy is to argue that America has never been able to live up to its heroic promises. What Lilburn Lewis did is not in any way a consequence of the prophetic ambitions embodied in Jefferson’s Declaration; indeed, Lilburn’s immediate motivations—defending his mother’s crockery—seem trivial without the extended analysis of love Jefferson and RPW give it. Likewise, the other racially tinged crimes mentioned in the book—the murder of the other slave in Smithland, and the murder of the Indian—likewise seem the product of squalid humanity rather than acts of an angelic imagination gone sour. Similar cases could be made about most of the other political items in the poet’s bill of particulars—the Pinkerton assassins at Ford, the plunder of the West, the Haymarket martyrs, the condemnation of Sacco and Vanzetti (this last dropped from the 1979 edition). Only the slaughter at the Wilderness in May 1864 (a subject of interest to Warren elsewhere in his oeuvre) lends itself to the reading Jefferson suggests in his opening tirade. Warren reads most of these other stories slightly against the grain, arguing that they show not a failure of the American democracy to live up to its ideals but rather that those ideals themselves have a demonic side. Only by treating sexual desire as something at once angelic and demonic can Warren make perfectly clear what he sees to be the price of similarly angelic political ambitions.

The point of the sexual theme in *Brother to Dragons* is to point out the fatal attraction of a certain kind of political idealism, the fatal attraction of a gnostic embrace of what the poem with dark irony keeps referring to as joy or virtue. Ultimately *Brother to Dragons* comes to redefine these terms in a more traditional way, seeking to turn this dark joy into a more recognizable moral wisdom. When

Lucy asks Jefferson to take Lilburn's hand and recognize both his inner and outer kinship with him, she is quite right to do so, and when Jefferson recoils from this she is also quite right to describe his act as a coldly proud repetition of what Lilburn had himself done in hot rage. While the logic of the rebuke to moral vanity here is clear, and while the moral grandeur of the recognition of complicity that the poem endorses, in a passage famously cancelled in 1979, as "the beginning of innocence," is also clear, it is not certain that that reconciliation can completely lay to rest the urgencies that made it necessary. It is not that there is much room to doubt that moral wisdom has to begin in the mutual acknowledgment of fallenness, nor that the rebuke of that recognition is a necessary precondition for taming the destructive pride of a heroic moral ambition and for saving one's self from the inner demonism of one's own idealism. Certainly if there really is innocence of a non-demonic kind, the recognition of complicity is its beginning. Certainly if there is virtue of a non-demonic kind, a chastened sense of one's own possibility of inner darkness is its precondition. The problem is that such a recognition would not seem sufficient to break the power of that demonic idealism if it is truly as attractive as the poem attests it to be. The chastened self-knowledge embraced here, like the chastened self-knowledge embraced by Jack Burden at the end of *All the King's Men*, has a strongly persuasive moral logic, but it is one that has compelling force only for those who are not at the moment in the grip of demonic idealism. For those who are within that grip, it seems to ask a fatal sacrifice of meaning, and must seem, as it seems to Jeremiah Beaumont at the end of *World Enough and Time*, a kind of counsel of despair. It explains why one should resist that kind of idealism but not how to cure one's self of it. Those would seem to be different things, as understanding how destructive addictive drugs are (something addicts perhaps know better than anyone else) and knowing how to resist their attraction once one has given into it are different things. One of the reasons the ending of *Brother to Dragons*, like the ending of *All the King's Men*, sometimes seems unpersuasive is that it imagines that an accurate diagnosis is a cure rather than an essential precondition of a cure. We are in need right now of a way to persuade ascetic idealists who serve the good only through death that it is better to live for ideals than kill for them, and it is hard to imagine how the argument about recognizing the complicity of all fallen humans, true as it is, might ever get across to people of such views, since it must seem to them only to be a form of abject self-abasement. If they know that we are all complicit in fallenness, it is one of the things they can't stand, one of the things that drives them to do what they do.

Characters who cannot separate the angelic and demonic aspects of their own political idealism (perhaps because they cannot really be separated at all) are a common feature of Warren's political thought. Jeremiah Beaumont of *World Enough and Time*, which Warren wrote during the composition of *Brother to*

*Dragons*, is perhaps his fullest development of this type. Certainly the tendency of ascetic idealism to turn demonic is well attested—one thinks of Cromwell, of Robespierre, or of Lenin and Stalin, and certainly our own age does not lack for similar figures.<sup>2</sup> Warren was aware, as Melville was before him, and Hannah Arendt in his own day, of that natural history of revolution which seems to have doomed revolutionary traditions from 1789 to 1989 to repeat the stages of the French Revolution, the Terror succeeding the Gironde, and Directory and Empire following with a kind of inevitability. That the American revolution might take this course was one of the fears that informed Melville's *Clarel*, indeed the temptation to align the Terror and the Civil War, the Empire and the Gilded Age, would have been a hard temptation for Melville to resist. Warren is less tempted by this view than Melville is, more frequently citing American folly and materialism (as in "Brightness of Distance" in 1957, or "Bicentennial" in 1976, or "New Dawn" in 1985, where even slovenly materialism has its hellish aspects).

If, when he writes about the actual use of a nuclear weapon, Warren's account emphasizes the gross materialism and seedy, short-sighted professionalism of the agents, why does he invoke the language of demonic idealism to describe the murder of a slave by a grieving mama's boy? The most plausible answer seems to me to be that "New Dawn" is driven not by the horror of nuclear war in the 1940s but by the more immediate but more venal transgressions of the middle 1980s. But in the late 1940s and early 1950s the temptations of demonic idealism in America were real ones, since America was in conflict with a power driven by just such an idealism and understood its attractions just well enough to be in some danger of embracing them. *Brother to Dragons* sees a kind of demonic idealism in the American past that perhaps was not actually in play in the nineteenth century. But the poem has its eye on its present, not on its past, and in that present the temptation of a political passion that destroys what it loves was a real one.

## Notes

1. All quotations from *Brother to Dragons* will use the 1953 version. Study of this text must begin with Grimshaw, James A., editor, *Robert Penn Warren's Brother to Dragons : A Discussion* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983). My own earlier study, Burt, John, *Robert Penn Warren and American Idealism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), took a rather less dark view of this poem than I develop here. Holder, Alan, *The Imagined Past* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1980) presents a treatment which is pointed and interesting but very different from mine. The essential book on Warren's treatment of racial themes is Szczesiul, Anthony, *Racial Politics and Robert Penn Warren's Poetry* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002). I have been strongly influenced by the arguments about Warren's views of American History in Ruppensburg, Hugh, *Robert Penn Warren and the*

*American Imagination* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1990), Clark, William Bedford, *The American Vision of Robert Penn Warren* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), and Cullick, Jonathan S., *Making History: The Biographical Narratives of Robert Penn Warren* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000). The religious ideas here owe a great deal to Strandberg, Victor, *The Poetic Vision of Robert Penn Warren* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1977), and to Koppelman, Robert S., *Robert Penn Warren's Modernist Spirituality* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1995). My views on Warren's harsh gnostic version of poetic sublimity owe a great deal to Harold Bloom's several essays on Warren, and to Bedient, Calvin, *In the Heart's Last Kingdom: Robert Penn Warren's Major Poetry* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), although Bedient doesn't discuss this text. My thinking about Warren generally has been shaped a great deal by Justus, James H., *The Achievement of Robert Penn Warren* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981).

2. It is hard to say whether Hitler ought to be on this list or not. Unlike the others he seemed to understand that his motives were demonic and to embrace that demonism with joyful abandon, and if his followers saw themselves as sadistic purifiers they also saw themselves as beyond good and evil.

Shadowing Old Red:  
The Editor as Gumshoe

*William Bedford Clark*

My wife is fond of quoting that old Jesuit adage “God writes straight in crooked lines,” and looking back on my career, such as it is, I must concur. I trace the start of my professional life to the fall of 1965, when, as a freshman at the University of Oklahoma, I took a long bus ride south to Shreveport, Louisiana, where I hoped to win a young artist’s competition and play the Schumann piano concerto with the local Philharmonic. By Sunday morning, when I climbed aboard yet another Trailways, headed north, it was painfully apparent to everyone, myself included, that I had stretched my small talent and even smaller hands beyond their limits. I was not, nor would I ever be, Oklahoma’s answer to Van Cliburn. That trip home was one of the longest of my life, but not without its rewards, for I had with me a book, a Bantam paperback of *All the King’s Men*, and that, as Robert Frost remarked on a not-altogether-dissimilar occasion, “made all the difference.” I would not want to suggest that I underwent some kind of immediate conversion. As a matter of fact, it was much later before I actually finished reading the novel. I was, you might say, distracted. But I did find something in Robert Penn Warren’s book that nagged at me, that would not leave me alone with myself. In time, this author and his work would become the primary focus of my own critical and scholarly writing.

When we consider the sheer range of Warren’s achievement, as fictionist, poet, critic, and social commentator, it is not difficult to see why his influence continues to play a formative role in American literature as we enter the Third Millennium. He may not have dominated his age in quite the same way Samuel Johnson did a portion of the eighteenth century, but at least one critic has argued that, given the centrality of his place on the literary scene, it might be useful to label the middle third of the twentieth century as the Age of Warren. “What of Faulkner?” you ask. I would point out that it was in large part “Red” Warren—along with Malcolm Cowley—who rediscovered Faulkner and introduced him to a new generation of readers in the 1940s, when much of his best work was out of print, thus assuring the Mississippian’s place of preeminence in the canon.

It is hardly surprising that Faulkner’s biographer Joseph Blotner wanted to do a life of Warren, and by the early 1990s he was putting the finishing touches on it. Blotner had followed up his biography of Faulkner with an edition of that author’s selected letters, and naturally he was in a perfect position to do the same for Warren. Joe demurred, and through the good graces of John Burt and the Warren family the task fell to me. It was daunting at first. Warren wrote many let-



ters. Multiple volumes would be involved. Moreover, like most Americanists who came through graduate school in the late '60s and early '70s, I was most comfortable employing a New Critical *cum* American Studies approach and knew next to nothing about archival research and textual editing. I learned, haphazardly, by doing, and I came to love the detective work involved. With your indulgence, I would like to relate my most satisfying "adventure" in the Warren trade, adopting the idiom of Jack Burden, the tough-guy narrator of *All the King's Men*, who owes much in turn to hard-boiled detective fiction and *film noir*.

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When it comes to pounding the pavement and getting the goods, nobody can lay a glove on Gentleman Joe Blotner, so when he finished that biography of his on "Red" Warren we all guessed he would make one more pass around the track and edit Red's mail, like he did in the Faulkner case, which had made his name and lined his pockets with limitless jack. But old Joe had other ideas. "I'm hanging up my hat," he said, "I got me a good woman, and we're heading for the hills of Ole Virginny." "You do it, Brazos Billie," Joe said, flashing two first-class tickets to Charlottesville. "Red's letters have a tale to tell. There's things out there nobody has ever turned up, including me. And besides, you could use the work. You're out there still riding on a shoe shine and a back slap. They have post-tenure review in your shop now, don't they?" And Joe give me a wink and flashed that kid's grin of his that had kept him alive in the stalag after the krauts took down his big bird back in '44.

They do have post-tenure review in Aggeland, and so I took the hint. No place to hide once you get an unholy alliance of bottom-line legislators and turn-coat deans crowding your heels. So I took the case, and for a long time the dope I was after seemed to drift over the transom like I was living right (which I wasn't) and with no more bother than the cost of postage and xeroxing and a few dimes dropped now and then for long distance. Red Warren had never spared postage himself. He left a long and incriminating paper trail, just like Joe had said, and I was going to go public with it. Now lots of guys in the racket undervalue librarians, but I had learned back during the Punic Wars that if you ever want to find your way home to Mama you cultivate archivists like a pothead weeds hemp. My nose was several shades of brown by now, and after trips to New Haven, Nashville, and DC, I was cocky enough to think I had things pretty well sewed up and figured it was about time to call in the press, kick up my dogs, and open up that long desk drawer where my flask of Old Faithful lurks unseen. Then Bo Grimshaw, Red's bibliographer and a born huckster if there ever was one, threw me a knuckle-ball that would have shamed Hoyt Wilhelm in all his myopic prime. "Cherchez la femme," Bo said. I looked at him like he was even more wasted than

he was. “Pardon my French,” says Bo, “but there was that stash Cinina took with her when she and Red split back in ’51.” I knew what he was getting at.

Cinina, a.k.a. Emma Brescia, was some dish. Red had met her out on the coast when he was jiving his way through the M.A. program at Berkeley in the twenties. They didn’t make them like Cinina back in Guthrie, Kentucky, the burg Red reluctantly called home. “Guthrie is a good place to be *from*,” he was wont to say to anybody who would listen. So when he rattled the well-wrapped package that was Cinina Brescia, Red was hooked and hooked good. They got hitched on the sly a few years later when Red was putting on the dog as a Rhodes man at Oxford.

What the dons didn’t know the dons couldn’t do nothing about, and when Red returned to God’s country to teach at that college in Memphis they came clean. Now folks in on the lowdown said Cinina had a “Latin temperament,” by which they meant no compliment. She was feisty, quick-tempered, and jealous of her lover boy’s time, but still she offered him compensations not easily come by. He took what he had to and took what he could get. This went on for two shaky decades from Tennessee to Baton Rouge to Minnesota and on both sides of the Atlantic, give or take time out, when Cinina would high-tail it for the coast to see her daddy, a composer who taught Scarlatti and such to rich girls in Frisco (or Oakland, to be exact). Now Cinina wanted to write like Red, but she couldn’t make it work, and Red’s down-home Southern pals, Allen the Masher Tate and Andrew “Polecat” Lytle, never had much use for her being Italian and all and made it plain to her face. Things like that get under a bride’s skin, and hurt feelings are seldom assuaged by gin. Just the opposite in fact. Cinina drank when she was angry and got angry when she drank. By the late ’40s, she was a lush and a candidate for the booby-hatch. Her shrinks thought Red was at the root of her misery, and when she raised the question of D-I-V-O-R-C-E he took off for Nevada like a pop-bottle rocket. Red remarried, had a pair of kids like he had always hoped, and eventually wound up as Poet Laureate. Cinina dropped off the screen.

But she was not finished. She gave up the sauce, moved to the Big Apple, and took a doctorate from Columbia to prove she had the stuff. She married a blue-blood she’d run across at AA meetings and took to teaching languages at little colleges clustered like forlorn debutantes on both sides of the Long Island shore. She was Dr. Emma Gardner now, but she carried her old self with her like an infection you can’t shed. When the Big C finally caught up with her in 1967, she was tool-pusher for the language department at Mitchell College in New London, just a hop-skip-and-jump from that summer place Gene O’Neill made famous in that play he wrote about how his own mother was a dope-fiend. Cinina, or I should say Dr. Emma, lost her wrestle with the crab, and one day not long after the obsequies her widower pulled up in front of the Mitchell library and presented them with a hulking white elephant: an oversized vacuum-cleaner crate that bulged like a

Sumo's tush with yellowed envelopes, reams of crumpled paper, and a dozen or so used books. This was what you could call an endowment, but the head librarian at the time was a sleepy man who would not be vexed. He did have enough sense to recognize that a book is a book and duly stamped the aforesaid volumes "Mitchell College Library" and put them into circulation, where there were few takers. If he had been a more energetic man, he might have sold the remainder of the contents of the scruffy Kirby box for scrap, but that would have meant a phone call, so he had some goofus carry it unexamined down to the basement where cellar seepage could gnaw at it every once in awhile. Years passed, like in some novel by that wacky dame Virginia Woolf, but in the fullness of time another library director landed at Mitchell, and she turned out to be quite a lady.

Barbara Van der Lyke had done time at the Connecticut State Archives, so she was street smart and knew how to boogie. When she eye-balled the territory, she spotted the moldering Kirby crate and naturally pegged it as dumpster-fodder. But a wee, still voice tickled her ear, and she decided to have a look-see. What she saw she saw for what it was worth, and she sprang for a slew of acid-free envelopes and a score of proper archival boxes. You know, them big, heavy-duty gray eminences. She tucked the Cinina papers away for safe-keeping and combed the stacks for stray books bearing Red Warren's John Hancock or somebody else's who was part of the same gang. Pleased with her hand, Barb put the word out on the street and settled back to wait for hardcore Warrenistas to line up outside her door for a fix. The word never reached the usual suspects, though, so Barb waited and waited some more and finally got on with her life. Things settled down in New London: Fog horns moaned where the Thames met the Sound; big sharks were taken off Montauk; and at night the Cinina papers glowed on their shelves in the dark.

Meanwhile, following a tip from Johnny Burt, I had managed to trace the footsteps of the first Mrs. Warren to Mitchell College, their sad terminus, and I thought I might be able to sweet talk the simple folk out of a personnel file marked "deceased" if nothing else. There was no reason to believe the rumored stash of Warren memorabilia still existed, or ever did when you got right down to it, but there just might be some doddering old codger or biddy still this side of Jordan who had known Emma Cinina Brescia Warren Gardner and be willing to relive old times over a snifter or two of MetaMucil. So I got on the horn, and some gruff Yankee dame put me through to Barbara Van der Lyke. She played it cagey. "We do have some things," she said. "Be a doll and shoot me some copies, won't you sweetheart?" I purred into the receiver. Barb laughed, long and loud: "No way. I don't have the staff to comply with such a request." "Baby, I'm desperate," I pleaded. "If you want it, come get it," she said and broke off the connection.

So I packed my gear and winged my way back east, with the nagging suspicion that I was being played for a sucker. I get a bad case of the heebie-jeebies

in New England, where they can't even get a man's name right. "Welcome to New London, Mr. Clock," the skinhead at the desk of the Light House Inn sneered, while another model youth made a grab for my bag and was half-way to my room before I got my sea legs (cost me a dollar to get it back). The Light House Inn wasn't the College Station Hilton by a long shot, but what it lacked in antiseptic amenities it strove to make up in quaint harbor charm and things that went bump in the night. I was hunting ghosts, alright, but not those kind, so I pretended to ignore most of the spirit-rapping under my bed. The next morning I did a little rattling of my own, until they condescended to open the doors of the Mitchell library to the day's business. I have to say Barb seemed glad to see me, and why not? Archivists feed on researchers like researchers feed on the dead. They served up the first course, one of those big gray boxes I mentioned earlier. I opened it and felt like that old limey Lord Carnarvon peeping into Tut's tomb: "What do you see?" / "Wonderful things."

What I held in my sweaty mitts was a ragged copy of the first American edition of a little number entitled *The Waste Land*, by Tom the Possum Eliot, which was a find in and of itself, but the clincher was the scrawl on the flyleaf: "Robert Penn Warren / Vanderbilt University / May 28, 1923." This was the smoking gun the boys had always known about but never turned up: the slim volume that lured a previously unsullied and freckle-faced kid named Red Warren away from an honest major in engineering and turned him toward a hardened life in literature. In the margins, there were even some schoolboy notations in that runic hand I had come to know so well from my prior investigations. This was a treasure alright, but only one of many. There was mail from the likes of Donald Davidson, Allen Tate and his old woman Caroline Gordon, that fox Katherine Anne Porter, and Albert Erskine, the kid Katherine Anne had robbed from his cradle.

Anyone curious about the scope of the racket Red had going for himself could find new leads to follow by perusing the letters from Malcolm Cowley, Kenneth Burke, John Peale Bishop, Dixon Wecter, and that bunch. There were sundry odds and ends that likewise pointed in some interesting directions: shopping lists, notices of overdue library books, demands for payment from impatient merchants, a morning-after note of apology from Scott Fitzgerald, and frail carbon-copies of some of Cinina's own stabs at spinning verse (gloomy, but on the whole not bad ... she could have been a contender). I came out three days later with what I was after, a half-dozen letters old Red had penned himself, but along the way I had seen enough for me to know that this little bequest of Cinina's would likely blow the ceiling off the Warren biz. For one, if Joe Blotner had taken a gander at all the mail the newlyweds received from Red's old lady and old man back in the Blue Grass, he would have done an even better job of nailing down the case in that biography of his. And Cinina's daddy, Maestro Brescia, must have written his little *peperoncina* twice a week for years, but he favored Italian, and my

command of that tongue is limited to ordering calamari stewed in its own ink. When they do get that stack of stuff decoded, I'd give better than even odds that the first Mrs. Warren will beat the rap her jeering section has tried to pin on her over the years. She may have taken on a tad too much a tad too often, but Red and his crowd were no slackers in that department, and any citizen Allen Tate and Andy Lytle took the trouble to bad-mouth on a regular basis couldn't be all bad. I say let the lady have her day in court, which is what Cinina likely had in mind when she carried the goods around with her all that time, though by now it was more like having a voice at your own inquest. You can probably tell that I am not given to sentimental musings, but I got to admit that after what I saw and read, I had a better idea what that old Roman bard meant when he went on about *lacrimae rerum*. In fact, I have half a mind just now to say something about how all of us, Cinina, me, and you, "beat on, boats against the current, borne ceaselessly into the past," but I won't.

Instead, I will put the quietus on these poor remarks. Barb Van der Lyke had dropped a heavy hint that Mitchell would part with its play-pretty if the market was right, so back beneath the Texas skies I rang up Steve Ennis at the Emory library on my own dime, mindful of a finder's fee that never arrived. Steve and Barbara, that blessed babe, struck a deal, and Emory took custody of the Cinina papers for a sum I am forbidden to divulge, though one thing is sure: they didn't have to go very deep into those Coca Cola coffers of theirs. Not the first time a big guy got what he wanted out of the little guy on the cheap. But I'm not griping, Cinina's legacy has gone where it can do the most good, and Uncle Sam would have taken my finder's fee anyway.

As for me, now my Volume II is out and on the record, I've decided to do a little out-sourcing when it comes to the Red letter biz. A couple of standup guys have agreed to do the heavy lifting, and I think I'd like to do some digging on a dude with the unlikely moniker Orestes Brownson, to see if he was on the up and up. But I am not sure that will make much difference in my nightly dreams, where a tall, dark, and handsome woman leads me into a dank cellar and whispers in a Lucky Strike contralto, "Look, *carissimo* . . . I've been saving this for you."

AUTHOR'S NOTE: A much-abbreviated and corrupt version of this piece appeared in the newsletter of the South Central College English Association in 2000.

### III Distinguished Guest Panelists

#### Warren Centennial Symposium

After our graduate student presentations, the next session of the Warren Centennial Symposium was a panel discussion with three distinguished American Literature scholars—Richard Davison (University of Delaware), Donald Junkins (University of Massachusetts), and Robert Lewis (University of North Dakota)—slated to discuss somewhat briefly and informally their personal connections with Robert Penn Warren and his work. Unfortunately, Professor Lewis was unable to be present at the symposium, but the text of his remarks on Warren, as printed below, was read by Professor Junkins.

—H.R. STONEBACK

## A Tribute to Robert Penn Warren from New Paltz

*Richard Allan Davison*

My brief tribute to Robert Penn Warren will rest mainly on his own words. First a few of his comments on writing, followed by a passage from his criticism and an unpublished letter he wrote to me.

The quotations below, from Julia Klein's interview with the Poet Laureate of America two years before his death, are a mere sampling of the common sense, honesty, clarity, and wit he brought both to his writing and to his life:

"I was doing what I wanted to do, that's all."

"Memory is the only thing that counts ... knowing a poem and hearing it in your head ... You can't know anything about poetry unless you know it."

Regarding his early failures, he talked of his first

"two terrible novels. ... You can't believe how bad they were. ... Everyone turned them down. And they were right."

Regarding praise for his later poetry he replied:

"If I hadn't learned anything in the past fifty years, I'd be pretty sore at myself"

He continued to live by his grandfather's creed:

"Love your wife, love your get, keep your word, and if need arise die for what men die for. There aren't many choices. And remember that truth doesn't always live in a number of voices."

In his introduction to the Modern Library edition of Conrad's *Nostromo* Warren states:

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 the symbol, for whom images always fall into a dialectical configuration, for whom the urgency of experience, no matter how vividly and strongly experience may enchant, is the urgency to know the meaning of experience. (xxxvii)

In my youthful new critical ecstasy, I wrote and published an article ("Robert Penn Warren's 'Dialectical Configuration' and *The Cave*") which traced various image patterns and concluded:

The numerous stages of all the characters' transmutations are rendered pow-

erfully successful precisely because of Warren's reinforcement of what might otherwise be sheer rhetoric and melodrama. It is through this masterful transmutation of imagery and structural patterns into a probing "dialectical configuration" that he has achieved what is, although not a great novel, certainly an eminently successful one.

I sent Mr. Warren a copy of the article. In about a week his kind letter arrived:

Dear Mr. Davison:

Thank you for your note and your essay on *The Cave*. It is very hard—if not impossible—to know how a book [of] one's own comes out, but one can at least know certain objective facts about a book, in this case the kind of thematic deployment you talk about. It is there. I wouldn't say that this had all been schematically worked out beforehand. It wasn't, though the general conception was clear. Much of the application developed along the way. Simply by logic of composition. Specifically, on this point, Plato never crossed my mind until the very last—certainly not as a source for title and epigram, and as far as I can remember, in no other connection. The book had originally been called *The Man Below*, a very bad title, as both my publisher and I agreed. The last possible day to settle the matter, after the page proofs were ready, etc., Erskine [the editor] and I were still hunting a title. Finally I said, "Oh, hell, let's call it *The Cave* and be done with it," and went into the next office and got a Plato and hunted the passage. But such things happen all the time, and sometimes with amusing results. In *Flood* I used the name Tolliver for a family—simply because it is a common name in Kentucky and Tennessee and used to know a lot of Tollivers. The Maggie Tolliver wasn't originally Maggie at all—some other name, what I forget, but it is in the early versions. But on impulse I changed her name to Maggie because I like the name and know somebody named Maggie. The thing was that some critic was making a fuss about *The Mill on the Floss*, which I hadn't read since I was a boy and couldn't have less interest in. All very natural.

Again, thanks.

Sincerely yours,

Robert Penn Warren

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# The Prose and Poetry of Robert Penn Warren

*Donald Jenkins*

## Part One

My middle son, who is due to arrive here from New York City today (unaware that he plays the beginning role in this brief overview of Penn Warren's prose), chose for his high school graduation yearbook quotation: "You follow Highway 58, going north-east out of the city, and it is a good highway and new." Today, to get here, he would follow Highway 87, going north out of the city, and it is a good highway though not new.

His introduction to Robert Penn Warren, then, came earlier than mine. I came upon *All the King's Men* while taking a Modern Novel course with Sterling Lanier, the grandson of Sidney Lanier, as one of my last MA courses in the spring of 1959 at Boston University. During my master's degree six hour written exam, I tangled with Jack and Anne and Willie and Sadie, on one of the major questions, and it changed my life. I don't say this lightly. During the writing of that essay answer, I felt the first freedom of expression in my writing career. "Career" is a lousy word, but you know what I mean.

So I owe Warren a debt I can never repay. But a changed life is a good debt to keep in mind. I'll get back to *All the King's Men* in a second.

## Part Two

The second ongoing debt that I owe Warren has to do with his poetry. My first wife gave me Warren's *Promises* for my birthday, almost fifty years ago, in 1957. That's a lot of poems between me and thee, Mr. Warren. I will read one of the poems from that book in a minute. There are only a few spheres of expertise in every language, and in ours, they have to do with 1) rhetoric, 2) diction, and 3) sensibility. Warren's poetry resides in a sphere equaled only by Frost and Dickinson and maybe Whitman. I realize that I am speaking *ex cathedra* here, in a context perhaps less significant than the new Pope in his yet to be written first Papal Bull, but with similar conviction.

The extraordinary thing about Warren's poems is their tough-minded explicitness, never less than lyrical, never shy of the lurking presence of intimacy. They muscle immediately to the point, and stay on it. At the end they leave you hanging there all alone with yourself. Warren, like the Eskimo wolf hunter who leaves blood-tipped upturned knives in the snow, draws the eater/reader to the final, stark, blood-in-the-mouth self-knowledge. (I use the word "stark" advisedly.)

Warren's voice in his poems is alert and probing; his tone, while musing inside the interior lines, forges into resignation. His metrics are conversational, and his hooks have no filed barbs.

[Here Professor Junkins read and discussed briefly Warren's poem "School Lesson Based on Word of Tragic Death of Entire Gillum Family." One young member of the audience, new to Warren, shy about asking at the occasion, finally contacted this editor a month later, saying he had been haunted by Warren's poem and the way Junkins read it, and, please—he had to have a copy of it. The copy was promptly supplied.]

### Part Three

Of the few major novels in American literature that qualify for consideration as the Great American Novel, and one would have to draw for nominations from firstly, Henry James and Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner (and when pressed might include Hawthorne's *House of Seven Gables*, Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, and perhaps one of Cormac McCarthy's novels), but ultimately for me the final choice comes down to Melville's *Moby Dick* and, for what it's worth to this noble gathering, Warren's *All the King's Men*. For anyone who thinks that I say this lightly and for the occasion, there are those in our audience, primarily Mr. Stoneback, who heard me say it almost twenty years ago in Lignano-Sabbiadoro, Italy at the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Hemingway Conference.

In this list, the only other American novel I know of where the sensibility behind the voice so dramatically infuses the narrative is Henry James's *The Ambassadors*, where Lambert Strether negotiates the moral contracts at work between him and Mme DeVionnet, him and Chad Newsome, him and Maria Gostrey. In *All the King's Men*, Jack negotiates the moral contracts between him and Willie, him and Adam Stanton, him and Sadie Burke, and him and Anne Stanton, even between him and Tiny Duffy and Sugar Boy.

But whereas in *The Ambassadors* Strether's loyalties to Mrs. Newsome reside in his final denial of Maria Gostrey, Jack Burden's final loyalties to himself become the determinant in Anne's ultimate acceptance of him after Willie Stark's death. In both *The Ambassadors* and *All the King's Men*, the voices of Jack and Lambert Strether reflect the dominant sensibilities in the novels, thus determining the outcomes of the two narratives.

Which leads me to the last points I want to make, hopefully in my final three minutes: First, the so-called "Restored Edition" of *All the King's Men* (2001), by Noel Polk, is both a literary betrayal of Warren and a dreadful literary mistake. Polk substitutes 202 times over the course of 609 pages, the name Willie Talos for Warren's final page-proof-approved Willie Stark. This wrong-headed substitution overshadows the sometimes critical acumen Polk exercises in restoring passages

botched by Warren's original editors. Polk's semi-monomania literally presumes that Warren didn't know what he was doing when he prepared his final text for publication.

To say, as Polk does in his "Editorial Afterword," that Warren's "approval" of the 1946 editorial change from his first draft usage of Talos as Willie's last name "may have come from fatigue, from pressures of one sort or another, from the years of constant work on it. Indeed, his very closeness to the novel may have prevented him from exercising his own good judgment, and in any case this version [meaning Polk's 2001 version] indicates that he [Warren] had written better than he knew" (641-42) is next to ludicrous.

When I was a boy, our answer to such a claim would have been, "malarkey!"

Finally, as for the critical edition of the poetry, we can proceed directly to the poems because the 1998 text of the *Collected Poems* edited by John Burt is flawlessly expert in every way. I will quote only one paragraph from the marvelous 191 pages separately titled "Introduction to the Notes," "Emendations," "Textual Notes," and "Explanatory Notes" at the end of the collection:

My collations and proofreading procedures were as follows. I collated the first editions of Warren's poetry collections against the magazine versions of the poems and against the Selected volumes by eye. Then all of the book texts (the poetry collections and the Selected volumes) were scanned into computer files, checked, corrected, and compared by electronic file comparison. Then my team of graduate students again collated the first editions against the magazine versions and against the Selected volumes by eye. Then I collated the pre-publication materials. Due to the heavily worked nature of these materials, this collation sequence was conducted by eye alone. In this stage of collation, the first edition text was used as the standard for collation, and compared against the following layers of revision: the underlayer of the early typescript (preceding magazine publication); the typescript revisions (approximating the magazine publication); the underlayer of the galley; the galley revisions; the page proofs; the "repros"; and the "blues." As a final check, the magazine versions of the poems were scanned into computer files, checked, corrected, and electronically compared with the first edition texts. (630-31)

[After some final spontaneous praise of John Burt's extraordinary job of editing Warren's *Collected Poems*, as an exemplary seminar in the art of editing, Professor Junkins closed with a reading of Warren's poem "The Red Mullet."]

## Who Were Chief Joseph & the Nez Perce? (Why Did RPW Write About Them)?

*Robert W. Lewis*

[The following informal remarks, taken from a text in outline form, were to be illuminated by interlinear commentary with reading of and brief comments on selected passages from Warren's book-length poem *Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce* (1983).]

Warren was a literate and literary historian in both prose and poetry. Cf. his novels and one other long poem *Audubon: A Vision*.

Is not imagination an essential virtue? Why did the ancients not include it among the “Cardinal Virtues” of Justice, Prudence, Fortitude, and Temperance? Were the ancients unimaginative?

Why did I choose this poem for our consideration? In 1967-68 I had a Fulbright to Italy, and the chair of the Dept. of English at the University of Catania was Professor Elemire Zolla who was writing a book that was to be translated into English as *The Writer and the Shaman*, an early study of Native American culture & writing on it. One day he asked me what I knew about American Indian literature, & I naively answered that I had read some James Fenimore Cooper and Longfellow's *Hiawatha* and—No, no, he said: What writing BY American Indians? I was stumped, but in that university's small English department library, he had assembled books BY those natives, & I began to read them.

Two years later I found myself at the University of North Dakota on the threshold of the American Indian renaissance. The only significant “Others” in the State were American Indians, & some were questioning the total absence of university courses about their culture. I told them that if they could tolerate a teacher staying just one step ahead of them, I would teach a course in American Indian literature.

That course led to others both in the English Department and in History and other departments. In a few years we developed an Indian Studies major & department—one of the first in the country. Our enrollment of Indian students grew, and related programs like “Indians into Medicine” grew too. The literature courses and an Indian Writers' Conference drew non-Native students as well.

Whether or not they may have read D. H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature*, they may have felt in their bones Lawrence's admonition that unless & until white Americans come to the Native spirit of place, a wonder and an awe for this New World that was and is an ancient land to its true natives, those whites will forever be aliens in it.

Another serendipitous chance occurred some years later when I canoed the last wild stretch of the Missouri River with Peter Nabokov, the American Indi-

an scholar. After a week's canoeing we drove east through north central Montana heading back to North Dakota. We turned off the road to the Nez Perce Historical Site of the Bear Paw Mountains battlefield where Chief Joseph fought the last battle of his courageous but doomed flight to Canada. On that fine summer day Peter and I were the only folk there. We wandered through the rolling terrain & read the battlefield markers and signs whose story we already knew.

But this place had a spirit—or spirits—that both of us felt. The solitude, the quiet save for the sough of the wind was eerie. Here the story of white expropriation & trickery & the Nez Perce resistance and flight came to an end. In some measure we were no longer only inhabitants or visitors or strangers in this land, knowing this story in cold historical outline only. “The land was ours before we were the land’s,” Robert Frost had written. On that day we were blessed to become the land’s.

Robert Penn Warren’s *Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce* leads to and embodies that place, an epitome of what Frost and Lawrence give us guides to. Warren’s poem is an imaginative, sympathetic account of his similar discovery, both history & personal encounter. It warrants praise and joy.

## IV Symposium Papers

### Discovering the Sacred Light of Secular Conditions: Coleridge's Light of Imagination in Warren's Criticism and Poetry

*Michael Beilfuss*

Any discussion of Robert Penn Warren's work can benefit from a close examination of his essay on S. T. Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. If we view Warren's poetry in the light of his essay, we can observe how Warren utilizes and unifies imagination, complicity, and selfhood to infuse his poems and his life with a mystical awareness of the human condition. If we look at his interpretation of the *Rime*, we can see how some of the themes and images he highlights also appear in his own poetry.

It is well known and documented that Warren never became a practicing Christian, even though, as Victor Strandberg writes, "In a broad sense, it seems obvious that Robert Penn Warren was a Christian writer . . . a confessional motif of sin and expiation recurs importantly in Warren's work, as witnessed in the testimonies of Willie Proudfit in *Night Rider*, Ashby Windham in *At Heaven's Gate*, and Cass Mastern in *All the Kings Men*" (17). The young Warren was exposed to religion in a way that left an indelible mark on the poet/writer/critic, but it never resulted in a conversion. There is, however, another theme, or rather an attribute, which in a way became a sort of religion for Warren, which helped him achieve a sensitivity to the most fundamental religious questions and their answers. Warren dubbed himself a "yearner." It is this trait that takes the place of religion for Warren, and in itself becomes a type of religion, guided very much by Christian ideals. In an interview with Bill Moyers, Warren explains the philosophy of the yearner:

MOYERS: Pilgrims sought God and looked for a promised land in the hereafter. What do you yearn for?

WARREN: I yearn for significance, for life as significance. Now, if I'm feeling with a poem or a novel I'm, in a small way, trying to do the same thing. I'm trying to make it make sense to me. (Watkins, Hiers, and Weaks 204-05)

For a full discussion of the "yearner" motif, we should begin with Warren's essay "A Poem of Pure Imagination: An Experiment in Reading." Much of the essay is concerned with the moon imagery in Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient*

*Mariner*. In the course of this discussion there is a clear connection between the character of the yearner and the image of the moon; the two are directly and intimately related in a passage Warren quotes from the poem's gloss: "In his [the Mariner's] loneliness and fixedness he yearneth towards the journeying Moon" (Warren, *Selected Essays* 243). That this gloss appears at the crucial turning point of the poem attests to its vital significance to the themes Coleridge was working through and attempting to highlight. Warren does not miss this point. Rather, he utilizes the moon imagery in *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* to unify what he calls the primary and secondary themes of the poem: that is, the theme of the "One Life"<sup>1</sup> and the theme of the "imagination," respectively.

The secondary theme of the imagination hinges on the moon imagery. Warren expands this idea also to include "Coleridge's half-light." The key is that any kind of muted lighting, from cloudy sunless days, to sunsets, to moonlight, to moonless starry nights "changes the familiar world to make it poetry" (235). Warren also notes in his essay that all the bad events take place under the aegis "of the sun" (233-34). The distinction is crucial because when Warren discusses the moonlight, it is obvious that he is not writing about some secularized, romantic idealization of the moon, but rather he sees the good events bathed in the sacred light of imagination.

Warren devotes the largest section of his essay, at nearly twenty pages almost double the size of the next largest, to his explication of the secondary theme and the significance of the moon imagery.<sup>2</sup> Warren begins his explanation by writing:

Let us see how this symbol [the moon] functions in the poem, in connection with the theme of the imagination. We must remember, however, that here by the imagination we mean the imagination in its value-creating capacity, what Coleridge was later to call the secondary imagination. (236)

The concept of the "secondary imagination" is just as important to Warren as it is to Coleridge, who explained its operation: "It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate ... at all events it *struggles* to idealize and to *unify*" (qtd. in Cuddon 307, emphasis added). If we compare Coleridge's definition of imagination to Warren's explanation of yearning (in the Moyers interview), we can recognize some startling similarities. Coleridge's secondary imagination struggles for unity, while Warren *yearns* for unity. Warren said that he was striving for significance and that in his work he tried to make sense out of life. Particularly in his poetry, we see Warren again and again dissolve, diffuse, and dissipate the world around him (often with images illuminated in some sort of half-light) in order to find meaning, to create out of the elements of the world and the human psyche a meaning of and for the human condition. He does the same with *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, dissecting it in order to find unity, a unity that he perceives not only in

the poem, but between his ideas about the poem and the world.

Warren explains that the moon carries great significance when we see the Mariner “yearning” toward it the moment before he blesses the water snakes, which is a mark of his repentance, and the beginning of his penance. Warren concludes that on the level of the secondary theme the killing of the Albatross is “a crime against the imagination” (239). But, as Warren finds, the Mariner’s expiation comes about also as a result of his imagination: “the imagination is a curse as well as a blessing” (245). Immediately after yearning for the moon, the Mariner recognizes the snakes’ beauty and the unity of all things in the universe. The sacred light of imagination provokes this recognition and the Mariner blesses the snakes. Warren writes: “The moon of imagination and the storm of creative vitality here join triumphantly to celebrate the Mariner’s salvation” (244). The celebration Warren is speaking of here is the Mariner’s recounting of his experience. The same compulsion that forced the Mariner to tell his story to the hermit, whom Warren dubs “the priest of nature . . . the priest of God . . . the priest of imagination” (255), occasionally arises and forces him to tell it to such people as the Wedding Guest. We must not forget that the Mariner’s story is also the poem that we are reading. Compelled by the imagination to compose the poem, the Mariner discovers unity and the doctrine of the “One Life” by relaying his experience to another person. The poem is his penance, and it binds the speaker and listener in a communion facilitated by the light of imagination. This leads Warren to conclude that *Rime* provides us with “the case of a man who saves his own soul by composing a poem” (254).

This discussion of Warren’s essay has finally brought us to a point where we can discuss his poetry in more detail. I do not wish to argue that Warren saved his own soul by composing a poem or many poems—I would leave that discussion to a more learned theologian—but we can see in Warren’s elucidation of Coleridge’s poem that he has a deeply spiritual sense of the importance of imagination. He also places a great value on the recognition of the theory of the “One Life.” And finally we observe how these two ideals unify to create a more substantial existence, a way of living in and appreciating the world. Warren also expresses these sentiments in his poetry. In fact, he does more than just express the significance of these values; he participates in them through the creation of his own poems, just as the Mariner does by telling his story. We often see Warren’s explorations of the human condition in a setting infused with some sort of half-light. The moon of imagination dapples its light throughout John Burt’s edition of Warren’s complete poems. “Man in Moon Light,” “What Was the Promise That Smiled from the Maples at Evening,” “Dark Woods,” “In Moonlight, Somewhere, They Are Singing,” “Star Gazing,” “Reading Late at Night, Thermometer Falling,” and “Old Nigger on One-Mule Cart Encountered Late at Night When Driving Home From Party in the Back Country” are just a few examples of poems where we see the light of



imagination at work on the mind of the poet.

Through the imagery in the poem “Moonrise” Warren explores the mysteries of life as illuminated by the light of imagination. The main theme in this short poem is the idea of the “One Life.” In the poem the moon rises above the “rock blackness” of a ridge (line 2). Once the moon gains the ridge, the foreboding darkness of the mountain is dismissed by the “bugle-blast” of the light pouring in (4). The poet informs us that “Light, . . . / Silver, pours at us. We are, / In that silence, stunned” (4-6). In its usual compulsive manner, the light of the moon mesmerizes the people at the café, and “their eyes yearn” (9). The poem ends with them joined by a mysterious bond: “We wait. We do not even / Know the names of one another” (15-16). The light of the moon compels the people to yearn towards it, but they do not know what they yearn for or with whom they yearn. The yearning itself initiates the unity, a unity that is beyond language (they wait in silence) and beyond names. Without language and names the people in the poem experience the “One Life”; there is no differentiation between them, and they are united in the common bond of yearning towards the moon. It is instructive here also to consider the epigraph to the volume of poems in which “Moonrise” is collected: “Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren” (page 221). Is there any way to express the idea of “One Life” more succinctly? For Warren, at least, the experience at the café of the “One Life” sparked his imagination, and provided the impetus for him to write the poem.

The theme of yearning is also apparent in the poem “The Mission.” Here Warren seems more readily able to accept yearning as the goal itself, but only after he doubts the purpose of the moon: “The spruce / Wants to hide the house from the moon, for / The moon’s intentions have never been quite clear” (lines 14-16). The poem continues:

The spruce does not know that a square of moonlight lies cunningly on  
The floor by my bed, and I watch it and think how,  
On the snow-locked mountain, deep in a fissure  
Under the granite ledge, the bear

Huddles inside his fur like an invalid inside  
A charity-ward blanket. (17-22)

Here we have another clear parallel between Warren’s essay and Coleridge’s poem. The moonlight works on the poet’s imagination, and his mind wanders to the bear. Like the Mariner, he experiences a connection to nature (the bear) and hence touches the “One Life.” But the imagination doesn’t cease there. The bear, in turn, reminds Warren of “an invalid inside / A charity-ward blanket.” The simile does more than just create an interesting image; it furthers the theme of the “One Life” and its connection with the moon and imagination. The “square of moonlight”

causes the poet (inexplicably) to think of a bear, which leads him to imagine a sick homeless person. The light of the imagination connects the poet with nature and nature connects him with the suffering of mankind.

Warren's imagination then drifts away from the invalid, back to the bear, and then returns to the moon outside, completing a circle that structurally also represents the "One Life." Warren then discovers that, like a frozen brook, he has forgotten what his "mission" is. After describing some of the images of his dreams, the poet decides in the last two lines that "Perhaps that lost mission is to try to understand // The possibility of joy in the world's tangled and hieroglyphic beauty" (36-37). After realizing the "One Life" through his imagination, Warren attempts to discover what the purpose of his life is and concludes that the mission after all may just be the recognition of a quest for the purpose of life. Yearning to understand the possibility of joy becomes the mission itself; the ends and the means are one.

Warren has said that "poetry is a way of thinking or a way of feeling; a way of exploring" (Watkins, Hiers, and Weeks 370). The themes Warren explores are well known—for one, because he explores the same themes over and over, but more importantly because they are familiar themes that everyone does (or at least should) explore. He asks the most fundamental questions about life and human existence, and he finds the answers in poetry, but often realizes that the answer is implicit in the question: that is, the answer is the attitude of the questioner, or the yearner. Life contains no purpose if we do not search for a purpose.

In his essay "'The Body of This Death' in Robert Penn Warren's Later Poetry" Watkins writes:

Warren's interest in the questions of life and death which are beyond answering and almost beyond pondering is in a strange ... way an indication that there has been a change in his yearning for religious belief, an increase, perhaps, in his faith—an increase which may find expression only in poetry, and which even in poetry he may not certainly know or be altogether aware of. (36)

With these words from Watkins in mind, we should contemplate Warren's own words again:

I would say poetry is a way of life, ultimately—not a kind of performance, not something you do on Saturday or Easter morning or Christmas morning or something like that. It is a way of being open to the world, a way of being open to experience. ... A way to love God?—yes I think it is. (Watkins, Hiers, and Weeks 370)

Warren believes in the mystery of the world, and he yearns to comprehend that mystery fully. He clearly believes in the mystical power of the self and imagination, and how those two elements are braided with the ultimate realities of the

universe. In the end Warren's poetry discovers and yearns for the unity of time, self, and other—a unity that is accomplished through imagination, through poetry. For Warren, these mysteries can only be discovered, or manifested, through a “way of living in the world” so that we may see the light of imagination.

## Notes

1. Warren also refers to this theme as the “sacramental vision.” It involves a recognition and an appreciation for the unity within the material world and a unity between the material and spiritual realms of existence.
2. In his essay “The Art of Theology” Homer Obed Brown points out that “like the poem, Warren’s study is divided into seven parts and just as he finds the crucial turning point in the poem in its forth part, the fourth part of *his essay* demonstrates what he calls the ‘symbolic fusion’ of the poem’s themes” (239, Brown’s emphasis). What we should note here is that Warren’s essay structurally corresponds to Coleridge’s poem: that is, the central event of the poem (when the Mariner, beneath the moon and stars, blesses the sea snakes—the “symbolic fusion”) and the central thesis of Warren’s criticism occur at the same point. This correspondence further demonstrates how important this section of Warren’s essay is and provides another reason for a close study of this section and how it relates to Warren’s poetry.

