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# The prison of the self: Images of entrapment, retreat, and release in the novels of Robert Penn Warren

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The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1986



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# THE PRISON OF THE SELF: IMAGES OF ENTRAPMENT, RETREAT, AND RELEASE IN THE NOVELS OF ROBERT PENN WARREN

by

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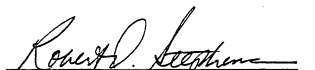

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Robert Penn Warren, the first poet laureate of the United States, has published ten novels, in which he employs the largely poetic device of imagery to aid in the development of his favorite theme, man's search for self-knowledge in the modern world. Employing images of entrapment, retreat, and release, he delineates the difficulty of his protagonist's quest. At the beginning of the search, each character feels trapped by the empty picture he has of himself. Desiring the knowledge which will free him from this prison of the self, he simultaneously dreads what he may learn. Thus he subconsciously devises numerous evasive maneuvers as he nears the realization of his goal. Eventually he must exercise his freedom of will to choose either continuing imprisonment or release from entrapment. If he makes a wise and timely choice, then identity is his. Demonstrating courage, perseverance, and a desire for reconciliation with his past and with estranged loved ones, he relinquishes his old self-image of worthlessness in favor of one which establishes his value. But if he chooses unwisely or delays too long, he experiences no release from his self-imprisonment, or he accomplishes only partial fulfillment of his quest. The protagonist's failure often stems from his selfishness and his fear of involvement. The

destiny of the failed protagonist is dire: damnation. The fate of the partially successful character is almost equally grievous: death, with the knowledge of what might have been. But the reward of the victorious searcher is generous, for it is redemption. The images of entrapment, retreat, and release in Warren's novels predict the failure or success of the protagonist's search for selfhood.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Biographer, social critic, teacher, textbook writer, literary critic, philosopher, short story writer, dramatist, poet, novelist--these are the roles describing the modern American Renaissance man Robert Penn Warren. Paradoxically, Warren's diversified talents are largely responsible for a sharp division among his critics who want to assign him to a neat and convenient niche in American literature. Repeatedly commentators such as Julian Symons complain he has divided his creative energies among so many genres that he has failed to produce a truly first-rate work in any of them. However, scholars like Louis D. Rubin, author of "Dreiser and Meet Me in the Green Glen: A Vintage Year for Robert Penn Warren"; Marshall Walker, writer of Robert Penn Warren: A Vision Earned; Richard Gray, author of "The Nashville Agrarians"; and John M. Bradbury, in "Warren's Fiction," have no similar difficulties with his literary scope and high productivity. In 1972 Rubin aptly summarized their position when he called Warren an excellent critic, poet, and novelist whose achievements are increased, not diminished, by the variety of his publications ("Dreiser" 10). More recently, 1979, Marshall Walker defended Warren

by explaining, "He is America's most distinguished living man of letters, an honnête homme involved with books and humankind and at ease in many genres" (Visior 17).

Another issue over which the critics argue is the question of whether to consider Warren a poet or a novelist. In 1981 Malcolm Cowley claimed the best way to discover the real nature of Warren is to explore his poetry (9). Certainly within the last few years Warren has channeled his talents into poetry. Even though he has not produced a novel since A Place to Come To, 1977, he has published a number of collected and narrative poems: Now and Then: Poems 1976-1978, Being Here: Poetry 1977-1980, and Rumor Verified, Poems 1979-1980; a revised version of Brother to Dragons: A Tale in Verse and Voices, 1979; and a long narrative poem, Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce, Who Called Themselves the Nimipu--"The Real People," 1983. Nonetheless, Warren enthusiasts such as John Edward Hardy, Louis Rubin, and Neil Nakadate believe Warren's rank as a major literary figure ultimately will depend upon his novels, ten to date.[1] But perhaps the most prophetic assessment comes from such writers as John L. Stewart, Cleanth Brooks, Richard Gray, and Helen McNeil, who claim his reputation will derive from his role as writer.[2] They do not foresee Warren's superior accomplishments limited to any one genre.

An examination of what Robert Penn Warren himself has said about his career during the last twenty-five years is revealing. In an interview with Alden Whitman in 1969,

Warren said he began as a poet, and thus he still feels intimately involved in poetry (54). Even though he experienced a period from 1945 to the summer of 1954 when he could not finish a short poem, he was still able to tell Frank Gado he enjoyed writing poetry more than novels or critical articles (First Person 63). Then, in 1970 in a conversation with Richard B. Sale, Warren claimed that poetry is his "bread and meat" (341). Although Warren does view himself as a poet, he has also written much fiction, perhaps in part for a reason identified by Henri Bergson, the French philosopher (1859-1941). Both have recognized that writing fiction takes the writer into himself (Warren, "Literature and Crisis" 37). This return into the self was probably a motivating factor in Warren's confiding to Carll Tucker that writing a novel is like "two years in prison; you never know if you will finish it" (41). Elsewhere Warren has explained that the novels he has written could just as easily have been poems (Walker, "Interview" 240). When asked how he feels about writing, he has described it as "a kind of pain I can't do without. It's not a particularly fun way to live. It's just scratching where you itch. But it's my life . . ." (Hendrickson 20). Warren perceives himself as a poet who also writes novels.

Since Warren is a poet, it is not difficult to see why so much of his fiction employs techniques often associated with poetry. Foremost among these devices is imagery,

which Warren himself, in collaboration with Cleanth Brooks and others, has frequently defined. Although many students of literature think imagery is limited to the depiction of "mental pictures" painted through word choice, an image can result from the description of any sensory experience. Imagery derives from the specific, concrete interaction of man with his environment, and it is expressed through descriptive and figurative language. Both the simile and metaphor are excellent figures of speech through which to frame images in poetry and fiction (Brooks and Warren, Understanding Fiction 605). In his fiction Warren is particularly fond of using images of entrapment, retreat, and release.

With John Thibaut Purser and Cleanth Brooks, Warren identifies the purposes of imagery: to illustrate, to ornament or decorate, to communicate something which otherwise could not be communicated (An Approach to Literature 913). Obviously imagery can be employed with great flexibility to accomplish a variety of effects. When a writer strives for concreteness, he often uses imagery to animate scene and advance tone.[3] When the abstract needs an immediate link to reality, images can contribute to the development of both symbolism and meaning of a piece of fiction.[4] Images, then, are significant devices to aid the reader in interpretation (Brooks and Warren, Understanding Poetry 269).

Warren has also theorized about the origins of the images writers frequently employ. In "Poetry in a Time of Crack-Up," he comments on William Blake's famous lines from "Tyger, Tyger": "What immortal hand or eye / Could frame thy fearful symmetry?" To Warren the language of these lines is more than a verbal one; it is also a "primary language of imagery . . . , the preverbal 'language' that reaches back to infancy and the primitive dark . . . [to] our deepest beings" (33). In his interview with Richard B. Sale, Warren similarly identifies his childhood as a major source of his own key images (326). In addition, John L. Stewart points out how Kentucky and Tennessee, where Warren grew up, provide numerous images for his poetry and fiction (Burden 430).

In their examination of imagery, Brooks and Warren have attempted to categorize images. Continuous imagery includes a series of images working together to create a complete picture, while discontinuous imagery distinguishes the independent image with its own discrete meaning. Or imagery may be neutral, existing primarily for its own sake (Understanding Poetry 292-93, 270). The three editors of An Approach to Literature also describe such types as visual and aural, labels reflecting the senses through which the images are perceived (912). Finally, from his examination of Herman Melville's poetry, Warren recognizes such groupings as representational and natural, terms deriving from the sources of the images themselves (Selected

Poems of Herman Melville 26, 40). Labels identifying the types of images are as numerous as the critics who invent the terms.

When criticizing the poetry and fiction of others, Warren frequently discusses imagery. From his commentary it is obvious that the writers whom he has studied have had some influence upon the images in his own writing. His pioneer essay in this area is "A Poem of Pure Imagination: An Experiment in Reading," in which he analyzes the imagery of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Rime of the Ancient Mariner. He sees the major images of the poem deriving from nature: the moon, the storm, the wind, the bird, the sun (235, 238, 240, 244, 296, 299). Indeed, one of the sources of images in Warren's canon is nature. In his comments Warren uses such literary terms as theme, symbol, metaphor, and simile as practically synonymous with image, thereby demonstrating the integral nature of these devices. Faulkner's imagery has similarly attracted Warren's interest. Writing in "William Faulkner," he has commented upon Faulkner's motion imagery, pointing out images of hunt, flight, and pursuit. He appears fascinated by Faulkner's image of "the frozen moment, the arrested action which becomes symbolic" (143). In Warren's fiction this image becomes one of paralysis. Faulkner's imagery of violence and degradation has likewise sparked a response from Warren when he asserts that these images ground Faulkner's novels in reality ("Faulkner: Past and Future" 1). But for the majority of critics

Robert Penn Warren's most important statement about imagery appears in his essay on Joseph Conrad. Here he writes:

> The philosophical novelist, or poet, is one for whom the documentation of the world is constantly striving to rise to the level of generalization about values, for whom the image strives to rise to symbol, for whom images 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. ("'The Great Mirage'" 58)

According to Neal Woodruff, this now classic definition of the philosophical novelist asserts that the philosophical novel is based upon a series of images (54-55).

The responsibility of the writer, Warren says in "On Writing," is to make himself and his relationship with the world as understandable as possible. To do so, he must use language, which becomes most comprehensible if couched "in terms of images of human experience" (59). When Richard Sale asked Warren how he employed imagery in his own writing, whether it was intentional or unintentional, Warren replied that his images are almost always spontaneous; they are not planned (329).

Vivid imagery is one of Warren's most distinctive traits. To Victor H. Strandberg, writing in The Poetic Vision of Robert Penn Warren, it is the device that places Warren among the best poets of America (273). Floyd C. Watkins believes each of Warren's literary works originates from an intensely specific image which is then developed into a finished piece of literature (6-7). For Leonard Casper, writing in his 1960 pioneer study of

Warren's use of imagery, Robert Penn Warren: The Dark and Bloody Ground, what is especially significant about this device is that he creates his own images, avoiding those frequently employed by less skillful and innovative poets and novelists (165). Robert B. Heilman agrees that among Warren's talents is his ability to choose the most effective image for the situation (27-28). Warren's reliance upon imagery is evident in his first novel, Night Rider (1939), and it continues a central device through the remaining nine: At Heaven's Gate (1943), All the King's Men (1946), World Enough and Time: A Romantic Novel (1950), Band of Angels (1955), The Cave (1959), Wilderness: A Tale of the Civil War (1961), Flood: A Romance of Our Time (1964), Meet Me in the Green Glen (1971), and A Place to Come To (1977).[5]

In their studies of Robert Penn Warren, a number of critics have examined a variety of ways in which the writer uses imagery with dramatic result. Harry Modean Campbell explains that the novelist chooses functional rather than ornamental imagery through which to develop his themes (225). Charles H. Bohner notes that these images generate subsequent ones, all related to each other, culminating in a unified effect (159). As L. Hugh Moore, Jr., points out, all Warren's novels incorporate closely related images, themes, and structure (99). John M. Bradbury, in both The Fugitives: A Critical Account and "Robert Penn Warren's Novels: The Symbolic and Textual Patterns," observes that each of the novels is governed by a number of image clusters

evolving into thematic and symbolic action. Simultaneously, isolated images are associated with individual characters to extend their symbolic significance, too (203; 77-78). On the other hand, Madison Jones has noted how each novel depends upon one major image or image cluster, different from those appearing in the other novels. The purpose of each discrete cluster is to amplify from a different point of view one of Warren's favorite themes, salvation ("Robert Penn Warren as Novelist" 51). Richmond C. Beatty views Warren's imagery as an attempt to unify the diversity of human experience so that the individual character can attain salvation through the discovery of his own self-identity (156). Not all the critics, however, are so enthusiastic about Warren's imagery. Even though Campbell praises the functional, "dramatically appropriate" qualities of the Warren image, he sometimes finds the imagery tiresome. To illustrate his point, he mentions some of the imagery in All the King's Men, especially that associated with Jack Burden, the protagonist. Campbell sees Jack's incessant "wisecracking under happy and tragic circumstances alike" as particularly tedious (225). Another dissenting voice is that of Roger Sale, who views the imagery in the later novels and Brother to Dragons as distracting. Parodying Warren's definition of the philosophical novelist, Sale writes, ". . . the wonderful storyteller is gradually buried by the images which strive to rise to symbols and the symbols which strive to rise

to allegory at the level of generalization about values" (76).

The majority of Warren's critics focus upon image clusters which fall into one of three content areas: images that relate to man, those that reflect nature, and those which connect man and man or man and nature. John L. Stewart, in "The Achievement of Robert Penn Warren," identifies the conflict between parent and child as Warren's major narrative image. In Warren's novels the child quarrels with a parent, usually the father, sees him for the first time with human weaknesses, and subsequently tries to run away from both the parent and the newly acquired painful knowledge. With the passage of time the child begins to yearn to return to the home and father. Finally he does go back, where he recognizes that even though he has rejoined his origins, he has not, and cannot, recover the innocence he enjoyed before the quarrel. At this point the child has to accept or reject forever the fact he must live with his loss (564). In The Burden of Time Stewart notes further that the child's difficulty is compounded because if he does accept his parent's humanness, then he must admit his own humanity, too (490). Warren, talking with Marshall Walker, sees the parent-child relationship as a major image. "'I've been told, and I think it's true, that the true and false father are in practically every story I've written. Now what that means, I do not know'" ("Interview" 236).

Although most of Warren's main characters have difficulties with a parent, the writer appears not to have had similar problems with his father, Robert Franklin Warren. According to Malcolm Cowley, Robert Franklin's childhood ambition was to study classical literature (9), but economic circumstance intervened. He did, however, write poetry, some of which was printed in an obscure anthology. When Robert accidentally discovered his father's poems, he proudly showed the book to his dad. Robert recalls that his father, radiating "some kind of an awful intensity," took it away from him and disposed of it (Farrell 783). His father's response does not appear to have scarred Warren, because in his interview with David Farrell he spoke admiringly, "'He was a man who hadn't had the life he set out to have, but in his old years he said to me "Well, I learned to take a joy in my obligation"'" (783). Floyd Watkins reports that Warren always speaks fondly and kindly of his father (48). But apparently there have been times when Warren was worried about his relationship with his own son, Gabriel. Conversing with Richard Sale in 1970, Warren said, "'I'm much closer to my father, or even my grandfather, than I am to my son. Let me add that my son and I are very close in terms of affection and relationship. We are'" (338).

James H. Justus, in The Achievement of Robert Penn Warren, has extensively studied the parent-child conflict in Warren's canon, and he has discovered three types. The

first he labels political/mythical, defined as the conflict in which "the father functions as a particular nation, god, or generalized truth" (13). On this level Warren synthesizes his vast knowledge of both American psychology and literary history. Once the Warren protagonist rejects his natural father, he begins to search for a perfect father surrogate, thereby subconsciously attempting to merge the worlds of fact and idea. Failing in this quest, he then is forced to admit the imperfection of the world. Thus he returns to the influence of his natural father (14). Louise Y. Gossett perceives this type of conflict to be one of Warren's symbols of the past (63), as does Frank Gado (Introduction xxxi). Charles A. Allen explains that the child's acceptance of his father symbolically suggests his acceptance of the past, too (22). Allen, then, refutes one of the theories proposed by Helen McNeil, who has claimed ". . . the sins of the father have been too monstrous to be forgiven in the Southern novel" (1363). In Warren the sins are almost always forgiven.

The remaining two types of parent-child conflict Justus discusses are the generic and personal. The generic conflict occurs when the male of the species revolts against the authority of the older generation, represented by the father, to establish his own independence. The personal level takes place when the son rejects his father to find his own identity (Achievement 13). The son carries around in his head an ideal image of his father, but when

he sees his parent's inadequacies, he becomes ashamed and rejects the source of that shame. Sometimes the conflict may grow from the son's jealousy of his father's untamed spirit, "flashy sexuality," and "blustering self-assertion" (Achievement 12). Regardless of the origins of his jealousy, however, the son must learn to accommodate what he considers "a personal affront based on social embarrassment" (Achievement 13). The next step is to recognize that whatever sins the father has committed, the son, too, is capable of committing. Finally, the really astute protagonist discovers that he is also capable of the same virtues his father has demonstrated (Achievement 13). Frank Gado adds a last stage to the process. The main character has to realize that "no father, real or surrogate, can deliver him from his heritage" (Introduction xxix).

A number of critics associate Warren's father imagery with his theme of the quest for self-identity. Thomas L. Connelly says that for a Warren protagonist to find himself, he must first rebel against his father, a symbol of history or past experience, and then gain wisdom through recognizing that all men, even his father and himself, are capable of both good and evil. With that knowledge the son can then literally or symbolically return to his father (9). Richard Gray claims the hero's rejection of his father is a symbol of the protagonist's inability to understand himself (Introduction 8). According to Marshall

Walker, while the main character is on his quest for self-identity, the father awaits his son at home in order to bestow forgiveness upon him. That forgiveness permits the son to find the self-identity for which he has been searching (Vision 21). In "Warren's Osmosis," Victor Strandberg states that the hero's acceptance of a father figure, no matter how undeserving, signals the protagonist's acceptance of himself, as well (24). Frank Gado points out that Warren often links some form of parricide of a surrogate father with the search for self-knowledge (Introduction xxx). In all ten novels father imagery plays a major role in the protagonists' search for self-identity.

In addition to using father imagery, Warren also employs images of academics and Jews in much of his work. He enjoys characterizing academics because they are "humanistic people who serve as a sort of buffer against the jittery, fashionable kind of thing" (Breit 20). Warren believes his Jewish imagery originates from the similarities he has observed between Jews and Southerners. They are both governed by a minority psychology. Because Jews and Southerners are outsiders, Warren has no difficulty writing about either group (Walker, "Interview" 241-42).

Another important image cluster related to man is the eye image. This series of images definitely has an autobiographical bias, since Warren is blind in one eye. Although the accident occurred when he was a teenager, he

has been able to talk about it only within the last decade. He feels his long silence grew from his feeling of being deformed and ashamed, according to Watkins (54-55). Daniel Joseph Singal agrees that Warren's fear of blindness has led to his images of "eyesight, blindness, darkness and light, night and day" (344). Moreover, John L. Stewart believes Warren's eye imagery is related to his theme of self-knowledge. In many of Warren's works the eye serves as a passageway between the interior and exterior selves. The watching eyes of his characters often express or perceive the condemnation and hostility of a contemporary society (Burden 441, 498). At other times, the eyes are sly, secretive, and accusing (Stewart, "Robert Penn Warren" 108).

Warren's sexual images also fall within the category of man-related imagery. Arthur Mizener, in his essay "The Uncorrupted Consciousness," argues that sexual experience is "the most human experience" for Warren (57), and thus in creating realistic characters he is compelled to report their sexual encounters in some detail. But Barnett Guttenberg, author of Web of Being, sees a much narrower motivation for the sexual imagery. He contends it grows from a "fallen world of exploitation and violation" (162). L. Hugh Moore agrees the genesis of the sexual imagery is negative. To him Warren's protagonists use sex to express rebellion, hatred, and contempt (96). Regardless of the

origins, however, the Warren character usually seeks to find himself through his sexual encounters.

A last image cluster related to man is imagery of decay. John L. Stewart states that Warren's study of Shakespeare's sonnets, with their frequent references to canker and rot, has influenced him to use similar metaphors to insinuate hidden evil within the most apparently innocent of situations (Burden 466). Early in his career Warren demonstrated a preoccupation with the bodily functions, and in his subsequent fiction he has found his images in both the normal and abnormal functioning of the human body (Burden 436). His novels abound with "images of destruction, malignant growth, and putrescent decay" (Stewart, "Achievement" 563). Through his images of cancer, "carnivorous orchids, and uterine monstrosities," Warren is seeking to give tangible form to the evil which corrupts moral will (Stewart, "Achievement" 563; Burden 497). Roma A. King goes so far as to connect Warren's decay imagery with that of parents. King points out that in the parent imagery Warren dwells upon the "idiocy, deformity, meanness, ugliness, filth, and stench" of the parent ("Time and Structure" 488). For the critics the most meaningful image clusters which touch upon mankind include those of parents, academics, Jews, eyes, sex, and decay.

A second content area into which Warren's image clusters fall is nature. From his earliest poetry and fiction through his most recent, according to Floyd

C. Watkins, have been "grounded on the earth itself" (1). John L. Stewart maintains that for Warren evil is an inherent aspect of the natural world with which men must contend ("Achievement" 564). But often Warren's protagonists attempt to retreat into nature, represented by images of swamps or the wilderness. Whenever a character withdraws to the wilds, he is trying to escape the responsibilities which accompany the fulfillment of self-knowledge (72-73). Joe Davis, author of "Robert Penn Warren and the Journey to the West," explains how Warren's characters who try to unite with nature must realize that retreat results in the degeneracy of mankind. Man has to learn to live with, but separate from, nature to save his humanity (76-77).

Three frequent nature images in Warren's novels are the West, gardens, and clearings. Foremost among those who have examined the role of the West are Chester E. Eisinger, John L. Stewart, Joe Davis, and Frank Gado. Eisinger thinks Warren's image of the West is meant as an escape, a place where man can lose his responsibilities and where he has license to do as he pleases (12). Stewart believes the Warren character views the West as a place where he can start anew to create his own version of the world he has left behind (Burden 491). On the other hand, Davis directly links the quest for self-identity with the West, which he then equates with man's attempt to submerge himself in nature as a means to that knowledge. On one level the

West serves as a challenge, a test which the protagonist encounters at some crucial point in the plot. But with its destructive and violent traits, the West is not a haven, although the character wishes it were. Once having journeyed Westward, he becomes a changed man. There he learns he must confront his problems and find the answers within, "in terms of the self" (76, 77, 82, 73, 75-76, 77). Finally, Frank Gado maintains that Warren does not employ the image as many other Americans have; Warren's West is not a Garden of Eden, but rather a place of sin. In learning to cope with the West, the character symbolically is learning to handle his own capacity for evil (Introduction xxxi). In Warren's novels the protagonists either travel West or plan to travel West, and thus the journey figures as an important stage in the characters' search for self-knowledge.

Even though the West is no Garden of Eden, Warren does incorporate gardens and clearings into his plots. Richard Gray sees these images as representative of a vital area separating the forces of civilization and the wilderness, a kind of buffer zone absorbing the energies of both the city and the wilds. The purpose of the cluster is to unite two of Warren's favorite themes, the Fall of Man and his Redemption through a return to the father (Introduction 10).

Warren's second most recurrent image cluster is the nature image of water (Stewart, Burden 466). Stewart calls water Warren's most important symbol, because it "is virtually the physical universe itself, or the changing

processes, the fluid continuum of birth, growth, decay, and death that we know as nature" (Burden 497). When a Warren character enters the water, he usually is trying to return symbolically to the womb (Burden 441). Frequently water imagery assumes the form of a flood, a life symbol which sweeps the characters along in its currents. Sometimes the flood symbolizes the forces of revenge, impersonality, or chance, as Paul West states in "Robert Penn Warren" (228). Leonard Casper links Warren's fondness for the image to the dual nature of water, with its fluid and solid properties, reminiscent of the duality of mankind ("Ark" 112). As revealed in the criticism, Warren's favorite nature images include the West, gardens and clearings, and water.

A last significant content area in which Warren's images fit is that of connecting imagery. This category contains those images which serve in some fashion to link man to man and man to nature. One such recurrent image is that of darkness and light. L. Hugh Moore has noted how often Warren refers to the "coiling inner darkness to suggest man's nature" (75). Then, too, much of the violent action of his novels occurs in the shadows of night. The darkness within man and nature assumes a sinister quality in Warren's plots. But when he wants to entertain the possibility of joy and hope, images of the sun and daylight dominate (Justus, Achievement 21). Another such connecting image is what James H. Justus calls retardation, slowed motion, or stopped action. Images of this type are often associated

with water, the medium which retards the motions of those moving through it. Those characters using water as a refuge, a return to the womb, are slowed in their search for self-knowledge (Achievement 270). L. Hugh Moore also alludes to this image with such labels as "stopped time" and "freeze time," labeling it Warren's usual device to call attention to the "symbolic moment" (156). Warren's paralysis images are of this type, too.

Highways and mirrors are also images of connection. Marshall Walker sees the highway symbol as an image complementary to that of retardation. It is the subterfuge by which the protagonist appears to move while making no progress at all in his search for self-knowledge (Vision 73). Paul West claims that as symbols of initiative and speed, highways link cities and states, but he adds that the symbols are undercut by the capitalistic avarice of the billboards lining their paths and by the large numbers of deaths, human and animal, that occur on their asphalt (227-28).

Another connection image, mirrors, Warren himself has found "pretty interesting." Speaking with Frank Gado, he said, "'I didn't frame this concept [characters gazing into mirrors, trying to find themselves in their relections] in the process of writing novels, but I have discovered it works as a principle over a long time'" (First Person 65). In another conversation with Marshall Walker, he revealed that his mirror imagery has recurred in all his published

novels, but with no conscious intention on his part. He thinks that his mirror images reveal the stories of society as they are reflected in the personal stories of his characters. Warren believes his mirror images have both moral and psychological bases ("Interview" 235-36). In their attempts to discover self-identity, his characters stare at themselves in mirrors, trying to see themselves as viewed by others. To James H. Justus these mirror images are "Jungian-like shadow selves," and they are more frequent in the earlier novels than in the later (Achievement 4). This cluster of images shows the Warren character trying to link his inner and outer selves into some sort of meaningful whole. With few exceptions the images which have attracted attention in the Warren criticism fall into one of the previously discussed content areas: man, nature, and connection imagery.

As Warren employs his images, they contribute significantly to thematic development in the novels. All the themes critics identify relate in some fashion to Warren's major concern, the search for self-knowledge.[6] According to Thomas L. Connelly, "History is the thematic core of all of his writing" (1). Man must know history to find self-identity (1). L. Hugh Moore, Barnett Guttenberg, Madison Jones, John R. Strugnell, Floyd C. Watkins, and James H. Justus all agree that part of the process includes the study of the history of man and his community. For a man to find himself, he must first know the history of man, because

he requires a tradition for self-fulfillment (L. Hugh Moore 108). Guttenberg says that all men experience an inner void when they lack self-knowledge. That emptiness is filled when individuals recognize their dependence upon others. Their acceptance of a common brotherhood with mankind is a major step in self-fulfillment (xii). Jones points out that the search always pits the needs of the individual against the needs of the community ("The Novels" 492). John R. Strugnell adds that the Warren protagonist must know himself and his past before he can join the community (102). To know himself, he must recognize that no man is without guilt, that the common brotherhood of man is based upon sin (Watkins 5-6). This Justus calls "the premise behind Warren's doctrine of complicity" (Achievement 38-39).

A number of critics have attempted to define and explain self-knowledge as Warren uses it. Thomas L. Connelly calls it a balance "between awareness of self and the universal human nature, or between the mythology of the past and the realities of the present" (1-2). Paul West defines it as a major test of the human condition (202). James H. Justus has tried to explain why the Warren protagonist wants to discover self-identity. He calls it "a response to two contradictory desires: the need to feel unique and the need to be a part of the community of man" (Achievement 273).

The pattern the search for self-knowledge takes remains consistent in Warren's fiction, according to Charles Thomas Samuels. As the protagonist matures, he feels an ever-increasing need to know himself. His first step as he initiates the search is to deny his father and to attempt to find an acceptable substitute. When the father surrogate betrays him, he acquires his first terrible piece of information to aid him in his pursuit. If the lesson has made him cynical, he next devotes himself to the "ruthless manipulation of others," but if it has made a "philosopher" of him, he may try to deny himself entirely by devoting himself to a person or a cause. The last step in the pattern is for the protagonist to become a realist. He cannot find himself in ruthless exploitation of others nor in selfless dedication to mankind. He must realize that all men, including himself, are sinners; he is not unique among men; he is not pure (47). Richard H. King has likewise discussed the pattern. "This pattern of secular salvation, a moral therapeutic and modern mythological heroic, provides the conceptual underpinnings of Warren's fiction" (232).

Warren's critics have also spent much time and effort identifying and discussing the various elements of self-knowledge. Irene Hendry, writing in "The Regional Novel: The Example of Robert Penn Warren," claims the theme is both psychological and moral (89). Martin Price explains the psychological sources of the theme. Man, in avoiding his real nature, is really running away from responsibility.

His flight may be actual or psychological, violent or detached, scrupulous or unscrupulous (124). Louise Y. Gossett associates pain, suffering, and violence with the search (54). On the other hand, Victor Strandberg and William C. Havard elucidate the moral bases of the theme. Strandberg believes Warren's fiction points to a "beast" within man, the result of Adam's Original Sin ("Warren's Osmosis" 26-27). Havard sees the discovery of this inner evil as the force which drives the protagonist to ask: "Who am I?" (520). Bradbury, in The Fugitives, claims the answer to this question comes only when the protagonist finds three kinds of acceptance: acceptance of one's guilt, acceptance of one's responsibility for the self, and acceptance of one's heritage (219).

The process of searching for self-knowledge is a difficult one indeed, requiring great expenditure of energy and commitment, according to Justus in "The Mariner and Robert Penn Warren" (127). What makes the search even more challenging, says H. D. Herring, is the madness that confronts the protagonist during the entire quest (56). Various facets of American society likewise hinder the protagonist's progress: Jeffersonian liberalism, Darwinian science, and American industry. The main character is opposed by all these forces, according to Eisinger's "The Conservative Quest" (12). On his search the Warren character looks to other people or to social institutions as a means to fulfill his goals, and when he fails, he flees

Westward (Davis 73). On a more positive note, Eisinger, Allen Shepherd, and D. G. Kehl say the search for self-knowledge always draws the protagonist out of himself into a love for someone he encounters during the hunt. Through that love redemption becomes possible, because to love another is to love oneself, a form of self-acceptance.[7]

Those who have studied the theme of this quest for self-knowledge disagree about whether or not the end of the search is ever achieved. A. L. Clements, writing in 1963 when five of Warren's novels had already been published, baldly states that the search is incomplete (41). Madison Jones mostly agrees with Clements when he says the quest is usually unsuccessful ("Robert Penn Warren as Novelist" 41). James H. Justus and Barnett Guttenberg are more positive in their assessments when they explain that characters like Percy Munn (Night Rider), Jerry Calhoun (At Heaven's Gate), Jack Burden (All the King's Men), Jeremiah Beaumont (World Enough and Time), Amantha Starr (Band of Angels), Adam Rosenzweig (Wilderness), and Brad Tolliver (Flood), in accepting the moral "responsibility for their public acts," find self-identity after long, painful struggle.[8] Both Charles Allen and Guttenberg have discussed the rewards of self-fulfillment by the protagonists. Allen says,

> Such self-knowledge means that repressions are released, anxieties alleviated, and defenses cracked. Hostilities are lessened, the compromises demanded by [the world] become possible--and thereby Warren's "terrible division of our age" is made less terrible. (22)

Guttenberg agrees when he says the accomplishment of self-identity brings love and a new world vision to the protagonist (161).

Warren's interest in man, his self-image, and his search for self-knowledge extends far beyond his fiction. In a number of essays he has commented upon his fascination for both the image and the theme. In a conversation with Ruth Fisher, he has revealed that his books are filled with the images of man he has had during various times in his life ("A Conversation with Robert Penn Warren" 139). Talking with Paul Hendrickson about his last novel, A Place to Come To, he has said that his books are about "a preservation of the self" (20). Warren connects his attraction to the image of the self with the fact that he is a Southerner writing about the Southern experience. In his introduction to A Southern Harvest Warren explains that during the twentieth century a main concern of the South has been an examination and definition of the self (xiv). He believes another source for his interest lies in the very nature of writing and the relationship the writer has to his creations. To him writing "is a self-exploration, the exploration of one's possibilities, of one's capabilities" ("On Writing" 60), and the process returns the writer into the presence of himself ("Poetry in a Time of Crack-Up" 133). When a writer fashions a hero, he is creating a second self ("A Dearth of Heroes" 4), with the story or poem representing "the author's adventure in

selfhood" ("Poetry and Selfhood" 71). But Warren goes one step further in his attempt to explain a very complicated process. He also examines the relationship between the reader of imaginative literature and the piece of literature itself. Not only does the writer attempt self-definition through what he writes, but also the reader tries to explore himself when he reads a poem or story ("Poetry and Selfhood" 71).

As a careful observer of both himself and his fellow-man, Warren has explained what he means when he refers to such concepts as the self and self-knowledge. In his foreword to Democracy and Poetry, he defines the self as "in dividuation, the felt principle of significant unity" (xii). He continues:

> By felt I mean that I am here concerned, not with a theoretical analysis as such, but with what a more or less aware individual may experience as his own selfhood, and what he assumes about other individuals. By significant I mean two things: continuity--the self as a development in time, with a past and future; and responsibility--the self as a moral identity, recognizing itself as capable of action worthy of praise or blame. (xiii)

Warren readily admits that this whole subject is quite complicated (Foreword xii), with at least two different sets of polarity. The first set he identifies as the self of action and the self of observation of that action ("Poetry and Selfhood" 92-93). The second he calls the self of personal awareness and the self of community awareness. At one and the same time the self recognizes its own personal integrity as it also sees itself as an

integral part of the community of man ("Poetry and Selfhood" 47). The total process is a rending experience, as Warren describes it in "Knowledge and the Image of Man." To find self-knowledge man must sever his ties to the community; he must discover separateness and isolation and the pain of self-criticism.

> In the pain of isolation he may achieve the courage and clarity of mind to envisage the tragic pathos of life, and once he realizes that the tragic experience is universal and a corollary of man's place in nature, he may return to a communion with man and nature. (186)

The sign that man has acquired selfhood is his ability to accept moral responsibility, the force that encourages the individual to allow his selfhood to be absorbed into the needs of the community ("Poetry and Selfhood" 65). True selfhood involves recognition of one's relationship to both the community and the past, as Warren explains in "John Greenleaf Whittier: Poetry as Experience," when he claims that for man to understand himself, he must first accept his past (57). This whole procedure is one which is often only partially achieved (Foreword xiii). The process of self-definition perhaps is best summarized by what Warren has written in "Poetry and Selfhood":

> . . . the self is a style of being, continually expanding in a vital process of definition, affirmation, revision, and growth, a process that is the image, we may say, of the life process of a healthy society itself. (89)

The bases upon which Robert Penn Warren has defined his concept of the self are Christianity and Democracy.

Writing in "Knowledge and the Image of Man," he asserts that a heritage of Christianity is the right for each man to define himself. Because God sees value in every man, each of us is free to look for self-knowledge through either good or evil means, thereby inviting salvation or damnation. Christianity gives the individual the rights to exist and to develop as himself (182). Then, in "America and the Diminished Self," Warren explains that the Declaration of Independence establishes the "concept of the significant self" (33). Even though that concept is violated every day in our modern society ("Knowledge" 182), it nonetheless provides the basis for American freedom ("Poetry and Selfhood" 66).

As Warren examines American literature from 1920 to 1941, he sees a dominant theme to be that of the self (Foreword xvi). In the works of Fitzgerald, Faulkner, Hemingway, Eliot, Pound, in the literature of every "distinguished practitioner of the art," that is the theme ("Bearers of Bad Tidings" 17). Through literature man is best able to confront what is dark in his nature ("America" 31), because it is both a reinforcement and an image of the self-concept ("Poetry and Selfhood" 68). In this sense, obviously, the purpose of literature is therapeutic, since imaginative writing confirms "the notion of the self" ("Poetry and Selfhood" 42).

