

ROBERT PENN WARREN'S PHILOSOPHY: THE THEME  
OF KNOWLEDGE IN ALL THE KING'S MEN

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## PREFACE

Several years ago, as an undergraduate, I first read All The King's Men and was attracted not only by the rich style of the novel, but by certain basic philosophical assumptions which the book seemed to present. After several rereadings I came to feel that a logical pattern underlay the surface ideas which, although interesting enough in themselves, often seemed paradoxical, if not contradictory. A more thorough acquaintance with Warren's other writings indicated a development of the author's same philosophy, though, perhaps, along different lines. Always some aspect of a problem of knowledge was stressed, but never so strongly as in All The King's Men. The book is generally regarded as Warren's best effort; yet a complete statement of theme which takes into consideration the author's basic ideas has not been proposed. Thus, the purpose of this study is to set forth the theme of knowledge, which I feel to be central to All The King's Men and which is the principal part of a complex philosophy seeking to define the individual in terms of his existence and to supply him with some sort of ethical system.

For his help in unraveling the logical and critical

complexities present in a philosophical study such as this one, I am greatly indebted to Dr. Clinton C. Keeler. In addition, this thesis has profited from the judgment and suggestions of Dr. Samuel H. Woods, Jr., and to him my gratitude is due. Special acknowledgement should also be made to Miss Helen Donart, Humanities Librarian, for invaluable assistance in the procuring of books through inter-library loan; more generally, the efficiency of the entire Oklahoma State University Library staff was helpful.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Robert Penn Warren's Pulitzer Prize novel, All The King's Men, was published in 1946. The novel was partially the product of Warren's tenure at Louisiana State University and owes much to the author's awareness of the Huey Long "legend" in that state. But Warren has steadfastly insisted that All The King's Men is not the biography of Huey Long. In his article, "A Note to All The King's Men," Warren has said, "Politics merely provided the framework story in which the deeper concerns, whatever their final significance, might work themselves out."<sup>1</sup> On this surface level, Warren delineates the rise and fall of Willie Stark, the shaggy, set-jawed politician who begins as "Cousin Willie from the country," a naive "redneck," and emerges as simply "the Boss" striding toward assassination in the state capitol. Attending Willie's career are the characters fascinated by his success and hoping to glean from it some advantage for their own lives.

These, however, are only the elements of plot, and though not to be minimized, they are just that "framework" which the author mentions. Beneath this structure is the significance of the novel, what it is saying about our world today, and most important, what it is saying about

the individual and his struggle for self-definition. This is, ultimately, what All The King's Men is about, man's unceasing effort to know what he is, to know his relation to other men, to know his place in the world and the meaning of truth. It is the purpose of this thesis to examine evidence for such an underlying philosophic attitude in All The King's Men, an attitude which shall be proposed as the theme of the novel. To help clarify this presentation of theme, certain of Warren's other works of fiction will be surveyed, for the author's preoccupation with his subject is not confined to his third novel and, to a greater or lesser extent, aspects of the same theme may be noted in much of his other writings.

Before becoming involved in an analysis of All The King's Men, however, I believe that an examination of those statements of Warren's which throw light on his philosophical assumptions may prove beneficial. Some of these comments are made directly, as in the Columbia University address, and some are observed in Warren's critical observations of other writers. The former will help reveal and make clear the author's own philosophical attitude, and the latter will indicate Warren's appreciation of philosophical fiction similar to his own. Finally, a review of the critical material on both All The King's Men and Warren's "themes" in general should make evident the need for a critical thematic study such as this one.

Warren delivered the most significant statement of his philosophical position at Columbia University (1954)

in an address entitled "Knowledge and the Image of Man." In this address, Warren made explicit what has been implicit in his fiction. To Warren, knowledge and a meaningful existence are complementary, and man struggles to achieve the former that he may ultimately fulfill the latter. Man must affirm his existence. His struggle is an individual struggle, and all of Warren's major characters cry, like Amantha Starr (Band of Angels) in the first line of the novel, "Oh, who am I?" Sue Murdock (At Heaven's Gate) cries, "Oh, what am I?", and essentially this is the question of Jeremiah Beaumont (World Enough and Time) and Jack Burden (All The King's Men), but "who" or "what," Warren's characters seek self-definition through knowledge.