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“I Require of You Only to Look”:  
Warren’s Mystical Vision

*William Boyle*

In a 1976 interview with Bill Moyers, Robert Penn Warren said that he still believed in religious conversion, and he identified himself as a “yearner,” saying that he had a “religious temperament with a scientific background” (Watkins and Heirs 204). When pressed by Moyers, he elaborated, explaining that he yearned “for significance, for life as significance” (205). Talking to Cleanth Brooks in *The Possibilities of Order*, Warren said something along the same line: “Now I know that you are a communicant and a believer. A person like me, who is not but who finds in Christianity the deepest and widest metaphor for life, might be described as a yearner” (Stoneback, “Warren Seminar Handout #3”). This signifies that Warren wanted to believe but could not. Yet communicants surrounded him; in fact, Warren was at his creative peak during what was certainly America’s greatest Catholic literary moment. Allen Tate and Caroline Gordon had converted to Catholicism. Robert Lowell had famously dabbled with Catholicism and produced some of the best poetry of his career. Thomas Merton, writing at a Trappist monastery in Kentucky, and Walker Percy, down in Louisiana, were Catholic writers of note. And, of course, there was Flannery O’Connor. Warren knew these writers, had close relationships with many of them, and most certainly—we can be sure—knew what they were reading and read it as well: Gabriel Marcel, Jacques Maritain, St. Teresa, St. John of the Cross, Graham Greene, Mauriac, Bernanos. Not to mention Hemingway, whose Catholicism and Catholic imagination are most often overlooked—even by Warren, who doesn’t, in his famous essay “Ernest Hemingway,” make the connection between John of the Cross’s theory of *nada* and Hemingway’s understanding of it. In addition, we know that the four works that most informed Warren’s life and writing were the King James Bible, Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, and Saint Augustine’s *Confessions*—four of the major works of Christian literature. Ultimately, the essence of Warren’s vision is closely linked to Gabriel Marcel’s basic modes of relating to the world, by “being” and by “having.” Everything Warren does comes under Marcel’s “being” list and “deepens participation in the mystery of being” (Stoneback, “The Roots of the Dis-ease”) by making war on abstraction, objectification, and solipsism. This leads to my focus in this paper: Warren’s relationship with Christian mysticism, particularly mystical elements of the Bible, and the works of Origen of Alexandria, St. Augustine, St. John of the Cross, and St. Teresa of Ávila. Warren is so close to the saints and mystics in regards to sin, error, guilt, history, and time that one might play on Harold Bloom’s definition of Warren as a “severe secular moral-

ist” (xxiv) and call him instead a secular mystic. Though I will only have time to discuss my topic in relation to *All the King's Men*, in the end I will show that many of Warren's core images are mystical and that a mystical understanding of things and an acceptance of the presence of Mystery are at the center of Warren's vision.

Tellingly, in the early '60s, Warren wrote a brief foreword to an essay collection called *Christian Faith and the Contemporary Arts*. The essay explores man's relationship to art and religion. Warren concludes the essay with an unforgettable and poignant meditation on the nature of art and religion:

The common term between the life of art and that of religion is humility. Both depend on revelation—and both recognize that revelation comes only from a prayerful reverence for the truth, especially from an unscared reverence for the shockingness of inner truth. Art, as Bergson put it, “brings us into our own presence.”

St. Teresa said: “I require of you only to look.” (9)

This passage is a key not only to Warren's relationship with mysticism but to his whole body of work. The quotation from St. Teresa of Ávila gets at the sum and substance of Warren's vision: Warren requires only that we look and try to learn to live in the world with significance. Ultimately, Warren is exploring the very stuff of mysticism: divine union and grace, the quest for the true father, and human communion.

Make of this what you will—Warren, the non-believer, the yearner, applying Christian theology to the secular quest and waiting for knowledge to redeem us. Understand, though, that he grasped what Eliot taught us in his essay on Baudelaire: that we can't have joy, grace, or anything until we understand original sin. Warren's understanding of original sin, his vision of human accountability and complicity, is expressed most memorably in *All the King's Men* when Jack Burden reflects on Cass Mastern's great lesson that “the world is all of one piece” and that it is “like an enormous spider web and if you touch it, however lightly, at any point, the vibration ripples to the remotest perimeter and the drowsy spider feels the tingle” (188). Jack's reflection continues: “It does not matter whether or not you meant to brush the web of things. Your happy foot or your gay wing may have brushed it ever so lightly, but what happens always happens and there is the spider, bearded black and with his great faceted eyes glittering like mirrors in the sun, or like God's eye, and the fangs dripping” (189). This vision is specifically linked to Christian mysticism. Jack, as William Bedford Clark writes, “achieves a new and fundamentally religious perspective on the world and the mortals who travel through it” (97), and this epiphany—the final stage of his development—corresponds with the mystical notion of ecstasy, “which Origen interprets as a ‘contemplation of amazement . . . when the mind is struck with amazement by the

knowledge of great and marvelous things' . . . not a ravishing from the senses, but a sudden new insight into the divine mysteries . . ." (McGinn 118, first ellipsis in McGinn). Isn't the acknowledgment of the Web such an insight? The passage also smacks of mystical symbolism—the oneness or union of things, what Sister Benedicta Ward called St. Teresa's "center of wholeness," her notion that "divine love enters into the very center of the soul, so that it affects every action and thought" (60-61). Of course, the spider's eyes "glittering like mirrors in the sun, or like God's eye" is a specifically Pauline vision, as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13:12: "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known." So, the progression from "mirrors" to "God's eye" follows Paul's logic. Also, interestingly, Paul equates knowledge and love with a face-to-face vision of God, so it is only right that Warren has the spider's eyes mystically transform into God's eye. Finally, the mirror image—the spider's bright, glittering eyes—might be compared with a similar image presented by mystic Gregory of Nyssa, "who saw God as visible in the mirror of the polished soul" (McGinn 153). This might explain Warren's fascination with images of dazzle, glimmer, glitter, glint, and gleam.

Moreover, Warren's Augustinian understanding of sin and guilt is evident in Cass's story. Cass, we learn, "came to know himself 'as the chief of sinners and a plague spot on the body of the human world'"—Saint Teresa, it should be noted, said the same sorts of things about herself—and, in a conversation with his brother Gilbert, Cass said, "Perhaps I shall preach Abolition . . . some day. Even here. But not now. I am not worthy to instruct others. Not now. But meanwhile there is my example. If it is good, it is not lost. Nothing is ever lost" (182-83). This line is a sort of inversion of a line from Warren's poem "Original Sin: A Short Story": "Oh, nothing is lost, ever lost! At last you understood" (line 20). The speaker in that poem learns that the burden of guilt is always there. Cass, on the other hand, learns that what's worth keeping is never lost. In essence, though, both know the same thing: *nothing* is lost. We must learn from our mistakes, make changes stick, make them mean something. There must also be, as the speaker tells us later in "Original Sin," "a new innocence for us to be stayed by" (line 33). This is, in fact, the theme of much of Warren's work, and it is a very mystical formulation. If we understand "innocence" as purity of heart, then the equation is simple, as much is promised to the pure of heart (see Matthew 5:8). However, the innocence that Cass calls for is different: it is the innocence that comes with knowledge of original sin, with recognition of complicity, and it is the only way that man can taste of innocence again, the only hope of Grace that he has. God will not come without work on the part of the soul, as St. John of the Cross tells us. Neither will such innocence. It can only be achieved by focusing on the interior, by accepting responsibility for everyone and everything.

There are two other instances in *All the King's Men* that I would like to take

note of. The first comes when Jack and Anne are lying out on the diving float, bathing in the sun. Anne asks Jack if he remembers the night before. He says he does, and then she drops into the water and swims away before he can say anything else, after which Jack says that he heard nothing else about it, didn't even think about it, and instead "fell back into the full flood of summer" (286). He goes on: "it was a fine, conscious surrender which was a participation in and a willing of the flood itself, and not a surrender at all but an affirmation and all that, like *the surrender of the mystic to God*, which isn't a surrendering to God any more than it is also a creating of God, for if he loves God he has willed the being of God" (286, emphasis added). This is a curious passage about the nature of mysticism, and it is certainly pertinent to my discussion, although I won't allow myself to get too caught up in it. We must remember, first and foremost, that this is Web-era Jack Burden recounting the thoughts of Great Sleep-era Jack Burden, which accounts for the smart-aleck tone. The passage, though, also recalls the teachings of St. Augustine, who, according to Bernard McGinn, knew that "the love that fuels our pilgrimage to God in this life does not preclude real knowledge of him [sic]—indeed, rather bestows knowledge far beyond what we might have dreamed of . . ." (262). So the message here is clear, I think, especially in light of Jack's conversion at the end of the novel.

About Jack's conversion: In the last pages of *All the King's Men*, Jack dismisses the Great Twitch, says he doesn't believe in it, and comes to realize that men live "in the agony of will" (436). His quest for the true father has led him to the Scholarly Attorney, who, as William Bedford Clark writes, along with Lucy Stark, shares something Jack lacks: "a capacity to define themselves through embracing the despised Other; they can love" (96). The Scholarly Attorney makes this dictation to Jack:

The creation of man whom God in his foreknowledge knew doomed to sin was the awful index of God's omnipotence. For it would have been a thing of trifling and contemptible ease for Perfection to create mere perfection. To do so would, to speak truth, be not creation but extension. Separateness is identity and the only way for God to create, truly create, man was to make him separate from God Himself, and to be separate from God is to be sinful. The creation of evil is therefore the index of God's glory and His power. That had to be so that the creation of good might be the index of man's glory and power. But by God's help.

By His Help and in His wisdom. (437)

After that, the Scholarly Attorney asks Jack if he got it all down; then he says "with sudden violence, 'It is true. I know it is true. Do you know it?'" (437). Jack nods and says yes, and then, as an aside, tells the reader: "I did so to keep his mind untroubled, but later I was not certain but that in my own way I did believe what he had said" (437). Again, this recalls Augustine, for whom "the soul is a fallen crea-

ture, bound by both original and individual sin, and hence any such elevation is always a result of God's action in us" (McGinn 233). The Scholarly Attorney's tract also resembles the theology of Origen of Alexandria, one of the greatest geniuses in the history of Christianity, who wrote:

For the Creator granted to the minds created by him the power of free and voluntary movement, in order that the good that was in them might become their own, since it was preserved by their own free will. But sloth and weariness of taking trouble to preserve the good, coupled with disregard and neglect of better things, began the process of withdrawal from the good. (qtd. in McGinn 114)

Origen has some difficulty explaining the nature of man's fall because, as Bernard McGinn asks, "can there really be an *explanation* of evil?" (114). Warren, though, has the Scholarly Attorney attempt to answer that very question: Evil, he says, is the product of sinful man, who lives in the agony of free will, and is ultimately the measure of God's glory and power. This is certainly a big load for Jack Burden, and he accepts it reluctantly because he knows that it will require major change, change that means something, change that post-lapsarian weakness often does not allow for.

The notion of religious conversion is in itself at the heart of mystical theology. St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross, like Jack Burden, passed through stages to come to their final conversions. What they have in common is that they submit to necessity. Jack's conversion is certainly not the mystical event that Teresa's is or that John of the Cross's is, but it is perhaps the only sort of conversion that fallen man, in the twentieth century and beyond, is capable of. As Warren reminds us in "Masts at Dawn," part of the "Island of Summer" poem-sequence in *Incarnations*: "We must try / to love so well the world that we may believe, in the end, in God" (lines 21-22). This is the stuff of Jack Burden's conversion; essentially, he finally comes around. Yet the conversion has its roots in the teachings of the mystics, and the Scholarly Attorney may be himself a sort of mystical doctor. After all, it is "the mark of sanctity to know oneself a sinner," and the Scholarly Attorney is like St. Teresa because he indeed knows himself to be a sinner (Dicken 13).

There is much more to say on this subject, many poems I haven't gotten to and fiction I haven't touched on, and—if there were world enough and time—I would keep going with it. In the end, what is important is that we understand that Warren was very concerned with Christianity, and very moved by it, and that he was indebted to Christian writers, particularly Dante and Eliot, but also to these mystics: Origen, St. Augustine, St. John of the Cross, and St. Teresa of Ávila, in particular. Warren—the yearner, the severe secular moralist, the secular mystic—has drawn on Western Christian mysticism in a unique and fascinating way.



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“Depth and Shimmer” or “The Secret of Contact” in  
Elizabeth Madox Roberts and Robert Penn Warren

*Nicole Camastra*

Robert Penn Warren’s essay on Elizabeth Madox Roberts’s first novel, *The Time of Man*, entitled “Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Life is From Within” was first published in *The Saturday Review* in March 1963, and republished that year as the introduction to a new edition of *The Time of Man*. This was almost 40 years after the publication of *The Time of Man* and, most tellingly, just one year before Warren published what he thought was his best novel, *Flood*. Given certain thematic concerns and continuities between the two novels, it is engaging to consider the possibility that Warren was meditating on *The Time of Man* when he wrote *Flood*. It is also engaging to question why Warren’s works have endured while Roberts’s works have been neglected in recent decades.

In addition to *The Time of Man*, Warren may also have been meditating on one of Roberts’s unfinished manuscripts: that is, her abandoned flood novel. In Frederick P. W. McDowell’s biography of Roberts, he tells us of her preoccupation “with the Ohio River flood” in “the winter of 1936-37.” He writes: “The spectacle of mankind at the mercy of nature profoundly impressed her, and she began to explore in a never-completed novel the implications of the flood for a man ... whose tragic domestic life makes him acutely sensitive to the destructiveness of nature, whose own spirit mirrors the turbulence of the flood outside him” (27). Moreover, Roberts’s “flood” novel was to be a “large-scale book in which she planned to wrestle with cosmic issues with greater clarity than she had shown in *He Sent Forth a Raven*” (McDowell 28). Perhaps it is neither coincidental nor incidental that the “cosmic issues” of Roberts’s abandoned flood novel may have precipitated the “tragic domestic life” and turbulent spirit of Bradwell Tolliver in Warren’s *Flood*.

Of course, the flood in Warren’s novel is not a natural one, but rather a forced event. Nevertheless, both floods would provide a “spectacle of mankind at the mercy of nature.” But *The Time of Man* holds that same spectacle, sans flood. Warren tells us that in *The Time of Man*, we “find no scanting of the grimness of fact, of the pinch of hunger, of the contempt in the eyes met on the road” (xxviii). And so we can infer that in *The Time of Man*, Ellen is at the mercy of the “actuality” (to use Warren’s word) of the harsh world in which she lives.

More pointedly, both Ellen Chesser and Bradwell Tolliver, the protagonists of *The Time of Man* and *Flood* respectively, come to reconcile themselves with the struggle between place and identity. For Ellen, it is with joy and wonder that she realizes the interconnectedness of things of which she is a living part, and it is also

with joy and wonder that Brad finally realizes that “there is no country but the heart” (440). This realization for both Brad and Ellen comes with a knowledge of the web of complicity, Warren’s most famous image and literary motif. However, we can find evidence of the web in Roberts’s work as well.

I will discuss Roberts’s web a little later, but for now, I would like to return to Warren’s essay on *The Time of Man*, in which he posits that “there is a sense of life as ceremony, as ritual even in the common duties, as an enactment that numinously embodies the relation of the self to its setting in nature, in the human community, and in time” (xxiii). For Ellen, the relation of herself to nature becomes the first intimate step in realizing a sense of complicity with the world outside of her. Warren notes that the sense of ritual is only explicit in one instance in the book, that is, the “office” that includes Ellen’s feeding of the turkeys, which occurs relatively early in the novel. Later, it is this ritual that tempers Ellen’s turbulent spirit both in waiting for Jonas, her first lover, and after his betrayal of her. Amid the tortures of this betrayal, Ellen’s “habit somehow knew or sensed its duty toward the turkeys so that she . . . came back to the farm where she went stiffly through her task” (222). Ellen somehow senses that her identity rests in what Warren calls the numinous embodiment of her self in relation to nature and humanity through ritual.

Ritual is a means to the end of discovering what Roberts calls the secret of contact. To understand this more completely, we can consider Warren’s comments on Roberts’s desire to fuse the “inner and the outer” worlds when he quotes her as stating that “somewhere there is a connection between the world of the mind and the outer order—it is the secret of the contact that we are after . . . there is a point where they come together, and we can never know the whole of reality until we have these two completely” (xxviii). That secret of contact resonates of mystery, and in a religious sense it is through ritual that one hopes to be illuminated by mystery. To further understand Warren’s treatment of this point of contact, we can refer to *Flood* and its exemplar, Yasha Jones, when he talks about poetry with Maggie. Yasha proceeds by analogy in this discussion when he says that poetry gives people a “sort of emotional paradigm—of what they are doing anyway. . . . It is an image of . . . depth and shimmer,” or perhaps, the inner and the outer.

What makes Yasha’s comments intriguing is the fact he is an “ex-would-be or would-have-been physicist,” and the poetry that he is referring to is the poetry of “our time” and “our physics.” But what does that mean? If physics is the science of interaction between matter and energy, then physics becomes an analogue for the depth and shimmer paradigm, or the inner and the outer, or mind and matter, or whatever binary relationship you may attach to this discussion. Further, in McDowell’s biography of Roberts, he states that “Miss Roberts consistently revealed in her fiction her sense of the intimate connections existing between the

material world and the mental. Awareness of this relationship led her to believe that poetry—and, by implication, all literature—should ‘search into the relation between mind and matter, into the one-ness of flesh and thin air’” (43).

Discovering this “one-ness” accompanies the shudder that Yasha Jones describes, and that we can otherwise know as the secret of contact. And Yasha is careful to qualify that the “shudder” (read “point of contact”) “comes from a flight *into* nature” (179, emphasis added). So when Ellen takes care of the turkeys as a ritualistic form of discovering that point of contact, the shudder that precedes the depth and shimmer, it becomes an important indication of her yearning for that point of fusion—of the connection between the inner and the outer worlds.

We can see another example of the point of contact when Ellen sees Jonas “smil[e] across at her in the way of the summer that was past and her need for him grew with the deep glow of the flower and with the soft rich mesh of the velvet petals” (175). Perhaps, for Ellen, the “deep glow of the flower” can signal a shimmering point of contact. This point of contact figures just as prominently, though much differently, in *Flood*. Through Yasha, we can see the dangers of living in abstraction: “He had known how a heart fills with longing. But it had not been his heart. For he was . . . past longing” (264). Of course, Yasha is not past longing, as he finds true happiness with Maggie, but as readers, we are aware of the yearning for discovery of the secret of contact. Further, Warren may have realized this secret in other of Roberts’s works.

Recently, I was afforded the opportunity to look through Warren’s personal copy of Roberts’s novel *Black is My Truelove’s Hair*, and while there is no marginalia, the old corner turndowns may indicate Warren’s close attention to certain passages. One of these passages relates Dena and Fronia sewing. As Dena identifies with the “wish” of Fronia’s “quivering fingers,” she thinks: “If she were aware of any movement or any object or wish or opinion, she would go *into* it entirely. Or she would stand or sit or lie in entire detachment from all objects and all memories” (246, emphasis added). Note that the either/or construction of this passage can be understood as *either* Dena identifies with the inner meaning of outside movement, *or* she is detached from everything outside of her, including all “memories” (that is, what she understands herself to be from experience).

Again, *Flood’s* exemplar, Yasha Jones, comments on the inner/outer paradigm to Brad Tolliver when he says: “To be overwhelmed with the outward, moving multiplicity of the world—that means we can never see, really see, or love the single leaf falling. And, therefore, can never love life, the inwardness of life” (127). Yasha’s suggestion to identify with and ultimately love the inwardness of the outside world resonates of the yearning for that point of contact in Roberts.

The fact that Ellen and Brad can discover and hold onto this secret of contact is related to what Warren refers to as the notion of telling in *The Time of Man*. More simply put, in the act of revealing part of one’s self by telling, one then

becomes a living part of another's experience and memory, thus creating a web of being. In his essay, Warren says that telling "makes for the understanding of experience in relation to the community of the living and the dead" (xxiv). The notion of telling is crucial in both *The Time of Man* and *Flood*. When Ellen meets Jasper, whom she will endure with, she notes of his story that it was a story of "labor, of wandering from farm to farm, of good seasons and bad, of good luck or evil" (277). In Jasper's telling, we see Ellen's story, which is, in part, what Warren means when he writes that "the novel is not Ellen's own 'telling,' but it is a shadow of her telling" (xxiv).

This is also true in *Flood*. For example, we know that before Bradwell Tolliver returns to Fiddlersburg he has written a very popular book based on his memories of Fiddlersburg, entitled *I'm Telling You Now*. The irony is that, despite the popularity of the book, Brad's book is a shadow of his telling—a cycle that overlaps itself, connecting the past to the present, and giving us the image of the web of complicity, or the interconnectedness of all things. For Ellen, the matter is less complicated when she thinks: "Wonder colored every act with a haunting sense of its past or its relation to something" (86).

Warren's most famous image of the web is present in *All the King's Men*, and it denotes that the actions of the self are infinitely related to the world around it—a more complex and philosophical notion of having the inner world of the mind meet the outer world of consequences and responsibility. Although Warren is easily associated with the web image, it is first clearly established in one of Elizabeth Madox Roberts's neglected works, *Jingling in the Wind*. More pointedly, the web image is identifiable on the first and last pages of that novel. On page one we see "a small grey spider, silver as she darted quickly away, drew back beneath a twiggy bough, her web glistening in the wet" (1). The spider's movement "back beneath," leaving her "glistening" web also gives us an image of "depth and shimmer." But the obvious legacy of Roberts's web to Warren can most readily be understood by reading the last paragraph of her novel: "Then that most exquisite spider that crouches at the hub of the web that is the mind stirred, feeling a tremor pass over the web as if some coil of it were shaken by a visitation from without. Life is from within, and thus the noise outside is a wind blowing in a mirror. But love is a royal visitor which that proud ghost, the human spirit, settles in elegant chambers and serves with the best" (256). Knowing this, we can appreciate how exquisite it is when Blanding Cottshill in *Flood* calls the web a "mystic osmosis of being" (423). Moreover, for Brad and for Ellen, love *is* a royal visitor whose arrival is the result of such knowledge.

This knowledge functions for Brad and Ellen by allowing them to choose to endure—not because they have reconciled themselves with the world outside, but because they find abiding strength within. And so we can return to the title of Warren's essay, "Elizabeth Madox Roberts: Life is From Within," to understand

Warren's appropriation of that phrase from one of Roberts's most explicit web passages. In that essay, Warren talks about Roberts's "gifts" of time and place and her struggle to find identity, and he notes that in addition to bringing these gifts to *The Time of Man*, she "fuses them in their inwardness" and this "amounts to the moment of genius" (xx, emphasis added).

In a sense, we can see the intertextual web of ritual, inwardness, telling and what Warren calls the "actuality" (xxviii) of the outside world take shape in this discussion. And while this paper has ostensibly been concerned with the relationship between *The Time of Man* and *Flood*, I have, in a broader sense, tried to establish Roberts's influence on Warren. H. R. Stoneback makes this assertion when he writes that if "Warren was hands-down, the greatest Kentucky writer" (33), then "Roberts was *the* seminal figure of the Kentucky and Southern Renaissance" (28). And if we accept that assertion, then we have to question the literary and historical paradox that the work of Robert Penn Warren is still widely celebrated, while Roberts's work has been neglected in recent decades.

Warren posits an answer to this question in his essay on *The Time of Man*. He asserts that the novel "fell out of fashion" because it depicts Ellen Chesser "not in active protest against the deprivation and alienation of ... life ... but in the process of coming to terms ... with the tragic aspect of life" (xxvii). Further, Warren notes that the "agenda of the 1930's carried many items bearing on the urgent need to change the social and economic environment but none bearing on the need to explore the soul's relation to fate." In other words, the social and political milieu of that later time dictated that one should choose the collective over the individual. And as literature can be understood in the context of its time, we can see how an individual and inner victory, like Ellen's, may not have been a story for the masses.

I will conclude by saying that many of Warren's books represent spiritual journeys toward identity by synthesizing the inner and outer worlds of experience. Further, these journeys imply hope. William Bedford Clark notes this in his book *The American Vision of Robert Penn Warren* when he talks about Warren's most famous novel, *All the King's Men*. Clark writes that "as the story of Jack Burden unfolds, two powerful streams, the historical past and the lived present, converge and move inexorably toward a revelation and rebirth that is finally the equivalent of a religious conversion in which the 'sick soul' of a representative modern man, alienated, skeptical, and vulnerable, is made whole" (93).

We could substitute Ellen Chesser for Jack Burden in the quotation above, and the result would be the same. The point is that both Warren and Roberts understood that the journey toward identity must involve individual recognition of the past, active involvement in the present, and an awareness of complicity in both. And when Clark writes that "the hope Warren offers is tenuous, but nonetheless present" (93), we can understand that it is tenuous, in one sense, because

Warren is telling us to avoid the “mystique of collectivism” and the alienation of solipsism—not an easy feat in a modern world where man seems tethered to external, material quantifications of his being. I will venture to guess that one reason for the endurance of Warren’s works is that he realized, amid what he called “the special sickness and dehumanizing distortions of the 1960’s,” just how much was at stake with such either/or thinking—that if we didn’t learn to choose both and find the secret of contact, we would verge “toward lunacy . . . toward a repetition of the bloodiest crimes of this century” (xxviii).

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## Sweeter than Hope: A Dantean Journey to the Recognition of Complicity

*D. A. Carpenter*

In a review of the 1953 version of *Brother to Dragons* Randall Jarrell comments that

Warren's florid, massive, rather oratorical rhetoric ... its conscious echoes of Milton and Shakespeare, its unconscious echoes of Eliot and Arnold ... is sometimes miraculous, often effective and sometimes too noticeable to bear. (43)

There is no doubt that the reader of *Brother to Dragons* wades through a multiplicity of contributing sources and styles. It is, in fact, sometimes too noticeable to bear because the flood of sources, at first, makes it difficult to dive solely into the tale without taking into account what these sources add to Warren's work. There are the four influences mentioned above, which, when explored, do add a great deal to the understanding of the tale. Warren's use of blank verse echoes Milton's epic *Paradise Lost* as well as Eliot's *The Wasteland* and its vision of darkness. The dramatics of the tale is indeed Shakespearean and there are some faint echoes of *King Lear*. Among these major influences, I would also add Coleridge and Dante.

The Ancient Mariner theme is another contributing source to the tale, and a major one at that. This shouldn't be too surprising since the theme can be seen in most of Warren's work. Lilburne's act of slaughtering John is the ultimate symbol of the Ancient Mariner shooting the albatross. There are also several other smaller examples of this symbolic action, especially in part one when R.P.W. mentions Kent, the boy who shot down a goose from Canada. There is also the mythic bear, "the horrible one, gray-grizzle and does not forgive" (112), that Meriwether and his men kill. Warren's use of the Mariner theme serves to bring focus to the dark inner beast that makes man shoot the albatross, the innocent. Lilburne takes the form of the Mariner, but in a much more wrathful sense. His wife and her brother constantly refer to his eyes as glittering, just as the unsuspecting wedding guest sees the Ancient Mariner's eyes glitter, but we must also note that the various beast images in Warren's tale also have glittering eyes. The two most notable of these images are R.P.W.'s "old *obsoleta*" and Jefferson's minotaur. The similarity between Liburne's eyes and the beasts' is what makes Lilburne seem much more wrathful than the Ancient Mariner. He is not portrayed as the man, but the beast within the man that necessitates the act. This idea can also be seen in Warren's essay on Conrad, where he remarks: "Man is precariously balanced in his humanity between the black inward abyss of himself and the black outward abyss of nature" ("The Great Mirage" 55). Understanding and accepting Lilburne as part of their



own being and responsibility is the process that the characters of the tale must go through. This is where Dante's influence becomes very important in the text.

Just like Coleridge, Dante always seems to be pulling strings behind Warren's work. Dante's influence on Warren's prose can be seen most prominently in *At Heaven's Gate*, *All the King's Men*, and *Flood*. *Brother to Dragons* is no exception to this influence, as Lewis P. Simpson notes: "the tale Warren tells is not unlike a journey through secular visions of hell and purgatory toward a vision, though muted, of salvation through the self's acceptance of responsibility for history" (137). Warren's tale does indeed resemble Dante's journey. This is present in three ways. There is the Hell of the moment passed, the terrible action of Lilburne that affects all the speakers in some way. Then there is the Purgatory of memory, the contemplation of the crime and recognition of human implications. This is the part the reader witnesses. Finally, in the end, there is a vision of salvation, the human recognition of complicity and acceptance of the beast within as a part of the human condition, which, in a way, echoes Dante's Paradise. Purgatory is where we are in the tale, working toward a form of Paradise.

In *Purgatorio*, Dante has emerged from hell with his guide Virgil, leaving "behind so pitiless a sea" where he "will sing about that second realm / given the human soul to purge its sin / and grow worthy to climb to Paradise" (page 3). Dante must climb the mountain of Purgatory to ascend to Paradise, passing through the seven terraces of the mountain (*Brother to Dragons* is in seven parts), each terrace housing a specific group of sinners. After he passes through these groups, he finds himself in an Earthly Paradise, characterized as Eden, where he meets Matilda and Beatrice. Here Dante repents his own sin and Beatrice leads him to Paradise. Purgatory is where the characters of *Brother to Dragons* are. Warren notes that

All the characters come out of their private purgatory and collide; everybody comes to find out or tell something, rehearse something. ... Then there was the need to tie this to a personal note, putting the writer character in so he could participate in this process, the notion being that we are all unresolved in a way, the dead and the living. (Watkins, Hiers, and Weak 61)

The two main characters I'd like to focus on are Jefferson and R.P.W. In the case of Jefferson, we see a very good example of the sinner suffering in Purgatory, working toward ascendancy. It is very fitting that Jefferson is the first voice heard in the tale because the first terrace of Purgatory contains those who sin in pride. Pride is most certainly Jefferson's sin. In death he has become cynical about the human condition and refuses to acknowledge Lilburne as kin (both as family and as a fellow human) because of his horrible act. Richard Law comments on Jefferson's pride:

In this case Jefferson's belief in human perfectibility is also one of the most cherished and, according to Warren, dangerous and superficial of our national myths. Jefferson's moral revulsion at his nephew's crime is presented as the other face of his Enlightenment optimism, and both are projections of his self-pride. (195)

We are able to surmise that Jefferson has already spent his time in hell when he remarks: "And thus my minotaur. There at the blind / Labyrinthine turn of my personal time— / What do they call it? *Nel mezzo del cammin*—Yes, then met / The beast, in beauty masked" (pages 7-8). Here Jefferson repeats the first line of Dante's *Inferno*, which also appears in *At Heaven's Gate*. Jefferson has passed through Hell and finds himself in Purgatory, which becomes clear by his reference to another line from Dante, the same one that serves as an epigraph to *All the King's Men*: "No man so loses, by their curse's power, / eternal love, that love cannot return / so long as hope shows any green in flower" (Dante 33). We can compare this to Jefferson's remark in the beginning of the tale:

What else had I in age to cling to,  
Even in the face of knowledge?  
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. (5)

Jefferson's vision of hope has a shade of green, and he must purify that vision in order to expiate his sin of pride and regain his love of the human condition, even with its imperfectability. By the end of the tale Jefferson does accomplish this in taking Lilburne's hand in recognition that he too is part of the same community and that to find hope in the future we must remember the past. As he states:

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. (118)

Letitia and Lucy serve as purifying catalysts in this action. Throughout the tale they emphasize the need and undying nature of "Love," which through their encouragement is finally restored in Jefferson. These two women seem to be echoes of Dante's Matilda and Beatrice, who entreat Dante to confess his sin and lead him to the absolving waters of Lethe, where he is cleansed of the memory of his sin. Jefferson partakes in a similar cleansing process with the invocation of an

image of communion in his last words: “But knowledge is the most powerful cost. / It is the bitter bread. / I have eaten the bitter bread. / In joy, would end” (120). In fact, this entire scene of reconciliation seems almost ritualistic, like a church mass, with all the characters singing in unison before Jefferson calls upon the image of communion. It represents not only Jefferson’s personal salvation, but also a communal salvation. The only voice missing in this chorus is that of R.P.W. His vision of salvation has not come yet, but what is his sin?

It would be difficult and perhaps reductive to place R.P.W. in a specific group of Dante’s sinners, but it is important to observe his kinship with the character of Jefferson, as Richard Law notes:

Warren’s characterization of himself seems hardly intended as a model of sanity or all-encompassing wisdom. On the contrary, that laconic, fact-ridden, alternately shrill and mundane voice belongs to a man who stands as much in need of “redemption” as Jefferson. (195-96)

Whatever R.P.W.’s sin is, it blinds him, like Jefferson, to a true understanding of the human condition. R.P.W. may not be dead, but that does not mean that he is not taking part in the same process as the other characters while in Purgatory, for we must remember that he is also there. R.P.W., the only living character, must walk among the dead, just as Dante, the only living character in his work, must do in order to reach a vision of salvation.

It is quite clear that R.P.W. is involved in a Dantean journey. We even see him climbing a bluff in the beginning of the tale, which symbolically resembles the mountain Dante must climb. When he reaches the Lewis house ruins, he is confronted with a manifestation of Jefferson’s minotaur. The snake, “old *obsoleta*” with glimmering eyes, represents the darker side of the human condition, which frightens R.P.W. when he first looks upon it:

Well, standing there, I’d felt, I guess, the first  
Faint tremor of that natural chill, but then,  
In some deep aperture among the stones,  
I saw the eyes, their glitter in that dark,  
And suddenly the head thrust forth, and the fat, black  
Body, molten, out-flowed, as though those stones  
Bled forth earth’s inner darkness to the day—  
As though the bung had broke on that intolerable inwardness. (24)

R.P.W.’s journey is as much an inward journey as a physical one among the inhabitants of Purgatory. After his first sight of the snake, he notes the forgiveness inherent in the beast, but has yet to come to terms with it. He longs to understand this forgiveness and accept kinship to it under God. As he states later, “The catfish is in the Mississippi and / The Mississippi in the catfish and / Under the ice both

are one / With God / Would that we were!” (61). At the end of the tale R.P.W. again climbs the bluff, perhaps to face the beast that had startled him a year before. It is no longer visible when he reaches the ruins. Old *obsoleta* is nestled under the ground, no longer a hulking metaphysical tremor in the soul of R.P.W. There now seems to be an acceptance of this tremor. Interestingly, R.P.W. invokes an image of a woman who was with him on “another bluff and another river” (129) as he stands on the threshold of acceptance and salvation. This is another echo of Beatrice leading the sinner to salvation.

After R.P.W. picks up “two or three pig-nuts, with the husks yet on” (131), which remind us of Jefferson’s acorns, he turns to leave the spot forever, only keeping that landscape in his heart. He is now prepared to enter and live in the world he has only been talking about. He moves from the ideal of human complicity to the reality of it, remarking:

I crossed the evening barnlot, opened  
The sagging gate, and was prepared  
To go into the world of action and liability.  
I had long lived in the world of action and liability.  
But now I passed the gate into a world  
Sweeter than hope in that confirmation of late light. (132)

By the end of *Brother to Dragons* it can be seen that it is not the sins of the characters we should be interested in, but the common source of salvation that serves to redeem them. That source is the recognition of human complicity and love for fellow man, which is indeed sweeter than hope. Hope is what pushes you up that mountain. It’s what keeps you going until you get to that recognition that we are all part of a community, and the darker corners of dank, sooty alleyways of the community are also a part of ourselves.

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## “Birth of Love”: Robert Penn Warren’s Mystical Vision of Life’s Embedded Spirit

Joshua Gran

I discovered Robert Penn Warren’s poetic skills on the first page of his novel *All the King’s Men*. The language immediately called attention to itself, breaking out of the semantic clarity of straight narrative, pulling my soul in with its intense second-person perspective. After finding *King’s Men*, I sought out Warren’s poetry; I had to see what America’s first Poet Laureate had to offer. All I could find at a local used-book store was a well-worn copy of *Understanding Poetry*, by Warren and Cleanth Brooks, an essential text for any emerging formalist. Warren wrote about Eliot, Browning, and Hopkins with such love and adoration that I felt I had found a guiding voice for my own form of “out-dated” criticism. Towards the end of the book is a section entitled “Representative Poems of Our Time.” Warren, with the utmost humility, had to select one of his own poems from his massive collection to stand alongside Ammons, Ashberry, Merrill, Creely, Rich, and others. He selected “Birth of Love.” The poem was originally published in the collection *Or Else*: “... the directions for reading this volume are playfully handed over to the reader, who must decide: is it a six-year collection of diverse poems now collected for the first time? Or is it a single poem conceived as a sequence? It is both” (Justus 97). Here we will examine “Birth of Love” as a self-contained declaration, a well-wrought urn.

The poem opens, “Season late, day late, sun just down” (line 1). Note the indistinct quality of the occasion’s place in time; the situation is not situated. The statement lacks definite articles and verbs; it is vague because Warren does not care to restrict himself to a season or a day. What if he had said, Spring? To what distant imaginative realms would we have had to travel to understand the metaphoric power of the imagery? Specifics would have decreased the power of the poetry. Warren is more Steinian, exposing essential cores embedded in the commonplace. He evades any obvious metaphors, seeking the similitude of the old, first scene, when love was born. But with a Stravinskyite rhythmic jolt, we are undoubtedly thrust into our modern world, relating the sky to “Cold gunmetal” (2). The metaphor is frightening and exact, like Eliot’s *etherised patient*. The spondee “cold gun-” dazes the reader. But there is love’s correlative there in the sky as well, battling the precision of the gunmetal with the tenderness of the rose’s color—a cleansing, animated trope, announcing the image of the nameless woman. The poet has cleverly shifted from poetic metaphor to poetic source. The woman is the wash of live rose.

When she moves, the gunmetal reflection in the water dissolves into some-

thing purer, the fine light of “shivering splinters of silver” (4); mere nature fractures next to her energy on the momentary eve of this tremendous new power. Another spondee: “raw grass” (5). Of course, the grass is “raw” under her ripened feet. With the birth of love, she will no longer be part of the earth’s decay.

“Rises” stands as line five’s mighty head, separated from the subject, “she,” by two lines of parenthetical commentary. Warren isolates the verb, stressing how the woman’s beauty encourages ascension and growth. Her nakedness offers renewal because it is no longer base, but noble, married to the transcendental alchemy of love. It is what Baudelaire calls the “incorporation of candor into lust,” an untainted nudity (“Jewels” 15).

Against the dark spruces, the woman’s light stands in stark contrast, like Blake’s *tyger*, burning bright in the forests of the night, dripping “fluent” silver. She is smooth, confident, the wash of live rose amidst the putrefying, “new-curdling night” (6).

The poem continues:

The man,

Some ten strokes out, but now hanging  
Motionless in the gunmetal water, feet  
Cold with the coldness of depth. (8-11)

Notice how Warren had eaten up his Hemingway. “Some ten strokes”—what essential language, with brevity and precision. “Motionless” in the “water,” holding steady like the Hemingway hero, an image to be seen. Note the repetition and the accentuation, pounding in the coldness of the cold within the depths of earth, feeling the icy chill of death. But this water is also cleansing, washing history away, and purging the man of his sardonic possession, his past. Let us examine the statement “all / History dissolving from him” (11-12). The accents lie on “all,” the first syllable of “history,” the middle syllable of “dissolving,” and “him”. So we have *all*, *his*, *solve*, and *him*. Nothing seems to matter at this point except for the force that surges through the scene, *solving* the man, offering him ultimate answers. And for the first time, the man “sees”; the doorway to his soul has been opened by her radiance and the power between them.

As the woman emerges from the water, she is tossed by “the abrupt and unsustainable element of air” (15). The air is a symbol of what Warren calls in line eighteen, “suddenly perceived grace,” God’s love, unexpected and uninvited. It makes the woman “sway, lean, grapple the pond-bank” (16). Warren’s verbs are loaded with significance. Not only is the woman physically swaying, but also her motion is swaying the onlooker, impressing him with inspiration. She is leaning over, but *lean* can also mean the absence of superfluous flesh: there is nothing unessential on her; her beauty is whole. She grabs the bank of the pond, though

*grapple* can also mean to wrestle; the woman seeks to soar above the earth that pulls her down: she seeks release from time and death. As she bends over, her breasts hang with a “pure curve,” and her buttocks mimic the curvature of the moon. The reader can envision the perfect bend in her body, the precision of her fleshy sweep. Her form is a “swelling unity” (20), a bursting accord of “silver... and glimmer,” tropes for purity and life (21).

As the woman stands up, the speaker says: “she is herself, whatever / Self she may be” (22-23). The woman is unified: whatever divisions there were within her, between body and soul, between desire and principles, are no longer. There is a little playfulness in this statement. Warren is taking a humorous stab at contemporary beliefs that the self is irreconcilably divided, but with the spirit of grace and love in the air there is no discord, only harmony. As she towels herself off, she gazes toward the sky, “where / The over-wash of rose color now fails” (25-26). What was more than just a taint in the sky has left, but more specifically *failed*, in that the metaphor stopped short of achieving the power of what it approximated. Perhaps this is what Warren means by “she is herself.” She is the nucleus of the scene. Next to her, the color must fail, for it is not truth but poetry, a trope upon the actuality of her reality, her beauty, her “self,” superb in its wholeness.

Warren continues:

The body,

Profiled against the darkness of spruces, seems  
To draw to itself, and condense in its whiteness, what light  
In the sky yet lingers or, from  
The metallic and abstract severity of water, lifts. (29-33)

The woman’s body is once again silhouetted against the darkness of the spruces. One has to wonder what lurks in that darkness; behind the woman lies dimness, obscurity, and blindness. But it is that dominant black that gives the woman her form, and to the onlooker, a perceived magnetic attraction with all of the light, both what remains in the sky and what is reflected and abstracted in the glossy water. Her light is not metallic, gunmetal, or conceptual, but a tangible white, what Warren aptly describes as *condensed*. Once again Warren has presented the reader with a loaded word, *condense*, commonly employed to signify intensity. But here the word also suggests an alternative meaning: *to epitomize*. The woman embodies the revelatory whiteness; perhaps now we can further understand why the wash of live rose has failed: its red hues were a fraction of the woman’s concentrated radiance. It is also important to note the rising rhythms of line 31, “To draw to itself”—an iamb followed by an anapest, the language prodding forward; then “and condense in its whiteness,” more rising metrics leading toward the emphatic, “what light,” making the reader pause. Again take notice of Warren’s clandestine



emphases, the accented *draw*, *self*, *dense*, and *white*. The poetry makes perfect sense structurally; the importance is felt prior to cognition, a formal poetic elegance.

As the woman continues to stare at the sky, her towel hangs down, creating an image of a stalk, also white, “from which the face flowers gravely toward the high sky” (35). The woman is in bloom, poetically in contrast to the dark spruces, a coniferous tree that retains its foliage year-round. Her blossoming offers the chance for renewal, giving the image its seriousness. Her skyward gaze is budding with possibility. She is blooming against the rigid monotony of the dark spruces. At this regenerative summit, the speaker interjects:

This moment is non-sequential and absolute, and admits  
Of no definition, for it  
Subsumes all other, and sequential, moments, by which  
Definition might be possible. (36-39)

The poet has stopped where it is appropriate to stop. Like Dante looking to the side when encountering the dazzling emanations of God’s throne, the poem’s narrator cannot contain the vision in words, for the approximations of language only degrade the brilliance of the scene’s actuality; the birth of love is “absolute.” John Burt, in his excellent book-length study, *Robert Penn Warren and American Idealism*, writes:

Warren’s characteristic poetic method, as we have seen, is a simultaneous evasion and experience of primary truth. Warren attempts, through his alternations of confrontation and retreat, to apprehend a possessing truth without, in turn, becoming possessed by it. . . . The large-scale movement of approach and withdrawal. . . . Those objects which draw and transfix the speaker’s mind naturally embody something for which the speaker does not have other adequate language. (112)

The poet cannot discuss what evades conceptualization, cannot situate temporally what does not adhere to time. “Moments” are “sequential”; love is eternal, as vast as the “high sky.”

Warren writes, “The woman / Face yet raised, wraps / With a motion as though standing in sleep, / The towel about her body” (39-42). The word *raised* describes her skyward gaze, but also indicates improvement and growth, harking back to the image of the human flower. “Standing in sleep” is a metrical mirror, a trochee followed by an iamb. “Standing” falls, while “in sleep” rises, reminding the reader of the woman’s ethereal qualities, as well as her reconciliatory paradox. Her beauty is so pure that any motion seems dreamy, like a statue come alive. Holding the towel below her breasts, she is “hieratic as lost Egypt.” Hieratic script was a cursive form of Egyptian hieroglyphics that retained its use in sacred circles when the language was formally replaced by demotic script (“Hieratic Script”). Like the old characters, the woman metaphorically refers to old values, and speaks

of sacred truths.

The woman “Moves up the path that, stair-steep, winds / Into the clamber and tangle of growth” (44-45). The language is concerned with ascension. The woman moves up a sheer trail. Warren uses the verb *clamber* as a noun, placing it next to *tangle*, emphasizing the dense and difficult forest that love can transcend. The poetry is thoroughly Dantesque; the growth is reminiscent of the entrance to Hell’s grueling path. The woman’s whiteness rises out of it; the darkness remains low, and the man watches the scene’s light fade, “Suspended in his darkling medium” (48). *Darkling* is an exquisite, antique word, reminiscent of Keats’s nightingale: “Darkling I listen; and, for many a time / I have been half in love with easeful death” (51-52). The woman’s beauty is so intense it verges on destroying the man; for fear of its loss, of incompleteness, consumes him. He wishes to guard her with a strength that he knows could never match her eminence, nor overpower the governing force of nature, “Inclemency of sky or slur of the world’s weather” (54).

The anguish of the beautiful woman’s absence consumes the man’s heart, but “Above / Height of the spruce-night and heave of the far mountain, he sees / The first star pulse into being. It gleams there” (56-58). The day is gone, but the new star is a reminder of what has left, sharing the woman’s glimmer. Like the beacon announcing the messiah’s coming, love’s birth has left its mark. Does it promise return? Along with the poem’s narrator, we cannot be sure what pledge it makes. Like life, its significance lies in individual choice. But the reader can be sure that the star, as a trope for the woman’s pure beauty, will act as a guide, offering recollections of the redemptive, creative scene that, through Warren’s artistic strength, we, the readers, have had the privilege of witnessing. “Birth of Love” has ascended to the summit of poetry, closer to truth in an Augustinian sense; it is the gospel according to Warren, his mystical vision of life’s embedded spirit.

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Paths of Sin: A Study of the Human Condition in Robert  
Penn Warren's "Blackberry Winter"

*Noah Simon Jampol*

Robert Penn Warren once stated, "the capacity for violence . . . is always there under the surface of southern life" (Blotner 418). Identifying a deep truth of the human condition, Warren is an author well aware of the relationship between man and sin. Themes of sin and evil can be well documented throughout the works of Warren, as he understands the permanence and significance of transgression inherent to the human condition. In what may well be his best-known and certainly most-anthologized short story, "Blackberry Winter," original sin takes the center of Warren's attention, with the closing line of this story showing his recognition of the "violent" nature within all men. Deeper, it is the recognition of original sin and an admission of the shared transgression that is the legacy to all men, crossing state lines, generations, and other perceived boundaries. "Blackberry Winter" artfully addresses the question of inner evil as it probes man's relationship with sin.

The last line of "Blackberry Winter" has served as a point of conflict for countless critical analyses. Unfortunately, some critics (see Dietrich and Tucker) approach the text from the position of the uninitiated, thus labeling the conclusion "inorganic" or "unfulfilled" and thereby failing to recognize the tight textual drive which brings Warren's story to a logical and fulfilling conclusion. As a bit of new criticism would quickly reveal, the last line recapitulates the brilliantly structured and executed progress of the protagonist. Seth's journey to adulthood and his recognition of original sin are encapsulated in the story's closing line. Additionally, we must consider the role that the Bible played in Warren's creative lens. Few texts were closer to Warren as a writer than the Bible, lending a new optimistic significance to the "gully-washer" of a flood that predates the action of the story.

A consistent character-driven thematic development can be documented through Seth's progress as he comes to understand the dynamic of good and evil. From the two dichotomous pairs of shoes, to Delle's trash, Jebb's slap, parental deaths, and ultimately the tramp, the text offers a clear path leading to Seth's final realization. Seth comes to understand that he is and always has been living in the world after the fall. Therefore, his life must be marked by sin, the sin embodied almost mythically by the tramp, whom, as he acknowledges in the story's final sentence, he has followed all the years of his adult life.

Seth begins much like all men, marveling, awestruck with what Warren calls "the childhood feeling of betrayal when early summer gets turned upside-down, and all its promises are revoked by the cold-spell, the gully-washer" ("Recollection"

640). This sense of betrayal echoes man's innocence before a deeper understanding of the necessity for sin. After eating from the tree of knowledge, man was expelled from the Garden of Eden and his pure state. Despite the sin being an act of man and a product of free will, the uninitiated feel betrayed by this expulsion, unable to view it as requisite punishment for man's fall. An understanding of redemption has not yet been attained as man—or Seth in the case of Warren's text—sets out to understand his relationship to God and other men.

Evidence for the orientation of Seth's character comes in the form of his other childhood observations. He reflects how “what you remember seems forever ... everything is important and stands big” (61). By providing the reader with Seth's other conceptions of reality, Warren makes his readers immediately aware of the protagonist's childhood naiveté and youthful perspective. At this point Seth views reality in very clear and well-defined terms, making future violations of these norms all the more dramatic.