Warren's studies have demonstrated to him that the gradual loss of an acceptable self-image is a major theme of

American writers ("America" 3). The last great American to permit his protagonist to reflect a healthy self-concept was James Fenimore Cooper, in his creation of Natty Bumppo. Herman Melville was our first significant writer to create a self-doubting hero, and that trend has grown in the protagonists of such writers as Henry James, William Dean Howells, Mark Twain, Theodore Dreiser, F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, and Ernest Hemingway. World War II and its aftermath have worsened the tendency ("America" 7, 8, 14, 15, 22, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30). Warren attributes this disintegration of self-concept to man's loss of contact with reality. "Man feels that a screen has descended between him and nature, between him and other men, between him and the self" (Warren, "Literature and Crisis" 36; Warren, "Poetry in a Time of Crack-Up" 32). Society encourages the idea that "the image is all" ("Poetry and Selfhood" 60), thereby promoting the creation of a number of contradictory selves to replace the unity of a single integrity ("Poetry and Selfhood" 58, 59). All these observations have inevitably contributed to Warren's dominant theme. He himself has written, "I endeavor to document the decay of the concept of self in relation to our present society and its ideals" ("America" 3). Warren does not, however, see man's situation as hopeless, because he states in "Literature and Crisis" that man can find redemption by learning to respect himself and experience (37). That respect can come through the

conscious cultivation of selflessness, perfected through "artistic sensibility, folk humor, courage, compassion, and humility" (8).

In all ten Robert Penn Warren novels the protagonists are searching for an acceptable self-image. Chapter 2 of this dissertation will identify the untenable selves of the characters as delineated through such image clusters as nothingness, duality, masking and mirroring, and victimization. The focus will then shift to the sources of these unacceptable self-portraits. Most often the characters blame their parents, the past, their own approaching old age, and a failure of love for their inability to achieve supportable identities. Unable to define themselves, they conduct a quest for an acceptable self-image through others. This type of search inevitably becomes a cowardly retreat for each hero, who fights the idea that his goal lies only within himself, not in others. When this first avenue of search fails, some of the characters resort to self-inflicted pain, hoping to regenerate a new identity through a kind of simulated birth agony. But once again such an attempt does not really involve a perceptive self-study of personal weaknesses and fails, also. Finally, a number of protagonists try to re-create the past, another impossible undertaking which leaves them helplessly entrapped in what Warren calls the quagmire of the self. As the imagery of the novel suggests,

the Warren hero and heroine have no easy access to the self-knowledge they desperately seek.

Chapter 3 will analyze how the loss of self-identity is often intensified through images of entrapment. The most significant aspect of this image cluster is that the imprisonment is frequently self-induced. The force which prevents man from finding his identity is what Warren identifies in Meet Me in the Green Glen as the prison of the self (366). There is a part of the individual which does not want self-knowledge, which fears having to face itself, and which subsequently erects numerous obstructions between the self and the search for identity. These entrapment images are both internal and external to the protagonists, and they are instrumental in character delineation. Often the protagonists experience emotional entrapment resulting from such feelings as shame, guilt, even love. A number become lost within their preoccupations with sex, success, or vengeance. Still others are imprisoned by their pasts, their self-betrayals or betrayals by others, and the paralysis of will which frequently follows. Even their need for involvement or noninvolvement becomes a means of ensnarement. All these image clusters work together to delineate the protagonists' defects of apathy, helplessness, naiveté, and gullibility.

Chapter 4 will examine the images of flight through which the main characters seek to avoid identity at the same time they search for it. The painful nature of the

self-knowledge they discover frequently forces them to look for refuge in such psychic or spiritual withdrawals as abstraction, passivity, cynicism, irresponsibility, callousness, idealism, insanity, and isolation, or it compels them to lose themselves in their pasts. Many search for physical shelter in the West or the South, in swamplands, green glens, or large cities, or in obsessive study and work. Self-confrontation is never an easy chore, but for the Warren protagonist it is an especially difficult task.

Release from the prison of the self is the goal toward which images of entrapment and retreat work. Chapter 5 will explore the images of release surrounding a character to determine how indicative they are of his damnation or redemption. Several of his heroes and heroines fail miserably, the result of the foolish choices they make. A few make more intelligent, but poorly timed decisions so that the tentative self-knowledge they have begun to acquire is aborted through their own violent deaths. Fully half his main characters, however, choose wisely and well, thereby attaining the selfhood and redemption for which they have searched. Through his images of entrapment, retreat, and release, Robert Penn Warren greatly enriches the theme which predominates in all his writings, but especially in the ten novels which span the almost half century of his active literary career: the theme of modern man's search for self-knowledge.

Notes

[1] John Edward Hardy, "Robert Penn Warren's Double-Hero," Virginia Quarterly Review 36 (1960): 584; John Edward Hardy, "Robert Penn Warren: The Dialectic of Self," Man in the Modern Novel (Seattle: U of Washington P, 1964) 195; Louis D. Rubin, Jr., "'Theories of Human Nature': Kazin or Warren," Sewanee Review 69 (1961): 505; Neil Nakadate, Introduction, Robert Penn Warren: Critical Perspectives (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1981) 2.

[2] John L. Stewart, The Burden of Time: The Fugitives and Agrarians (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1965) 542; Cleanth Brooks, "Brooks on Warren," Four Quarters 21.4 (1972): 21; Richard Gray, Introduction, Robert Penn Warren: A Collection of Critical Essays, Twentieth Century Views (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1980) 1; Helen McNeil, "Sticking to the Real," Times Literary Supplement 28 Nov. 1980: 1364.

[3] Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, Understanding Poetry, 3rd ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), 272, 268; Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, Understanding Fiction (New York: F. S. Crofts, 1943) 595.

[4] Brooks and Warren, Understanding Fiction 420-21, 605; Brooks and Warren, Understanding Poetry 271.

[5] James H. Justus, The Achievement of Robert Penn Warren (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1981) 165; Neil Nakadate, "Identity, Dream, and Exploration: Warren's Later Fiction," Robert Penn Warren: Critical Perspectives (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1981) 175.

[6] Justus, Achievement 38-39; Victor H. Strandberg, A Colder Fire: The Poetry of Robert Penn Warren (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1965) 3; Frank Gado, Introduction, First Person: Conversations on Writers & Writing (Schenectady: Union College P, 1973) xxx; Barnett Guttenberg, Web of Being: The Novels of Robert Penn Warren (Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 1975) ix-x.

[7] Chester E. Eisinger, "Robert Penn Warren: The Conservative Quest for Identity," Robert Penn Warren: Critical Perspectives, ed. Neil Nakadate (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1981) 16; Allen Shepherd, "Robert Penn Warren as a Philosophical Novelist," Western Humanities Review 24 (1970): 159; D. G. Kehl, "Love's Definition: Dream as Reality in Robert Penn Warren's Meet Me in the Green Glen," Four Quarters 21.4 (1972): 117.

[8] James H. Justus, "The Uses of Gesture in Warren's The Cave," Modern Language Quarterly 26 (1965): 449; James H. Justus, "The Mariner and Robert Penn Warren," Texas Studies in Literature and Language 8.1 (1966): 127; Guttenberg, Web of Being xi-xii.

## CHAPTER II

## PROBLEMS OF THE SELF: IMAGES, SOURCES, AND RENEWALS

In At Heaven's Gate the protagonist Sue Murdock asks, "'Oh, what am I?'" (155). Her question is echoed by the heroine of Band of Angels, Amantha Starr, who queries, "'Oh, who am I? For so long that was, you might say, the cry of my heart'" (3). This goal of selfhood has been well defined by Warren's characters themselves, as well as by the critics. Perhaps its most effective definition comes from Jed Tewksbury in A Place to Come To. He claims that "selfhood is the moment of perception between pastlessness and futurelessness" (272). Later he describes it as "the long experience through which I was passing" (332). A less poetic explanation comes from Sweetie Sweetwater of At Heaven's Gate, who says, "'Till you know what you stand for you ain't anything'" (307). The critic Richard G. Law defines selfhood in "'The Case of the Upright Judge'" as "the imposition of order and significance upon chaos . . ." (4). Warren himself calls self-identity "the country of the 'self,'" a country "more fantastic" than any political state could ever be ("The World of Huey Long" 5).

Even with the many heroes and heroines, it is still possible to paint a composite picture of the Warren protagonist. Normally beginning as an idealist with

unrealistic self-expectations, he reaches adulthood, at which time he must admit the impossibility of fulfilling his childhood and adolescent ambitions (Stewart, Burden 488, 491; and Justus, Achievement 249, 23). That epiphany, asserts Frank Gado, forces the hero into self-denial, a state from which he emerges only after undergoing numerous life experiences. Many of the protagonists eventually accept a "tragic vision of life" and formulate a self-image which they can accept (First Person xxvi). According to John L. Stewart, their most important lesson is that they are like everyone else, capable of both good and evil (Burden 517). Leonard Casper refers to this internal conflict as "the crime of self and of existence" (Dark and Bloody Ground 142). A major consequence of such intense self-analysis is the protagonist's alienation from both himself and those about him (Lyons 4; Justus, Achievement 14). Warren describes his characters' alienation as mechanistic. In "Poetry and Selfhood" he writes:

> Technology . . . [has] carried the image of machine as model into man's consciousness. . . . Man [has begun] to feel even more cut off from nature, . . . from society, from a sense of significance in his own work, from . . . any sense of significance in his own existence. Alienation . . . [has] appeared. (53, 54)

His protagonist suffers, especially after realizing that he himself is primarily responsible for the malaise (Samuels 50). In his self-examination he begins to distrust, then to hate himself; when he no longer can endure his agony, he turns upon his loved ones in an attempt to punish himself

(John L. Stewart, "The Country of the Heart" 254; Justus, Achievement 160). Thus he exacerbates the crime of the self, and the biggest hindrance to overcoming that crime is himself.

No wonder a number of the protagonists have readily admitted poor self-images. For example, in Night Rider (NR) Percy Munn says to his one-time friend Senator Tolliver, "I'm nothing" (NR 375), thereby defining his own lack of substance and inability to relate to his acquaintances. Amantha Starr of Band of Angels (BA) makes a similar admission: "I had been nothing to Tobias Sears [her husband], nothing at all, nothing but the excuse for his magnanimity" (BA 187). Bradwell Tolliver, the hero of Flood (F), has allowed his poor self-image to block his ability to write. Terrified by his condition, he thinks "that if he was not a writer then he was nothing, he was not real, he did not exist. He stood there in the cold terror of nonexistence" (F 134). The typical Warren protagonist freely acknowledges feelings of nothingness, a condition so pervasive that Barnett Guttenberg has called it a great "flood of nothingness" (Web of Being 30).

Everyone is lost "in some blind lobby, hall, enclave, crank cul-de-sac, or corridor of Time. / Of Time. Or Self. And in that dark no thread," writes Warren in Brother to Dragons. And so Warren's major theme is man's search for himself, which John Lewis Longley claims must be developed negatively by any novelist living in the modern world.

When Longley uses the word negatively, he means the writer of fiction has to show what man is not, what he has failed to accomplish, what he has failed to become ("'At Heaven's Gate': The Major Themes" 16). Not unexpectedly, then, Marshall Walker points out that "Warren's work in all genres presents images of the self in its struggle for fulfillment" (234). By far the majority of these self-images are couched in negative terms. Robert Penn Warren's ten novels employ such recurrent clusters of negative self-images as metaphors of nothingness, duality, mirroring, and victimization. A few novel titles provide additional clusters of imagery, and there are also several miscellaneous groupings. Both Justus and Longley classify Warren's protagonists as hollow men,[1] a particularly appropriate label since the main characters see themselves as images of nothingness, blankness, emptiness, and darkness. Their sense of unimportance is accentuated by the fact that they usually remain stationary while the world recedes from them and by the fact that they feel filthy, transparent, invisible, shapeless, disembodied, crushed, or unspooled. These are the negative self-images which the protagonists attempt to dispel in their search for self-knowledge and an identity they can tolerate.

Robert Penn Warren has devised a remarkable number of images through which to demonstrate the hollow natures of his protagonists. Foremost among these images are those connected in some fashion by the concept of blankness, one

of the forms nothingness can take. In his two latest novels, Meet Me in the Green Glen (MM) and A Place to Come To (PTC), Warren depicts heroes who suffer from what Angelo Passetto calls the "blankness of being" (MM 51). During the three years Angelo spent in prison before meeting Cassie Spottwood, the country women who befriends him, he had become adept at thinking of nothing. He purposely made himself blank, the result of an earlier discovery that thinking of himself and his past life can lead literally to physical illness (MM 51). In A Place to Come To Jed Tewksbury also suffers from "a light-headed nausea of blankness," the outcome of his being treated like a nothing at the University of Chicago, where he had tried unsuccessfully, at first, to enroll in the graduate school to study classical literature and languages (PTC 44-45). Later, at a time when he has completed his course work for the Ph.D. and is working on his dissertation, Jed stares at a blank page on which he is trying to say something profound about Dante. He discovers he feels just as blank as that empty piece of paper (PTC 81, 84, 87). Both protagonists resort to blankness of being in order to avoid "being drawn out and absorbed into the undifferentiated blankness of the world" (PTC 205). They prefer feeling placeless, timeless, and lonely to recognizing that they are a part of the brotherhood of mankind (PTC 45). Images of blankness, however, are not unique to the later fiction. In Warren's first published novel, Percy Munn also resorts to feelings

of blankness to protect himself from society (NR 182). A persistent image in the novels, metaphors of blankness are designed to emphasize the negative self-image of the protagonists.

Another "nothingness" image cluster Warren uses to aid in character development is that of emptiness, or the void of self.[2] Often the protagonists' sense of emptiness is heightened by their sexual relationships. After making love with Lucille Christian, his mistress, Percy Munn becomes "infected by her emptiness. Or her emptiness had discovered to him his own. She had held it up to him like a mirror, and in her emptiness he had seen his own" (NR 269). In The Cave (C) Monty Harrick also experiences emptiness after confessing his love to Jo-Lea. He resents his physical attraction to her, yet he feels helpless to do anything about it (C 21). In At Heaven's Gate (AHG) Sue Murdock suffers from personal emptiness following her involvements with various lovers. After breaking up with Jerry Calhoun, she confesses to feeling hollow (AHG 154, 244). During her affair with Sweetie Sweetwater, the labor organizer and father of her unborn child, she admits her lack of purpose (AHG 301). The most significant image of her emptiness, however, is her abortion. Unable to dominate Sweetie, she takes her revenge through the abortion, a literal emptying of herself from her commitment to love (AHG 356-57). In the process, Sue becomes Warren's most tragic female version of the modern hollow man.

The images of blankness and emptiness surrounding Warren's characters are indicative of just how difficult their search for self-knowledge is. Warren creates for his characters a dilemma which has a paradoxical solution. At the end of their quests the characters must discover their kinship with all men; however, their knowledge must come not through others, but rather from themselves. If they see themselves as blanks, as voids, then from what internal sources will their information derive? Each of these images, then, poses a situation which requires an immense, intuitive response from the protagonists.

A third series of images through which Warren develops his characters' self-concept of nothingness is darkness. For two protagonists this darkness of the self is quite tactile. The dark which descends upon Sue Murdock when she breaks her engagement to Jerry is an "unbreathing, velvety motion" (AHG 147), an image suggesting softness, security, and forgetfulness. Isaac Sumpter likewise appears to cherish his shadowy inner self where things do not matter when he refers to it lovingly as "his dew-dark inwardness" (C 98). To him that darkness becomes the blackness of the non-self, "a state of being which was, at the same time, both peace and achievement, both non-life and life" (C 277-78). Both characters find in their inward dimness a refuge from their intense need to know more about themselves, as does Jeremiah Beaumont of World Enough and Time (WET), who sees only peace in his interior darkness (WET 382). On

the other hand, Angelo Passetto has an inward blackness "into which he never looked" (MM 175). His interior mystery provides no retreat. Of all Warren's protagonists, however, only Percy Munn and Murray Guilfort identify the site of their inward darkness as the head (NR 92; MM 29). Their self-images are intellectually conceived, while the other protagonists' pictures of themselves come from the heart, an emotional response to their feelings of inadequacy.

Warren employs a number of images to underline the inner darkness demonstrated by his protagonists. Of particular interest are his images of blindness, water, the dark hole, the womb, and the foetus. Percy Munn calls his lack of self-knowledge a blindness, a darkness (NR 96-97), as does Jeremiah Beaumont, when he complains that "the hot blackness of self" is a "blindness like death of self, and then a sleep" (WET 413). Referring to his sense of fading selfhood, Brad Tolliver compares his loss to "Flannel-gray water draining slowly, with no sound, down the clogged drain of a bathtub. There was, finally, nothing" (F 204). Water imagery becomes even more filth-laden in Murray Guilfort. He alludes to his interior darkness as a "viscous, lightless tide," "black, thick as slime, and nameless, . . . sluggishly flooding upward" like an "internal drowning" (MM 333).

In World Enough and Time the big black hole is a "womb of the quagmire" to suggest Jeremiah's "black inwardness

(WET 479). But the black hole/womb image is carried to its ultimate in the characterization of Jack Burden in All the King's Men (ATKM). He describes the self as "huddled up way inside, in the dark which is you, inside yourself, like a clammy, sad little foetus you carry around inside yourself" (ATKM 11). In this image Warren also employs the earlier blindness motif associated with the dark inner self. The eyes of the foetus are blind, an appropriate trait since the self resists seeing the truth (ATKM 11-12). For a long time Jack has no desire to emerge from his inward darkness to acquire self-knowledge. Thus the characters' inability to see the truth about themselves is paralleled by darkness images in a number of novels.

Warren develops a fourth significant cluster of nothingness images through figures of speech focusing upon a character and his relationship to the space and distance surrounding him. Most frequently the author creates a character who sees his nothingness as a little point from which the rest of the world rapidly flees. In Meet Me in the Green Glen Cassie Spottwood describes herself as "the fixed point [of light] from which there was forever the going away" (MM 94). For her, life "was a going away. Life was the way things went away from you, and left you standing" (MM 73). Life withdraws from her, "bleeding out of her at every pore" (MM 74), leaving her with nothing but a vision of a meaninglessness which is both painful and awful (MM 97-98, 151-52). Sue Murdock also feels that she

is nothing but a little dot from which there is an "enormous expansion of darkness which seem[s] to revolve slowly around her" (AHG 146). Amantha Starr's self-image, that of an old, dry raisin from which the world withdraws, leaves her dreadfully aware that she is nothing (BA 76-77, 52, 190). Jed Tewksbury sees himself as a jellyfish which the retreating tide of life has left stranded on a rock to rot in the sun (PTC 44-45). Sometimes, however, characters feel as if their lives are falling inward. Amantha Starr also envisions herself as "some dark, delicious pit into which I fell inexhaustibly, like sleep, like dying" (BA 77). Isaac Sumpter similarly feels as if he has fallen into himself (C 332-33). He imagines himself as the shaft of some astronomical telescope into which a great eye is staring from the wrong end, watching him spin as he falls into himself, "getting smaller and smaller, forever" (C 104). A number of Warren's protagonists feel as if they are a great void from which their very essence is constantly being lost, a concept reinforced by images of distance and space.

Warren's images of darkness and space/distance serve dual purposes. First, they contribute to the characterizations of his protagonists, and second they make more complex the theme of the characters' search for self-knowledge. Already confused by their poor sense of self-worth, the characters lose themselves further in their inward darkness and interior hollowness. Unable to perceive

either light or direction in their innermost beings, they find their already difficult duty of self-discovery assuming more difficult proportions.

Occasionally a character expresses his devalued self-image through metaphors of physical illness or similes of old, worn-out bodies. Jeremiah Beaumont, suffering from the cankers of venereal disease, reflects upon his emotional state when he refers to the "bleeding sore of self" (WET 506). All he has by which to define himself is his stink. In Wilderness (W) Adam Rosenzweig, lamenting the loss of his old, idealistic self, describes his new self-image as a "dry, pale shell, like that discarded by a locust" (W 99). These images serve to intensify the characters' perception of their valuelessness as they search for self-knowledge.

In addition to developing such image clusters as blankness, emptiness, darkness, receding distance, and gross allusions to the physical body to convey the characters' feelings of nothingness, Warren also employs a number of miscellaneous metaphors for a similar effect. To express a sense of insignificance, Jack Burden describes himself as a piece of furniture before which Willie Stark and Sadie Burke quarrel, totally unaware of his presence (ATKM 36). Elsewhere he feels like a "nice, cool, steel filing cabinet with alphabetical cards" (ATKM 345). Or sometimes he imagines himself a piece of glass through which everyone can see except himself (ATKM 302). To

convey how "lost, unpursued, and devalued" he feels, Adam Rosenzweig confides that occasionally, even in a crowd, he feels unseen, invisible (W 136, 245, 112). His image of invisibility underscores how hopeless he believes the search for selfhood to be. Shapelessness is another image through which Amantha Starr communicates her sense of inadequacy. Called a lump by the slave trader Mr. Calloway, she finds her life a series of coiling shadows in which she is just a shape, "an outline here, a bulge there, quickly blotted out" (BA 222, 221, 67). Sometimes she feels "peculiarly disembodied," completely outside herself, while at other times she envisions herself being crushed into nothingness by the bigness of the world (BA 54-55, 3). But her most interesting self-image is that of a spool of thread being unwound until there is nothing left (BA 258). Such graphic images as shapelessness, disembodiment, and unspooling certainly do emphasize Amantha's conception of her own nothingness.

One of the largest phobias Warren's protagonists have is the deeply seated fear that because they are really nothing, their quest for selfhood inevitably will be unsuccessful. Warren skillfully sustains his characters' terror through numerous images of nothingness. Other major clusters also contribute to the suspense surrounding the characters' search for selfhood. Duality, or a character's tendency to see himself as two or more different people trapped in one skin, is an example of such a cluster.

Sometimes this dual image is conveyed as simply as by Warren's choice of names for his characters. For example, the last name of the protagonist of Wilderness, Rosenzweig, means "twig of rose." L. Hugh Moore thinks this name is meant to suggest the rose, a beautiful, good flower, offset by the bad thorn of the twig (Robert Penn Warren 158). And indeed the characterization of Adam Rosenzweig illustrates a "good," idealistic man being torn by the "bad" realities of life. On the other hand, Percy Munn's duality is shaped by his confessing he often feels as if he can "see himself clearly, as if he were another person, a spectator. Another person" (NR 148). Jed Tewksbury experiences a similar division when he thinks about his life and realizes that he looks at his past as if he were outside it, not a part of it (PTC 3). Elsewhere, after having told his friends in Nashville the story of how his father died, he admits, "I knew that I myself was very strange to me. I thrust forth a hand to regard it. I did not, in the deepest sense, know whose hand it was" (PTC 160). The tendency of these characters to act as spectators of themselves indicates the division of being from which they suffer.

Jeremiah Beaumont appropriately labels a similar condition the "doubleness of life" (WET 153, 333, 479). Constantly examining himself, he uncovers two versions: the public and the private selves. This discovery quickly becomes for him a nightmare in which one self betrays the other (WET 333-34). Later, as he lies in his dungeon cell

at night, he discovers another set of dual selves, his past and present identities. His past self is ruled by "dreamful sleep," but his present reality is dominated by a "lust for blankness and oblivion" (WET 415). As he explores his duality, it suddenly occurs to him that there must be a "perfect point" where the two selves will converge, and that moment will be his death (WET 415). Jeremiah has been a divided man since learning of Rachel Jordan's seduction. On the one hand he longs to kill Cassius Fort, her seducer and his mentor, but on the other he wants only to forget what his one-time friend has done. At times he even wants to punish Rachel for her part in the betrayal, yet at the same time he yearns to forgive her. Beaumont's "doubleness of life" is the major image emphasizing his duality, a major obstacle in his search for self-knowledge.

Cassie Spottwood similarly discovers both past and present selves. Her old identity she associates with youth and her passion for Cy Grinder, the suitor whom her mother scared off. Her current personality, however, she perceives as cold and passionless, a discovery which fills her with a distant pity and a sad revulsion for what she was and is (MM 79-81). Leonard Casper points out that Cassie's dual self-image is strengthened by Angelo's ability to see in her both the young girl she once was, "la picola," and the old woman she now is ("Robert Penn Warren's Evergreening Glen" 62). The protagonists' penchant for perceiving themselves as two individuals, a past and a present

personality, is an additional obstacle in their search for self-discovery.

Some characters consciously create a dual set of selves, the original version and what Jerry Calhoun calls the made self (AHG 219). Jack Burden of All the King's Men attempts to make a new self to replace the old. Looking back on himself as a young man in love with Anne Stanton, he perceives an early dual self-image: "So there are two you's, the one you yourself create by loving and the one the beloved creates by loving you" (ATKM 299). Beginning as a "brass bound idealist" who discovers some uncomfortable information about himself and those he loves, he makes himself over into the cynic who adopts his boss's philosophy of life: "'Man is conceived in sin and born in corruption and he passeth from the stink of the didie to the stench of the shroud. There is always something'" (ATKM 54). In his cynicism he tries to convince himself that the made self-image "is frequently better than the real thing" (ATKM 149). Satirically he thinks, "It would be amusing to know what [the two you's] would say to each other" if they could get together (ATKM 137). As long as Jack Burden tries to create an image of himself, he cannot acquire the self-knowledge he so desperately seeks.

Frequently the Warren protagonist has difficulty distinguishing the real from the unreal self. Trying to discover self-identity, Percy Munn sees himself as an onion from which he must peel the unreal selves to discover the

real (NR 89). David J. and Annette C. Burt, authors of "Robert Penn Warren's Debt to Ibsen in Night Rider," claim this onion imagery foreshadows a "destructive flaw in Munn's character," a tendency to see life in "superficial 'layers,'" resulting in a lack of substantive personality (360). Later Munn thinks of his two selves as "superimposed exposures on the same film of a camera," indicating that neither self is real to him (NR 96). Secretly Percy Munn fears the real self will have no more substance than the unreal. Jerry Calhoun has a similar difficulty in his quest. As he reviews his life, "It was like a movie inside his head. It was like there were two Jerry Calhouns, the Jerry Calhoun to whom it had happened and the Jerry Calhoun to whom nothing had happened" (AHG 232). Jerry's problem is that he cannot tell which he is. Is he no more substantial than a character in a movie?

Isaac Sumpter, too, has difficulty with his real and unreal selves. Fascinated by Keats's bird in "Ode to a Nightingale," Isaac imagines himself destined for a similar fate:

> Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird,
> No hungry generations tread thee down;
> The voice I hear this passing night was heard
> In ancient days by emperor and clown. (61-64)

Repeating these words, he senses something stirring in his inward darkness, not the bird, but "something like the bird. . . . It was his self" (C 98-99). For Isaac the nightingale is the symbol for the ideal self he would like

to become (C 353-54). Throughout the novel, however, Isaac has to face his own reality. Deep in the cave, he wishes he were someone else. But that desire is quickly extinguished by horror when he realizes that he then would not be himself (C 278). Isaac feels only contempt for the kind of person he is (C 102, 196), but the possibility of changing terrifies him. In moments of truth, he knows himself to be poor, unkempt, and mysteriously weak (C 113), but never innocent. Above everything else he longs for innocence, a purity like that of Keats's nightingale (C 287). Unlike Percy Munn and Jerry Calhoun, who have difficulty distinguishing between their real and unreal selves, Isaac knows his two identities, but terror prevents him from pursuing his ideal.

When a character is not perceiving himself as a zero or examining the duality of his nature, he often peers into mirrors trying to discover the reality of his self-identity. What he sees in his reflection is usually an unrecognizable self. As Percy Munn gazes into the mirror, he fails to recognize himself (NR 312), while Jed Tewksbury's reflection reminds him he really does not know who or what he is (PTC 114). Monty Harrick, certain his identity is being stripped away by his love for Jo-Lea Bingham, likewise is unable to find the truth of self in the mirrored image (C 12-13). Nor can Isaac Sumpter discover anything worthwhile in his mirrored reflection (C 99-100). All too often the mirror serves to remind the Warren protagonist of his

own emptiness. On the other hand, in rare moments of self-confrontation both Jerry Calhoun and Angelo Passetto can see themselves in their reflections. Jerry says, "That person in the mirror was just himself" (AHG 75), and later, having lost Sue Murdock, first to Slim Sarrett, then to Sweetie Sweetwater, he perceives in his mirrored image his own failure, which fills him with anger and defiance (AHG 219). Angelo, too, sees in his reflection a terrifying sight (MM 120, 107-08). James H. Justus claims that the function of this episode is to emphasize "Angelo's shadowy self" (Achievement 265), but what is even more significant is that the protagonist does see something frightening, which he recognizes as part of himself.

A fourth dominant cluster of images characterizing Warren's protagonists is that of the victim. Isaac Sumpter apparently draws some type of pleasure from what he considers his victimization. He especially likes to lie in his room and think about "all the deprivations of his life. . . . Lovelessness, loneliness, defects of pleasure, joyless rooms, cheap food, seedy clothes, contempt of schoolboys . . ." (C 331). Brad Tolliver also falls into self-pity. Unable to break through his writer's block, he envisions himself "a man bleeding to death from some inner wound" (F 69). When other goals in his life fail to develop, he has an "image of himself, far off, yonder on the flat earth, crouched naked and alone, under the unending grayness of rain" (F 323). In his role as victim Tolliver usually

feels he is being totally rejected by life (F 383). Jed Tewksbury likewise asserts he has been deprived by life. As he remembers his painful studies with his old high school Latin teacher, Miss McClatty, a picture rises unbidden in his mind. "We lean over the book together, two deprived ones, two crippled ones, two wanderers in a world of shadows . . ." (PTC 22-23). But unlike Isaac and Brad, Jed, at these moments of self-pity, experiences "an indefinable sense of outrage at myself--at, to be more specific, my unfended weakness in the face of the way the world was" (PTC 6). Most of the characters who feel themselves victims do not recognize that they themselves are responsible for such self-images. Nor do they realize that their self-pity serves as another obstacle separating them from the goal of selfhood. Only Jed realizes he is the one victimizing himself, and that knowledge opens up the possibility of a new self-image for him.

In three novels the protagonists' search for self-identity is made in a natural setting or through the forces of nature. In each instance the title provides the major self-image for the protagonists: The Cave, Wilderness, and Flood. The cave-tomb of Jasper Harrick symbolizes the inner recesses of the individual into which he must burrow if he is to attain self-knowledge. The dangers of the literal cave, the pit in the floor, the constant threat of cave-ins, entombment, and suffocation, represent the hazards man encounters in his self-exploration.[3] All the searchers of

the cave use Jasper's entombment to try "to break through to the heart of the mystery which was themselves . . . [or] to break out of the dark mystery which was themselves" (C 395-96). The title Wilderness refers literally to one of the battlegrounds of the Civil War, but it also alludes to the wilderness of the self, as Adam Rosenzweig points out a number of times (W 201, 210, 276, 310). The wilderness is a metaphor for the self which must be crossed and explored if Adam is to acquire self-knowledge (W 266-67). Rosenzweig can only imagine how he will feel when he attains his goal: "Adam, looking into the depth [of the wilderness], thought of quietness. He thought of peace. He thought of Time moving deeper and dimmer, onto coolness and peace" (W 109).[4] Finally, the image suggested by the title Flood is more complicated. Brad Tolliver is both the town, Fiddlersburg, and the flood which eventually will cover that town (F 254). He readily admits that his life has been a confused mess, a description enhanced by the parallel imagery he uses to describe Fiddlersburg. To Brad his hometown is a prison, a garbage dump, a place already dead (F 165, 392, 172-73). As he tells Lettice during their marriage, Fiddlersburg is just "God-awful" (F 208). Brad has returned home to make peace with it, as well as to discover where he is going and where he has been (F 353, 350-51). He wonders what part of himself will be destroyed when the flood inundates Fiddlersburg (F 254). On the other hand, the water which will cover the town suggests

the flood of self-knowledge which will wash over and through him when he faces the reality of what his life has meant and can still mean. Neil Nakadate suggests that Brad returns home to discover "some sense of his own significance in the rush of time and circumstance" (Robert Penn Warren: Critical Perspectives 177).

In addition to such major imagery clusters as nothingness, duality, mirroring, victimization, and those delineated by novel titles, Warren also employs a number of miscellaneous images through which characters seek self-exploration. The lost self is one such image. In Night Rider Percy Munn observes that man often fails to realize he is losing the essence of himself until he wakes up one morning and suddenly sees there is a difference (NR 250, 267, 290-91). Munn alludes to his own lost identity through a number of colorful images. He feels like an object obscured first by a mist, then by smoke occasionally stirred by a breeze. In this lost state he can almost catch glimpses of what he once was (NR 301, 330-31). The individual who has lost himself is like the seed, full of potential life, washed from the soil to die in the heat of the sun (NR 321). Leonard Casper observes that the more Munn tries to recover the lost self, the less there is to recover (Dark and Bloody Ground 104). Once admitting that he has lost himself, Munn knows his future is dead, too. Lying in the cold mud, he sees his destiny as an "impersonal light grow[ing] in the sky, above the dark trees" (NR 321).

Another type of metaphor for the lost self is the one in which the character views himself in the most derogatory fashion possible. Jack Burden, who often feels compelled to apologize for his past, describes how his being sorry makes him "a little green apple that's got a worm in it and falls off the tree before it even gets ripe" (ATKM 114). Such poor self-esteem makes Jack call himself "that maggot in the cheese" (ATKM 280). Out of touch with himself, he says he is the joker in the deck, the one who is wild, but not one-eyed (ATKM 439). Adam Rosenzweig suffers even more from his negative self-image than does Jack. His crippled foot with its painful corrective boot epitomizes his lost state (W 61-62, 71). His lameness robs him of all identity. In America when he asks his new friend Mose to call him Adam, he instead acquires the nickname Slew, for slew-foot (W 92). Spying Jedeen Hawksworth staring at his foot, he feels robbed of his very existence (W 98-99).[5]

In three novels the protagonists' self-images are so unacceptable that they attempt to cast themselves as fictional characters in the dramas of their own lives. In At Heaven's Gate Slim Sarrett baldly tells Sue Murdock, "'You were making yourself up for yourself, too. . . . You don't understand yourself, and therefore you have to make up a version you do understand'" (AHG 152). Both Charles H. Bohner and James Hall ask how Sue can distinguish the real from the unreal self in all her lies.[6] James H. Justus explains that when Warren's characters attempt to make up

acceptable versions of themselves, they merely add obstacles to their search for self-knowledge (Achievement 182).

In World Enough and Time Jeremiah Beaumont creates for himself the role of hero in a high, noble tragedy (Bradbury, Renaissance in the South 69). Beaumont himself sets the stage for his role. He says his life is "an ambiguous drama which seemed both to affirm and to deny life, to affirm and deny humanity. . . . It was to be a tragedy. . . . But the actors were not well trained" (WET 5). Repeatedly he refers to his life as drama (WET 7, 11, 63). Even his plan to kill Cassius Fort he views as a romantic act of revenge in the tragedy of life.[7] In his role-playing Beaumont is totally unable to perceive his real self. The same is true of Amantha Starr. In one of her many introspective moments, she asks, "Oh, are we nothing more than the events of our own story . . .?" (BA 52). She wonders if life is only a reenactment of "the very essence of what your self was" (BA 287).

A close examination of Robert Penn Warren's ten novels reveals a masterful use of imagery to intensify the protagonists' sense of low self-worth. In their search for self-knowledge, they must come to know and accept each of these negative self-images if they are to attain the goals they set for themselves.

After having seen how unworthy Warren's characters consider themselves, the reader cannot help but wonder why. With the exception of Percy Munn of Night Rider, the primary

reason is that the protagonist has an unsatisfactory relationship with one of his parents, most often his father. However, his association with his mother, brother, aunt, or uncle may also influence his lack of self-esteem. John L. Stewart notes that the majority of Warren's protagonists have only a single parent, whom they deny as role models ("Country of the Heart" 254). According to Louise Y. Gossett, the result of their rejection is a feeling of chaos, which then leads to violence. They often turn toward a father substitute, who also proves inadequate, or they become introverted (54). Robert Berner observes that the father frequently symbolizes the past. The protagonist must become reconciled to both his father and his past if he is to acquire self-knowledge (56-67).

A number of characters reject their fathers because they find this parent too unromantic, unsuccessful, or weak. Jeremiah Beaumont resents his father because he was a man who married above himself, who for a few years prospered, and who then fell upon hard times, from which he never recovered. Trying to disguise how he feels, Jeremiah calls Jasper Beaumont "my good old father," a "loving father [who] did not bend or swerve" (WET 7, 9). Borrowing an anecdote from his own life, Warren describes how as a child Jeremiah found his father's old self-improvement book "Love's Surveying, the sort of book which any man in the West who could read and cipher might have at hand in case he decided to become a speculator or run lines for others" (WET 10).