Knowledge of his relation to the world, though not the absolute and fool-proof answer, is the only means by which man may attain his identity. Knowledge through experience gives man "the image of himself. And the image of himself necessarily has a foreground and a background...."<sup>2</sup> In other words, knowledge fixes man in position to the world around him. Once an individual sees himself in relation to other individuals and to the world, he becomes truly subject to the motion that is life, and as his perspectives and his values change, so does the self change and grow more substantial.

It affirms it /Identity/ for out of a progressive understanding of this interpenetration, this texture of relations, man creates new perspectives, discovers new values--that is, a new self--and so the identity is a continually emerging, an un-



folding, a self-affirming and, we hope, a self-corrective creation.<sup>3</sup>

It is enough for the present to note that Warren's most successful major characters, at the novel's end, do find some measure of self-identity and "the peace which passeth understanding." Amantha Starr discovers that only she can rid herself of her nightmare fears; Jeremiah Beaumont can accept responsibility for the murder of Colonel Fort and decide to return to his punishment; Jack Burden can face "the awful responsibility of Time." Even Thomas Jefferson in Brother To Dragons may say,

For nothing we had,  
Nothing we were,  
Is lost.  
All is redeemed,  
In knowledge.  
But knowledge is the most powerful cost.  
It is the bitter bread.  
I have eaten the bitter bread.  
In joy, I would end.<sup>4</sup>

Jefferson expresses what all of Warren's characters discover and what constitutes the conflict and action of Warren's fiction; the search for self-knowledge is long and difficult and only through suffering and the knowledge of evil as well as of good can the individual succeed. In "Knowledge and the Image of Man," Warren says,

Man can return to his lost unity, and if that return is fitful and precarious, if the foliage and flower of the innocent garden are now somewhat browned by a late season, all is the more precious for the fact, for what is now achieved has been achieved by a growth of moral awareness. The return to nature and man is the discovery of love, and law. But love through

separateness, and law through rebellion. Man eats of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, and falls. But if he takes another bite, he may get at least a sort of redemption.<sup>5</sup>

(Italics mine)

Warren's statement here sounds remarkably like Stein's advice in Joseph Conrad's Lord Jim, "to the destructive element submit yourself...."<sup>6</sup> In his article on Nostromo, Warren discusses at length Stein's speech, "the central passage of Lord Jim," and finds it the key to one of Conrad's most important themes.<sup>7</sup>

In the same article, Warren, who has been called a philosophical novelist, applies the term to Conrad and defines it.

...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 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.<sup>8</sup>

As philosophical novelists, both Conrad and Warren face an intensely complex problem. Their highly speculative abstractions about life must be grounded in the concrete reality of experience in order to achieve any validity. Thus, when Stein wishes to express the opinion that one must, in order to gain self-knowledge, immerse himself in the destructive element of life, he employs the image of a man sinking into the sea. If he tries to climb out, to avoid or escape life, he will sink; but if he reaches

out with hands and feet, the sea, or life, will support him. In All The King's Men, when Jack wants to forget Willie's trip to Burden's Landing to blackmail Judge Irwin, he describes the significance of their wild ride through the night in terms of how the action would appear to a cow beside the road; "We were something slow happening inside the cold brain of a cow. That's what the cow would say if she were a brass-bound Idealist like little Jackie Burden."<sup>9</sup>

The philosophical novelist is always aware of the conflict of the universal and the particular. He is aware of the pull of opposites and the often ironical dialectic of human existence. What can be seen explicitly in his writing is also evident in his philosophical assumptions and his basic themes. Warren picks Nostromo as the focal point of Conrad's fiction because in this novel the central themes of Conrad, themes which had been developed piecemeal in earlier works (Lord Jim and Heart of Darkness), come together to make the first definitive statement of the author's philosophy. The themes are those "of isolation and alienation, of fidelity and human solidarity, of moral infection and redemption, of the paradox of action and idea, of the 'true lie', of the problem of history."<sup>10</sup>

Not only are these themes of Conrad quite similar to the concerns of Robert Penn Warren's fiction, but what is true of Nostromo is also true of All The King's Men. The latter is an artistic perfection and fulfillment of the philosophical fragments revealed in Warren's earlier and later work.