Early on, Warren hints at a deeper darkness within what appears to be an innocent country boy. The character is a yearner, even if he is unable to identify a label for his state. The boy is driven down to “see what the storm had done ... down to the creek to see the flood” (63). Further evidence of this latent drive towards a more complete understanding of life is catalogued when Seth observes “the red clay mud ... [that] splashed up over his white chest and looked exciting, like blood” (67). Enticed by the violent image, the reader sees that Seth is yearning for a more comprehensive understanding of the human disposition. The simile comparing the mud to blood triggers a slew of destructive images in the mind. Furthermore, by describing this image as “exciting” Warren is identifying the power of the scene on Seth's consciousness. This drive to witness the destruction strikes a chord that many readers can immediately identify with: the twist of the neck to catch a glimpse of a passing car wreck or wide-mouthed marveling at the awesome destruction of a house fire. In this sense, an understanding of evil and destruction is being sought; the innocence of a garden state is subconsciously sensed as inadequate, as Seth feels pulled down to see the destruction following the flood.

The boy must begin to think about evil in more concrete terms when the tramp arrives at his father's farm. Warren envisioned this wanderer as a “city bum turned country tramp, suspicious, resentful ... bringing his own brand of violence into a world ... a creature altogether lost and pitiful, a dim image of what, in one perspective, our human condition is” (“Recollection” 640). When reading Warren's reflection, it seems apparent that Seth's conception of the human condition is going to be altered. The polarity between good and evil is going to be challenged. Thereby the tramp occupies a complex role beyond an archetypal embodiment of evil, representing a human consumed by sin.

The bum's urban origins contribute to the initial role he plays in Seth's

revelation. The tramp's entrance into Seth's world is clearly a violation of his expectations, as the boy reflects: "There was no place for him to have come from, and there was no reason for him to come where he was coming, toward our house" (66). The wayward vagrant is completely out of sync with the normalcy and landscape of Seth's world. As unnatural as the blackberry winter chill itself, the tramp embodies new experience coming to change Seth. More than just a seasonal betrayal, the change that Seth will undergo will be characterized by a dramatic alteration in his world-concept. Both stimuli, the seasonal change and tramp, are uncomfortable and jarring, refusing to be ignored as they interfere with former idealistic conceptions of what seasons or men "should" be.

When the tramp comes into the house, Seth's conception of what the man represents is further complicated, mirroring the reader's own confusion as to what the vagrant will mean for the narrative and characters. The tramp wears clothes fit for the city, not the country, and Seth is quick to note "the [tramp's] perfectly unmemorable face" (69). The overall appearance of the tramp is not that of some malignant monster, prowling the countryside, but rather one of an out-of-place stranger. What is most disturbing about the tramp is his disruption of rural normalcy. It is in this same description that Warren offers the reader a clear clue as to what the tramp might mean for Seth. The boy observes of the tramp: "there was a scar, not very old, there on the lower lip" (69). A symbol for world experience and initiation, the scar clues the reader in to the tramp's potential role. Like the mark the Green Knight makes on Gawain's neck, the scar is the mark of the initiate. Marking life experience, knowledge and change, the scar shines great light onto what will be Seth's final recognition. Not a clear monster, but perhaps a man out of place, the tramp symbolizes an impending and unavoidable change that makes Seth uncomfortable.

Seth further questions his conception of innocence when he is shocked to see "the drainage water had washed a lot of trash and filth out from under Dellie's house ... the ground was not clean anymore" (78). Just as the tramp posed a complicated figure of evil, Dellie embodies a varied conception of good or purity. However, what makes this image such a powerful impetus for Seth's realization is the element of surprise. Seth remarks: "It was worse, as a matter of fact, because it was a surprise. I had never thought of all that filth being under Dellie's house" (78-79). Just as Seth had not expected a tramp to come out of the nearby woods and just as the tramp's clothing shocked Seth's sense of expectation, Dellie's house violates what had been known. Dellie's family had held a pure status in Seth's mind. In viewing this exposed trash, Seth's old understanding of the dichotomy between purity and sin will no longer suffice.

And when Dellie slaps Jebb, the former clarity of the mother's role is inverted. Warren reflects: "beneath mutual kindness and regard some dark, tragic, unresolved something lurked. And with that scene with Dellie, I felt I was fore-

casting the role of the tramp in the story” (“Recollection” 642). The link between the slap and the tramp is clear in Warren’s reflection, with both serving as catalysts for Seth’s eventual recognition of his own internal darkness.

Before leaving the farm, the tramp spits and stands face to face with Seth’s father. Seth’s world view is most clearly articulated in the subsequent contrasting description of the two men’s boots. The two men face each other as Seth notes the position of his “father’s strong cowhide boots, with the brass eyelets and the leather thongs, heavy boots splashed with good red mud and set solid on the bricks” (85). Seth still sees his father as the embodiment of all benevolence and strength. This description is set in opposition to the details of the tramp’s boots, consisting of “pointed toe, broken, black shoes, on which the mud looked so sad and out of place” (85). The juxtaposition of the infallible and noble father to the pitiful tramp exemplifies Seth’s dichotomous world-orientation. Two different realities still exist in the young boy’s mind: the world of the natural and benevolent as embodied by his father versus the unnatural and urban evil found in the tramp; no sin in the father and no good in the tramp. It is only when reflecting on the events of the story thirty-five years later that Seth can begin to see the complexity of human experience.

The tramp leaves the farm, and what was believed to be a literal embodiment of evil leaves along with him. However, this external and idealized version of evil is ultimately false, as misfortune and injustice find their way into the lives of those around Seth. His father dies while doing farm work, and the subsequent death of his mother, overcome by grief, underscores the complex reality of evil and misfortune. The reader understands that the potential for harm did not leave the farm that day with the tramp; rather, it always was and continued to be a reality for all the characters of the story. Seemingly benevolent and pure characters still find cruel ends. These deaths and the life of crime that Little Jebb, Seth’s childhood friend, found represent challenges to Seth’s spirituality.

The darkness behind the eyes of Seth and his progress as a human being come to a resolution in the final lines of the story. As the tramp is leaving the family’s farm, he threatens: “‘Stop following me. You don’t stop following me and I cut yore throat you little son-of-a-bitch.’ That is what he said, for me not to follow him. But I did follow him, all the years” (87). The threat on Seth’s life and request for him to stop following do nothing to alter what the next thirty-five years of his life comprise. Rather, with the benefit of time and experience, the adult Seth can appreciate the common ground between himself and the tramp. Therefore, despite some surface ambiguity, the conclusion of Warren’s story is a hopeful one, marked by personal and spiritual growth.

The resolution of the story is optimistic. Warren notes that Seth is ultimately “more precious for no longer being innocent” (“Recollection” 642). Furthermore, Warren remarks: “I hope that I might have been able to follow him anyway, in the

way the boy in the story does" (643). In light of this comment by Warren, the conclusion must be read as optimistic, hopeful, and devoid of damnation or dread. Seth withstood the challenges to his faith in the duality of good and evil, managing to see past the abstracted or idealized polarities of his youthful conceptions of human experience. Good and evil have merged for this older Seth, and since that day on the farm, he has led a life conscious of this complex relationship between good and evil and no longer rejecting the darker half.

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## Bridging the “Continental” to the Continent: Complicity and the “Frozen Moment” in Warren and Hemingway

James Stamant

The need for man to consciously connect with others may stem from our deeply held knowledge that we are already truly connected to each other in a somewhat unconscious way. We may not realize how large this connection is, expanding through all people in all time, but Robert Penn Warren helps to illuminate this idea in his writing. His efforts are not unlike those of other Southern writers such as William Faulkner and Elizabeth Madox Roberts, but they are also similar to the efforts of Ernest Hemingway. Warren also understood the importance of time; he focuses on the past in *All the King's Men* when Jack Burden tries “to tell [Anne Stanton] how if you could not accept the past and its burden there was no future, for without one there cannot be the other” (435). This idea is echoed throughout much of Warren’s work, including a great deal of his poetry. In “How to Tell a Love Story” Warren writes about the inability to tell a story “when Time truly began” (line 18), noting that “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” (8-11). My purpose in this essay is to examine Warren and Hemingway through the lenses of complicity and time to show how these themes tie Warren’s *Flood* together with Hemingway’s *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.

The common thread of complicity, especially made through a shared connection to the land, is made in both books before the reader even arrives at the first page of text. Hemingway utilizes the words of John Donne not only in his title, but also in his epigraph: “No man is an *Iland*, intire of it selfe; every man is a piece of the *Continent* . . . any mans *death* diminishes *me*, because I am involved in *Mankinde*.” There is a clear message sent to Hemingway’s reader as he or she begins this novel, the idea of our complicity through our simple existence, our time on this earth. Warren also explores this idea in his epigraph to *Flood* with lines from the Book of Amos: “And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God.” In case Warren’s readers miss this important message, as some may not understand the relevance of epigraphs, he restates the passage at the beginning of Chapter Seven, coming out of the mouth of Yasha Jones, one of the most thoughtful and trustworthy voices in the novel. While the flooding of Fiddlersburg will uproot the characters in *Flood*, they must realize that the impending change in the physical landscape, and the subsequent change in the townspeople’s location, does not change their place in humanity. As Bradwell has discovered, a changing of geography does not change the person or solve one’s problems. His



time spent out in the West does not change the past, the events that occurred in Fiddlersburg, and he can only truly move on when he has accepted those events from the past. In the end, literally on the last page of the novel, Brad realizes that “*There is no country but the heart*” (440). This line may be interpreted in more than one way, but it seems reasonable to assert that some kind of association with a shared experience of humanity is implied here, through our connection to each other in something that runs deeper than town lines—our hearts. *For Whom the Bell Tolls* is book-ended with an image of Robert Jordan lying on the ground, symbolically planting himself in another country and making a connection between the country and the heart. The closing line of that novel directly connects the place to Robert Jordan’s heart as he prepares for his death and a literal planting into the ground: “He could feel his heart beating against the pine needle floor of the forest” (471).

*For Whom the Bell Tolls* is not the first work in which Hemingway explores complicity. H. R. Stoneback makes the connection between *A Farewell to Arms* and Warren in regard to this concept: “Frederic Henry learns about the paradoxes of the human condition, as neatly summarized (in another context) by Robert Penn Warren: ‘The recognition of complicity is the beginning of innocence / . . . / All else is surrogate of hope and destitution of spirit.’ . . . If we see that Frederic has experienced this ‘death of the self’ and has achieved true selfhood then we may see all the rest of it” (“Lovers’ Sonnets” 70-71). In *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Hemingway is simply continuing to explore the theme of complicity that he began examining in *A Farewell to Arms*.

Complicity is further examined in *Flood* through the characters’ statements about isolation and separation. The prison, a place of seclusion, will be further isolated after the town of Fiddlersburg is flooded; it will become an island, making a connection to Donne’s “Meditation” and thus *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. An examination of solitary confinement and complicity is given to the reader toward the end of *Flood*, conveyed through Calvin: “In solitary you decide, well, I’ll just shut my eyes, for only what you can think can truly exist. But then you shut your eyes and that thing that was unthinkable—it really does come true. . . . You realize in that flash that there is no *you* except in relation to all that unthinkableness that the world is” (412). Calvin moves past a solipsistic view to make a substantial revelation in regard to his own complicity. It is in the extreme isolation of the place that will become an island that Calvin realizes the truth of John Donne’s words.

The connection between *Flood* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* is further strengthened by the two novels’ focus on time. Both novels deal with ideas of sin, grace, and complicity while operating under an extreme time constraint. In *Flood*, there is a need to reach certain understandings before the clock runs out and the town is submerged by water. *For Whom the Bell Tolls* operates under a similar time constraint; the novel takes place over the course of a few days and centers

around Robert Jordan preparing for the moment of the blowing of a bridge. As in *Flood*, there is a countdown to an event of extreme significance and there is pressure to complete certain objectives before that time.

The idea of “frozen Time” also exists in both novels. There is an attempt to catch a moment and freeze it, if only temporarily. Warren discusses frozen moments of time in literature (perhaps Eliot’s *Four Quartets* is in the back of Warren’s mind here), as well as Hemingway’s use of time, in an interview he gave to Ralph Ellison in 1956 (Blotner 350), after he had begun working on *Flood*:

That’s the frozen moment. . . . Some of these moments harden up an event, give it its meaning by holding it fixed. Time fluid versus time fixed. . . . Take a look at Hemingway; there’s no time in Hemingway, there are only moments in themselves, moments of action. . . . Everything is outside of the time process. . . . Those frozen moments are Faulkner’s game. Hemingway has a different game. (Watkins and Heirs 39)

I was somewhat troubled by Warren’s comments on Hemingway at first, but it is also important to note that Warren continued in the interview to state that he “was in no sense making an invidious comparison between [Faulkner and Hemingway]—or between their special uses of time” (41). Warren admits that Hemingway uses time, and I believe that this usage is not always so different from the way that Warren and Faulkner use time. This idea is worth considering, especially with *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, a novel that Allen Josephs has declared as “completely time-obsessed” (134). There seems to be an emphasis in this novel on time, timelessness, and history, just as in much of Warren’s work.

The existence of a focus on time in *Flood* may be obvious. Personal histories prove important; Bradwell’s past is important to Yasha because Bradwell has lived in Fiddlersburg, and has written so well about the town. But personal history is important for Robert Jordan in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* also. Jordan must convince men to trust him quickly, and his ability to gain this trust is aided by his own past, the ten years spent in Spain, “traveling in it, on foot, in third-class carriages, by bus, on horse- and mule-back and in trucks” (248). His history allows him an intimate knowledge of the land that gives him legitimacy with the soldiers, men who are “only really loyal to [their] village in the end” (135). Jordan’s history is not the only important aspect of the past that plays a role in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Pilar’s tale of the slaughtering of the Fascists in her hometown is a powerful and essential piece of the novel that comments on the history of the revolution. Hemingway uses Pilar’s tale to demonstrate how a person should conduct oneself when faced with dire circumstances. The demonstration comes through the actions of the only priest presented to the reader in the novel. Although the priest’s life is about to end in a violent manner, he continues to perform his duties, helping the other condemned men to prepare their souls for their time of judgment.

H. R. Stonbeck writes that Pilar's telling of this story shows that she "recognizes the great evil done, knows that they have all touched the web of complicity and that the consequences will reverberate infinitely" ("The Priest" 109).

While issues of history, in relation to time, are evident in both *Flood* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, perhaps a stronger connection between the novels is made through the idea of frozen time that is mentioned earlier in this essay. In *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, the love affair between Robert and Maria highlights the importance of acting in the present. Robert and Maria achieve the frozen-time moment, described by Jordan as a "passage which lead to nowhere, . . . and time absolutely still and they were both there, time having stopped" (159). In *Flood*, Yasha Jones yearns for the "human moment in the midst of the land" and "the preciousness of that moment" (41). Obviously, even if he succeeds in grasping such a moment, he will not be able to hold onto it. Time continues to move, no matter how much we want it to freeze. Still, Fiddlersburg is a strange town, "the place where God just forgot to wind his watch," according to Blanding Cottshell (48), where the courthouse clock "has stood at eight thirty-five for a hell of a long time" (48). Later in the novel, Yasha and Brad unexpectedly meet up at what Brad calls the "spiritual center of town," the base of the Confederate monument. Not only does the monument, as something that commemorates history, evoke the importance of the past, but it is also a vision of arrested motion, frozen time. Yasha continues to sit at the base of the statue after Brad departs, telling himself that he is sitting there "in the stillness of joy" (264). The monument relates to the town and its inability to escape into the future. A reader of Warren knows that the townspeople cannot move forward until they have accepted the past; for many in Fiddlersburg, this means coming to terms with the events surrounding Calvin's murder of the Tuttle boy. The most direct treatment of these events occurs in the section of *Flood* that specifically references *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and it would be impossible to examine the connections between these two books if a reader did not look closely at this particular passage.

Brad begins reading *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and thinks how "everything was the cause of everything" (307). Brad's comment on the interconnectedness of things is expected; however, the passage also possesses a heavy cognizance of time: "He held out until 2:00 P.M.," "By dinner, at seven o'clock, Brad had read one hundred and eighty-five pages"; "He read until three-thirty in the morning; . . . slept till eight-thirty"; "He came down at two-thirty to eat something" (307-08). The heavy emphasis on the recognition of time points the reader to the importance of time in the book that Brad is reading, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. After finishing the book, Brad lies still and thinks of the coming evening, dreading the impending drinks, supper, and *bridge* game on the screened porch. Quite correctly, Brad's reflection on *For Whom the Bell Tolls* bridges to a section dealing with the events that affect everything else in the novel. These events begin with Brad and Lettice's

entertaining of Maggie, Frog-Eye, and the Tuttle boy. Brad plays “The Continental” over and over and Maggie remembers: “It seemed that all this was going to go on forever. Or rather, it seemed that it didn’t have anything to do with time passing, for there was nothing but that same record over and over, saying ‘The Continental—the Continental’” (317), another allusion to Hemingway’s epigraph and the *continent* that John Donne claims we are all a piece of in his “Meditation.” The record begins to skip, and it is as if time refuses to move forward at this point; the action freezes. The Tuttle boy breaks time free from its holding pattern with “a sound like a painful, breathed-out groan,” and it “was as though something had given way” (319). This moment is not the precious moment that Yasha Jones yearns for. The reader is given a contrast to “the stillness of joy” that Yasha mentions (263), and the joy that Lettice claims to experience after her conversion to Catholicism when she prays to “know the *nowness* of God’s will” (432). Here, there is an implication that while we cannot stop time, we need to be still, perhaps to listen for a response to our prayer to know God’s *nowness*. Lettice and Yasha both see a connection between stillness, *nowness*, and joy. The central event that these characters must accept to move forward, or perhaps to find stillness/*nowness*, is introduced by a passage that references *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, a novel that is about making connections, about a bridge, about complicity, and about the nature of time and timelessness.

While both novels focus on, and use, the past to show the importance of history, the two books also focus on the present, the time that we are currently living in and can act in to affect the future. I do not believe that Hemingway denies the past in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, but he does focus on moments in the present. In the *la gloria* passage, the word “now” is uttered in Robert’s mind over forty times in one paragraph (379). In the end, it is the “now” that is most important to the characters in *Flood*. After accepting the past, the characters will face their present lives, moving forward after moving away from Fiddlersburg. We do not know how we will handle the present, but we can hope that we will do the right things, improve on our pasts, and continuously become something better; as William Bedford Clark comments on Warren as a mature writer: “[he] came to regard living in the world as less a state of being than a continuous process of becoming” (8). Blanding Cottshill correctly states the reality of our continuous choosing when he responds to Brad’s question about whether he would have gone down to the black church: “You never know till the time comes” (425). And none of us do know what choices we will make until we are faced with those choices. But perhaps we must yearn to “know the *nowness*” if we are to experience the “stillness of joy,” or what Eliot writes in “Burnt Norton”: “the still point of the turning world” (64). Robert Jordan and Maria seem to know the secret that goes beyond simply living in the moment and approaches the silence of happiness, the stillness of joy, *la gloria*. Prayer and yearning (in some form) factor into both of these novels, as

does a recognition of complicity and an understanding of time (past, present, and timelessness). It may be difficult to verbalize the connection between these fundamental aspects of life, but a yearning to “know the nowness” might help us to understand the joy that can be grasped, if only for a moment, and the innocence that begins with a recognition of our own complicity.

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## Cleansing Waters of the Flood: Understanding That Our Lives Are Blessed in Robert Penn Warren's *Flood*

Goretti Vianney-Benca

In many of his works, Robert Penn Warren offers his readers a moral lesson that seems to be rooted in a Christian sensibility that is not always understood by his readers or critics. Repeatedly we find in his works variations of his famous spider web imagery with its connotations of human communion and interconnectedness. Warren's vision of complicity is clear. We must be responsible for our actions and for the consequences of our actions. This is the lesson that allows many of Warren's characters to rise above their circumstances to a possible redemption. This theme is found again in one of Warren's greatest literary works, *Flood*, a story about a successful Hollywood screenplay writer who has been hiding for twenty years from his past transgressions. Brad Tolliver has been unable to face the reality of his world and the spiraling effects of one fateful evening for himself, his sister, his ex-wife, and his brother-in-law.

*Flood* contains a "metaphysical dimension" that is difficult to detect for some readers because it takes the understanding of complicity to another theological level. Although it is important to accept responsibility for the sins that we have committed, we must also know "that the lives we lived are blessed" (*Flood* 81). This is the core of the entire novel. However, this fundamental statement is not easily comprehended. It is rather "difficult to paraphrase adequately the exact nature of that blessedness ... some feel it powerfully, ... like Yasha Jones, ... [while] others like Brad Tolliver, ... can not feel it at all" (Longley 171). John Lewis Longley, Jr. explains in his essay "When All is Said and Done: Warren's *Flood*":

[Warren's] method ... ultimately [is] to show how all our choices or rejections flow from a basic theological awareness or lack of it. The novel is infused with a powerful and desolate sense of alienation, but in every case that aloneness is what the [character] has earned by his choice between flesh and spirit, the self and other, and the self and God. (170)

According to *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, the term "blessed" is usually used as an "official Church title conferred on one at the pronouncement of the judgment of beatification" (77). In other words, the term "blessed" is used to talk about a life of virtue or one who lives in the "happiness of heaven." To truly know that our lives are blessed suggests that we are connected to those around us *and* to God. If we choose to alienate those around us, then by extension, we are alienating God from our lives. According to Catholic doctrine, when we separate ourselves from God,

we experience a spiritual dryness that causes us to be unable to experience full communion. In short, this separation is the definitive *aloneness*, for without God we are left with nothing (*Catechism* 655). Brother Potts, the venerable preacher of the town, reminds us in his poem for the farewell ceremony for Fiddlersburg that it is the blessings that come from God that are important and what makes life significant, not the regret and envy that he hopes will be drowned by the waters of the flood. So, perhaps the knowing “that the lives we lived are blessed” is knowing that although our lives on Earth will be filled with times of hardship, suffering, and loss, we should ultimately pray for the strength and courage to move beyond all of that and maintain lives filled with joy, blessed by the grace of God, and for spiritually prosperity not just material success.

With this in mind, it is no real coincidence that the Hollywood producer, Yasha Jones, finds a connection with Brother Potts. Yasha, like the preacher, understands that there is something more important in life that is outside of ourselves. He has reached a certain level of blessedness because he has seen pain and sorrow through the death of his wife, but has chosen to recognize that his life is full of good instead of wallowing in what has happened in the past. This blessedness is at the crux of a spiritual growth or a complete transcendence, as we will see in Maggie Fiddler, Calvin Fiddler, Lettice Poindexter, and finally in the main protagonist, Brad Tolliver.

Maggie Fiddler, Brad’s sister, is an unselfish and caring woman from the outset of the novel. Although it is often assumed that Maggie was raped by Alfred Tuttle, it should be noted that she accepts guilt for what took place in the bushes the night of the party: “. . . and in the middle of all my guiltiness . . . I began to get the feeling that everybody was caught in some sort of web . . . the crazy tied-togetherness of things” (*Flood* 330-32). However, it is only when she finally lets go of the past and moves on with Yasha that she is able to rise above her life in Fiddlersburg. She realizes happiness in true love and looks forward to a new life with her new husband and child. If we return to Longley’s explanation, we see that Maggie goes through a period of alienation because of the choice she made between herself and another person, but now she is transcending that by accepting her part of the sin.

Maggie’s choice is the preceding link to Calvin’s murder of Tuttle in the chain of events that underlies the story of a town that will soon be flooded due to the closing of the TVA dam’s floodgates. It may seem at first that Cal’s reaction is that of a loving husband who desires to avenge his wife’s honor. In reality, Cal is incensed that his own reputation is blemished. It is selfishness that drives his actions. Cal is able to transcend his self-centeredness only after he accidentally shoots Brad and is placed in solitary confinement: “Now in solitary, you begin by thinking you can detach yourself. That there is, somehow, a you different from, and above, that thing that they have put into solitary” (411). But then he “realize[s]

... that there is no you except in relation to all that unthinkableness that the world is. And you yourself are” (411). It is a paradox that is at the root of Roman Catholicism. Catholic doctrine teaches us that we must accept a separation of our corporal self from our spiritual self in order to be rewarded in Heaven (*Catechism* 262). Although he does not come to a full spiritual redemption, Cal finally understands that the hope of something greater is not found within ourselves, but it is rather “the possibility of something” outside of ourselves that we will find when we stop being wrapped up in our “own innards” (413).

As Maggie and Cal are able to transcend the sins of their past on a more secular level, it is Lettice Poindexter, Brad’s ex-wife, who is truly converted and comes to a full understanding of what it means to know “that the lives we lived are blessed.” She is the one who assumes responsibility first and tries to explain to Brad: “We played hell. ... Our little Dionysiac, goat-footed revels of last Saturday night, we put Maggie and that Tuttle boy right on the grass and under the hydrangeas” (322). Maggie understood that “they had a nasty responsibility ... and couldn’t dodge it” (324). Lettice understands that she and Brad are partially responsible and knows that they are a part of whatever happens going forward. It is unfortunate that she is left to carry the burden alone because Brad cannot—will not—accept any responsibility. She tries to have a loving relationship with Brad, but since he is unwilling to face complicity he fails to connect with anyone (including his wife). His alienation causes the breakup of their marriage. But she realizes she also had a part in her failed marriage to Brad because she did not reach out to him as she later reaches out to those in need with the Sisters of Charity. This is a further illustration that in order to have a full communion with others we have to let go of ourselves.

Lettice explains her conversion in a letter to Maggie. Here, again, we see that the first step to transcendence is the letting go of the self. Lettice boldly states that she has seen that “a body has a soul living in it” (429). She realizes that there is a soul, and that is what connects us to each other and to God. She admits that she may not fully comprehend the meaning of it, but she fundamentally recognizes and believes, which is the foundation for faith. Her work with the Sisters of Charity in Chicago is an embodiment of the Corporal Works of Mercy. She finds joy in serving others and realizes that her connection to others and thereby to God is what makes her life meaningful and complete.

Warren’s writing of Lettice’s conversion demonstrates his own Christian sensibilities. He gives his readers a basic understanding of the need for a transcending leap towards something; in Lettice’s case it is a leap of faith towards conversion to Roman Catholicism. For Lettice, though, it is more of a push towards faith: “If you are that dumb, you have to be ... goosed to God” (436). She does not wallow in regret, but instead accepts the crosses that she has had to bear to reach the joy she now has. Lettice allows the death of herself in order to fully



live in the will of God. She understands that the will of God is constant and is ever present, not just when we want it to be or think it should be an integral part of our lives. As mere humans, we cannot assume that what we want is necessarily what is in God's plan for us; nor will we always understand why things happen the way they do. This is the purest meaning of blessedness, as it is meant by Brother Potts, because Lettice is living for the spiritual rewards of heaven and not simply the fulfillment of pleasures on Earth.

Unlike the others, Brad Tolliver is unable to grasp any chance of redemption until the very last moments of the novel. Brad is extremely egotistical and does very little to renounce the self-centeredness that separates him from everyone and everything else. Longley claims that Brad is "the most dramatic failure of fulfillment and redemption" (171). James H. Justus describes Brad as independent and free of any responsibility; he adopts an escapist existence that allows him to "psychological[ly] dodge" the past (288). Brad does not want to recognize the real in anything because that would mean that he would have to recognize his fakery also. This ultimately is Brad's downfall in all that he does and in all of his relationships, especially with his wife and sister.

Brad's marriage, as we have noted earlier, dissolves because of the lack of union between Brad and Lettice. Instead of coming together as one in the union of marriage, they never get past the physical and the superficial. He is aloof and withdrawn towards her and then claims a pretended victory that is steeped in a defeat he does not understand because he cannot see outside of himself. Theologically speaking, the separation between Brad and Lettice is also a separation between Brad and God. He justifies this, though, with his white Jaguar, awards for his screenplays, and wealth to create a façade of meaning for his life. He tries to validate himself through material things, thereby stunting any transcendence.

Brad is so engrossed in himself that even in Maggie's greatest joy he is still only thinking about himself. When he receives the note that tells him that she and Yasha are together, he feels, for a brief moment, "joy in her joy" (387). At first it seems that Brad may be, finally, reaching out to his sister and making a connection with another person. Unfortunately, he reverts back to himself and his self-centeredness. He begins to marvel at his own capability of experiencing that feeling. Then he continues to journey further into himself and moves from the "joy in her joy" to a "joy of vindication" (387). Just as he had feigned a victory with letting Lettice go, he declares another victory in Maggie's new life. Brad actually takes credit for Maggie's happiness and ability to move on. Since he always felt like she was blaming him, he feels relieved now because, in his own mind, her moving on frees him of any responsibility.

There is another glimpse of hope for Brad when Cal arrives at the Fiddler home ready to shoot Yasha. During the confrontation, Brad lunges for Cal's gun to disarm him. Although his motives are not clear, we could surmise that either Brad

acts impulsively to save himself or that he truly is trying to save Yasha, maybe even for his sister's sake. Despite all of our speculation, however, Brad later admits that he does not even know the meaning of his actions. More importantly, however, this one act is the beginning of his movement towards redemption. It is the act that causes Cal to ask Brad to visit him in the prison, bringing Brad back to Fiddlersburg one last time.

As the novel comes to a close, Brad attends the town's farewell ceremony. There, he reads Lettice's letter to Maggie about her conversion. He finally grasps that all the material things that he valued really did not equate to a meaningful life. Longley suggests that at this point Brad is still unable to "fit meanings together" (176). I suggest that Longley may be selling Brad a little short. It is true that he does not come to some grand epiphany where he immediately has all of the knowledge and understanding that he lacked throughout the entire novel, but Brad does realize that he needs to "re-establish the connection that had existed before the weight of ice broke the wires" (438). He tears up the proposal from Mort Seebaum, another Hollywood producer who is interested in Brad's work, because he sees that his whole existence has been a lie. As the pieces of the telegram flutter away, an image of the dying of Brad's self, he sees why Brother Potts is ultimately victorious. True, Brother Potts will eventually die of cancer, but the pain and suffering is not what concerns him. The heart of Brother Potts' life is to serve others. He only wanted to be able to survive his illness so the he could bring the town together in fellowship one last time. By attending the farewell ceremony for Fiddlersburg, Brad is able to see that Brother Potts was able to win "his race against the rising waters" and in the end do "what he set out to do" (438).

Overall, I have to disagree with Longley's evaluation of Brad's character. He is not a "failure of fulfillment and redemption" because he does come to an understanding. He may not quite grasp this knowledge completely as do Lettice, Maggie, or Calvin, but he, at least, acknowledges that he needs to find the connection between himself and others: "in his inwardness, he said: ... *I have not found the human necessity*. He knew that was what he must try to find" (439).

Brad recognizes that his life has been a fabrication and that he has been hiding from his responsibilities all along. He even begins to be drawn towards the people saying good-bye to Fiddlersburg, the same people and the same town that he spent so many years of his life denying. He begins his journey back into the community and becomes less alienated. Perhaps Brad will walk over to the townspeople and be enveloped into the community, remembering his earlier image of the crowd opening up to swallow up Leontine and her father. Maybe he will join in the fellowship and break bread with his townspeople—a secular communion with others. Even though we do not know what Brad does next, we do know that he has found joy that is pure and not tarnished by selfish motives. He recognizes that he will take Fiddlersburg with him in his memory wherever he goes. And he

is beginning to know that the life he lives is “blessed.”

Warren’s novel *Flood* is a reminder to all of us that nothing from our past is ever lost, and that it is our responsibility to piece together all of our transgressions, moments of joy, and the communion we share in each other, if not with God, to form, as Justus puts it, a “morally meaningful life” (287).

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## Drowning in the Darkness: Robert Penn Warren and the Human Communion

Tiffany A. Wootten

Robert Penn Warren called himself an “agnostic Presbyterian” (Guttenberg xii), a “yearner” (Watkins and Heirs 234), a man with a “religious temperament,” accompanied by a “scientific background” (204) and “a man of temperament in the modern world who hasn’t got any religion” (234). Regardless of what Warren called himself or is called by others, his literary endeavors seem to be part of an attempt to define the world in his own terms. In a 1976 interview with Bill Moyer at Yale University, Warren described his yearning as a search for “significance, for life as significance” (Watkins and Heirs 205); he explained that his fiction and poetry were attempts at the very same thing: “to make it make sense to me” (205). The journeys that his characters undergo reflect Warren’s fascination with finding the “inner significance” (205) of all things of the universe and the self. His characters often suffer alienation not only from the community of man and the universe, but, perhaps even more importantly, from the self as well. Warren’s characters voyage through the physical, tangible, and present worlds to arrive at an understanding of themselves as part of a complex universe. He creates a system of secular moralism, free of liturgy and the extraneous devices of the church, which allows the characters to escape the isolation and alienation that had previously defined them and to achieve the all-important and fulfilling communion.

The image of the spider web embodies Warren’s vision of transformation. In *All the King’s Men*, Cass Mastern’s awakening is accompanied by his recognition and understanding of the world in terms of a spider web:

He learned that the world is like an enormous spider web and if you touch it, however lightly, at any point, the vibration ripples to the remotest perimeter and the drowsy spider feels the tingle and is drowsy no more but springs out to fling the gossamer coils about you who have touched the web and then inject the black, numbing poison under your hide. It does not matter whether or not you meant to brush the web of things. (189)

The web represents the recognition of complicity, a secularized redemption, which forgives the transgressor the sins of his past through his admission that what he does impacts others. *All the King’s Men* first clearly articulates and identifies the web theory of being central to Warren’s vision of communion. The desire for communion drives the quest of Mr. Percy Munn in Warren’s earliest published novel, *Night Rider*. Images of the web are as prevalent in the consciousness of Mr. Munn as they are in that of Cass Mastern. Munn is attracted to the Association of

Growers of Dark Fired Tobacco for the oneness that the multitudes seem to possess through their union. As Mr. Sills reads a list of potential association members, Munn remarks that the names are drawn together by “invisible threads”: “They were all webbed together by those strands, parts of their beings, which were their own, different from each, coming together here and becoming one thing” (16). Munn’s desire to become part of the “unifying fulfillment” (208) is at the heart of his attraction to the Association, its goals, ideologies, and false promises of solidarity. Munn seeks to end his isolation by joining the Association. Yet as Alvan Ryan notes, Munn’s “failure is that he embraces a false solidarity, and paradoxically, in so doing only increases his sense of isolation” (33). Munn does not fully understand the meaning of the web imagery, which he articulates in the initial stages of the novel, and therefore never finds the communion for which he so desperately longs. Munn mistakenly imagines that he can find happiness “as a thing in itself, an entity separate from the past activities of his life” (160). Corinthians reads, prior to receiving communion “man must examine himself” (1 Corinthians 11.28). Similarly, the necessity for introspection and the recognition of past transgressions rest at the center of Warren’s vision of communion.

When in 1963 Warren published *Flood: A Romance of Our Time*, he once again wrote a novel in which the isolated and alienated temperament was at its center. Brad Tolliver’s remark that the “whole south is lonesome” (165) suggests the estrangement that the individual suffers. His observation, however comical, that “the south is the country where a man gets drunk just so he can feel even lonelier and then comes to town and picks a fight for companionship” (165) illustrates man’s need to break from his isolation. Yet as in most of Warren’s novels, an individual’s desire to escape isolation is insufficient in itself; the characters of *Flood* must come to terms with the “crazy tied-togetherness of things” (332), the “mystic osmosis of being” (423). In other words, they must recognize the web. In many respects Brad Tolliver’s journey can be compared to that of Percy Munn in *Night Rider*. Munn, “irritated with his insufficiency” (47), attempts to fill a void that exists in his being by defining himself through others. Munn looks to May, his wife, to “explain something of himself to himself” (35). His eventual rape of his wife represents the physical manifestation of his desire to “penetrate to her world” (55). Similarly, he has an affair with Lucille Christian only to find that she exacerbates a misunderstanding of self. Munn eventually realizes that he had been “infected by [Lucille’s] emptiness” and “her emptiness had discovered to him his own” (325). In *Flood*, Tolliver’s relationship with his wife demonstrates another false solidarity in its attempt to deny reality. The letter that he writes to Lettice Poindexter, during her absence, evinces the false sense of being that he seeks:

I have walked the dark house, where there is no sound, and in that darkness and silence I know that your goodness and beauty and love are what I live by and

shall always live by. I have seen your face in the darkness, and I have held my arms to it, and I felt Time simply flowing through me and over me in a deep process which was infinitely sweet. From you in that moment, I learn how humanly sweet it is to live in Time, to have the past and the future in a present vision. I now have the vision of what our life will be, and when, soon, you come into the dark house all will be. . . . (196)

Tolliver clearly adopts a false self, a counterfeit unity in Lettice. Like Munn, who embraces the Association for its perceived ability to fill the void of self, Tolliver looks to others for fulfillment, as well.

The characters in Warren's fiction who successfully attain communion are those with journeys marked by a voyage into darkness. It is through a journey into darkness that his characters arrive at a greater wisdom. In order for his characters to attain self-knowledge, they must first come to know "darkness, depth and time" ("Speleology" line 16). This is intimately connected to the importance that Warren places on history and the past. In order for his characters to attain communion, they must fully understand the darkness of their past. They must leave behind their feigned innocence and recognize the blackness of the sins that tarnish their being. The journey into darkness reveals "what we must wake to be" ("Crocus" line 14). Yet they cannot, as Brad suggests, reside in the "dark house" and achieve communion within its walls; they must eventually emerge from the artificial protection that the darkness provides. They must undergo the fortunate fall, which Warren so clearly defined as central to the Mariner's journey:

The Mariner shoots the bird; suffers various pains, the greatest of which is loneliness and spiritual anguish; upon recognizing the beauty of the foul sea snakes, experiences a gush of love for them and is able to pray; is returned miraculously to his home port, where he discovers the joy of human communion in God. ("A Poem" 222)

Willie Proudfit of *Night Rider* is perhaps the most Mariner-like character portrayed by Warren. Proudfit's journey begins in a world of persistent darkness where he thoughtlessly and mechanistically slaughters vast herds of buffalo. After years of wandering, Proudfit, like the Mariner, returns to the home of his childhood, where he experiences his vision and redemption (426). Proudfit is able to return to his youth, a time of innocence, but once again like the Mariner with a knowledge and understanding of his sin. Proudfit's experience of the "benediction in darkness" ("Crocus" line 9) allows him to "pass beyond his period of slaughter into a state of self knowledge" (Blotner 172).

The manner in which Warren integrates water into his works is integral to his vision of communion, as well. Water occupies the very center of Proudfit's revelation. A "thirsten" (424) drives him to the actual moment of his awakening:

“I taken the turn in the road, and that was the church. New Bethany church, hit is. And the spring, and I run to hit, on-steady and nigh blind, with what come on me when I seen hit. I put my face down to the water. I take my fill” (426). After his journey into the darkness, Proudfit is driven towards the water, the element that like the web ties everyone and everything together. By drinking the water, Proudfit symbolically partakes of a Eucharist, of sorts. It represents his recognition of human complicity and his participation in the “One Life” (“A Poem” 214). Proudfit’s experience at the stream differs from that of Percy Munn. After his murder of Trevelyan, Munn arrives at a stream:

He rose quickly, clumsy with haste, and stared at the water before him. It was black under the trees. A man would lie in the water and the water would be over him and inside of him and he would become a part of the water, The water which he had just drank so avidly felt cold and inimical within him. Again, he had the impulse to vomit, but controlled himself. (204)

The water here, like the web, is ubiquitous. Yet, unlike Proudfit, who thirsts to partake of the water, Munn is repulsed by the water. Munn’s murder of Trevelyan is a defining moment in his voyage. Unlike the events that preceded it, which were part of the will of the entire Association, responsibility for the murder rests solely in Munn’s hands. Yet, he “refused the statement of what happened; the fact itself was denied in namelessness” (203). He even asks, “my shot, did it hit him?” (201). Like Jack Burden and the Mariner before him, in order for Munn to achieve self-knowledge, he must see that he acts of his own free will, yet he refuses to do so. In the case of the Trevelyan murder, for example, he believes that Trevelyan’s actions were the cause of his death, rather than his own hand. Munn calls Trevelyan a “poor God-dammed fool!” (204) and subsequently experiences relief. Munn’s actions, like those of so many of Warren’s characters, are driven by the Great Twitch (*King’s* 314) of mechanistic determinism. It is for this reason and because Munn fails to accept responsibility that he is unable to partake of the water and to emerge from the darkness with the knowledge of his sin and simultaneously the communion with man that it offers.

The importance that Warren places on the past, and the web and water imagery which he often employs, are inextricably linked to his secularized vision of Original Sin. Warren defines Original Sin, not as something passed down to us by our biblical predecessors in the Garden of Eden, but rather as a sin that we define through our active participation: “Original Sin is not hereditary sin; it is original with the sinner and is of his will” (“A Poem” 227). The Ancient Mariner did not kill the albatross because of the sin that he inherited from Adam and Eve. Nor did he do so because, as Willie Stark suggests: “Man is conceived in sin and born in corruption and he passeth from the stink of the didie to the stench of the shroud” (*King’s* 49). The Mariner simply chooses to shoot the bird because “he has the

crossbow to shoot the albatross” (Watkins and Hiers 203). In order to understand the nature of our sin, we must “try to see how [we] came to be the way [we] are” (Watkins and Hiers 204). Such reasoning explains why Warren’s characters must undergo such intensive, often excruciating introspection and self-analysis. They cannot simply study the past of others, but must come to understand that their own past causes infinite vibrations and ripples on the surface of the web and water. They must drown themselves in history, in the darkness, and emerge with the knowledge that can only be found in the dark recesses of the individual and collective past. Only in this way can they obtain Warren’s truly human communion.

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# V | Unpublished Warren Letters

## Introduction

Some readers of this journal will be aware of the massive *Selected Letters of Robert Penn Warren* project; three volumes have been published thus far, under the General Editorship of William Bedford Clark, one of the two Keynote Speakers at our Warren Centennial Symposium. The first three volumes cover the years 1924-1952. Further volumes, covering 1953-1989, are currently in progress. When Bedford Clark asked me to make available for the *Selected Letters* project my letters from Warren, I undertook what can only be described as an act of historical recovery, a quest to find two decades' worth of old letters scattered among books and boxes and files in four different disorganized studies on four storeys of my house, letters stashed away in places difficult to access from a wheelchair. The task has been further complicated by the dislocation from a campus office inhabited for more than three decades, and the rushed chaotic packing of scores of boxes to accomplish that move in 2001, boxes that are still being unpacked in 2006. The quest for missing letters continues, but the found letters have been made available to the Warren Correspondence Project.

As exactly as I can recall, my correspondence with Warren began in 1968 when I was at Vanderbilt University, writing for my PhD dissertation a long chapter that dealt with Warren's fiction. And the correspondence continued, with substantial lacunae when one or both of us was living and traveling abroad, until Warren's death in 1989. In my quest to find all the letters, to discipline the farouche elusive beast of memory, to pinpoint actual dates when letters might have been incoming and outgoing, I recently saw some letters of mine to Warren, held in the Special Collections at the Beinecke Library. These letters reminded me of the steady chorus of what we both called "befuddlement" over displaced, misplaced, long-delayed or unforwarded mail as we lived and traveled abroad, and as Warren moved back and forth between his home in Connecticut and his place in Vermont, and I shuttled back and forth between New York and my farm in Kentucky—he seemed particularly amused by my "Gravel Switch, KY" mailing address.

There were certain recurrent themes and subjects in our letters, some of which are reflected in the letters printed here: 1) his revisions of *Brother to Dragons*; 2) the Chinese translation(s) of *All the King's Men*; 3) what might most exactly be called "literary gossip" involving such old friends of Warren's (and Vanderbilt acquaintances of mine) as Andrew Lytle and Allen Tate; 4) recurrent invitations to visit each other. Other subjects of our correspondence are alluded to in my recent

book-length poem of tribute, *Homage: A Letter to Robert Penn Warren* (2005). As I reread recently recovered letters, I am struck by another minor but telling detail in the evolution of our salutations and sign-offs. Over the entire two decades of our correspondence, I felt that I could not address him in any other way than “Mr. Warren”—he was, after all, in my estimation (a judgment shared by many others) the world’s greatest living *Homme de lettres*, and I held him in the most profound respect. After a while, sometimes we addressed each other and signed off as RPW and HRS; but he kept gently hinting (e.g., see letter III below) that I should call him, as his friends did, “Red.” So, finally, it was “Dear Stoney—Dear Red.”

And one more thing. I reprint one of my letters to Warren here, not so much from the firm belief that two-sided correspondence is more interesting and informative, but to illustrate the exactitude and punctiliousness of his reply. Now, years later, I am moved and humbled by the recognition that an 80-year-old world-famous writer with pressures and deadlines and obligations impinging from all sides replied promptly, generously, and warmly to an unknown young professor-writer—that Warren was always a far better, more regular and exact, correspondent than I ever was.

—H. R. STONEBACK

I – TLS [typed letter, signed]

Dec. 1, 1977

2495 Redding Road  
Fairfield, Connecticut

Dear Mr. Stoneback,

You see, I'm trying your West Park New York address and hope that it works.

Yes I have finished the rewriting (after some twenty years) of *Dragons*, and have turn[ed] it in to my editor.<sup>1</sup> I trust that it is vastly improved. I was very dissatisfied with much of the rounding of the rhythm previously, having fallen into the trap of blank verse, and the padding which that so often brings on. Also, there has been some substantial changes in the handling of certain scenes, the result of the experience on the stage.

Yes I wish there were more books including some of my fiction available in soft cover. Some negotiations are on the way now about that, but God knows when it will be concluded. Or how.

Perhaps next spring I would be able to come over for an afternoon. With things the way they are at my house now I can't leave my wife alone here in this isolated spot after dark. Our children, you see, are now gone. Again I thank you for sending me the poem.

Very sincerely yours,

Robert Penn Warren

Note

1. The original version of *Brother to Dragons* was published in 1953; *Brother to Dragons: A New Version* was not published until September 1979, nearly two years after Warren says here that the rewriting was finished.

## II – TLS

August 10, 1986

New Paltz, NY

Dear RPW—

Just back from some months in Europe where I heard, belatedly, the news of your laureateship. In fact I was speaking at a big to-do in Italy, where the American Ambassador was speaking, too, and he relayed the news to some of us who'd been abroad and missed the word. The general refrain was "it's about time." HRS was heard to add: "Maybe those damned fools in Sweden will take the hint now." In any case, I wanted to add my line of congratulations to the general chorus, but didn't think a postcard would do, so waited until home, now, to send this note of acclamation, this accolade.

Hope this finds you and yours well and thriving—

All best,

HRS

PS Apparently my former Chinese colleague's translation of *All the King's Men* is now out in China, though I haven't seen a copy—have you? If you haven't, I'll do my best to have one sent—a slow, tricky process (I can't even get copies of my own stuff that's been published there). I hear, too, that someone is translating a volume of yr. poems there, though my source did not say which volume.

### III – ALS [autograph letter, signed]

September 10, 1986

West Wardsboro, Vermont

Dear Dr. Stoneback,

I greatly appreciate your letter of exactly a month ago. It arrived about a week ago. Forwarding is slow to this undecayed “hole among the mountains.”<sup>1</sup>

The whole PL business is more sensible than it might be. It is merely a congressional adjunct to the Consultantship in Poetry, which has existed since 1943—an act of MacLeish as Librarian. I left that post in 1945, the second holder.<sup>2</sup> The PL changes with the appointment of the Consultant. Hurrah!—it carries no obligation of any sort—or I would not be there unless in chains. And the salary of the Consultant comes from a Library endowment.

The Chinese translation of AKM to which you refer is news to me. For almost 2 years I have answered notes from a Chinese woman about words & phrases.<sup>3</sup> But I know nothing of that being done or has been done by your former colleague. As far as I know that has not yet been finished. As far as poems are concerned, yours is the first rumor to reach me.

I envy you the period in Italy. We haven't been back in some years now, but we used to be there often & for months, many times. I miss it.

Again I thank you for your kind note.

All good wishes:  
Sincerely

Robert Penn Warren  
sometimes known as  
Red

[written at bottom of page:] No typewriter working here!

#### Notes

1. Even in the last years of his long life, Warren echoes T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*; as a 17-year-old sophomore at Vanderbilt in 1922, when Eliot's work appeared, Warren was overwhelmed by it; he was said to have memorized it then, and inscribed it on the walls of the dormitory room that he shared with Allen Tate.