When Jasper caught his son examining the manual, he grabbed it and stomped enraged from the room. But unlike Warren's own experience, "that night [Jeremiah] found the book lying on his cot, a silent apology . . ." (WET 10). As an adult Jeremiah finds himself plagued with ambitions similar to his father's. Full of ideas to improve his wife's farm, Jeremiah thinks about what his father could have made of the place (WET 164). Later he strikes upon the plan of making his own land and wealth by staking out a homestead in Kentucky. His ambitions recall to him his father's study of Love's Surveying.

> Then at once my eyes swam with tears I could not shed, . . . and I knew the nature of his hope, not for lands and wealth, but to show his manhood in the way the world would understand, for a man must find a way to be a man. (WET 182)

The son's memories of his father's failures remind him of his own, and Jeremiah's resentment and guilt grow proportionately. Having rejected everything his father stood for, Jeremiah has sought a father substitute, and his search has given him two. The first is Dr. Leicaster Burnham, his childhood tutor, and the second is Colonel Cassius Fort, the lawyer who undertook to teach him law. These men are his heroes, until they, too, disappoint him (WET 432-33, 48, 62, 68, 131, 140, 503). Eventually he comes to see them as the world does: "one a back-country quack, . . . the other a lawyer who probably had little more than a few Latin tags" (WET 36). Jeremiah has a poor self-image because he has been disappointed by the unsuccessful careers of real and

surrogate fathers alike. He has no role model after which to pattern himself.

In Meet Me in the Green Glen Angelo Passetto's low self-esteem also derives from his memories of his father's failures. Remembering his father's hands and how he had sworn never to be like his father, Angelo has to admit that he, too, has failed (MM 124). Having been released from jail and now trudging down the dead-end road toward Cassie Spottwood's impoverished farm,

> he saw in his head the picture of his father sitting in the smoky kitchen, in the falling-down house, . . . the face stiff and gray when the pain hit him, but the jaws clenching together, and the breath coming hard and slow. (MM 7)

Angelo has failed as his father faltered before him.

Jack Burden, of All the King's Men, also has a poor self-image, the result of the picture of his parents he carries in his memory (Law, "The Case" 10). He believes his mother to be smooth, unruffled, and ageless, but he also presumes she is weak, demanding, and completely incapable of love (ATKM 41, 117). Ellis Burden, the man Jack grew up believing his father, but who biologically is not, is an unacceptable father, too. Jack calls Ellis Burden a fool who walked out on him and his beautiful mother, an act Jack cannot understand (ATKM 213). What Jack calls his father's weakness is totally repellent to him (ATKM 45, 112, 207). In his search for an acceptable role model, the young man turns first to Judge Irwin, his neighbor and his biological father, although Jack does not know it for a long time, and

then to Willie Stark, his boss. But they cannot give him the self-image he desires. Judge Irwin, who took Jack hunting and who taught him to shoot, to ride, and to read history, loses his influence when Jack begins to see him as an old man who still plays with toys (ATKM 44, 130, 221). Likewise, Willie Stark's affair with Anne Stanton greatly disappoints Jack (ATKM 327). Jack will not find an acceptable self-identity until he can accept the weaknesses and strengths of his fathers, both real and surrogate.

In A Place to Come To Jed Tewksbury's self-portrait originates in the bad memories of his father. Jed is most influenced by what he considers his father's ineffectuality and his ridiculous death. Buck Tewksbury had allowed his wife's inheritance to diminish to such an extent that his son believed him a "feckless, vanity bit dreamer" who disdained money (PTC 13, 193). Jed's earliest memories are of his intoxicated father unconscious on the floor with his mother staring at the immobile body (PTC 2). But his most traumatic memory is that of how his father died.

> I was the only boy, or girl either, in the public school of the town of Dugton, Claxford County, Alabama, whose father ever got killed in the middle of the night standing up in the front of his wagon to piss on the hindquarters of one of a span of mules and, being drunk, pitching forward on his head, still hanging on to his dong, and hitting the pike in such a position and condition that both the left front and the left rear wheels of the wagon rolled, with perfect precision, over his unconscious neck, his having passed out being, no doubt, the reason he took the fatal plunge in the first place. Throughout, he was still holding on to his dong. (PTC 1)

With the passage of time, Buck Tewksbury's death becomes

more and more unreal to his son, like a scene from a Southern novel, a photograph in a book, a movie scene, a stage set, an unfinished scene (PTC 5). The memory of his father continues to haunt him, wherever he goes (PTC 119, 151), and thus like Coleridge's Ancient Mariner Jed feels compelled to tell his father's story (PTC 55, 158, 295). Leonard Casper claims that Jed Tewksbury believes "he lost the promise of self in the death of his father" ("Circle with a Center" 402). The young boy learns to hate his father as the source of the humiliation he suffers at the hands of his schoolmates (PTC 16, 19). As James H. Justus says, Jed lives under the shadow of his "prodigal father and a paternal legacy seen by the son as destructive" (Achievement 303). Jed, however, is unique among Warren's protagonists because he is the only one with a mother who exerts a positive influence on her child. Her strength, her energy, her purposefulness, and her depth provide the foundations for Jed's ambitions (PTC 2-3, 7, 48). She is the one who pushes him out of Dugton, warning him never to return. He makes his way to the University of Chicago, where he eventually establishes his academic reputation as a Dante scholar (PTC 42-43, 333). She loves her son enough to let him go, but he still takes with him the unacceptable image of his father.

The reasons why Jeremiah Beaumont, Angelo Passetto, Jack Burden, and Jed Tewksbury have been unable to identify with their fathers have been passive in nature: their

fathers were unromantic, unsuccessful, weak, and ridiculous. With other protagonists, however, the reasons become much more active. Sue Murdock, Amantha Starr, Adam Rosenzweig, and Brad Tolliver have fathers who are domineering, deceitful, and cruel.

Although Bogan Murdock is never seen attempting to dominate his daughter, Sue reacts to what she calls his dominance. Having been asked to leave the elite girls school belonging to Miss Millford, she feels she need not worry about "how her father would be" after she arrives home (AHG 5). When she lands and he invites her to sit, she refuses, "as by an act of will against the compulsion of his gaze," and she thinks, "He is so polite . . .; the politest man in the world" (AHG 6). However, Sue's fears are supported by her brother's reaction to their father. Learning of his sister's plans to defy Bogan's edict that she eat dinner with the family and greet their guests, Hammond says, "The Old Man will be sore as hell. I heard him tell you to study tonight. And you know what he said about you driving at night by yourself" (AHG 17). Sue purposely finds ways to oppose her father: making her fiance Jerry have sex with her in her father's house; breaking her father-supported engagement to Jerry; taking the socially unacceptable Slim Sarrett as her lover; later taking her father's enemy, Jason "Sweetie" Sweetwater, as another lover and becoming pregnant by him; and going to labor meetings opposed to her father and his way of life

(AHG 32; 135, 177; 250; 310; 300). Sue loves her father, whom she affectionately remembers as Dockie, but she hates him, too, for what she calls his attempts to live her life for her.

Amantha Starr both loves and resents her father, too, because she believes he has betrayed her. Her earliest memories are of a father who loves and protects her. She remembers sitting on his lap and hearing him tell her what little boys and girls are made of, a story always followed by hugs and kisses and declarations of love (BA 16). She also recalls a terrible twilight storm into which she had gone to rescue her favorite doll. Unable to find it, she had panicked, but her father arrived just in time to rescue her and the doll (BA 8-9). Her idyllic childhood memories are disturbed by only one memory, her father's taking away from her the beautiful doll Jessie, which had belonged to his dead wife, Eileen (BA 8, 5). Unable to understand why her father acted as he did, Amantha is filled with the pain of her first adult experience, one she sees dimly as a betrayal of love (BA 7-8). His big deception, however, is that he never told her she is of mixed blood, his illegitimate child by one of his slaves. Out of love and loneliness he had taken her into his wifeless home and reared her as his white daughter. He had even sent her North to receive a white education. But also from love he had not prepared emancipation papers for her. The betrayal comes when she is seized and sold down South to help pay off the debts he

left at his death (BA 48-52). Of course Amantha feels betrayed, and she will require the rest of her life to realize the truth about her father. What he did not tell and what he did not do came from his great love for her and from his own cowardice. He was unwilling to admit to her or himself that she is the daughter of a Negro. Walter Sullivan points out that as a result of Mr. Starr's actions and Amantha's mixed heritage, she lacks a sense of identity (39). She literally does not know who she is. Cudworth Flint also states that "The conflict within Amantha Starr . . . is continuously represented as a struggle between what in her nature she shares with whites, and what she shares with blacks" (635). As long as she tries to deny her blackness, says Barnett Guttenberg, she will be unable to find self-knowledge. She has to accept her heritage, that her parents are of different races, before she can form an acceptable self-image (Web of Being 80, 77). Prior to accomplishing any of this, however, she must acknowledge that her father's betrayal grew out of his devotion to her.

Adam Rosenzweig likewise thinks his father has betrayed him. He wants to believe his parent a great man who lived for human liberty and fought and suffered for freedom (W 63, 7, 91). He needs to credit his father with faith in man, but six months before his death, Leopold Rosenzweig denied that faith. His denial "had withdrawn the gift given long ago to the son" (W 9), the gift of self-respect (W 160-61). Adam feels deceived, and thus when he has the opportunity

to go to America to fight for the ideals his father had supported and then denied, he makes his plans (W 303, 12-13). Adam's sense of betrayal is not a personal one; rather, he feels it is a betrayal of the ideal for which both he and his father have lived. If Adam is to acquire an acceptable self-image, he must learn to accept what he considers his father's betrayal, and he must forgive his father.

Brad Tolliver, whose mother died at his birth, has great difficulty finding a satisfactory self-image because of the cruelty he experienced from his father during his childhood. Of all his youthful memories of his father, he has only one which is pleasant. He recalls watching his father shave and then asking him if he was ever going to die. When Lancaster tells him yes, Brad replies, "'Well, when I die, the first thing I do when I get to heaven and get my wings is to fly around till I find you'" (F 244). All his other memories cause Brad to call his father "a son-of-a-bitch" (F 54, 116). Among Brad's more violent recollections is the one of Lank in the library of the Fiddler house, just after foreclosing the mortgage on it. His father is tearing pages from the books, his way of rebelling against everything the Fiddlers represent. It is the library, also, where his father most frequently abuses him (F 116). Another particularly painful memory is his father's foreclosing on the Methodist Church. Brad wonders how a man can foreclose on a religious institution (F 79, 182-83). As a boy Brad is bound to his father by the man's

brutality, and he even learns to use it for his own ends. He loves to anger his father, experiencing "a trance of joyous power" with each success (F 176-77). The one thing he fails to understand is the reason why Lank goes into the swamp to cry. As a young man Brad says his father's disappearances were his one weakness (F 118-19, 177). But as an adult Brad will have to recognize that both his father's cruelty and weeping were marks of his humanity, his way of reacting to the loneliness and disappointments in his life. To attain his own acceptable self-image, Brad will have to admit his common humanity with his father, and he will have to learn to weep (F 128).

One of Warren's protagonists has difficulty finding self-identity as a result of his father's deeply embedded religious nature. Isaac Sumpter's father is a preacher, and the son resents him for his sanctimonious attitudes. Isaac, whose mother died giving him birth, ironically blames her death on his father (C 82-83, 132, 192). When he asks his father why he was named Isaac, MacCarland tells him that the name comes from his son's having been given to him in his old age, as was true of Isaac in the Old Testament. But Isaac takes great pleasure in reminding his father that Abraham in the Bible almost sacrificed his son at God's request. Then he says, "'I was just wondering. Wondering how you'd do. Personally, I don't think you'd be up to [the sacrifice]'" (C 96). Isaac enjoys using religion to hurt his father. But when he was a child,

Isaac took great comfort from his father's visits to his room, where they would kneel and pray together (C 100). However, after losing his faith at college, Isaac begins to resent his father. No longer believing in God, Isaac doubts that there is a self, as well (C 101). Then, when he observes his father's certainty in both God and himself, he cannot help but feel jealous, and he turns his resentment toward his parent. Completely misunderstanding why Brother Sumpter goes into the cave where Jasper is trapped, Isaac presumes it is to reveal the lies the son has been telling. His father wants to sacrifice him. "The old man would take him upon a mountain and bind him and set a knife at his throat and --" (C 331). Sumpter's action, Isaac asserts, "unangers" and "unmans" him, the son (C 334-35). Then, when Sumpter refuses to reveal his son's lies, Isaac moves past him "as though he were a natural obstruction, a post or rock" (C 357). Because his father and his father's religion are completely unacceptable to him, Isaac fails to establish a self-image with which he can live comfortably (C 94, 192).

Monty Harrick, also from The Cave, has difficulty acquiring his self-knowledge because of a father who is jealous of him. Warren, in an interview with Richard B. Sale, has said:

> The old man who is the old hellion, who is really jealous of his son and can't die because of his jealousy, can't take his role as a dying man. He can't accept himself being the age to die. He is the enemy of his son, and the son knows it. . . . (345)

In his analysis James H. Justus adds that the two major

blocking agents in Monty's search for selfhood are his father, Jack Harrick, and his brother, Jasper (Achievement 276-77). Thus the boy tries desperately to mold himself after both father and brother, hoping to assume their identities, but of course he can be only himself (Guttenberg, Web of Being 89). Wishing he looked and behaved more like Jack, the woman chaser, the hunter, the heller, Monty hears repeatedly such comments as "'Boy, you made like him?'" "'Yeah, and you--air you a chip off the old block--hee-hee?'" (C 14). Sometimes Monty feels ashamed of his hillbilly heller of a father, but then he is overcome with guilt for thinking that way of his father, dying of cancer (C 25). Since he is not made like Jack, Monty tries to convince himself he does not really want to be a womanizer, but that rationalization is usually followed by the thought he does not truly know who he is (C 29, 14). That is what Monty most envies about his brother. Jasper is "a chip off the old block," but more importantly, he is "himself so completely" at the same time (C 14, 19). Monty constantly competes with his older brother to win approval, but he feels destined to lose in these contests, and he always does (C 342, 16-19). Monty has difficulty during his search for self-knowledge because he is torn between wanting and not wanting to be like his father and brother (C 29). That conflict is intensified by the guilt which results from his condemnation of his old heller father and hillbilly brother.

Of all Warren's characters, however, Jerry Calhoun has the most difficulty in his relationship with his father. Instead of having an indifferent or cruel father, Jerry has a parent who loves him and makes sacrifices for him. Jerry finds that love unbearable. Warren describes Jerry's attitude as "'a crime against nature: he's impious'" (Walker, "Interview" 236). And Jerry lives under a cloud of guilt for reacting the way he does. From his childhood he carries an image of a parent who sweats easily, who is clumsy at doing small chores like repairing a broken vase, but who is very capable with tasks requiring strength. Jerry hates his father's clumsiness, and he defines himself in terms of that clumsiness (AHG 40-43). At times Jerry successfully refocuses his hatred upon his uncle Lew: "Hating Lew was all right. . . . Lew was not his father. It was all right to hate Lew" (AHG 41). But at other times he remembers Mr. Calhoun's awkwardness and becomes infuriated (AHG 265). As a successful young man, Jerry literally must force himself to visit his father on Sunday mornings (AHG 84). His confusion is compounded by his attitude toward his great-aunt Ursula, who reared him after his mother died. When she became blind, Jerry says he lost her and did not know what to make of her. Every time he is with her, he feels guilty and unworthy (AHG 43-44). Jerry admits he loves his father and Aunt Ursula, but he hates them, too. When he realizes how much they love him, he curses with every vile word he knows (AHG 44-45). With this

attitude he delays taking Sue Murdock to meet his family. But finally when he can refuse no longer, Sue readily accepts both the old man and the older woman. She announces to them that she and Jerry are to be married, the first time she has agreed to his proposal (AHG 123-24). With his spiritually rending attitude, Jerry finds a much more comfortable surrogate parent in Bogan Murdock (AHG 83). But Murdock betrays him, forcing a knowledge upon Jerry that strikes "the very center of his being" (AHG 280). At this point Jerry has to reexamine his father's love, and if he can accept that love for the unselfish emotion it is, then he may eventually find a self-image he can accept.

In addition to the characters' having difficulty identifying with their fathers and other family members, a few protagonists have other reasons hindering their finding appropriate self-images. One such reason is the past, as Murray Guilfort of Meet Me in the Green Glen and Jed Tewksbury of A Place to Come To discover. Murray, whom Barnett Guttenberg calls "another figure of the void" in "flight from nothingness" ("Meet Me" 113), has tried to shape his whole adult image after the one he remembers of the friend from his young adulthood, Sunderland Spottwood (MM 23). Murray says to himself:

> Why couldn't you be like Sunder, who had known nothing, who cared nothing, whose own image of Sunderland Spottwood was that of an angry, laughing self clamped astride a great beast that reared triumphantly against a world of nothingness and who had plunged ahead into the darkness of time, his eyes bulging bright and lips damp with the spittle from a last yell of manic glee? (MM 34)

Middle-aged Murray tries to think of himself as a trim and lithe horseman who is also skillful at the game of extra-marital intrigue (MM 225, 145). Because he finds his own past a nothingness, he tries to live as the reincarnated image of his friend from the past (MM 143).

Jed Tewksbury, too, is haunted by images from the past. He says, ". . . we are all stuck with trying to find the meaning of our lives, and the only thing we have to work on, or with, is our past. This can be a question of life and death" (PTC 15). In times of stress two pictures from Jed's past flash into his mind. The first, the child Jed weeping under a chinaberry tree, fades into the second, the child Jed weeping in the schoolyard (PTC 5, 6, 8, 70-71; 16, 7). Analyzing why he was crying in these scenes, Jed believes that in the first he was mourning for what the world might be. In the second he knows he was crying from outrage at the contempt of his schoolmates and from rage at his father and his manner of dying (PTC 16). Jed says, "In many places, in many unexpected moments, I have seen [these scenes] . . ." (PTC 6). "I felt no identity with that child. Sometimes it was as though I hated him" (PTC 70-71). Jed would like to deny his past, "to deny any sense of identity with the weeping child and the whole reality of the scene" (PTC 7). Mentally Jed envisions the past as a great avalanche threatening to destroy him, the rabbit in the meadow. After such self-examination he decides that when the landslide hits, he would much prefer to be a boulder

in it than the rabbit caught in its path (PTC 61-63, 65, 71, 72). Tjebbe Westendorp points out the psychological significance of this avalanche to Jed. "He has always felt threatened by the fearful nightmare of his past experiences" ("A Place to Come To" 126), symbolized by the forces of the avalanche. If he is to construct an acceptable self-identity, he must first face his past ("A Place to Come To" 126). If he cannot accept the boy he was, then there is no man for him to become (PTC 7). He can be only "like a somnambulist wandering a dark house" (PTC 14). The past which substitutes for the present or which goes unaccepted hinders the possibility of either Murray Guilfort's or Jed Tewksbury"s finding a gratifying selfhood.

Two other sources for poor self-images can be identified for Brad Tolliver and Cassie Spottwood. Unable to accept that he is middle-aged, Brad runs away from himself and his memories. He can no longer write what he feels and sees, and he finds himself drawn to women who personally mean nothing (F 27, 54, 76). Neil Nakadate writes of him: "Midway on the road of life Tolliver finds himself increasingly detached from others and from a sense of place . . ." (Robert Penn Warren: Critical Perspectives 176). Cassie Spottwood, too, has lost her sense of self-identity. Her loss has resulted from her youthful lover's fleeing from their love (MM 82). His desertion she describes as being like

> the sudden wound from the knife that slips or the first cool feel of scalding water . . ., which, in the instant before pain begins, you look down and see, but in seeing refuse to recognize as happening to you. (MM 73-74)

When she loses her love, she also loses her self-identity so that when she marries, she does so to continue losing herself in servitude to a husband who does not care (Justus, Achievement 295). Leonard Casper explains that all her years with a paralyzed husband have left her "listless," "loveless," "existless" (Evergreening Glen" 55). Warren's protagonists experience a poor self-concept because of their not having acceptable fathers, because of their having a past which they continue trying to live or which they fail to accept, and because of their having lost the great loves of their lives.

Unable to endure the pictures they have of themselves, these protagonists attempt to find new images which will offer them a self-knowledge they find agreeable. Most seek new identities through their association with others: wives, lovers, friends, employers, even enemies. They are convinced that if they can understand how and why their associates are so much in control of their lives, then they, too can apply that knowledge to their own circumstances to forge new, more acceptable identities. Often sex and dominance are the means by which they seek new self-images through others. Sometimes, however, a character like Adam Rosenzweig uses self-inflicted pain as a way to discover a more acceptable identity.

Percy Munn baldly admits he does not know himself. Contemplating his own situation, he thinks perhaps one of his problems is having grown up in a womanless house. Having lost his mother as an infant, he never had the opportunity to talk with her. Then, when he grew up and went to visit his old Aunt Ianthe Sprague, he discovered he had nothing meaningful to discuss with her, either (NR 96, 175-78). He longs to be like others, and occasionally he feels "caught up and drawn . . . into the same current that gripped the other men about him" as they discuss the affairs of the Tobacco Growers Association (NR 40, 29). But what he sees in them and misses in himself is the ability to make commitments, and so he habitually studies faces as he tries to catch the essence which makes them different (NR 42-43, 45, 359, 366). Adam Rosenzweig of Wilderness also studies faces, only to learn that what he observes there, innocence, can never be his (W 206). These two characters cannot attain what they discover in the faces of their acquaintances.

A number of critics identify Percy Munn's obsession for trying to find himself through his relationships with others. John M. Bradbury believes Munn seeks self-identification through joining the Tobacco Growers Association. If he can commit himself to a cause, then his uniting with the men in that group will give him new direction and meaning (Renaissance 67-68). Louise Gossett asserts that Munn exploits others as a symptom of his own

feelings of inadequacy (59-60). Alvan S. Ryan suggests that Munn's attempts to dominate are really his means of trying to define himself (341). Munn's violent acts, such as the execution of Trevelyan, Leonard Casper interprets as his will to create a more stable self (Dark and Bloody Ground 104). According to both Irene Hendry and Charles H. Bohner, Munn's quest for an alter ego is really another form of his search for personal identification ("The Regional Novel" 92; Robert Penn Warren 64).

Subconsciously Percy Munn believes that if he can dominate his wife May, he will be able to find himself in that dominance. Sometimes when he looks into his wife's eyes, he feels as if she may be withdrawing from him "into an impersonal and ambiguous distance" (NR 104). Because he wants her to return, he often employs physical force to bring her back. He squeezes her hand or hugs her so tightly that she protests (NR 44). He also uses her as a scapegoat. Knowing that the Association will suffer as a result of Senator Tolliver's desertion, he wants to make May suffer. He interprets her pain as a way to get into contact with himself. After making a cruel remark to her, he gazes into "her face for an instant as though he drew a nourishment from the distress which was so obvious upon it" (NR 108). Both Richard Law and Charles Bohner insist his cruel treatment of May is his way of trying to define himself ("Warren's Night Rider" 58; Robert Penn Warren 63).

Munn also seeks himself in his relationship with Lucille Christian, whom her father fondly calls Sukie. To him she is a symbol "for definition, for certainty. . . . in trying to extract her promise [to marry him], he was like a man who tries to find in the flux and confusion of data some point of reference . . ." (NR 209). Munn is impressed by her stillness and repose (NR 114). She represents "'something to move toward, to hope for. Some direction'" (NR 268). Because he believes Lucille is a whole woman, he turns to her after his wife leaves, hoping to find a pattern by which he can pull himself together. In Marshall Walker's study of both Sukie and May, he finds that these two completely opposite physical and emotional types personify Munn's lack of self-knowledge (Vision 91). By trying to discover the essence of these two women, Munn is also seeking to discover himself.

Munn likewise studies Captain Todd, one of the founders of the Tobacco Growers Association, as he looks for self-definition. Percy admires Todd, a man with a "deep, inner certainty of self" (NR 39). Describing Captain Todd, Munn asserts that the man's self-confidence makes him seem "like a great gray boulder, still submerged, in the course of some violent, flooded stream" (NR 40). What impresses Percy is Todd's sense of identity, which can withstand any force, as the gray boulder withstands the flood. Charles Bohner points out that Todd has the self-knowledge Munn wants for himself (68). For a short time Munn also studies

Dr. MacDonald, a member of the night vigilante group he evenentually joins. Since MacDonald appears to know himself thoroughly (NR 274, 275), Percy thinks of him as the man who "carried his future in himself" (NR 321). Ironically, Munn, who depends on others as a means of acquiring self-knowledge, admires the independence of those whom he seeks to imitate.

At Heaven's Gate depicts one character who searches for herself through others. Sue Murdock employs dominance to find an avenue toward what she hopes will be a new identity. Both John Lewis Longley and Leonard Casper assert that Sue tries to define herself through dominating the four men in her life: her father, Jerry, Slim, and Sweetie ("'At Heaven's Gate'" 20; Dark and Bloody Ground 112). Fascinated by her father's world, his freedom and power, she resists his control. She even searches for ways in which she can exert influence in his personal "empire" (Bradbury, "Patterns" 82). Early in the novel Sue proclaims, "Nobody owned her," (AHG 5) and thus her various encounters with her father become contests of control (AHG 6). At every opportunity she defies her father. When he asks her to sit, she stands; she turns down his dinner invitations; she refuses to use his money after she leaves home (AHG 6, 17, 211-12). Her father has what she wants, not money, but the power to control his own world. "He just doesn't say a word, and people do what he wants" (AHG 104). If she can resist her father, even dominate a situation in which he is involved, then perhaps she can find herself.

Often Sue's encounters with Jerry Calhoun turn into contests, too, ambushes from which she looks on triumphantly (AHG 14). In straightforward social intercourse Sue has little difficulty dominating her fiancé. When she beckons him from a business meeting with her father and other important state officials, he docilely comes, making her feel she has won some power game. In their relationship she orders and he obeys (AHG 29-30, 39-40). Barnett Guttenberg observes that she has no compunction about using sex to find herself (Web of Being 20). She will not permit Jerry to touch her except under her conditions. She decides when and where they first make love: in her father's house in the room directly under where Murdock can be heard moving about (AHG 16, 32, 104). In that one encounter she believes she dominates both her lover and her father. But what she most wants from Jerry she cannot take forcibly. She wants to understand him, to take him out of her father's control. She refuses his marriage proposal until he takes her home to meet his family. Then, without consulting him, she announces to Mr. Calhoun and Aunt Ursula that they are to be married (AHG 125). However, when she cannot shatter her father's influence on Jerry, she breaks the engagement (AHG 177). If she has no control over Jerry in this one important area, then she cannot possibly find a new identity through him, and she will have to look elsewhere.

Thus she turns to Slim Sarrett, to whom she says, "'Oh, Slim, you've got to make me know, know about me'" (AHG 251).

Early in their relationship Slim permits Sue to order him about, although she does not realize what he is doing (AHG 17, 146). She does not become his mistress, though, until he stands up to her father and apparently wins (AHG 248-50). If he can beat her father in a power play, then he is worthy of her love. However, when Sue learns that Slim is not the man of strength she had believed, when she learns that he has lied about his family background and that he is bisexual, she breaks off the relationship (AHG 252-58). Allen Shepherd says that Sue discovers her father and Slim "are almost mirror images" ("The Poles of Fiction" 714); both are deceitful and manipulative. Sue even declares she would like to kill Slim, because "He was the part of her she wanted to kill" (AHG 304). Nevertheless, even in her disappointment she feels a little thrill, since she has acquired a piece of information which she perhaps can use against Slim at some later time (AHG 256-57). Once again she has failed to discover an acceptable self-identity through her attempts to dominate another.

Finally, in a short, but interesting role reversal, Sue allows herself to be maneuvered by the man to whom she next turns. When she looks at Sweetie Sweetwater, she sees a man totally in control of himself. Because he is a major figure in the union challenging her father, he must be worthy of her obedience (AHG 302, 288-90). Her subservience, however, quickly becomes tiresome, and once again Sue attempts to dominate the man in her life. Pregnant by Sweetie, Sue

decides she wants to marry him and give her child a father. But Sweetie is already married, and although he has not seen his wife in years, he refuses to seek a divorce. He says he cannot marry Sue and retain the essence that is himself (AHG 312). Longley claims that Sweetie sees marriage as a middle-class trap. If he permits himself to be manipulated by Sue, then the image he has of himself would be flawed ("'At Heaven's Gate'" 22). When Sue loses, when she definitely knows Sweetie will not marry her, she plays her last trump in their power game. She tells him he is just like her father, and then she has an abortion (AHG 355, 310-20), her most self-destructive act. Following it, there is no hope she can ever find a new, acceptable identity. Unable to discover self-knowledge through the attempted domination of the men in her life, Sue destroys herself even before Slim Sarrett murders her. As Paul West says, "Sue, moving from man to man, reveals the futility of defining oneself through others" ("Robert Penn Warren" 220).

On the other hand, Jerry Calhoun, the other protagonist of At Heaven's Gate, does not understand the game of domination. In a conversation with Slim, he says, "'I reckon I just never got the point'" (AHG 15). Instead, Jerry seeks to comprehend himself by loving and understanding another human being, Sue Murdock. He spends many nights "trying to define what he knew about her, and about himself" (AHG 95). But since he cannot understand her, he

cannot know himself, either. He has absolutely no idea why Sue breaks their engagement, nor does he perceive why she becomes angry when he tries to discuss their situation (AHG 95, 135-41; 229-32). Charles R. Anderson asserts that Jerry's attempts to find himself through Sue Murdock fail (214). The key to self-identity does not lie outside, but rather inside the individual.

Jack Burden of All the King's Men likewise makes the mistake of trying to discover a self-identity through others. Believing a person is what he is only in relation to other people, Jack says if there are no other people, then there is no individual self (ATKM 136). Therefore, he tries to make a new self by studying Cass Mastern, Willie Stark, Anne Stanton, and Tiny Duffy (ATKM 373). A student of history, Jack studies the papers of Cass Mastern, a supposed distant relative killed in the Civil War. He collects the facts about Cass's life, but once he has them, he cannot make sense of them. He still does not know Cass Mastern, and therefore "he could not put down the facts about Mastern's world" (ATKM 200). The result is an unfinished dissertation and an incomplete Jack Burden, both of which he stores away in boxes real and figurative (ATKM 170, 201-02). The point Warren makes is that the key to Jack's self-understanding does not lie just in the past, in the study of Cass Mastern, but of necessity must also involve the present and future. Thus Jack becomes involved with a rising state politician, one Willie Stark, who comes

to believe the Machiavellian philosophy "the ends justify the means." Jack often finds himself watching Willie, how his eyes would bulge, and then he would think, "It's coming": the answer to all Jack's questions (ATKM 11). But the answers that matter are never there. Jack's self-identity does not reside only in his understanding Willie Stark, the Boss.

Like Percy Munn and Jerry Calhoun, Jack next turns to the woman in his life as he vainly strives for self-knowledge. What especially impresses him about Anne Stanton, the love of his youth, is her "deep inner certitude of self which comes from being all of one piece" (ATKM 220). If he can discover what gives Anne her purpose, then he can use it to find his own way. But when Anne becomes Willie Stark's mistress, all Jack's hopes are shattered, making him realize that he cannot find himself through Anne (ATKM 329).

Jeremiah Beaumont of World Enough and Time makes the same mistake. He, too, searches for self-identity through the woman he loves, Rachel Jordan Beaumont. He is first attracted to Rachel as a cause when he learns how she was seduced and then deserted by his own patron, the great Colonel Fort (WET 44, 56-59). Her dishonor and need for revenge become the bases on which Jeremiah's love is built. Before adopting Rachel's cause as his, he had been afraid to permit himself or others to know the real Jeremiah Beaumont. When he falls in love with his wife, he tells her she has given him himself, and thus it no longer matters

if people see the real Jeremiah (WET 84, 162). However, Jeremiah gradually begins to suspect that he has not truly found himself when he realizes he has allowed his happiness with Rachel to distract him from his vow of vengeance (WET 204-05). After Rachel's miscarriage of their child, he again promises to kill Fort, an oath he soon fulfills (WET 221-25, 262). Nevertheless, Jeremiah still has not attained self-knowledge, for he has not yet recognized that his murder of Fort was carried out, not for Rachel, but rather for himself and his own need to impose an idea upon the world. His search for self-identity through Rachel has been a failure; a man cannot find himself through another.

Amantha Starr, whose biggest identity crisis derives from her not knowing to which race she belongs, black or white, assumes a different personality with each person she meets. James Justus and Barnett Guttenberg claim Amantha's problem is that of other Warren protagonists; she believes she can find herself only through others (Achievement 245; Web of Being 71). Even Amantha says she has been defined "by the world around me" (BA 52). In her various encounters with Rau-Ru, her master's trusted slave, Amantha unwillingly identifies with his blackness. She especially is drawn to his face, which she describes as "of preternatural blackness, like enameled steel" (BA 99). When she thinks of his countenance, it is usually in terms of "black enamel" (BA 139, 221). His blackness reminds her of her own Negro heritage, but while she is in his presence, her white

heritage also lies near the surface of her subconscious mind. Although fascinated by Rau-Ru's blackness, she almost always contrasts it to something white in the environment. His color is made more outstanding by his white shirt or by the white crushed shell in the background (BA 268, 223). Ironically, while she resentfully seeks her own self-identity in Rau-Ru, her image of him constantly reminds her of her own division of identity, as does her image of her white husband, Tobias Sears.

In Tobias's presence Amantha often is practically overwhelmed by his "brilliant whiteness." She loves his color, which she sees as a means to subdue "some coldness and desperation" of her own (BA 201). In most of her accounts, she lingers longingly over his white, glimmering, marblelike features (BA 198-99, 200-02, 244, 278, 280, 288, 309, 310). In the descriptions of both men in her life, Amantha employs images which are equally lifeless: the enamel blackness of Rau-Ru and the marblelike whiteness of Tobias Sears. The fact that she chooses lifeless metaphors for her imagery suggests neither man is the key to her own self-identity. John M. Bradbury believes that

> The original black-white dichotomy which has dominated Manty's conscious life must undergo a mixing and merging process until it exhibits itself to her as the gray of the actual world, which is the color of her real self. (Fugitives 227)

The protagonists of The Cave similarly strive for self-identity either through love or domination. Monty Harrick, whose dying father is jealous of his son's youth and vitality,

searches for selfhood through Jo-Lea Bingham, a young girl pregnant with his child. When he looks into her face, he is practically paralyzed by her vitality and her sense of self, two traits he hopes to find through her (C 8, 12). Even though he often experiences a sense of completeness in her presence, he also resents that his love prevents his being more like his father, a real "heller" (C 10, 15). During these moods of animosity he reproaches Jo-Lea for his inability to be himself, for his not being "a chip off the old block" (C 20). She makes him feel like a nothing, like little pieces of iron filings being pulled around by a dimestore magnet (C 12, 30). Monty thinks he should want to be like both his father and his brother, but he is not, and it is convenient to blame Jo-Lea. At other times, when he forgets his role models, he is just himself with Jo-Lea, and that makes him feel as if for the first time in his life he really is Monty Harrick (C 340-41). His newly acquired sense of self-identity quickly disintegrates, however, when in confusion Jo-Lea mistakenly tells him the father of her child is his brother, Jasper. "She had been his, and now she was not. . . . He felt alone, and powerless. . . . It was as though the wind had snatched even his name away" (C 341). Here Monty learns what the other Warren protagonists must learn; he cannot find himself through another.

Isaac Sumpter, like Percy Munn and Sue Murdock, is convinced he can best find himself by dominating others. Isaac's favorite pastime is manipulating others, from his

hick neighbor Jebb Holloway to his college sweetheart, Rachel "Goldie" Goldstein. He maneuvers Jebb into going inside the cave, where he uses Jebb's terror of going farther underground to support his lies about Jasper. Every time he pulls the strings on others, Isaac says to himself, "I am myself" (C 279). Even though Isaac believes he is using Goldie, that he is being himself with her, he finally must recognize that instead, he has been taking his identity from her (C 117-28). He had gone to college a freshman nobody, but he became somebody. How, he does not like to admit; it has been through his relationship with Goldie. Because he has not been the dominant member of the pair, he tries to hurt Goldie when he has sex with Eustacia Pinckney Johnson, one of her self-seeking acquaintances. Of course Eustacia cannot wait to tell Goldie, and that ends his relationship with her and his successful identity at college (117-28). After the breakup, he is forced to admit that he feels as if "a chunk had literally been hacked out of his vitals" (C 131-32). Isaac has been exposed to the painful lesson that self-identity does not come from domination of others.