In another critical essay, "Melville the Poet," Warren defends the "roughness" of Melville's poetry by suggesting that it may be the result of an intentional thematic conflict.<sup>11</sup> Melville's problem had been similar to Warren's and Conrad's; he was trying to express the "fundamental ironical dualities of existence: will against age, the changelessness of man's heart against the concept of moral progress, the bad doer against the good deed, the bad result against the good act, ignorance against fate...."<sup>12</sup>

Critic Leonard Casper points out that these dualities constitute much of the thematic material in All The King's Men.

...paraphrases of Melville's philosophy might serve equally as statements of the theme realized in Warren's Pulitzer Prize novel: 'Man may wish to act for Truth and Right, but the problem of definitions is a difficult one and solution may be achieved in terms of his own exercise of will and his appetite for action.' Cass Mastern himself would have agreed with Melville's estimate that man's deepest composure lies in realizing that each human act participates in all.<sup>13</sup>

Casper also notes a likeness between Warren's protagonists and Coleridge's ancient mariner, both deposed and wandering, seeking restoration of the self. Warren's critical analysis of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" was "almost immediately...taken as confirmation of the critic's own theories" of imagination, an "active, shaping function of the mind."<sup>14</sup>

The question of individual responsibility, a question germane to all of Warren's work, comes to light in the

mariner's seemingly purposeless destruction of the albatross. The mariner's action appears unmotivated, but this is simply the result of his refusal to exercise his capacity for self-knowledge; he is still responsible for his actions.<sup>15</sup> In All The King's Men, Jack Burden faces a similar situation and denies responsibility for his actions by embracing the philosophy of the "Great Twitch."

The above philosophical and critical observations by Warren are helpful in interpreting All The King's Men; and a steadily increasing number of publications dealing with Warren's work should also prove helpful. An examination of the Warren bibliography indicates that the author received minimal critical attention prior to the publication of All The King's Men, but since that date (1946) periodical articles have increased, and theses and dissertations on Warren's fiction have appeared. In 1957, Carnegie Institute of Technology published All The King's Men: A Symposium, a formal study of several significant aspects of the novel. Recently, the most notable achievement is the first book-length study of Warren's writings, Leonard Casper's, Robert Penn Warren: The Dark and Bloody Ground.

For the purposes of this thesis, a division of Warren criticism into two categories should suffice: (1) thematic studies dealing with Warren's work in general, and (2) thematic studies of All The King's Men, showing first the critical estimate of the novel as the artistic zenith of Warren's philosophy, and discussing second the validity of the arguments setting forth various themes in the book.

Thematic treatments of Warren's writings have not been satisfactory. The scope of the subject is broad for a journal article, though this fact has deterred too few critics. The one book-length study unfortunately adds little in the way of a comprehensive view to the shorter articles which have gone before; Casper is content, primarily, with thorough explication. Several articles present partial surveys of a "central" theme; yet, though there is some merit in each isolated treatment, no one, apparently, has seen the possibility of the inclusive investigation.

One group of critics stresses Warren's fragmentation of his central characters. For instance, John Edward Hardy's "Robert Penn Warren's Double-Hero " states as Warren's principal theme the incompleteness of man. In All The King's Men, this takes the form of a "dissociation of sensibility, the split of consciousness, in modern man."<sup>16</sup> The same theme of incompleteness is stressed by Everett Carter in "The Little Myth of Robert Penn Warren"; here, however, the incompleteness is the result of a conflict between the romantic idealist and the pragmatist, a conflict which "affirms the need for a reconciliation" of the two.<sup>17</sup>

Another central theme proposed for Warren's works is that of self-knowledge. Eric Bentley, "The Meaning of Robert Penn Warren's Novels," asks the question, "What has Warren been saying to us?" The answer is Warren's main theme: we need self-knowledge.<sup>18</sup> Roma A. King, Jr. in "Time and Structure in the Early Novels of Robert Penn Warren," concurs, but uses the term "self-definition" as related in some way to

the character's past. Warren's handling of this relationship may be seen developing through his novels and exercising an artistic control on the structure of his writings.<sup>19</sup>