2. Archibald MacLeish, poet and then Librarian of Congress, hired Allen Tate as the first Poetry Consultant at the Library of Congress in 1943. Warren succeeded Tate.
3. Tao Jie, distinguished translator of American literature, formerly my graduate student at SUNY New Paltz, later my colleague at Peking University in 1984 when I taught there as a Fulbright Scholar, began her translation of *All the King's Men* in 1984. We often discussed difficult passages and unfamiliar idioms in the novel. Apparently at about the same time another Chinese scholar—to whom Warren here refers—began another translation of the novel; no information is available regarding this translator/translation. Tao Jie's *All the King's Men* was published in 1986; not long after this letter, I received a copy from her that I forwarded to Warren, who expressed great delight with the book. On a February 2006 lecture tour in America (and visit to SUNY New Paltz), Tao Jie announced that her translation of *All the King's Men* would soon be reissued.

## IV – ALS

August 17, 1988

[West Wardsboro, Vermont]

Dear Stoney,

I am glad to have your letter—a real one. Which this will not be. So you'll be spared my handwriting—I have no typewriter by my knees—and it is a long way, and raining, to my “work house,” where the typewriter lives.

We are in deep woods with a mountain for sunset. For the moment our daughter & two little grandchildren are here & so I don't much care that the sunset is dreary & dismal over the mountain. And “for the moment” a gray mist hides any possible sunset. But the babies are gabbling and babbling away cheerfully enough. And I look forward to my dinner.

But how strange your tale of the girl and the lines of my old poem.<sup>1</sup> I don't remember any revisions, but she must be right about the fact. In fact I remember little of old poems—& all are “old” now.

All good wishes,

Red Warren

### Note

1. The letter is from Vermont. Dated in Warren's hand August 17, the envelope is postmarked August 29, from West Dover, Vermont. Warren's reference to “my old poem” concerns *Brother to Dragons: A New Version* (1979). I had told Warren that one of my graduate students, comparing the first and second versions of *Brother to Dragons*, had bewailed and lamented the disappearance from the later version of her favorite lines, the passage beginning: “The recognition of complicity is the beginning of innocence.”

## VI Warren's Unpublished Fiction

### An Introduction to "Goodbye, Jake"

*H. R. Stoneback*

Robert Penn Warren's early short story, "Goodbye, Jake," is here published for the first time. Two typescript versions of the story are housed in the Robert Penn Warren Papers, in the Yale Collection of American Literature, at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. The text published here is the later revised draft, a clean typescript with a few holograph corrections (Beinecke: Box 221, Folder 3854). The editors of this journal wish to express their gratitude to John Burt Warren's Literary Executor, for granting permission and making possible this rare opportunity to publish what we believe to be Warren's finest unpublished fiction, which serves, at the very least, as important documentary evidence concerning Warren's literary apprenticeship. We also extend our thanks to the Beinecke curatorial staff, and to our research assistants, Matthew Nickel and James Stamant, for journeying to New Haven to acquire copies of the manuscripts.

Although both the Beinecke archival notes and Warren's bibliographer, James A. Grimshaw, Jr., accurately list the two "Goodbye, Jake" manuscripts as undated material, it is possible to date the story with apparent exactitude. On January 26, 1931, Warren wrote to his friend and Vanderbilt-Agrarian colleague, Andrew Lytle: "I have just completed a short story. It may be good or it may be bad, but it's very one or the other. I want your opinion of it. I'll direct Carolyn [Caroline Gordon] to send it on to you when she gets the copy" (William Bedford Clark, *Selected Letters of Robert Penn Warren* 1: 195). Apparently Gordon liked the story, for sometime in the early spring of 1931, Warren wrote to Maxwell Perkins: "At the suggestion of Carolyn Gordon I am sending a story which you may be able to use in *Scribner's*." He identified himself to Perkins as "the author of *John Brown*" (his first book, a biographical study published in 1929), and a contributor to *Fugitives* and *I'll Take My Stand* (1930), thus perhaps contextualizing both his writerly credentials and this particular story, and concluded: "I hope that you will find a place for *Goodbye, Jake*, but in any case I shall appreciate any comment you may make concerning it" (Clark 198). By April 24, when he wrote to Allen Tate and Caroline Gordon, he was reporting Perkins's rejection of the story: "I sent *Goodbye, Jake* to *Scribner's* and got a gentle but firm rejection. I see a lot wrong with the thing, but I don't know how to remedy it" (199). There, it would seem, the published record of commentary on the story ceases.



When Warren wrote “Goodbye, Jake,” he was a 25-year-old Assistant Professor of English at Southwestern College in Memphis; the story typescript bears his home address—2095 Poplar Avenue, Memphis, Tennessee—where he lived from September 1930 to May 1931. He was not entirely happy with his academic situation, and, given the controversy surrounding the Agrarian manifesto, *I’ll Take My Stand* (with contributions by Lytle, Ransom, Tate, Warren et al), as well as the academic pressure to write critical and scholarly articles, he seemed anxious to write fiction (Joseph Blotner, *Robert Penn Warren: A Biography* 111-15). His novelle *Prime Leaf* (1931, his first published fiction) and “Goodbye, Jake” mark the beginning of his career as a writer of fiction.

Early influences on Warren’s writing—for example, Faulkner and Hemingway—may be detected in “Goodbye, Jake” by the literary sleuth alert to certain details of dialogue and characterization. But we leave that to the perspicacity of our readers. A more important and perhaps more obvious influence is discernible in what we might call the story’s Agrarian theme, or thesis. The narrative situation pivots on Jake Hawkins’s announcement of his imminent departure, his determination to leave behind the family farm in its “obscure valley” in Middle Tennessee, move to Florida where it’s “all sandy and flat,” and make lots of money. Emily tries to convince him that he should stay home, that he “won’t be any better off in Florida” than he is in Tennessee. When Jake uses his departure as a seduction-maneuver, Emily flees into the “tangled bushes” and down the limestone bluff, trips and falls and rolls against the “upturned roots” of the fallen cedar tree. This looks like a straightforward Agrarian symbol of deracination—nothing good can come from leaving behind the family farm. Yet taking a stand is one thing, taking a fall is another, and Warren, the youngest of the Vanderbilt Fugitive-Agrarians negotiates his Nashville Agrarianism(s) with greater subtlety than might be expected from a 25-year-old writer. Sense of place, family, and rootedness are not unmixed blessings, for they may also involve blood-vengeance, precipitate violence in the name of family honor. And Emily, left “hanging” on that gate, is equally the *deus loci* (or spirit of place), and the victim of both place and deracination from place.

An even more important influence on “Goodbye, Jake” is the work of Elizabeth Madox Roberts. Since Roberts’s work has been largely neglected for more than half a century, this influence may be invisible to most readers today. Even Roberts and Warren scholars have completely overlooked the connections, but Warren knew and admired Roberts’s work from his student days, through his early teaching days (when he taught *The Time of Man*—her 1926 masterpiece—every chance he got), and throughout his writing career as evident in his critical writing on Roberts (first in 1931, again in 1963) and the echoes of her work throughout his fiction. Roberts’s fiction is replete with Agrarian motifs and concerns that reverberate in Warren’s work. Yet perhaps the most telling influence may be discerned in matters of style, and in Roberts’s remarkable skill at rendering landscape that

Warren echoes in “Goodbye, Jake.” For example, when Warren composes his extended landscape passages here—“the harsh knuckles of the roots” (of the *up-turned* tree) that cut Emily, and on her urgent flight to Jake’s farm, the trees in their “regular places,” the air that “fingered the high leaves of the hickories,” and the “careful willow leaves [that] feathered the water”—he writes like the fully engaged apprentice to Roberts’s art of landscape. His manuscript revisions and insertions focus on the landscape—the addition of those very Robertsonian “cattle, fatalistic and heavy and sculptural” in the pasture, the revision of the early draft’s opening paragraph, with its cliché view “over the deep vista of the valley” changed to the final “over the twisted cut of the valley”—read like lessons in the art of landscape learned from Roberts.

Moreover, Roberts’s landscape is always symbolic landscape, *paysage moralisé*, and the most extraordinary thing about her landscapes is the way they serve as objective correlatives to the inner states of being and feeling of her characters, usually young women with an intense sacramental sense of connection with the land. Roberts composes landscapes that become inscapes. It seems to me that the greatest risk Warren takes in “Goodbye, Jake,” the challenge that he sets for himself, is to center the story in Emily’s sensibility—he doesn’t seem at all interested in Jake—and to render her state of being in terms of the landscape. At this, he succeeds admirably, thanks to the example of Roberts. More than three decades after he wrote “Goodbye, Jake,” Warren would write in his 1963 essay on Roberts: “By 1930, with the appearance of *The Great Meadow*, the fourth novel, it was impossible to discuss American fiction without reference to Elizabeth Madox Roberts” (*Saturday Review* 2 March 1963: 20). And it seems that in 1931 it was impossible, for Warren, to write fiction without reference to Elizabeth Madox Roberts. Maybe the clearest sign of that in “Goodbye, Jake” is the cryptic reference to the Jarvis place, next to Jake’s place—Jarvis, of course, is the name of the man who goes away in *The Great Meadow*. And students of names should note, too, that Warren’s protagonist is named *Emily Roberts*.

Finally a word about the story’s setting: it takes place in the country of limestone glades, small stream valleys, and cedar forests south of Nashville, near Murfreesboro, Tennessee. The stream in the “obscure valley” setting flows north into Stones River. In 1931 no one in Tennessee, where Warren had spent much of the past decade, perhaps no one in the South would hear the words “Stones River” without thinking of the “Battle of Stones River,” one of the fiercest battles of the Civil War, albeit tactically indecisive, with what is often said to be the highest percentage of casualties of any major Civil War battle. The furious battle took place in the terrain of Warren’s story, a country of limestone outcroppings and dense cedar thickets. The Confederate army under the command of General Bragg, after a defeat in Kentucky at the Battle of Perryville (where, incidentally, Elizabeth Madox Roberts was born—her father having served under Bragg’s command), made

its way to Murfreesboro where the great confrontation with General Rosecrans's Union army took place: c. 80,000 troops, more than 20,000 casualties. Warren ends his Stones River valley story with the striking image of Emily Roberts clinging "against the gate, hanging against the sharp palings, looking somehow like the boys of that section who, far away across the ocean, had died on the enemy wire." Thus, in that one compelling symbolic landscape image, Warren evokes the burden of the past and the burden of place, the old war and the recent war, and inscribes Emily Roberts as "somehow" another war victim, another casualty. That gate is the portal that opens out into much—fiction, poetry, and history—that Warren would later write.

Goodbye, Jake

*Robert Penn Warren*

The Buick pounded up the grade. At the corner where the steepest part of the road began Jake put it into second with a clatter and grind of the old gears. The wheels slipped a little in the loose gravel, the dust spun out in thicker clouds than before to settle on the leaves of the bushes by the roadside, brown upon the new lustrous green. It settled on the tight little blackberries which clustered, green and nodular, where a few weeks before had hung the white blossoms. When they reached the broader shelf of the hill near the summit, he slowed down and drove the car just off the road to face over the twisted cut of the valley. For a moment he sat without even looking at her, one hand still on the wheel and the other on the brake. "Are you gonna miss me, Honey?" he said.

"Of course I'll miss you, Jake." Then, when she spoke, he turned to her.

Down the valley it was already getting dark. The stream that followed the long northward drift of the valley toward Stones river gleamed like cold nickel where it debouched from the cedar grove at the base of the bluff below them, disappeared among willows, gleamed again more remotely, and was lost in the tall shadow of the hills whose base it hugged. Above the hills to the west side the light flung out level and straight like painted streamers, and in that brighter reach, the crows, going to roost, passed over the valley.

"Jake," she said. "Jake, I wish you wouldn't go."

He didn't answer her for a minute and then he spoke in the stubborn voice a person uses in saying something already said and settled many times before. "You know I'm going," he said.

"I reckon so."

"You know so. There ain't any reckon about it."

"All right, Jake. But I bet there won't be any place in Florida as nice as here. They say Florida is all sandy and flat."

"It can be sandy as all hell for all I care. I'm going down there and make some money."

"You won't be any better off in Florida than you are right here in Tennessee. Anyway, I don't believe that everybody that goes to Florida makes money like you say."

"Maybe not. But I'm gonna make some. Don't you want some money Em'ly?"

"Yes, I want some money, but I don't want you to go off down there. You're making money right here."

"Sure, I've made a hell of a lot. I've worked like a dog for three years now and I ain't made but about twelve hundred dollars for my part."

"I think you've done real well, Jake."

"That ain't any money. And I won't make that much from now on when Tom gets back from Knoxville for good and starts working his part of the place all year round. Then I won't get anything for putting in his crop. Mama don't need me any more now, and I'm going."

"I just don't see why you've got to go, Honey. You all've got a nice place, and I don't see why you want to go."

"I hate the damn place. I've told you a hundred times I hate it worse'n poison. If Papa had just divided it up in his will I'd sell my part right off so quick it'd make your head swim. And I'd take all the money to Florida with me. I could make some real money quick down there. That's what I told Mama."

"Why, Jake!" She sat up straight, pushing his hands away from her shoulders. "Jake, you ought never told her that."

"Maybe not but I did, I was so mad. Mama, she wouldn't loan me a cent to take down there, and she could too. She loaned Tom money to go off to Knoxville on to study agriculture. Hell, I bet I know more'n Tom right now about farming."

"I know you do. Everybody says you know a lot for a boy and you've done mighty well since your father died. Everybody says so."

"I don't give a damn what everybody says. And I'm not a boy. I'm going on twenty-two."

"Anyway, you're not grown up yet or you wouldn't act so crazy," she said. But it was not true: the hand that cupped the small of her neck was a man's hand with deep palm and fingers brusque and alive. "You act crazy as a kid," she said.

"Well, I'm four years older'n you, and you think you're mighty big."

"Girls get grown quicker'n boys. Everybody knows they get grown quicker. I'm just as grown as you are right now."

He tried to look at her face, but even close beside her he could not make it out clearly in the darkness. He could only make out its whiteness under her dark hair, the shadowed cavity of the eyes, and the dip of her bare arms, held close to her sides, against the dark dress. He reached over in her lap to cover her hands with his larger one. She acted as if he hadn't touched her. She only kept looking out over the obscure valley.

"Jake, I wish you wouldn't go," she finally said.

"I don't see why I oughtn't go. You just keep saying that, and you haven't got a single reason in the world."

"It's just because I love you so much, Jake. I'll miss you so much if you go."

"I'm going." Then when he leaned over and kissed her, he found that her cheeks were wet. "Honey," he said. "You know I'm just crazy about you. It ain't gonna be long before I come back. You ain't but seventeen now and I'll be back

soon. You know I love you, don't you?"

She did not answer.

"You know I love you?"

"I don't know. If you loved me you wouldn't want to go off and leave me. And I'll miss you so."

"You know I love you?"

"I don't know." And then both her arms were around his neck and she was kissing him hard while she sobbed. "I love you so much, Jake. I don't want you to go."

His hand was behind her head while he kissed her, and with the other he held her waist, drawing her to him so that their knees touched. "I love you so much, Jake," she kept saying, but he did not speak a word. After a while she stopped crying. Her head was supported by his hand, and between kisses their lips almost touched. "Are you glad I love you so much I cried?" she asked.

"Yes," he said.

Once after a long silence she took one arm from around his neck and pointed off down the valley. "That light's at the Jarvis place, ain't it?" she said. "And that other one, it's your all's place, ain't it Jake?"

"I'm not gonna talk about that anymore." Then he added more harshly, "you know damn well it's our light."

Before she could answer, he began kissing her again, and after a moment she responded, her small nervous arms holding his neck closely while she kissed him back.

"Em'ly, you know I love you," he said, with his voice almost as harsh as when he had said, "you know damn well it's our light." Then differently, "and I'll miss you a hell of a lot, Em'ly."

"I'll miss you, Jake. I'm missing you already."

"You won't miss me like I'll miss you. You can't. You don't know."

"I will miss you," she said.

"I'll bet you forget me. I'll bet you get to going around with somebody like Tom Sanders or somebody like that."

"I'll miss you every minute till you get back," she said. She pulled his head to her and kissed him over and over again, on the mouth and face, with quick little violent kisses like those of an excited child.

"You'll forget me," he said, "and everything."

"I couldn't, Jake."

"Yes you will. You'll forget because you're just a kid. I wish I could know you'd belong to me while I'm off in Florida."

"You know I belong to you. We belong to each other, Jake. Don't we, Jake?"

"No," he said. "You'll forget. You're nothing but a kid."

"No."

“If I could just have you before I go. Really have you. Then it would be all right.”

“Jake.”

“Then I’d know you belong to me. Em’ly, I’ve got to. I’ve just got to!” He pushed her head back, half choking the words which were no answer, but only his name. “Jake,” she cried, “Jake, Jake.” She struggled, then her right hand found the catch of the door. She jerked loose and half slipped, half fell, from the car. He tried to follow, caught against the gear lever, wrenched it back, and was out after her, but she had disappeared through the tangled bushes of the roadside some ten yards away.

She heard the startled beat of his feet on the gravel, then the cracking of the bushes when he tore through, the cracking of dead cedar branches closer behind her, and then his voice calling. “Em’ly, Em’ly,” he called, but she went on. She clambered over the rounded limestone that shouldered from the bluff, found the trail for an instant, and stumbled and fell. She rolled a few yards downward and piled against the upturned roots of the tree whose broken upper branches had tripped her. From above a rock came bounding, cracked solidly on the smooth surface of the limestone—one, two, three—and thudded in the soft earth of the trail. Jake plunged down the trail, not calling now, and she heard the murderous swish of the cedar boughs as they struck him. “God damn,” he said out loud. “God damn her, God damn her.”

After he had passed and the noise of his descent was lost, she still lay there. She did not even move, although the harsh knuckles of the roots cut against her back and side. It was a long time before he came back up the trail. He was walking slowly now, and she caught the sound of his heavy breathing as he went past her hiding place. He did not turn and climb up over the boulders directly to the car, but followed the easier way of the trail itself to the road. The lights of the car leaped out, two clear and steady beams high over the cedars. The motor started, and the swift radii of the lights swept away from her view.

She got up, shaking as with a chill, and supported herself against a sapling. After a little she climbed back to the trail, bending forward almost on all fours to help herself in the slippery residue of leaves and dry cedar needles. It was three miles to her house—down the bluff, across the fields of young corn where the plowed earth crumbled like ashes over her shoes, across the pasture by the creek, and along the road for a hundred yards to her gate. Near the pasture ford stood the cattle, fatalistic and heavy and sculptural in the darkness, while she went by. It was eleven o’clock when she saw the house like a black wooden box from whose front apertures a little light shone out to grey the grass where it fell. Almost two hours had passed since she rose from beside the tree on the face of the bluff.

She skirted the house, and climbed the sagging wooden steps by the cistern to the back porch. She stood there, holding the edge of the screen door as she had

stood beside the sapling. Just as she entered, the tall figure of her brother stepped into the alley of light that reached from the front room across the hall.

“That you?” her brother asked.

She crossed the porch quickly, saying nothing.

“Come here, Mammy wants to see you.”

She reached the back end of the hall and stopped. “I’m not coming. I’m going right to bed.” And she turned to the door beside her.

“You come here,” he ordered, and took a couple of steps toward her, looming bigger as he came into the shadow.

“I’m not,” she said. Then she burst out crying, leaning her head against the door, quivering with sobs.

“Her brother seized her arm. “You come here,” he said, and pulled her forward.

An instant she clung desperately with one hand to the door knob, still sobbing, and then went with him to the alley of light.

“Look at her!” he almost shouted into the room. “Look at her, just look at her.” He jerked her arm a little, as a constable jerks a thief or a boy jerks a sullen dog. “Look at her,” he said, jerking.

The little bald-headed man by the lamp, her father, looked up from his newspaper with a certain mean toothless surprise. Behind steel-rimmed spectacles the eyes of the woman, her mother, were wide, hurt, unloving. The twelve year old boy who had been sleeping on the couch by the window sat up and blinked like a toad. He got to his feet, snatching the twist of sheet up about his naked middle. “What’s the matter with you?” he demanded, and his voice, though a child’s, was much like that of his brother.

“You all know what’s the matter with her,” the big one said. “She’s been out with that Jake Hawkins. She’s been out with him just once too many times.”

She stopped sobbing.

“Em’ly,” her mother asked, “what’s the matter, Em’ly?”

“I done told you. Ain’t you got eyes!” said the big brother.

Her father did not speak. He still held his paper up, stiffly and inert as if he had been struck to that posture. His cheeks were sucked in now so that the lamp-light cast a little sepulchral shadow in the cavity of the cheekbone.

“Em’ly,” said the mother. “You answer me.”

The girl turned, slow and dull, to the brother standing beside her, and stared at the hand that held her arm.

“Don’t you hear her talking to you?” he asked, and again jerked the arm.

“You turn me loose,” she said with sudden passion. “I hate you Alec Roberts, you don’t know how much I hate you. I wish you was dead!” She flung loose from him, ran down the hall, and slammed the door to her room with a violence that shook the frail structure of the walls.



“You see there,” said Alec, whose hand still clutched the air with stupid fingers. “She said she wished I was dead!” There was a note of vindication in his voice. He went across and stood a little in front of his father. “What you gonna do about it?”

“Nuthin. They ain’t nuthin to do.”

“Nuthin, hell! She ain’t my kid, but she is my sister, and I’m gonna shoot that son-of-a-bitch.”

“Alec, you ain’t.” It was the querulous voice of the woman.

“Ain’t I?” he demanded, not even bothering to face her. “If’n Paw had any guts he’d shoot him hisself.”

Again the man looked up, vague and toothless as when his son and daughter had appeared at the door. “Mammy,” he suggested with a trivial mockery of hope in his voice, “you go and talk to her. Maybe it—”

“Maybe, hell! She’s my sister and it don’t matter what happened. I’m shooting the son-of-a-bitch.”

The mother did not rise from her chair, did not even look at her husband. Their son stepped across to the mantleshelf and picked up a pearl-handled revolver. From a vase covered with a mosaic of red and gold cigar bands shellacked down he poured out the cartridges into his palm. “I’ll teach him to monkey around. I’ll fill him full of .38’s. He thinks he’s better’n anybody. All them Hawkins thinks they’re so damn high-falutin.” The man and the woman stared at him, disturbed and fascinated like simple people at the theatre. Deftly he slipped the cartridges into their chambers, and flicked the gun shut. “I’ll teach him all right.”

“Yeah,” said the young one, “them Hawkins thinks they’re better’n anybody!”

“Alec, you ain’t!” Again the voice of the woman. It was not a command, not a protest; it was more like a wail at the sudden recollection of a deed already done.

“You hush up, Mammy. I know what I’m doing.” Then he turned fully to his father. “Are you coming or ain’t you?”

The man’s lips parted dryly, tentatively, like the beak of a chicken that gapes with the heat. “Maybe,” he began.

“Hell! Are you coming?”

“I’m coming.” He stood in the middle of the floor, his feet on the lighted patch of the carpet. The heavy work shoes he wore, with their metal hooks and thongs, gave the look of a childish, pathetic masquerade.

“Get you a gun,” ordered the son, “and come on.”

The man went to the corner behind the door and got a shotgun. He dropped the oil-spotted white envelope from its muzzle, and loaded it with shells from a box on the mantle. He was vacant, mechanical.

“I’m coming too,” declared the younger son. “Alec, you wait for me, it won’t

take me no time.” Already he had pulled a shirt over his head, and was separating his pants from the tangled sheet on the floor.

“Naw, you can’t come. Get in bed.”

“Alec,” he pleaded.

“Shut up,” Alec ordered savagely. “Come on, Paw.”

They went out into the hall, and out to the narrow front porch, slamming the screen door after them. The woman sat in the chair from which she had never moved, heavy and fatalistic like the cattle by the ford. Her hands were crossed on her breast, and the grey folds of calico sagged and looped between her parted knees. Across the room stood her son. His lanky thighs extended from beneath the shirt tails, the lanky thighs of adolescence; his brown feet were lost in the ruck and tangle of the sheet he had dropped. From the yard came the sound of a Ford motor backfiring, sharp and quick, and then a clatter as the car drove off over the make-shift wooden bridge at the big gate. “Me’dith,” said the woman to her son, “you get to bed.”

After a time the woman rose from her chair and picked up the lamp. The boy on the couch watched her movements with a dark animal-like glance. When she had gone out and the room was in shadow, he lay on his back, with the sheet pulled taut up to his armpits to outline his body, and stared at the ceiling.

The woman went to the back end of the hall and stood listening beside the door of her daughter’s room. Stealthily like a thief, she turned the knob, entered, and closed the door behind her. The rays from the lamp she held reached across the room to show the girl’s figure face down on the bed. Her hair was loose, and her arms were flung out as if a long time before she had clutched the coverlet with an abandonment of grief, and then, long before in weariness, had relaxed her hold. Her feet hung over the edge of the bed, and her light stockings, like the skirt of her red silk dress, were spotted with the mud of dust and dew. The woman put the lamp on the marble-topped dresser, where it illumined the glass powder box, the painted celluloid brushes, the lace pin cushion, and illumined the large bank calendar in which an Indian girl looked faithfully across blue water. The girl on the bed did not stir.

“Em’ly,” asked the woman, “Em’ly, you ain’t asleep?”

There was no answer from the bed. The woman sat patiently, hands folded on the breast, like one who still keeps a disastrous vigil already endured for a long time.

“Em’ly. Em’ly, listen to me.”

Again there was no answer.

“Em’ly. You better listen to me. They done gone.”

The girl turned painfully and lay on her side, staring like a sick, dry-eyed child at the lamp on the dresser.

“They done gone,” repeated the woman.

Something in her voice, some peculiar inflection of the repeated words, caught the girl. "Gone," she answered, "gone?" Heavily she sat up. "Where?"

"I couldn't stop them, Em'ly."

"Where?"

"They done gone after Jake Hawkins. I couldn't stop them."

The girl did not seem to understand.

"I couldn't stop them," said the woman. "You know how Alec is."

Then the girl was standing, gripping her mother's arm, shaking her, and saying over and over again, "why didn't you, Mammy, why didn't you?"

"You know how Alec is," said the woman. "He just got his gun and went. He said yore Paw didn't have no guns, and he went too."

The girl stood in the middle of the room. "Paw too," she said. She gave the woman a sudden direct glance, not of hatred or contempt or fury, but the appraising, inimical glance of a stranger, and then, as suddenly, she fled from the room. She fled down the hall, across the front porch, and across the grass. Once there came from the house the thin voice of the woman, calling.

Between the stone walls lay the pike. On one side beyond the tumbled stone the young, erect appletrees stood at their regular places, then the pasture; on the other side the cornfield stretched. The path that turned off the pike went along the border of a cornfield, next to the wall dividing that field from another. Honeysuckle looped the stone. Beside the stone grew the fennel. In June before rain the wind is down the valley. It was not wind, the downward drift of air between the hills, over the corn. It fingered the high leaves of the hickories that stood between the field and the creek. Under the darkness of the shagbarks went the path. The slats of the grapevine bridge rattled with footsteps, and beneath the bridge the water, glossy and black, spread downward flatly over the fanwise laminae of shale. The careful willow leaves feathered the water. The guywires of the bridge hummed like gnats. Then the path went beside the willows, then the long wagon road went across the hayfield beside the barbed wire. There stood the barn and the silo, and there the house like a great black box among the trees. From its apertures no light shone.

When she opened the side gate, a dog barked, rushed at her from the shadow of the trees. "Bob," she said, "Bob, Bob." The dog came up with wagging tail. Though she paid it no further attention, it cavorted beside her as she hurried toward the house. She beat with the flat of her hands on the door. She listened. With clenched fists she beat the solid wood. Finally there was the faintest click from within, and on each side of the door the colors of the stained glass panels came to life. The door swung inward, stubborn, grudging. In the space stood a tall woman who wore a blue flannel wrapper. Against the dim light from the single electric bulb of the hall the grey hair seemed a thin, incongruous aureole of gold about her shadowed face. She stood very straight with one lean hand on the doorfacing

as if to bar entrance.

“Where’s Jake?” the girl demanded.

The woman regarded her with a slow, sober malignity. “It can’t be much to you,” she said.

“Where’s Jake?” Her voice was peremptory, breathless. “Tell me, Mrs. Hawkins.”

“He’s gone,” the woman said, and watched the girl’s drawn face relax. “He’s gone,” she added, “but it’s no fault of yours he got away.”

“Mrs. Hawkins!” It was a child’s voice in puzzled protest.

“I sent him off before they came, then I told them he’d gone to Fayetteville. But he’s gone to the woods and he’ll catch the freight at the crossing tonight. I sent him off.” There was something stored and awaited, a cold unction of hatred, in the slow words. “I knew what those low-down pore white trash Roberts would do.”

“Mrs. Hawkins!”

“I knew what you would do,” she said. “You sent them here, you sent them here with guns!” The voice broke, suddenly tearful. “But they didn’t get him, you—you bitch.”

The door slammed. Beyond it was the sound of harsh, muffled sobs. The girl turned from the door and took the brick pathway to the front gate. Beside her under the maples paced the dog in an awed animal sympathy. Behind, the stained glass of the panels went dark. She clung against the gate, hanging against the sharp palings, looking somehow like the boys of that section who, far away across the ocean, had died on the enemy wire. But she had been gone for a long time when the night freight whistled for the crossing beyond the hayfield, Johnson’s creek, and the woods.

## Notes on the Typescript

- p. 100 Three typed sentences at the beginning crossed out:  
“Are you gonna miss me, Honey?”  
The Buick pounded up the grade, drowning out the sound of her reply.  
“You know I’ll miss you,” she said.  
Handwritten sentence inserted:  
*The Buick pounded up the grade.*
- p. 100 Typed sentence crossed out:  
“That don’t matter to me. It can be sandy as all hell for all I care. I’m going down there and make some money.”
- p. 101 Typed word crossed out:  
~~Then~~ I could make some real money quick down there.
- p. 101 Typed word crossed out; handwritten word inserted:  
But it was not true: the hand that cupped the small of her neck was a man’s hand with deep palm and fingers ~~firm~~ *brusque* and alive.
- p. 101 Typed sentence duplicating preceding sentence crossed out:  
“It’s just because I love you so much, Jake. I’ll miss you so much if you go.”
- p. 103 Typed word crossed out:  
~~Suddenly~~ The motor started, and the swift radii of the lights swept from her view.
- p. 104 Typed words crossed out:  
She’s been out with him just one too many times. ~~with him~~”
- p. 104 Typed word crossed out:  
She ~~suddenly~~ stopped sobbing.
- p. 104 Handwritten words inserted:  
He still held his paper up, stiffly *and inert* as if he had been struck to that posture.
- p. 105 Typed word crossed out; handwritten word inserted:  
... it was more ~~as-like~~ a wail at the sudden recollection of a deed already done.
- p. 105 Typed word crossed out; handwritten word inserted:  
He stood in the middle of the floor, his feet on the lighted patch of the ~~floor~~ *carpet*.
- p. 106 Typed words crossed out:  
The woman went to the back end of the hall and stood listening beside the door of her daughter’s room; ~~but not the faintest sound came from within.~~
- p. 106 Arrow indicating relocation of phrase:  
She turned the knob, stealthily like a thief, entered, and closed the door behind her.
- p. 107 Typed word crossed out; handwritten word inserted:  
*Heavily* she ~~suddenly~~ sat up.
- p. 107 Typed words crossed out:  
~~For an instant~~ The girl did not seem to understand.
- p. 107 Typed and handwritten words, duplicating the following passage, crossed out:  
She gave the woman a sudden direct glance, not of hatred or contempt or fury, but

the appraising, inimical glance of a stranger, and then, as suddenly, she fled from the room. She fled down the hall, across the front porch, and across the grass. Once there came from the house the thin voice of the woman, calling:

~~Between the tumbled stone walls lay the pike. On one side beyond the inert and tumbled stone~~ Beyond one wall the

p. 107 Typed words crossed out:

“Bob,” she said, “Bob, Bob,” ~~and whistled softly.~~

p. 107 Typed words crossed out:

Though she paid it no further attention, it cavorted beside her, ~~trying to lick her hand;~~ as she hurried toward the house.

p. 108 Typed words crossed out; arrow indicating relocation of phrase; handwritten words inserted:

I sent him off ~~because I knew what those low-down pore white trash Roberts would do.~~ She spoke each word with a certain unction of hatred. There was something stored and awaited, *a cold unction of hatred*, in the slow words of ~~the insult.~~

p. 108 Typed words crossed out:

~~“You don’t understand, Mrs. Hawkins! You don’t know.”~~

p. 108 Typed word deleted:

~~“But~~ I knew what you would do,” she said.

p. 108 Typed words crossed; handwritten word inserted:

~~Then her~~ *The* voice broke, suddenly tearful.

p. 108 Typed words crossed; handwritten word inserted:

“But they didn’t get him, ~~=you bitch~~ *you—you bitch.*”

p. 108 Typed word crossed out:

The door slammed ~~shut.~~

## VII The Craft of Warren's Poetry

### The Evolution of "Amazing Grace in the Back Country"

*H. R. Stoneback*

Since a number of the New Paltz Symposium speakers, as well as the poets who read at the "Homage to RPW" Centennial Reading, paid tribute to Warren's poetic craft, it seemed appropriate to include here one of Warren's well-known poems. With a view toward encouraging close attention to Warren's art of revision in the case of one poem, we sought permission to publish here the final text, together with facsimile pages of the holograph manuscript, and the later typescript with holograph corrections by Warren (and editorial suggestions by William Meredith). "Amazing Grace in the Back Country" was first published in the *Ohio Review* in 1977; its first appearance in book form was in *Now and Then: Poems 1976-1978*; the text printed here is from John Burt's edition of *The Collected Poems of Robert Penn Warren* (Louisiana State University Press, 1998). The editors are grateful to John Burt, Warren's Literary Executor, for permission to reprint the published text and include here the manuscript facsimile pages.

We might note briefly a few of the more striking aspects of Warren's revisions. He begins with the old hymn title "Amazing Grace," adds "In Back Country" in the typescript, and in the final editorial process "the" is inserted in the title—although to some editorial ears the title without "the" might sound both more Warrenesque and more true to place-idiom. The poem's opening line evolves from the first version's "Under the star-stung sky of late August" (which remains in the typescript) to the final "In the season of late August star-fall"; such a change might evoke a feeling familiar to students of manuscripts, an inkling of preference for the original version. In any case, it seems hard to give up that "star-stung sky," and one wonders why Warren felt compelled to do so. Here, too, some readers may ponder some unthinkable future when *all* poets compose on the computer, all manuscript variations cease to exist, all revisions are lost, and only final versions exist. Finally, we note the precision with which Warren navigates and negotiates the syntax and categories of grace: "Amazing grace so freely found" (holograph) becomes, quite correctly, "amazing grace so freely given" in the final version; and the typescript version of "moving on into darkness, / Of amazing grace" is transformed, with a clarifying effect that removes any syntactical ambiguity with regard to the darkness of grace, into the final felicity of "moving on into darkness, / Voices sang of amazing grace."

Warren's revision process is also illuminated by the recognition that the typescript contains notes made by his friend and fellow poet William Meredith. It is instructive to note that Warren, in his 70s, still follows a practice he had begun as a teenaged member of the *Fugitive* group of poets at Vanderbilt in the early 1920s—sending out poetry manuscripts for commentary from other poets. Graduate seminar students of explication, as well as poets, might learn a good deal about the craft of poetry from contemplating William Meredith's commentary (at the bottom of the second typescript page): "If this is still malleable, I'd suggest that it could be revised in the light of its 4-beat or 5-beat line. I think only the exceptionally long or short line should be allowed to resist what I hear as a tetrameter matrix. Wm Meredith." We note also Meredith's editorial note in the margin next to line 27 (in typescript and final text): "stet: this line needs its length"; and, next to Warren's original long line 40, "Like an incantation . . . fresh-minted," Meredith wrote "Not this one, though." Warren heeded Meredith's advice and let line 27 stand as the poem's longest line, and he achieved a significantly sharpened effect by changing the typescript line 40 into the two short lines of the final version: "Like an invocation, out loud—and the word / So lovely, fresh-minted." Thus Warren, at the pinnacle of his poetic form, with ten volumes of poetry behind him, spanning a career approaching six decades in duration, pays heed to the advice of a poet fourteen years his junior. Some of the advice, that is, for Meredith's "tetrameter matrix" is a far more complicated matter, too intricate to deal with here.



## Amazing Grace in the Back Country

Robert Penn Warren

In the season of late August star-fall,  
When the first crickets crinkled the dark,  
There by woods, where oaks of the old forest-time  
Yet swaggered and hulked over upstarts, the tent  
Had been pitched, no bigger than one of  
Some half-bankrupt carnival come  
To town with fat lady, human skeleton, geek,  
Man-woman and moth-eaten lion, and one  
Boa constrictor for two bits seen  
Fed a young calf; plus a brace  
Of whores to whom menopause now  
Was barely a memory, one with gold teeth and one  
With game gam, but both  
With aperture ready to serve  
Any late-lingerers, and leave  
A new and guaranteed brand of syphilis handy—yes,  
  
The tent old and yellowed and patched,  
Lit inside by three wire-hung gasoline lamps  
That outside, through threadbare canvas, were muted to gold.  
Here no carnival now—the tabernacle  
To the glory of God the Most High, for now corn  
Was laid by, business slack, such business as was, and  
The late-season pain gnawing deep at the human bone  
As the season burned on to its end.

God's Word and His glory—and I, aged twelve,  
Sat there while an ex-railroad engineer  
Turned revivalist shouted the Threat and the Promise, with sweat  
On his brow, and shirt plastered to belly, and  
Eyes a-glaze with the mania of joy.

And now by my knees crouched some old-fool dame  
In worn-out black silk, there crouching with tears  
In her eyes as she tugged me to kneel  
And save my pore twelve-year-old soul

Before too late. She wept.  
She wept and she prayed, and I knew I was damned,  
Who was guilty of all short of murder,  
At least in my heart and no alibi there, and once  
I had walked down a dark street, lights out in houses,  
Uttering, “Lust—lust—lust,”  
Like an invocation, out loud—and the word  
So lovely, fresh-minted.

I saw others fall as though stricken. I heard  
The shout of salvation. I stared  
In the red-rimmed, wet eyes of the crazy old dame,  
Whose name I never remembered, but knew  
That she loved me—the Pore Little Lamb—and I thought  
How old bones now creaked in God’s name.

But the Pore Little Lamb, he hardened his heart,  
Like a flint nigger-head rounded slick in a creek-bed  
By generations of flood, and suddenly  
I found myself standing, then  
Ran down an aisle, and outside,  
Where cool air and dark filled my lungs, and fifty  
Yards off, with my brow pressed hard  
On the scaly bark of a hickory tree,  
Vomited. Fumbling  
In darkness, I found the spring  
And washed my mouth. Humped there,

And knowing damnation, I stared  
Through interstices of black brush to the muted gold glow  
Of God’s canvas, till in  
The last hymn of triumph rose voices, and hearts  
Burst with joy at amazing grace so freely given,  
And moving on into darkness,

Voices sang of amazing grace, singing as they  
Straggled back to the village, where voice after voice died away,

As singer by singer, in some dark house,  
Found bed and lay down,  
And tomorrow would rise and do all the old things to do,  
Until that morning they would not rise, not ever.

And now, when all voices were stilled and the lamps  
Long out in the tent, and stars  
Had changed place in the sky, I yet lay  
By the spring with one hand in the cold black water  
That showed one star in reflection, alone—and lay  
Wondering and wondering how many  
A morning would I rise up to greet,  
And what grace find.

But that was long years ago. I was twelve years old then.





# Amazing Grace in the Back Country

(typescript with holograph corrections)

Robert Penn Warren

## AMAZING GRACE *in Back Country*

Under the star-stung sky of late August,  
While first crickets crinkled the dark,  
There by woods, where trees of the old forest-time  
Yet swaggered and hulked over upstarts, they  
Had pitched the tent, no bigger than one of  
Some half-bankrupt ~~circus~~ carnival come  
To town with fat lady, human skeleton, geek,  
Man-woman, and moth-eaten lion and one  
Boa constrictor for two bits to be seen being fed  
A young calf; plus a brace ~~new~~  
Of whores to whom menopause was barely  
A memory ~~now~~, *one* with gold teeth and one  
With game gam, but both  
With aperture ready to serve  
Any late -lingerers, and leave  
A new and guaranteed brand of syphilis handy -- yes,

*Wistfully*

The tent was ~~not~~ old and yellowed and patched,  
Lit inside by three gasoline lamps hung on wire. ~~Light was~~  
*Part* ~~and~~ outside, through the threadbare canvas ~~if there were~~ muted to gold.  
~~Part~~ no carnival now -- a tabernacle  
To the glory of God, the Most High, ~~now with~~ corn  
*was* laid by, "business slack, such business as was, and  
The late-season pain gnawing deep at the human bone  
As the season burned" to its end.

God's Word and His Glory: and I, aged twelve,  
Sat there while an ex-railroad engineer  
Turned revivalist, shouted the Threat and the Promise, with sweat  
On his brow, and shirt plastered to belly, and  
Eyes a-glaze with the mania of joy.

*stet: this line needs its length*

And now by my knee crouched some old dame,  
In worn-out black silk, crouching with tears  
In her eyes as she tugged me to kneel  
And save my pores, twelve-year-old soul  
Before it was too late. She wept.  
She wept and she prayed, and I knew I was damned,  
Who was guilty of all ~~short~~ of murder,  
At least in my heart and no alibi there, and once  
I had walked down a dark street, lights out in houses,  
Saying, "Lust -- lust -- lust," ~~and~~  
Like an incantation, out loud -- the word ~~was~~ <sup>so</sup> lovely, fresh-minted.

*not this one, though*

SPACE

SEE page 2

amazing grace - 2

Isaw others fall as though stricken. I heard  
The shouting of joy at salvation. I stared  
In the red, wet old eyes of the ~~damned~~ dame whose name  
I didn't even know, ~~but~~ knew that she loved me,  
The Pore Little Lamb - and thought  
How her old bones now creaked in God's name.

But the Pore Little Lamb, he hardened his heart,  
Like a flint nigger-head rounded slick in a creek-bed  
By generations of flood, and suddenly  
I found myself standing, then  
Ran down an aisle, and outside,  
Cool air and the dark filled my lungs, and fifty  
Yards off, with my brow pressed hard  
On the scaly bark of a hickory tree,  
Vomited. Fumbling  
In darkness, I found the spring  
And washed my mouth. Humped + here,

There, and knowing damnation, I stared  
Through interstices of black brush to the muted gold glow  
Of God's ~~camas~~, till ~~the voices~~ <sup>rose</sup> voices  
Rose in the last hymn of triumph, and hearts  
Burst with joy at amazing grace so freely given,  
As they moved out into darkness.

~~As they moved out into darkness,~~  
Of amazing grace they still were singing, singing as they  
Straggled back to the village, ~~their~~ voice after voice died away  
As ~~soon~~ in a dark house found bed, and lay down  
And tomorrow would rise and do all the old things to do,  
Until the morning they would not rise, not ever.

And then all the voices were stilled, and ~~now~~ <sup>now</sup> now  
The lamps were long out in the tent, and stars  
Had changed place in the sky, ~~and~~ I still lay  
By the spring with one hand in the cold, black water  
That showed one star in reflection, alone, and long  
Wondered and wondered how many mornings I  
Would rise and what grace would find.

But that was a long time ago. I was twelve years old then.

Robert Penn Warren.

by this is still malleable, I'd suggest that it could be revised in the  
light of its 4-beat or 5-beat line. I think only the exceptionally long  
or short line should be allowed to resist what I hear as a tetrameter  
metric. Wm Meredith

~~And wondering, wondering how many~~  
~~a morning's small fragments, and that fine point~~  
~~and that fine point~~

## VIII Homage to RPW Poetry Reading

### Introduction

The opening event of the Robert Penn Warren Centennial Symposium was the “Homage to RPW Poetry Reading,” an extraordinary gathering of poets and writers of national and international reputation (together with younger poets), all of them assembled to pay tribute to Warren. In his introduction to the program, H. R. Stoneback, host and moderator, read greetings to the audience and tributes to Warren from a number of celebrated writers who had been invited but for various reasons were unable to attend. Warren’s daughter, Rosanna Warren, Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets, sent her regrets that she could not attend because she had to teach her class that night at Boston University; thus the audience was reminded that her father—poet, novelist, literary critic *sans pareil*—was first of all a *teacher*. Other leading writers who sent messages of tribute to Warren included Wendell Berry, Billy Collins, Richard Wilbur, and Tobias Wolff. Collins, our recent Poet Laureate, sent appropriate words of praise for Warren, our *first* Poet Laureate. Wilbur, Warren’s near-contemporary who is still writing extraordinary poems in his mid-80s, wrote that, although house-bound at the time, he wished he could attend “to help celebrate Red Warren, who deserves all sorts of remembrance and acclaim.” Dave Smith, distinguished poet and Coleman Professor of Poetry at Johns Hopkins, was scheduled to read but had to cancel due to illness; he sent both a poem for and a reminiscence of a visit with Warren (see below).

Of the readers who did participate in the celebration only two are not represented in the works collected here. Chinua Achebe, internationally acclaimed and widely regarded as the father of African literature in the English language and one of the most important writers in world literature in the last half-century, praised Warren’s work—especially *All the King’s Men*—and regaled the audience with informal commentary on Warren’s themes of responsibility, identity, and redemption interwoven with his reading from and discussion of his own masterpiece *Things Fall Apart*. (Unfortunately, there was a video and recording malfunction; thus his commentary cannot be reproduced here.) Joan Murray, award-winning poet and author of numerous works, including *Queen of the Mist* and, most recently, *Dancing on the Edge*, read from her work in honor of Warren.

Robert Kelly, author of more than 50 volumes of poetry and fiction, mesmerized the audience with a poem of tribute to Warren composed for the occasion—“Robert Penn Warren Puzzles Over A Variant In A Stanza of Coleridge’s



‘Rime of the Ancient Mariner’—here printed for the first time. John Burt, Warren’s literary executor, read the selection included here from his forthcoming volume of poems, *Victory*, and perfectly exemplified what Warren meant when he instructed his writing students at Yale to ground their work in history. Donald Junkins read from his most recent of ten volumes of poetry, *Late at Night in the Rowboat* (a collection that deploys as epigraph quotation from Warren’s poetry). And H. R. Stoneback read an excerpt from his sixth volume of poetry, released on Warren’s 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday (24 April 2005)—a book-length poem entitled *Homage: A Letter to Robert Penn Warren*.

William Bedford Clark, leading Warren scholar, read poems from a volume-in-progress, including his meditation here on Warren’s house in Fairfield, Connecticut. James Finn Cotter, President of the International Hopkins Society and translator of *The Divine Comedy*, added a variation on the same street address in his “The Onion Barn.” Lynn Behrendt, founder of the Cosmic Baseball Association, author of several volumes of poetry, paid eloquent tribute in her “To Robert Penn Warren.” Dennis Doherty, author of a recent collection of poems, *The Bad Man*, saluted Warren with “Tattoo.” Robert Waugh, widely published poet and author of a recently published critical volume on H. P. Lovecraft, evoked a Warrenesque meditation on Time.

It is particularly gratifying to witness the engagement with Warren’s work that reverberates in the poems written for the occasion by a younger generation of poets and Warren aficionados. The relationship between the grand canonical poet and his inheritors is not always and only agonistic. Michael Beilfuss, William Boyle, Damian Carpenter, Brad McDuffie, and Matthew Nickel—all current or recent graduate students and TAs at New Paltz—honored Warren with their meditations on the central themes of his poetry and fiction. I feel certain that the Warren I knew, who was *always* a teacher, who valued profoundly his connections with students and younger writers, would find joy and deep delight in these poems that salute him as mentor. These poems have a way of *knowing* what David Milch—one of Warren’s students and great admirers (and creator of *Hill Street Blues*, *NYPD Blue*, and *Deadwood*)—knows and means when he declares that he finds it necessary to reread Warren’s poetry “at least three mornings a week.”

When I was a graduate student (at Vanderbilt in the 1960s) my generation of young poets loved Warren’s poetry, especially the later work. In 1969, when *Audubon: A Vision* was published, a poet and songwriting colleague got hold of a copy before I did. He called me long distance, well after midnight and instructed me to “get a bottle and *listen*.” He then read the complete *Audubon*—it was one of the great poetry readings, just the voice on the phone, Jack Daniels and me. That reading was in the back of my mind when I chose to conclude the Warren Centennial Poetry Reading with the closing lines of *Audubon*:

Tell me a story.

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

Make it a story of great distances, and starlight.

The name of the story will be Time,  
But you must not pronounce its name.

Tell me a story of deep delight.