John Lewis Longley, in his critical evaluation of Warren's novels through Flood, says of Brad Tolliver: "Seeking himself, he can define himself only in the reactions he produces in others: attraction, admiration, envy" ("Robert Penn Warren: The Deeper Rub" 978). Thus Brad's marriage to Lettice Poindexter fails when she does

not give him the self-identity he wants from her. During the early part of their marriage, in 1939, he had indeed begun to experience "the intuition of some new possibility in himself" (F 209). Then the shooting had occurred, the incident in which Cal Fiddler, his sister Maggie's husband, had killed her lover, and at that point Brad's marriage changes. Lettice comes to him and tells him they are largely responsible for Maggie's affair. Sure that Lettice has betrayed him by not providing the self-image he desires, Brad withdraws until she is forced to seek a divorce in Reno (F 335).

Both Angelo Passetto and Cassie Spottwood in Meet Me in the Green Glen hope to acquire self-knowledge through their relationships with each other. Desiring to renew his youthful picture of himself, Angelo Passetto undertakes to remake Cassie Spottwood in the image of the women he remembers from before he went to prison (MM 166). He teaches her how to dress her hair, and he buys her a shiny red dress, black stockings, and pointed, black patent leather shoes. In the morning as she dresses to attend her invalid husband, Angelo refuses to look at her in her

> old dingy robe, for if he saw her like that, in the morning light, he might not remember her the way he wanted to during the day. Something might happen, the bottom might drop out of everything, he would feel himself shriveling away to nothing. (MM 169)

Angelo, who is living a dream with Cassie, knows his fantasy is very fragile; the least ripple will destroy the narcissistic self-image he has found with her. On the other

hand, Cassie lives for the time she spends with Angelo; he gives her a different, more acceptable identity (MM 151, 157). Angelo makes her feel alive and herself, emotions her husband Sunderland never instilled (MM 152). She tells Angelo, "'I feel I just got born'" (MM 153). However, after Angelo runs off for a wild weekend with Charlene, Sunderland's illegitimate mulatto daughter, everything changes (MM 203-07). She permits Angelo to leave, then kills her husband, a crime for which Angelo is charged and found guilty (MM 358-59, 224, 259). Even though Cassie eventually admits she is the murderer (MM 313), no one believes her and Angelo is executed. She loses the self-worth she thinks she found through Angelo, and thus she withdraws from reality into a world where everything conforms to her desires (MM 355-60). Neither Angelo nor Cassie can realize the self through love.

Jed Tewksbury is the latest of Warren's protagonists to strive toward new self-identity through the love of another. Rozelle Hardcastle, Jed's lifelong love, appears to hold the secret of Jed's self-knowledge. In high school on prom night Rozelle had parked with Jed and asked him to kiss her so that she might know what there was to know about him (PTC 33). What that kiss did was to make Jed very aware that he did not know anything about himself. Her kiss made him feel as if Rozelle had breathed a soul into him, for the first time (PTC 34-35). Following that one date, Rozelle fades from his life, to reappear many years later after his

wife's death and his return to the South to teach at the university in Nashville, Tennessee. Shortly after they renew their acquaintance, Rozelle tells him, "'You don't know what you are, Jed Tewksbury'" (PTC 114). Since she can say that to him, Jed believes she must know what he is. If he tries hard enough, he can wrest the secret from her. So begins a long, destructive affair between the two, an affair which Peter Glassman calls a means of self-discovery for Jed (441). But as Leonard Casper points out, Rozelle's "body is a place to come to, only to be lost in" when Jed fails to discover the identity he seeks ("Circle with a Center" 403). Instead of being the means to definition, sex with Rozelle robs Jed of all sense of identity. All Robert Penn Warren's protagonists, with the exception of Adam Rosenzweig, make the painful discovery that the search for selfhood cannot be fulfilled through another human being.

Adam is Warren's only protagonist to hunt identity through self-inflicted physical pain. Just as Adam's father bore the pain of dying for six months, so, too, does Adam bear the misery of the boot he invented to correct his crippled foot and ankle. He sees his pain as the agony of birth, "the price of being born into manhood" (W 17). Both Barnett Guttenberg and L. Hugh Moore have commented upon the symbolic significance of Adam's boot. Guttenberg calls it the representation of Adam's "false being" (Web of Being 105), while Moore believes it represents the "time honored

traditions" which man often finds painful to follow (Robert Penn Warren 181). When Adam leaves for America to satisfy his idealistic need to help the Negro fight against oppression, he takes two items with him, his corrective boot and a satchel filled with religious objects given him by his uncle (W 31-32). These religious relics he takes as painful reminders of his own lost religious zeal. Stanley Edgar Hyman finds in the boot and satchel the symbols of Adam's "divided inheritance," which he will leave behind at the end of the novel when he walks out of the Wilderness (25). In America Adam constantly wears his boot to remind him of the painful, shameful experience of his first night ashore. Wandering the streets of New York, he sees a man hanging from a lamp post, and his immediate response is sympathy. When he realizes the man is a Negro, his compassion disappears, to be replaced almost immediately by a sense of guilt over what has just happened (W 43-45). Even after observing that the man has been mutilated, Adam still feels no returning sympathy, so that he is forced to ask, "Can I be that vile?" (W 45). His sense of shame deepens, however, after he survives a black pogrom in which he is caught. Rescued by a black man, Adam falls asleep, awakening later to painful memories.

> He was overcome by sadness. The sadness flowered into a strange sense of guilt. For a moment it was a guilt without reference, without crime. Unless, he thought, the sadness and the guilt came from the realization that he was himself. (W 56)

Adam recognizes that "the redeeming experience of

sympathetic pain had been withdrawn from him. He had not been worthy of the pain. Ah, that was his guilt" (W 57). Adam must discover that neither physical nor spiritual pain alone can give him the new identity he seeks. Self-knowledge cannot be so easily attained.

In Robert Penn Warren's ten novels a definite pattern in the search for self-identity develops. The protagonists pose the question, "Who am I?" and the self-images which arise in answer are unacceptable to them. They cannot tolerate seeing themselves as hollow men, as dual personalities who must hide behind masks. They cannot accept themselves as victims, as lost individuals who strive to cover their lack of identity by playing fictional roles in the drama of life. Because of the offensiveness of the answers the protagonists discover to their universal question, they look around them for the origins of their unacceptable self-images. Most frequently they blame their fathers for what they, the sons and daughters, have become. A few charge the past for what they are; another makes his own middle age the culprit, while still another blames the lack of love she has experienced in her own life. During their search for the sources of their poor self-images, none, at first, think to examine themselves as probable causes. That possibility occurs to them very late in their quests. Once having recognized their untenable natures and having begun to look for the reasons why, Warren's protagonists then desperately seek new, more worthy

self-images through dominance or love or pain. But before they can create for themselves their long-sought-after new identities, they must recognize that they themselves have been the biggest hindrance between them and self-knowledge. To make this prison of the self a more vital metaphor, Robert Penn Warren employs numerous images of entrapment, retreat, and release to emphasize the difficulty associated with the protagonists' pursuit of selfhood.

Notes

[1] Justus, Achievement 160, 166; John Lewis Longley, Jr., Robert Penn Warren, Southern Writers Series 2 (Austin: Steck-Vaughn, 1969) 6.

[2] A number of critics have discussed the emptiness of the Warren protagonist as revealed through the theme of the search for self-knowledge. See especially Jean Garrigue, "Many Ways of Evil," Kenyon Review 6 (1944): 135-38; Leonard Casper, "Ark, Flood, and Negotiated Covenant," Four Quarters 21.4 (1972): 114; Justus, Achievement 166; Joseph Frank, "Romanticism and Reality in Robert Penn Warren," The Widening Gyre: Crisis and Mastery in Modern Literature (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1963) 182.

[3] Strandberg, A Colder Fire 3; Richard Allan Davison, "Robert Penn Warren's 'Dialectical Configuration' and The Cave," CLA Journal 10 (1967): 351-52; Robert Hatch, "Down to the Self," Nation 4 July 1959: 138; Charles H. Bohner, Robert Penn Warren, Twayne's United States Authors Series 69 (New York: Twayne, 1964) 150.

[4] Victor Strandberg, in A Colder Fire 3, discusses the wilderness of the self. Granville Hicks has suggested a Christian allegory for the meaning of the wilderness. He contends that the title and setting are intended to represent the wilderness in which Christ spent his forty days of temptation. See Granville Hicks, "Crusader in a World of Chance" [Wilderness], Critical Essays on Robert

Penn Warren, ed. William Bedford Clark (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1981) 51-53.

[5] A number of critics have referred to Adam's clubfoot as a symbol of man's moral flaw, his guilt resulting from the Original Sin of Adam and Eve. For a discussion of the various meanings of Adam's lame foot, see Guttenberg, Web of Being 105; Frank Gado, Introduction, First Person xxxi; L. Hugh Moore, Jr., "Robert Penn Warren, William Styron, and the Use of Greek Myth," Critique 8.2 (1965-66): 76; C. Hugh Holman, "'To Grieve on Universal Bones': The Past as Burden," The Immoderate Past: The Southern Writer and History (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1977) 86; Hicks 52; Stanley Edgar Hyman, "Coming Out of the Wilderness?" New Leader 44 (1961): 24-25.

[6] Bohner 75; James Hall, "The Poet Turned First-Degree Murderer: Robert Penn Warren," The Lunatic Giant in the Drawing Room: The British and American Novel Since 1930 (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1968) 86.

[7] John M. Bradbury, The Fugitives: A Critical Account (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1958) 212; John M. Bradbury, "Robert Penn Warren's Novels: The Symbolic and Textual Patterns," Accent 13.2 (1953): 84; Frank 192; Leonard Casper, Robert Penn Warren: The Dark and Bloody Ground (Seattle: U of Washington P, 1960) 145.

# CHAPTER III

## IMAGES OF ENTRAPMENT AS DELINEATORS OF CHARACTER

In Robert Penn Warren's novels the self is the most significant obstruction blocking the protagonists' search for identity. In The Cave Warren paradoxically defines this trap as "the dark mystery of the self from which a man must escape to find himself" (396). Before his release this individual suffers from uncertainty, and thus he is like a "locked-in man [who] may himself be only a dream," explains Warren in "Poetry and Selfhood" (49). Apparently Warren has been fascinated by the idea of self-entrapment throughout his career. Writing in his 1959 essay "Writer at Work," he describes his own compulsion to write as a type of self-entrapment (4). Even in his literary criticism this same idea appears.

> The story of his youth is one of entrapments--and of his failure to break out into the world of mature action. His [mad] ambition . . . to break out of the entrapments, became . . . another entrapment. . . . He found release . . . only in repudiating the self, and all the self stood for, in order to save the self. ("John Greenleaf Whittier" 54, 55)

Similarly, the critics have commented on Warren's preference for protagonists trapped within themselves. Writing in The Burden of Time, John L. Stewart refers to this recurrent character type as a lonely, self-absorbed egotist whose self-entrapment isolates him from his fellowman (448).

Therefore, Stewart continues, the majority of the protagonists are "emotionally stunted. They have never really grown up" (517). A part of that emotional immaturity, observes John Lewis Longley, is the characters' resorting to such obsessions as private or public service to find themselves ("The Deeper Rub" 971). A third consequence, claims Louise Y. Gossett in "Violence and the Integrity of the Self," is a tendency toward violence (53). The paradox of the self as the most serious impediment to self-discovery is a persistent theme in Warren's novels. Repeatedly the protagonists establish goals intimately linked with their desire for acceptable identities. In every instance, however, some form of self-imprisonment blocks the fulfillment of their objectives. The entrapment imagery surrounding each character in his search for selfhood contributes greatly to Warren's development of character.

What comprises self-entrapment to the Warren protagonist varies. In some instances it is the character's inability to respond to the needs of the people around him. When they ask for his involvement in their lives, he does not have the self-knowledge which would let him know what part of himself to give up in order to make the commitment. Failing to meet these demands external to himself, he frequently experiences a sense of guilt, another form of self-imprisonment. His failures and their accompanying guilt feelings then serve to isolate him even further from

the community of mankind. Thus alienation becomes a third form of entrapment. At this point the protagonist has such low self-esteem that he begins looking for a means to bolster his increasingly poor self-image. Sometimes he turns to the pursuit of material success as his means. He becomes a man so possessed with ambition that his very need traps him into a personally unacceptable mode of behavior. At other times he champions an impossibly idealistic cause, which by its very nature dooms him to failure, thus reestablishing the pattern of entrapment from which he seeks escape. Or else the protagonist feels trapped by circumstances completely beyond his control. Unable to cope with such realities as his racial heritage or family background, he runs away, only to discover new snares like self-pity or hatred. The traps the hero discovers in his search for selfhood are both internal and external to himself. Those which are outside himself he interprets in such a way that they become another part of the self hindering his discovery of identity.

The goal of Percy Munn, from Night Rider, is to take his place among the brotherhood of men. Above everything else he wants to belong. Only then can he discover an appropriate identity. In his quest he joins first the Association of Growers of Dark Fired Tobacco, and later the illegal vigilante branch of the Association, the Night Riders. He hopes involvement will be the key to his finding self-knowledge (Olson 168). Needing to be a part of the

group, at the same time Munn is convinced he must shield himself from it. To protect the self, he thinks, he must erect a "blank brick wall" between the world and himself (NR 20). That blank wall becomes a major image of entrapment in the novel. Emotionally Percy cuts himself off from the very group he has sought to join. He is afraid he will reveal too much of himself to his fellowman (Stewart, Burden 473). No wonder Munn is "locked inside the darkness that was himself" (NR 148), just as he feels trapped by his participation in both the Association and the Night Riders. After all, he has joined these organizations to feel more a part of the community, but instead they have served only to intensify his lifelong isolation. His feelings of helplessness are greatly amplified by symbolic clusters of entrapment imagery.

Yearning to be part of the group, ironically Percy Munn feels trapped by the crowd which has gathered to support the Association. The opening image of the crowd on the train places a burden upon him; it weighs him down; it makes him feel crushed, engulfed.

> Percy Munn, feeling the first pressure as the man behind him lurched into contact, arched his back and tried to brace himself to receive the full impact, which, instinctively, he knew would come. But he was not braced right. (NR 5)

Literally and symbolically, he is "not braced right" to be either a part of or apart from the society of man. This early image immediately begins to characterize Percy Munn. Desiring to protect the self inviolate, "Mr. Munn again

resented that pressure that was human, too, because you could not isolate and blame any one of those human beings who made it" (NR 6). This time the crowd image focuses attention upon a second character defect, Munn's inclination to blame others for what essentially is his own responsibility. Still a third of Munn's characteristic weaknesses is highlighted by the crowd image when "Mr. Munn felt a momentary irritation and disgust with that dead, hot weight of flesh which would plunge against him and press him . . ." (NR 6). He does not like the crowd which he seeks. Intellectually Munn wants to join the brotherhood of mankind, represented by the crowd, but emotionally he detests the hordes of humanity surrounding him, and he would remain aloof from them, if only he could. He feels like the man who knows he is to be inundated by slowly rising flood waters; Munn is trapped by the flow of humanity (NR 7).

Additionally, the crowd image functions as a thematic device, according to a number of critics. Alvan S. Ryan believes the crowd is symbolic of Munn's sense of isolation even in a throng (340). John M. Bradbury, in "Symbolic and Textual Patterns," sees the opening image as a political symbol representative of the society Munn seeks, but from which he is restrained by his own aloofness (78, 79). On a second level, Ryan claims, the mob also represents the pressures which will lead Munn to participate in the illegal activities of the Tobacco Growers Association. Just as the power of the crowd maneuvers his body, so too will Munn's

need to belong manipulate his cooperation with the Night Riders' plans (340). James H. Justus, Charles H. Bohner, and L. Hugh Moore all agree the train crowd is symbolic of the pressures forcing Munn into his pursuit of violence throughout the novel.[1] In his need to acquire self-knowledge, Percy Munn tries to find his identity through interaction with his fellowman, which to him means doing what they want. As he discovers, however, his cooperation with the vigilantes does not supply him with an acceptable self-image. Indeed, it succeeds only in making him dislike himself even more than he did before his joining. Thus the trap of the self is intensified by the crowd imagery of the novel.

A second major image cluster, the hand upon the shoulder, provides another type of pressure entrapment. Munn's acquaintances frequently are pictured with their hands on his shoulder as they attempt to convince him to do something they want. As a lawyer, Munn has met a number of politically important men, among them Senator Tolliver and Dr. MacDonald, both powerful advocates of the Association. An astute judge of men, Tolliver recognizes Munn's political ambitions, and he uses the bait of political advancement to involve the younger man in the activities of the group. Early in the negotiations Tolliver "stretched out his hand paternally and laid it on Mr. Munn's shoulder" (NR 79). Once a member of the Association, Munn becomes one of its board of directors,

working directly with Senator Tolliver. Speaking in favor of advising the farmers not to sell their tobacco to the buying companies, Tolliver again paternally places his hand upon Munn's shoulder, forcing agreement (NR 95). At this point Munn does not recognize "he had been the dupe in the game the Senator was playing . . ." (NR 97). Later, after the Association boycott has begun to work, Tolliver tries to convince the board that the time to sell has arrived. Percy Munn votes with the Senator, but the motion fails. Leaving the meeting, Tolliver "hesitated a moment beside Mr. Munn, and then reached out to touch him on the shoulder" (NR 101). In each instance the hand on the shoulder has convinced Munn to cooperate with Senator Tolliver. In one of the many instances in which Percy refuses to accept responsibility for his own actions, Munn claims that the Senator's hand on his shoulder finally convinced him to join the Night Riders vigilante group (NR 124-25). According to Munn, it is Tolliver's characteristic gesture which has trapped him into activities he would not normally support. Similarly, Dr. MacDonald and Bill Christian use the same technique to persuade Munn to cooperate with them (NR 295, 14, 18, 113, 248).

The Association itself suggests entrapment. Still unsure about his role in the tobacco alliance, Munn allows himself to be dragged off to one of its meetings, thinking perhaps his involvement will promote his political ambitions. Just before arriving, Percy questions his

motives. "Politicians were slaves, . . . and if he desired anything of life, that thing was to be free, and himself" (NR 15). Then, at the meeting door, Percy loses all choice when Mr. Christian literally shoves him inside (NR 15). Munn subconsciously has realized that his joining the board will be a kind of trap, but he has allowed himself to be pushed into the situation which he has both sought and avoided. Following the interview, the group does indeed ask Munn to join. Instinctively his first response is "No," but his friends' attitudes and comments finally compel his acceptance (NR 30-31). Over the next several months Munn wholeheartedly works for the Association, but at the same time he perceives "that more and more [it] was claiming, not only his energies and interest, but also that inner substance of his being which was peculiarly himself" (NR 31). Ironically the Association, through which Munn was to discover self-knowledge, becomes the trap which engulfs his identity and prevents the very goal it was to serve. Such entrapment images as the crowd, the hand upon the shoulder, and the Association underscore the innate character weaknesses standing between Munn and his discovery of an acceptable self-image.

Although At Heaven's Gate features four different protagonists, the entrapment imagery works almost exclusively to delineate Jerry Calhoun. Like Percy Munn, he is driven by a need to find an acceptable identity, and like Munn he believes the discovery can come only through

his joining the brotherhood of man. But to Calhoun this concept of brotherhood means something different from what it suggests to Munn. What Jerry wants is material success, represented by Bogan Murdock and his capitalistic world. Calhoun can find self-knowledge, he believes, only if he becomes a successful businessman like Murdock, and his ambition is one of the major metaphors of entrapment in the novel.

Just as Jerry wants something from Murdock, so, too, does Murdock need something from Jerry. He wants his daughter's happiness. When Sue chooses Jerry as her future husband, her father goes to work on her fiancé. Like Senator Tolliver, Dr. MacDonald, and Bill Christian from Night Rider, Murdock likes to use his physical presence to influence others. It is not at all unusual to find Murdock in deep conversation with Jerry, with his hand on the shoulder of the younger man. After the announcement of the engagement, Murdock places his hand on Jerry's shoulder and welcomes him as a positive influence upon Sue. Jerry quickly recognizes Murdock's subtle pressure. "Jerry could feel the pressure of the fingers closing there, the pressure of each finger firm and distinct" (AHG 110). Even though marriage to Sue and her father's support are his aims, Jerry suspects that such an arrangement will be a kind of trap since it will place him even more directly under the control of Murdock.

A bit later Bogan uses identical tactics to persuade Jerry to lie. Jerry's family background is undistinguished, but he does have a great-uncle, Old Governor Calhoun, who served his state well. Because Murdock wants a son-in-law with socially impeccable credentials, he casually mentions to some of his friends that Jerry is the grandson of Governor Calhoun. As he tells his lie, he simultaneously puts his hand on Jerry's shoulder, as if to quell any disclaimer which might follow (AHG 128-29). His tactic is effective, since Jerry allows his ambitions to trap him once again; he does not deny Murdock's claim. His silent lie works, because shortly thereafter Murdock appoints the young man vice president of one of his banks (AHG 130-31). Finally, after Sue has broken their engagement, Jerry fears that his chances for a successful business career will be withdrawn. That fear sets him up as a dupe in Bogan's shady dealings. Having learned about some fake securities supposedly offered by the bank, Jerry confronts his boss with the information. Neither confirming nor denying the charges, Bogan gives his employee the opportunity to check into the situation. However, Calhoun backs off, saying that such a verification will not be necessary, after all. At the end of that conference Murdock places his hand on Jerry's shoulder and offers him a not-so-subtle bribe (AHG 283-84). This image of Murdock's hand upon Calhoun's shoulder symbolizes the pressure of the trap his ambition has set for him. Wanting to say something to Murdock,

> . . . he did not know what it was he had to say, as though he were a table, a tree, some natural object with a vitality locked deep within it, an object about which people moved and spoke, and which observed, eyelessly, and knew, and suffered with the numb, obscure germination within it. (AHG 279)

Jerry is painfully trapped within himself, unable to establish an acceptable identity because of his capitulation to the ambush of personal ambition.

Jerry's love for Sue Murdock functions as another entrapment image which aids in the delineation of his character. Although he loves her, he also is frightened by her. "Yes, sometimes she had scared him. . . . Hell, anybody would be scared, the way she acted, acting sometimes like the minute was all there was . . ." (AHG 117). The operative idea here is the word act; Sue is active, not passive, a constant reminder to Jerry of his own passivity (AHG 115, 116). She causes him to feel inadequate and betrayed (AHG 96). Sue can make Jerry do things he does not want to do. Once, during one of Jerry's important meetings with Murdock and some associates, Sue, unobserved by the others, motions him to join her. Making his excuses, Jerry slips out like a puppet on strings to where she waits. After an argument he returns to his business friends, feeling

> that the very walls of the room, the high walls which reached into the floating shadows of the ceiling, were bending toward him, converging saggingly upon him with a soft and betraying mass, like wax. (AHG 31)

The image of the entrapping room parallels the self-entrapment of Jerry's attachment to Sue Murdock. His love

and ambition ironically make him an emotional cripple, a man who cannot act or make a decision independently (AHG 99, 271).

Feelings of guilt and terror also make Jerry feel trapped. After Sue breaks their engagement, Jerry imagines how Bogan will look at him with "vindictive accusation," because Jerry has failed, the one thing his patron cannot tolerate (AHG 218-19). The expectations others have of Calhoun are traps, and his inability to fulfill those expectations is another. His failure causes Jerry to feel as if his acquaintances are "ringing him around . . . [making him squirm] like a baby mouse you held up by the tail" (AHG 135). His incompetence grows into guilt when Sue temporarily disappears after the breakup. He can imagine himself accused of kidnapping, of murder, after which "they would ring him around with their faces, and the light would be glaring on his face, and the world would try to make him confess" (AHG 140). This entrapping ring represents the world Jerry has sought to join, but which he believes he has lost when Sue leaves him. His defeat leaves Jerry with strong guilt feelings, another form of self-entrapment. However, his sense of fault takes a far more serious turn in his dealings with his family. Ashamed of his background, his clumsy father, his deformed Uncle Lew, his senile Aunt Ursula, Jerry has excluded them from his plans. They just are "not in the picture. There was no place in the picture for them" (AHG 382). Yet after he

is arrested and accused of embezzlement, his father supports him. When Mr. Calhoun reaches out to him, Jerry flinches back; the one thing he cannot bear is having his father touch him (AHG 381). Guilt is the barrier between him and the comfort his family has to offer. Because he has denied them, he believes he is not worthy to accept the love they volunteer. The entrapment images of At Heaven's Gate, including those of ambition, love, and terror and guilt, have all worked together to expose Jerry Calhoun's serious character flaws. Such defects as his passivity, inability to accept responsibility, and shame of a loving family hinder Calhoun's self-discovery, his major goal.

In All the King's Men, Jack Burden is the protagonist dissatisfied with himself. His problem, too, is complicated by his unwillingness to act to find an acceptable identity. Above everything he wants just to be left alone. Noninvolvement is his goal. But if he is to find self-knowledge, he must admit his common brotherhood with mankind, and he must participate in the world of man. Life, to him, is just a box, a trap, a container of swill, because it demands sociality (ATKM 375, 34). The very idea of involvement makes Jack feel "caught and tangled and mired and stuck like an ox in a bog and a cat in flypaper" (ATKM 442). The activities of his friends and acquaintances requiring his participation are like a giant snowball chasing him downhill, trying to catch him under its great

weight (ATKM 318). He defines commitment in Promethean terms:

> Maybe you had to get chained to the high pinnacle with the buzzards pecking at your liver and lights before you could see it. Maybe it took a genius to see it. Maybe it took a hero to act on it. (ATKM 418)

Indeed, Jack Burden will become involved in a number of traps requiring heroic responses before he is released from the snare of noninvolvement to discover an acceptable self-image.

Like Jerry Calhoun, Jack Burden has no will to act when action is required (ATKM 381). Burden himself accounts for his inertia. After the deaths of his best friend Adam Stanton and his boss Willie Stark, Jack says, ". . . I didn't feel anything except a kind of numbness and soreness inside, more numbness than soreness. . . . there was just the numbness" (ATKM 427-28). In his paralysis of will nothing seems important (ATKM 430). This particular trap is depicted quite effectively in a seesaw image Jack uses to describe his relationship with Anne Stanton, the love of his youth, in the days following the two funerals. Referring to their relationship, he claims they have achieved "a beautiful and perilous equilibrium" (ATKM 429).

> It was as though we each sat on the end of a seesaw, beautifully balanced, but not in any tidy little play yard but over God knows what blackness on a seesaw which God had rigged up for us kiddies. And if either of us should lean toward the other, even a fraction of an inch, the balance would be upset and we would both go sliding off into that blackness. But we fooled God, and didn't say a word. (ATKM 429)

Jack does not want to ask Anne the question most on his

mind, because the answer will disrupt his benumbed state and demand response. He quietly wonders to himself who made the telephone call to Adam, the call which revealed Anne's affair with Willie Stark and set Adam off on his rampage of murder. When he finally poses the question, Anne does not know the answer, and "so we resumed our conspiracy of silence, while the seesaw wavered and swayed beneath us and the black clawed up at us and we clung on" (ATKM 430).

Jack longs for noninvolvement, but the three women in his life demand his response. Thus love provides an additional set of entrapment images, as Jack perceives them. Characterizing his youthful love for Anne Stanton, he says it is similar to the feeling a person would get if he inherited a million dollars, or if he just learned he had cancer. His love has harpooned him as if he were a whale. His love of Anne is the trap which robs him of himself. His adolescent experiences with Anne Stanton definitely shape his later choice of a wife. To avoid feeling duty-bound, he seeks a mate who demands no commitment. He marries Lois, "a beautiful, juicy, soft, vibrant, sweet-smelling, sweet breathed machine for provoking and satisfying the appetite" (ATKM 321-22). As long as he views her as a "mystic combination of filet mignon and a Georgia peach," he feels no entrapment (ATKM 321). Gradually, though, he realizes that she, too, wants his commitment. That demand he likens to a series of interesting imprisonment images. In one he is the rat

caught stealing cheese from the pantry. In another he is a tiny speck of marine life being devoured by some carnivore of the sea. In a third he sees himself as the Duke of Clarence drowning in the butt of wine, which is Lois (ATKM 321-22). The first image suggests that even though Jack will not admit it, he is largely responsible for his current situation. In the other two, however, he tries to assume the guise of the innocent prey being victimized by an evil villain. All these images of entrapment help to delineate both Jack's paralysis of will and his inability to accept responsibility.

Finally, Jack's love/hate relationship with his mother provides an additional set of entrapment images. Referring to the mother-dominated house in which he grew up, he sarcastically calls it "the Kingdom by the sea" to which he always comes back. Almost magically it and his mother force his unwilling, periodic visits (ATKM 110, 118). To him, returning home is like being in an "octopus tank at the aquarium" (ATKM 39). There, encounters with his mother remind Jack of his own insecurity and self doubts. Away from her he is convinced she cares nothing for him. He is just another man to do her bidding. But when he is with her, he completely forgets his previous impressions and bends easily to her will (ATKM 117). Like other Warren characters, she uses her hands to control her son. Each of his visits follows a little ritual. First she ushers him into the living room and seats him upon the couch. Then, sitting

down herself, she makes her son lie down with his head in her lap so that they can discuss what he has been doing. Jack describes the scene

> I let myself go, and keeled over toward her. I lay on my back, with my head on her lap, the way I had known I would do. She let her left hand lie on my chest, . . . and her right hand on my forehead. (ATKM 119)

His mother's hands symbolize her ability to control, and she uses them intentionally for that purpose (ATKM 118, 134, 135). All these imprisonment images force Jack to recognize his apathy and lack of purpose, the tools he uses to avoid participating in the lives of others.

Unlike Jack Burden, Jeremiah Beaumont of World Enough and Time actively pursues involvement in the life of another as a means to self-discovery. To dramatize his concept of the ideal, he champions what he considers the cause of Rachel Jordan. Having been seduced and made pregnant by Cassius Fort, an elderly, married statesman of Kentucky, Rachel becomes for Beaumont an image of defiled womanhood, betrayed and in need of his protection (WET 63-66). After a long, arduous courtship, she agrees to marry him, if he will kill Fort. His reaction to her stipulation is immediate and forceful. "'What she said struck me like the clap of thunder and the flash of lightning when the bolt rips the summer tree before your face and unravels all its green . . .'" (WET 125). Their "great Purpose" is born, "the awful commitment" which will dominate the rest of Jeremiah's life (WET 127, 163). Vengeance, his means to self-identity, is

also the trap that prevents what he seeks. Jeremiah calls revenge "the perfect justice self-defining and since defining self, defining all else" (WET 181).

When Jeremiah challenges his former patron, Fort refuses to fight, yielding the younger man no socially acceptable outlet of vengeance. Fort's evasion leaves Beaumont feeling imprisoned. "That was the old circle. Whatever happened, whatever road he took, the circle always closed where it began" (WET 181). Even though he has not yet killed Fort, he and Rachel marry, and in their happiness they forget the bond on which their marriage is forged. Then circumstances intervene, and Beaumont renews his vow. This time, however, he goes to Fort as an assassin and accomplishes his mission. Looking back on the murder, Jeremiah claims, "For that was the way of the world. To drive you to a lie and then snare you by lies and false witness against all facts in the case" (WET 320). Beaumont, who actually did commit the murder, is arrested and eventually found guilty on false evidence and perjured testimony. Beaumont's act of vengeance and the subsequent events make him wonder what truth is. He looks into his own heart and finds no answer (WET 360). Jeremiah comes to see the world as a trap, but he also learns there is another trap, concealed in "his own heart. And that trap was the 'idea'--the idea itself and pure" (WET 228). Jeremiah's idealism, which has driven him to avenge his wife's dishonor, effectively traps him within the prison of the self. As

Frederick P. W. McDowell says, Jeremiah is imprisoned by his own "fervent personality" (47).

To realize an ideal image of himself, Beaumont tries to defend the honor of a woman whom he considers a victim. However, all his efforts make him see himself as the martyr betrayed by those who call themselves friends. Treachery is a trap from which he can discover no escape. One of the images of that betrayal is the now-familiar gesture of the hand upon the shoulder. Fort, who has betrayed Jeremiah through his moral failure, snares Beaumont beneath the hand he places on his shoulder in their first confrontation. Jeremiah's response is to tremble with rage and to jerk away from contact. There is, nonetheless, no escape from Fort's influence upon him (WET 139). Similarly, Wilkie Barron, urging Jeremiah to remain true to the cause of Relief, "grasped his shoulder harder, driving his fingers in, and leaned at him . . ." (WET 167). Nor is there deliverance from Wilkie's magnetism, because Beaumont carries out every strategy for which his friend has programed him. The hand upon the shoulder exerts a crushing weight from which Jeremiah finds no release (WET 320). Another simile of betrayal and entrapment is that of the black flood. After hearing his friend testify against him at his trial, Jeremiah feels "like a man caught in a black flood and being borne down and down . . ." (WET 379). He is "a chip on the tide," captured by events over which he has no control (WET

312). He is like the swimmer snarled in seaweed, "drowning in lies, and nobody would stretch out a hand to him . . ." (WET 320). As Harry Modean Campbell says, Jeremiah is not free; his hopeless situation is emphasized by the flood and tide images which encircle him (229).

These metaphors of entrapment, the vow of vengeance and betrayal, contribute to the characterization of Jeremiah Beaumont. Dissatisfied with the role life has for him, he pursues a course of action which he hopes will give him the heroic stature of the knights from the Age of Chivalry. He wants to be like the medieval knight charging to the rescue of a damsel in distress. But, of course, Beaumont is hopelessly out of touch with reality, because history reveals there were no such knights. Similarly, these same symbols emphasize Beaumont's helplessness in the real world. His sense of idealism has not prepared him for the betrayal of his best and only friend, Wilkie Barron. He is not equipped to recognize how Barron maneuvers him into carefully orchestrated situations. It is Wilkie who suggests to Beaumont that Rachel Jordan needs a champion. It is also Wilkie Barron who prints and distributes the flyer which sets Jeremiah off in pursuit of Fort, a quest which ends with the politician's death. The various images of entrapment underscore Beaumont's idealism, helplessness, naiveté, and gullibility.

Of Robert Penn Warren's first five novels, Band of Angels features the protagonist who complains most loudly

about the trap of self. Amantha Starr, with her mixed racial heritage, wants desperately to be white, but feels guilty for being ashamed of her black mother. The whole world appears a prison, crowding her with people, words, papers, letters (BA 214). Her surroundings are an avalanche; she is the pebble caught in its path (BA 220). Her whole environment is a flood, "a physical, suffocating mass, green like a wave, shot through with light and dark, whirling over me" (BA 296). Appropriately, her world is the South, and for a while a Northern boarding school, before the turbulent era of the Civil War. Such images as the forceful avalanche and flood establish the helplessness Amantha experiences over her inability to change. Until she learns to accept herself, she will be the victim of self-imprisonment.

Among all Warren's self-entrapment images, the most terrifying is found in this novel: that of the carnivorous plant.

> You must have seen pictures of those tropic plants--great, fat-petaled, luxurious blossoms in jungle darkness--that entrap and devour insects and small animals? Well, in that instant, with the vision of the great blossom, I knew myself the victim, the insect, the animal, struggling among down-spiked hirsuteness, against the sweet fetidness of dark secretions, against the constriction of the great gullet of time, caught in that corolla of history. I was being digested, being dissolved from my own bones, the marrow from the bones and the gray matter from my skull being deliciously extracted. (BA 257)

This image of the Venus flytrap graphically captures both the hypnotically seductive and abhorrently repellent essence

of the self-entrapment to which Amantha falls victim. Intellectually she is quite alert to what is happening, but emotionally she is powerless to escape the trap she has set for herself. What is Negro about her disgusts her; it is a stain which is both horrifying and frightening (BA 190, 189). When a small black girl takes Amantha's hand and places it on her kinky head, Amantha feels revulsion. "And I jerked my hand away, and was standing there with it held in the air before my gaze. I was staring at its whiteness. Yes, it was white" (BA 208). As Madison Jones points out in "Robert Penn Warren as Novelist," Amantha's denial of her racial legacy effectively imprisons her within a "false self" (45). Most of the remaining images of self-entrapment reflect in some fashion her confusion over her ethnic identity.