A theme of evil in Warren's fiction has been found by James Magmer and John L. Stewart. The latter, in "The Achievement of Robert Penn Warren," asserts that the author repeatedly tells the same story, "the story of man's efforts to flee from the problem of evil and of his ultimate return to that problem."<sup>20</sup> For Magmer, the Warren theme is the tension created as men strive against evil to do good, the "confusing problem of...existence in the present historical situation."<sup>21</sup>

A dichotomy between violence and order is the basis of Charles R. Anderson's study of a central theme in Warren's works. Mr. Anderson has found that half of Warren's theme states "that violence is life without principle"; the other half is that "order is living by principles."<sup>22</sup> A significant part of this critic's argument rests upon Warren's ironic distinction between "the man of principles" and "the idealist, with whom he is popularly confused."<sup>23</sup> The importance of this distinction in relation to All The King's Men will be discussed later.

What one immediately notices in all of these accounts is their insistence upon conflict in Warren's fiction. In addition, this conflict, no matter what its outward manifestations, is rooted in a division of the inner being of the individual. Why have the critics not formulated under a single theme these topics of basic similarity? Could not

a man be "incomplete" because he lacked "self-knowledge?" Could not this deficiency of knowledge be the result of a lack of a responsible effort to understand the basic problem of knowledge, knowledge of evil as well as of good? And, are not all of these elements closely concerned with the principled or unprincipled life?

Any discussion of Robert Penn Warren as a writer of fiction must eventually turn to his most outstanding literary achievement, All The King's Men. Most critics would agree that whatever Warren is trying to say or do, in his 1947 Pulitzer Prize novel he says and does it best. In discussing theme and structure in Warren's early novels, Roma A. King, Jr. feels that in All The King's Men, the author "achieves thematic completion, emotional maturity, and structural wholeness."<sup>24</sup>

In general, this estimate is also indicated in separate articles by Robert B. Heilman<sup>25</sup> and Charles R. Anderson<sup>26</sup> who express the conviction that Robert Penn Warren is a tragic writer and that All The King's Men is his finest example of tragedy. While not insisting on the tragic interpretation, Eric Bentley attests to the artistic exactness of the novel calling it "the clearest and most concise statement of Warren's main theme."<sup>27</sup> Another critic, John L. Stewart, who, in attempting to isolate Warren's central theme occasionally finds much confusion in the author's statements, admits that "no such confusion attends the arguments of Warren's recent novel, All The King's Men."<sup>28</sup>

Thus, since there seems to be little critical doubt



that All The King's Men is Warren's foremost novel, the important question becomes, what is the theme of this novel? The answer is attended by general scholarly disagreement. Robert B. Heilman in "Melpomene As Wallflower; or The Reading of Tragedy," detects several themes in the book: (1) the history theme, (2) the action theme of participation and withdrawal, and (3) the knowledge theme.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, Robert C. Slack emphasizes a single theme, "The Telemachus Theme,"<sup>30</sup> in the novel. Oddly enough, thematic studies of All The King's Men seem to vacillate between these two points. Either the critic propounds a multiplicity of themes, hoping, no doubt, to trap the elusive matter by sheer scope, or he selects "one of the principal themes" of the book and dwells on it at length. This is not to imply that such studies have been useless. Many are quite perceptive and have added greatly to a critical understanding of All The King's Men. The fact remains, however, that no single, specific theme which will satisfactorily account for all the major actions and character developments in the novel has been proposed.

Among those critics who present a variety of themes for our inspection is Elizabeth M. Kerr. According to Miss Kerr, the large number of themes increases the "universal significance" of the novel.

The configuration traced by the whole thematic structure manifests a comprehensive philosophic concept; interpretations based on single themes or a few themes are inadequate to represent the total meaning. The action centers in man's sin and guilt

and his attempt to evade evil; the total meaning centers in the necessity of assuming responsibility and acknowledging guilt, thereby accepting evil as an inevitable part of life....<sup>31</sup>

Miss Kerr's insistence upon a plenitude of themes is somewhat perplexing, since she would eventually group each theme under one of the general headings quoted above, "action" or "total meaning." It would seem that some inclusive theme could be formulated from these general statements, but Miss Kerr prefers to discuss the isolated, specific themes such as "guilt and innocence, action and idea, present and past."<sup>32</sup> At one place in her article, Miss Kerr appears to be moving toward some unity of criticism when she touches on the theme of knowledge.