Taken together, the poems of *Homage to Warren* gathered here tell a story beyond unpronounceable Time, distanced by deep delight.

—H. R. STONEBACK

## Warren's Flowers

Dave Smith

Out of the chalet, chests warm with bourbon  
poured lunch long, we moved in leaves  
Vermont lay down season after season,  
going to the pond Warren dammed up,  
where each lap, he said, sounded a line  
he strung over the water, over blackness  
it made my skin creep to look down upon.

But now I saw his writing room out there  
under the great canopy where the sun  
occasionally starred the resolute dark,  
its walls only screen, the roof flat,  
sloped like a face nothing here loved.  
As if some interrogation was in progress,  
in the middle sat a plain desk and a chair.

Blossoms white as camellias, some fat  
like magnolias, budded the understory,  
emerging from the earth no one had  
disturbed with plow or foundation,  
fecund as answers. Already we had come  
to log-steps he hacked in the hillside,  
crows jeered our intrusion, a web's flap

grazed my face. Things moved. I'd been in  
the pond already, the slick newts eyeing me,  
the moss that clung like unsloughed skin,  
a bottom no weight could hold long on.  
"What flowers grow up there?" I asked.  
"The never finished kind," he laughed.  
Soon he'd go under. But then "new poems."

EDITORIAL NOTE: Writing to the editor about the background of this poem, Dave Smith recalls that Warren's homemade pond, where he always invited guests to swim, "was awful, though funny." Like other visitors to Warren's Vermont place, Smith comments on Warren's swimming attire (black tank suit and white bathing cap) and his swimming style ("like a

strange dolphin”). Warren told Smith that he wrote poems in his head, trying out the lines as he swam. On one visit, Warren, laughing, showed Smith a book where some critic reported that Warren swam regularly in his Olympic-sized swimming pool.

—HRS

## September Song

Donald Junkins

Butternut squash flowers bloom on the edges of the late  
picked fields, and the hurricane season languishes  
in the glow of Penn Warren's hundredth year, the anguish  
of New Orleans in the autumn air, our state  
of mind. His *Band of Angels* tracks us down  
again, "sold down the river" in high yellow season  
again, the nation's old theme. Long fuses, vines  
bursting into trumpet flames, Amanda, brown  
become "yaller," the genitalia of the map  
the slave journey's end. Robert of Kentucky knew  
King Louis' delta earth, the fecund sap  
of life: mockingbirds, trombones, the brew  
of bodies intertwined. When the walls came tumbling  
down, the angels wept, fearing at the rumbling.

## Robert Penn Warren Puzzles Over a Variant in a Stanza of Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner"

Robert Kelly

Why does *lonely* become *lonesome*?  
I am lonely, you are lonesome?  
Lonely means to stand alone  
when someone else is wanted,  
needed, absent. Desired even.  
This poem does not speak of desire.

Lonesome is just a place, a place  
can be lonesome without me.  
O love. I love you for your  
etymologies. Lonely means  
*lone-bodied*. The other  
—any other?—is *lone-full*,

full of being alone. The mariner  
so full of anguish on the lone sea  
refers his terror to the crowded land,  
and he finds an absence there,  
a complex literary metaphor,  
a road that breaks my heart.  
Why, why won't it leave me alone,  
alone as his road. A road, a road  
goes on the land from place to place,

an empty place, or road, or house, is  
*lonesome* (1834) where once, one,  
only, you alone, the text, the woman  
was *lonely* (1798). The road  
was lonely, the man was in his body  
all alone. This place is full of alone—

I turn around and look back  
over my shoulder—why?—to see  
what my body has left behind  
after I have passed through the world.  
To see if I am alone with my body  
on this road. What does a body

do on a road that needs alone?

What does a man do with his body  
when alone? He looks behind furtively  
and sees he is not alone. A man  
is a woman on this road, a woman  
is a lonely place, a lonesome man  
keeps walking towards her, walking  
away from what he knows. At evening  
moving west his shadow would be behind him

clear. He is followed by what he chooses,  
a man's act is always waiting behind him,  
step by step, advancing till the man and his deed  
come together. The shadow becomes the man.  
But all his life Coleridge fled from his deed,  
from all the busy doing that sucks the mind  
from kindlier shadow, the silence place,  
and leaves him alone with what he must do.

Nothing. What road is this? Alone with his body  
already is a crowded place—man, deed, shadow,  
road, all jostling to be alone. Alone with him.  
He yearns all his life for a lonesome place,  
a house with nobody in it. My body is a house  
with nobody in it, not even me.

Because I am lonely on a road? No, the road  
is always talking, loud and soft the way they do,  
all day long the crows or cars or phones are calling.  
Phone is a Greek word for voice but phones have  
no voices, only crackling sounds that make like words  
and frighten me, scare me the way a noise  
behind me makes me spin around and look.

And nothing's there. Nothing's ever there.  
At noon the church bells have a fit

and make the merchants hungry, hurry  
to their silly lunches and a maiden's eye  
wary as she takes their orders and I outside  
stare past the roast beef to their sprightly unions,  
communions, I stand outside, sick  
with poetry, tricking myself to feel,  
to feel that every rhyme is coming home.

What does a dead man have to do with the living?  
What can we learn from dead Coleridge  
that the girl across the street could never tell us?  
He makes them all come back to life,  
*Arise, arise* his shadow says, *I spill these words  
along the pavement so that you follow, follow.*  
It must be you I see when I spin round  
to check the empty road behind every word,  
the eager terrifying hungry shape  
that flees from wherever we have been together,

flees towards us trying to *mean*. Words  
try to hide themselves in thee. In me.  
Embedded in our distances, we flee  
into each other, there, ahead  
of any place we've ever been, free  
of any scent or flavor, the pure alert  
apartness of the future, the only place  
still free of me, still room for me  
to find a lonesome house to store my mind.

We read what no one wrote.  
We wrap ourselves with wind  
and claim to be trees, gaze  
at the interminable sea  
and think we have something to say,  
even about it, the sea, naming,  
naming, speaking birds out of high heaven



to ride the masts of our imagined ships.  
No ship, no road, no man, no fiend  
behind him hurrying. Just one word now,  
another word thirty years later,  
and more years go by we try to read.

So little happens in a life but living.  
It is terrible to be drunk and read a book,  
we try to read everything as if it were a book,  
what else can we do, only read, only mark  
down words on pages that make us feel  
that now I'm reading, this writing business,  
just to pretend there's a text I'm reading,  
terrible to be drunk and reading, never  
knowing where the words are taking,  
my own breath so loud I can't smell the words.  
They have their own mouths too, *phonai*  
the Greeks said, voices. I have no voice  
and if I had I would not listen,

Like one who on a sunlit lawn  
Sits trembling in his chair  
And having once begun to think  
Stops short and thinks no more  
Because he knows some frightful thought  
Commands him to despair,

no, I don't want to think about it.  
Anything. I want to sit here on the lawn  
and drink. Forget his strange moon horns,  
his broken bird, I have icebergs of my own,  
this lawn, *this body round my thought*—

did I say that? A line I have to use.  
Write. But never think. Sit here in the sun  
like a man who sits quietly and drinks.  
But drinking is a kind of thinking,

lonesome thinking that bursts into song,  
raucous, a drunk is always young, adolescent  
baritone, Coleridge springing up the Devon path  
singing. Not for me to sing. A little Mahler  
on the phonograph—Jesus, the word means  
*writing the voice!*—then a little Patti Page  
until one is drunk enough for no more drinking,  
rhyming poets are always heavy drinkers,  
why is that, no more rhyming, hence no more thinking.  
This dead albatross between my legs,  
this Freudian universe I see in every mirror,  
no different from the lonely road  
that stretches out before me when I close my eyes.

30 April-1 May 2005

from **Homage: A Letter to Robert Penn Warren**

H. R. Stoneback

VII

Here, now, in France decades later, I struggle  
to finish this letter. Totemic sculpture  
whines and whistles in the wind in the dunes.  
The house, the yard, is littered with art: weird tunes  
played by the sea—our hearts and this lonesome coast  
one vast Aeolian Harp. We were lucky, or cursed,  
to get this place. Met them at the Countess’  
townhouse in Paris. Got on well. He’s mad—  
She’s a poet, translator of René Char.  
Tonight, by candlelight, I find it hard  
to read poetry. I must find a way to hear,  
to say what I’m missing here, get it to come clear  
for History, Truth, Art. Tomorrow in Paris  
I’ll mail this: will I then feel shamed, embarrassed?

Today in the village pumping water from the well,  
I heard the boy’s choir, voices singing in the church.  
Walking back from town, I shouted songs  
to curious cattle contemplative  
in their free-range sea-pastures,  
songs I had not sung since boyhood: 12 years old, revivals,  
camp-meeting. I loved the old songs about Joy and Grace  
(and I sang them for girls with those names) and how I came  
“Just As I Am” and we were “Almost Persuaded”  
and I knew I was wretched but I could be Saved.  
Then I remembered old songs I did not like:  
“I want to be in the world, not *of* it,

AUTHOR’S NOTE: This excerpt is Section VII of a book-length poem, *Homage: A Letter to Robert Penn Warren*, published in 2005 on the occasion of the Warren Centennial (New Orleans: Portals Press). The “now” of this section refers to the winter of 1973-74, when I wrote this part of the poem, while living in Brittany and Paris. The “decades later” refers to encounters and connections with Warren and his work in the 1950s and 1960s referred to in the sections (I-VI) immediately preceding this passage.

I want to avoid its sin, not love it.”

I knew even then that was bad poetry, bad songwriting,  
and I knew too that I wanted to be all-totally  
*in and of* the world and sin could not be avoided,  
I wanted the fire of the World’s Body  
in my eyes and its flesh against my skin  
touching, always touching, like guitar-strings  
under my fingers. And I knew then that if I could have  
and love the world that way I could at last  
learn to love God for I was never a Gnostic  
and from age six at least I abhorred the Abstract  
for I knew that the World had to be God’s Body  
for I knew that complicity would set us free  
and that was the only way we could *be, love*, in Time.  
(I wept with this knowledge when I was 12.  
I wanted to give away what I didn’t even have.  
I wanted to sing everything into silence and love.)

It is because I have seen this, and more, in your writing  
that I send you this homage, this awkward windy letter.

What I must try to tell you has come to me:  
The Time is September 1962. The Place is Louisiana,  
the Sugar Cane Festival in Cajun Country.  
Dancing and singing everywhere in the streets.  
Walking the world with my guitar, finding festival,  
I was enlisted to sit in with the band that played—  
fiddles, accordions, guitars, washboard—the stage  
was a flatbed farm truck. After I sang some Hank,  
the leader of the Fête adopted me. Shoulder-slung,  
crossing his chest like bandoleers, two Clorox jugs  
of “homemade absinthe” (thus he named it to me,  
and I believed,  
in the yellow cloud and shudder of that liquid poetry).  
He shared sips with others, jug-chugalugs with me.

At some point, when he had started speechifying over the microphone, someone told me he was the heir to the local Tabasco fortune. He kept talking about Oxford, raising an army to march through the swamps to Ole Miss, said it was every red-blooded American's duty to resist, to fight the Federal government's "occupation of Mississippi," to stop the "damn Yankee invasion of Oxford."

We sang for hours in the dancing streets. Things got crazier when he kept making his speech.

Pickup trucks with gun-racks  
and truckbeds full of guys with ax-handles began to line up  
in formation down a sidestreet. One of his lieutenants  
wanted to know if I'd ride with him, said "you know this ain't  
about race, this is about States Rights."

I of course had no intention of riding or marching to Mississippi  
with his army to resist anything.

(Hell, I'd read your *Segregation*. I was already a Civil Rights  
Troubadour, if not Crusader. Even been to jail over it.

By then I'd read Faulkner—

Lucas and Sam Fathers were my brothers.)

I was only concerned with the song I was singing  
and the weightlessness of the guitar in my hands.

I could not stop them,  
but I'd had enough of Original Ab(sin)the.

At some point in the curve of the bleached dawn  
our Clorox Captain and his hot-breathed regiment  
had gone off towards Mississippi, to pass out in the sugar cane,  
to cough up their last gas somewhere in the vast and lost  
bayou and shadow

of the ever-receding Mississippi of their dreams.  
(I heard later they never made it to Oxford. But others did.)

We were picking and singing in the last lit bar:  
in that numinous place, a living chronology,

exact sequences of all the hieratic country songs—Jimmy Rodgers, all of Hank Williams, Webb Pierce, Roy Acuff, early Elvis and Everlys, Fats Domino, Johnny Horton and some jambalaya jukejoint tunes.  
All sung out at dawn, we felt *placed*, near and safe, and we talked softly, languorously, about crazed crusaders gone off into the night, slouching towards Yoknapatawpha. Then a tall Tulane blonde, sultry in the sad detritus of her innocence, down from the Garden District to slum with the rednecks, announced: “Did y’all know Bill Faulkner is dead?” It had been some weeks; everybody had heard but me—news travels slow when you move fast on the road. There was something in the studied way she said it, the presumption of that “Bill,” the voice’s unearned familiarity, that set my fingers moving on my guitar— Thus I hardly heard the old man behind the bar mumble over his bourbon: “I wonder what Red Warren would say? He’s all we got now.”

I have not thought for years of that bartender in New Iberia, Louisiana, and I have not stopped to wonder between the intervening accretion of facts and the accumulating burden of the past whether that bartender was maybe a student of yours at LSU, writer of freshman themes or senior papers or even a poem for your *Southern Review*. But now, from this mammoth isolation where I seldom hear the news, here, under the miraculous rhetoric of the sea, in the storm-flawed grammar of this forlorn shore of Brittany where a grand theory of manners disciplines our violence,

under the sentence of vast indiscretions of dying summers,  
seasons where I sweat and dread the coming of letters,  
and the winter's allotment of non-sequiturs,  
I am obscurely moved to make a pilgrimage to bayou country  
for the next great harvest festival,  
to seek out that old man behind the bar  
(reading, I fancy, *Brother to Dragons*  
between poised dispensations of bourbon).  
And after an hour of yearning innocent guitar  
and our common portions of whiskey, and night,  
in the quiet complicity of dawn, in the original light,  
I would turn to him and whisper hoarsely against the day:  
"I know what Red Warren would say,  
and he's all we got now."

Les Moutiers-en-Retz, Brittany & Paris  
(December-January, 1973-74)

## The Passing of the Armies

*Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, 1865*

John Burt

He was at Falling Waters in a dream.  
The horses picked their way on shuddering planks  
And clambered up the rubble on the shore  
Under the furtive sibilance of leaves.  
Gaunt riders whispered in moon-spattered dark,  
Drew into shadows, noiseless, shifting, mortal.  
Each time he knew how it would go. First, scouts,  
Then skirmishers, and then, all through the night,  
The wary tireless regiments of shades,  
Lee's men, groping back from Gettysburg,  
Slipping the trap, escaping into war  
While he was huddled, silent, miserable,  
And rooted terribly upon that bank.  
At Wilderness, at Spotsylvania,  
That steaming night in front of Rives' redoubt,  
Where, as he bled through stinking bandages  
And orderlies pulled dead men off the cots,  
His broken boys, tangled between the lines,  
Moaned all night for water, for their mothers,  
For someone to crawl out beneath the guns  
And blow their brains out (Jesus! do it now!),  
Or in the hospital in Maryland,  
He'd watched those riders feeling their way out.  
And now, again, the war all over with,  
And Lincoln in his grave, he had that dream,  
Outside of Richmond, marching his troops home.  
Someone was shaking him. "Sir?"

"O.K. What is it?"

"I'm sorry, sir. It's just your horse again."

EDITORIAL NOTE: This is an excerpt from a book-length poem entitled *Victory* forthcoming from Turning Point Books.



“What’s spooked him now?”

“He’s kicked Lieutenant Keene.”

“He hurt him?”

“No. But he’s just getting started.  
We thought you’d know the way to talk him down.”

“All right. I’ll see to him.” And thought, “My horse.  
Five thousand men do what I tell them to,  
But not my horse.” And he could hear the stamping  
(As he eased his sore feet into boots)  
Thirty yards away, the snort and whinny  
Of a horse about to rear, the murmured “Easy ...”  
As the orderly edged closer, “Easy now ...”  
Crooning, wheedling, the straining self-control  
No horse would fail to see through and disdain.  
“It’s all right, Joe,” he called out from the tent  
And stepped into the smoky moonlit camp  
They’d pitched in darkness, hungry and annoyed  
To march so hard in peacetime, and so long,  
To God knows where. Near Hanover, he guessed.

A dozen campfires smouldered past the trees,  
Red haloes in the distance. The surgeon’s lamp  
Inside his rotten tent cast silhouettes.  
But no light near. He saw the shadows scuffling,  
Peered hard a second, then came trotting out  
In darkness, through the brittle, ragged pines.  
Their needles, thick and soft, gave underfoot,  
And stayed him with their clean and bitter smell.

Then something grabbed him. Something underground  
Reached up, and took his ankle, pitched him down  
Hard in the leafmeal, wrenched him to his knees.

He stood, and brushed his trousers sheepishly.

“General?”

“I’m all right.”

“Look—my God!”

And there was what he’d stepped in, a dead man’s heart,  
The broken bone-house just beneath the leaves,  
And then his horse kicked loose what made him rear:  
A half-crushed skull he’d pawed up from the dirt.  
Before the horse was calmed they’d found ten more,  
A bayonet, a buckle from a belt,  
A blue cap with a little 2 attached.  
All round he saw, as the moon washed through the clouds,  
The pale ribs swamped in litter, drifting there  
Like spars and tackle shattered in the surf.

This was Peake’s Crossing; a little fight, their first.  
These were his townsmen, from the Second Maine,  
Left in the night retreat three years ago.  
They had not, in the dark, known where they were,  
And in the light might not have recognized  
That muddy hedgerow where they’d stood their ground,  
Ramming muskets through the tangled brush  
Till night fell down and both sides slipped away.  
Now, on their way to life again, they met  
Their other selves, still waiting in death’s harbor  
For the long slow crossing into nothingness,  
And they were nothing too, stone-blank and spent,  
Sick with war and mystified with peace  
If this was peace, this armistice with death.

Next morning, as they marched, their fractured salvage  
Stowed in crackerboxes one by one,  
Bands of ragged Freedmen trailed them, laughing,  
Cheering, begging food and shoes, half-starved.  
“What will they do,” he thought, “How will they live?  
Will anyone remember how to live?”

He passed each gutted house, each gullied field  
Asproun with burdock, thistle, clouts of brush;  
Each one, he thought, is rooted in a man.

“Dimly in dusk after the harbor fight,”  
—How often he had parsed this passage out,  
In freezing classrooms full of eager kids—  
“Demosthenes and Nicias could see  
In twos and threes, with every soughing swell,  
White swollen bodies of Athenian boys  
Swept up the sand, with flopping outstretched arms,  
Then dragged back down into the bitter foam.  
The Syracusans sealed the harbor mouth  
And sent detachments out to block the fords.  
The ships were gone. They had not men enough,  
Unless they drained the courage of despair,  
To force their way by land that night and flee  
The chains of those they came to put in chains,  
But nothing less could save that army now.  
Each man left his dead there for the crows,  
The laughing ones, the pluckers-out of eyes.  
And, knowing what would happen soon enough,  
Abandoned too their wounded in the tents.  
All those too weak to go clung to their necks  
As men in shipwrecks clutch and drown their friends.  
But, fearing worse, their brothers shook them off  
And marched to meet, next night, defeat and shame.”

He shook himself, and tried to turn his mind  
To Brunswick (Maybe he would teach again.  
Teach what? What did he know that mattered now?),

To Fanny (not a single word came back  
Of her last letter, pale and general  
As letters turn when nothing is to say).

We had no thought that war would master us,

Would lay to waste what war was meant to save.  
Down Pennsylvania Avenue, next week,  
Our shades will march in triumph in our place,  
Still tempting us as more and less than men,  
Still taunting us with what we have become.

Destiny, not men, will rule us now,  
That goddess freshened with the taste of blood,  
Whose many names are synonyms for death.  
Now every man goes tense for the command  
He serves, is driven by, but cannot fathom,  
Past all knowing, past all right and wrong,  
Swept up in something grim and great and fatal,  
Till he is nothing but what he is in fire,  
And freedom bends itself back into force.  
Every spirit builds itself a house,  
And in it builds an altar to necessity:

“For our part, look, we’ll skip Speech Number One,  
How Athens drove the Persians from your gates  
So you owe her your freedom (Give it here!  
We’ll keep your freedom safe for you for sure!);  
For your part, spare us all that rhapsody,  
How Sparta has no stake here any more,  
Or how you mean us well if left alone.  
That kind of talk’s for equals, not for you.  
You know we’ll take your city in a week;  
Save us the effort and we’ll let you live.

“At least we have the honor to be frank,  
So don’t pretend the gods are judging us,  
As if a human quarrel bothered them.  
If what we do were any grief to Zeus  
He could have stopped us any time he wished.  
Gods don’t take sides until it’s over with.  
They’re just like us: they conquer when they can,

And love those most who make the most of chance,  
That chance that you'd have taken if you could.  
Don't tell us otherwise: we too were weak,  
And made the little speeches you've rehearsed,  
And talked down other cities, till in time  
We had the force to use more forthright means.  
Another day may come, and when it does  
We'll take it as we have to, just like you."

Behind him rolled the dust, all gold in blaze.  
Ahead lay Washington, half swamp, half shrine.

## 2495 Redding Road

William Bedford Clark

It takes some time to raise a barn or two:  
The tardy glacier plants its hoarded stones  
Reluctantly, and timid woods push north  
One season at a time—retreat, regroup,  
And harden toward the beams they will become  
Once Yankee pluck and cagey faith arrive  
With bar and adze to make the most of what's  
At hand. Unsanded planks embrace the peg  
And corner-notch, confound Atlantic gales  
That leap the Sound to be at ox and man.  
Spring thaw, like sleet, tries stone and timberwork  
Alike for well one-hundred years and more.

Fairfield indeed, though farmers drop their bones  
Small landholds merge, new peoples are declared,  
Then tear apart and reunite, renewed.  
The not-so-placid 1950s come:  
A Southern man and Yankee bride take charge.  
Derive upon those stones and old-growth wood  
A place of sturdy grace, turn out their books,  
Raise up their get, eat well, drink long with friends,  
Invest a home with royalties and sweat  
(The latter most exactingly applied),  
Then shed their bones in turn, but in an age  
When reconstructions fail to fetch the price.

*Location's where it's at, so build anew.*  
It takes no time to raze a barn or two.

## **The Onion-Barn**

*for Robert Penn Warren*

James Finn Cotter

On Redding Road the lawns are as white  
As the snow-solid sky. The old onion-barn  
That became your home is no longer there:  
All that is left are a field-stone foundation  
And a solitary water tank in the backyard  
Overlooking a meadow where sheep once grazed.

For thirty eight years you and Eleanor lived  
And wrote in the barn you converted yourself,  
Restoring the wooden doors, planks and floors,  
Plastering walls, fitting stones in the fireplace  
And hammering three-hundred-year-old beams.  
At first you had to chase cows out of the barn.

A fifteen-room modern colonial  
With tennis court and pool on three prime acres  
Has replaced the barn. Four large SUVs  
Are garaged where cows were once stalled and milked.  
The real estate agent reports that the house  
Once belonged to the writer Warren Penn.

Kentucky mountain farms, Tennessee woods,  
A kestrel hovering in a Montana sky,  
The nightmare wave towering down the street  
Haunt me like a grandfather's clock in the hall,  
The nettle of innocence and peach-pit of pain  
That blisters the finger at its touch.

Remember the sunlight in your high windows  
Like indigo reflected on the Nile,  
And the pyramid-smooth walls around you,  
Red, as you sat at the table and wrote  
Hieroglyphics on parchment leaves of grass  
Spelling the riddle of our part in the world.

## **Waiting It Out**

*for Robert Penn Warren*

Robert H. Waugh

Give it time, give it time,  
we've not yet bitten in,  
the ground's as hard as it can be,  
the word as wiry,

the times as wiry, the frost-heave,  
the rock and the bitter suns  
you grapple on, you wait on spring,  
you die in winter's taproot.

Why should it matter? (A boy  
puts his hand to a second hand  
that moves and does not move) our slow  
life's rooted elsewhere.

Give it time, give it time,  
we've not yet bitten in,  
the sleet and the snow-driven rage of the land  
you laugh at, bitten in.



## Tattoo

Dennis Doherty

Our long concrete walk from the ramshackle,  
tar splashed road (lane of honeysuckle hedges  
and loving-hand-placed stones in the nut butter sun)  
to the house of open doors, open arms,  
the three story house of many rooms,  
summercool with the breeze of open windows,  
dank with the odor of cuttingboard wood ...

not yet to enter the home, but that biding walk  
beneath the tree, now a livid, spongy mat from  
the purple venal bleeding of her mulberries,  
the stains of the quick stamped into concrete  
by summers of naked family feet, in glee,  
in anguish: flight to bosom, or flight from womb.

Can random pattern be possible on a walk  
palimpsest of legends in bruised rosettes?  
In the soul's dark night longing for mother, father,  
I dream rhyming bursts of red and blue in twos.

Walk's living, livid sod of knuckly rootlets  
grows a dream of towel wrapped necks after raft wars,  
the jangle of dancing life jacket buckles  
flying loosely out and back again,  
of bare toe's recoil at the fleshy squish.  
My ticklish lungs still ache with air of that bay.

Now walk's a lively busy bed, as under tree's arms,  
prolific and profligate, we heard the birds  
at her boiling flesh, toed the seeds at our feet,  
and learned what the beaks of birds will eat.

We calloused our soles chasing phantom manhood  
up the rutted gravel drive (yearly less stone,  
more piercing assault from isolate points),  
blackened in the circuit of warm road tar,  
empurpled upon eternal entrance, exit.

The next owner paved the drive,  
perhaps to trap and save his way.  
He blithely lopped the tree.  
Whence, my drop-fruit memory?

I lost a lover once, who, when she came from me,  
flushed like a drunk on the wine dark sea.  
Areolae bloomed from her nipples to her chin.

Daughter in a shop today bore her aura  
from the balls of her bop, rolled her eyewhites,  
popped the sacs of a berry, my capillaries,  
and I stopped. Closed the eyes (for the dark) of my face.  
Dreamt in colors, ever to enter reclaimable space.

## To Robert Penn Warren

Lynn Behrendt

There was a hawk with a glass eye  
Landed in the shuddering leaves once  
An anti-emersonian bird at the tip of a high blue hill.

And there was boy on a dark road at night  
in a certain season beyond seasons, listening.

In an earlier maniacal century  
in a poem you didn't write  
John James Audubon had a dream  
and forever tied a string onto the leg of an eastern phoebe  
to see if it would return  
come Spring. He learned that it did.  
They do. Some things return.  
Some never leave.

Sixteen darkneses have come and gone.  
One hundred bright mornings ...  
Is it easy to shout Here I Am  
cross the chasm of death  
or does the ruckus of the books get in the way?  
No matter. The evidence is still here;  
what was is; and we can still stand  
to learn something about piety, epiphany, passion,  
the truth not necessarily in capital letters, reading,  
and readying; preparing for, as you wrote, eternity.

Some of us who are still awake begin to feel, reading your lines  
a circular blur of tumbled darkness  
and a remembered spruce or cedar toward sunset  
leans northward in our minds and the road  
seems to lift up off the earth.

## Red's Song

Michael Beilfuss

I first read the first page of *All the King's Men*  
On the sunny spring steps of a youth hostel  
In Jefferson's pristine Romanesque Capitol where,  
The night before, a prostitute in a car propositioned me.  
I don't think the two are related.

I read the last page of *All the King's Men*  
On the sunny steps of Hasbrouck dining hall  
In the last dashing moments before class (American Lit III).  
I thought I knew something of Jack's Burden, the web, and time.  
Then I read *Brother to Dragons*, later that summer,  
And I really heard Robert Penn Warren's voice.

I read it aloud, in my living room, on Elting Corners,  
Just to hear the long rhythms.  
A slight southern accent crept down my throat.  
RPW started speaking.

My housemate Chris walked in.  
I kept on reading, aloud.  
He dropped in a chair and listened.  
Then Jim came in, grungy, home from his roofing job:  
"What's going on?"  
Chris didn't answer and I kept reading.  
He dropped into the stained third-generation Salvation Army sofa and listened.

We all watched as the words floated off the page  
And fluttered out into our living room.  
I wasn't reading anymore.  
RPW read, said, his poem. His words hung  
In the air gaining weight and texture.  
Their density silenced us, the characters crowded us.

Jefferson, head high, stood there, on our dirty green rug  
Then crouched in the corner sweating and biting his nails.  
Lucy, Lilbourn, and Isham, gathered in an opposite corner,  
Whispered, glanced at Jefferson, met us in the eyes,

Stared at our broken furniture and cracked dishes.  
Jim and Chris and I huddled, crouched with the other slaves.

We heard the thunk of the axe on the meat block,  
We felt the earth shake, kicking up the dust of ages  
Past in our living room on Elting Corners.

The two-dollar clock hanging above the empty doorway ticked on  
But that evening, that moment (at no place, at any time)  
Silently followed us, stayed with us.  
Red's words traveled over the hills and valleys of time,  
They whispered through the dense air of memories,  
Light as autumn leaves on their spiraling journey  
They touched ground in our souls  
And rested, to fertilize the coming years.

## The Original Sin Boys

for Robert Penn Warren

William Boyle

Gravesend sweats at the skull with snow, the sky Rebel gray. I carry your books with me—pack heavy with your books—on the D train home. Old women with scissored shopping carts watch me as I read your *Collected Poems*. At Bay Parkway the doors spit open, and I

step out onto the platform. It's quiet. Deadly Brooklyn quiet. First thing I hear is the church bells from St. Mary's on 85<sup>th</sup> Street, the church where I was baptized, where I received First Communion and Confirmation. And I remember what you

wrote in your blizzard poem: "Bless coverings-over, forgettings." I leave the station, stopping at a bodega for a six-pack, put on my headphones, listen to Tim Hardin's "Black Sheep Boy." I walk past St. Mary's, past Augie's Deli, where I used to

buy Topps baseball cards, past P.S. 101, where my buddies and I played stickball, tag, and football, where we talked to pretty girls with braces and hair like root beer, where I could roof any spaldeen, where I stood and stared, staggered and soared, and saw life as

Glory. I spent years trying to forget those things. Left Gravesend at eighteen. Rode the train and wondered if it was really there. Forgot. Blessed forgetting. Have had to keep that sin tight in my left hand since. Have had to learn again about Glory and Guilt,

Communion and Complicity, History and Sin, Mystery and Grace. Have had to learn on long walks to Bay Ridge, Sunset Park, Red Hook, and Park Slope, feeling empty and hollow, dull and picked clean. Have had to face the nightmare. Now I know: Nothing is

lost, ever lost. So I have come back to bless my  
mother's tired heart, to bless my grandmother's eyes,  
to bless my grandfather's ears, to kneel and to pray,  
my pack heavy with your books.

## Hey Mr. Warren (Awake with a Branded Soul)

D. A. Carpenter

How I've wasted these last few years in bars and on binges!  
I could have been memorizing *The Wasteland*  
And writing it on dorm room walls.  
Instead I made a bet on the Eliot vs. Pound fight at the Titanic  
And lost five bucks.  
But then there was you who helped me break into another world;  
A world I never knew  
As I stood next to you on tiptoes looking for Arcturus.

You said: "Things exist in you without your knowing it.  
You don't know what comes out  
of yourself, but it comes. It is you."

I thought: How long do I have to wait for it?

Rereading *Audubon*,  
I dreamed how you could have been some lost dauphin  
Naming the world as that dapple-dawn-drawn evening hawk sinks in amber  
light.  
Although I know you stood  
Firm on the ground  
Like some old bearded oak.

Hopkins said he knew the "beauty of our lord" by a single bluebell;  
I know the inscape, the truth, of the human soul by every single line you wrote.  
It's not always pretty, but it's real, something you can touch, a promise  
That there's a space between a morphine scream and dreamland garden.  
It's good, it's bad, it's ugly and hysterical;  
It's here.

The truth of it can never be spoken but in dream;  
It's there.

I know you were only a man, as am I,  
But there's one kind of favor I ask of you;  
See that the blessed drift of your words cover my soul and keep it true.

I often talk with other tongues;



Echoes of thoughts I wish were mine,  
But this is me,  
Tellin' you now.

*God Have Mercy on the Mariner*  
*... where ... the girls wear ... no panties ... and have*  
*smooth little faces to break your heart ...*

Brad McDuffie

Where

In a peach of a dream the other night

I was pushing 90 on a high desert  
Plain; a black gravel slab that caught  
No sight of the end in the distance,  
But was rather like the end anyhow—  
Like the slow drip of a preacher's tie  
Set against the white  
Of the shirt his wife had pressed  
On Sunday Morning.

And I can see, here in the tomb of this black car,  
All the King's men,  
And to my side she's sitting there low in the seat  
Letting the breaths of air  
Catch up under the seam of her dress.  
I can make out the pattern of it—  
½ faded in yellow with purple whispers  
Flowering all about it.  
And I can see the way the sun beads about her skin,  
Like diamonds, upon the upper of her lip, breasts,  
And ankles;  
And I feel something like Lazarus in Hell  
Asking my Lord for a drop of water.

I am thinking out towards evening  
In Kentucky  
She's in the swing that father hung  
Out under the Willow,  
She ripples in & out of my sight.  
Her dress dances against the wind

AUTHOR'S NOTE: The title (and italicized line), which also serve as the first two lines of this poem, are borrowed from the opening movement (second paragraph) of Robert Penn Warren's *All The King's Men*.

The seam catching more of the ghost now  
She leans her head back—  
Her hair falls—  
And I say to her gently from the distance:

“Let’s go out into the night babe,  
You can toss your dress off in the grass,  
We’re gonna eat of the tree  
That will bring us back to life,”

“We’ll fix everything Adam & Eve  
Didn’t get right;  
We’ll swim in the new moon  
& dance in its white light  
& pray the Final Flood  
Will come and bless the hearts of men  
With His enduring love.”

**Not Just *La Patria*—  
Homage of an Expatriate**

for Robert Penn Warren

Matthew Nickel

Walking out of Notre Dame, I could see, beyond  
The pigeons, Charlemagne, Roland, and Olivier  
Facing the west, lingering like ghosts brackened  
Green on the edge above that aged bronzed river,  
And this would be my final week in Paris, alone,  
Before I moved south for the winter

I looked across to the left bank of the Seine  
Remembering the nights before and having read  
Warren's *A Place to Come To* silently beside  
A window facing Notre Dame and how she held  
The sky's dazzling light slanting through the dusk  
And I thought about the question of *la terra*,

Thinking that I came east in my attempt to avoid  
Running into a vision of American western solitude  
Knowing that running anywhere can leave us with  
A deadly empty happiness of survival, selfhood,  
A pastlessness: to be just another puppet twitching in  
The Great Orgasmic Imperium Intellectus

I wanted to relinquish something, a deniable guilt  
About love and neglected people who love us the most  
My life had become the subject of my thesis, no longer  
Me, being outside the going on but at the same time  
Inside it; thinking this, I was startled when overhead  
I heard cathedral bells that tolled the time, and

I thought of home, wherever that was, and  
Having fled to some place, to some woman and  
Her waiting sex sweating with contempt  
For the actual context of the bleeding heart  
I remembered wanting to spill my contempt, to see it  
Raw and swollen, that I was real in all that emptiness

But Warren made the past's burden salvageable  
Taught me to reject the dark alley and its wind-swept

Scraps as the terminus of solitude, taught me to reject  
The incunabulous spontaneity of the *carpe noctem*;  
I was still alone having left much behind and not  
Wanting to shore against it, but I had found in Warren

A place to come to, and have since, willingly, come  
Nodding home where by the banks of the Hudson River,  
I have clutched a handful of familiar dirt, knowing  
Atonement is the final professor of Love, the final gift  
Of a place to come to, a home, a family to return to,  
So I lift up this raw earth, my terra, to you.

## IX Hurricane Poems

### Introduction

A poetry reading to benefit New Orleans and Gulf Coast poets and writers who were victims of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita was held at the Oasis Café in New Paltz on November 3, 2005. Organized by Dennis Doherty, Matthew Nickel, and H. R. Stoneback, the event was sponsored by the William Vasse Poetry Board of SUNY New Paltz. Some twenty poets read—including many New Paltz English Department faculty and graduate students (along with several undergraduates), and other poets from the community and the Hudson Valley region. Poets who read were asked to contribute five cents per word, and the audience was invited to choose poems and match the donation made by the poets. It was a highly successful fundraising event, and all proceeds were sent to the Maple Leaf Poetry Programs in New Orleans.

The Everett Memorial Poetry Reading Series at The Maple Leaf in New Orleans is often said to be the oldest poetry reading series in the South. The hurricane-wrought devastation temporarily ended their poetry program and seemed to threaten its ongoing existence. However, when they received the generous donation made by the New Paltz poetry community, they were able to restart their poetry programs. Thanking the New Paltz Poetry Board for the “life-support” we contributed, the program directors wrote: “The struggle continues here. Many of us are still living without electricity more than four months after the flood that followed Hurricane Katrina. . . . However, your heartfelt giving has lifted our spirits. It has paid for a new microphone and public address system and it will be providing monetary and inspirational foundation for publication.” Their plans to publish a post-hurricane anthology (with a dedicatory note to New Paltz poets), the directors indicated, will give hope to about 100 writers from the hurricane-afflicted New Orleans and Gulf Coast region whose work will be included in the anthology. Finally, they sent their greetings to everyone in New Paltz who participated in and donated to our fundraising reading, thanking all of us—“for sharing your love and reverence for the arts. It has showered us with hope.”

The poems that follow are printed as an evocation of a truly remarkable and memorable evening of poetry. They are also printed as a reminder that poetry sometimes does have consequences in a very real and ravaged world; poetry can create ripples and reverberations of renewal and hope. (It should be noted that the

event was recorded live, and a professionally produced CD is available—all proceeds to the Maple Leaf Poetry Programs; contact Matthew Nickel in the SUNY New Paltz English Department or at [sapling805@yahoo.com](mailto:sapling805@yahoo.com).)

The poems are arranged here not in the artificially privileged order of the alphabet (forward or reverse) but according to some deeper musical or compositional principle involving the cadence of the movement from shorter poems to longer poems, and the sequence of particularity of the hurricane motifs in the individual poems. Not all of the poems are *about* hurricanes, but all of them address—obliquely or directly—what the reporter for *The New Paltz Oracle* called “the universal spirit of grief, loss and compassion that informed” the reading (10 November 2005: 5B). It was an evening of words anchored in the spirit of human community and deeds of concrete compassion. It was one of those rare occasions when words—a nickel each—were deeds.

—H. R. STONEBACK

## The Storm Dance

Robert H. Waugh

Through Bourbon St. and canny Canal St.  
ignorance pours.

You can hear the ignorance roar.

Far out to sea on a deep wave crest  
a ray of the sun  
brushes a drop of the spindrift, they rise and dance,  
they link their tendresse to another drop, they rise  
sparkling and glittering, kick off  
the turn of the earth.

Listen,  
we open the air, the smallest drops of our burning  
crack holes in the sky, the sun  
cracks through our frail, dread  
earth to the sound of trombones.

The cotillion of the air  
turns on itself, sing  
the natural grace of the earth  
we inhabit where ignorance pours  
from the monstrous  
contentment political powers  
wrought for a monstrous  
profit.

The surge-lift  
pours through the levees, your ignorance  
of tide and time pours through  
the doorways and windows, roots shudder  
and loosen, walls rot.

More suns,  
more wind and more weight  
stream through the live-oak drenched  
in moss, through knobbled branches  
and bring them down, bring you



all down, the release  
of profound waters  
pours through the streets where a willful  
ignorance pours.

Dance, storm.

Back in the alleys, back in the bayous  
odor of resin rubs along those wires  
wound up for music, in squat accordions  
all in a rage, they rattle  
Attention, mon coeur, my heart  
is broken, where Lake Pontchartrain breaks  
through levees my heart  
is broken—

where through my blackened  
valves a deaf, brash, bickering  
ignorance pours.

And the sun roars.

Sing it.

## North South

Pauline Uchmanowicz

Leaves turn color  
and dappled apples  
drop down  
in a town  
ringed by mountains  
hiding horizons,  
hawks circling  
northern sky.

South of there,  
flattened by winds  
along Lake Pontchartrain,  
houses lay  
under water in graves  
and weathercasters index  
for the national  
hurricane gazetteer.

## Down to Wine

William Boyle

Holed up with four cases of wine, two cases of cold beer, and some leftover shrimp. Listened to records—Sarah Vaughan, Fats Domino, Johnny Cash—until the power went. Sat down at the table with a candle, ate the shrimp, the storm outside dark and loud. Read Warren’s “The Ballad of Billie Potts.” That part about being dipped in the healing flood, about being dipped in Time. Finished one case of beer. Next day, finished the other case. Ate whatever else I could find: bread, beans, cheese. Started in on the wine. Emptied one bottle. Found a pen, the one Joyner had left behind when he was over for cards. Found a piece of paper in the kitchen junk drawer. Wrote: “To whom it may concern: Please send immediately (one) ice-cold chest of Coors Light. I’m out at this time. Down to wine. Shrimp and oysters would also be appreciated. Thank you.” Gave my address, stuffed the note in the bottle, corked it, went outside, and threw the bottle into the high flood-waters. Watched it float away.

Next day, a guy from Wildlife & Fisheries came by in a boat. I was out on the front porch, drinking wine, playing solitaire. The guy said he got my note, found it drifting on Canal Street. He said he was going to frame it because it was “pure New Orleans.” But he didn’t bring any beer.

## Dogs of Disaster

Dennis Doherty

When you're touched by the news too large for real—  
At your bedstead: doom's lecherous caress—  
Mama, baby— "These joints weren't crooked for air!"  
In the earth's crust: a shrug, misery's abstract  
Numbers, the body politic interred,  
And a lost dog is all the lens can hold ...

When the towers crash all monument buckles  
And ground becomes the pile of trash  
Where history begins to fail—  
Rerouted future, dissembled past.  
Is a scum muzzy dog some balm, at last?  
Who throws the scraps? Rolls over?

In a death dream I'm the black dog,  
A shivering self-shitted pelt  
Surfing flotsam through ghettos  
And grandeurs of great cities gone down.  
Gas bubbles rise from the bodies and pop,  
Nosegays for hangmen. Waking woes stench,

Radial in reach, extends the sin-sweet  
Intimate shoulder taps of ever ends,  
Of a speck or a sweep, death by heartbreak  
Or pressure drop. When these throes greet again  
I'll quail, then, by my fatalist's pen,  
Obey true tales, defy all fools, fall to.

## Last Call Before the Flood

Brad McDuffie

Katrina comes in like Babylon's Whore  
Riding the beast of the apocalypse.  
I watch the men step up to take their  
Turns upon her hurricane wheel  
With their microphones and lenses.  
And I hear them all decry, decry—  
But I'm no prophet and here's no  
Great matter  
Please bring the president's head in on a platter.

Let them line up the politicians in the streets  
Like shots of whiskey  
And we'll wash our hands  
Like Pilot before the masses  
Who called out, "Crucify Him."  
"Crucify Him."

Oh, Katrina may spit but it's we who swallow.

We've got one last pilgrimage to make—  
Like Sherman on a Yankee Charge—  
Down through Natchez for one more storm before  
The Storm.  
You can hear the existentialists on the road  
Crying out in whispers,  
"What don't come, don't go."

But I'm hearing you  
Lucinda Williams,  
Louisiana's angel,  
And I too have a reason to go  
Up 90  
To Pass Christian.  
And I know, I know, Lucinda  
That I better get right with Him,  
But I got blue skies and there's so much good going on tonight.  
We'll take that bridge over Lake Pontchartrain

And go one last time down to the Crescent City.  
Where  
Katrina's gonna blow like  
The devil's Fat Tuesday

And I've got a Walker Percy vision for all that  
Will be  
Not so much a vision for the end of the world  
But for some apocalyptic blank  
That lets the dead and the living  
Go coughing on  
Like backwards sailors pissing into the wind.

Yet, all my doubts subside when  
I see Stoney rise against the Crippling Tides—  
When I see him stand up, stand up,  
For His fallen city,  
Like a Homily sung on Ash Wednesday.  
And we rise, sing and clap—not so  
Much for him as for whom he stands for.

And I know that in that Day  
That black will be black  
And white will be white—  
When, in last full measure,  
The earth's tide draws its final  
Breath,  
And we all fly away.

from **Hurricane Hymn**

H. R. Stoneback

***Hurricane:** a system of rotating wind, originating in the Atlantic or Caribbean, often hundreds of miles in diameter, that travels widely, bringing driving rain and often great destruction (fr. Carib huracan)*

***Hymn:** a song of praise or thanksgiving to God, or a song of joy, or ode of praise of gods and heroes.*

How to begin in the wind and the waves?  
How do we hymn horrific hurricanes  
that blasted the lost coast from New Orleans  
to Mississippi, Cameron Parish to Texas,  
Pontchartrain to Pass Christian to Biloxi—  
where Katrina's gouged a thousand new graves?

Voices:

*Blow, winds! Rage! Levee-cracked cataracts—Flee!  
The storm-surge flattens the rich rotundity  
of Lear-thund'rous coast of ingrate humanity*

**Hymn** (to be sung):

**We were sinking ... Love lifted me, love lifted me  
When nothing else could help, love lifted me**

Poetry cannot perform search and rescues.  
Words are not water or food or shelter.  
Grief cannot put a roof over storm-refugees.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Since this poem, properly performed, requires the singing of certain lines of old hymns that are useful (perhaps necessary) in the midst of otherwise unanswerable catastrophes, I acknowledge here my debt to the great poets of flood and storm, of higher ground, of search and rescue—the hymnodists of refuge, the writers of old Protestant hymns. In a good old Protestant hymn, the waters are always rising and we are always in need of being saved. In addition, Johnny Cash, Fats Domino, Bob Dylan, and Hank Williams, who are echoed in the “hymn” sequence here, are also in my view important hymnodists. I salute them, too. The truncated version of this long poem printed here is one of several excerpts that have appeared in various print and audio venues in New York and New Orleans (including the *Hurricane Hymn* CD). The *only* complete and authoritative text appeared in *The North Dakota Quarterly* (Fall-Winter, 2005-2006).

Compassion's not a substitute for action.  
Come in from the wind, let words restore power.  
Come in under the blue tarp of this Muse:

*Witness:*

*Katrina and her sluttish sister Rita  
sounds like names of Bourbon Street strippers—  
they got a sister, I don't wanna meet her*

Fly iambic helicopters, drop quatrains of wonder.  
For the poets storm-stripped of possessions,  
hungry, roofless, books lost, manuscripts washed  
away, flood-palimpsests, I give five cents a word  
for every word I speak here—sound cheap? sound funny?  
Let's see *your* mouth-money, raised hands for matching funds.

*Memory:*

*O I know those roads, those rivers, those coasts, those towns,  
those bayous, those people, that crawfish country's gumbo-ground  
the French Quarter where I lived the sound that cannot be drowned*

**Hymn** (to be sung):

**Rescue the perishing  
Care for the dying**

Some things must be heard. (OK, you give a *penny* a word.)  
Shall we say, a woman dead in a wheelchair,  
hot street, body under sheet, in the sludge-gutter?  
Shall we say, a nursing home, all abandoned,  
none could walk, all drowned—our mothers maybe?  
Rats eating corpses—shall we say all we've heard?

*Witness:*

*"I held tight onto my wife and kids when that flood-surge teared  
up the house and smashed everthing and washed her away somewhere  
and I ain't seen her since—and they ain't found her body nowheres"*



Hymn (to be sung):

**Throw out the Life-line! Someone is drifting away**

**Throw out the Life-line! Someone is sinking today**

We hear voices of a vast cloud of witnesses:

One tells of coffins floated out of raised tombs.

Trapped on her second floor, watching gators and snakes swim by;

she hears a banging against the house, looks out,

sees what she thinks is a boat coming for to carry her away,

then sees only a fleet of coffins, resurrected not to blessedness.

[ ... omitted stanzas ... ]

I keep dreaming of kids in a schoolyard

remembering a waking dream from long ago

voices of children laughing and chanting game-rhymes

outside the window of some place where I stayed

somewhere on that coast or in New Orleans—

Saint Ignatius I think the school was called.