Amantha cannot help feeling guilty about her betrayal of what is essentially a part of herself. That sense of fault is given form through the images of the black men in her life. Shaddy, an old black slave on her father's plantation, had loved Amantha as a child, and he had even made her a doll. Once in her hearing, however, he said something about her black mother, and even though Amantha failed to understand, she told her father about it. Although selling his slaves was against Mr. Starr's principles, this time he made an exception and got rid of Shaddy. Only later does Amantha understand her role in this betrayal, and she feels guilty (BA 14-15, 144). Rau-Ru, the favored slave of

Amantha's master, likewise serves as a reminder of guilt, according to Leonard Casper in Robert Penn Warren: The Dark and Bloody Ground (155). Responsible for his having gone maverick when he hit a white man in her defense, Amantha is fascinated by the scars he carries as reminders of the justice of white men. When she leaves Tobias Sears, her white husband, to go to Rau-Ru, she literally orders him to show her his scars, a demand she makes a number of times (BA 248, 295). These scars, emblems of the black man's helplessness in white society, remind Amantha of the trap of her own blackness. Her superior attitude about the fact that she is not obviously a Negro also shades into feelings of guilt, from which she cannot escape. Guilt locks her away from self-identity.

Finally, Amantha Starr is a prisoner within herself from the pressures two men exert upon her. Her first owner, a former slave trader, has taken for his name the pseudonym Hamish Bond. Bernard Kalb, a former book reviewer for Saturday Review, finds special relevance in this new name. Hamish, who sold the descendants of Ham into slavery to make his fortune, has been the instrument of their bondage, and so, too, does he hold the bond of Amantha Starr (10). Amantha is particularly impressed by his authority over what he owns. His giant dog willingly does his bidding, as do his slaves, and she knows he will expect instant obedience from her (BA 81). On the night he first takes her physically, Bond has to use the power of his hand to

subdue her. After the fact, Amantha recalls what happened.

> I would . . . remember that heavy-bulked, raw-handed, stertorous, brutal stranger--the raw hand seizing my hair, compelling me, that compulsion outside me evoking some new compulsion inside, like a terror. (BA 179)

The image of his hand in her hair becomes the symbol of her own impotence under the onslaught of the white world. Rau-Ru, too, uses force to remind her of a similar vulnerability in the black world. Having slapped Amantha twice, he looks at her, and "his right hand came out very slowly, fastidiously, and touched me on the shoulder" (BA 249). He asks her a question: "'Whose side are you on?'" When she does not answer, he says, "'If you can't say it, I'll say it for you. You are on the nigger side'" (BA 250). But she really is not on either side. Trapped within the prison of herself, unsure of who or what she is, she cannot begin to make a choice. Such devices as the carnivorous plant preying upon the helpless fly, her guilt from denying her Negro mother, her fascination with Rau-Ru's scars, and her memories of hands forcing her to do things all intensify the image of Amantha Starr as one of Warren's locked-in prisoners of the self.

The Cave is another of Warren's novels featuring multiple protagonists, with the entrapment imagery primarily aiding in the delineation of Isaac Sumpter and Monty Harrick. In an interview with Richard B. Sale, Warren has said of this novel:

> The working title of The Cave was originally The Man Below, and the man below is the man inside, of course, inside you. The submerged man in you and the man in the ground. Somewhere along the way this became the point. (Sale 346)

Thus the novelist continues to pursue his favorite theme, the difficult search for self-identity. Since the circumstances of his characters are much like those of the man trapped in Plato's famous cave metaphor, the title was changed to the one the work now carries.[2] Although Jasper Harrick is the man literally imprisoned in an unexplored cave, that cavern becomes the metaphor of the self which traps practically every other character in the novel.[3] According to Justus, everyone who reportedly attempts to rescue Jasper is trying to find redefinition ("The Uses of Gesture" 451). The physical act of going into the cave symbolically represents the characters' attempts to explore themselves. Some of the characters, especially Isaac Sumpter, never emerge from the metaphorical cave, but those who do, like Monty Harrick, have begun to reach toward self-knowledge.[4]

Isaac Sumpter resembles a hateful version of Jerry Calhoun, from At Heaven's Gate. Like Jerry, Isaac longs for material success, and also like the earlier protagonist, he believes his family, particularly his father, is an obstruction to his goal. Unlike Jerry, however, Isaac is willing to harm those who stand in his way. His indifference to the suffering he causes is one form his self-entrapment takes. He is perfectly willing to let Jasper die if the

accompanying publicity will promote his plans. It is no wonder, then, that the vast, open, gallery-like spaces of the cave parallel the vast emptiness of Isaac's own personality. Also a part of the cavern are the tight, narrow passages which link the open areas, crawlways that resemble "a dry, black, gullet" (C 132). These claustrophobic passages are images of the inner meagerness and meanness which best characterize Isaac Sumpter. Interestingly, when he first enters the cave with Jasper, Isaac has no problem with the huge, open areas, but he does have trouble with those passageways. He cannot crawl through them; they make him feel trapped (C 133). Isaac can enter the cave just so far, and then he has to pull back, a fact metaphorically suggesting that he can explore the self only superficially, never breaking through to the heart of his real identity. The cave is indeed a symbol of the trap of the self which prevents Isaac from realizing an acceptable identity.

Bohner believes the cave is also a symbol of the womb and of sex, providing yet another area of terror for Sumpter. "Sex is either a form of coldly egotistical aggression, or a violent and mechanical coupling. The cave of sexuality . . . reverberates hollowly" ("Interim" 151). Looking back on his college affair with Goldie Goldstein, Isaac remembers the sexual act as "a kind of suffocating medium" (C 193). His relationship with her had made him feel trapped; it was through her that he had begun to

establish an identity for himself on campus (C 125). But he wants a reputation based upon his own merits. Perhaps it is for that reason that he uses sex as a weapon to force his separation from Goldie. His little rendezvous with Eustacia Pinckney Johnson in the front seat of Goldie's red Mercedes breaks them up and leads to his flunking out of the university (C 126-32). The sexual act which he uses to dominate and hurt is likewise the trap which cuts him from knowledge of himself and his motives in life.

In addition, the cave acts as a moral trap for Isaac Sumpter. His lies about his attempts to save Jasper, followed by Jasper's subsequent death, make it Isaac's "spiritual sepulchre" (Donaldson 68).

> After the first lie when he came out of the cave the first time and met all the eyes and told the lie, he should have known he was trapped. Oh, it wasn't Jasper Harrick, it was he, Isaac Sumpter, who was trapped. . . . Something in him, but not himself, had told the lie through his lips.
>
> Oh, what a fool! he exclaimed inwardly, sick of himself, sick with fear. (C 357-58)

Isaac knows how disgusting his behavior is, but he cannot escape the self-serving trap of greed to tell the truth. He does not have the strength to change "that thing in you [which] was what you could never escape" (C 358). Isaac likewise is trapped by the guilt he experiences for hating his father. The reasons for his hostility are complicated. Revolting against everything his father represents--love, decency, faith--he resents the fact that his own lack of these qualities is the reason he detests himself, too. Most

of all, however, he despises Reverend Sumpter for the love he bears his son. Trying to convert all those gathered at the scene of the tragedy, Brother Sumpter preaches, saying "that whoever lives with a guilty secret lives in a dark cave and cannot breathe for the weight of sin" (C 320). He is describing his son, suffering from the sin of his lie. Suspecting what his son has done, MacCarland rushes into the cave, to emerge hours later. One look into his father's face tells Isaac what he has discovered, ". . . and in that moment he [Isaac] felt a disorientation, a dizziness at the entrapment in the infinite series of unfoldings . . ." (C 333). He expects his father to blurt out the truth, but when it does not happen, Isaac feels even more caught in a snare. Against all his principles, but from love of his son, he supports the lies Isaac has told. After the announcement of Jasper's death, for MacCarland had gone far enough into the cave to discover the recently dead body of the trapped man and to arrange the physical evidence to support his son's story, Isaac tries to run away from the awful love of his father. But as he passes houses and small villages in his flight, he "felt some dry entrapment of the heart, a clutch of terror and despair, unresolved, and thought, Jesus . . ." (C 366). As Martin Price says, Isaac yearns for "anything that will help him escape 'the terrible self-betrayal which love is'" (125).

The cave also functions as an image of entrapment in Monty Harrick's life. Leonard Casper, in "Journey to the Interior," and S. V. Donaldson agree that it is a symbol for man's emptiness, loneliness, and need for fulfillment (154; "Let That Anvil Ring" 64). Monty, who feels trapped because he cannot be like his father and brother (C 13, 14, 341), is left with a hollow sensation which Jo-Lea Bingham partially fills. Nonetheless, that does not comfort him; rather, it makes him feel even more helpless (C 15). Thus the cave again imposes a sexual image to aid in character delineation.[5] Never delicate in his sexual descriptions, Warren establishes the cave as a vaginal image. Monty's "pecker was hurting, and he was looking right at the hole in the ground . . ." (C 25). Thinking of Jo-Lea's breasts, Monty concentrates on their soft, suffocating heaviness, drowning Jo-Lea beneath their weight (C 11, 12). Pillowing his head on their softness, he listens to her heart "making a strange, dark-sounding, juicy-sounding bumpity-bumpity. Like a sound down a well. Or in a cave" (C 32). Her sexuality makes Monty feel trapped, as if he were the bear caught raiding a honey tree (C 22). In The Cave both the horrifying and the seductively agreeable act as images of entrapment for the protagonists.

On the other hand, Wilderness has little entrapment imagery, the result of Warren's limiting the amount of self-description and introspection he permits his protagonist, Adam Rosenzweig. Like Warren's other heroes,

Rosenzweig is trapped by his lack of self-knowledge, the source of which is what he considers a betrayal by his father (W 303). Leopold Rosenzweig, believing in mankind, had fought in Germany for human liberty and had been imprisoned for his fight. His son admired him for his moral conviction. Then, on his deathbed the father reclaimed the gift of his idealism when he repudiated his trust in man (W 7-9). What his father denied, Adam vows to assume, and so he decides to go to America to free the Negro. Of this decision Justus writes, "For Adam the impulse to liberate is self-righteous and ends only in self-entrapment" (Achievement 260).

Adam needs "to understand what life lurked behind the mask of flesh, behind the oath, the banter, the sadness" of mankind (W 164), but because he fears to face himself, he cannot understand the motives of others (W 204). His failure to comprehend why his black friend Mose kills their boss, Jedeen Hawksworth, leaves him confused and miserable (W 230). Wanting to live up to his ideal, Adam has tried to teach Mose to read, but when some Union soldiers ask him what makes him a "durn nigger lover," he feels trapped as if he were "sinking into a mire, a morass" (W 179). He cannot grasp why trying to realize his idealism should leave him feeling guilty and entrapped. Not knowing the motives of others, he cannot understand his own, and not understanding himself, he cannot comprehend others. He

does not yet realize that his refusal to admit his common brotherhood with other men is the snare.

Bradwell Tolliver, the author-protagonist of Flood, is trapped by his past (Hiers 98). As a young writer he had shown much promise, but after his first story, a great popular and commercial hit, he has not really been able to repeat his success. At the time Flood is set, Brad is suffering from writer's block. He blames everything and everyone else for his problem when he should be examining himself. Brad's memories of his past and of Fiddlersburg, the town of his childhood, are the agencies which he condemns. As the novel opens, Brad is returning home ostensibly to write a screenplay about its death, since it is soon to be inundated by the waters of a new dam project. As it turns out, though, he really has returned to work through his memories so that he can accept his past, after which he hopefully will be able to greet his future with artistic talents renewed.

Brad's memories isolate him from both family and friends, and that isolation is expressed through a number of interesting images. Once, after a serious drinking bout with his childhood friend Frog-Eye, Brad compares his separateness to that of a deep-sea diver, imprisoned in his "monstrous gear--the helmet nodding like a nightmare, the trailing cords and pipes, the shapeless, swollen gray body, the lead-weighted feet--enter[ing] a chamber long submerged" (F 385). Brad's sense of isolation urges him to explore the long

submerged chamber of himself, but his fear holds him back. Another of these images is the glass cage of the telephone booth, from which "He could call out, but . . . nobody in the world, would hear" (F 420). In this picture Brad imagines that his alienation puts him on display, spotlighted inside a glass phone booth, where he feels trapped and unable to breathe (F 420). The personal separation he senses between himself and his sister Maggie is also described in imprisonment language. When he angrily confronts her for her part in suppressing the one really fine novel he has written, he feels "blank and deprived," as if he were confined in "the darkness of a cave" (F 394). Until this point in his life he has not been consciously aware of his anger toward his sister. Finally, his isolation has prevented him from communicating with even the most casual of his acquaintances. Trying to apologize to the dwarf Jingle Bells for a thoughtless comment, Brad feels like the oyster being devoured by a jellyfish: the jellyfish smothers the oyster "with softness, the oyster gets tired in the softness, the shell relaxes" (F 9). Such images as these serve to underscore how serious a problem the trap of isolation is to Brad Tolliver.

Recollections of Fiddlersburg also imprison the protagonist. Both Casper and Justus compare the town to a prison ("Ark" 112; Achievement 291). Through a series of colorful images Brad describes the fascination his hometown holds for him.

> But if I had the wings of an angel and were flying higher than flying saucers and space ships, I could look down and smell it and come coasting home straight as a buzzard heading down to dive on a dead horse. (F 86)

Obviously he has a love/hate relationship with Fiddlersburg; he cannot tolerate the idea of leaving home, but he also cannot endure the reality of being there. That division he describes as having a hold on a tiger and not knowing what to do with it (F 336). His writing problems Brad also blames upon Fiddlersburg. Much earlier, during his marriage to Lettice Poindexter, at a time when his editor Telford Lott was pressuring him to write the great American novel, Brad felt trapped by his roots. Unable to write, he describes his helplessness. "A nausea was coldly clotting in him. His right groin hurt. . . . Fiddlersburg was rising and closing around him like a fog, like a trap. He could not breathe" (F 30). Not having accepted his past, represented by the small town in Tennessee, Brad could not repeat the success of his first story. But then his brother-in-law Calvin Fiddler murdered Maggie's lover, Brad's marriage broke up, and suddenly he had the material for his novel. His writing again came easily and he was ready to publish. However, once his sister Maggie read the manuscript, her anguish subtly pressured him so that he packed his work away in a trunk and fled to Hollywood (F 336). From that time until his present return to Fiddlersburg, he has written nothing personally meaningful, although he has enjoyed commercial success from his screenplays

(F 340-43). Brad Tolliver's isolation, his memories of his hometown, and his unpublished novel about what happened there have blocked his creative energies, making him another of Warren's locked-in protagonists.

In December of 1969, shortly after the publication of Audobon, Robert Penn Warren reported to Allen Whitman that he was again working on a novel, one with the preliminary title A Definition of Love. Describing the plot, Warren said it was to be a novel about entrapment, with the action once more set in Tennessee (Whitman 54). Upon its publication in 1971, the title had changed to Meet Me in the Green Glen, but the theme had not. Again using the multiple protagonist approach, Warren depicts three characters, Cassie Spottwood, Angelo Passetto, and Murray Guilfort, whose self-entrapment hinders their obtaining their shared goal in life: discovery of the self through love. Marshall Walker reports, "Each of the main characters is as trapped in his or her dream as Angelo in his prison or Sunderland Spottwood in his paralyzed body" (Vision 207).

Robbed of her youthful love by her mother, Cassie married the much older Spottwood to escape her domination. In that marriage she has experienced not a single moment of passion or love; before his paralysis Sunderland enslaved her to her housework and to her conjugal duties. Now middle-aged, metaphorically chained to her home and paralyzed husband, Cassie wants to know love before it is too late. That desire becomes a possibility with the

arrival of Angelo Passetto, a convict recently released from jail. As her hired man on the farm, he provides a striking contrast to all that imprisons Cassie. Her house, and especially the kitchen with its grease-laden, fly-specked bare light bulb hanging down in the center, is the physical means of her entrapment (MM 97). Repeatedly she refers to her kitchen as a box (MM 172, 174, 191) and to the bare bulb as a "cold blaze of timeless light, . . . fixed and frozen . . . suspended and floating in the timeless dark of night that stretched away in all directions over the land" (MM 172). Her imprisonment takes the image of an eternal darkness from which there is no escape. Inside the house is the source of her moral entrapment, her husband. With his paralysis, a physical parallel to her own spiritual ensnarement, Sunderland makes Cassie feel duty-bound to care for him (MM 43). The horror of this timeless trap of marriage is given visual impact through one of Murray Guilfort's descriptions of how much time has passed in that union. Remembering a Cassie of twenty years ago, Murray is making one of his periodic visits to the Spottwood house to see if he can do anything for the wife of his old friend.

> Now, so many years later, standing at the door that would open upon the same dark hall, he saw the vision of [Cassie's youthful] hand clutching the door. The varnish on the door had long since swollen in tiny yellow pustules that, broken, had left white streaks, now dry and scrofulous, and the hand was more bony now. (MM 33)

Kenneth John Atchitz, a book reviewer, calls this passage a

masterful image depicting the painful trap of time Cassie's home and marriage have been (64). Cassie's entire life has been composed of shadow experiences, lacking passion and substance, which are like "bars of shadow holding her fixed" (MM 304).

Angelo Passetto, a Sicilian immigrant to the United States, had fled to rural Tennessee after a prison term to escape some men who were searching for him. In running from one trap, he finds another; Cassie's house, initially a refuge, becomes a significant image of his new entrapment. In his essay "Meet Me in the Green Glen," Barnett Guttenberg calls the house "another version of the cave," a place where Passetto can avoid self-confrontation (116). He tries to repair the deteriorating house, but he finds the task Herculean. Lying on his bed at night, trying unsuccessfully not to think of himself, Angelo has an image of the house which fades into a frightening self-picture. "But even with three years of practice it is not possible to caulk every crack, nail up every rat-hole, seal every window casing and perfectly defend the dark inner nothingness" (MM 51). The house, then, becomes the symbol of Passetto's own inner condition, greatly in need of a repair which can come only through self-knowledge. Gradually the house begins to weigh upon Angelo, making him feel pressured by some incomprehensible force. Crawling beneath the structure to make plumbing repairs, he is all too aware of its great mass and weight, which he imagines are "slowly coming down on him"

(MM 117). Upstairs, where he explores the long unused bedrooms, he feels the heaviness of the house upon his shoulders (MM 106). Even the quilts on his bed weigh him down (MM 56). A less articulate character than Percy Munn, who similarly felt borne down by external circumstances, Angelo merely experiences his feelings of oppression without speculating upon what they reveal about himself.

Remembering a more carefree time when his only worry was how to make his bawdy women happy, Angelo attempts to remold Cassie Spottwood in their image. With a red hair ribbon, lipstick, and dress and black shiny stockings, belt, and shoes, he re-creates Cassie into an image they both like (MM 63, 168-69). Although their relationship causes Cassie to feel as if "she were just born" (MM 153), it soon makes Angelo feel trapped, as if he were "being put in a dark room and a key were turning" (MM 110). Cassie, the cause of his imprisonment, is like a large body of water into which he must dive and "where, if he forgot and made a gasp for breath as he would in the world up above where Time was, he would die" (MM 181). The images of entrapment surrounding Angelo Passetto emphasize his helplessness, inarticulateness, and dependence upon the past, which obstruct his attempts to find an identity through love.

Murray Guilfort is another of Warren's protagonists trapped within himself, much in the same way his friend Sunderland is isolated by his paralysis (MM 366). Early in the novel Murray recognizes his self-entrapment, which he

says is like "a camera obscura, and he was inside the dark box" (MM 28). For twenty years he has wanted what his friend has had, Cassie Spottwood. And for twenty years he has lived vicariously, first through Sunder's escapades, until his friend's stroke, and then through his daydreams about Cassie (MM 366). He has lost himself in an unreal world of his own creation. "More and more, it seemed that, when, in his inwardness, he stared at the light [of himself], his vision dimmed for the world of things around him. He was, in fact, alone" (MM 29). After his visits to Cassie, he returns to Durwood, his country estate, where he feels the walls closing in on him (MM 366). Just as the Spottwood house is a symbol of Cassie's and Angelo's imprisonment, so too is Durwood an image of its owner's self-entrapment. Standing in his house at a time when he is unconsciously contemplating suicide, Murray is very aware of "the icy weight of the chandelier" above his head. He thinks, "But if the self was the prison, then what was trying to get out?" (MM 366). Perhaps it is "Love, he thought, and the word rang hollowly in his head as in a great cave" (MM 365). But love is something he believes he has never had, not even with his wife, Bessie. When Miss Edwina, his wife's cousin, tells him the painful truth, that he uses the people who love him, he feels helpless, "As though his whole body were under Novocaine, existing but not knowing its existence" (MM 330). The images associated with Murray Guilfort point out his tendency to live vicariously or in a world of his own

creation. Murray's self-entrapment has made him pursue an impossible love instead of enjoying a love already available to him.

When a young man Jed Tewksbury, the displaced Southern protagonist of A Place to Come To, left his hometown of Dugton, Alabama, and since then he has been searching for "a place to come to." Before he can find a place where he belongs, though, he must discover an acceptable identity. That means he must escape the traps of his past, of his scholarly life, and of sex, all of which comprise the most serious snare--the self. Above everything Jed needs to accept his past and put it behind him so that he can live for his future. His roots haunt him, especially Dugton, where his father humiliated him and his mother molded him. Jed calls it "a valley of humiliation and delusive vanities," and all his memories come back to the way his mother describes it (PTC 19).

> "Dugton," she would say, shuddering, "do you know how it came to be? . . . One time there was a pigeon big as the Rocky Mountains and he had stuffed his-self on all the pokeberries and cow patties this side of Pikes Peak and the bowel movement hit him about this part of Alabama and they named it Dugton." (PTC 19-20)

This small town is the only place that can remember Jed's father, Buck, who humiliated his son by the manner of his undignified death. "That scene lives vividly for me--more vividly with each passing year . . .," says Jed (PTC 5). Jed calls his life there a coffee grinder with him and his father as the coffee beans being dropped in one by one (PTC

5). Jed's past is like a machine set to devour him in every way.

Jed's mother, however, has had a positive influence upon her son. Recognizing Dugton as a dead end, she reared him with the desire to escape (PTC 19, 39). And leave he did, in 1935, to return only once more during his mother's life. After graduating from Blackwell College, he decided "to go to cast a last look over Dugton and to see my mother" (PTC 42), but he neglected to tell her of his proposed visit. He arrived late in the evening, to discover his mother with a man. He was amazed to find her in smeared lipstick and a silk pink robe with nothing underneath. His only response was to roar with laughter, after which he collected his dropped knapsack and fled (PTC 42-43). He does not return home until his mother's death, many years later. He cannot reconcile his memories of the mother who reared him and the woman she became after he left. His only contacts with her after that night are in the periodic letters they exchange. Jed calls her notes the past, pursuing him wherever he goes (PTC 202). His mother made his escape from Dugton possible, but she also makes his escape from the past impossible. Until he can connect his present with his past, he will be unable to attain self-knowledge (PTC 5).

Education is one of the means through which Tewksbury attempts to circumvent the trap of his past. He selects the University of Chicago for his graduate studies, but the

Graduate School there chooses not to admit him. Only after waylaying Professor Stahlmann and convincing him of his aptitude does Jed get his chance (PTC 44-53). He easily completes all the requirements for the Ph.D., except the dissertation.

> . . . my dissertation had become dust and ashes in my mouth. I began to regard it as little more than a trick performed by an idiot for the edification of fools, or vice versa. . . . If this dissertation represented the imperium intellectus, then to hell with it. . . . I would turn it into a parlor trick. (PTC 84)

Frustrated by his inability to make progress, he sees himself as a Sisyphus trapped in an eternal hell (PTC 84). Jed's problem is that he is trying to write about death in Dante's Divine Comedy at a time when he knows nothing about the realities of his subject. But then his young wife Agnes is struck down by cancer. With Agnes in the hospital, he looks at his dissertation. "I had the feeling, all at once, of total entrapment" (PTC 87). It is during the time he watches his wife enduring her painful death that his understanding comes: ". . . for Dante death defines the meaning of life . . . [and] the core drama of the Divina Commedia depends upon this idea" (PTC 89). Now his dissertation flows from his pen. However, the very ease of his writing makes him feel trapped and guilty, because his wife's pain and death have given him his impetus (PTC 98, 117). Jed's completed dissertation wins for him a reputation in academe, but memories of how he gained his insight haunt him and become a part of the trap of the past from which he seeks release (PTC 103).

Sex, another means by which Jed attempts to escape his past, instead becomes a third compartment in the prison of the self. Before leaving Dugton to attend college, he had been relentlessly attracted to Rozelle Hardcastle, the most popular girl in their class. He had even dated her once, at her invitation, and she was one of the major factors Jed's mother wanted removed from her son's life. But in Nashville, where Jed has gone to teach at the university, fate reunites the pair. When Rozelle reads about his appointment in a local newspaper, she calls to invite him to a small dinner party at her husband's mansion. After hanging up, he experiences a moment of disorientation, as if time were flowing backward. All the things that had ever happened to him are given life so that they stand around him, staring as if they know what he is going to do. Just one telephone call makes him feel trapped (PTC 103-04). Sometime thereafter they become lovers, with Jed describing his passion as an attempt to expunge the past. He thinks of Rozelle in terms of a "hot, wet, dark aperture of timelessness" (PTC 175), which draws him "unresisting, into the deep, rich slime of being" (PTC 185). Orgasm with her is "like the 'black hole' of the physicists--a devouring negativity" into which the self disappears "like dirty water when the plug is pulled at the bottom of the sink" (PTC 187). Their affair is obsessive, and sex with Rozelle makes Jed lose his sense of identity (PTC 163). His life becomes a "steely encapsulating present into which I had

managed to lock myself with a dream named Rozelle Hardcastle Carrington" (PTC 187).

During the affair Jed feels "stuck at dead center" (PTC 191). He describes the trap their relationship has become through four graphic images. First, he sees himself as a puppet, with Rozelle pulling the strings. His sense of helplessness continues in his next metaphor, with himself the grasshopper impaled on a fishing hook, "twitching, kicking, spitting, and gesticulating, over the water" (PTC 192). The danger of his losing his self-identity to Rozelle is expressed through his image of the traveler, fallen overboard into the Amazon, being eaten alive by "insatiable piranha" (PTC 202). Last, the affair is a wave breaking over the swimmer who dived into its depths to avoid its very violence (PTC 23-24). For him their liaison is "a doom to be fulfilled" (PTC 205). What began as the wish fulfillment of an adolescent fantasy evolves through repetition into a "nasty, brutal" sexual act of self-entrapment (PTC 230-31). Perceiving the trap, he tries to break off. On a trip to Florida he begins investigating Rozelle's first marriage. He uncovers the questionable circumstances under which her first husband died, and he is suspicious of her second marriage to the man involved in his death (PTC 253-62). Even with this information Jed's obsession continues, as does his sense of powerlessness and entrapment (PTC 252). In a desperate attempt to save himself and his love for Rozelle, he delivers an ultimatum. She must leave her husband to go

with him, or he will never see her again (PTC 263). Then, instead of remaining strong, he makes love to her one more time. Later, on the airplane away from Nashville and all the city holds, he looks back upon their last meeting with shame, and he calls the sexual act an experience of necrophilia (PTC 267). That thought does, indeed, kill the physical part of their affair, but it will require years for Jed to put his emotional commitment behind him. Until he does, his past will pursue him and make him continue as Warren's most recent locked-in protagonist.

In their obsessive search for identity, Robert Penn Warren's heroes and heroines encounter numerous, frustrating obstructions, many of which are formulated through entrapment imagery designed to assist character development. Weighted down by such personal considerations as ambition, guilt, love, sex, desire for vengeance, shame of family or race, and the past, they discover that they themselves are the most serious impediments to their goal. Images of imprisonment emphasize their flaws: their helplessness, passiveness, irresponsibility, insecurity, gullibility, naivetė, and unrealistically ideal approach to life. To escape the prison of the self, they must delve into themselves to unearth and to accept what they are, both good and evil. This task of self-examination is their most onerous chore, one from which they make numerous attempts to retreat.

Notes

[1] Justus, Achievement 173; Bohner 62; L. Hugh Moore, Jr., Robert Penn Warren and History: "The Big Myth We Live" (The Hague: Mouton, 1970) 60.

[2] Bohner 149; Martin Price, "Six Recent Novels," Yale Review 69 (1959): 125.

[3] For in-depth discussions of the cave as an important metaphor for self-entrapment, see especially Bohner 147-52; Davison 349-57; Guttenberg, Web of Being 85ff.; Madison Jones, "Robert Penn Warren as Novelist," A Southern Renascence Man: Views of Robert Penn Warren, ed. Walter B. Edgar (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1984) 52-53; Marshall Walker, Robert Penn Warren: A Vision Earned (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1979) 187ff.

[4] Bohner 149; S. V. Donaldson, "Let That Anvil Ring: Robert Penn Warren's The Cave and Hawthorne's Legacy," Southern Literary Journal 15.2 (1983): 64; Paul C. Wermuth, "Review of The Cave," Library Journal 84 (1959): 2524.

[5] Guttenberg, Web of Being 170; Leonard Casper, "Journey to the Interior: The Cave," Robert Penn Warren: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. John Lewis Longley, Jr. (New York: New York UP, 1965) 152-53.

# CHAPTER IV

## THEMATIC IMPLICATIONS OF IMAGES OF RETREAT

Even though Robert Penn Warren's characters frequently and openly profess their major objective to be self-discovery, they exhaust much of their energy trying to avoid that knowledge. They often use the excuse of self-imprisonment to evade attaining their goal, since they know whatever they uncover about themselves will be painful to accept. As they avidly look for identity, they also demonstrate an unconscious, but equally zealous, attempt to withdraw from what they find. Thus the many images of retreat in the ten novels underscore the divided nature of the protagonists and the resulting difficulties they experience as they search for self-knowledge.

In addition to the painful nature of the information the characters seek, there are at least two other reasons for their evasions. According to Louise Y. Gossett, those protagonists who reject their fathers and families are thrown into a violent search for father substitutes or are forced by their confusion to flee from their own responsibility and guilt in a miserable family situation. Denial of their heritage, then, is another major factor in their withdrawal from selfhood (54). Gossett sees retreat as a negative response by the characters, as does Allen Shepherd

in his article "Robert Penn Warren as a Philosophical Novelist." He claims that whenever a protagonist withdraws from the knowledge he has sought, that character is eliminating all "possibility of redemption through knowledge" (161). On the other hand, Sam Hynes finds a positive motive underlying the characters' retreats. He believes that the protagonists' withdrawals are attempts to give themselves both space and time to acquire self-knowledge (281).

The clusters of retreat imagery in Warren's novels are varied. James H. Justus labels one type as psychic. For example, he claims that Percy Munn (NR) seeks refuge in abstraction, Jerry Calhoun (AHG) in "inarticulate passivism," and Jack Burden (ATKM) in cynicism. Additional forms of this type include the characters' inability to accept responsibility and blame and to express concern for the welfare of others (Achievement 161, 160). But this mental retreat has other shapes, too. Some protagonists withdraw from reality into the past or into insanity, or they isolate themselves from others and themselves. A few try to find physical refuge in the West or the South, and some even flee to such arenas as swamps and grassy meadows, with several attempting to lose themselves in large cities. Many withdraw into sexuality or the single-minded pursuit of study and work. The quest for self-knowledge and identity is so formidable that every Warren protagonist runs away at least once from his goal. The imagery through

which that withdrawal is developed helps shape the author's pervasive theme of man's struggle to find an acceptable self-image.

For Percy Munn (NR), time, especially the past, is a viable retreat where he can both seek and avoid self-knowledge. After executing Buck Trevelyan, Munn listens to the sounds of his horse's hoofs, associating their cadence with time. Lulled, he thinks of this aural image as belonging

> wholly to the moment in which he existed, a moment without affiliations with the past or the future. He tried to sink into that moment, trying to escape from time by surrendering most completely to time. (NR 169)

Lost in the confusion of his present life, he especially remembers his childhood preoccupation with his stereopticon. Gazing into the machine, he was fascinated by the depth and reality of whatever card he was viewing. When he removed the card to discover its flatness and lifelessness, he wondered where its vitality had really derived. His present life is like the card before it is viewed through the stereopticon, dull, static, and spiritless. His retreats into the past do give him temporary respite, however, making him feel three-dimensional and alive, like the scenes he studies through his toy (NR 135).[1] Another image associated with Munn's retreat into the past is his distant cousin, Miss Ianthe Sprague. After May leaves him, he reviews his recollections of Miss Sprague, looking "for some explanation, some hint of interpretation for the

present" (NR 178). If he can understand "her special loneliness," then perhaps he can begin to comprehend his own (NR 179). He spends hours within his memories, finally deciding that the person she had been when he visited her during his university years in Philadelphia was "her real being . . . in its perfection of negativity and rejection" (NR 176). She is what she has always been, the "unifying fulfillment" for which he has been seeking in order to give his past value and stability and his future meaning (NR 173-74). By withdrawing into time and the past, he hopes to discover a means to an acceptable present identity, but the very act of retreat removes that possibility.

Like many other Warren protagonists, Munn seeks a kind of physical refuge in the arms of a loved one. When he feels trapped, Munn resorts to thoughts of his wife, May (NR 6). Whenever possible, he goes to her physically, but in her presence he senses her mystery, something he cannot penetrate and understand. He wants her to be the center of his life, but because he cannot know her inner reality, she cannot deliver the happiness she represents (NR 134, 49). Having accepted a post in the Association, Percy feels compelled to join his wife. "He rode too fast. . . . He wanted to get home. He wanted to see May" (NR 32). He has gone to her hoping that "her mere presence might help explain himself to himself" (NR 33). However, since he does not know her, she in turn cannot give him himself (NR 136).

Thus he retreats from her, his would-be refuge, into the safety of solitude (NR 34, 49).

In his seclusion he avidly studies the faces of the people around him, looking for a clue to his own identity. Having first examined his own face to discover a change which does not show (NR 133), he turns to others to see if it is reflected in their expressions (NR 88, 113, 145-46, 156, 191, 206, 324). In those countenances he observes such things as goodness, "a flicker of triumph," or even love for a husband or wife, but he does not find himself (NR 80, 153, 263-64, 297). After a while the faces all begin to seem identical, but he still does not see himself (NR 55, 70-71, 125, 168). Not recognizing his common brotherhood with all those he has studied, he begins to experience hatred and a desire to torture everyone who has not given him himself (NR 238). All those faces, images of retreat and knowledge, have told him nothing (NR 85, 272, 293, 295). Percy Munn's flights from himself do not provide him with an acceptable self-image.

The retreats from self-knowledge continue in At Heaven's Gate with Sue Murdock and Jerry Calhoun, who, according to Leonard Casper, "are fugitives from a human condition which they cannot escape and which they are not strong enough to live with either" (The Dark and Bloody Ground 113). In fact, Sue Murdock literally is introduced to the reader through flight images. Whenever she is distressed or unable to cope, she envisions herself high in the sky, where she does

not have to care about earthbound troubles. In airplanes she feels "all by herself and free and it was like nothing that ever happened mattered any more, and she didn't care what was going to happen . . ." (AHG 5). Flying is just one image of Sue's retreats from reality; her fondness for acting and drama is another. John M. Bradbury says that Sue "experiences her most significant moments in non-self-identifications: on the stage, particularly as the innocent victim, Cordelia" ("Symbolic and Textual Patterns" 82). Charles H. Bohner adds that impersonation makes Sue feel alive (74). It is during those times that she is rehearsing and literally living the fictional part that she needs to withdraw from reality. She tells Slim Sarrett, "'When we weren't rehearsing, I just didn't want to see anybody. I was so afraid something might happen to change it, to change me'" (AHG 197-98). Sue's dramatic roles are avoidance mechanisms; she hopes that by taking refuge in the lives of imaginary characters, she herself can remain unchanged. Although she is seeking self-knowledge, she cannot face the necessity of change if she is to reach her goal.