One theme centered in Jack is explicitly stressed from beginning to end: the theme of knowledge or man's search for truth, of man's compulsion to gain knowledge contrasted with his desire to evade it.<sup>33</sup>

However, her treatment of this theme is a superficial one and a quite incomplete recognition of its actual scope. Ultimately, Miss Kerr would seem to be saying that Warren's philosophy is "comprehensive" because it is fragmented and inexplicable.

Miss Kerr's problem is not unique. It is that of the sympathetic Warren reader who fails to understand completely the totality of what Warren is saying. The same failure is magnified in those critics who are not attempting to be laudatory. Despite Warren's statements of denial, All The

King's Men is often considered a thinly disguised novel of "political morality."<sup>34</sup> This, of course, has not helped to increase appreciation or understanding of the book. An example of these unfortunate critical studies is Oscar Cargill's "Anatomist of Monsters"; Mr. Cargill finds Jack Burden "heretical on the problem of evil." In addition, Warren's emphasis on the element of chance creates "a world of facile excuses."<sup>35</sup> The conclusion of the article is that the human will cannot exercise good; Warren's characters are non-moral "monsters" who "have only entertainment value" and who serve as an excuse for the "Huey Longs."<sup>36</sup>

Though there appears to be considerable validity and perception in most of the thematic studies of All The King's Men, the same lack of unification may be seen as in the larger thematic treatments of all Warren's works. This insufficiency has its basis in a failure to understand certain philosophical assumptions present in the author's fiction. For, as mentioned earlier, Warren considers himself a philosophical novelist. It is not enough to say that Warren shows this or that about the problem of evil and then fail to make some statement as to Warren's position on the subject. In order to establish such a position, of course, one would have to correlate all the relevant aspects of Warren's philosophy and present a sort of world-view which could, to a greater or lesser extent, be applicable to every piece of the author's fiction.

Only by attempting to clarify Warren's philosophical position, his world-view, can his theme in All The King's Men be recognized and understood. To my knowledge, only

one critic has dealt perceptively and accurately with Warren's philosophy as revealed in All The King's Men. The brevity of this critic's study and the fact that he has omitted a detailed discussion of theme in the novel make the effort necessarily incomplete; yet the article does supply an adequate springboard to the points which will be made later in this thesis. The article is James Ruoff's, "Humpty Dumpty and All The King's Men: A Note on Robert Penn Warren's Teleology."

In his analysis, Mr. Ruoff cites the title of Warren's novel and the nursery rhyme from which it comes to prove that "Willie is Humpty Dumpty, not 'King'."<sup>37</sup> "In Warren's teleology only God is King, and we are all of us 'all the King's men.'"<sup>38</sup> While this seems a relatively minor point, Ruoff assures that it serves

...to reveal the profoundly spiritual nature of Warren's convictions about the broad themes of man and God; and once we have properly understood the title in its relation to the context of the novel, we shall be in a position to see exactly what the author intended....<sup>39</sup>

In "A Note to All The King's Men," Warren has stated that he did not want to write a naturalistic novel; by propounding the idea that God is King, Ruoff indicates how Warren established an assumption of predestination "quite different from determinism of a theological order."<sup>40</sup> All The King's Men ends with an affirmation of "the enigmatic paradox of Christianity--the omnipotence of God and the moral responsibility of man."<sup>41</sup>

This, according to Ruoff, is the "agony of will" which man must face; he must choose though he has no choice, and he must accept responsibility for his choices. Man possesses knowledge of right and wrong, but he lacks the ability to stand outside time, as God does, and know that his actions are, in the absolute sense, either good or evil. Still, he must act and do the best that he can; as Hugh Miller in the novel expresses it, "History is blind, but man is not."

Thwarted in his attempt to fulfill some idea of the good by his tragic limitation, man, according to Mr. Ruoff's interpretation, can seek his only comfort in the "Christian experience of humility, repentance and hope." Ultimately, this is what Jack Burden does after he has repudiated the "Great Twitch."