*Memory:*

*I don't know where that schoolyard was, but its trace*

*through memory rings clear and it leads from the waste-*

*land of my youth to the Saint's exercise of Composition of Place*

That first time, hitching and walking in on old US 90 from the Pass,

through Waveland (now gone), I got to the Quarter late,

climbed the fence in Pirates' Alley behind the Cathedral,

slept in Saint Anthony's Garden. It was a trick of sanctuary

I'd learned on the road: sleep in or against the wall of a church.

In the early morning a priest woke me, the sound of early Mass—

*Voices:*

*Harden not your hearts. The sea is his, and he made it—his hands*

*prepared for you a place on the unquiet earth, on the high land.*

*Build your spirit's home beyond the vast presumption of the human.*

**Hymn** (to be sung):

**When we gather on that high ground, and the gates are closed within  
I'll be shouting "Glory, Glory," when the Saints go marching in**

—echoing from within. Priest brought me coffee and beignets in the garden and warned me about the cops. Later I learned that Faulkner used to live across the alley. Soon my name was in lights on Bourbon Street—with luck and a thirty dollar guitar, through the kindness of strangers, priests and gangsters, strippers, bouncers and bartenders, Garden District millionaires, Tulane girls, gentle old jazzmen, folksong fans who pardoned—

*Witness:*

*"Don't be messing with that tall skinny white kid—he's family,"  
the old jazzman told them all. "Don't come around here asking for union fees,"  
the gangster told them, "no musician union in my club—Stoney works for me."*

**Hymn** (to be sung):

**When the Saints go marching in, when the Saints go marching in  
O Lord I want to be in that number, when the Saints go marching in**

—(or collected) my eccentricities. Preservation Hall was open, but I preferred now-defunct Dixieland Hall because Walter played God's trombone there, with Cornbread Thomas on clarinet. I used to walk Walter home, carry his trombone—he had a bad limp—across Rampart into "back-a-town" near the old St. Louis cemetery. Some said it was a bad place. Nobody ever bothered me. I ate in Walter's kitchen. I had never heard—

*Memory:*

*And oh the jazz funerals and "Just a Closer Walk with Thee,"  
echoed down the years in "Last Walks" in the islands, Eleuthera, Bimini,  
Guadeloupe, but no band ever played grace or moved like New Orleans*

**Hymn** (to be sung):

**Just a closer walk with thee,  
Grant it Jesus is my plea**

—the trombone played that way. Once Walter came to hear me sing at my club. You know how it was then—he had to come in the back door

and stand in the hallway. It hurt Walter to stand, so I asked my boss if he could sit, right down next to the stage. A good guy, he said yes. Hell of a good guy for a gangster, he always said I was under his protection. Wanted me to get out, go to college. Now Walter's house, and everything—

*Voices:*

*“Fair Play for Cuba” Lee Harvey Oswald chanted in the street outside my apartment. In the Absinthe House, Garrison talked conspiracy. The Sixties had started. Nothing would ever be the same again—Oh freedom.*

—is under water, and they are all gone and I love, I bless them all. And that schoolyard is gone, that school is gone, and those kids are gone somewhere but I still hear their voices like an ancient song that echoes above the miraculous roofs of the flooded world. O come back again mysterious horns and gentle souls to those blessed streets where, the rankest sinner, I first heard the Voice of God call.

*Witness:*

*I will make a pact with you Katrina and you too Rita.  
It was you who smashed the old wood and new, obliterating  
beloved country and city. I curse you, your brothers and sisters.*

**Hymn (to be sung):**

**And I'll stand on the ocean until I start sinking  
And I'll know my song well before I start singing  
... It's a hard rain's a-gonna fall**

Or consider this pact: if I praise your hurricane curves, the elegant wrists of your winds, eloquent breasts of your waves, sleek ankles of your rising, haunting stillness of your eyes, your divine destiny decreed by weather-gods in Noah and his wife Joan's Book of the Ark, will you kindly take your striptease, your dirty little dance, somewhere else, some deserted coast, some lonesome sea-surge.

*Memory:*

*Who was it who said: “This storm proves God is like So not Dead.”  
Was that the same TV program where the commentator said:  
“It's time to move on. The country's hurricane moment is over, ended.”*

Dear America, the Country of Tomorrow, always fleeing the Past,  
even if it's only a month ago, and a half-million are still lost, displaced.  
And no one wants to talk about *Rita* and Cameron Parish, where all  
is bedraggled and derelict, where the last tree left standing holds  
diluvian decorations—shredded banners of bedsheets and clothes  
like dry leaves before the wild hurricane flown and all through the House—

*Voices:*

*“We must relearn humility and compassion and it does not matter  
where or how we learn it, in the storm, or in the gutter,  
and we must live it and not talk about it, kill it with chatter”*

—not a creature is stirring because there *are no* houses  
and there will be no Christmas in the Empire of Forgetting.  
But I see there's a relief auction of Britney Spears' underwear  
and soiled flip-flops on eBay so maybe everything will be OK.  
Besides, we live in a country where 200 million pounds  
of ice can be moved around the country for weeks in a crisis—

*Witness:*

*The truck driver said: “I picked up 20 tons of ice in PA, hauled it  
to Missouri, then to Alabama, then up to Virginia for a week, stalled  
there, truck run for a week to keep the ice frozen, waiting for a call.”*

**Hymn (to be sung):**

**Why can't I free your doubtful mind  
and melt your cold, cold heart**

—well they called him, sent his load of ice to Nebraska; he unloaded  
it into government-rented storage freezer. Not one ice cube melted.  
“Dragged that ice around,” he says, “two weeks, 4,000 miles, never used.”  
Truly wondrous country, where 4,000 truck drivers can drag 90,000 tons  
of ice all over the map for two weeks and not one ice cube gets lost.  
Enough to make you want to mix a real tall gin and tonic and get loaded.

*Memory:*

*When I was twelve I sold Italian Ice from a red barrel I pulled  
around on a red wagon. So much depends on ice. Later I hauled*

*stuff all over in a big rig for Allied. In the Marines, I liked beer ice cold.*

**Hymn** (to be sung):

**Jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle all the way ...  
Never send to know for whom the bell tolls**

Robert Frost worried whether the world would end in fire or ice. He favored fire, but if the world perished twice, ice would suffice. When Rita struck, I saw on TV a motel on lowground by the Gulf, surrounded by fast-rising waters. A few years ago, I stayed there. They were very nice people. I forgot an old tweed jacket, left it in the room. Had the usual important things in pockets—pen-knife,

*Voices:*

*When I told her I'd just done some poetry readings in San Antonio was on my way to read in New Orleans she said "Oh I wish I could go I love poetry but I've never been anywhere but here minding the store"*

coins, scraps of notes for poems. I didn't miss it until New Orleans. I called and talked to the sweet Mexican girl who ran the store attached to the motel. We had talked about poetry and the world the night before. I meant to give her one of my books, but I forgot that too. She said she'd mail my coat right away. When it arrived, neatly packed, all contents intact, I read the note she'd written:

*Witness:*

*"I really enjoyed talking to you about poetry. Nobody talks much about poetry around here. I was embarrassed to tell you I write some too and I wanted to send a poem with this but I haven't got the guts."*

**Hymn** (to be sung):

**The water's deep and chilly and cold, Hallelujah  
Chills the body but not the soul, Hallelujah**

I wrote back to thank her, and with my check for the postage, I sent her a copy of my book of poems about springs and water and floods. She wrote back, said she loved my poems, was memorizing some of them. Said she was writing a poem about how it's scary living on the Gulf edge.

Said she hoped to get to college before she was thirty, but she couldn't leave her folks alone to run the place. Said if it got good enough she'd send—

*Memory:*

*I remember how I felt age ten when I met my first real published poet  
and he gave me a copy of his book I thought it was really neat  
and it might be cool to write, even go to college, so much world to see*

—me her poem about water. I never got it. I was away for a long time. That was years ago, and I'd forgotten it all until I was sure I saw that motel and store, that girl on TV last week, fighting, sandbags holding back Rita's rising sea. I've lost the phone number, the address, the name of that motel on a back road in the middle of nowhere. I can only pray she is not one of those washed away, missing forever, in the briny—

*Voices:*

*"Hey! Over here!" He got his family out, stayed behind to go  
to church, got caught. Trapped in the attic 16 days, 76 years old,  
no food, a gallon of water. Now he's found, saved—only wants a Taco.*

**Hymn** (to be sung):

**Let the lower lights be burning!  
Send a gleam across the wave**

—Abyss of the Gulf. All knowledge is local, all grief, all love. Bless me Father I have sinned. Bless me Katrina, Rita, I hate wind. In the name of the city, the country, and the holy Spirit of Place. (If I could find her I'd send this poem now, ask her to send her poems.) *Listen*, did you hear that? Forty years ago, I heard it as they did two hundred years ago. Above the brooding waters, the raven and the dove—

*Witness:*

*—It is the ghostly voice of Père Dagobert chanting in Jackson Square  
the Kyrie Eleison: relief workers heard it last week the oldest prayer  
the people's litany: In an ancient city nothing is simple except prayer*

**Hymn** (to be sung):

**Kyrie Eleison: Lord have mercy upon us ...**

Do we really understand? Do we get it yet? Can we comprehend?  
Hiroshima, they say, flattened three square miles;  
9/11 was confined to a few blocks; now extend that  
400 miles, from Manhattan to Montreal and beyond; or, think  
from New York to North Carolina—thousands of square miles—  
devastated. Where does rebuilding begin, and how will it end?

*Memory:*

*the voices of children singing in the schoolyard: toxic ditches  
I sat upon the banks of Pontchartrain at sunrise in the '60s, fishing  
I remember even atheists singing old hymns in the kitchen*

So let us hymn the heroes: Cops, Firemen, Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines,  
Coast Guard, National Guard and all the volunteers; that Bourbon Street  
Bar that never closed; that search and rescue team that lifted 4,000 people  
from rooftops in two days, the PJs sliding down cables bringing MREs;  
ground-pounders doing knock-and-mark neighborhood sweeps, zipping  
body-bags; neighbors who cared, survivors who shared, nuns and priests:

*Voices:*

*The Katrina-Rita Diaspora, scattered in fifty states helter-skelter,  
a half-million homes destroyed; they huddle in motels and shelters,  
they try to dream a song of rebuilding, remaking lives lost in the welter*

**Hymn** (to be sung):

**Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound  
that saved a wretch like me**

And as the graygreen mold rises, voices say: “Build an endless mall of dreams,  
a highwalled nature-free zone with themed Jazz Villages, Old South Villages,  
Cajun Villages, one vast casino-coast—Bourbon Street a hundred miles long,  
where it’ll always be Mardi Gras never Ash Wednesday.” (In Russia, they want  
to dump Lenin’s fungus-sprouting syphilis-ridden corpse—“horrible  
mummy”—

Some leftover ’60s Lefty says: “Install it in the Peoples Republic of New  
Orleans.”)

*Witness:*

*“Good for Tourism,” he says. “The future of this whole coast is Disneyland.”  
The People say: “We’ve got news for Con-men & Comrades in Katrina-land  
—this is our place, our song; we’ll make it new with our vision, our hands.”*

**Hymn** (to be sung):

**I once was lost, but now am found  
Was blind, but now I see**

After all the hurricane hymns and penitential psalms we will go back again to the last real city in the authentic country of the giants who flourished before the flood, and they will come back with joy and horns and songs, and we will walk The Street again. And all along that ravaged coast we’ll dance at Cajun Fêtes, Bless Shrimp Fleets, eat Michelin-manna, pray at Cathedrals and *be* in that miracle-number when Sinners and Saints go marching in.

*Memory:*

*I’ll have a Dixie beer at the Napoleon House, maybe eat at Galatoire’s even Antoine’s (old neighbors); feed a hungry poet at the Maple Leaf Bar (she’ll be new in town from some motel on some lost coast); maybe I’ll hear Fats Domino, or Walter’s grandson on trombone, voices in the schoolyard*

September-October 2005



## The Unfortunate Meeting of Delta Blues and Jazz

D. A. Carpenter

Like a dream, the dusk was new and bright and vivid.  
Harmonious sounds colored the night in bright splashes.

—Then—

They squawked and pounded and swished and hammered.  
Sharps, flats, and sevenths whirl and tangle in bougainvillea.

No more saints are marching in.  
It's more of a stampede.  
You can throw sainthood out the window.

There's an arrow on a doorpost  
saying, "This land is condemned."  
Up the river the devil is soaking wet,  
dog-paddling in circles above sunken crossroads,  
wondering where Robert Johnson went.

An uneasy calm settles but the high water's a-risen.  
Murky orbs of sound form and lumber toward the surface.  
They bulge into the damp, dead air and explode  
with echoes of tenor saxophones, muted trumpets, and whisked snares.  
They labor to dissipate the flood.

What's the jazz to do?  
What's the jazz to do?  
When no amount of blowing  
will empty the flooded spit valves.  
Water pours from sound holes.  
Louie gurgles, "I don't know what to do,  
But I'm still so black and blue."

Someone send word to the blues.  
They're needed now.

The Masked Marvel swoops in and floats above the high water.  
Wind and water done chased poor Charlie from his home.  
We ain't got no direction.  
Lordy Lord I'm so alone.

Blind Lemon Jefferson streams tears to wash away the flood.  
He knows it's bad.  
We ain't got no sufficient clothes.  
Doggone our bad-luck souls.

Somewhere down the line this will be a story about an evil-hearted woman  
who devours every gambler she sees  
with her red, demon eyes and whirlwind hair.  
A warnin' to folks:  
Better keep clear from her path.  
Better keep a good heart.  
Stay on the straight and narrow.

For now this is a story of a hurricane and the unfortunate meeting of Delta  
Blues and Jazz.  
Jazz will endure  
with a little help from the blues.  
There's been miles and miles of bad road in the rain.  
Don't even remember when the road was lookin' good.  
Sometimes there's nothin' you can do but sing the blues.  
Set down in the wind and rain,  
Lament and remember when the road was clear and bright.  
  
It may seem like a foggy, long-lost dream,  
but it's there.

## To Those with the Most Light

Jenica Shapiro

It has been said that those with the most light  
get the most pain.

There was a lot of light this August  
in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama  
and a lot of pain.

The news-etched images will linger.  
The pictures of mothers stretching their babies to the sky,  
men brought to their knees by their loss, dogs stranded on rooftops.

These are all part of the reminder that our power is limited by what we can build  
and nature's power is in both what she can make beautiful and what she can  
destroy.

Out of the water and the flooded lives  
came faces that crowded our thoughts and our dreams.

The American people got off their couches  
and filled in the spaces left by the government.

We plugged the holes in the dams and the cracks in the broken levees  
with food, water, money, and love.

We took strangers into our homes and put aside our wants for others' needs.  
We realized we are still a great country and still know how to take care of  
our own.

In a desperate need to understand and to somehow feel less helpless,  
I thought of my own losses.

In heavy rains, my basement has flooded.  
Not much of a comparison.

I lost a few pictures once,  
but they were the pictures I kept in the basement,  
not the ones on my nightstand or the one of my grandparents on their  
wedding day.

What we have all learned from the hurricanes  
is what we already knew.

What is true and lasting and real  
is love and family and friends.

If we have these, we are all filled with light.

## Just Things

Julie O’Niell

They are just things, people say,  
inanimate objects lacking earthly souls.  
Only material goods, they console.  
You have your health; everything else can be replaced.

And as you wander empty street after empty street,  
where so many neighborly houses once stood,  
comprehending crude crosses crafted from rubble,  
the gravity of lost lives pierces your fog.

You say: yes, I am one of the fortunate,  
while surveying incomprehensible destruction  
wrought by nature’s bitch,  
murderer of the innocent,  
devastater of humanity.

You think: I am alive. I am lucky.

But as you near the plot where your own house once stood  
humble and yet proud, new and yet old,  
the Southern hearth your gypsy children finally could call home,  
on this tiny parcel nestled in the land of your people,

the land to which you had only recently returned after a lifetime of running,  
bringing with you beautiful tokens of your extraordinary journey,  
Vietrian pottery, Bavarian wood-carvings, Korean chests of drawers,  
which you placed next to family heirlooms  
from the house on Jefferson street in the Garden District,  
your childhood home  
your home,

and you think of photographs, countless pictures of shining children  
in sun-drenched Italian fields and snow-covered Alpine towns,  
children now grown and returned to their native land,  
far from their familial South, but happy to visit you there,  
glad you have come full circle ...

as you near this place, a once cozy museum of your past,  
a shrine to your ex-pat life and a new beginning on your old Gulf Coast,  
the first house you ever owned,  
now just a slab of concrete covered with sludge and wood,  
you feel yourself sinking into that bottomless molasses pit of loss.

You spot a corner of a wooden frame, recognize it as one of the  
family photos which used to line the hallway wall,  
you pull it from the mud  
to find the image now waterlogged and undecipherable.

The salty wetness on your cheek is not a remnant from her,  
the evil Lady Katrina,  
but from you, a lapsed Southern Belle,  
who finally realizes that she is allowed to grieve,  
that there is no valediction forbidding the mourning of her loss,  
even if not for lost lives, but for lost memories,  
lost representations of a strange and rebellious life.

And, finally, you rise up  
out of your cane syrupy abyss  
and stand, tall and strong,  
like the ancient oak in your front yard,  
whose Spanish moss has been brutally ripped from its limbs,  
but whose roots still plunge deep and defiant.

October 2005

## Poem for Katrina

Jamie Manning

I do not have a poem for this Katrina  
I have never met, for the cities I have never  
Been to, for the people I may never know.  
But I do have a poem, somewhere in here,  
For the photo someone lost,  
For the memories they wish to unearth.

One clear day—a brother's graduation,  
Tassel swung to the side; a baby photo  
Crinkled from water wear,  
First steps wobbling beneath;  
A deceased wife with a childish grin,  
The only image from a past chapter.

A photograph. A simple photograph.  
Image soaked through with laughter, enough  
To shake the bones down under.  
She is scooping mud now out of her swimming pool—  
Hands aged plunge through particles  
Of what once were chairs and tables where she  
Sat with old friends, now ghosts wispig before her eyes.  
The coffee has grown cold.  
Her gypsy lifestyle, holding onto the concrete,  
Picking up the trinkets from Italy, Africa, China, beyond.  
Her single mother strings that once held a family together  
Washed clean from her property.

And suddenly,  
The materialism of the world does not matter anymore. This is not materialism.  
These are moments. Lost. Shreds of stories. These are memories. Life  
Irrecoverable.

A simple photograph under the weight of Katrina  
Sinking  
    Beneath the mud of nature's soul.

## A Salutation to Darkness

*For my sister and all hurricane victims who cannot find the place they called home*

Matthew Nickel

I.

I was caught in the dark outside walking  
And it was dark; I felt for the gate of the fence  
In the darkness to find the last un-ripened  
Tomatoes before the frost, and the green—  
If you call it that—for the black frying pan  
Where inside away from the dark  
She would lay round slabs of fresh floured  
Tomatoes to sputter in oil and to brown harden  
And to eat in the light inside, and  
The smoke would curl around the light.

II.

Wet leaves outside slid along my hands  
Breaking round hardened fruit from  
Summer-old vines breaking the scent  
Of tomato vine to fill the hard cool  
Autumn night—I thought of the sound  
Dripping in the leaves as this three-day blow  
Dried, dropping the newly dying leaves  
Bursting from hundred and ten years long  
Drought, hot summer with no rain and  
Hell in hurricane places; here, drought-  
Stricken, early autumnal plunging and the wet  
Leaves expired before this year's first frost.

III.

The land is wet beneath me, the ground  
Is wet under my boots, seeking in the dark  
Of the garden, I kneel to reach against the fence  
For the rolling broken water-bursting  
Tomato, not yet red-ripened, for the cool  
In the garden-night, I feel the fruit on the  
Wet ground leaning against the wooden fence,  
My boots pivot, and I stand holding the  
Muddied fruit, unable to speak.



Holding the fruit, my fingers tremble  
In the cool night holding onto something.  
The sky is black with shadow,  
Nothing moving in the torn night,  
I remember reading the Sunday Times  
In the light of morning, the headlines:  
Scattered in a Storm's Wake and  
Caught in a Clash of Culture: In a strange land—  
I remember trying to make sense of it all  
Trying to hold back something—feeling  
In momentary unbelief the earth slipping  
Away in one last somersault out to sea,  
One last typhoon-earthquake-hurricane-  
Apocalypse—unable to imagine how you  
Go back home when home is gone.

Holding the fruit steady now,  
I squint through tear-edged eyes,  
Seeking for some Answer,  
I hold the globed fruit steady  
Against the dark.

IV.

The gate to the garden bends and leans against  
The dark, against the outside night, I close  
The gate gently with one hand.  
One hand holds the green fruit,  
And I look toward the house,  
A home standing still against the dark;  
I smell some scent of food beside the house,  
I hear a voice singing hymns, fingers pounding  
Piano keys like pronunciation—my eyes awake  
Find the door to the house, and my hand  
Seeks for some answer to the Dark,  
Which is a strange land,  
And even the hand cannot grasp forever;

Seeking for some familiar rail and step up  
To the house, forward, I stumble on the steps,  
Concrete and edged upward,  
I fall onto the porch  
and hold the fruit tight in my fingers,  
Too tight, unable to let go of memory,  
Remembering people I've loved  
and lost and lost loving, and those  
I cannot find anymore in the dark,  
For they are lost and I love them still,  
But cannot get them back; and I kneel  
On the steps hardened in my knees  
Praying for those who are lost, uprooted  
From themselves, lost in the nothing  
And drowned in the wake that follows  
The night and the dark that swallows faith.  
How do we know what to seek for  
Anymore, when the leaves plunge  
Downward unhindered in the silence.

I stand unknowing, in the darkness,  
But I hear some voice in the kitchen  
Of the house, singing an old song  
About a story, like annunciation, of  
Plunging to victory, beneath a cleansing  
Flood—I stand in my knees, holding  
Contritely the cracked fruit, the shadows  
Of the night encroaching, I find the door-  
Handle, cold like brass, edging the door,  
Feeling the suction warmth,  
And I know soon we will sit together  
At a table, and speak of daily things—  
Which is not ignorance of hope, but of  
The best hope, as we hold tight to actuality  
Of motion toward hope—and the light

Will be good, and the sound of the night  
In the dark outside will vanish, as we sing  
And taste of the green fruit, browned and  
Seasoned by the pan, the green tomato  
Before the blood-ripe redness, the green  
Of concentrated flavor, of all infinite hope,  
The incarnation of the essential Flesh and Fruit;  
And the smoke will fill the room like psalms  
That shape the light, our words unspoken will  
Act as deeds in motion toward prayer.

## On Women in the Priesthood

Lynn Behrendt

A pale young nun sits on a chair at dawn,  
her soul a black crow flies  
into the pure white sky over the Seine then back again.  
Her mind's rosary is perched on faith's timid knoll,  
as she attempts a kind of one-woman reformation,  
regurgitation of all time past in each bead  
in the red red saying, Hail Mary Full of Flesh  
His flesh My flesh Your flesh Her flesh Our flesh  
the great Catholic flesh held like a limpid wafer  
up to the stained windowlight only to disappear  
into a dark cavernous mouth emptied of words  
fitful and dim while death, like the snow,  
waits to fall outside.

These are the holes of religion after religion fails.  
These empty pews. These halls of women. Hail these  
Marys these Esthers their abiding stigmata  
that fester still rare  
in the tumescent rhyme-scheme of prayer.  
They are time-imprisoned,  
this tattered veil  
gender-emblazoned across the sky  
like a big letter W  
that dissipates into the gilt glow of the rising sun.  
She lifts her face and says,  
I Bleed Therefore I am As Him  
but the only thing heard is  
Hail Mary full of where the wind whooshes through  
in this region where nothing's left but the rind  
and the dry sockets of papal eyes  
and the tragic ancient forgotten apostolic Mothers  
remain mere indentations in the earth.

## Sheer Red Beauty

Lynn Behrendt

I dream of a promised rose,  
the flower of the proletariat  
blooming on Mother Teresa's forehead.  
I dream of a thread to the future  
woven into time by all the small tasks  
I perform day after day  
out of necessity  
and love for my son.  
I imagine the prescient star of humankind  
will not always have this python of greed wrapped around it  
and that the rose will bloom  
and out of its sheer red beauty  
free the enslaved.

## Collision of Worlds: With My Niece, Samantha

Jan Zlotnik Schmidt

We play pretend zoo  
Sort and stack alphabet blocks  
The sides and edges rough and grainy  
“A—C—Z—O”  
“Z for zoo,” I tell her.  
We move yellow and orange squares  
Purple triangles and long blue  
Planks into rectangles octagons  
Hexagons  
Places for animals  
To dwell  
Ducks—Quack-quack, Clara,  
Alphonse and Claire—  
Rest next to the Dinosaur pen  
The pandas and  
The horses have their  
Own space  
And the dolphins and sharks  
Swim together  
“These sharks won’t bite,”  
Samantha explains.  
“Aunt Jan, stack, play.”  
Her fingers thump horses  
Across the floor  
She is certain  
Where each animal  
Belongs and her  
Pale white flesh  
Is translucent and slightly rosy  
Like the skin of angels  
  
And I don’t tell her  
What I know

AUTHOR’S NOTE: This poem first appeared in *Home Planet News*.

During the bombing of Belgrade  
At the zoo  
The tigers driven mad  
Devoured their young

The rhinos dazed and afraid  
Bashed their heads  
Against the cement walls of their cages  
They banged their heads until  
They cracked their skulls  
And stoned themselves to death

I don't tell her this  
I never will  
"They're going to sleep now,  
Aunt Jan."  
She carefully covers  
Each animal  
With a small piece of flannel  
The layers of cloth  
Fold in on themselves  
Like thin yellow  
Petals of poppies

## Calving

Jack Foster

Walking, well past the end of the old gravel track,  
Across this wide, hot, high-littered field,  
Amid the shards of another winter-savaged calf,  
I turn to look down on the barn beneath me.  
Now wisps of tar-heat are beginning  
To shimmer in an eastern sun.  
Wavering barn walls undulate along  
Endlessly heaved and thawed foundation stones.

That is where we labored; where hot mist  
Rose from my sweating, shivering body. Mist  
That floated like August dust then cooled  
And changed and fell freezing into a rimy dream  
Of old wood, darkness, and crystal. A matte  
Finish on cobwebbed-beams that throws  
Sparks when our light trembles.

We are three alone: Her, me,  
And the one at our center,  
The helpless one, the one struggling to be.

A wave passes and her breathy groan says she is releasing.  
Now is when her muscles will yield and allow me to reach  
To feel the calf: a big one, facing away;  
It must be turned.

Reaching around him, I find one leg, then another.  
I seize and pull against his mother's mass  
To guide him to our thin air.  
I strain and pant; he moves. Another wave builds  
And, seizing my hand and arm,  
Bends me into the night.

Helpless, bound to her, by her, my face is bare.  
It burns with red pain as fluid flows across my eyes.  
Wet salt drips at our feet.  
The pool is lacy where water meets frozen ground.



I am bound to listen into the night. With defenseless ears  
I hear winter ravaging hungrily around us,  
Testing the doors and windows;  
Searching for a new entrance.  
The barn groans under the pressing wind.

Nearby, a glassy clang tolls another falling pane.  
I sense, I do not see new air flood  
Through that new-opened window,  
But the wind knows, the wind knows.  
It circles and rushes through the break  
Taking web and fly alike.  
Our hissing lantern swings,  
The light shudders,  
Then the wind leaves through another, older break.

Her womb releases me and we are where we need to be.  
I hold now-soft, now-new feet  
And, with teeth bared to tighten my desperate hand,  
I pull all my weight until, delivered,  
She steps away and half-turns  
To see me drop to the mud.  
Drop to the streaming, sliding form she would roughly tongue.  
We both would breathe for him,  
Teach how it must feel.  
I take the salty face in my mouth.  
I press his cooling chest  
Then seize a straw to blow more useless breath even further.  
But he refuses his first or last breath  
And, defeated, I fall back.  
Then, light-headed, I raise myself  
From the crunching cold and toe his flaccidity.  
I untie her. She stretches, bends,  
Smells him twice, forgets him once,  
Then she turns to eat. It is a good sign.

The rest is here. I pulled on my oldest coat, tied baling twine  
To white, unused feet, and dragged the serpentine calf  
To and through the wind-held door,  
Into the slap and sting of a February blizzard.  
Blind in chewing cold, I walked backward,  
Dragged him through drifts of dust-light snow  
To this high field where I dropped the ropes  
And watched grey dawn cover the stiffening form.  
Alert dogs, wailing from the forest,  
Promised to change him less than we did.

Shivering in full sun,  
I wipe sweat that does not cool,  
Then bend to lift a bit of dry bone by its shred of twine.  
I look at it, twirl it into the midst of hungry, flowering weeds.  
Then with my foot-fall raising another summer's dust,  
I walk to the break I know is ahead;  
There is a fence down.  
I do not guess; the fence is weakest there.

## V Other Essays

### My Climax in Reading Johnson Explained Or Roland Barthes's Pleasure and Bliss in Denis Johnson's *Jesus' Son*

*David Alfieri*

I read Johnson. I hit a particular word, line, passage, and am overcome. Perhaps I drop the book for a moment; but in any event, I stare dumbly, jolted. My intellect is satisfied, has been—I have been enjoying the book all the while, the narrative, *et cetera*—but then what-it-is flashes forth from the text, and for that instant my experience is no longer cerebral but visceral. Something on the page flashes, but I explode. And I turn to Roland Barthes for some help, an explanation.

Barthes, a Frenchman, scholar, logophile, defected from the structuralist camp about mid-way through his career, just prior to positing, in *S/Z* (1970), the *readerly* and the *writerly*. These forms of texts correlate with and lay the foundation for his discussion in “From Work to Text” (1971) of the difference between, respectively, a work and Text. As he explains, the former (a work) can be investigated as if through Newtonian physics: it is stable and constant (there exists a signified, a static structure); the latter (Text) demands something rather Einsteinian: it is dynamic (*no* static structure), relativistic insofar as it encompasses the interplay of the text, the act of reading and thus the reader, and also any observers, the critics (Herman 40). These seminal positions eventually brought about Barthes's ideas of, respectively, *pleasure* and *bliss*, put forth in *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973). It is in this last text that I shall seek explanation of my apparent visceral reaction, personal interaction with Denis Johnson's *Jesus' Son* (1992).

I am not so much concerned with what *Jesus' Son* is, as I am with what it does (though, as will be shown, the two indeed are significantly linked). A *poetics* will offer me little by way of help. Barthes has, with *The Pleasure of the Text*, explored and catalogued in his erratic way the manners by which a text may please the reader: a hedonistic aesthetics. He has created an “*erotics*” of reading (Howard viii).

A text may offer a reader *pleasure*—this from a *readerly* text, a work. The readerly text is a classic text, pre-modern. There is a discernable meaning, hidden or otherwise, for the passive reader to comprehend. This passive enjoyment of a text, *pleasure*, is translated from the French *plaisir*, and can be understood as the

reader being a consumer of the text (the text as product), savoring the world of its characters, vision, et cetera (Jones). The text of pleasure, writes Barthes, “contents, fills”; it “comes from culture and does not break with it, is linked to a *comfortable* practice of reading” (*Pleasure* 14).

Or a text may offer *bliss*—this from a *writerly* text, or Text. The writerly text is a modern text, or postmodern. But this is abstract, an idea involving the experience of the reader participating in the text. The writerly cannot be held in the hand; it is not the physicality of the book, but the co-creation of the text at the very moment of its creation by both the writer (who is dead) and the reader. Barthes posits this to be our “value,” as currently “the goal of literary work is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text” (*S/Z* 4). Whereas the readerly produces comfort, the writerly “imposes a state of loss, . . . discomforts, unsettles the reader’s historical, cultural, psychological assumptions . . . brings to a crisis his relation with language” (*Pleasure* 14). In short, the writerly very much breaks with culture. This feeling of displacement, unsettlement, and its attendant sublime ecstasy, is what Barthes terms *jouissance*, or in translation, *bliss* (Miller). *Thrill* (Heath 9) is probably more accurate than *bliss*, as it preserves the sense of being physically and emotionally startling, which is key, without forsaking the sexual implications. Either way, this *jouissance* leads certainly to *climax* (most literally it is, simply, “coming” [Howard vi]).

*Jesus’ Son* maintains both pleasure and bliss. But one quality of the text does not precede the other, or vice versa. It is always at once pleasure *and* bliss (but perhaps the former proffered, the latter imposed). As I pass through the temporal experience of my reading, one does not cease that the other may begin. The book affects me with such sublimity precisely in that it is able to maintain the two *concurrently*, offering at once the interplay of both pleasure and bliss: neither disappears though one may come clearer into focus—in an instant. This is its power. And then I come across this passage of Barthes’s:

Now the subject who keeps the two texts in his field and in his hands the reigns of pleasure and bliss is an anachronistic subject, for he simultaneously and contradictorily participates in the profound hedonism of all culture . . . and in the destruction of that culture: he enjoys the consistency of his selfhood (that is his pleasure) and seeks its loss (that is his bliss). He is a subject split twice over, doubly perverse. (*Pleasure* 14)

I wonder if perhaps he isn’t trying to offend (*doubly* perverse?). But I maintain that it is not I, but Johnson, or rather his narrator in *Jesus’ Son* that is the “subject split twice over.” And the story along with its language necessarily takes the shape of its narrator.

Through this narrator (Fuckhead, so he is nicknamed), Johnson creates a world that resides somewhere between culture and its destruction; and both the

story (narrated events) and its language (linguistic elements) are wedded perfectly, each complementing the other, suspended in this emulsive state of limbo, as in the following passage:

The sun lowered itself through the roof of clouds, ignited the sea, and filled the big picture window with molten light, so that we did our dealing and dreaming in a brilliant fog. People entering the bars on First Avenue gave up their bodies. Then only the demons inhabiting us could be seen. Souls who had wronged each other were brought together here. The rapist met his victim, the jilted child discovered its mother. But nothing could be healed, the mirror was a knife dividing everything from itself, tears of false fellowship dripped on the bar. (122-23)

The characters themselves are explicitly somewhere between life and death, are products of culture but at the same time signify the destruction of culture, its failure or absence. This is the split within the story. As for the language, aside from the comma splices added for effect, it is perfectly grammatical, adhering to convention, but yet its effect is startling, tearing us away from our assumed culture, luring us into a scene of moral turpitude and debasement (which we ought to despise) by seducing our aesthetic sensibilities with such beautiful and elevated description. Throughout the eleven stories that make up *Jesus' Son*, Johnson consistently portrays such wretchedness unapologetically and with equal rapture. The effect is that the stories and their characters are “the more disturbing” for Johnson’s refusal to “make them conventionally appealing” (Miles 1), yet we are drawn to them all the same.

Barthes writes that bliss is “achieved by cutting.” Similar to what Johnson’s mirror (as a knife) does for his characters, so language can do for itself and thus for culture, which is sustained by language. Through manipulating the structure of language, “[t]wo edges are created: an obedient, conformist edge,” and a “subversive” edge (*Pleasure* 6). But, “neither culture nor its destruction is erotic; it is the seam between them, the fault, the flaw, which becomes so” (7). Johnson does not disrupt the structure of language (stylistically, he is obedient to convention, allowing me pleasure), yet he effects such cutting nonetheless through his inventive, unexpected, and thus unsettling use of conventional language (the sum result being bliss).

Jack Miles, as evinced in his review of *Jesus' Son* in *The Atlantic*, understood well and appreciated such inventiveness. He writes of Johnson’s using “wild, delicate, jolting language” (1) and observes that his sentences “splash and shatter on impact, like a drink flung in the face,” that they “dazzle and slice” (2). *Jolting, shatter, slice*: the language of violence and destruction but at the same time superlatively complimentary. No doubt Miles was affected greatly. He closes his review by noting in *Jesus' Son* a “wild, schizophrenic edge” (8). Schizo: *to split*; Phrenia: *the heart, the mind*—Miles’s pleasure and bliss lying somewhere in the fissure

(Barthes' *seam*) created by Johnson's words. And I concur wholeheartedly.

As with the book's language and story, so too with its narrator. It is because of his schizophrenia (not clinical but literal) that his world is divided. It is fitting that the narrator have no identifying name. We refer to a character's name only for the sake of economy; that is, we are not referring to the character's person (he is fictional), but to his "figure," which is a tortuous and "indeterminable network of meanings" (*S/Z* 95)—it is simply easier to use a name. Barthes writes that "when identical semes traverse the same proper noun several times and appear to settle upon it, a character is created. Thus, the character is a product of combinations" (67). In *Jesus' Son* there is no proper noun for meaning to settle upon; rather, as the stories are all in the first person, it is the narrator's vision and thus his entire world (created, colored by the narration) that forms the character. His combinations are the sum of each story's elements. To give him a name would restrict his characterization immensely (though Fuckhead *is telling*). Now a look at him.

To begin, we have the title. "Jesus' Son" is taken from Lou Reed's "Heroin," a song in which the persona (also nameless) seeks a sort of ironic salvation ("I'm gonna try / For the kingdom if I can")—to him the ultimate withdrawal from humanity—through abusing himself with heroin. In a prefatory page, Johnson gives us the relevant couple of lines: "When I'm rushing on my run / And I feel just like Jesus' Son. . . ." So, we have a sense of feigned salvation via destruction before the first word of the story is even met with.

The opening story, "Car Crash While Hitchhiking," begins with a series of clauses set apart by ellipsis points, leading into the first paragraph. Ignoring the first few lines, the transition is thus:

And a family from Marshalltown who head-onned and killed forever a man driving west out of Bethany, Missouri . . .

. . . I rose up sopping wet from sleeping under the pouring rain, and something less than conscious. . . . At the head of the entrance ramp I waited without hope of a ride. What was the point, even, of rolling up my sleeping bag when I was too wet to be let into anybody's car? I draped it around me like a cape. (3, final ellipsis mine)

I read "rose up" and understand that the title is linked with the narrator. He is *Jesus' Son*, but he rises up "without hope." But now retrospectively I read "Bethany," thinking *Bethlehem*? which gives the apparently superfluous tautology "killed forever" (*of course* forever; is death not permanent?) disturbing connotations (will Jesus never return?). Death governing the imagery, I wonder then whether that "cape" marks his redemption (will he prevail?), or is he marked for death like the man from Bethany (is that cape really a *shroud*?), or both.

I do not wish to give a lengthy treatment of the entire collection, which

would not be excessive, but it is sufficient to state that these convoluted and paradoxical associations pervade each of the eleven stories and mark the narrator's character and progress throughout. But this figuring of associations, the connecting of them, gives me pleasure (*plaisir*): it is a cerebral activity, I am pleased with myself intellectually. This is my participation in the readerly. Bliss (*jouissance*) comes from, in addition to the text's particular use of language, its disruption, destruction of my conceptions regarding culture (an effect of the writerly).

As stated earlier, Johnson offers to the reader an abject characterization of society, without making excuses, without apologizing. There is a plurality of ideologies abounding in *Jesus' Son*, but none is given privilege over another; rather, each is presented without comment, neutrally. In a text that pleases, Barthes writes, "what is overcome, split, is the *moral unity* that society demands of every human product" (*Pleasure* 31). The narrator here has no moral sense; what morals may be introduced by secondary characters or by the narrator himself, unwittingly, are ephemeral—promptly forgotten or never acknowledged. *Jesus' Son* is, until its ultimate story, pointedly amoral. Regarding the reader's reaction to a text, Barthes writes: "The asocial character of bliss: it is the abrupt loss of sociality" (39). And I think of the narrator's reaction to his world as well as my reaction to him and his. That is, I get all mixed up with the narrator, sick as he is. I have been tricked into identifying with him. Barthes suggests that the reader secretly wishes to be thus disturbed, that he is unaware of his desire for this moral split, that society at large "is ignorant of its own perversion" (24). If anything, Johnson *forces* the reader into realizing his own perversion.

And so it is, when, after this lavishly and brilliantly articulated description of being put into a drug induced sleep,

A beautiful nurse was touching my skin. "These are vitamins," she said, and drove the needle in.

It was raining. Gigantic ferns leaned over us. The forest drifted down a hill. I could hear a creek rushing down among rocks (12),

Johnson promptly deflates his sentiment and thus my elation. As if to terminally punctuate the story, he adds this: "And you, you ridiculous people, you expect me to help you." I am startled with being addressed directly, not simply by one but by way of four second-person pronouns (the excess is haunting); jilted and hopeless, for I was seduced by the narrator's poetic language, drawn willingly into his wretched world, only to be summarily abandoned by his accusation, evidence of the strict cleavage between him and me (and what's more, *why might I need help from such a man?*).

Enjoying the narrator's world is my pleasure (the comfort of the engagement, the vicarious participation); bliss comes from my being ejected. The comfort

Johnson provides is equally necessary to the ultimate effect as is the disturbance (I must be given some comfortable height from which to fall). Because the pleasure, the bliss progress not in tandem but at once, *Jesus' Son* is afforded a power commensurate with its stylistic genius—"That's it!" is my visceral reaction, "That's it for me!" (*Pleasure* 13). And to my delight, each one of the stories takes a similar tack.

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## Pregnancy Potion No. 9

*Jessica Napolitano*

### Metaphors

I'm a riddle in nine syllables.  
An elephant, a ponderous house,  
A melon strolling on two tendrils.  
O red fruit, ivory, fine timbers!  
This loaf's big with its yeasty rising.  
Money's new-minted in this fat purse.  
I'm a means, a stage, a cow in calf.  
I've eaten a bag of green apples,  
Boarded the train there's no getting off.

Sylvia Plath's "Metaphors" presents itself as a riddle. First published in Plath's 1971 *Crossing the Water*, it is a fixed-form, strophic, syllabic poem lacking a rhyme scheme. Though it seems to be a simple, nine-line poem, it harbors a much deeper angst than one could believe possible in such brevity and apparent simplicity. Each of the poem's nine lines is polysemic, expressing the speaker's emotions and serving as a clue to the riddle. The poem comments on itself and the poet herself without making a definitive statement about the poet's "condition"; the reader must work to discover the answer. After a close examination of the poem metrically and rhetorically, the reader sees that the answer to the riddle is that the speaker is pregnant. The symbolism of the nine-syllable lines in a nine-line poem is the most obvious clue to the speaker's pregnant state: nine months of pregnancy. The metaphors in each of the lines start by presenting the speaker as overweight but then suggest that she has experienced a sudden weight gain that will bring about a "new-minted" product (6). When one reaches the answer to the riddle, he or she surely would achieve some sense of satisfaction: "I got it!" This is not the case, however, with this dark poem. It is at this point of epiphany that an explication de texte becomes inevitable, as the mere solving of the riddle does not show how the poem means as a whole. Through a careful analysis of the poem's metaphors, the reader will come to understand the irony of its negative tonality. Pregnancy is supposed to be one of the greatest "joys" in life, but the speaker's attitude toward her pregnancy is much more ambivalent than that.

The poem begins with the line "I'm a riddle in nine syllables." The first of the nine polysemic lines, the tone comes across as mysterious and almost playful. It ends with a period, which implies that this isn't only a definitive statement itself, but also a definitive statement about the poem as a whole. The "I" in this line refers

to both the speaker and to the poem. As the speaker calls herself a riddle, unable to fully grasp her pregnancy, the poem is metadiscursively personified, because it refers to itself as a game. It immediately begs the reader to “read me,” just as the bottle in *Alice in Wonderland* begs a traveler to “drink me.” What game could possibly come of this? A “riddle” is a child’s game, and to consider the poem from the author-biography theory of criticism, Sylvia Plath does not play games. To look at the word “riddle” through a closer lens shows more than just the flippancy a reader may initially take from the first line. The word “riddle” is defined by the *OED* as “a question or statement intentionally worded in a dark or puzzling manner, and propounded in order that it may be guessed or answered, esp. as a form of pastime; an enigma; a dark saying” (def. 1a).<sup>1</sup> The word itself is essentially defined as the tone of this poem. A riddle is not necessarily child’s play according to this definition because of its “dark” and “puzzling” manner. There is indeed irony in the fact that the answer to the riddle is a child. Another definition of “riddle” can also help the reader understand the speaker’s feelings, as a riddle is “a difficult or insoluble problem” (def. 2). The last line of the poem shows that this pregnancy is certainly felt by the speaker to be an insoluble problem: she has “boarded the train there’s no getting off” (9).

The number nine has significance other than representing the nine-month gestational period for female humans. It also has great religious significance. An important biographical fact about Plath is her religious heritage of being half-Jewish. This will become increasingly more important in a later discussion of Holocaust imagery in her poetry. For now, her religion is significant in the use of the number nine. In the Hebrew alphabet, letters have numerical values. The letter *Tet* has the numerical value of 9. The letter has the shape of “a vessel with an inverted rim; a waterpouch” (Rich). This is the image of a cup filled with water. Water is the life-giving force religiously and scientifically. In Jewish mysticism, words, like individual letters, have numerical values. The word for life is *Chai*. Its numerical value is 18. Pregnancy is, of course, the stage in life which brings new life. What may be even more important to note is that 18 is the reciprocal of 81, the number of syllables in “Metaphors.” The opposite of life is death. There again occurs a negative tone associated with this pregnancy. The images that follow the first line of this poem are what truly enhance the puzzling and dark tone of the first line. Is this pregnancy a death, either physically or mentally, for Plath?

The first line of “Metaphors” is a complete sentence ending with a period. The next two lines comprise a list of three images lacking a verb: “An elephant, a ponderous house, / A melon strolling on two tendrils” (2-3). These three distinct images, though completely unrelated, build on one another to create a more specific image of a pregnant woman. The first image of an elephant does not suggest pregnancy at all. Generally, a reference to an elephant would suggest that a person is overweight. Being called overweight is not a compliment in American culture.

The next image of the “ponderous house” compounds the preceding image. Calling someone a house would also be an insult to his or her stature, but the speaker adds the word “ponderous,” which has multiple meanings. The first meaning of “ponderous” is “having great weight; heavy, weighty; massive; clumsy, unwieldy” (def. 1). With this definition, it still seems as if the riddle’s clues are referring to the speaker as obese. It is other definitions of “ponderous” that change the focus from obesity to “something” else. The word can also have the following definitions: “of grave import; weighty, serious, important, profound” (def. 3); “given to weighing, considering, or pondering matters; grave, deliberate” (def. 4); and “of a literary or other task: heavy, laborious” (def. 5). Each of these definitions addresses a much less tangible characteristic than weight. Synthesized, the definitions create an image of a woman enduring something “profound” in her life that she must heavily “consider,” and this could be a “laborious” task. The situation is greater than just a weight gain; it is a life change.

Line two ends with a comma, leading the reader into the third line. This line is the culmination of the images presented in the preceding line. The visual image of the melon is almost comical. The idea of a melon walking along on two, thin legs is not a serious image. It is not a positive one either. It is ridiculous. The speaker isn’t describing herself as a lovely, fluffy cloud gliding down the streets on wisps of air. “Melon” and “tendrils” are harsher sounding with their hard, consonant sounds. “Tendrils” is also an odd word to use to describe legs. A tendril is “a slender thread-like organ or appendage ... often growing in a spiral form, which stretches out and attaches itself to or twines around some other body so as to support the plant” (def. 1a). The lanky tendrils are working to hold up the melon. When a woman is pregnant, usually most of the weight gain only occurs in the abdomen, creating the image of roundness on two thin strands. The alliteration of “two tendrils” also stresses the polysemy of imagery in this poem. Though referring to the speaker’s legs, the idea that the speaker is now two beings is highlighted. Plath is also of Christian heritage, and this is no less important to the poem than her Jewish heritage, as we can see in the metaphor of melon. The melon can be viewed as an archetype for the pomegranate. The pomegranate is a symbol of the Virgin Mary because of the number of seeds contained in this fruit. Mary is the life-giver, and the speaker refers to herself as a melon, which can bring forth seeds of life. The melon, like the “ponderous” house,” provides the reader with another clue to the riddle: the speaker is not simply becoming obese. The Christian allusion to the Virgin Mary could be considered ironic when taking into account the bitter and confused tone of the poem. Also necessary to observe is that this melon is “strolling.” The deliberate use of “strolling” rather than “walking” is an odd choice. Strolling seems so whimsical and free when it is becoming increasingly more obvious that this poem harbors deep unhappiness, though it does try to put on a “happy face” by presenting itself as a riddle. To “stroll” means

“to roam or wander from place to place without any settled habitation” (def. 1). This could refer to the state of mind of the speaker. She is feeling like a lost wanderer dealing with the reality of her pregnancy.