Sue's most significant withdrawal, which is both self-protective and emotional, occurs during the months following her breakup with Jerry Calhoun. Having run away from her fiancé and her father, she enters her own "timeless world" with no past or future. It is a place where nothing means anything to her, where she is permitted just to be. In it she does not have to think about herself (AHG 242, 244).

She does not even wonder if she is happy.

> Only now and then she remembered times from the past when she had asked herself that question [Am I happy?]. Those times seemed very far off, now, and--there was a kind of victory in the thought--irrelevant. (AHG 251)

She rarely leaves her apartment, but when she does, she goes to Slim's studio, peopled by his sycophants. During these visits Sue is merely leaving one fantasy world for another, because Sarrett, it is later revealed, has created the "facts" of his life to suit his own purposes. There it becomes Sue's habit to let the conversations flow around her, since "words didn't have much meaning for her. You just lived the way you were, anyway" (AHG 251). Having lost contact with reality, she slips even farther into her dangerous refuge through her drinking, encouraged by Sarrett. When she is intoxicated, she feels outside herself, safe from what she is (AHG 251). This world of retreat from herself could have continued indefinitely, had Sue not finally learned the truth about Slim. Instead of being the stronghold through which she can resist her father, he is a deceiver who has lied about all the important things (AHG 256-59). Devastated by Slim's reality, she says, "'I never--I never--want to see anybody again. Not anybody!'" (AHG 259). Sue's retreats from and toward self-knowledge are destructive, since each one leads to another and another, where instead of discovering an acceptable identity she finds only additional reasons for her continued flights from selfhood.

Jerry Calhoun, described by Justus as a "spiritual drifter . . . unable to communicate to others what he is like or how he feels," is another protagonist who retreats from painful self-knowledge (Achievement 183). All Jerry wants from life is to run into a darkness where he can be alone and where everyone "would leave him alone" (AHG 381). Just as Warren chooses to introduce Sue Murdock in terms of flight imagery, so too does he use aviation images when he first presents Calhoun. Aboard an airplane on the return leg of a business trip for his employer Bogan Murdock, Jerry feels himself a part of "a richly piled, dark velvet on which the bright center of his consciousness was cushioned" (AHG 7). Flying makes him feel aloof, as if he were drifting "effortlessly . . ., curious and detached" (AHG 10). Flying, with Jerry's emotional response to it, is a major symbol representing his many withdrawals from knowledge.

As is true of several Warren protagonists, Calhoun escapes from his troubles by studying some subject in which he has a particular interest. For Jerry that subject is business, especially investment. Justus, in "On the Politics of the Self-Created," says that Calhoun's homework on banking gives his life a necessary pattern (289). But it does something else, too; it gives him a retreat when he cannot endure thinking about himself. The books he studies are "so clean and sure, that flow of unheard voice off the page--a guarantee that the world was secure" (AHG 77). He

looks forward to his study time, which he calls "a kind of uneasy refuge," uneasy because it reminds him of the person he was in college (AHG 83). One of the things Jerry likes about his studying is that he is doing it with his friend and mentor, Duckfoot Blake. Often the two meet at the home of Duckfoot's parents, where "Jerry would feel himself absorbed into a powerful but nameless security" (AHG 79). Never at home in his own father's house, for a short time Jerry does feel comfortable in the Blake household, a surrogate for his own. But when he begins to see the same human frailties in the Blakes that he has observed in his own family, his visits begin to provoke "in him a discomfort and revulsion, almost a hatred for these people" (AHG 79). What was once a sanctuary becomes unbearable, because it forces him toward a self-examination for which he is not yet prepared. His time with his friend makes a question gradually arise in his mind: why is he so antagonistic toward his father?

Justus claims that Calhoun traces all the imperfections and inadequacies of the world to his father, with the result that he feels he must withdraw from all human involvement demanding responsibility (Achievement 183). The emblem for that retreat, says Barnett Guttenberg, is Calhoun's rejection of his father and other family members (Web of Being 26). Every time his father unselfishly offers his love, Jerry's impulse is to run away (AHG 381). When he returns to his father at the end of the novel, he takes

refuge in his childhood bedroom on his old bed. The image of himself sinking into the mattress becomes for Jerry a parallel to his burrowing "into the self he had been. What had he been? And what did he share with that Jerry Calhoun who, long ago, had lain there?" (AHG 386). The answers to these questions are what Jerry has been trying both to discover and to avoid. Now that his final retreat is into the self, which he has always regarded as a prison, perhaps he is ready to accept the knowledge he will discover. Jerry Calhoun is poised on the brink of finally discovering an acceptable self-image.

The images of retreat in All the King's Men have been widely examined by the critics, who disagree about the reasons for Jack Burden's numerous withdrawals. Casper claims Jack is trying to escape the corruption of the world (The Dark and Bloody Ground 130), while Guttenberg believes he wants to regain lost innocence, or failing in that, to forget that he cannot (Web of Being 41). To Norton R. Girault, Jack is running away from responsibility (32), and James C. Simmons writes that Jack's flights are his attempt to escape "himself and self-knowledge" (80). Intellectually Jack recognizes his retreats for what they are, but emotionally he can do nothing about them, another form of his inability to face the world. He sees his escapes as self-protective, his effort to locate "some place with a better climate where nobody would ever hurt him" (ATKM 342). Along with commentary on the reasons for

Burden's flights, the critics also label the forms of his retreat; these include his dedication to "research," his marriage to Lois, his trips Westward or into the Self, his idealism, the Great Laugh, the Great Sleep, and the Great Twitch.[2] However, Jack's withdrawals into idealism, the past, the Great Sleeps, the West, and the Great Twitch provide the most thematically significant images of retreat.

Jack's idealism particularly focuses upon his images of personally important people like his mother, Judge Irwin, and Anne Stanton (Singal 362; Welch 170-71). Mark Royden Winchell believes the beginning of the protagonist's flights from the world can be traced to his breakup with Anne Stanton (578). Welch adds that an irritant to that breakup is Burden's idealistic image of Anne, which prevents him from treating her as a mature woman (170). Jack's attitude toward her is formulated through three composite memory images, which have a common ingredient: her innocence. The first of these pictures is of Anne as a little girl, "leaning her head against [her father's] knee" (ATKM 218). Her innocence makes her seem frail, like glass in a lantern "that if you turned the wick up a fraction the glass might crack" (ATKM 257). The second comes from a summer's picnic when Jack was seventeen and Anne thirteen, the day on which Jack "first saw Anne and Adam as separate, individual people, whose ways of acting were special, mysterious, and important" (ATKM 126). Remembering that afternoon, Jack thinks: "I got an image in my head that never got out. . . .

The image I got in my head that day was the image of her face lying in the water, very smooth, with the eyes closed . . ." (ATKM 126). Bradbury and a number of other commentators believe this memory of Anne represents a kind of "womb innocence" which Jack wants to preserve.[3] After this day Jack views Anne's grace and softness with a kind of "mathematical formality," which prevents him from penetrating to the reality of the woman she has become when his third memory takes form (ATKM 111). In this one Jack is twenty-one, Anne seventeen, and it occurs on the night Jack chooses not to consummate their love. Jack undresses Anne.

> Then, letting one hand drop to the bed for support, she leaned a little sideways, lifted her feet from the floor, still together, and with a gentle, curling motion, lay back on the white counterpane, then punctiliously straightened out and again folded her hands across her bosom, and closed her eyes. (ATKM 312-13)

As he looks down upon her, the face of the thirteen-year-old Anne superimposes upon the other face, and Jack thinks that he cannot violate her innocence (ATKM 313). He is so struck "by the pathos of her submissiveness and her trust in [him]" that he hesitates, and in doing so loses the womanly Anne but retains "that image of the little girl in the waters of the bay, all innocence and trustfulness, under the stormy sky" (ATKM 328, 329). In his idealistic urge to protect the innocence of Anne Stanton, he retreats from the commitment which would lead him to self-knowledge.

Burden's youthful image of an ideal Anne Stanton is one form of his withdrawal, but his intellectual interest in history is another. Jack retreats into the past in two different ways: his research into the Cass Mastern story for his dissertation and his digging up dirt on the political enemies of his boss, Willie Stark (Kerr 40; Ellington White 205). As long as he is investigating the lives of others, he does not have time to examine his own and face what he discovers. Looking back upon his college career, Jack cynically comments: "I was a brass-bound Idealist in those days. If you are an Idealist it does not matter what you do or what goes on around you because it isn't real anyway" (ATKM 33). During the time Jack was working on his dissertation, he later admits, he was hiding from his present by taking refuge in the past (ATKM 170). He pours over the memorabilia of Cass Mastern, a distant relative, searching for the facts of his kinsmen's world. But because he does not understand Cass, he cannot understand Mastern's world, either (ATKM 200).

> Or perhaps he laid aside the journal of Cass Mastern not because he could not understand, but because he was afraid to understand for what might be understood there was a reproach to him. (ATKM 201)

However, Jack's withdrawal into research is no refuge at all. In it he sees some facts which apply to himself, yet that self-knowledge is the very thing he has been fleeing, and thus he has to run away once more.

Unable to accept his common brotherhood with Cass Mastern and all men, Jack eventually goes to work for Willie

Stark, digging up personal information on the Boss's political opponents. He hopes that by finding the skeletons in their closets, he will not have to confess his own. Whatever he finds he puts in his little black books, and wherever he goes, they go, too. "A man's got to carry something besides a corroded liver with him out of that dark backward and abysm of time, and it might as well be the little black books" (ATKM 23). Jack is good at his job, and he does "get the dirt" Willie wants, even on Judge Irwin, who chooses to commit suicide rather than to allow himself to be blackmailed. In trying to run away from himself, Jack withdraws into the past through his research on others. What he cannot know is that whatever he uncovers will have bearing upon him, as well as upon others. He cannot know that in confronting the Judge with his information, he will lose and then find his real father (ATKM 370). Terrified of involvement, Jack retreats to the past, but ironically what he uncovers in his research forces him toward the self-confrontation and commitment he has been fleeing.

As each one of Burden's retreats becomes a new prison, Jack seeks others. One such escape he derisively labels the Great Sleep. When his life becomes too painful, he resorts to long periods of sleep, where he experiences none of the needs or desires of reality (ATKM 201). He falls victim to the Great Sleep for the first time when he discovers he cannot go on with his dissertation.

> He would sleep twelve hours, fourteen hours, fifteen hours, . . . [plunging] deeper and deeper into sleep like a diver groping downward into dark water feeling for something which may be there. . . . (ATKM 201)

Although he does not know it, this "something which may be there" at the end of the Great Sleep is self-identity, but when he walks away from his dissertation, he also abandons that possibility. He turns to the Great Sleep a second time in the weeks before he leaves his wife, Lois.

> I went to bed and slept soundly, with the sweet feeling of ever falling toward the center of delicious blackness, . . . [with] a wonderful sense of peace, a peace which must resemble the peace of old age after a well-spent life. (ATKM 324-25)

During these times Lois would attempt to rouse him by feebly beating him with her fists, but he would sleep on (ATKM 325). Like his investigation of Cass Mastern, Jack's marriage to Lois demands his involvement in another's life, and he just is not ready for such a commitment. Jack retreats into the Great Sleep one last time after losing his job on the Chronicle for reporting the political corruption of the state (ATKM 106-07). During this period Jack drags himself out of bed so that he can go back to sink "down in the sleep like a drowning man in water" (ATKM 115). By the time of this retreat the water image from the first Great Sleep and "the center of delicious blackness" from the second have become the water in which a man drowns, suggesting the life-threatening potential these withdrawals represent to Jack. Realizing that his Great Sleeps have changed nothing, he leaves them behind when he takes a job with Willie Stark (ATKM 115-16).[4]

For Jack the most traumatic event in his life occurs when he learns Anne has been having an affair with his boss. That knowledge shatters his long-held idealistic image of Anne, and it reaffirms the idea he has acquired during his withdrawals to the past: there is always something nasty and immoral in the lives of even the most upright. When he hears about Anne, Jack flees West,

> For West is where we all plan to go some day. It is where you go when the land gives out and the old-field pines encroach. It is where you go when you get the letter saying: Flee, all is discovered. (ATKM 286)

As Jack says, ". . . when you don't like it where you are you always go west. We have always gone west" (ATKM 327). There a man can find a refuge from the law, a sanctuary from the knowledge of his own insignificance in the universe, a second chance, new beginnings, a land of wealth, and a retirement haven (ATKM 286).[5] But like Jack's other retreats, his trip West is a negative one. As he flees westward, everything reminds him of loneliness and death. Describing New Mexico, he calls it ". . . a land of total and magnificent emptiness with a little white filling station flung down on the sand like a sun-bleached cow skull by the trail" (ATKM 286-87). Arizona, with its Mohave Desert, is a place where

> your breath rasps your gullet as though you were a sword swallower who had got hold of a hack saw blade by mistake, and [the terrain looms] at you with the shapes of a visceral, Freudian nightmare. (ATKM 287)

For Jack, going West is a drowning in memories, since the drive gives him ample time to remember those he has loved

(ATKM 288, 327). He thinks of his "father," Ellis Burden; his mother; Judge Irwin; his stepfathers; Adam Stanton; but he especially recalls Anne (ATKM 288-89). All his memories are like a home movie gently unrolling in his mind, and he is so disturbed that he advises, "Therefore, if you have any home movies, I earnestly advise you to burn them and to be baptized to be born again" (ATKM 288). He goes to California to search for personal meaning, he thinks, but he is not yet ready. He decides that the meaning really is not important; rather, it is the motion toward meaning which counts (ATKM 287-88). And so there is no escape for Jack in the West. On his trip home he does not remember the things he remembered going West (ATKM 287). He has not made the connection that he must accept the faults of others if he is to live with his own. Jack is not yet at the point where selfhood is a viable option to him.

The last major withdrawal Jack makes in the preliminary rites of self-knowledge is what he labels a belief in the Great Twitch. Bohner calls this "philosophy" a metaphor for Naturalistic Determinism, an approach to life which relieves a doer from the responsibility of his actions so that he can discover "a new 'innocence'" (93). To Jack this idea is "the dream that all life is but the dark heave of blood and the twitch of the nerve. . . . the dream of our age" (ATKM 329), and it is embodied by the facial tic of the hitchhiker he picks up on his trip home from the West (ATKM 333). Jack embraces his new philosophy enthusiastically because it

reinforces an idea he hopes is true: what one man does has no influence upon another. It is this "fact" for which he has been searching through his other retreats. If this "fact" is true, then his not consummating his love for Anne Stanton really has had no effect upon her and is not a major factor leading to her affair with Willie Stark. Likewise, Cass Mastern's actions had no impact upon the lives of Duncan Trice, Annabelle Trice, Gilbert Mastern, or the slave Phebe, and Cass is not responsible for his friend's suicide. Similarly, Jack's own research into the life of Judge Irwin did not trigger the Judge's suicide. Nor has Jack's trip West and his subsequent retirement from the political affairs of the Boss in any way been responsible for Adam's learning of his sister's adultery and his murder of her seducer, Willie Stark. The Great Twitch permits Jack to divorce himself from any responsibility in the lives of others. His new "secret knowledge" cuts him off from everyone important to him (ATKM 334). The image most representative of this, Jack's last retreat, is that of the catatonic schizophrenic being treated by Dr. Adam Stanton. When Burden thinks of this man, it is always as a parody of the Anne Stanton image: the patient lying on his back staring upward into space (ATKM 336). Burden is fascinated by the surgery he watches his friend perform upon the schizophrenic, for its purpose is to produce a new personality. Jack calls it "high-grade carpenter work" designed to contrive a miracle, like what happened to Saul

on the road to Damascus (ATKM 335-36). The surgery is a baptism, after which the patient will no longer be responsible for anything he has done in his madness (ATKM 338). That is exactly what Jack wants--absolution from all responsibility in his life. Jack Burden's idealism, his interest in the past, his Great Sleeps, his trip West, and his reliance upon the Great Twitch philosophy are all attempts to retreat from the unbearable agony that self-knowledge brings.

Jeremiah Beaumont (WET), like Jack Burden, is one of Warren's protagonists who finds life worth living only if he can live it in his own little world where nothing ever goes wrong. But because life is not ideal, Jeremiah must retreat from the knowledge that he, like everyone else, is capable of both good and evil. The beginning of Beaumont's disillusionment comes with his learning of a dishonorable act by his friend and patron, Colonel Cassius Fort. Fort seduced a young woman, Rachel Jordan, who had come to him for help, and later he deserts her, even though she is pregnant with his child (WET 64-66). Jeremiah interprets Fort's weakness as a betrayal of idealism. In the weeks following his discovery, Jeremiah withdraws more and more from the life around him, unable to admit what is wrong. "Nothing was wrong except that the world was the way it was" (WET 67). Unable to face Fort with his information, Jeremiah runs away and enters a period similar to Burden's Great Sleeps.

> He did not try to plan. He felt that the future was beyond plan, it already existed, he would discover it step by step as he moved toward some flame, some point of light, beyond the murk and mist of things. He need not plan, he need only be himself. Be himself and not be snared by the world. He had almost been snared, snared by Fort's tawdry glitter, corrupted by his promise of easy greatness, tempted to connive with the world. (WET 68)

Because life is not perfect, Beaumont tries to retreat from it.

Also like Burden, Jeremiah runs from one refuge to another, and for him the next significant one is Rachel Jordan. Dale T. Renquette, in "The Gray Pessimism of Robert Penn Warren," says that because Beaumont cannot live within the world, he tries to live outside it in a place he invents with Rachel Jordan (40-41). At first the dominant passion in his new world is revenge, because he convinces Rachel to marry him only after he promises to kill Fort. Having tried and failed, however, he takes refuge in the happiness of their marriage, and he is happy (WET 170, 202). He enjoys Rachel, living with her in

> a warm inner world of their own, leaving the hard frozen crust of the world outside, the way sap hid warm in the root of a winter tree or the furred animal curled in its warm earth to dream away the season. (WET 200-01)

The imagery of this passage, with the sap in the root and the animal hibernating in its lair, suggests the temporary nature of Jeremiah's sanctuary: he is living in "his winter dream," and eventually he will have to leave it to pursue his search for identity (WET 201). That day arrives when Rachel miscarries their child, who was to give them both a

new start in life (WET 221). His child's death releases him from his happiness with Rachel, leaving him with only his vow of vengeance, which he then successfully carries out. Captured and on trial for the murder of Cassius Fort, he again seeks security in the arms of Rachel, who is permitted to share his cell with him. Sex becomes a mindless retreat for both: ". . . they discovered a new passion, a blank and absolute passion, as blank and absolute as the face of death that they now confronted" (WET 412). During this time they do not speak, they remember nothing, and they hold the world in contempt (WET 412-13). Their lust is "'the blackness we longed for,'" a "'divine frenzy and sweet blackness'" an absolute, meaningless blankness (WET 414). Jeremiah uses sex to avoid admitting to himself that he is as much responsible for the evils of the world as is Cassius Fort or Rachel Jordan.

Beaumont's last retreat is into the wilderness of the West, especially the swamplands ruled by an old pirate named Gran Boz. To Jeremiah the West represents many of the same things it meant to Jack Burden. It is a place where names do not matter, where nothing matters, since it offers the opportunity of a new start and renewed innocence (WET 182, 183, 275, 295, 334, 458, 459, 506). Bohner describes Jeremiah's trip westward as a journey "out of time and into nature" and innocence (115), as do Robert Berner (59) and Robert White (103). When the fugitives arrive at the village ruled by Gran Boz, Beaumont immediately recognizes

that it holds no security for him or his wife. Seeking protection from the rain beneath a shack on stilts, he looks about and describes what he sees.

> Scattered about were two or three fish heads in various states of decay, and several bones of small animal or fowl trodden into the earth. A twist of rotten cloth, . . . fragments of a fire-blackened pottery container . . . the handle of a broken knife [lay on the mud around him]. A lean hog slouched out of the cave and began to nuzzle one of the fish heads. (WET 462)

Jeremiah's retreat to this village in the swamps of the West is a symbol of degradation paralleling his own inward corruption, according to Frederick P. W. McDowell (39). Justus calls his refuge "a scrofulous Eden," an image of dissolution and slow decay (Achievement 221, 219-20), and instead of discovering innocence and redemption there, Beaumont finds the Gran Boz, an image of Original Sin (Fiedler 742). Jeremiah journeys westward to avoid self-confrontation, and there he does enjoy

> . . . a kind of peace, a peace which he called "the black inwardness and womb of the quagmire." It was a peace with no past and no future, the absoluteness of the single, separate, dark massive moment that swells up fatly like a bubble from the deep mud, exists as a glove of slick film housing its noxious gas, then pops and is gone. . . . (WET 479)

It is a peace which does not endure, because gradually all the filth and decay begin to remind him of himself. The more Jeremiah Beaumont attempts to run away, the more he is exposed to images which reflect his own inner condition. Neither Rachel nor the West proves more than a temporary retreat from the self-knowledge he both seeks and avoids.

Amantha Starr (BA), like Warren's other characters, is haunted by "that vacuum of no identity," by the fear that "I was a being without being . . ." (BA 52). Thus she devotes her life to searching for her identity, at the same time she flees self-knowledge (Casper, "Miscegenation as Symbol" 142; Justus, Achievement 245). Wanting to be like everyone else, she dreams of finding a "cocoon of quietness" where "nothing would ever have happened" (BA 279). Wherever she goes, she carries with her a picture of a grassy place of refuge which is both real and dream. The reality is a green nook where she used to play as a child, a little meadow containing the grave of her mother. The dream is of a grassy area where she is free and happy, and in her mind the two are identical. She is confused by this merged image, since in her dreams the cool expanse is a place of beginnings, but in reality it is a place of endings. Ironically this image of shelter holds the key to the knowledge Amantha desires, but from which she runs. She retreats into this dream spot of freedom to avoid admitting her Negro heritage, but it also holds the symbol of the blackness to which she must admit, the grave of her slave mother. In running away from her identity, she takes refuge in the very place which is a constant reminder of what she wants to escape (BA 3-4).

One of the ways she tries to deny her race is through her marriage to Tobias Sears. Married to a white man and secure in his white society, she thinks she will be able to

forget. She idealizes their marriage, seeing it as a photograph in which she and her husband are on each side of their son's cradle,

> holding hands across the cradle and staring down in perfect bliss, untouched by fate and history. . . . life frozen in quietness, in eternal stasis, out of time, no past, no future, no beat of the heart. (BA 283)

If she can retain this mental photograph, then perhaps it will make everything real. Another image which becomes the symbol of her retreat into an unrealistically ideal marriage is Tobias's published poem about war and death, which she frames and takes with her each time they move. One day, however, the poem disappears, revealing a shabby, discolored rectangle on the wallpaper where it had hung (BA 284). Suddenly she is confronted with the reality of her marriage, which is like that empty place on the wall. She must admit that she personifies the opening line of her husband's poem, now gone: "I who, alone:" (BA 288). She is alone; her marriage has never been a refuge, but rather the "gilt of the scab over the old sore" (BA 287). Never once has she or Tobias been able to forget or forgive her racial background. Again her retreat has brought her face-to-face with the identity she has been trying to escape.

Having failed twice to forget the painful truth of her birth, Amantha makes one last retreat, this time into the West, where she hopes she and Tobias will find a renewed life together (BA 282). Their flight westward comes at a crucial point in her search for identity, according to

Justus (Achievement 243), at a time when she has lost their son and is about to lose Tobias (BA 290). Their first stop is Sills Crossing, Kansas. Tobias sets up a little shop where he almost succeeds in perfecting an invention that would have made them a great deal of money. When he fails, he turns to whiskey and women, forcing Amantha to urge a second move, this time to Blair City. There his infant banking business fails, and the drinking and affairs begin once more. Amantha advocates still a third move, thereby establishing a pattern of "failing westward" (BA 292, 294). Instead of facing her husband's failures and her own, the result of their inability to accept her Negro bloodlines, she encourages running away. Each one of Amantha Starr's retreats, the grassy place of reality and memory, her marriage to Tobias Sears, and her flight West, pressures her toward admitting the truth she is resisting.

In The Cave Isaac Sumpter is the protagonist most driven to withdraw from the identity he seeks. During his freshman year at college in Nashville, Isaac uses obsessive studying to avoid self-confrontation and commitment. He spends almost every waking moment preparing for his classes, where ". . . he might answer the question, calmly, precisely, almost contemptuously. . . . If the grade came right, if there was the A, he felt an icy joy that, for the moment, justified all" (C 100-01). Isaac's whole world is his academic achievement, which fills the void inside where "he had no plan, no ambition--nothing--to hope for, or about"

(C 101). Occasionally, however, Isaac attempts to examine the reasons he is fanatical about his study, and he wonders about the contempt he experiences every time he receives an A. He is intelligent enough to realize that his obsessive studying is his way of avoiding self-knowledge, and he feels contempt for his weakness. His situation in Nashville is complicated even more by his loss of faith in God. During that first year he decides that neither God nor the self exists (C 101). If he believes in God, that is a way of affirming his duty to his preacher-father, MacCarland Sumpter, and Isaac cannot endure the thought of such a commitment.

Isaac's preoccupation with studying and his denial of his father's God are just two of the metaphors of retreat in the novel. Another refuge frequently on Sumpter's mind is death, often formulated through the image of the cave. Isaac is especially drawn by the idea of the cave, with its nice, even temperatures, where things are of no consequence (C 239-40, 241, 248). On one of his several forages into the cavern, Isaac thinks he might like to put out his lantern and just sit alone in the darkness, but he does not do it. Instead, "he shut his eyes, and it was almost as though he were in another place, and in another time, and nothing had happened yet or perhaps nothing might ever happen and he would not have to suffer" (C 277). Isaac longs to find a refuge where "things don't matter" and where he will not have to suffer. Sometimes death appears to be one answer. His

desire for the escape of death is again obvious when he feels himself "overcome by a painful, inexorable envy for Jasper Harrick. . . . he lay in the cool, cool dark, and did not suffer" (C 324). According to Bohner, in The Cave "Warren depicts the consequences of the longing for withdrawal and non-being in nightmare images of claustrophobic terror" (150).

From his study of Adam Rosenzweig of Wilderness, Justus states that the protagonist primarily attempts to elude identity through his retreat into passivity (Achievement 252). Like Jack Burden and Jeremiah Beaumont, Adam has an idealistic view he tries to impose upon the world. When he fails, however, he retreats by refusing to think of the realities surrounding him. Faced with painful facts, he closes his mind "as though fog had descended to blot out a valley" (W 168). He literally seeks refuge in both spiritual and physical paralysis. As he watches his black friend Mose struggle to learn to read, Adam feels unmanned, a "constriction in his chest. Something too complicated, too terrible, for him to give a name to was in him, was in the world. And he could not move" (W 232). What he cannot admit is that he, like many others, feels both compassion and contempt for the black who has to struggle so hard to read. This self-image falls far short of Adam's ideal, and so he withdraws into the frozen moment where life seems to stop (W 292, 293). Like all retreats, however, Adam's paralysis and withdrawal from time are only temporary

refuges, which explode around him and crash "like an enormous glass demijohn hit by a brickbat" (W 292).

Mose Crawfurd is the means by which Adam is sent off in pursuit of other retreats. Mose betrays Adam's idealistic expectations by murdering their boss. Only after this betrayal can Rosenzweig admit that he came South to Virginia to find something. "And now he was free to go. . . . Suddenly, all the past was nothing, and joy flooded his heart" (W 245). With his newly won freedom, Adam chooses to go into the Wilderness, which the Southern deserter Monmorancy Pugh calls "The Pisen Fields." "It is shore-God a place a man can wander and not know" (W 276), and as such should make a perfect retreat for Adam, who does not want to know. But it is also the place to which Adam brings his own expectations of fair play, so that when he sees a Southern soldier stalking a Yankee, he thinks to himself, "He shouldn't do that. It is not fair" (W 297). With that thought he kills the Reb, an act for which his passivity has not prepared him, a deed which he believes a betrayal of his own idealism. Thinking about his action, he decides that the one reason he had left Europe to come to America was to perform this killing. It has been the reason for everything (W 299). Repeatedly he tries to reassure himself that because he killed for freedom, he is not guilty, but his act continues to haunt him. The Wilderness has indeed been a "poison field" to Adam's idealism, for it has become a false refuge where he has been

forced to see himself as no different from other men, capable of the same deeds as all men. Adam's retreats, too, have brought him to the moment of self-confrontation.

In Flood, Brad Tolliver, whose self-entrapment hinders his fulfilling a potentially fine literary career, retreats from knowledge that would enable him to write well again. Like so many other Warren protagonists, he is running away from involvement with his loved ones, from the commitment that would free him to be himself (Guttenberg, Web of Being 120). His retreat is given form through the image of his expensive Beverly Hills sunglasses, "guaranteed to take the glory out of any sunset exploding at you over the Pacific" (F 28). Just as the tinted lenses take all life out of whatever he looks at, Brad's withdrawals rob his writings of reality and meaning. Tolliver's flights are part of a pattern he establishes as a young man. During that long summer in Fiddlersburg when his marriage to Lettice Poindexter is deteriorating, he often thinks of how the two of them will finally go to Mexico, the land of escape. Brad's floating image of that country gives him the strength to plunge into the world at Fiddlersburg (F 304-05). With a sanctuary in mind, Brad endures the summer of destructive passion and murder surrounding his wife and his sister, Maggie (F 307, 322). Then, after his brother-in-law Calvin Fiddler murders Maggie's lover and after Lettice miscarries their child, Brad discovers he needs a more immediate retreat. He finds it in the same place as had

his father before him, the swamp (F 333). But there his friend Frog-Eye tells him the uncomfortable truth that Brad's own pushing has led to Maggie's affair and the events which follow (F 374-77). As Justus says, the swamp has been "a psychological dodge to keep [Brad] away from the complexities of self" (Achievement 288), but in the swamp Brad encounters his own responsibility in the events which destroy the lives of four people--Maggie, Calvin, Lettice, and himself. He must run away once more to avoid the self-knowledge he wants.

Brad flees West, to Hollywood, California, where he hopes to find innocence and to avoid human involvement (Guttenberg, Web of Being 126, 122). But nearly twenty years later "after . . . one book and half another one . . ., five lead reviews, one screen writers' award, two Oscars, seventeen picture credits, and two marriages" (F 28), he has returned to Fiddlersburg, where it all started. He comes home to find the knowledge that will help him break his writer's block, but because he still is not ready, he withdraws into one last refuge, Leontine Purtle, his "Lady of Shalott" (F 87, 221-22, 224-25, 242, 351). To Brad she is a personification of innocence, and according to Marshall Walker, his romantic illusion about her is essential "as a vehicle of redemption and self-fulfillment" (Vision 199). Through her he tries to forget himself. Lying in bed with her is like being in a current which carries away with it everything that has ever happened (F 361). Brad's illusion

is broken, however, when he discovers that his pure maiden wears a diaphragm and is well known by the personnel at the Seven Dwarfs Motel (F 362). His interlude with Leontine Purtle reminds him of the realities of life and of a painful, personal fact. In one of their conversations Leontine has tried to tell Brad what being blind is like. She struggles in her explanation, but finally says, "'If you're blind, it's--it's just being yourself'" (F 232). After an afternoon thinking about what she has told him, Brad confides in his sister.

> "Do you know what the Lady of Shalott, the beauteous Leontine, said to me this afternoon when I asked her how it felt to be blind? . . . She said: 'Being you's like being blind.' Being me, that is." (F 242)

In his spiritual blindness Brad has retreated from the selfhood that will return his writing ability to him.

In Meet Me in the Green Glen, the protagonists search for identity through love, but because they, too, are terrified of commitment, they run from what would give them self-knowledge. The title identifies a major image of retreat for Angelo Passetto, the green glen, which is a symbol reminiscent of the grassy place of Amantha Starr (BA). The color green in this refuge is especially significant, says Leonard Casper. He claims that Warren uses green to symbolize "false security," a pattern which can be traced back to the 1930s, with the poems "Bearded Oaks" and "When the Light Gets Green" ("Evergreening Glen" 61). When Angelo discovers the green glen, he calls it the spot God forgot

(MM 53). Guttenberg explains that as a place of enchantment it takes on an image of unreality where lovers can live "happily ever after" ("Meet Me" 113). There Angelo first sees Charlene, who is the black, illegitimate daughter of Sunderland Spottwood and one of the Sicilian's retreats into love to avoid selfhood. Afraid to approach her, he spends many days spying upon her from the woods and gradually making his presence known. Fascinated by the play of her skin over her muscles, he frequently comments upon how she appears to withdraw from him through the air. In many ways Charlene represents the impossible and the unreal (MM 53-60). "In one sense, that was now all she had been, she was not real to him, only an abstraction of motion, a fleeting, flowing sign in the shadow of trees" (MM 53). She is a symbol of potential happiness, and as such is unavailable to Angelo (MM 67). When she rejects him, he feels "the sadness and lostness clot in him and intensify and darken" (MM 62). The green glen and the girl are the dreams of life to which he futilely tries to withdraw, but from which he must return to rejoin Cassie and the realities of life (MM 193-94).

As Angelo's life away from Charlene and with Cassie becomes more and more intolerable, he buries himself in ritualistic work (Justus, Achievement 295). What particularly frightens him into this form of escape is the secret knowledge that something about Cassie, perhaps her defenseless innocence, touches a vulnerability in him too (MM 49).

Angelo retreats from commitment to Cassie into the refuge of work, and "If earlier, work had been a flight, a refuge, now it became a fury. That was all the days were--a blind occupation" (MM 115). The ritual of labor he does by day enables him temporarily to escape the attraction of Cassie by night (MM 119).

> He was dimly aware of some need to grasp first one project, then another, as some new image of the future. The activity of the day itself--even though it became more and more obsessive--was not enough. (MM 180)

Cassie, who demands nothing, represents a responsibility her lover is strongly drawn to assume, but one for which he is not prepared. Each one of his flights, represented by first the green glen, then Charlene, and finally obsessive work, eventually takes him back to Cassie Spottwood, to whom he cannot make the commitment essential to his self-discovery.

Like Angelo Passetto, Cassie also seeks security by withdrawing into her own world of unreality, first as a young woman with Cy Grinder, and then later with her marriage to Sunderland Spottwood (MM 73-87). For her each of these men represents a security away from her domineering mother, but each proves a disappointment. Cy is not strong enough to withstand her mother's attack (MM 79), and with Sunder she feels "no sense of any future" (MM 85). Marshall Walker says these retreats "have forced her to retreat into herself to such an extent that she can hardly distinguish between subjective impression and external reality" (Vision 208).

Unable to find with either Cy or Sunder the love she believes will give her identity, she sees Angelo Passetto as her last chance. Since so much of her adult life has been lived without freedom, she promises the much younger Angelo not to imprison him with her love (MM 148-49). The commitment she makes to him causes her to feel renewed, "a different me" who laughs like a girl and feels pretty for the first time in her life (MM 151, 169, 163, 312, 358). Angelo is only a temporary sanctuary, since he is drawn to Charlene and believes he must be free to pursue her. After spying upon the two young lovers in the green glen, Cassie decides to betray him and herself by killing her husband and framing Angelo for the murder (MM 217).

Cassie's last flight from identity is into insanity, where she denies what she has done to Angelo and herself. With a history of mental instability, she insists upon regularly attending the trial of her lover (MM 279). During the entire trial Cassie appears to be in a state of shock, capable only of staring down at her hands so that she does not have to look at Passetto (MM 227, 235, 259). Then, when it is too late to reverse Angelo's guilty verdict, she confesses, but no one believes her (MM 259, 266). As she continues to insist upon her guilt, Murray Guilfort and other concerned friends have her legally committed to a sanatorium (MM 290). Waiting for Angelo's sentence to be carried out, she tries to convince everyone that she is, indeed, the murderer. Finally, after his execution, Cassie

retreats one last time from the painful reality of betrayal and guilt, revising the memories of her lover and her husband's death so that they are more comfortable (MM 341). She spends the rest of her life in an insane asylum. Speaking to Murray on one of his rare visits, she says, "'It is like--' She stopped, then pressed the hands, hard, over her heart. 'Like you tore your heart out,' she resumed, 'and threw it away'" (MM 357). She denies Angelo's death, insisting "how he went away--and he's happy" (MM 359-60). For most of Warren's protagonists commitment is the reality from which they are running, but such is not the case with Cassie. It is not her love, but rather her betrayal of that love from which she retreats as she desperately tries to evade the self-knowledge for which she searches.