And if at the end of the novel Jack's acceptance of this view of life is not without some reservations, we must remember that the paradox is baffling, is one that derives not from a spontaneous rational acquiescence but from a hard discipline of faith.<sup>42</sup>

As I have stated earlier, Mr. Ruoff is the only critic who has detected the basic paradox of Warren's philosophy, the philosophy which is the thread of continuity running through all of Warren's fiction and finding its finest expression in All The King's Men. Still, there is much to be desired in Mr. Ruoff's article. First, there is no specific mention of theme. Second, after asserting that Warren would have us accept responsibility in an "agony of will," Ruoff says of Burden after he has come to accept Cass

Mastern's "Spider Web Theory" of the far-reaching consequences of evil, "Jack dares not assume responsibility for awakening the drowsy spider."<sup>43</sup> The point is that Burden, for the first time, realizes that he must accept responsibility for his actions and that he must continue to act.

Third, Ruoff agrees with Eric Bentley's observation that the Cass Mastern story is Warren's attempt to "put the whole theme of a work into one short and strongly symbolic interlude."<sup>44</sup> The Cass Mastern story is, of course, a vital part of the novel, but not a condensation of the complete theme. The importance of the Cass Mastern episode is its very incompleteness; it is historical fact and, ultimately, can convey only fact. What Jack Burden and the other characters of All The King's Men are striving toward is a reconciliation of fact and idea. It is only after Burden has effected this reconciliation that he finds he can return to finish his dissertation on Cass Mastern. However, the significance of this point in relation to the theme of the novel will be discussed later in more detail.

Finally, there is the fact that Mr. Ruoff sees Warren's philosophy in purely Christian terms. The Warren reader is well aware that the author himself makes predominant use of such terms, but he has explicitly stated that he does not insist upon strict interpretation in these terms only. In "Knowledge and the Image of Man," Warren has said, "Every soul is valuable in God's sight. Or with the secularization of things, we may say: every soul is valuable in man's sight."<sup>45</sup> In dealing with the sense of guilt in the characters in All

The King's Men, one critic has observed,

In theological terms that...is Original Sin, but its definition may be expanded, its face altered to please the modern man who is not accustomed to meet himself on theological grounds.<sup>46</sup>

As shall be made evident later in this discussion, certain significant aspects of Warren's philosophy are denied accurate interpretation within the limited confines of Mr. Ruoff's analysis.

What then are the philosophical assumptions of Robert Penn Warren? The main assumption, and the one which seems to constitute the theme of All The King's Men, is very simple: we need, first of all, knowledge. Then from this knowledge can proceed self-knowledge and, finally, the ability to act meaningfully and in a state of awareness. Warren has Jack Burden say that "the end of man is to know." But the apparent simplicity of this statement fades before the inconsistencies and dualities of the human situation as it is viewed by Warren. Man not only has a desire to know, he cannot live and avoid knowledge. And knowledge can be of both good and evil.

Before birth into the world of fact, man is not capable of knowledge. The foetus, Jack Burden tells us, is "warm in its not-knowing."<sup>47</sup> This warmth and security of innocence vanishes with birth, because man instantly begins to know, to experience in terms of the real world. The amount of knowledge a man may attain in his lifetime, however, will necessarily fall short of ultimate knowledge; there is at

least one thing that cannot be known empirically and that is death. This view is what Jack Burden is stressing in his argument with the "Scholarly Attorney" who asserts the primacy of achieving union with God. God has nothing whatever to offer to man-alive.<sup>48</sup>

I thought God cannot be Fullness of Being.  
For Life is Motion...For Life is Motion  
toward Knowledge. If God is Complete  
Knowledge then He is Complete Non-Motion,  
which is Non-Life, which is Death.<sup>49</sup>

Man is bound in a temporal world of past, present and future. God, however, exists outside time. When Jack Burden can anticipate the outcome of Willie Stark's attempted impeachment, he states,

I stood there and felt like God-Almighty  
brooding on History. Which must be a dull  
business for God-Almighty, Who knows how  
it is going to come out. Who knew, in  
fact, how it was going to come out even  
before He knew there was going to be any  
History. Which is complete nonsense, for  
that involves Time and He is out of Time,  
for God is Fullness of Being and in Him  
the End is the Beginning.<sup>50</sup>

Man in his temporal world is not favored with such foresight. This creates the terrible paradox with which Warren's characters struggle. If God is omniscient and omnipotent, how can man be said to have responsibility for his moral actions? Seemingly, man has no choice and no power to govern his life. In this context, good and evil have no meaning. As Burden perceives, only by denying the idea of God may man gain a measure of free will.