The fourth line of “Metaphors” serves as a lament to the images in lines two and three. Beginning with the interjection “O,” the speaker then cries out to “red fruit, ivory, fine timbers.” The line is composed of three dactyls, creating a monotone rhythm. Each dactyl cries out to the previous metaphors, with which they are precisely associated: fruit with the melon, ivory with the elephant, and timbers with the house. All three dactyls come from what the speaker describes herself as being. She is crying out to this baby in a mournful manner. The word “ivory” does not lend itself to syncopation and therefore becomes a stressed, three-syllable word in order to fit the nine-syllable line form. The unusual accentuation of this word adds to the lament of the speaker, just as the exclamation point at the end of the line does. It is the only line that is punctuated this way. This creates an auditory image as the speaker practically wails to her unborn child. Nevertheless, the metaphors the poet uses for the unborn child are all beautiful: fruit, ivory, and timbers that are specifically described as “fine.” The speaker appears to love the child, but not herself as being pregnant with this child.

“This loaf’s big with its yeasty rising” is the fifth line. The phrase “loaf’s” is syncopated to fit the nine-syllable form. The line ends with a period, so the line is meant to be read as a single metaphor. The word “loaf” refers to a single unit of bread or metonymically to the many slices. The double meaning shows that the speaker considers herself one being now divided. “Loaf” has Christian implications, just as the melon did. The first definition for “loaf” in the *OED* is “bread” (def. 1). Bread is archetypically a reference for the body of Christ. The pomegranate connection with melon for the Mother now extends to an image of the child, continuing the mother-child imagery of the poem. Though the metaphors have consistently referred to the size of the speaker’s body, this is the first line that explicitly states that she is “big.” However, it does attribute the size to the “yeasty rising,” which is the growing fetus. Is this passing the blame somewhere else?

“Metaphors” is about the plight of the mother, yet there has not been mention of the father. The only plausible references occur in line five with “yeasty” and in the next line with “new-minted.” Yeast is what is used to make bread rise. This is a possible metaphor for male sperm. Yeast is also considered a fungus. If the speaker were to angrily pass blame to the father for her current state, it would seem fitting to refer to his semen as a fungus that has enlarged her abdomen. In the next line she does refer to the baby as “money” being “new-minted,” an interesting capitalistic term for procreation. This metaphor could give a positive connotation to the father, but the bitter, sarcastic tone in “fat purse” takes any positive credit away. The reader does not believe, after thinking about line six, that the speaker feels she is truly gaining some kind of wealth through this preg-

nancy—either literally or figuratively.

The beginning of Plath's poem gives metaphors that vaguely refer to an overweight woman. These metaphors change into images of a pregnant woman. Yet, both images give the speaker an identity. *She* is pregnant; *she* is gaining weight. The seventh line, "I'm a means, a stage, a cow in calf," removes the woman from playing an active role in this pregnancy. She becomes merely a vessel. The line begins with the simple vessel and then moves into a more specific image of an intermediary. "Mean" is defined as "a person who acts as mediator, intermediary, negotiator, or ambassador between others; a person who intercedes for another or uses influence in order to bring about a desired result" (def. 1b). The speaker is a "means" for something to happen—a child to be born. She is a hollow vessel. Interestingly, "mean" is also defined as "intercourse, fellowship; *spec.* sexual intercourse" (def. 1) and "lament or complaint; a mournful sound" (def. 2). The word is loaded with meaning as far as the physical and mental state of the speaker is concerned. Following "means" in this line is "a stage." "Stage" is also abundant with meaning. A stage is a place where performances occur, but it also refers to a point in someone's life. Because of the transition that occurs within this line of the poem, the word "stage" is a stage of the line itself. If one were to list the stages of life, for a woman pregnancy would be considered one of them. Yet, thematically for this particular line, the most prominent definition for the word would be "a floor raised above the level of the ground for the exhibition of something to be viewed by spectators" (def. 4). Although the speaker considers herself a meaningless "means," she concedes that something important is occurring within her. The line ends with the agricultural expression "cow in calf." This is a farm term for a pregnant cow, the word *in* functioning as it would in the expression "dog in heat." The overweight metaphor returns in this image, as well as the negative tone, because the speaker calls herself a cow. This is a common American metaphor for a woman who is fat. The line builds on itself to create this image. The speaker feels like a cow on display at some 4H show. Maybe on a stage? It is also important to note that a cow in calf is also a tool used in making lace. This corresponds with the feminine, maternal image being created. Though it may seem like a positive take on the image on pregnancy, Plath uses an awkward phrase with the negative imagery of cattle to counteract any positive connotation.

First, there were melons. Then, there was bread. Now, there are apples. Apples are not the father in this extended Christian/food metaphor. The speaker hyperbolically explains that she has "eaten a bag of green apples" (8). This line has numerous implications. To begin, there is the literal image of what a woman would look like if she physically were able to consume a bag of apples. Then, there is the idea of what a person would feel like if she ate a bag of green apples. "Green" may imply that the apples are not ripe and may cause a stomachache. Therefore, the notion of morning sickness enters the poem—another lackluster aspect of

pregnancy. Yet, the apples have further Christian implications: original sin. The serpent tempts the woman. The woman takes the apple. Paradise fails and we get clothes. So, the question is posed: what was the speaker's sin? The clues are in the line. First, the speaker did not eat just one forbidden apple. She ate a whole bag. This hyperbole could represent greed and gluttony, which are both sins. She could have been gluttonous in her sexual desires. Maybe it was her desire for love. Then, there is the fact that these are "green" apples. Perhaps she partook in something that she wasn't quite ready for or something that wasn't quite ready for her. The speaker could feel too young herself for parenthood. The melon may be ripe with its red fruit and the loaf may be risen and ready to be sliced, but this line shows second thoughts and deeper reflection. The pregnancy makes her feel sick and guilty. The speaker places the blame for this pregnancy primarily on herself, just as cultural tradition and history places the blame on Eve. The speaker seems to have internalized the anti-feminist notions that are present both in the Bible and in Plath's America of the 1950s. These anti-feminist notions are based on certain male-driven values that were placed on sexuality and the nature of women in society and in the household.

Line eight ends with a comma, which pulls the reader into the final line of the poem. The ninth line and the first line are the only lines that do not physically describe the speaker. The two lines create "book-ends" to this woman's brief, dark tale of impending motherhood. The last line is also the only line that is active. In other words, the previous lines describe what the woman looks like in this journey, and the last line explains what her journey is. After seven lines of physical description, the concluding line leads the reader away from the poem: "Boarded the train there's no getting off" (9). This run-on sentence actually gives the feel of the speaker getting on this train. In other words, the final line is grammatically incorrect, yet symbolic of the speaker's life. The line lacks the subject "I" and is missing a comma and conjunction between "train" and "there's." The poem starts with the subject "I" in the first line, yet by the end of the poem she has completely lost her identity. "I" is also the ninth letter of the alphabet, so it is interesting that by the end of this lament, she tries to lose connection with the symbolic number that took precedence just eight lines previously. The metaphor of the speaker getting on a train for a journey that she cannot return from is a strong, concluding line. This line is not unlike the couplets of Shakespeare's sonnets, yet it does not offer a resolution unless one is to consider the resolution to be reluctant complacency. The speaker knows that she is trapped in this pregnancy.

There are many critics who believe that the biographical information of a poet is unimportant in the analysis of a poem. Yet with Sylvia Plath it is difficult not to think about her heritage, depression, and suicide when reading some of her darker work. Therefore, the author-biography school of criticism should be employed because it is important to know that Plath was half-Jewish and un-

happy with her domesticated life. The reason for this arises with a deeper look into the final line of this poem. The line seems so simple; she is on a journey that she can't turn back from. Yet, there is a darker hurt represented here. The speaker says that she has boarded a train that she cannot leave. Figuratively, there is no turning back from pregnancy, yet the train metaphor seems odd, as people going on journeys are ultimately able to get off of the train. What kind of train brings people on an unending journey? A train that ends in death. Trains are powerful symbols of the Holocaust due to their role in transporting concentration camp detainees. Plath is known for using Holocaust imagery in her poetry. Not knowing this would cause the reader to look away from the final line a bit more quickly. Yet Plath does not explicitly discuss the events and politics of the Holocaust in her poetry. Al Strangeways explains:

Plath's concerns with the Holocaust were not purely disinterested, academic connections between past and present threats ... [her] personalized treatment of the Holocaust stems, then, from a combination of two motives: her very "real" sense of connection (for whatever reasons) with the events, and her desire to combine the public and the personal in order to shock and cut. ... (375)

Strangeways also explains that Plath doesn't discuss the events and the complicated history of the Holocaust as much as she uses its images as metaphors for her own life (385). The train ride is a metaphor for her pregnancy. It is a subtle yet apparent connection to Plath's feelings about the Holocaust and its atrocities. Whether people agree or disagree with her moral right to do this, it was still within her creative right and power.

Throughout "Metaphors," Plath describes the speaker as an animal or inanimate object. Never is the speaker considered human. Even the last time lacks humanity, because animals and objects board trains just as easily as people do. The poem's title is metadiscursive itself. It could be "I hate being pregnant" or "why me?" But it is simply put: "Metaphors." The speaker has completely dehumanized herself; she is only a list or a composite of something (or someone) else. Jeannine Dobbs explains that when the poem was first published in the *Partisan Review*, it was entitled "Metaphors for a Pregnant Woman," which made it less of a riddle (25). Also, it made the poem applicable to all pregnant women and took away the "I" of the speaker in a way that totally detached the speaker from her angst. Plath wanted the poem to be a game for people, a challenge, just as, perhaps, pregnancy was a challenge for her:

Several of Plath's poems about pregnancy and motherhood (all published before her second child was born) are exceptions to her more common habit of ending on a note of pessimism or of terror. These poems are all composed using the same technique. They play a metaphorical game: the referent (the fetus or

the child or the pregnant woman) is described through a series of images. If the reader does not perceive the subject, the poems remain obscure. (Dobbs 19)

Plath continually goads the reader with her poetry. If the reader cannot figure out the answer to her riddle, then it is “too bad for you.”

Yet, after all of this discussion about this dreaded pregnancy written in an oddly playful and dark manner, it is still unclear as to why this woman is not joyful about her forthcoming motherhood. It is difficult to figure out, but some critics have tried to offer an explanation. Plath felt a contradiction with motherhood, as Dobbs explains: she thought that childlessness was death because of the family line dying, yet childbirth was martyrdom (15). Creativity was lost when a woman gave birth. Plath felt she lost a part of herself, and sadly ended her own life over a deep depression starting with the death of her father and continuing through her disdain for domestic life. Yet she still managed to create poetry “pregnant” with mysticism, life, creativity, and power. Unfortunately, Plath failed to heal herself through her writing.

## Notes

1. All definitions in the paper come from *The Oxford English Dictionary*.

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The Perils of Prospero's Magic  
in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*

Jim Perry

William Shakespeare wrote the romance *The Tempest* near the end of his career as a playwright: "A performance of it is recorded for November 1, 1611, and it also formed part of the celebrations... of [the] wedding of King James' daughter Elizabeth in the winter of 1612-1613" (Frye 1371). While some scholars hold that the play is Shakespeare's last, David Lindley observes that "to treat *The Tempest* as the grand finale to a writing life obscures the fact that in many respects this is as experimental a play as Shakespeare ever wrote" (3). This view provides a more interesting context for investigating if the play conforms to the conventions of romance and particularly if the Prospero character's use of magic contributes to romance's characteristically perilous route to contentment at the finale.

Even the most cursory reading or detached viewing of the play reveals the tortuous plot devices that qualify *The Tempest* as a romance. The play opens on a ship caught in an unusually violent storm during a routine trip from Tunisia to Italy. Lindley identifies three plot strands that unfold after the crew abandons the ship: "The developing relationship of Ferdinand and Miranda, the conspiracy of Antonio and Sebastian... [and] the plot of Stephano, Trinculo and Caliban" (5). Each strand contains its own hazards. The noble-born lovers must overcome their otherwise disparate upbringings, their supposition that Ferdinand's father is dead, and Prospero's apparent opposition to their love. Both conspiracies suffer from unlikely allies and face slim chances of success against their formidable targets.

These intertwined complications comprise the most obvious components of *The Tempest* as romance, but they do not address Lindley's assertion that the play is experimental: "It is as if the conjunction of the romance genre's traditional interlacement of plots, the neoclassical prescription for unified action, and the new theatre's demand for clearly marked act-breaks, precipitated Shakespeare into the experimental design" (6). One element of the play that warrants further exploration in this context is the perilous nature of Prospero's use of magic and how it contributes to the overall presentation of the play as an experimental romance.

The root of Prospero's fascination with magic begins many years before the play begins when Prospero was Duke of Milan. Remembering this, the play becomes a progression from a fascination with magic to his abandonment of it in the last act, when he says: "But this rough magic / I here abjure" (5.1.50-51) and "I'll break my staff, / Bury it certain fathoms in the earth, / And deeper than did ever plummet sound / I'll drown my book" (5.1.54-57). Prospero's wielding of magic,

his initial full embrace and subsequent denunciation of magical arts, comprises another plot strand in addition to Lindley's three mentioned above. Prospero's use of magic before the start of the play's action provides a context for understanding it within the course of the play. Moreover, magic fills a central role in a performance of *The Tempest*. Gary Schimmgall suggests Prospero's magic and the magic of theatre are inseparable: "Part of Prospero's magic is the magic of the stage itself; it permits him to transcend the normal bounds of the dramatic transaction and gives him special dramaturgical omnipotence. His magic gives *The Tempest* its extraordinary complexity" (225). This conclusion seems warranted, as magic provides not only complexity to *The Tempest*, but also its distinctive flavor.

Of course, a truly omnipotent Prospero might merely gesture in the air or order his supernatural minions to resolve every conflict or facilitate his escape from the island. But Prospero cannot do so, and this fact distinguishes the play's complex treatment of magic from the simpler (and playful) magic of a romantic comedy. These limits enrich the Prospero character, because they require him to exercise reason along with power. The most important boundary of Prospero's magic entails his inability to manipulate the emotions of others directly. In this he differs from the Fairy King Oberon of Shakespeare's earlier (circa 1594) comedy, *A Midsummer's Night Dream*. Oberon, through his agent Puck and a magical elixir, commands the hearts of mortals at will. Through Puck's errors the manipulations go astray, but Oberon's supernatural abilities resolve all problems before the obligatory marriages of the last act. Prospero, being merely human, lacks this power. Instead, he must conjure the right conditions for Ferdinand and Miranda's love to germinate and grow. At first glance, the need to intervene seems unnecessary. When Ferdinand and Miranda first meet, Ferdinand proposes marriage, saying: "O, if a virgin / And your affection not gone forth / I'll make you a Queen of Naples" (1.2.451-53). Miranda, having never before seen an adult male except her father or Caliban, falls in love at first sight, remarking: "I might call him / A thing divine, for nothing natural / I ever saw so noble" (1.2.421-23). Prospero refuses to depend on their initial reactions. Unlike Oberon, who merely commands love and it appears, Prospero combines his understanding of human nature and magic to provide the right circumstances for the couple's free will to manifest itself as lasting love. The restraints and tasks assigned to Ferdinand serve to strengthen the commitment between the lovers, but the possibility remains throughout that Ferdinand's love, and therefore Prospero's machinations, may fail.

Similarly, the conspiracies depend on the emotion and free will of their respective schemers. Powerless to stop them, Prospero uses his magic to discover and expose the plots before they can unfold. Ariel invisibly enters as Sebastian announces to Antonio his plan to usurp the throne of Naples. The first move in the planned usurpation is the assassination of Gonzalo, but Prospero's agent, the spirit Ariel, intervenes and awakens Gonzalo. Drawing parallels with *A Midsum-*

*mer's Night Dream* again exposes the complexity of Prospero's magic. When Puck, Oberon's agent, intervenes in human affairs, he follows his master's orders completely and derives all of his power from his master. Puck's failure to enchant the intended victims results from his poor judgment, not any limitation of Oberon's power. In contrast, Ariel has his own inherent power and enjoys some independence in executing his orders. This independence underscores Prospero's limited power to divine the thought of, or manipulate, the conspirators. Ariel's attempt to foil the murder succeeds, but might have failed if Sebastian and Antonio had attempted to overwhelm Gonzalo as he awakened. Shakespeare leaves room for doubt in both Prospero's power and the final outcome of this plot strand.

The more comical attempt by Caliban, Trinculo, and Stephano to overthrow Prospero never seriously threatens to succeed, but the use and limit of Prospero's magic plays an important role in defeating it. Ariel again plays a key role, whispering alternately into the trio's ears and fomenting an argument (3.2). The disagreement leads to Caliban remarking: "Why as I told thee, 'tis a custom with him / I'th' afternoon to sleep. There thou mayst brain him, / Having first seized his books" (3.2.82-84). Caliban's advice to seize Prospero's books foreshadows the key turn of the magical plot, which is discussed below. For the moment, consider that Stefano's reply reveals the schemer's true goal. He boasts: "Monster, I will kill this man. His daughter and I will be king and queen—save our graces!—and Trinculo and thyself shall be viceroys" (3.2.103-05). If Ariel had not witnessed this albeit poorly conceived plot, the oft-distracted Prospero might not have discovered it, allowing the possibility of its success. This episode reinforces the assessment that Prospero's power cannot discover or control thought or emotions.

These few examples demonstrate how by limiting Prospero's power Shakespeare ensures that it cannot unequivocally control the plot. Instead, the limits of Prospero's art contribute to the convoluted plot strands typical of a romance and place the outcome of the play in doubt. Yet magic contributes more to the uncertainty of *The Tempest* than is evident in the progress of the particular scenes. The use of magic itself suggests complex moral questions.

Consideration of these complexities of magic on the Shakespearian stage necessitates a momentary departure from the formalist methods used elsewhere in this discussion and a short foray into New Historicism. Misconceptions exist about the general view of magic in the early modern period, particularly the presumption that magic was considered evil. In *The Magical Universe*, Stephen Wilson describes a different view:

Only the learned and clerical demonological view of magic, developed from the later medieval period, which linked all magic with the Devil, saw it as inherently evil. At the popular level, it was only the ends to which it was put that made magic evil or good, and these were not absolutes; they had more to do with the

interest and well-being of individuals, and much more families, competing to survive in a hostile world. (xxvi)

This prospective adds a new layer to the idea of magic as a romantic complication unique to *The Tempest*. The play incorporates a fundamental dilemma beyond the interactions on stage: the conflict between popular beliefs about magic and the religious doctrines taught by clerics, who associated magic with the devil. The original Jacobean audience likely viewed the play with both ideas in mind. Unlike the mischievous magic of *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, magic in *The Tempest* presents serious consequences for the characters and raises questions about its morality. If his magic results in evil, the audience might conclude that Prospero is evil. If his magic yields benign consequences, its use becomes excusable. Regardless, a determination cannot be made until the play clarifies his motives in the final act. This issue returns us to our formalist investigation, suggesting some key questions. Does Prospero's application of magic in the play constitute a good use subject to the standard described by Wilson (that good ends justify magic)? Further, does the nature of Prospero's magic change during the play and how?

D. G. James investigates the morality of Prospero's magic. In his view, "the magic of Prospero is wholly good, and belongs to a learned, noble, and spiritual life" (64). Specifically, he defends this conclusion, saying: "his magic belongs to the episode of his exile from Milan; it occurs between the committing and the righting of a bitter wrong" (65). He finds the final proof in that at the end of the play "Prospero abjures his magic; it has served its purpose and may go" (65). Without prejudice to James's general conclusion, I think his argument seems shaky. Prospero uses magic to free Ariel, yet the same magic enslaves the spirit. Prospero enslaves Caliban with magic. Perhaps most dangerously, he sends Ariel to create the storm at sea that lends the play its name and endangers the King of Naples, his retinue, the ship's crew, and the ship itself. Prospero insists to Miranda: "I have with such provision in mine art / So safely orderèd that there is no soul / No, not so much perdition as an hair / Betid to any creature in the vessel" (1.2.28-31). The truth of this boast assumes an omniscient Prospero, who can foresee the ship's safety, but his ignorance of the conspiracies against him defeats this assumption. He possesses no powers of omniscience or prescience. If the restoration of Prospero to the Duchy of Milan is the only point of the plot, and the achievement of that goal excuses any harm done, then James's conclusion that Prospero's magic is "wholly good" stands. Yet a rigorous inspection of Prospero's magic must include the manipulative enslavement of those around him; thus his magic cannot be understood as "wholly good."

Prospero's particular evolution in the play spans three phases, demonstrated by his attitudes towards magic. Before the first act, he investigates the mystical arts and loses his duchy. These events reflect his arrogance, which is based in great

knowledge but reflects an absence of wisdom. Although not inherently evil, neither can his studies and magic arts be considered good, since the play contains no context by which to judge them. While on the island, he applies his arcane abilities to the task of regaining his rightful place in the social order outside of the island's self-contained world. Thus begins his inquiry into wisdom. This knowledge does not come readily, and he makes mistakes along the way. He first tries to teach Caliban, but when his efforts fail, he uses supernatural means to enslave him. Prospero frees Ariel, only to turn the spirit to his aims. He orders Ariel to subdue the ship; yet whether he intends harm to, or reconciliation with, its passengers does not become clear until much later in the play. And lastly, he abandons magic upon his impending return to Milan, throwing off his intellectual preoccupation and tempering his pursuit of justice with mercy. This progression reaches an almost religious climax when "Prospero's decision to drown his book [of magic] is immediately preceded by his conversion from vengeance to forgiveness" (Lindley 47). Here we see that Caliban's counsel (and wisdom) to dispossess Prospero of his magic reaches fulfillment by Prospero's own hand. At this moment, when he forgoes the outward accoutrements of power, Prospero signals the end of all the play's conflicts. Sebastian and Antonio's plot to overthrow the King of Naples has unraveled, and they abandoned it. Stephano and Trinculo are undone. Ferdinand and Miranda gained both their fathers' leave to marry. Prospero is restored. The play does not resolve these conflicts by magic, but magic facilitates their resolution.

James's summary of the scene is apt: "I am saying that when Prospero declares he will abjure his rough magic we behold his creator, the greatest spirit of civilization, in these its early days, saying farewell to a whole region of the human imagination" (68). James sees the transition from the last vestiges of pagan practice to the beginnings of the modern world echoed in these lines. Other critics agree in principle, but assign a different perspective: "Prospero ... signal[s] the end of belief in magic and the ascendancy of artistic and theatrical magic" (Schimgall 226). Perhaps more importantly, Prospero replaces his rough magic—his intellectual pursuit of power—with the wisdom built upon a foundation of justice and mercy.

The polysemous use of magic in *The Tempest* provides an additional layer of complexity to the otherwise already tortuous progress through the play en route to a happy resolution. While the direct action of the play contains many twists and turns, on a more subtle level Shakespeare outlines on stage his age's transition from superstition towards free inquiry and discovery. Shakespeare's magical experiment works because it eschews the *deus ex machina* found in *A Midsummer's Night Dream*. The difference in the genre of the two plays necessitates the novel treatment of *The Tempest*. As a comedy, *A Midsummer's Night Dream* requires only that it entertain and reach a happy ending. Romance, in contrast, requires

complication, and Shakespeare supplies it both in the direct action of the characters and in the implicit interaction with the audience's perception of magic and its wielders. Ultimately this tension culminates when Prospero replaces the incantations and legerdemain of the magic world with mercy and justice, and introduces the emerging modern age of inquiry into philosophy and science. Like Prospero, the success of those inquiries depends (still) on the combined pursuit of knowledge and wisdom.

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## The Unfortunate Triumph of the German Will

*Bianca Sausa*

In his book, *Mein Kampf*, Adolf Hitler said that the purpose of propaganda “is to convince the masses . . . and only after the simplest ideas are repeated thousands of times will the masses finally remember them” (185). Seventy years later, Noam Chomsky, speaking out against such propaganda, said that it is prevalent even in a democracy, where leaders feel they must “tame the bewildered herd,” whom they view as “too stupid to understand things” (17). This type of taming comes in the form of propaganda or “information, especially of a biased or misleading nature” (“Propaganda,” def. 1). Yet, when governments disseminate propaganda, it is usually under the guise of newsworthy information or truth. It is hoped that the media and the masses will see it and respond to it on an emotional level, regardless of its veracity or lack thereof. Propagandists seldom reveal their true intentions. And that is why propaganda works so well; the bewildered herd has a hard time distinguishing fact from fiction when they are intentionally bombarded with images and words.

According to Zeman, propaganda is what helped propel the Nazis to power: “It was not intended to persuade by reasoning; it appealed to the emotions, and it was reinforced by a considerable dose of violence” (32). There were postcards, photographs, and flyers depicting Nazis as angelic, humane people while Jews were shown to be dirty thieves. After technological advances were made, microphones and speakers were used at rallies, making it possible for the Nazis to draw hundreds of thousands of spectators (Zeman 20). The Nazi party soon took a strong hold over the film industry and manipulated film to its own advantage. They wanted films for propaganda and entertainment (Infield 52). Hitler already viewed propaganda as an art, and propagandized film could do what any tangible piece of propaganda could do: call attention “to certain facts and processes,” and drill into people those repeated images that would cause emotional reaction (Hitler 179).

One such film entitled *Triumph of the Will* is considered to be “the most successful propaganda film ever made” (Infield 107). It was directed by Leni Riefenstahl, “one of the world’s few female directors,” and was an alluring portrayal of the Nuremberg Party Rally of 1934 (Lenman 30). What made it so great, according to Infield, is that Riefenstahl had the talent and the brilliance to “turn the overblown display at Nuremberg into an exciting spectacle” (107). The film’s main subject was Hitler, and the film’s supporting roles were occupied by the adoring crowds. Riefenstahl’s portrayal of Hitler in the film established him “as the ‘savior’ Germany needed” (107). The rally in which the crowds were in great at-

tendance was in itself a type of propaganda. One critic referred to it as “a fictional spectacle” (Infield 106). The result is a product made for the specific purposes of propaganda for the masses.

Riefenstahl, born in 1902, was a gifted, tenacious young woman by the time she began filming *Triumph* in 1934. She had been a dancer most of her life, but chance led her to acting. It was while acting in German mountain films that she learned how to direct (Berg-Pan 19-23). It was not long after Hitler took power as Chancellor that he noticed Riefenstahl’s work in her first film as director, *The Blue Light*. Hitler enlisted Riefenstahl to film the 1933 Nationalist Socialist Party Congress. That film was called *Victory of Faith*. Impressed, Hitler asked her to film the Party Congress at Nuremberg in the fall of 1934 (Berg-Pan 28). The Congress was Hitler’s chance to unify the party and portray that unity to Germany and the world (Berg-Pan 38).

In 1934, Dr. Joseph Goebbels, Hitler’s propaganda minister, was appointed the head of the Reich Film Association, and he immediately began to standardize the German film industry (Berg-Pan 34). Riefenstahl became a member of the RFA only after she could prove her Aryan heritage (Infield 60-61). Although Riefenstahl was initially not interested in doing the film, Hitler, partly through persuasion and partly through intimidation, insisted that Riefenstahl film the rally, granting her full artistic freedom.

Hitler apparently had an “amateurish devotion to art (or at least his own often misguided conception of it), a result of his own frustrated attempts at an artistic career” (Hinton 31). It seems that Hitler’s idea of propaganda had become so obfuscated—possibly from Riefenstahl’s artistic influence—that he thought a film of a political party rally was considered art. Perhaps he believed the two were one entity, especially considering his belief that “propaganda is a true art” (176).

The film presents the three goals the rally organizers had in mind: to reveal “Nazi politics, philosophy, and culture” (Berg-Pan 38). The party congress was fraught with ritualized events that people could not resist. Hundreds of thousands of people were witness to this compelling event. According to Berg-Pan, 770,000 visitors came to Nuremberg, in addition to the 350,000 people who already lived there. This enriched Riefenstahl’s crowd scenes and painted a picture of mass devotion to Nazism, which may have prompted many more Germans to follow. This is because the film direction focuses on and celebrates, through its cinematography, a newly instated Hitler who, just a month prior to the rally, consolidated the office of President and Chancellor (Hinton 33). The film encompasses Hitler’s arrival in Nuremberg by plane, the adoring crowds greeting Hitler with fanatic devotion, Hitler politely waving to his adoring fans, soldiers professing their devotion to Germany and the Nazi Party, the speeches made by the party heads to the party congress, Hitler’s speech, and a long period of marching by various groups.



Most critics view Riefenstahl's cinematographic work as original. Lenman claims the film had many "technical innovations—cameras mounted on lifts, shots from planes and balloons" (30). Similarly, Berg-Pan argues that Riefenstahl "was innovative and full of ideas in the preparation of the film" (100). The preparation for the film was done in the two weeks prior to the rally. Riefenstahl wanted to compose the film using a series of swiftly moving images (100). She dug pits in front of platforms, laid tracks down so the camera men could move along with the marchers, and had elevators built to obtain overall shots of the crowds.

The unifying image of the film is the Nazi symbol, the swastika, presented on banners, flags, shovels, uniforms, and stage platforms. The swastika is ubiquitous in this film, and that makes it a major thematic prop, used to rouse the nationalism from the German non-Jews. The repetitiveness of the swastika on every building, on every person, and on every uniform conforms to how Hitler believed propaganda worked: to repeat the same images until the people remembered it. The music, the marching, the military, and the crowds likely provoked a nationalistic emotion in Nazi-era Germany. The insignia on the Nazi flag obviously possesses a different meaning when looked at through a modern lens compared to what it meant in pre-war Germany. At the time, it meant unity and nationalism. The cinematography of the film is such that there is a constant fading in and out of flags and items with the Nazi symbol. At one point in the film, the camera is following the tops of flags as if they are people marching towards a greater good. It has a mesmerizing effect on the viewer.

Yet it is the editing that makes the film, according to Berg-Pan, a triumph in itself. The editing, which was original and unique for its time period, helps the film flow very smoothly. There is no sharp contrast between shots, except when night shots follow day shots and vice versa. The night portions of the film almost always bring on an eerie feeling, as if one were suddenly spying on a secret society. Berg-Pan comments that "the editing is responsible for its liveliness and the absence of monotony usually accompanying political conventions" (103). There are certain points in the film where the director, who personally edited the film, was unmistakably propagandizing. This is apparent when later in the film at the stadium in Nuremberg Hitler's face in front of a clear sky is juxtaposed with blond adolescent boys smiling with the same sky as the backdrop. The camera fades back and forth from Hitler to the boys and back again. At the same time, Hitler is telling the crowd he wants his people to be obedient, peace-loving, and courageous. Evidently, Riefenstahl is sending out a subliminal message with this juxtaposition of proud leader and loyal youth. She could have shown only Hitler during his speech, but she chose not to. Instead she focused on the youth in the crowds, who are most likely to be hypnotized by his presence and his words. That is what makes the film so lively. It never stays focused on one thing. There are many characters in the film with many props, but there is only one subject. Every-

thing and everyone revolves around Hitler. The mass worship is omnipresent.

According to Berg-Pan the editing helped create three themes: “the deification of Hitler, the solidarity between the German people and the Nazi party . . . and finally, the promise and hope for a future and glorious Germany” (103). Barsam believed that through “photography and editing, she has transformed the prosaic happenings into cinematic poetry” (29). He asserted that the constant movement is a “metaphor for progress” (28), so that this film is a kind of meta-narrative in which the director creates something in the cinematography and editing that was also actually happening at the rally and uses advanced cinematic technique to comment metaphorically on what the Nazis were doing for Germany. Barsam also noted that another secondary theme was “to display civilian and military strength” (28).

Not only did the editing help create and connect the major themes, but it also helped send political messages through the mouths of party leaders (Infield 89). According to many of the critics, the speeches were not all made at the same time, but they were shown in succession with distinct sound bites taken from each leader. Each sound bite was preceded by the name of the speaker in glowing letters across the screen as if they were modern-day celebrities. For instance, we see Dietrich’s name followed by Dietrich sternly saying that “truth is the basis of the power of our press,” and Streicher’s name followed by a clip of him asserting that “a nation that does not attribute its high value to its racial purity will perish.” Each leader addresses a different topic, and the audience gains a well-rounded sense of the Nazi party philosophy. It is clearly edited so the “simplest ideas” are relayed to the masses of Germans who will soon be this film’s audience (Hitler 185). This scene also “unites the speeches with the motifs of hope, progress, and unity, bending the actual substance of each speaker’s remarks to the general purpose of the film’s propaganda” (Barsam 41). Essentially, the speeches reiterate the themes of the film as a whole.

At the time, the film did not present any overt anti-Semitic themes, although there was an obvious pro-Aryan theme throughout the film. This could have been Hitler’s first phase of propaganda, in which he glorifies himself and Germany’s Aryan roots and insists that white people with blond hair are members of an ideal race. This was done not through words but through images that Riefenstahl presents in her highly edited version of the rally. We see young blond girls and young blond boys all looking healthy and content in their roles.

Most critics generally categorize *Triumph of the Will* as a propaganda film but also acknowledge that Riefenstahl viewed it as piece of art and a documentary and not a film with moral implications. But there is no doubt that a firsthand look at the film 70 years later brings an immediate understanding of the German fervor towards Hitler and how that provoked Germans to turn against the Jews. The film can also serve a historical purpose in that it makes clear to the contemporary

viewer—who has never experienced Germany during the Third Reich—that this leader was adored, or at least revered, by millions and that he derived his power from popular support. The film makes the subject, Hitler, appear to be a God-head who could incite people to follow him through his mysterious intensity that simultaneously seemed quiet and modest. In the film, he is the person whom the masses want to see, want to touch, and want to be. We do not meet a single individual besides Nazi leaders, but we see the same adoration in everyone's eyes. There are no angry citizens critical of Hitler. The camera only allows us to meet the masses of people, who are grinning from ear to ear and waiting for a glimpse of their leader. They are the bewildered herd waiting for a leadership to tell them that their nation is now unified. For all of these reasons, this film can easily be classified as propaganda or “information that misleads or is biased” (“Propaganda,” def.1).

In 1935, the film premiered in Berlin, and while Hitler was pleased with the results, others within the party complained that it was too artistic (Infield 104). Although the German public wasn't especially interested in the film, people in larger German cities did go to see it (Berg-Pan 102). The film did not go over too well in other parts of the world. In England, for instance, the movie was usually shown with a film that presented an opposing viewpoint of Hitler. As to be expected, Riefenstahl won Germany's National Film Prize for the movie that same year. Goebbels commented at the award ceremony that the film “is a grand vision of our Fuhrer” (Barsam 67). He added that Riefenstahl's work “has successfully overcome the danger of becoming a mere propaganda feature. It has lifted up the harsh rhythm of our great epoch to eminent heights of artistic achievement” (67). Goebbels saw the merit in transforming basic propaganda into art. Yet at the same time the film clearly served his purpose as a brilliant piece of propaganda, regardless of its artistic nature. It was also awarded Italian and French film prizes in 1936 and 1937, although many French people protested the award because of the propagandist nature of the film (Infield 105-106).

In 1938, Riefenstahl naively went to the United States to promote her next film, *Olympia*. While there, she was given the cold shoulder by Hollywood insiders. People mocked her with names such as “Hitler's Honey” and the “Fuhrer's Favorite Film Maker” (Berg-Pan 44). From then on, Riefenstahl had to vehemently defend her film to the rest of the world. In 1967, an interview with Riefenstahl showed that she saw her film from a historical point of view. She told the interviewer, “The film is purely historical. . . . It reflects the truth that was then, in 1934, history. It is therefore a documentary. Not a propaganda film” (Barsam 68). In an interview with NPR in 2002, she claimed that her film is not propaganda because “the film has no comment. It is a real documentary and art film” (Riefenstahl).

There is a distinction between what Riefenstahl said she intended *Triumph* to be and what it actually became. It is clear that when the Nazis took credit for

producing the film she was highly offended. Yet she must have known that a Nazi production label on it would surely classify it as a propaganda film. Because she was the director, she wanted to see her work as an artistic accomplishment, not merely as something commissioned by her government. However, it is also important to note that her artistic accomplishments are what upheld Nazi beliefs and contributed to their triumph. In the same NPR interview with Riefenstahl, the interviewer, Guy Raz, also reported an interview he had conducted with a German Jew who fled to the U.S. in 1936. This man remembered what it was like when he was forced to watch Riefenstahl's first Nazi party film, *Victory of Faith*, at the age of 13. He said he and his Jewish peers had to sit in the front row while his Aryan peers stood behind them and sang German songs. Afterwards, he and his Jewish friends were physically assaulted (Riefenstahl). Clearly, while Riefenstahl may have had the talent to make beautiful films, she nurtured that talent in a brutal environment, under a regime that killed 12 million people. Does this mean her artistic achievements should be discounted and looked at only through a propagandist lens? Although she was successful in making art out of a political event, one cannot forget that it was a political event that she was filming. There is only one true reason to convey on film what occurred at a political event, and that is to further the beliefs of the controlling government.

The purpose of the film was to show that Hitler had the power to unite the German people “in a great will to triumph” (Feldmann 58). Riefenstahl accomplished this through her editing and cinematography by crafting Hitler into a mesmerizing persona (Feldmann 59). She may have been the most innovative artistic director of her time, but her talents were utilized by the Nazis for perilous ends. If art is “the expression or application of creative skill and imagination, especially through a visual medium,” then Riefenstahl's work is a piece of art, in that the director used her expressive nature and creative skill to communicate the ideology of the Third Reich (“Art,” def. 1). Yet what her art achieves is the valorization of a murderous regime. While her work should never be discounted—since it is now historical in nature—neither should it be prized. It should be looked at for the purpose it served: propaganda to feed the masses.

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# XI Literacy Narratives

## Introduction

I am pleased that three of the literacy narratives written for Modern Theories of Writing have been included in this edition of the *Shawangunk Review*. Before I discuss the place of this assignment within the course, I would like to describe Modern Theories of Writing itself. The course is exactly what it claims to be: a writing theory class. Just as literary theory proposes different ways to read and interpret literature, writing theory proposes different approaches to writing and the teaching of writing. Just as literary theory can be philosophical, dense, and, at times, more theoretical than practical, so can writing theory. I encourage the students to weigh the theories, to openly question their own assumptions and those of the theorists, and to recognize that there is no one way to write or teach effectively.

During the course of the semester, the students complete a range of writing assignments: a reader-response/teaching journal; the literacy narrative; a review of a particular theory, theorist, book, or article; and a research paper in which they design a theory of writing or apply writing theory to a text of their choice. The purpose of the literacy narrative is to encourage students to consider why they have chosen the academic path they are presently following: what passions, influences, or mistakes have led them to this point in their careers? The narrative provides a space for the students to reflect on themselves and their choices, a space that ideally sets the stage for the remaining half of the course in which they place themselves within a continuum of writers and theorists who advocate certain practices for specific reasons: the moral (Mary Rose O'Reilley), the political (bell hooks, Bruce McComiskey, Ira Shor), or the personal (Lad Tobin, Ken Macrorie, Peter Elbow).

The literacy narrative also addresses an ongoing debate within the field of Rhetoric and Composition about the value of the narrative as a legitimate academic form. Although historically many serious authors are known as fine writers of narratives—Thomas DeQuincy, G. K. Chesterton, Virginia Woolf, E. B. White, and Joan Didion, to name a few—the narrative has, to a great extent, been overlooked in academic writing assignments. In his essay “Reading Composition’s Misplaced Anxieties About Personal Writing,” Lad Tobin reminds us, “What counts as an appropriate academic topic or form is not fixed and inherent but fluid and culturally constructed” (106). As a consequence, he speculates that the suspicion of personal writing “reveal[s] more about our own discomfort than

about any inherent feature of the form” (108). With the increasing popularity of creative nonfiction, the narrative has been slowly returning to the classroom, but it still isn’t taken as seriously as its more privileged, analytical cousin.

In the works chosen for this edition of the *Review*, David Alfieri’s best joins the genres of narrative and academic writing. In this exploration of his first semester as a Composition instructor, he forges connections between his teaching experiences and his training as a writer and scholar of literature. Andrea Ditter discovers common ground between her passions for literature, writing, teaching, and medicine; the powerful opening paragraph of her piece forms the central image of which Alfieri speaks in his. Gloria Winter, in perhaps the most personal of the three narratives, recognizes life as a cycle in which loss is partially compensated for by hope for the future. Like Ditter in her work, Winter notes the tightly bound relationship between the past and its effect on present-day choices. These three narratives demonstrate the range of voice and style that characterizes the literacy narrative, and they represent only a few of the excellent pieces written during our fall 2005 Modern Theories of Writing course.

—LYNNE CROCKETT

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## Self-Interest and the Teaching of College Composition

David Alfieri

*We tell ourselves stories in order to live.*

—Joan Didion, *The White Album*

So I have been told that the impetus of one's greatest work may be a mere single image. For Faulkner, it was that little girl in the limbs of a fruit tree, peering into the house at what she could not comprehend—this seen from below, her drawers soiled, wet and muddy, visible to all (*The Sound and the Fury*). I always liked knowing about that one, not necessarily for its being pregnant with significance, but for that rich glimpse into the creative impulse. I suppose for Melville it was the whiteness of the whale. There is always that warm central image the rest of the work crowds around. If nothing else, it seems to provide for the whole a certain stability, a hardness and definition. I've been thinking a lot about images, thinking that the need to establish one of my own is becoming rather importunate.

But my work is no great opus, what I do being much simpler: I teach college composition. Or rather, I have been awarded a teaching assistantship and pretend to teach freshman composition twice a week for one hour and fifteen minutes a pop. But I suppose that this is a creative act, a bit of an opus. One always dons a mask for the public, as I do for the class, creating for himself a subtly fictive and manageable persona. Always something greater than himself. There is a certain artfulness about it, and a necessity. So that I may stand before a class, so that I may speak with authority about that which I myself know rather little, so that I may make it through the hour and fifteen minutes without feeling as though I've soiled my drawers, I have been creating a narrative about myself.

For all the revision, still it took Faulkner four perspectives and some three hundred pages to negotiate his image. So far, I have had just a couple weeks of class meetings and am still trying to flesh out something useful. Though, sadly, my story goes on all the same, wavering and disjointed as it is. Problem is, I cannot get it down in print so to see it all at once, to make some sense out of it. For this reason—and this alone, I contend—my narrative has been somewhat flawed. The only vehicle available to me for delivering this narrative is speech. That is, my voice, which cannot be retracted, nor sometimes even restrained. And as Roland Barthes keenly observed, it is the spoken word, not the written, that is truly indelible (“Writers” 190). And now, if I somehow could put it all down on paper, believe it, it would be a revisionist history of the story currently in progress. For instance, the written story would not begin as the actual story had, with the timed essay I forced the students to write in class that first day so that I might diagnose



whatever sickly, misshapen, or otherwise defective idea of composition governed their writing.

Rather, it might. But it might not include a few of the details: for instance, that I pulled my selection of topics from the Graduate Record Exam website, and when the students could not comprehend the vocabulary therein, I offered them definitions by way of equally puzzling words and concepts, thinking they wanted clarification of the terms as used in their contexts, not a basic, elementary understanding of each. But the ego is incredibly resilient. I am overjoyed that I can no longer remember so to record here that grand speech I gave clarifying and adding nuance to the idea of “elusive knowledge,” when all the particular student wanted to know was the mere definition of “elusive.” And those who did understand the terms failed to grasp the concepts. Because the topics came from the Graduate Record Exam and the students were first-semester freshman. That has been banished from my memory. And I can sleep at night. But in the narrative I have been creating for myself, which is at the same time transmitted to the students, that was the first and botched installment of the story of myself. It didn’t even occur to me what the students had really asked or had tried to ask until I read their essays. Oh, they were painful to read. And truly, each one was sickly, misshapen, or otherwise defective, almost by my own design. I was too embarrassed to openly acknowledge the mistake, let alone make any reparations; and when I sheepishly handed them back, although they are required to go into the students’ portfolios at the end of the semester, I silently prayed for each diagnostic essay to be lost.

I remember a line by Robert Creeley: “What am I to myself that must be remembered, insisted upon so often?” (“The Rain”). But this is not it exactly; I am not necessarily negotiating the self. I know who I am as well as any man might—I am not grappling with some ontological dilemma. More specifically, my question might take the form of: What am I in the classroom and to my students that must be defined, stressed so often? Having no clear identity of myself as a teacher, I have been encouraged in subtle ways to emulate the best I have known in the profession and to resist the influence of the worst. During my interview for the assistantship I was asked to reflect on my years of study and describe some specific teaching styles that I have appreciated, that have served me well, and to describe some I thought ineffective. In effect, I was being asked how I might perform in the classroom. Through answering this question I had unwittingly taken the first step in creating the image of myself as a teacher. During the seconds before my mouth began to articulate a response, all at once the images of each memorable teacher from my past rushed my mind, a torrent, each in action and having the quality and substance of a ghost. Over each of which my mind superimposed an equally ghostly image of myself—my mouth but their speech voicing their pedagogy; my body but their gesticulations. The resultant images were discordant and ghostly. When my mouth finally began to deliver its response, unable to reconcile my own

image with that of any that had flooded my mind, and remembering a class on composition theory I had taken, I unconsciously parroted some non sequitur regarding de-centered authority and increased student agency. I was pleased to find the faces before me begin to smile, each nodding in approval at what may actually have been taken verbatim from an old text one of them had given to me the previous year. So in addition to somewhat accidentally aligning myself philosophically with the mission of the composition program I was hoping to join, I realized that this image of myself was not to be created, as through combining disparate elements from others, but rather discovered from something already present within myself. I needed to encourage whatever teacher was in me to emerge, the way Michelangelo coaxed the image from the stone.

But as was reaffirmed by my pomposity in waxing intellectual over some ridiculous diagnostic essay topic, I harbor within myself more than my share of arrogance and pretension. As if a reflex, something ancient and instinctual, when frightened and confused I retreat to the form and figure of this pomp to reestablish a solid ethos for myself, to inculcate my students toward a respect and reverence for their instructor. In effect, they are at best confounded; at worst, they are drawing themselves further and further from any sort of engagement with me or the rest of the class.

By way of example, and something else that might not be included in my written narrative, here's another episode, occurring but days after the previously mentioned. I am giving a lesson on Annie Dillard but thinking about myself and what Barthes wrote about figures. He uses the term "not in its rhetorical sense, but in its gymnastic or choreographic acceptation," the original Greek signifying "the body's gesture caught in action and not contemplated in repose"; this is "the body of athletes, orators, statues: what in the straining body can be immobilized" (*A Lover's Discourse* 3-4). I picture the image of myself frozen mid-sentence at times of such ethos-building, think of Barthes's "figure."

Myron's Discuss Thrower? Idiotically, nonsensically, I picture this. The beauty, the movement, the strength. I wonder about any correlation. What might I be hurling at my students? I am saying something regarding Dillard's style, have by this point spoken the words *eloquent, beautiful, vivid, engaging, vivid, beautiful, eloquent*, enough for them to now come automatically. The students do not yet seem to appreciate these qualities of the text, and so I press the issue further, keep these words flowing off the tongue in quick staccato fashion. I smirk, internally, remembering having learned that in Greek times the children ran around for pranks, breaking the phalli (you know, the penises) from the tremendous and powerful marble statues. Kids have always been kids, even in ancient times, despite whatever high culture or sophistication we or the historians or their own society may have tried to impose onto their lives. I am lecturing on one of Dillard's famous and failed epiphanies, and I am Myron's hero but realize what I am

hurling is something heavy and blunt and stone. My words are stilted, my cadence pedantic. Suddenly ripped from my musings by these false notes somewhere far off in my own voice giving a lesson, I look out over the class—as if Faulkner’s little miss—uncomprehending, feeling the full weight of twenty-one glowering faces peering back at me. *What do they want from me?* I think of the Greeks, of castration, of the impotence to perform for these students. And in my ears only the static hum of fluorescent lights overhead. My behaving in such a way, it is the students that become ossified, indifferent as stone and unresponsive. I think about the words *agency* and *de-centered*. I ask the class what it is they think about the text, and uselessly. They are peering up at me from their seats below, blinking, and sure to notice my soiled drawers.

Whatever ostensibly authoritarian and omniscient figure I had created through that speech was beginning to vacillate uncertainly on its pedestal, and I felt within myself the weight of stone pulling me down. That second week an office mate, another TA, turned to me, said that his lesson planning wasn’t going so well, that some force dragged him down into sleep each time he tried to begin, not for its being boring—the lesson planning—which it may have been, but for the stress. Same stuff that makes people faint, I said. The ultimate withdraw from the unpleasant. I felt it also, but something else had its hands on me. A certain dizziness, giddiness—vertigo pulled me down, set the statue of myself teetering there before the class. It happens, as we’ve read, to any man reaching for impossible heights, at the exact moment of his acknowledgement of the impossibility, of the arrogance of the act, and of his own weakness. Milan Kundera defined it well. Vertigo is: “a heady, insuperable longing to fall” (61).