Murray Guilfort, too, seeks his identity through his love for Cassie Spottwood, but when he betrays her by refusing to help clear Angelo, he tries to escape from what is essentially a self-betrayal, too. Like Angelo, he fills up his days after Cassie's commitment through work, this time of a political nature. All the years he has spent building political ties pay off. He becomes Attorney General, then a member of the Supreme Court of his state. He tries to convince himself that finally he has found the respect he craves, but he knows something is missing (MM 344). Through all those years of political success, he stays away from Cassie, but finally he visits her again. As he listens to her talk about her reconstructed past and sees

her new contentment, he attempts to shatter her security with the truth of what she has forgotten (MM 360). Having betrayed Cassie once again, Murray flees, with the world shimmering around him unrealistically (MM 362). Forgetfulness is what he wants, but cannot attain. If he is to find peace, he must admit his betrayal of the love that was supposed to give him an acceptable self-image.

The need to retreat from the prison of the self is a constant in the Warren protagonist, and thus it is not surprising when Richard Howard states that A Place to Come To is the story of the spiritual withdrawal of its main character, Jed Tewksbury (72). Escape seems a welcome prospect to Jed, who says, "The condition was not unpleasant. It must be . . . like the calm irony of age, after the death of ambition and desire: the last wisdom or the last blankness" (PTC 136). Retreat is a self-protective device, and he describes it through the image of fog, which he would enjoy drawing around him "like a dark woolly robe to protect [him] from all eyes" (PTC 271). Like so many other Warren protagonists, Jed runs from one sanctuary to another, trying to find a place where he belongs, but where he will not have to admit his personal weaknesses. From Dugton, Alabama, his hometown, he goes to Chicago and hides in his scholarly pursuits at the University of Chicago. But when his benefactor, Professor Stahlmann, commits suicide on the very day he receives his American citizenship, Jed flees to Italy by enlisting in the U.S. Army (PTC 63-65). He cannot

understand why his friend chose to die on what was the happiest day of his life. In Italy Jed learns more about death, first through his execution of a captured Nazi officer and then through his activities as an American officer attached to the Italian partisans. Death becomes a way of life for him, one to which he becomes so accustomed that he quits asking himself why that should be so (PTC 69-70). During his time in the service he learns that "it is more blessed to kill than to be killed" (PTC 71), and he tries to escape the horrors of war by reading a battered copy of Dante's Divina Commedia. But his refuge confuses him more than it helps.

> The trouble here was that, though this was my program for keeping sane, the book's vision of all-embracing meaningfulness, in the midst of the incessant violence and perfidy depicted there, aggravated, by fundamental and ironic contrast, my awareness of the blankness of spirit that was then my way of life. (PTC 70)

Once the war is over, he returns to Chicago to escape the death he associates with Italy and to complete the degree he had started before his enlistment. Back on campus he works diligently on his dissertation, but makes no progress. Again searching for an asylum, he marries Agnes Andresen, another scholar on the verge of her Ph.D. (PTC 72-73). Through love he hopes to protect himself from his memories of death. Jed does find the peace he yearns for in the early months of their marriage, which he describes as "our little floating island, cut off from the world" (PTC 83). Then Agnes finds she has cancer, and in a moment of weakness she accuses her husband of having put it in her.

Jed is shocked by such an unfair accusation coming from the woman in whom he had sought security. "My mind seemed to be numbly refusing something, seeking refuge in numbness" (PTC 86). During the months Agnes slowly dies from her disease, Jed has the opportunity to become intimately acquainted with the fear of death from which he has been fleeing. He uses what he learns about death to write his successful dissertation on Dante and the metaphysics of death. Following her death a new element is added to the retreats Tewksbury periodically makes--guilt. He describes the quality of his life at this time:

> And so life was really unendurable, for I began to realize that, in the mystic texture of the universe, my success would have been impossible except for the protracted agony and lingering death of Agnes Andresen. (PTC 98)

Once more Tewksbury flees, this time to Nashville, Tennessee, to assume a teaching position at the university. His retreat, however, quickly becomes another prison as he becomes embroiled in an affair with Rozelle Hardcastle Carrington. Desperately unhappy, he tries to bury himself in his scholarship, since work fills up time (PTC 160, 219, 269-70, 280, 291, 307, 308, 318). He fails, however, because each time he is with Rozelle he feels a bit more spiritually dead.

> I don't know how much longer I could have lived the life I had been living in Nashville, all the intensities, lies, self-divisions, dubieties, duplicities, and blind and variously devised plummetings into timeless sexuality. (PTC 269)

Jed Tewksbury, who wants above everything else "a place to

come to," seeks refuge in Chicago, Italy, and Nashville, but he does not find in these places what he needs. In each, guilt and death, either physical or spiritual, intrude, setting him off in search of yet another retreat where he perhaps can feel he belongs. He will not attain what he seeks, however, until he confronts and accepts himself.

Robert Penn Warren's persistent concern in his ten novels has been his characters' search for selfhood. Dissatisfied with the images they project, his protagonists feel locked within themselves, helpless to discover identities of which they can be proud. With the convenient excuse of entrapment, they complain about how circumstances obstruct their quests for knowledge. But in the course of living, the characters sometimes stumble upon opportunity to escape their self-imprisonment, yet when they attempt to seize the chance, they find that the freedom to be themselves is painful. Thus they retreat from identity back into the prison of the self, in spite of the lip service they pay to their need to find themselves. Warren employs a number of images through which to develop his characters' withdrawals from truth. At times their refuge takes the form of psychic or spiritual withdrawal, expressed through passivity, cynicism, irresponsibility, callousness, idealism, and isolation, or through their efforts to relive the past to avoid the future. At other times their retreat is physical, with their fleeing from one place to another or from one project to the next, anything which will fill up their time

so that they do not have to think about their own faults. No matter how far these characters run, they are constantly pursued by their inner need to know themselves. For those who learn to accommodate their human frailties, release from the prison of the self is possible, but those who refuse to accept their weaknesses find neither release nor redemption.

Notes

[1] For additional interpretations of the stereopticon, see Bohner 64ff.; Casper, The Dark and Bloody Ground 102-06; Richard G. Law, "Warren's Night Rider and the Issue of Naturalism: The 'Nightmare' of Our Age," Southern Literary Journal 8.2 (1976): 61.

[2] Bohner 91; Bradbury, "Symbolic and Textual Patterns" 83; Casper, The Dark and Bloody Ground 130; A. L. Clements, "Theme and Reality in 'At Heaven's Gate' and 'All the King's Men,'" Criticism 5.1 (1963): 35; Guttenberg, Web of Being 41; Robert J. Ray and Ann Ray, "Time in All the King's Men: A Stylistic Analysis," Texas Studies in Literature and Language 5 (1963): 454; Earl J. Wilcox, "'A Cause for Laughter, A Thing for Tears': Humor in All the King's Men," Southern Literary Journal 12.1 (1979): 32.

[3] Bradbury, Fugitives 209; Norton R. Girault, "The Narrator's Mind as Symbol: An Analysis of All the King's Men," Twentieth Century Interpretations of All the King's Men: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Robert H. Chambers (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1977) 31-32; Elizabeth M. Kerr, "Polarity of Themes in All the King's Men," Modern Fiction Studies 6 (1960): 37, 42; Murray Kreiger, "The Assumption of the 'Burden' of History in All the King's Men," The Classic Vision: The Retreat from Extremity in Modern Literature (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1971) 290; Ray and Ray 454.

[4] For a discussion of the purposes served by Burden's Great Sleeps, consult Casper, The Dark and Bloody Ground 128; Beekman W. Cottrell, "Cass Mastern and the Awful Responsibility of Time," Twentieth Century Interpretations of All the King's Men: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Robert H. Chambers (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1977) 117; Bohner 91; Richard Gray, "The Nashville Agrarians," The Literature of Memory: Modern Writers of the American South (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1977) 76; Kerr 40; Bradbury, Fugitives 211.

[5] In addition to what Jack says the meaning of the West is, several critics have their own interpretations. See Mark Royden Winchell, "O Happy Sin! Felix Culpa in All the King's Men," Mississippi Quarterly 31 (1978): 581; Sam Hynes, "Robert Penn Warren: The Symbolic Journey," University of Kansas City Review 17 (1951): 282; Kreiger 292.

# CHAPTER V

## IMAGES OF RELEASE: REDEMPTION AND IDENTITY

During his speech accepting the 1970 National Medal for Literature from the Library of Congress, Warren said each man's responsibility is to redeem himself ("'Negative Relevance'" B3). In this statement he obviously does not use the word redeem in the Christian sense, since man is to be saved through his own efforts, not through Christ. In fact, Warren denies that he is a believer; instead, he calls himself "a great 'yearner'" (Watkins, Then & Now 51). Richard Gray adds that although Warren often expresses the theme of redemption in Biblical language, its form is really "a humanist version of Christian legend" (Introduction 9). During an interview with Patrick O'Sheel of the Washington Post, Warren describes how difficult salvation is for his characters, since they cannot rely upon the redemption promised by Christianity (F3). Writing in "John Greenleaf Whittier: Poetry as Experience," he explains that rebirth is possible "only in repudiating the self, and all the self [stands] for, in order to save the self" (55). Barnett Guttenberg identifies one additional ingredient of this redemptive process: self-awareness, which signals its onset (Web of Being 158).

As the characters search for the self-knowledge which will give them redemption, they pursue one or more of the following steps. James Magmer writes that some protagonists (for example, Jack Burden, Jeremiah Beaumont, and Adam Rosenzweig) try to associate themselves with an abstract ideal like love, truth, goodness, or justice (180), but James H. Justus believes this means of discovery is counter-productive, because it shelters the protagonists from the realities they must learn to accept ("A Note on John Crowe Ransom and Robert Penn Warren" 429). Michel Mohrt, a French critic, sees revolt as another step in the process. In his interpretation a protagonist like Percy Munn or Jeremiah Beaumont becomes an outlaw destined to fail, but his defeat is unimportant, since in it the character finds "personal justification" (77). John Rees Moore asserts that suffering is an essential phase of the quest (320), and indeed all the protagonists do suffer. Justus identifies a fourth stage as the hero's ability to admit guilt (Achievement 25), as Jack Burden and Adam Rosenzweig do. Guttenberg, Gray, and Justus all observe that another aspect of rebirth is the character's recognition of his common brotherhood with mankind.[1] Along with that acknowledgment must come his acceptance of family, place in life, and past.[2] Finally, John Rees Moore considers the protagonist's learning to accept responsibility for his own actions an essential step toward salvation (321).

Self-knowledge is the goal toward which Warren's characters yearn, and entrapment and retreat are the obstacles blocking its fulfillment. For each protagonist life is the journey he takes to acquire identity. Four characters, Sue Murdock (AHG), Isaac Sumpter (C), Cassie Spottwood (MM), and Murray Guilfort (MM), fail miserably, while three others, Percy Munn (NR), Jeremiah Beaumont (WET), and Angelo Passetto (MM), are poised on the brink of self-discovery as their lives end. Seven reach a position from which acceptable identity becomes a very real possibility. Jerry Calhoun (AHG), Jack Burden (ATKM), Amantha Starr (BA), Monty Harrick (C), Adam Rosenzweig (W), Brad Tolliver (F), and Jed Tewksbury (PTC) all learn to accommodate the realities of themselves, both good and bad. Although there are no guarantees that their lives will be rich and productive following their self-acceptance, the opportunity does definitely exist. Redemption and identity are the rewards for the protagonists who successfully fulfill their search for self-knowledge. The images of release in Warren's ten novels suggest the degree of redemption available to each protagonist.

Sue Murdock, Warren's most tragic hollow female protagonist, fails to discover a new identity because she abuses the power of love. She tries to eradicate her poor self-image by pretending to be someone she is not, by withdrawing from those who love her, and by drinking, but nothing gives her the knowledge which will permit her to

live with herself. In her misery she strikes out against Sweetie Sweetwater, her last lover and the father of her child. Because he will not marry her, she punishes him by having an abortion, the major image of her failure. She tries to think of the abortion as her victory, and indeed as she awaits her scheduled appointment, she does feel like a winner, like a politician who has just received word of a "victorious armistice," like an investor who sells at just the right moment. But underneath she knows that what she plans will really be a personal nonfulfillment, as her next thought indicates. "She felt like one who, after vomit, relaxes in the relief from pressure and retch, and is ready to sleep" (AHG 356). To prepare for her operation, she purges herself of all feeling, so that she is calm, "empty, and secure with finality" (AHG 365). In her choice, however, she is risking more than self-fulfillment and Sweetwater's loyalty; she is also denying her father's love. Concerned for his daughter, Bogan Murdock sends her a monthly check for her expenses, but she has refused to spend any part of it. Yet once she decides upon her abortion, she uses the total amount to finance her illegal operation. What she refuses to use to make a new life for herself she will use to destroy the life of her unborn child and the love of its father (AHG 357). Having rejected both her lover and her father and having killed the emblem of Sweetwater's love, she feels the essence of herself slip away. That loss is expressed through the image of a trapeze artist who

releases her hold on the bar and fails to clasp the hands of her partner, reaching out to catch her (AHG 359-60). There is no redemption for Sue Murdock, and as Slim Garrett slowly strangles her, she makes no struggle to save herself (AHG 361). Sue dies trapped in the prison of the self, where she has discovered neither identity nor redemption (Guttenberg, Web of Being 25).[3]

Of all Warren's protagonists, Isaac Sumpter of The Cave is most removed from the redemption self-knowledge can give. Completely aware of his own emptiness and blankness of being, he willingly enters the trap of self through ambition, greed, and indifference to the suffering his actions cause. When his self-image becomes unbearable, he tries to escape it with obsessive study and with thoughts of death. He is the character suggested by part of the introductory epigraph from Plato's The Republic: "True, he said: how could they see anything but the shadows if they were never allowed to move their heads?" Isaac's entrapment results in a loss of freedom which denies him selfhood. Tragically he recognizes his lack when he thinks of "the darkness of the self that suffered and was not free" (C 99).

In his selfishness he sees his involvement in Jasper Harrick's death as "his triumph" (C 368), rather than as one of his deeds that place him among the damned (Donaldson 71). He does everything he can to turn Jasper's entombment into a profit, yet unconsciously he must feel guilty, since he excuses himself by claiming he has not planned any of

it (C 231, 282). Lying to himself is part of his problem. Even though he tries to convince himself he has not orchestrated the publicity surrounding the tragedy, he has. As soon as he learns of his friend's disappearance, he calls Haworth, one of his newspaper connections, to set up the story and to grab a personal exclusive (C 280-82). In his obsession to succeed, Isaac lies to himself that the ends justify the means. His deceitful, ruthless actions deny him the release he seeks.

Isaac's relationship with his father is another major obstacle preventing his redemption. He believes MacCarland Sumpter placed an unnecessary burden upon him when he prayed "that a son of [his] seed might rise up, to redeem all" (C 91). Isaac has grown up feeling like the Biblical Isaac offered in sacrifice by his father Abraham, and he resents everything connected with his parent. Thus one avenue toward salvation is removed, since he cannot accept who and what his father is. In his blind inwardness Isaac does not recognize his father's love as a means to redemption. After the old man emerges from the cave to tell his son he has covered for him,

> Isaac felt growing in him, too, the weakness, the suffocating sweetness, the insidious fear of unmanment. He felt the gush of gratitude, the welling of tears in his heart, the beginning of the terrible self-betrayal which love is. (C 358)

That is another of Isaac's problems. He cannot get beyond the idea that commitment is betrayal; he can neither give nor receive love. Oddly, he blames his father for his own

inability, feeling betrayed and lost like Isaac awaiting the sacrificial knife blade (C 359). Because Isaac cannot assume the responsibility of his own actions, he is emotionally stunted and twisted. As he leaves his father for the last time, he does not understand the man's sacrifice for him. All he can think is that "the old fool had saved him. The old fool had done that and he would never escape that fact" (C 359).

At this point Isaac is surrounded by images of illness and death, emblems of his own spiritual death. He is "sick of himself, sick with fear" (C 358). Thinking of life as a mess, he realizes his deeds will fester "like a tiny ulcer in the brain, unhealing forever and oozing. He felt physically sick, and did not know why" (C 366). Running away from his father, he observes the towns through which he passes, describing them as resembling animals killed on the highway and thrown to one side to await decay and corruption (C 365). Everything reminds him of death; even the lawn of a house is like the "mortician's artificial green of scarcely sprung grass" (C 366). Feeling contempt for himself, he turns his disdain upon the world. Having already betrayed one love, he does so again as he thinks about Goldie. "To hell with her, for a fact, for who she was . . ." (C 368). He imagines her dead in childbirth, and for a moment he feels deprived, then relieved. The image he has of the rest of his life is equally depressing. Haunted by Jasper Harrick, he discovers success is not

enough. To escape, he envisions himself turning to Seconal, Scotch, women, and money. As the reader leaves Isaac Sumpter, the protagonist is pondering his future: "Where he, Isaac Sumpter, Ikey, Little Ikey, who wanted to be good, and had paid the price, could at last be totally himself" (C 372). L. Hugh Moore concludes that Isaac "remains steadfast in self-ignorance, self-deception, and self-pity" (85), while Marshall Walker believes he will continue "disconnected from the human bond," out of touch with himself and God (Vision 187). For Isaac Sumpter there is no release from the prison of the self; all he has to anticipate is a continuing self-hatred and lack of freedom.[4]

The failed protagonist appears in one more novel, Meet Me in the Green Glen, with Cassie Spottwood and Murray Guilfort. Cassie, who has searched for identity through love and who has been deserted by everyone to whom she turns, kills her husband to escape the trap of marriage. When she permits Angelo Passetto to be tried and convicted of the murder she committed, she has to recognize that she is guilty of the same sin for which she has condemned others. She, too, has betrayed love. In her agony she retreats into insanity, rearranging the facts of the past into a more acceptable version. That insanity is described by M. D. Herring as "a metaphor for the failure of the self to achieve being" (63). In the last scene depicting Cassie, she has spent years in an asylum with only an occasional visitor. On this afternoon Murray Guilfort has

decided to pay her one last visit. As he walks in, he observes the neutral colors she wears, the dark skirt, gray pullover, white collar of a blouse beneath, and black and white saddle shoes, shades symbolic of her withdrawal from the world. From the beginning of this confrontation, Cassie remains unresponsive, as indicated by the imagery through which she is described. She turns upon Murray a smile as "bright and unexpected as a new tin pie plate you hang on a cherry tree to turn in the breeze and keep the birds off" (MM 355). That is exactly how she employs her smile: to put distance between herself and the people who would intrude upon the world she has re-created for herself. When Murray speaks to her, she looks at him so attentively that he knows she is hearing no word he says. Even her hands lie in her lap, "palm up, inert, empty, weak" (MM 356). Earlier, when he shook her hand, it "was as unresponsive as a small rubber glove filled with sawdust" (MM 355). Everything about Cassie is lifeless and withdrawn; she is completely uninvolved in life. Leaving her, Murray glances back and sees her "standing there, her face calm and pure, not looking at him, but into distance, like a lamp in the darkening room" (MM 360). Release from the prison of the self demands recognition of the common brotherhood of man and acceptance of the past and responsibility; in other words, it requires man to embrace life, but this Cassie cannot do. She is another of Warren's protagonists who fail the test of selfhood.[5]

The last of Warren's hollow protagonists is Murray Guilfort, who early in the novel is described wanting to be free of the past, "transformed and redeemed, his true self at last unhusked" (MM 29). Dissatisfied with his self-image, he has spent his life wishing he were someone else: Sunderland Spottwood, characterized by his easy way with women; Alfred Milbank, who thinks nothing of purchasing a prostitute for the evening; a judge on the Supreme Court, admired and respected by his peers; even Angelo Passetto, beloved of Cassie Spottwood (MM 366). Locked within the prison of the self, Murray cannot get beyond his jealousy of others. He even envies Arlita, the black mother of Spottwood's illegitimate daughter. When he searches her out in the city to buy her land, he looks at her, old and wrinkled, "And in that instant he [is] engulfed by such a wave of lust, envy, sick fear, revulsion, and nameless yearning" that he is practically paralyzed (MM 349). Hatred blocks his self-knowledge. After leaving Cassie at the asylum for the last time, he realizes he hates her, too, for the happiness she has found, while he has only "the empty distance of the world" (MM 361). He thinks of how he despises life and everyone in it, the woman he passes on the roadside, her husband working in the field, his dead wife Bessie (MM 361-63, 369). "He hated them all," but most of all he abhors himself (MM 370). Murray's envy, jealousy, and hatred are all emblems of his inability to discover acceptable identity. For Murray Guilfort there is

no release. Not yet having consciously decided to kill himself, he lies upon his bed feeling "a massive lassitude of mind and body, like a great stone perched on the edge of an abyss" (MM 364). When he finally decides to act, however, he chooses self-destruction instead of renewal. Like Sue Murdock, he elects to destroy life rather than to reconstruct it (MM 372). Suicide is his ultimate retreat, from which there is no redemption.[6]

The Warren protagonists who fail in their quest for self-knowledge are those who deny and betray love. They find life so terribly painful that they renounce responsibility for themselves and for others. Unable to accept their oneness with mankind, they destroy themselves and their loved ones. Sue Murdock, Isaac Sumpter, Cassie Spottwood, and Murray Guilfort are the hollow men of the modern world for whom redemption is impossible.

Another group of Warren protagonists who search for self-knowledge as a means to redemption includes Percy Munn, Jeremiah Beaumont, and Angelo Passetto. Whereas Sue, Isaac, Cassie, and Murray fail completely, this second set of characters at least has begun the redemptive process, only to be tragically diverted from it by death. Sharing a similar self-image of unworthiness and blankness of being, they search for identity through others. Trapped by their own idealism and by the treachery of their "friends," they retreat into an unreal world, from which they must find the will to escape if they are to discover selfhood. Release

from their own imposed imprisonment is an imminent likelihood, but their success is aborted when their new identities come too late for them to act (McDowell 34).

The critics of Night Rider are widely separated in their interpretations of how to perceive Percy Munn's success or failure in achieving identity.[7] The imagery, however, seems to support the idea that he has begun to move toward self-knowledge and redemption when he is killed. Munn believes he can be saved only if he fulfills himself through joining the brotherhood of men. The importance of his goal is made apparent very early in the novel with a connection image. During a meeting of the Association, a list of names of men who will support the cause is read. Listening to the roll call, Munn thinks how the list links all those men together in a common cause to make something that "had not existed before" (NR 17). Partly Munn joins the Association to enjoy its camaraderie. Once a member, though, he does not find the fellowship he has sought. When he is accused of murder, he flees to the remote farm of Willie Proudfit, where he is cut off from the men through whom he hopes to find definition. There he is again overcome by the lethargy that periodically has plagued him (NR 355-56).

His apathy is disturbed by a visit from Lucille Christian, who comes to ask him if they have a chance to live happily together. Even though Munn sends her away, she leaves him with a renewed interest in life. After her visit

Percy withdraws to a nearby bluff, where he spends the day staring off into the perfection of the sky. For a time he watches a buzzard spiraling upward into the air, an image suggesting that for him there is indeed another chance to attain perfection of self (NR 368). This sight helps him reach an important decision. Feeling the need to act, he decides he can best do so by killing Senator Tolliver, a traitor of the Association and a would-be seducer of Lucille (NR 368-69). Completing this goal surely should make him worthy of standing among men as their equal. On his journey to find his enemy, however, his certainty of purpose becomes clouded, as symbolized by two more images. Percy loves to gaze into the sky, but toward the evening of the first day of his search, he observes that it "opened, milky blue and pale and opalescent, above the spot where the big trees stopped" (NR 371). The previous perfection of the sky has now become opalescent, outwardly brilliant but incapable of inward penetration. The second important image is the cabin where Munn spends that first night. Percy sees the structure as old, decaying, and imperfect. "The logs had been badly notched, with weak, slovenly strokes" (NR 372). The imperfections of these two images make him think that perhaps his plan of decisive action is flawed, also. The next day that self-doubt is partially offset by another image. Approaching the area where Tolliver lives, Percy observes signs of civilization and order (NR 373). This vision assures him that if he can reach the proper decision, his

future will be clean and patterned like the countryside through which he passes. Simply stated, the decision he must reach is whether killing Tolliver will admit him to the brotherhood of man or whether not killing his enemy will do so.

Having found Tolliver's home, Munn waits until late night to enter. When he finds the old man, alone and ill, lying on his bed, Percy announces his purpose. He explains that although he is nothing, if he shoots Tolliver, he will become something. Percy cannot pull the trigger, however, and he ends by offering a glass of water to the man he has come to murder. This gesture is significant, since mythically water is a means of washing away old sins and a promise of rebirth (MR 374-76). Interestingly, Munn offers the water, rather than receives it, symbolically representing that he is giving up the self to find the self. The imagery suggests that Munn's not killing Tolliver has been the proper choice, a chance for cleansing his soul and for redemption. Percy has joined that community of mankind which has sinned and been forgiven. Now he must find the self-knowledge which will let him choose to do something worthwhile with his life, but he does not have the time to make the choice. Betrayed by Proudfit's nephew Sylvestus, Munn discovers that soldiers are closing in on him. He makes his escape through a side door and flees across the yard, only to run headlong into a wall blocking his path. The wall becomes a metaphor for the obstacles standing

between him and fulfilled self-knowledge. Although he is able to climb over the barrier, he is immediately killed by one of the pursuers obstructing his retreat into the woods (NR 377-78). The last sounds he hears are "the voices down the slope calling emptily, like the voices of boys at a game in the dark" (NR 378). This image of life as "a game in the dark" played by boys with the power of life and death highlights the futility of Munn's entire life. Tragically his movement toward knowledge and redemption, made possible by his refusal to murder Tolliver, has been aborted by his death.

In World Enough and Time Jeremiah Beaumont also searches for selfhood, which he gradually begins to discover before his death.[8] The first step he must take is to recognize the evils of the world, symbolized by the broadside which would help explain his murder of Cassius Fort and by the treachery of his friend Wilkie Barron. In that handbill, reportedly the work of Fort, the Senator denies his paternity of Rachel's child, charging it was the offspring of one of her slaves. This flyer causes Rachel to lose her child by Jeremiah, and it spurs her husband to seek out and kill Fort (WET 224-25). Only after his trial and escape to the hideout of the Gran Boz does Jeremiah learn the broadside was entirely the work of his best friend, Wilkie Barron. Thus it stands as an emblem of man's treachery to his fellowman (WET 497-99). After Beaumont's anger passes, he becomes obsessed with one question. Why

did Wilkie betray him, then save him from the hangman? On his way back to civilization to confront Wilkie and to give himself up, Jeremiah ponders the why of everything his friend has done. He decides that

> . . . what Wilkie did was always done for affection, for calculation, for interest, for conscience, for honor, for noble rage and contempt, for the cold flicker of pride, for the public good, for the sweetness of cruelty, for the joy of magnanimity, for the warm tear of pity, for fun, for fun, for fun. . . . (WET 501)

Wilkie's perverting the tragedies of life into games for his own enjoyment becomes for Jeremiah the universal depravity representative of all men. Using a powerful image, he describes that evil:

> . . . he was a cold, bright, terrible seed in the dark, somewhere in the darkness behind the world, beyond the world, and it sprouted forever and grew, and the world was the mask of it, the world was its terrible leaves that grew from the stalk. (WET 502)

In his manuscript he writes that his knowledge of Barron's wickedness is "'the kind of knowledge that is identity'" (WET 502). The beginnings of Jeremiah's identity lie in his recognition that evil is a part of life.

So far Beaumont has acknowledged the sinfulness of other men, but he has yet to confess his own. His evil is first given form through the venereal disease he contracts during his stay at the Gran Boz's. When he notices the canker, he writes in his journal, "'It proclaims me one of them [evil men], and of their great descent'" (WET 491). Later, when he is experiencing his rage at Barron's betrayal, he thinks that his anger is not enough to make him forget

something he has begun to realize about himself. He asks, "'Oh, why am I the bleeding sore of all the world? Oh, who will stanch me, rinse me, wash me clean?'" (WET 502). Using the imagery of his sore, he envisions himself as an embodiment of all the evils of the world. But he is not yet prepared to assume the responsibility for his own deeds, because he still hopes someone will excuse them. Then, on his return to civilization, he writes, "'I . . . bear my heart within me like a bleeding sore of self, as I bear the canker on my body'" (WET 506). If he is to heal the "sore of self," he must admit his guilt, and the confession finally comes when he tells One-eye Jenkins, "'I have killed one man. . . . With my hands. . . . He was a man. A great man. He was my friend and benefactor. He loved me like a father, and I killed him'" (WET 503). In agony Jeremiah admits his sin, which is most damaging because it is the same offense Wilkie committed against him: betrayal.

However, the worst crime for which he seeks expiation is "'the crime of self, the crime of self. The crime is I'" (WET 505). In trying to realize the pure idea that the evil in this world must be punished, he has succeeded only in alienating himself from mankind. Jeremiah's confession permits him to see himself clearly for the first time. He is not different from other men; like them he has sinned. He has begun to attain knowledge, and he writes in his journal:

> ". . . that is all we need: knowledge. That is not redemption, but is almost better than redemption. I

> go home through the wilderness now and I know that I may not have redemption. I no longer seek to justify. I seek only to suffer. I will shake the hangman's hand, and will call him brother at last." (WET 506)

Had Jeremiah lived long enough to call the hangman brother, he perhaps would have found the redemption he dared not hope for. But he does not live that long. Instead, Jenkins overtakes him on the trail home, kills him, and decapitates him to claim the reward (WET 507-08). In accepting the responsibility for his own deeds and in admitting his brotherhood with sinners, Jeremiah Beaumont begins to find identity and rebirth, a process which is aborted before it can be pursued. The last words he writes in his journal are significant. "'Oh, was I worth nothing, and my agony? Was all for naught?'" (WET 511).

Judging the success of Angelo Passetto's search for self-knowledge and redemption is difficult, also, because practically everything revealed about him is channeled through someone else. The reader does not have access to his mind. Instead of describing Angelo's reaction to Cassie's betrayal, Murray Guilfort relates that during her testimony she implies the Sicilian is the last person to have seen her husband alive (MM 258-40). How Passetto feels about this treachery, or even if he understands what Cassie is doing, is unknown. It is Murray, also, who summarizes the accused murderer's testimony, labeling it a "cock-and-bull story." Angelo swears that on the morning of the murder, Cassie called him into her husband's room, praised

his work, gave him two hundred dollars and her blessing, and loaned him her car (MM 250). His trial lawyer, Leroy Lancaster, describes the last interchange between Cassie and Angelo. Toward the end of the trial Cassie breaks down, standing up in court and declaring her guilt. Angelo responds immediately, leaping to his feet, crying out "'Piccola mia--piccola mia!'" ("My little pretty one, my little pretty one!"), staring "across the space at the woman," and attracting unfavorable speculation from the jurors (MM 274-75). This image of Angelo declaring openly his affection for Cassie can be interpreted as the beginning of his movement toward salvation, since he obviously does not blame her for his situation. The words piccola mia signal his forgiveness of her betrayal and his willingness to make public confession of his feelings. But what Angelo thinks in prison awaiting his execution is not reported, and the reader has only one opportunity to determine what he may be experiencing. From his jail cell he writes Cassie a note, in which he does not reproach her. He acknowledges the love she has given him, and he writes that he has loved her, but not in the way she requires (MM 365). His public and private confessions signal the beginning of his redemption. The fact that he says he does not fear death also suggests the onset of self-knowledge, according to Guttenberg ("Meet Me" 119). But neither his redemption nor his self-knowledge is completely realized, since each is aborted by his execution.

Percy Munn, Jeremiah Beaumont, and Angelo Passetto all suffer intensely in their search for self-knowledge and redemption. Faced with choices, they recognize the wickedness of the world as their own ability to commit evil, they confess their guilt, and they learn to accept the responsibility of their own actions. In the process they begin to see acceptable identities for themselves, a means toward redemption, but the potential success of their new insight is shattered by violent death. At best their release from the prison of the self is an aborted affair.

A last group of characters who realize self-knowledge and release from entrapment includes Jerry Calhoun, Jack Burden, Amantha Starr, Monty Harrick, Adam Rosenzweig, Brad Tolliver, and Jed Tewksbury. All these protagonists begin by rejecting their fathers, families, and heritage. Fearing punishment, they become morally and spiritually paralyzed by their guilt. Many find themselves trapped by their idealism and their pasts, by the demands of their loved ones, and by the need to accept the responsibility for their own sins. In agony they seek relief by withdrawing into psychic, spiritual, and physical retreats away from involvement and commitment. Often these refuges compel the individual into a self-examination which leads to identity and rebirth. In Warren's fiction images of release greatly contribute to the fulfillment of the theme of the search for self-knowledge and redemption.

During Jerry Calhoun's college career he receives the nickname Bull's-eye Calhoun for his skill at passing a football. After graduation he feels he must continue the tradition that name suggests by always being "right on target" in both his personal and professional lives (AHG 50). But "It was hard for him to identify himself with [this] Jerry Calhoun, [this] Bull's-eye Calhoun . . ." (AHG 52). Too much of his life has not been "on-target." According to Marshall Walker, he begins by believing he must re-create a new self is he is to earn the success he wants (Vision 94). He tries to remake himself in the image of Bogan Murdock, a successful businessman (Justus, "On the Politics" 287), but he chooses a poor role model. Murdock's private life is empty and meaningless, and if Jerry adequately copies his patron, then he, too, will pursue a life-style which is incomplete and sterile (Casper, The Dark and Bloody Ground 107, 113). To escape the prison he is building for himself, Jerry must discover his mistake, admit his error, and find a new identity based on his own strengths and weaknesses. As At Heaven's Gate concludes, Jerry Calhoun has begun the process of personal reconstruction which releases him from self-entrapment into a world of knowledge and selfhood.[9]

Following his arrest, Calhoun has time to examine his successes and failures. Looking back, he realizes that he has had what he wanted.

> He had had those things and he had wanted those things. He had wanted so many things and had had all of them, and had had none of them, for what you had came wrong or too soon or too late, or it wore another face, and your three wishes always came true but the last undid all the rest, and you were where you had begun. (AHG 387)

Jerry has to wonder why his accomplishments have not made him happy. First, though, he must come to terms with the love/hate he feels toward his father. Jerry perceives Mr. Calhoun as a failure, representative of everything he does not want to be. Conveniently forgetting his father's many kindnesses, Jerry remembers only his clumsiness, which the son calls "the last indignity, . . . the last betrayal, . . . the very cause of everything . . . that had happened to him . . ." (AHG 380). He hates his father for his lack of material success, but he cannot admit that hatred. All he permits himself is an occasional snide remark about some of his father's shortcomings (AHG 380). When Mr. Calhoun tells him everything will be all right, he says to himself:

> Nothing had ever been all right, . . . and the old man would be alone in the house, alone with the old woman and Lew, and his son gone to prison and disgraced. . . . Thinking that, Jerry suddenly felt a kind of grim glee, a vindication, a vengeance. (AHG 386-87)

After all, he speculates, "What the hell did his father know?" (AHG 385).

Jerry begins to learn what his father knows when Bogan Murdock's weaknesses start to surface. Although he has not yet admitted it, Calhoun earlier has noticed some of his employer's imperfections. On the morning after he first hears about the brewing Southern Fidelity scandal, Jerry

observes on Murdock's face a razor nick from which a crusted bead of blood has not been removed (AHG 278). This scab is the first crack in his ideal image of his surrogate father. Jerry believes that there is a mutual liking and respect between the two of them, but he is quickly disillusioned when Murdock manipulates the facts to shift legal responsibility to his employees. Jerry's arrest helps him to understand what real treachery is, and in comparison what he considers his own father's "betrayal" proves insignificant (AHG 388). Mr. Calhoun's confidence in him and love begin to assume new meaning. He sees that his parent accepts him for what he is, not for self-gain. Knowing what love is, his father gives it unselfishly. At this point Jerry can confess that he has wanted his father dead. In his mind he hears his father's acceptance and forgiveness.

> You knew? Did you know?
> Yes, son.
> Oh, father--
> Yes, son. (AHG 389)

And now Jerry knows what his father knows. Love is sharing and accepting, forgiving and acknowledging responsibility, involvement and commitment. Mr. Calhoun's love gives Jerry himself, and from that will grow renewed identity and rebirth.

Jerry's growing new self-image and redemption are subtly emphasized by Warren's descriptions of his appearance and physical movement in the closing scenes. Before Jerry arrives at his revelation, his very posture highlights his

feelings of inadequacy. In his jail cell Calhoun is pictured "sitting on the cot . . . hunching forward, his elbows on his knees, his wrists drooping forward, [and he] did not even look up when he heard the sound of approaching feet" (AHG 379). Then, as Duckfoot Blake drives Jerry and Mr. Calhoun home from prison, Warren places his protagonist in the back seat and Mr. Calhoun in the front, as if to suggest to the son that before him is someone worth emulating. Calhoun's lack of purpose once again is symbolized by his swaying and lurching in time with the movement of the car (AHG 381-82). At home Jerry walks behind his father as they approach the house (AHG 383). Alone at last, they go to Jerry's old room, where they make up the bed, one on each side, involved in their first cooperative effort together. However, father and son are still separated by the bulk of the mattress. Then, as Mr. Calhoun starts toward the door, Jerry moves around the obstacle to the "side toward the door" so that nothing remains to keep them apart (AHG 385). And indeed by the end of the novel nothing does isolate him from his father. Jerry Calhoun has recognized the duplicity of Murdock and the unselfishness of his parent; he has confessed his love/hatred for his father, and he has learned to accept himself, both weaknesses and strengths. Jerry's quest for knowledge has been realized, and he is finally free from his self-imposed imprisonment.

The theme of affirmation continues in the next novel, All the King's Men, with Jack Burden as one of Warren's most

fulfilled protagonists.[10] In it, Burden learns that "my only crime was being a man and living in the world of men" (ATKM 353). To escape the trap of self, he must be reborn, and to be reborn he must accept his parents, he must recognize that the nature of man is both good and evil, and he must accept the responsibility of love and being loved.

First, Jack must learn not to blame his parents for everything that has gone wrong in his life. John M. Bradbury points out that "Jack's rehabilitation is both projected and reinforced by a series of rebirth images and metaphors . . ." (Renaissance 68). Having grown up watching his mother switch husbands as easily as she redecorates her house, Jack thinks her incapable of love. Similarly, he has resented Ellis Burden, the man whose name he bears, for his weakness in having given up his wife without a fight (ATKM 375). The beginning of his new insight is signaled by his mother's scream when she learns of Judge Irwin's suicide, a cry which both Norton R. Girault and Charles Kaplan describe as an aural image of the birth scream (Girault 31-32; Kaplan 22). Her mourning the judge's death demonstrates to Jack that she, too, is capable of love and has loved deeply (ATKM 373). Jack notes that "She gave me a new picture of herself, and that meant, in the end, a new picture of the world" (ATKM 458). With his new vision Jack readily believes her when she tells him Judge Irwin is his father (ATKM 370). Her revelation gives him a new parent whom he willingly accepts in the place of Ellis Burden. Jack thinks to himself,

"There was a kind of relief in knowing that that man was not my father" (ATKM 375). Jack's reconciliation with the reality of his parents is reinforced by two of his actions. The first is the lie he tells his mother. Hurt by Irwin's suicide, she asks Jack if the Judge had ever done anything which would make him want to kill himself. The old Jack would have answered yes, but in his new identity he tells her there was nothing (ATKM 456-57). For Jack truth has become secondary to love, and if lying saves his mother pain, then he will lie. The second sign of his new identity comes when he reopens the Judge's house and lives in it with Anne. There he thinks, ". . . I now felt so fully at peace with myself. I thought of my mother and I felt the peace and the relief and the new sense of the world" (ATKM 459). Equipped with an acceptance of his family heritage, Jack finally is able to act.

One big dilemma, however, continues to dominate his thoughts. It is the same problem that has plagued mankind since Adam and Eve, the nature of good and evil and the degree of man's responsibility when he chooses to embrace wickedness. As a student of history Burden cynically says to Anne that people are "very complicated contraption[s] and they are not good or bad but are good and bad and the good comes out of bad and the bad out of good . . ." (ATKM 263). That he does not really believe what he says is made apparent by later developments. His world virtually turns upside down when Anne, the very personification of innate

goodness and innocence, has an affair with Willie Stark. He also has difficulty understanding how a man as virtuous as Judge Irwin could have taken a bribe. Jack compartmentalizes people into two basic groups: one composed of most of humanity capable of doing both good and bad, and one made up of those whom he loves and respects incapable of anything but good.

If Jack is to attain selfhood and redemption, he must accept "how all knowledge that is worth anything is maybe paid for by blood" (ATKM 455). An advocate of facts, Jack has always believed truth to be the keystone of life. But when truth leads to his father's suicide, he perceives its dangerous side, too, which he expresses through a frightening water image.

> For the truth is a terrible thing. You dabble your foot in it and it is nothing. But you walk a little farther and you feel it pull you like an undertow or a whirlpool. First there is the slow pull so steady and gradual you scarcely notice it, then the acceleration, then the dizzy whirl and plunge to blackness. For there is a blackness of truth, too. They say it is a terrible thing to fall into the grace of God. I am prepared to believe that. (ATKM 363-64)

Jack is left with a terribly complicated question. Is it good that truth, representative of all that the Christian God represents, often leads to the blackness of pain and suffering? The answer he gradually works out is given form in the lie he tells his mother. Some things, like love, <u>are</u> more important than truth. Good and evil indeed do exist side by side in man, and sometimes a man must sin to achieve virtue. But Jack still does not know why, and he will not

know until Ellis Burden shares with him the knowledge his life has given him. Even before creation, God, in His omnipotence, knew man would sin. God could easily have made mankind without that capacity, but to have done so would not have been a measure of His perfection. Man has to be apart from his Creator to have the freedom of choice. Only in choosing virtue over sin does he demonstrate God's greatness.

> 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. (ATKM 462-63)

Jack now can accept that his new identity has been paid for with the blood of Judge Irwin, who died so that his son might be redeemed (Bradbury, Fugitives 211; Chambers 12-13). He has learned that there are not two groups of mankind, but rather that all men are united by their capacity for both good and evil, and he knows that he is one among them.

Jack Burden finally comprehends what Cass Mastern had had to learn. That knowledge is expressed through the image of the spider web. Cass discerned that the world is like a giant spider web, interconnected. What one man does influences the lives of all (ATKM 200). As Beekman W. Cottrell says, "The Spider Web theory demands responsibility, and Jack only gradually learns to become responsible" (118). Burden admits to himself he has not taken the responsibility for his past. With that confession he is ready to learn by watching how the people in his life have dealt with their

duties and obligations. Lucy Stark, Sugar Boy, the Scholarly Attorney, Sadie Burke, Anne Stanton, Judge Irwin, Adam Stanton, and Willie Stark all have something to teach him. Jack follows their lesson well, as suggested by his finally committing to the people he loves. He marries Anne Stanton and assumes the care of Ellis Burden, infirm in his old age (ATKM 461-62).

Jack Burden's closing comments indicate that his newly found selfhood and redemption will continue. Looking about at what he has accomplished, Jack assures himself he will not grow complacent. He will remain open to new ideas, just as he has received and accepted in his own fashion Ellis Burden's explanation of good and evil. His interest in the future is represented by the book he is writing, a work about "the life of Cass Mastern, whom once I could not understand but whom, perhaps, I now may come to understand" (ATKM 463). By writing about the past, he can finally give it up. With Anne Stanton he plans for the future. Confident in his self-knowledge, he plans to reenter politics, this time with Hugh Miller, who believes corruption and bribery have no place in the political arena. With full awareness of what it means, Jack Burden is ready to embrace the future (ATKM 462, 464).

Amantha Starr of Band of Angels is Warren's only female protagonist to emerge from self-entrapment to realize selfhood.[11] All her problems stem from what she considers a betrayal by her father. A slave owner, Mr. Starr had sent

his daughter North for her education, and although he loves her dearly, he has never talked with her about her mother. No wonder, then, that Amantha feels lost at her father's graveside when she is seized as one of his slaves who must be sold to cover his debts. He had not told her about her Negro mother, nor had he drawn up her emancipation papers. Amantha, a strong advocate of abolition, suddenly finds herself hating her Negro heritage and her slave status, blaming everything on a father who could not have loved her. She will not discover identity and redemption until she becomes reconciled to her ancestry, forgives her father, and assumes responsibility for herself. ...

Her loathing of her black background enslaves her even after she has been freed and has lived in white society with a white husband for many years. All her insecurities are embodied in the old Negro man who shows up one day in Halesburg, Kansas. Peering at him, she sees scars on his back, and at that instant she is convinced he is Rau-Ru, returned to haunt her with her blackness (BA 295). Almost as a bribe she offers him a few coins, then flees into her house. There all her resentment washes over her like a wave.

> I stood in the middle of the floor, and that flood overwhelmed me, and I said the word nigger out loud, several times.
> You know, I had not thought about that for years. I simply hadn't. (BA 296)

But now that is all she does think about. She even finds herself afraid to do her daily shopping for fear of encountering the old man, who reminds her of what she is.

Every day to assuage her guilt she gives him a coin, yet she experiences a shock when she learns he has died. On the day after his burial, she is drawn to the cemetery, where she easily spots his grave, marked only by a stake to which is tacked a piece of paper with the note "Old man, colored, no name" (BA 301). Looking at the mound, she tries to convince herself that all her hatred for her blackness lies buried with him, that finally she is free from fear (BA 297-301). However, she soon realizes that his death has not freed her (BA 302).

Thinking about her own enslavement, she runs through a list of all those whom she blames: her father; Seth Parton; Mr. Marmaduke, the slave trader; Hamish Bond; Tobias Sears; Rau-Ru. None of these men had freed her, and the death of the old man she believes to be Rau-Ru seems to confirm she will never be free. Dispirited, she experiences an epiphany in the form of a vision filled with all those people who had not set her free. She sees them all, crouching together on the prairie, holding their hands out "in some humble beseeching" (BA 302). Gradually an idea formulates in her mind: "Nobody can set you free . . . except yourself" (BA 303). She describes the terror she experiences at this thought: "it was just a big, dark shape, a kind of dark over-poweringness that I couldn't bear to put words to, like the thought of dying" (BA 303). She feels stripped naked, for she can no longer blame others for what is essentially her own problem. On this afternoon Amantha learns

responsibility, made possible through the sacrificial death of the old man, who, she admits, cannot have been Rau-Ru. That she has assumed responsibility for herself is made apparent by her last action at the grave site. She tears the scrap of paper from the stake and lets the wind carry it away. Her act means that just as she has released the paper into the wind, she also has given up resentment of her black heritage in order to be free. On that day Amantha can speak about her Negro traits for the first time. Tobias tells her about how his client Mr. Lounberry made his fortune by inventing a new type of hair-curler. Amantha reacts immediately.

> "Oh!" I said, "you mean to take out the--" and I caught myself hesitating on the word kinks, thinking somewhere in the deep of my mind of my own crisp hair, then wondering how many times in my life I must have hesitated on that word, on my secret, then aware, all at once, that somehow I didn't have to hesitate any more, I could just say it. (BA 311-12)

All that remains if Amantha is to achieve full identity and redemption is reconciliation with her dead father. She must forgive him if she is to forgive herself. The means to that goal is provided by the same Mr. Lounberry, the rich Negro from Chicago, who comes to Halesburg to reclaim his father and do him honor. Thinking of him, Amantha admits, "I envied Mr. Lounberry, not merely because he would honor his father, but because he could honor the father who had rejected him" (BA 311). That admission makes her realize her father had loved her. She finally understands that it was his love that caused him not to tell her about her Negro

mother. His devotion made him unable to write her freedom papers (BA 311). Amantha's acceptance of her father reaffirms her identity and redemption, which are made even more certain by one last event. Emotionally estranged from her husband for years, Amantha discovers she now has the strength to make a second commitment to him. Strong in her selfhood, she tells him never to call her "poor little Manty." He agrees, and then asks, "'Miss Manty, you don't think it's too late, do you?'" (BA 312). She answers "'No'" and enters his arms, with tears of joy streaming down her face. With a strong new identity earned through suffering and renewal, Amantha Starr can now look forward eagerly to a future free of self-doubts and self-loathing.

In The Cave the familiar search for selfhood and redemption continues with Monty Harrick, who is different from other Warren protagonists in that he still is quite young when he establishes an acceptable identity. "He is a young boy, seventeen, or eighteen, a likely boy . . . but still kid scrawny" (C 7), and he suffers from the same uncertainties and doubts that plague all Warren's characters. Feeling betrayed by his girlfriend Jo-Lea Bingham and his brother Jasper, he will have to betray them in turn before he can escape the prison of the self.

Monty's first encounter with betrayal comes with Jo-Lea's very public confession that she is pregnant with Jasper's child (C 324). Monty's first response is disbelief, appropriately symbolized by the sharp pain in his head, not

his heart. He feels her words move around "just inside his forehead . . . like hot stones grinding and grating together" (C 337). Paralyzed by her admission, Monty feels trapped as if it were all a dream from which he soon would awaken. Shaking off his shock, he rushes into the woods in pursuit of Jo-Lea, who has run away after her revelation. Because Monty does not understand what is happening to her or him, he flounders about "like a blind mule with the dogs on him" (C 338).

Monty's second encounter with betrayal occurs when he realizes that Jo-Lea has hidden from him. Disbelieving, he says, "'You hid. You were going to let me run on'" (C 239). At first this second act of treachery is all that seems important. "He could not even remember how he ever started chasing her in the dark, in the woods" (C 339-40). Facing her in the forest, he feels the pain in his head return. But then he tentatively asks, "'Is it--is it true?'" and she nods yes. A strange thing happens to him, as he feels himself expanding, growing taller than the darker trees. "It was a feeling as though, for the first time in his life, he was himself" (C 340-41). At this moment he has no doubt the child is his, but when he remembers her earlier confession, he feels uncertainty undermining his new sense of self. As if she can read his thoughts, Jo-Lea again runs away, and this time Monty does not follow. "He [is again] paralyzed by a sense of betrayal" (C 341) as a new idea occurs to him. Jo-Lea's betrayal is also Jasper's

betrayal, thereby making everything doubly painful (C 341-42). The previous rush of confidence engendered by Jo-Lea's pregnancy is completely gone, and he feels lost. "The worst was to realize how crazy he, Monty Harrick, had been to think that anybody would turn to him, when Jasper was there" (C 342).

After his chase through the woods, he turns back toward the cave to await news of Jasper's rescue. Two important things happen on that return. First, he hears a shout from the general direction where the crowd has gathered, and he thinks perhaps Jasper has just been saved. "Then, with a kind of horror, . . . he realized that he did not care whether Jasper was saved or not" (C 342). He, too, has betrayed someone he loves, thereby symbolically joining the sinful race of mankind. The second significant event is his encounter with a whore. Having taken time out to give her partner a rest, she stops Monty and makes advances, to which he temporarily responds. But then he retreats, thinking lust is not for him (C 345-47). Monty resists a strong temptation, restoring his belief in his own self-worth. These two episodes graphically demonstrate to Monty that though a person may sin, he still has the choice to resist if he will. He has begun the redemptive process, and all that remains is his reconciliation with his brother and with Jo-Lea.

The last incident featuring Monty pictures him crouched outside the cave after learning of Jasper's death. He is

waiting for the crowd to disperse so that he can privately enter to tell his brother good-bye (C 351). That Monty will reconcile with Jo-Lea, too, is suggested by his father's talk with her as they both await his return from the cavern. Mr. Harrick reassures her that his son will understand about her confession. He then adds that Monty "has crawled in the ground to his Big Brother. . . . He has gone all the way, for he is Jasper's brother and he is brave. He will hold his Big Brother's hand, and tell him good-bye" (C 392). Whether his brother betrayed him or not makes no difference. Love supersedes betrayal, and Monty will have his time alone with Jasper, just as he will marry Jo-Lea and love her and their baby.

Adam Rosenzweig of Wilderness is Warren's only protagonist with a physical handicap, and it is his image of this handicap which stands between him and self-knowledge. Unable to accept his clubfoot as an accident of birth, he blames it and the way it makes him feel on everyone else. Yet in a peculiar way, Adam is also proud of his foot, because it is what makes him different from other men. In the closing scene Adam is portrayed in the Wilderness while the notorious Civil War battle rages around him. Looking at the Rebel soldier he has just shot, he is reminded of all his friends who are dead. Then a terrible thought surfaces: ". . . they all betrayed me. . . . Yes, they had betrayed him. The world had betrayed him. And my father . . . he betrayed me" (W 303). What that betrayal is, he cannot explain, but in

his anguish he looks "down at the twisted whiteness of his poor foot. He stared at it" (W 303). What he cannot yet admit is that he blames them for being whole while he is crippled. Returning his gaze to the dead Southerner, he has another idea: he killed the man "because his foot was not like mine" (W 304). Adam's admission gives him immediate, if temporary, relief. "With that thought he felt suddenly pure, and young. All the past was suddenly nothing" (W 304). He understands why at the moment of killing he "felt so much more a man" (W 299). He was using the soldier as a scapegoat on whom to take out his hatred of everyone he blames for his foot.

Adam's confession is the beginning of his new insight. He can now ask: "Am I different from other men?" (W 306), a question to which he does not yet have the answer. Since his own boots have been stolen, Adam approaches the man he shot and removes the ones he wears. He cannot, however, bring himself to put them on. Subconsciously he realizes that to do so would be to admit he is no different from other men. The boots become a symbol of the knowledge Adam seeks. If he can wear them, then he will also be accepting the knowledge he has rejected his entire life. Confused, he falls on his knees in the ferns, praying the prayer he last heard at his father's funeral (W 308). When he finishes, he thinks that "he might be able to rise and do what he would have to do. Yes, he had done only what he had to do, he decided, good or bad. . . . Yes, he was only human . . ."

(W 309). Adam has the answer to his question. He is like other men, with their capacity for both good and evil. With this knowledge he can think more objectively about his foot, admitting that no one is to blame. He understands that the only one ever to have betrayed him is himself, for "only the betrayer is ever betrayed, and then only by his own betraying" (W 310). Adam Rosenzweig can now assume responsibility for himself, having forgiven himself and the world for his crippled foot. His release is accomplished through his last act, when at last he dons the shoes of the soldier and leaves the Wilderness of the self.[12]

In Flood Bradwell Tolliver is another protagonist whose past is an entrapment retarding his quest for selfhood. Brad's past has taught him two nihilistic lessons: guilt and fear of involvement. The episode which has so influenced his life occurred twenty years previously on a summer's night when his recently married sister Maggie committed adultery with a young engineer visiting his home. As a result of that evening, his brother-in-law, Calvin Fiddler, killed his wife's lover and was sentenced to life imprisonment. Looking back on the events leading to the tragedy, Brad decides that it was his own drunken, erotic behavior which prodded the two young people to their act. Over the intervening years Brad's sense of guilt has increased to the extent that he now fears emotional involvement with everyone. Suffering from his guilt and fears, Brad finds himself unable to write the screenplay for

which he has returned to Fiddlersburg. The more he tries to describe the last days of the town before it is inundated by the flood waters of the TVA project, the less he is able to put on paper. If Brad is to conquer his writer's block, he must discover an acceptable self-image by giving up both his past and his false future.

Tolliver's past is symbolized by the grave of Izzie Goldfarb, about whom Brad wrote his first successful published short story. Because Brad does not want Goldfarb's body to lie under the rising waters, he has decided to pay the expenses for its removal. The problem is that he has not yet located the grave, and the water is already at the foot of the cemetery. On his last day in Fiddlersburg, Brad, recovering from two gunshot wounds, listens to Brother Potts's outdoor farewell service as he plans to locate the tomb of his old friend (F 418). Drowsing in the heat, he thinks about how his doctor has told him he will be "as good as ever" (F 437). Depressed, he wonders just how good that might be. To date his life has just been a set of daily habits he follows blindly. He tries to reassure himself that he has done good in life. He has been generous, giving to charities, and he has proved his loyalty to friends. But if all this is true, then why does he wish he were dead, that the two bullets had done their job more effectively (F 438)? After this expression of self-doubt, others quickly follow. "For he, being a man, had lived, he knew, in the grinning calculus of the done and the undone" (F 439). For

the past two decades he has lived his life separate from everyone about whom he cares. Brad can finally confess what troubles him most: ". . . I cannot find the connection between what I was and what I am. I have not found the human necessity. He knew that was what he must find" (F 439). With a sense of the self flooding in upon the self, Tolliver realizes he no longer has to find Izzie Goldfarb's grave. In giving up this quest, he also symbolically is giving up his past. What is in the past must remain there, and in its place he must forge a present in which to discover his identity.

For the past several days Brad has been carrying around in his pocket an object which symbolizes the false future he may be tempted to follow. Periodically he discovers that his left hand has slipped into the inside pocket of his coat, where he fondles a telegram from Mort Seebaum, the movie producer. The telegram confirms a deal Tolliver's agent has made with Seebaum. Brad will receive $125,000 plus 7 percent of the net for his screenplay about the flooding of Fiddlersburg (F 418). Although what he has written has not been good enough for the famous producer Yasha Jones, Brad seriously considers letting Seebaum have his second-rate script for production. The telegram represents one of Tolliver's possible futures, one in which his success is based upon less than his best effort (F 437). But now that Brad is free from his past, he finds the will and the strength to tear up the telegram (F 439). Having

relinquished the past and a false future, Tolliver is finally able to give up his guilt, also, by perceiving the need for human involvement, even when it leads to tragedy.

Brad Tolliver, the man who previously defined freedom as the lack of social responsibility and who has described involvement as frightening, looks at everyone gathered at the prayer service, and he experiences "a sudden, unwilled, undecipherable, tearing, ripping gesture of his innermost being toward those people" (F 440). Undergoing what Blanding Gottshill labels a "mystic osmosis of being" (F 423), Brad finally understands what makes life worthwhile. "There is no country but the heart" (F 440). Since he has given up his past and a false future, Tolliver can construct the future which his new identity and his need for commitment demand. With tears in his eyes, Bradwell Tolliver realizes he has been "Goosed to God" (F 436), the phrase his wife Lettice used earlier to describe release from the prison of the self into redemption.[13]

When Robert Penn Warren published A Place to Come To in 1977, he was seventy-two years old. Not surprisingly, then, a major theme of the novel is death, not as a morbid topic, but rather as a last natural process of life (PTC 338). Learning to cope with death is a part of the knowledge toward which the protagonist's search is directed. Although still in his late middle age, Jed Tewksbury is reminded of his own mortality when his mother dies. From his study of Dante, Tewksbury understands that one of the places to which

a man comes is death. What he does not comprehend, however, is how to find the place where a man belongs before his death. To discover that, he must first discover and accept his origins. Jed knows his birthplace, Dugton, Alabama, and he knows who his father was. But he has not been able to accept his father. Jed has been haunted all his life by the dishonor Buck Tewksbury's death brought upon his family. Although Jed left Dugton to search for another place where he can belong, he has not found it because he has not settled the problem of his hatred for his father. For most of his adult years Jed has felt life going by him "like a black blast of wind of mounting intensity and from a quarter undefined" (PTC 337). He must now define that quarter.

To do so, he must return to his roots, and thus after his mother's death he finally comes back to Dugton. As he enters Elvira Simms's house, he observes that "each object seemed to glow with a special assertion of its being--of my being, too, as though only now, after all the years, I was returning to my final self, long lost" (PTC 332). Visiting with Perk Simms, he is forced to listen to his stepfather read from the letters that he, always the dutiful son, had sent his mother through the years. Sitting there, Jed feels as if he were in an inquisition. "But I did not know what the Inquisitor wanted me to confess to in particular" (PTC 337). Jed is not yet ready to admit his hatred of Buck Tewksbury, but Perk helps him toward his confsssion when he admits how Elvira hurt him on her deathbed. The old man

describes to Jed how she asked him to bury her beside Jed's father. He tells Jed how she tried to explain her request; she said that "if something in yore past was good even a little time, it deserves you not to spit on it, no matter how bad it turned out . . ." (PTC 336). Jed is impressed by a love so strong that it enables Perk to forget his own hurt to carry out his wife's last wish. This request also has special meaning for Jed, because it demonstrates there was something about his father which kept alive a part of his mother's love for her first husband. He begins to hope that for him, too, there is something about his father he can now love.

Jed's return home, though, has to include a visit to the cemetery where his parents are buried. Wandering about among the graves, he remembers how his mother loved him enough to send him away, and he recalls how lonely he has been ever since. Nothing seems to have filled the void, not even his Dante scholarship, the mainstay of his existence. All his study has accomplished is to make him lose "the blessedness of knowing that men were real, and brothers in their reality" (PTC 339). Nothing in his life has given him back his father. Looking at the graves of his parents, he asks himself, "Was all too late? Was all too late, after all?" (PTC 339). His question opens up possibilities, to which Jed responds emotionally.

> I had the wild impulse to lie on the earth between the two graves, the old and the new, and stretch out a hand to each. I thought that if I could do that, I

> might be able to weep, and if I could weep, something warm and blessèd might happen. (PTC 340)

The symbolism is obvious, with Jed reaching out to join his parents in death and to link himself to both in life. His reconciliation with his father and with himself has begun, but it is not yet complete, since he does not follow his impulse at the ironically named Heaven's Hope graveyard. "The trouble was, I was afraid that nothing might happen, and I was afraid to take the risk" (PTC 340).

Before he can take the risk, he has to visit the site of his father's pathetic, yet ludicrous death. Searching for the old iron bridge near the spot where his father had fallen, he can find neither. Their disappearance becomes a sign to Jed that Buck's disgrace really is unimportant, certainly something his son need no longer resent. Thus his reconciliation continues as he forgives his father. "I drove and thought that the only thing wrong with Buck was he was born out of phase" (PTC 340). And then he thinks, "Poor Buck" and says out loud, "'Poor Buck'" (PTC 341).

Jed Tewksbury's reconciliation with his parent's memory removes for him the great terror death has held. He is ready to take the risk. He can get on with the joy of living, which he finally knows is possible through the example of his mother and Perk Simms. The fulfillment of his quest for self-knowledge is made apparent in the letter he writes to his estranged wife, Dauphine. In it he says, "I ask for your company for what blessèdness it is. But I say also that in it I may learn, even as the light fails, a little of what

I need to know" (PTC 341). It is appropriate that he close his request with the words "In all hope," because Jed Tewksbury does have the hope of a full life during the time which remains to him. He has found the courage of selfhood and the redemption of forgiveness for which he has been searching.

The protagonists of Robert Penn Warren's novels search for identity, another term for redemption, rebirth, and release from self-entrapment. Since each character feels he has been betrayed by a loved one, he suffers intensely. As he looks for the knowledge to cope with his situation, someone he knows or encounters must die in his stead, usually in a violent manner such as suicide or murder. Ultimately, each has the freedom of will to choose a course of action suitable for himself. If he makes a wise and timely choice, then redemption is his. But if he chooses unwisely or delays too long, he experiences damnation, or perhaps even worse, aborted redemption. Sue Murdock, Isaac Sumpter, Cassie Spottwood, and Murray Guilfort make foolish choices and die either physically or spiritually without fulfilling their quests. Percy Munn, Jeremiah Beaumont, and Angelo Passetto choose to accept responsibility for themselves, but they delay so long that their redemption is aborted through their own violent deaths. Jerry Calhoun, Jack Burden, Amantha Starr, Monty Harrick, Adam Rosenzweig, Brad Tolliver, and Jed Tewksbury compose a third set of characters, all of whom choose wisely to discover the

identity and salvation they have sought. Each one accepts responsibility for himself, and in the process he finds the courage to effect a reconciliation with the one he believes guilty of his betrayal, usually a father or other close relative.

In March 1986, the Library of Congress awarded Robert Penn Warren a singular honor when its members named him the first poet laureate of the United States. As a man of the twentieth century, he has devoted much of his career to poetry, but he also has written in several other genres, as well. Certainly his reputation one hundred years in the future will give more than a passing footnote to his novels, in which he thoroughly pursues the theme of man's search for selfhood. In fact, Warren's interest in this theme has been so consistent in the novels that D. G. Kehl describes them collectively "as an American epic of the self" (116).

Considering Warren's love of poetry, it is not surprising that he uses the largely poetic device of imagery to aid in theme development. Numerous negative self-images help delineate the sources of the difficulty his protagonists experience in their quests. Powerful imagery clusters picture the traps into which the characters fall as they look for more satisfactory identities. Within their entrapments the heroes and heroines are forced into a self-confrontation from which they perversely seek escape, but failing in that, they attempt to retreat from the knowledge they have uncovered. Finally, images of release forecast

the failure or success of each protagonist in his search for self-knowledge. Consistently throughout the novels Warren employs images of entrapment, retreat, and release to signal the extent of damnation or redemption his characters attain in their quests for identity.

Warren's failed protagonists appear throughout his novels, as do his partially successful and reborn characters. Redemption is not reserved for his recent novels, nor is failure a unique trait of his early heroes and heroines. A student of life, Warren reflects the verisimilitude of human existence when he depicts his characters in various stages of damnation or grace. Contrary to the opinions of some critics, Warren is far from being the pessimistic writer they describe. In fact, exactly half his protagonists employ their free will to choose selfhood and redemption. Reconciliation is their key to identity, and responsibility, forgiveness, and love are the locks it opens.

Notes

[1] Gray, Introduction, Robert Penn Warren 10; Guttenberg, Web of Being 162-63; Justus, Achievement 302; James H. Justus, "A Note on John Crowe Ransom and Robert Penn Warren," American Literature 41 (1969): 429.

[2] Eisinger 13; Louise Y. Gossett, "Violence and the Integrity of the Self: Robert Penn Warren," Violence in Recent Southern Fiction (Durham: Duke UP, 1965) 54; Gray, Introduction, Robert Penn Warren 9.

[3] For contrasting points of view, see Clements 30; Justus, Achievement 190; John Lewis Longley, Jr., "'At Heaven's Gate': The Major Themes," Modern Fiction Studies 6 (1960): 21.

[4] Bohner 149; Donaldson 70-71; Guttenberg, Web of Being 93; Justus, Achievement 278; Price 124. For a different point of view, read Gado, Introduction, First Person xxx-xxxi.

[5] Most critics, however, believe Cassie Spottwood attains some degree of identity. See especially Leonard Casper, "Robert Penn Warren's Evergreening Glen," Texas Quarterly 21.3 (1978): 54-55; James Grimshaw, "Robert Penn Warren's Annus Mirabilis," Southern Review ns 10 (1974): 512; Barnett Guttenberg, "Meet Me in the Green Glen," Robert Penn Warren: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Richard Gray, Twentieth Century Views (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1980) 117; Nakadate, "Identity, Dream" 182.

[6] For other explanations of why Murray Guilfort fails to achieve self-knowledge, see John W. Aldridge, "The Enormous Spider Web of Warren's World" Meet Me in the Green Glen , Critical Essays on Robert Penn Warren, ed. William Bedford Clark (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1981) 69; Grimshaw 512; Guttenberg, "Meet Me" 120.

[7] Contrasting interpretations are found in Eric Bentley, "The Meaning of Robert Penn Warren's Novels," On Contemporary Literature, ed. Richard Kostelanetz, expanded ed. (New York: Avon, 1969) 617; Bradbury, Fugitives 206; Kenneth Burke, "The Philosophy of Literary Form," The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1941) 80; David J. Burt and Annette C. Burt, "Robert Penn Warren's Debt to Ibsen in Night Rider," Mississippi Quarterly 22 (1969): 361; Robert Frank Cayton, "The Fictional Voices of Robert Penn Warren," Four Quarters, 21.4 (1972): 46; Gado, Introduction, First Person xxviii; Guttenberg, Web of Being 14; M. P. Heseltine, "The Deep, Twisting Strain of Life: The Novels of Robert Penn Warren," Robert Penn Warren: Critical Perspectives, ed. Neil Nakadate (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1981) 157; Justus, Achievement 162-77; Justus, "The Mariner" 119-21; Law, "Warren's Night Rider" 57; Hugh Moore, Robert Penn Warren 77; Alvan S. Ryan, "Robert Penn Warren's Night Rider: The Nihilism of the Isolated Temperament," Modern Fiction Studies 7 (1961-62): 344-45; Stewart, Burden 472; Walker, Vision 92.

[8] For a variety of interpretations of the degree of Jeremiah Beaumont's redemption, see Casper, The Dark and Bloody Ground 32; Cayton 48; Frank 191-94; Guttenberg, Web of Being 67; Robert B. Heilman, "Tangled Web," Sewanee Review 59.1 (1951): 116; Justus, "The Mariner" 30-31; Neil E. Nakadate, "Robert Penn Warren and the Confessional Novel," Genre 2 (1969): 332-33; Stewart, Burden 506-08.

[9] Several critics have written that the process of Jerry Calhoun's redemption is doubtful and incomplete, since Warren ends the novel abruptly. See especially Bentley 621; Clements 32; Gossett 59; Justus, Achievement 28, 162. Others argue that he does reclaim himself and experience release, particularly Charles R. Anderson, "Violence and Order in the Novels of Robert Penn Warren," Southern Renascence: The Literature of the Modern South, ed. Louis D. Rubin, Jr., and Robert D. Jacobs (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1953) 215; Guttenberg, Web of Being 25-26; Walker, Vision 92-93.

[10] Not everyone is so optimistic about Jack's finding self-knowledge and redemption. See especially Bradbury, Fugitives 209; Hall 107-08; Glen M. Johnson, "The Pastness of All the King's Men," American Literature 51 (1980): 556-57; David B. Olson, "Jack Burden and the Ending of All the King's Men," Mississippi Quarterly 26 (1973): 167-70. For those who are confident of Jack's success, read Robert H. Chambers, Introduction, Twentieth Century Interpretations of All the King's Men: A Collection of Critical Essays

(Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1977) 13; Gado, Introduction, First Person xxix; Kerr 44; Louis D. Rubin, Jr., "Burden's Landing: All the King's Men and the Modern South," The Faraway Country: Writers of the Modern South (Seattle: U of Washington P, 1963) 130.

[11] Bradbury, Fugitives 226-28; Casper, The Dark and Bloody Ground 158; Guttenberg, Web of Being 82; Justus, Achievement 239; Justus, "The Mariner" 126; James Magmer, "Robert Penn Warren's Quest for an Angel," Catholic World 183 (1956): 179-81; Walker, Vision 130. For a different interpretation of the conclusion, read Walter Sullivan, "The Historical Novelist and the Existential Peril: Robert Penn Warren's Band of Angels," Death by Melancholy (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1972) 42.

[12] Many reviewers write that Adam Rosenzweig discovers the self-knowledge which sets him free and grants him redemption. For their explanations see Cleanth Brooks, "Robert Penn Warren: Experience Redeemed in Knowledge," The Hidden God: Studies in Hemingway, Faulkner, Yeats, Eliot, and Warren (New Haven: Yale UP, 1963) 125ff.; Casper, "Ark" 112; Cayton 50; Hicks 51-52; Holman 87; Justus, Achievement 259ff.; Samuels 52.

[13] Once again the critics do not agree that Brad Tolliver earns redemption. Those who believe he does not include Justus, Achievement 288-94; Longley, "The Deeper Rub" 975-80; Nakadate, "Identity, Dream" 178. On the other hand, several critics write that Brad does attain selfhood

and redemption at the conclusion. See especially Casper, "Ark" 113-14; Guttenberg, Web of Being 137; John T. Hiers, "Buried Graveyards: Warren's Flood and Jones' A Buried Land," Essays in Literature 2.1 (1975): 99.

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