I feel the story of myself becoming quite the tragedy, replete with deception, guile, hamartia and the resultant plunge. And it is all becoming rather uninteresting to me. And I have my own classes to worry about, let alone the one I’m trying to teach. Just thinking about all this makes me tired. And my mind flirts with ideas of vertigo, and I dream of sleep.

\* \* \*

*He must teach himself that the basest of all things is to be afraid: and, teaching himself that, forget it forever.*

—William Faulkner, “Nobel Prize Address,” 1950

I suppose my question now would read something like: What knowledge is to be discovered in the classroom, and what are we in ourselves that must be discovered, reinvented so often? I’m too tired now to trump myself up. I’ve forgotten about the creation of any fraudulent image. I don’t need to prove myself to the students; although most of them may have at least a few inches on me, I’ve got at

least six years on the oldest of them, and plenty of smarts. And what with ADD and the truncated memory of society today, anyway, I'm sure they have forgotten whatever narrative I was trying to force onto them. I don't need any revisionist history as recourse. One day I simply walked into the class as myself, and the transition was mysteriously seamless.

It's over a month into the class meetings now, and I just keep the fluorescent lights off. I teach late in the morning, sitting on top of my desk, and the natural light warms the room with color just fine. The room with its four white walls and linoleum tiling is sterile enough as is, without the fluorescent lighting. Luminescence: the production of light without heat. I remember looking out over the cold glowering faces only a few weeks ago. And although the metaphor reeks of kitsch, it is always heat, tension, the friction of student whetting mind on text that brings ideas to the fore. The token image of an idea gotten: the incandescent bulb, that sudden manifestation of light, that intuitive spark. There is no room in our heads for mercury vapors, for ionized particles. I just keep the lights off. Anyway, the natural light better flatters my visage, though the dull rings have by now faded away from under my eyes.

I enter the room each class as one of the students, and we each put our minds in direct contact with the text. I offer them little by way of instruction and do not pretend toward any authority. It's more that I mediate our progress as we try to negotiate each individual piece. Sometimes it takes us all period just to figure out what something is. Sometimes we don't figure it out. But through our investigations we yield more insight than I ever had previously hoped to drum into their heads with lecture. I remember Faulkner's admonition to young writers—to deal of “love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice,” else the writer labor “under a curse” (“NPA”). Forever mixing literature with life, still I've done well to bring a few of these values to the classroom through my teaching. Having lost whatever specious images of myself I had tried to create, my pedagogy has become transparent, the purpose governing my lessons overt. To them Dillard may be forever ruined, but I can't worry about that now. We're making progress together. A few days ago we listened to the “Blue Danube,” jotting down our thoughts furiously, laughing, trying to figure out what exactly Aaron Copland really meant by his “How We Listen.” The students and I, we pretty much go wherever that river takes us, trying to keep our minds open and pencils moving along the way. I had always suspected there were little filaments above their heads, but it took this type of experimentation to make them glow.

They have summarily refused the circular formation of seats, I suspect primarily for the work involved to set them thus; but it's fine, and we'd rather do without the pretension anyway. I refuse to force them into any arrangement simply because it purports to change the power structure within the class. It would be ironic and antithetic. When not joined in groups, it's still them in rows looking

up at me, but that's only because I'm their instructor; and I'm sitting atop my desk and don't tell them anything important anyway. What the hell do I know? I'm a TA. And regardless, they can figure it out themselves. A few of them have like half a foot on me.

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My Life's Opposition:  
A Teaching Narrative

*Andrea Ditter*

The second floor of the Humanities building at SUNY New Paltz represents two important firsts in my life. It is there where, big eyed and 17, I walked into my first college English class, a random general education requirement that sounded interesting enough in the course catalogue back in June. “Social Issues and World Literature”—why not? I was a biology major, pre-med, I needed to get these classes out of the way early so I could concentrate on the “important” stuff. Three years later, seven months away from receiving my Bachelor’s degree *summa cum laude* in English, I would race up the stairs of that same building and, down the hall from the classroom that changed my life, save someone else’s.

I remember feeling like I was flying up those stairs. The thirty-pound airway bag, the first “real” medical equipment to reach the scene, felt like nothing. I wasn’t even out of breath when I burst into the classroom and moved away the bystanders who had already begun CPR. This was it, my first code.<sup>1</sup> This is the story always told while sitting around the kitchen table at the station. What should have happened and what did. Who was saved—who died that day.

Medicine, healthcare, literally having the ability to hold someone’s breath, their life-force, in your hands, has been an obsession of mine since as long as I can remember. Over the last 10 years I have been convinced that I would be a doctor, a nurse, a paramedic, a radiologist, even a vet—whatever, so long as I could “heal,” so long as I could make a real and lasting, a tangible difference in someone’s life.

As I knelt down on the floor on that beautiful fall afternoon literally pumping the life back into a man who had spent it imparting knowledge to others, without even realizing it I was coming face to face with my own life’s opposition: the ivory tower versus the “muddy, ruddy, bloody bank.”

Once our paramedic arrived on scene along with another ambulance and more people the next hour became a blur. We were like parts of a machine, carrying out a set of duties long since practiced and designated to us by experience and rank, confused because of the mess that these situations inevitably create, but at the same time confident in our skills and in our intent. This is one of those rare moments that comes only a few dozen times in a career, but is always there in mind every time those tones go off and the crew jumps into the rig. Somehow the irony of that day, that my first code was in the same building as my first college English class, down the hall from the room where I had met the teacher who had inspired me to change my major and my career path, wouldn’t hit me for a long time. But as I progress in this seemingly contradictory life, it remains foremost in

my struggle every day to figure out who I am, where I'm going, and how I got here in the first place.

When I'm really honest with myself, I realize that as much as I, and the well-intentioned people around me, wanted the prestige and rewards that come from being at the "top" of a field such as medicine, there was never much in my personality that was conducive to its realities. It's often been said of me, and I'm fain to agree, that I am a very passionate person. I put my whole self into whatever I do and always feel guilty if I do not, despite the success or failure of the endeavor. Being a doctor to me meant a complete engagement of mind, body, and soul from day one. That meant college, medical school, residency, and practice. And, as I did some research, meeting and talking to family and friends, it became obvious that being the type of physician that I would respect, that I would be able to live with at the end of every day, would mean giving up other parts, other people, in my life, or at the least having them take a backseat. When it came down to it, that was simply not something that I could do.

How could I live my life with passion if that meant throwing away or casting aside those who inspired me to do so? How could I commit myself to years of study and piles of debt in order to aid those whom I don't know while in the process ignoring those I do? My family, present and future, somehow stood out as that which I would have to ignore or give less to in the long run. And, as silly as it seems, from the time that I was 16 or 17 years old, I knew two things: First, that I wanted to be a mother more than anything else. To me this stood as the most simple, beautiful, and difficult way to give and create life; but in order to do that best, most passionately, I would have to find a profession that allowed me to concentrate on that primary role. In that way then, teaching, in and of itself, was probably never much of a stretch for me. But even then "teaching" meant science, biology or nursing, never English, never writing. Those things were not what I "wanted" to focus on, they were not "acceptable" or worth my time and intellect.

I guess part of this came from growing up as the daughter of a doctor and an engineer in a family where the "humanities" always took a back seat. "Concentrate on science and math." "Get a professional degree so you can get a good job, or at least meet a man who can." "Those who can't do, teach." I've heard them all. Through the pride and the pats on the back for what I *have* accomplished, I still hear them, whispered in my ear late at night. That I still have not "chosen" between my two loves, that I live in a world full of contradiction, that I switch back and forth from the week's beginning to its end, doesn't help, and the voices are unrelenting.

But in all fairness, I've really been lucky in my life, sort of "falling" into all the situations that have lead to meaningful fulfillment. I never set out to be an English major or save someone's life, but along the way, I have been fortunate enough to meet the right people that have helped me create meaning out of doing

these things. My mom suggested that I take an EMT course and volunteer “for my résumé” and I never looked back. Similarly, a then adjunct instructor in a random GE course sent me an email commending me on my final exam and completely changed the course of my life.

I’ll be the first to admit that at 21 years old it seems a bit odd for me to be saying this with so much conviction. And although I cannot argue with those who do call me young, I take a certain offense when they use it as a means to put me down, to assert some kind of unconditional authority on all things practical based solely upon age and experience. Yet it has been through my close observation of those people, both young and old, positive and negative, that I’ve been able to amass a kind of wisdom that has proven much more valuable. This does not mean that I am smarter or more able than anyone else, just that I take time to look below the surface and see people inside.

My parents, though very much opposite from myself in their life’s journeys, instilled this in me. They have never tried to stop me from making my own decisions, and my own mistakes. As much as they may or may not agree with the choices that I have made, for as long as I can remember they have held their tongues, let me fall, and hoped that they were successful either in sufficiently padding the ground or helping me back up. Their actions and inactions, their silence and support, created the person that sits here today. And their success (at least in my opinion it’s a success) has subsequently led me to want to emulate them in a far more profound way. I don’t want to follow in their footsteps and become a chiropractor or a computer engineer; I would much rather find my greatest success the same way that they did: by loving, imprinting and allowing another human being to live and grow.

On the other hand, those whom I have found most hostile to my choices—who have called my path a “waste” of intellect, or ability, or whatever else—usually come across, when really looked at closely, as those least happy with themselves and their own life’s decisions. I guess I’ve found that “happiness” is a relative term, one that is created anew within each individual and constantly reinvented throughout the course of a successful life.

In EMS on a daily and weekly basis we handle so many different scenarios, most of them bogus, so that after a while they all just bleed into one. But your first code is like losing your virginity; every move burns itself into your mind. I can remember the face of everyone there, even the bystanders whom I had never seen before. I remember the fear and the adrenaline simultaneously coursing through my body, helping me, forcing me, to continue to move, to think, to act. Giving life to another, I was consequently creating it anew within myself, redefining my happiness. Every time you see someone on the brink of death, it forces you to re-analyze the way you live. It becomes even more significant that when this event transpired, my own life was at a crossroads. In my last year as an undergraduate I



had important, lasting decisions to make about where I was going and who I was going with.

Yet in some ways it seems that I still haven't made that decision, that by living a life that takes me from an ambulance to a writing classroom, I've just made up my mind not to decide on one or the other. But I have, and in many ways understanding that comes down to what, symbolically and practically, happened on the day of my first code. I don't know that I could even attempt to explain the journey that my reasoning took that day. What I do know is that not long afterwards the decision to stay in New Paltz and pursue teaching rather than changing career paths was made independently from any outside input. But at the same time I also knew that "just volunteering" wasn't going to be enough any more. I wanted the "real" thing; I wanted to get my hands dirty and my heart broken. I wanted to live.

And I guess that's where my reconciliation lies, in living my life my way. Despite those who may cast a judgmental look, who see me as indecisive, or perverse, or simply young, I know that it's more complicated than that, and I think it's a good thing that it is. Every day, when I go into work at Mobile Life Support, I know that maybe I will, once again, give someone breath, try desperately to help them hold on, pull through. And then, a few days later, I will walk through the doors to the ivory tower and use that experience, those emotions and insights, to teach.

I guess I've realized that "giving life" to another can be done in more than one way. You can do it through birth, through raising, nurturing, and helping a child to grow; you can do it by teaching that same child and encouraging him to live his own life fully; or you can hold a bag in your hand and literally force life back into someone who's not ready to give it up. For me, giving life literally has meant all of these things, and without experiencing each, I don't know that I could feel the magnitude of the others. The diversity of the tasks set before me on a daily and weekly basis, in my mind, complement and strengthen one another. As I give breath to one, I give voice to the other, and in doing so I give myself breath so as to hear my own voice more clearly.

Those on the outside, those who haven't found their own balance or their own voice, may never understand that, but they don't have to, and I've given up trying to make them. On the day of my first code I was fortunate enough to play a part in a changing a man's life by saving it. On the day of my first college English class, I was fortunate enough to have my life changed. And though the methods and the tools used may have been different, the outcome was the same, which makes me wonder if my life's contradiction is really that at all.

## Notes

1. A “code” is the common term used by medical personnel to refer to the event when a patient goes into cardiac arrest and, as a result, has life-saving procedures such as intubation and CPR performed. During a code, the patient’s heart literally stops and they cease to breathe on their own; literally and medically speaking, the patient is dead.

Catholic School + Construction Paper +  
Morning Sickness = One Tired Writer

*Gloria M. Winter*

October 4, 2005. I probably will remember today for as long as I live. No, not just because today was a beautiful, exceptionally warm autumn day. And yes, the sun felt warm, but not as warm as the sensation growing inside of me. I will remember this day for my miracle. Today, more than anything, was a full-circle day for me. The starting point began on July 1, 2003 when I watched my father take his last breath and bravely leave his cancerous body behind. That night I experienced a warm sensation overpower me—a sudden flash of heat in a freezing hospital room. I believe that warmth was his spirit leaving us. His last embrace. The last two years without my father have been the most challenging. Wait—that is just too easy and too much of a cliché to say right now. Hell. Anger. Confusion. Frustration. Longing. Grieving. Tears. Panic. These words seem to capture the last two years well. All that was held near and dear to me was suddenly altered or skewed. I was familiar with this feeling though. It was how I felt at the age of seven, when my family moved from the Bronx. Everything that mattered to me was taken away when we moved; my sacred little, seven-year old world was turned upside down. I felt the same way when my father died, but a thousand times worse.

Today, though, I felt as though I got a piece of my father back or at least a part of the hope that I have missed for the last couple of years. I am almost twelve weeks pregnant and I went for my first sonogram this morning. For the past two months, I have walked around wondering, worrying, and perhaps even doubting that I am carrying a child. Even after seven pregnancy tests, five of which confirmed a positive result, I had my doubts! I have had all the typical tell-tale signs of pregnancy. For example, the never-ending fatigue: I came pretty close to falling asleep during one of my 9<sup>th</sup> grade English classes. Nausea: usually triggered by my vitamins, the smell of garlic, garlic breath, toothpaste, cranberry juice, and the smell of garlicky leftovers. Cravings: McDonald's vanilla milkshakes, vanilla ice cream, egg creams, cheese sticks, school French fries, and bagels with cream cheese and butter. Plus a couple of other maladies that I choose not to mention. My doubts were finally laid to rest today when I saw my baby for the first time on the sonogram screen. There, before my eyes, waved my future and restoration in hope. A little arm moving back and forth in what appeared to be a salute to me and my husband—"Hey Mom and Dad, there is life after death." Again, a sudden flash of heat in a freezing medical room. I believe my father was there with us. He hugged me yet again.

So how do today's events or events in my past all tie in with me as a writer?

For as long as I can remember, I have taken my feelings, my thoughts and frustrations and placed them on a page. Writing is a part of me. Whether I am writing a letter for my husband's lunch bag, a lesson plan for my 9<sup>th</sup> grade English class or a letter to the editor of the local newspaper, words are my saving grace and defense against this crazy world. Writing also allows me to process or record feelings of overwhelming experiences like the ones I previously mentioned. Sometimes it is difficult to absorb or understand what is happening at the exact moment it is happening. Writing is preservation.

My journals, or Thought Books, as I like to call them, are filled with random thoughts, musings, dreams, heartbreak, and with mind-numbing-music-infused orgasmic episodes. In truth, the only place I truly exist is within my pages. If a someone wants to know the real me, all that person would have to do is read my pages. Without the power or healing properties of writing, I am not sure how I would have overcome some of the obstacles in my life. In retrospect, what amuses me most about my relationship with writing is that, at first, I did not view writing as an outlet. Writing was my ticket to acceptance. In other words, writing was a membership in the Mechanicstown Elementary School Bulletin Board Club.

During second grade, I moved to Middletown, New York from the Bronx. My parents wanted us to have clean air, green grass, and a safer place to live. After a few weeks of "Utopia," I wanted to leave the cows and quiet behind. My new school and my new life in the country were nothing like my parents said they would be. I missed the city, the sound of the trains, and the closeness of my relatives. Incidentally, for the longest time, I thought a prerequisite for being part Italian was living in the city and having at least half of your immediate family living on the same block or in the same apartment building as you. Moving to the country made me feel like an orphan. I even missed my ugly Catholic school uniform and the insane Sister Mary Margaret. My new school did not have classrooms; instead we were in one giant wing where the classrooms were sectioned off by chalkboards and bulletin boards. Students were allowed to move from one class to another for reading groups or math help. We could go next door to borrow chalk or to ask for a snack. There was too much freedom and open space in this town. Where did all the strictness go? I couldn't function in this Romper Room meets The Magic Garden atmosphere.

The truth of the matter, I was not bothered that much by my new school's lack of structure. Simply, I was lonely. I was an outsider trying to find a niche within the already established routines of academia and the student population. The kids already had their cliques and secret societies. Nobody was letting this city kid in. Side note: if at all possible, do not move your children into another school district after the school year has started. I just wanted to make friends and belong somewhere. Fit in.

Another bizarre thing my new school did was to encourage kids to try new

hobbies or sports. Every few weeks we were given a list of clubs that we could join. The choices were things like chess, rug hooking, floor hockey, cooking, and computers. On Friday afternoons we would end our school week by breaking up into our assigned clubs and spending the remainder of the day having fun. The only clubs I had ever belonged to in my old school were the weekly Rosary Round the Flagpole Club and The St. Francis of Rome Mass Club. The difference being, I was an automatic member without the option of dropping out. Since I started my new school later in the year, I didn't have a choice for my first club. My teacher was the advisor for the bulletin board club, and she told me to stay with her group. I really wanted to join the cooking club—what was a bulletin board anyway? I reluctantly followed my group to the meeting place out in the main hallway. I soon found out, as told to me by my fellow board member Stacy, the bulletin board club was the most popular club in school. I can remember her nasal voice exclaiming: "All the kids want to join this club, but they can't. You have to be put on a waiting list. Only the cool kids get picked. You're lucky that Mrs. Z let you in." (Little did I know that, ironically, in my twenties, I would hear something very similar to this diatribe trying to get into Limelight.)

Our project was to decorate the bulletin board by the main entrance for the upcoming PTA meeting. It was already decided that the board was going to depict the four seasons, a quarter of the board for each season. Students were already assigned their seasons and the busy bee groups got right to work. Mrs. Z told me to pick a season that I liked and to join that group. All the kids turned and glared at me as if they were telepathically conveying to me, "You're not joining our group!" I felt feverish and dumbstruck. It was then I decided to do my own thing. I sat on the floor with construction paper and a pencil and I began to *write* about the four seasons.

I honestly do not know what made me write about the four seasons or why I chose to do this in the first place. I never just sat down to write before nor did I ever just write to write. I think I wanted to show my classmates that I was good at something too. By the end of the day, I had written a little poem for each of the seasons. These simplistic poems, four lines at the most that sounded more like nursery rhymes than anything else, were the seeds that started my writing life. (I cannot remember the lines, but I am sure that my mother has them safely tucked away in my portfolio at her home.) I handed the poems to Mrs. Z, and I remember her eyes lighting up. She asked me if I wrote them and I told her that I did. She was impressed and began squealing to the other students that they had to stop what they were doing to make room for my poems on the bulletin board. Most of the kids groaned about the idea of changing the scheme of things, but some of the students liked my poems and thought they were cool. Some students even asked if I would write poems for the existing bulletin boards they had already completed. My first commission! I loved that some of the students were interested in what I

had to offer, and a part of me finally felt accepted. I believe this moment is what first made me correlate writing with acceptance. I learned later in life that for me writing is something so much more and sacred.

After adding twenty-seven years to my first writing experience, I can look back and admit that the bulletin-board moment did not drastically change my popular status in school and that my story did not have the typical “feel good movie of the year” ending. The students did not lift me up on their shoulders to parade me through the hallways, nor did they start chanting my name as Queen’s “We are the Champions” played in the background. In fact, some students despised me even more after that because I had received some extra attention. I did, however, learn that I had something special—a way to communicate my thoughts and feelings through writing. It made me feel better. Even today, when I reach the end of my page, I know that a healing is going to take place. It may not happen immediately, or in this year, but it will happen.

## XII Book Reviews

Camille Paglia. *Break, Blow, Burn: Camille Paglia Reads Forty-Three of the World's Best Poems*.

New York: Pantheon, 2005.

Thomas G. Olsen

On your next browse through the literary criticism section of a bookstore—and more and more, that means one of two big-box retailers where the bestsellers are cheap and the lattes expensive—you are not likely to miss *Break, Blow, Burn: Camille Paglia Reads Forty-Three of the World's Best Poems*. With its bold three-word main title emblazoned on a bright pink cover, this volume of about 250 pages makes for a very eye-catching article on a shelf or sales table. I learned more than a year ago that it was forthcoming and have been awaiting its arrival with great anticipation.

Brilliant to some and notorious to others, Paglia has in the last decade and a half developed a reputation for her provocative critical pronouncements, especially because she is so adept at drawing parallels between different forms of artistic expression, often shaking up conventionally held distinctions between high art and popular culture and tweaking various critical establishments in the process. To my mind, she can be brilliant as a cultural critic (and is almost always brash, too), but this book strikes me as a much more modest and traditional project—in some ways similar to what an “unplugged” acoustic album means for a rock star who has made it big. After her electrifying work in studies such as *Sexual Personae* and the essays of *Vamps and Tramps*, Paglia goes acoustic in *Break, Blow, Burn*, returning to her roots as she applies to forty-three poems the approaches and techniques of the formalist/humanist *explication de texte* method in which she was trained during her undergraduate years at Harpur College (SUNY Binghamton) and at Yale, where she obtained her PhD and wrote a dissertation under the guidance of Harold Bloom.

*Break, Blow, Burn* is composed of three parts: an autobiographical/polemical introduction of 11 pages, in which she derides contemporary poets and critics; a much longer section in which she reprints forty-three poems, followed by her critical responses of between two and ten pages; and finally a brief section devoted to paragraph-length biographical sketches of the poets she discusses. She begins with a solid enough reading of Shakespeare's Sonnet 73 and ends with a rhapsodic one of Joni Mitchell's “Woodstock,” which she calls “possibly the most

powerful and influential poem composed in English since Sylvia Plath's "Daddy."

Though the book's subtitle promises that she will read forty-three of the *world's* best poems, in fact all twenty-eight poets she discusses wrote in English, and from Whitman forward she deals almost exclusively with Americans. (In fairness, in her introduction she gives her reasons for her principles of selection, but the book's subtitle still seems to suggest that only English-language poetry is world-class.) The pre-1900 writers are all thoroughly canonized figures and all but two are English. Male poets outnumber female poets twenty-two to eight. Almost all her pre-World War II writers are represented by two or three selections; all the post-war poets by just a single poem.

These features, combined with the chronological organization of *Break, Blow, Burn*, give the first half of the book the feel of a Norton anthology or first-year composition textbook. That's fine, of course, but I find that Paglia is more daring and interesting when she works with modern American poets whose idiom is distinctly American—especially Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, Frank O'Hara, May Swenson, Chuck Wachtel, Rochelle Kraut, Wanda Coleman, and Ralph Pomeroy. She seems to me less able to convey what is distinctive and world-class about Gary Snyder and Norman H. Russell, whose poems, for all their American-ness in some respects, do not explore the urban and confessional themes Paglia responds to with so much verve. In her discussions of indisputably canonical pre-twentieth-century poems she must position herself in relation to time-honored critical traditions, with the result that her readings often seem only a little different from what one would find in any other anthology. Overall, I think most readers will find her choices fairly predictable up until the 1950s, less so thereafter.

Among the most interesting sections in the whole book, however, is her introduction. In it she reveals some interesting autobiographical details related to her own engagement with poetry and popular culture, and she describes how she reads and enjoys a poem. But woven into this story are some darker strands, a deep nostalgia for the days before "theory" destroyed "literature." The introduction quickly turns into a polemic against "the influx of European post-structuralism into American universities in the 1970s," which she calls "a cultural disaster from which higher education has yet to recover." She's no fonder of "crusading identity politics" or of Cultural Studies, which she sees as "undone by its programmatic Marxism" and marred by "a morass of misreadings or overreadings." She avers that "during the past quarter century, humanistic principles and honest practical criticism could more reliably be found among low-paid adjuncts faithfully teaching service courses at community colleges than in the vain, showy professoriat of the elite schools." All of this combines to insure that ideology triumphs over art and that no one in the academy can "read" anymore, least of all those who are paid to teach others to do so (viii-ix).

These are fighting words indeed. Whatever one thinks of her claims, in my



opinion Paglia scores at least one very important point in this introduction, one that ought to be on the mind of anyone who thinks seriously about imaginative writing of any sort: the supposed art of “pure” close reading is always in peril when literary criticism makes common cause with other disciplines or traditions, whether politics, aesthetics, linguistics, history, or popular culture. The more important problem below this problem, however, is whether literary analysis is diluted or enriched by such mixing. Personally, I think that close reading of the sort New Criticism espoused (and which she seems to value to some degree, despite her spirited protestations otherwise) is never really possible and that sometimes the best things to say about a poem are what it says about the larger world around it. Paglia’s own methods and outlooks in the rest of the book make it abundantly clear that she, too, brings a kind of theory to bear upon the analysis of poetry. She is a powerful advocate for reading the world’s best verse through the prism of popular culture—language patterns, images, ideas, tones—and human sexuality. This is an eclectic mix, but it is a theoretical position which leads her to poems that foreground what she’s most interested in discussing, especially in postwar American poetry.

But this is Camille Paglia’s book and not mine, and so the choice of poems, methods, and critical positions—whether we call it theory or Theory—is entirely hers. What is interesting to me is that, for all her claims about the depredations modern critical theory has made on poetry, her project is far, far from the self-contained close-reading enterprise in appreciation, written for non-specialists, that she announces in her introduction. True, she is not in the least interested in semiotics or the slippery play of language as a topic in itself (though in at least one case, her reading of *haply* in Shakespeare’s Sonnet 29, a little more attention to polysemy would be space well used). And only occasionally does she invoke the larger political worlds in which her poets lived and against which they flung their poems (she sounds a little like Terry Eagleton might when she discusses Blake’s “The Chimney Sweeper” and “London”—but who wouldn’t in the case of these two powerful poems?).

Unlike the New Critics, who set the rules by which her undergraduate education was played, Paglia unabashedly resorts to biographical criticism in many of her analyses. In fact, several essays become extended biographical glosses of obscure poems; see especially the selections by Herbert, Hughes, Roethke, Lowell, Plath, O’Hara, Coleman, and Pomeroy. Without the biographical facts that clear up some real obscurities in these poems, however, they seem to me very odd choices for the designation of “world’s best poems.” They are hardly the universal artifacts she celebrates in her introduction and hardly the kind of works that let readers discover meaning without the aid of trained critics. But again, this is Paglia’s book and not mine. She has a right to nominate whichever poems she wants for this distinction, and if she feels that Sylvia Plath’s “Daddy” is “one of the

strongest poems every written by a woman” (page 167: but does “strongest” mean forceful and angry, or universal and great?) or that Chuck Wachtel’s found-poem “A Paragraph Made Up of Seven Sentences” and Joni Mitchell’s “Woodstock” deserve places of honor among the magical forty-three, she is free to say so.

*Break, Blow, Burn* has several other distinctive features. Paglia’s choice of poems certainly favors lyrics with sexual themes or undertones. This focus should come as no surprise to those who know her previous scholarship—she’s never been coy about her interest in sexuality as a human life-force—but it also leads her to some rather ingenious (take this word in either of its principal senses) readings. For example, I am not sure I can really see the vestige of the Petrarchan mistress in William Carlos Williams’s “This Is Just to Say”—though it shakes up my sense of the poem in interesting ways to try to read it her way. I was more bothered by her persistent references to important poems she did not include in this volume. In the opening sentence of her introduction, she claims that she intends this book for a general audience. But throughout her discussions she refers to dozens of great poems, plays, and other products of the Western cultural imagination, both literary and not, that she seems to assume her readers will immediately recognize. Keats’s “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” is invoked to helpful purpose, though Keats is not represented by a single selection; Whitman “opens himself to divine inspiration,” as if he were communing with “Shelley’s west wind” (though Shelley is represented by “Ozymandias” only); he is also hyperbolic, “in the Byronic way,” though Byron is not otherwise in this volume (90-91). Though she argues for the inherent meaning and beauty of the lyric poem as a form, she must make two hundred such excursions to works outside this volume in order to make meaning of those that are in it. For myself, this is not a particular impediment; I rather like the way she recreates the atmosphere of a seminar, where teachers and students are always trying to draw parallels and suggest connections across time and space. In fact, the whole book reads in some ways like the transcript of an interesting seminar. But I wonder how many of her intended general readers can really follow her, for she seems to assume that everyone has already taken the implied prerequisite poetry appreciation courses to which she refers on what seems like every other page.

Essentially unrelated to this point but just as perplexing to me is her decision to include a selection from *Hamlet* and to represent Whitman with two sections of the longer *Song of Myself*. In a book celebrating the lyric poem, I am quite unsure why she opted to ignore the marvelous sonnets of Sidney or Spenser (or Wyatt or Drayton or Daniel or Wroth, for that matter) in favor of an excerpt from a Renaissance play, or why she represents our first great American populist lyric poet with a something other than a self-contained lyric. These choices make her project seem whimsical and confused.

I would have liked to like this book more than I did. But by the end, I

came to the conclusion that at some basic level this is really not a well-conceived enterprise: it's neither introductory enough to be the project for general readers that she announces in her introduction, nor (especially in the first half of the book) fresh enough in its analyses to qualify as really original criticism. Nor, for that matter, do her readings always illustrate the critical practices for which she advocates in her introduction. Even so, I would strongly urge readers to read that essay, if nothing else in the book, keeping in mind that it's an interesting comment on the state of literary criticism, but certainly not gospel. If you have world enough and time, read more of the book, perhaps going to the poems you admire rather than reading from cover to cover, as I did. In the end, though I often found myself admiring individual points of Paglia's analyses and sometimes appreciating her straight-up prose style, I never came to feel that the forty-three discrete parts—forty-four if you include her introduction—of this book really come together into a coherent whole.

True Under Kilimanjaro: Truth & Lies, Story &  
Truthiness in Hemingway's African Memoir

Ernest Hemingway. *Under Kilimanjaro*.  
Kent State University Press, 2005.

*H. R. Stoneback*

Readers of this journal may recall that in the Special Hemingway Centennial Issue I reviewed Hemingway's *True at First Light*, a book that was widely celebrated as the literary event of 1999 (*Shawangunk Review* XI [2000]: 93-102). In that review I noted that as a Hemingway Foundation Board member involved in the process of deciding what Hemingway manuscripts would be published posthumously I had "cast one of the five votes, perhaps the deciding vote, which allowed the publication of *True at First Light* to occur" (93). I counseled the reader against lamentation and remorse over that diminished 1999 version of Hemingway's African "memoir": "It is better to have what we have than to have nothing at all," I noted; and precisely (given the negotiations between the Hemingway Estate and the Hemingway Foundation) because we then had *True at First Light* we would someday have a complete version of the restricted-access manuscript then referred to by scholars as the "African Book" (102). That day is now here, for Kent State University Press has published (Fall 2005) an admirable edition of what incautious or uninformed reviewers are referring to as Hemingway's "last book." And its new title is *Under Kilimanjaro*.

For several months now, I have been reading and rereading Hemingway's African narrative *Under Kilimanjaro* (admirably edited by Robert W. Lewis and Robert E. Fleming "to produce a complete reading text" of Hemingway's manuscript), and reassessing *True at First Light* (the radically truncated 1999 commercial version of the same manuscript, skillfully edited by Patrick Hemingway), hoping to say something perspicacious or at least useful in these brief remarks. Since I will be teaching *Under Kilimanjaro* in a graduate seminar this semester, and I taught *True at First Light* immediately after its release in 1999, I thought I would list here some of the reasons why we should read and teach *Under Kilimanjaro*, not its earlier half-brother text *True at First Light*: a) aesthetic reasons having to do with language, style, character development; b) thematic reasons having to do with the more complete presentation of major themes such as the "new religion" that drives so much of the narrative; c) scholarly reasons having to do with the need to assess the real thing. For the same reasons that I send all graduate students with strong interest in *The Garden of Eden* to the Kennedy Library to read the manuscript, I would send all readers of the African narrative to *Under*

*Kilimanjaro*. Whatever sense we finally make of this manuscript, we must make it from the real thing, the whole thing.

One example of textual variation must suffice here. On the first page of *Under Kilimanjaro* Hemingway describes Keiti, the old man who is the “head man of this outfit”: “His religion was absolute but I never knew how much of it was snobbishness and a desire for a special ritual and how much was true belief. There were very many things I did not know. There were more every day” (1). Since the book is centrally concerned with religion and ritual, truth and belief, things that are known and unknown, one may well wonder why this opening passage did not appear in *True at First Light*. Aside from its telling characterization of the old “head man,” it establishes the truth-seeking character of the narrator, the fundamental *humility* of Hemingway’s stance as deracinated outsider who yearns to understand, to accurately observe, and finally to merge with the Deus Loci of his corner of Africa, the particularity of the Spirit of Place where he knows the people and the animals individually, where he will practice the special rituals of place to support his candidacy for tribal membership, and try to sort out “how much was true belief.” But this key passage, and scores of others, disappears from the brief and much diminished first published version of Hemingway’s narrative.

All during the month of January 2006 my meditations on the two versions of Hemingway’s 1953-54 safari “memoir” were invaded on a daily basis by the media brouhaha over the fictionalization of events in James Frey’s best-selling “memoir”—*A Million Little Pieces*. Was there a single day in January 2006 that the print and broadcast media did not make some pronouncement on truth and fiction, on fictionalized memoirs? I started to keep a file on all this, many clippings, many scrawled notes, thinking it might be instructive to place Hemingway’s “fictional memoir” of Africa in this contemporary context. I took careful notes on memoir-related media occurrences of the word “truthiness,” which the American Dialect Society had voted the “2005 Word of the Year.” I kept trying to fit Patrick Hemingway’s observation, in his introduction to *True at First Light*, about how “ambiguous counterpoint between fiction and truth” (9) was at the heart of his father’s African “memoir” into the contexts of the season’s literary sensation. I did the same with the careful statements about truth and “fictional elements” made by Lewis and Fleming in their introduction; and I took copious notes regarding what Hemingway had to say in this narrative about truth, lies, and writing, and how these statements related to earlier observations he had made on the subject, going all the way back to the deleted conclusion of “Big Two-Hearted River” (published as “On Writing”). I had just about decided that my desire to Oprah-contextualize Hemingway’s fictionalized memoir should be abandoned because, as always, the quest for contemporaneity would lead only to banality, when three things happened in a 24-hour period in late January: 1) an English major said in my class that Hemingway’s memoirs, especially *A Moveable Feast*, were (like James Frey’s)

full of lies; I replied: “Are you saying that Hemingway’s memoirs are French-Freyed Lies” (at least half the class laughed, deepening my suspicion that more of them had read Frey than had read Hemingway); 2) Oprah said on TV that James Frey had “betrayed millions of readers,” the *New York Times* ran a story headlined “Author is Kicked Out of Oprah Winfrey’s Book Club” (27 January 2006), and literature, as it were, upstaged all other news of the world in radio and television commentary for several news cycles; 3) then, rereading certain crucial passages of *Under Kilimanjaro* late at night, I fell asleep somewhere between Hemingway’s observations about the “mystical countries” (23) we visit in dreams and his meditation on what “Scott Fitzgerald had written that in the something something of the soul something something it is always three o’clock in the morning” and how he finally remembered the Fitzgerald quotation: “In a real dark night of the soul it is always three o’clock in the morning” (219). That night I dreamed of James Frey, whom I have no intention of reading, although many of my students are doing so; and Oprah, whose TV show I have never seen, although everybody else seems to have watched it since birth. I dreamed I was sinking, drowning in some Dark Night *Nada* of the Book Club’s Soul, and the dream’s headline read: “Hemingway is Kicked Out of Oprah’s Book Club.”

Hemingway has a good deal to say about truth and lies in *Under Kilimanjaro*, much of it in connection with the act of writing. “All a writer of fiction is,” Hemingway writes, “is a congenital liar who invents from his own knowledge or that of other men. I am a writer of fiction and so I am a liar too and invent from what I know” (113). The passage goes on to characterize Lawrence as “a sensitive journalist sightseeing in Indian country” who could “write beautifully” but whose “cerebral mysticism” got in the way, and Hemingway could not believe Lawrence had ever slept with an Indian girl (114). This sounds like a standard against which Hemingway invites the reader to measure his African narrative: is he more than a “sensitive journalist”? Do we believe he slept with Debba? In another truth-facts-lies passage Hemingway tells the interpreter who needs “to know the truth” that there “is very little of it in books”; he has “sought it all [his] life and had to be content with facts, coordinates” (341). In another scene, Hemingway, lying in bed, remembers pleausrably “great and respected liars” he has known. Again, writing is linked with lying: “Ford Madox Ford was perhaps the greatest liar I had known in civil life.” At first, Hemingway remembers, he was “shocked and, puritanically, offended” by Ford’s lies, but after Ezra Pound assured him that Ford “only lies when he is very tired,” as “a way of relaxing,” Hemingway’s puritanical sense of shock at Ford’s lies may be somewhat diminished. What matters most to Hemingway is that “a self-confessed master of English prose . . . lied so badly” (385).

What does all this add up to in the contexts of the current controversy over fictionalized or false memoirs? Does it mean that writers are always primarily concerned with “truthiness,” that word of the year defined by the American Dia-

lect Society as referring satirically “to the quality of preferring concepts or facts one wishes to be true, rather than concepts or facts known to be true”? Facts matter a great deal at first light; and they may be lies by noon; late at night, however, truthiness—which, after all, is a word that has been around a long time (at least since 1824 [OED]) and means simply truthfulness—is what matters most. “Nobody knows the night,” Keiti tells Hemingway, who wants very badly “to learn it” (379). And to learn the night, “certain lies were truer than the truth and they were a necessity to any form of religion” (282). Taken together, his meditations on fact, truth, and lies in *Under Kilimanjaro* would probably get Hemingway kicked out of Oprah’s Book Club.

But then, memoir, the debased solipsistic form of memoir that occupies center-stage in the current debates over the betrayal of truth, is not the genre Hemingway practices, in this book or anywhere else. He is, first and last, a storyteller, and a storyteller’s job is to perfect the verisimilitude of the lies that tell the truth. I *know*, for example, that the actual Ernest Hemingway never sacked a city but I accept Hemingway-the-storyteller’s narrative claim that he did (358). I *doubt* that the actual Ernest Hemingway ever slept with an African girl, and I feel certain he did not see in that the possibility of “the most chances of happiness” of any day in his life (355); it is only necessary for the reader to accept this as the truth of the narrative moment. Yet who knows, since Hemingway’s name is at last beginning to appear in the great “false memoir” debate (e.g., Nancy Milford), even now there may be truth-investigators at work in Africa; and some day soon, I may watch the Oprah show for the first time and see Debba discussing her relationship with Hemingway—she would be about my age now, a perfect age to write a memoir.

In sum, then, any reader with an interest in any of the following rubrics will have to read and reread *Under Kilimanjaro* carefully: 1) Hemingway on Writers and Writing; 2) Hemingway and Religion; 3) Hemingway and Humor; 4) Hemingway and Hunting (and what Derek Walcott calls Hemingway’s “Franciscan” “tenderness towards animals” [11]); 5) Hemingway and Africa (obviously, but more generally, Hemingway and the Spirit of Place); 6) Hemingway and the Deracinated American Quest for Autochthonous Tribal Identity (from Cooper to Twain and scores of Local Colorists and Regionalists through Faulkner and beyond). If the storyteller’s *voice* seems a bit windy in *Under Kilimanjaro*, if the style has evolved from what Derek Walcott calls an early “chivalric hermetic solitude” that has now “grown garrulous,” and become “a loquacity that turn[s] his readers into members of a privileged club” (7), we all remember *In Our Time* and what the narrative voice would not say then because it was risky to try to say it, what a 25-year-old writer could intuit, hint at, and omit; we all remember our initiation into that “privileged club,” and we still pay our dues because there isn’t any better club—certainly no better book club—to belong to.

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## XIII News and Notes

In this column we feature news from current and recent graduate students: honors, achievements, publications, conference papers, progress in PhD programs, and other news.

1. Two recent recipients of our MA will enter doctoral programs in the fall: Michael Beilfuss (2005) at Texas A&M University; and Timothy Gilmore (2004) at the University of California, Santa Barbara.
2. Fifteen recipients of our MA and one of our MAT continue their progress in PhD programs: Eileen Abrahams (2002) at the University of Texas at Austin; Lawrence Beemer (2002) at Ohio University; Danielle Bienvenue (2004) at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette; Nicole Boucher-Spottke (1996) at the University of South Florida; Nicole Camastra (2005) at the University of Georgia; Kimberly Combs (1995) at the University of Delaware; Debbie DePiero (2001) at the University of Rhode Island; Steven Florczyk (2002) at the University of Georgia; Christopher Hartley (1999) at Fordham University; Tina Iraca (2001) at the University of Connecticut; Jennifer Kaufman (2003) at Fordham University; John Langan (1998) at the City University of New York; Cornelius Rose at the University of North Carolina (MAT 2001); Amy Washburn (2005) at the University of Maryland (in Women's Studies); Cristy Woehling (2002) at Miami University of Ohio.
3. New Paltz graduate students and recent recipients of the Master's degree continue their extraordinary record of professional activities. In the past year, the following students have secured academic positions, won awards, published creative and scholarly work, and presented papers at conferences (note: the Annual Robert Penn Warren Conference was held at Western Kentucky University, April 20-22; the Eighth Annual Elizabeth Madox Roberts Conference was held at Saint Catharine College, Kentucky, April 22-24):

Jacqueline Ahl worked last summer as an Academic Consultant for Vassar's Summer Institute for the Gifted and as Tutoring Facilitator

for SUNY Dutchess. Her play “Fear Itself” was selected as winner of the 2005 Brevard Little Theatre New Play Competition (One-Act category), Brevard College, NC.

Michael Beilfuss (2005) presented “Berk’s Story and Place in the Great Meadow: The Thinking and Eating Parts” at the EMR Conference.

William Boyle presented “Something About Sin and Saloons: Warren and Milch” at the RPW Conference and “Common Ground: Roberts, Warren, and Berry” at the EMR Conference. He has essays on Paul Auster, William Kennedy, and W.P. Kinsella forthcoming in *Magill’s Survey of American Literature* (Salem Press, 2006); also forthcoming is “February 14, 1929: Valentine’s Day Massacre Shocks Chicago” in *Great Events from History, 1901-1940* (Salem Press, 2006).

Nicole Camastra (2005) is the winner of the 2006 Hinkle Award for participants in the International Hemingway Conference in Spain. She presented a paper at the EMR Conference.

D. A. Carpenter presented a paper at the EMR Conference.

Kevin Cavanaugh (2002) has accepted a tenure line position in the Department of English and Humanities at Dutchess Community College.

Jane Dionne presented a paper at the EMR Conference.

Steven Florczyk (2002) published the article “A Captain in Hemingway’s Court? The Story of Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms*, and the Unpublished Papers of Robert W. Bates” in *Hemingway’s Italy: New Perspectives* (Louisiana State University Press, 2006).

Sarah Gardner (1992) is teaching English at Ganzu Lianhe University in Lanzhou, China.

Timothy Gilmore (2004) is currently teaching at Oxnard College and Santa Barbara City College. He has been awarded the Dean’s Fellowship at UC Santa Barbara, where he will begin his doctoral program in fall 2006.

Landan Gross presented “Mammy, Pappy, and the Hills Shoulder-to-Shoulder: The Nature of Family in Elizabeth Madox Roberts’s *The Time of Man*” at the EMR Conference.

Rob Kirkpatrick (1995) finished his PhD at SUNY Binghamton in 2003 and is now Senior Editor at The Lyons Press in Connecticut. His first

book, *Cecil Travis of the Washington Senators: The War-Torn Career of an All-Star Shortstop*, was published in 2005 by McFarland.

Brad McDuffie presented “The Great Twitch of Evening Redness In The West: The Burden of Time and the Devolution of Man in Robert Penn Warren’s *All The King’s Men* and Cormac McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian*” at the RPW Conference and “Bringing in the Sheaves: Cosmic Dispensations of Grace and the Redemptive Tryst in Elizabeth Madox Roberts’s ‘The Shepherd’s Interval’” at the EMR Conference. He has received a Nyack College Research Grant for his work on Hemingway.

Matthew Nickel presented “‘A Normal, Human, Christian Impulse’: The Weight of Sin and Fear of Being Buried Alive in Warren’s *The Cave*” at the RPW Conference and “‘Henceforth your name will be’ Felix Culpa: The Recognition of the Flesh, the Acceptance of Sacrifice, and the Mystery of Magdalenian Salvation in ‘The Sacrifice of the Maidens’” at the EMR Conference. He has essays on Robert Pinsky and W. S. Merwin forthcoming in *Magill’s Survey of American Literature* (Salem Press, 2006).

Jim Perry published a poem, “And then God Said,” in *Poetica Magazine* (July 2005).

Jenn Smits has recently become a Publisher’s Representative for Allyn & Bacon / Longman.

James Stamant presented “Nada Alibi: Warren’s Hemingway Essay and Introduction to *A Farewell to Arms*” at the RPW Conference and “A Wedding of Dark and Light: Bird Imagery and Duality in Roberts’s *Black Is My Truelove’s Hair*” at the EMR Conference.

Goretti Vianney-Benca presented “Looking at the Self: Elizabeth Madox Roberts’s Use of the Mirror in ‘The Haunted Palace’” at the EMR Conference.

Amy Washburn (2005) presented “Power to the ‘Most [Un]wanted Woman’ in Amerika: Assata Shakur, the ‘Revolutionary Gendered Genderless’ ‘High Priestess’ of the Black Panther Party and Black Liberation Army in *Assata: An Autobiography*” at Revisiting the Black Arts Movement Conference, Howard University, Washington, D.C., March 23-24.

4. The Editors would remind students of the Russell S. Cleverley Memo-

rial Fellowship, established by Luella and Donald Cleverley in memory of their son Russell S. Cleverley, who earned his MA in English from SUNY New Paltz in December 1995. The Cleverley Fellowship is open to students matriculated in the MA English program with a 3.5 GPA who register for 41590, Thesis in English, in the award semester. The award is \$500. Please submit a letter of application with transcript, the thesis proposal signed by the thesis director, and two letters of recommendation (one from the thesis director) to Daniel Kempton, Director of English Graduate Studies. Applications for the next award (fall 2006) are due May 15, 2006.

## XIV | Guidelines for Submissions

As the journal of the English Graduate Program, the *Shawangunk Review* publishes the proceedings of the annual English Graduate Symposium. In addition, the Editors welcome submissions from English graduate students in any area of literary studies: essays (criticism; theory; historical, cultural, biographical studies), book reviews, scholarly notes, and poetry. English faculty are invited to submit poetry, translations of poetry, and book reviews.

Manuscripts should be prepared in accordance with MLA style and should be submitted as an electronic file accompanied by a hard copy. Essays should not exceed 3500 words (10-12 pages), stories 3000 words, book reviews 1250 words, poems five pages, and MA thesis abstracts 250 words. With your submission please include a brief biographical statement.

Please submit material to the Department of English, SUNY New Paltz and/or [kempton@newpaltz.edu](mailto:kempton@newpaltz.edu); the deadline for Volume XVIII of the *Review* is December 15, 2006.

## XV | Contributors

**David Alfieri** is an MA student and Teaching Assistant at SUNY New Paltz.

**Lynn Behrendt** is a former MAT student at SUNY New Paltz. She is a publisher, sculptor, and widely published poet, whose books include *The Moon as Chance*. She is also a founder of the Cosmic Baseball Association.

**Michael Beilfuss** has recently completed his MA at SUNY New Paltz and will enter the PhD program at Texas A&M University next fall. He has presented papers on Hemingway, Warren, and other writers at major conferences, and published critical essays in the *Shawangunk Review*.

**William Boyle** is currently completing his MA at SUNY New Paltz. He has presented papers on Hemingway, Roberts, and Warren at major conferences. His essays, poetry, and fiction have been published in *Aethlon*, the *Shawangunk Review*, and other journals.

**John Burt**, Professor of English at Brandeis University, is a leading Robert Penn Warren scholar and author of numerous works on Warren. Editor of the definitive edition of Warren's *Collected Poems*, he has also published several volumes of his own poetry. He serves as Warren's Literary Executor.

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