Such a denial, however, would also remove any moral basis which might have existed on an absolute scale. With God, good and evil have no meaning; without God, they may have a meaning but only in a relative sense. Now that man has denied the absolute and gained his freedom, he has also sacrificed any certainty upon which to base his choices. He, himself, cannot attain ultimate knowledge and grasp the absolute concepts of good and evil; he cannot transcend time. Thus, when Jack Burden says, "Life is Motion toward Knowledge," there is no designation as to what kind of knowledge is desirable, whether it should be moral, amoral, or immoral. In an anguish closely akin to that of the existentialist's, however, man must continue to act.

It is at this point that Warren's philosophy exacts its greatest test of faith. Even though man is limited in his ability to see the moral consequences of his acts and is unable to know absolutely what is good and what is evil, he must accept responsibility for his actions. Even though his concept of good is illusory, he must strive toward it. According to Warren, the only worthwhile knowledge is that knowledge which leads to awareness of oneself and the individual's relation to the community of mankind. In other words, man must hope to attain knowledge of the good, the moral. Only by acting in awareness and responsibility can a man hope to achieve a complete self-definition. Though every act he commits will not by any means always be a good act, he still must act and, if possible, attempt to profit from his errors. This final position is the one to which

Jack Burden succumbs at the end of All The King's Men. He has not so much accepted a faith as he has at last realized that an idealistic or deterministic detachment from the world and its affairs is impossible. Burden has accepted the tragic limitations of existence and the anguish of being aware; he is prepared to "go into the convulsion of the world, out of history into history and the awful responsibility of Time."<sup>51</sup>

Despite, however, the impossibility of achieving it, man yearns toward some fulfillment of the good. When he discovers the futility of this search, he may deny "the awful responsibility" and try to escape the world of fact. Jack Burden, for example, first isolates himself with his "brass-bound Idealism" and then with the "Great Twitch" of determinism. Both of these positions deny the action that is life and the movement toward knowledge. Ultimately, man must return to his inevitable quest for knowledge. As I have quoted earlier from Warren's article, "Knowledge and the Image of Man,"

Man eats of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, and falls. But if he takes another bite, he may get at least a sort of redemption.<sup>52</sup>

In All The King's Men, Warren has Jack Burden say much the same thing, but places more emphasis on the paradoxical situation and uncertainty of human existence.

The end of man is knowledge, but there is one thing he can't know. He can't know whether knowledge will save him or kill him. He will be killed, all right, but he can't know whether he is killed because of the knowledge which he has got or

because of the knowledge which he hasn't  
 got and which if he had it, would save  
 him.<sup>53</sup>

Thus, man has no choice but to act and hope to gain knowledge.

It would seem that, from these philosophical assumptions, Warren has constructed the theme of All The King's Men. Each of the novel's major characters (Willie Stark, Adam and Anne Stanton, and Jack Burden) is confronted with a significant aspect of the problem of knowledge, and in his reaction demonstrates the tenets of Warren's philosophy. The actions of each of these four characters have a definite influence upon the lives of all, and the final position of each character in the novel is directly related to the way in which he deals with the knowledge he acquires and the amount of active responsibility he accepts. It is Jack Burden, of course, who is the principal character in the novel and who makes the final statement of the theme of knowledge. His story by way of summation will be held till last. But, though All The King's Men is Jack Burden's story, he tells us that it is Willie Stark's story, too. Thus, it would be well to begin with Willie Stark and the theme of knowledge.

## CHAPTER II

### WILLIE STARK AND THE THEME OF KNOWLEDGE

Most able readers of All The King's Men have now dismissed the idea that the novel is primarily concerned with the morality of politics, and with the fading of this hastily-formed conjecture has gone its corollary, that Willie Stark is only the fictional equivalent of the late Senator Huey P. Long. Though these erroneous evaluations have done the book's reputation more harm than good, it would not be contradictory to say that the basis of their origin is easily seen. Without doubt Willie is the most dynamic character in the novel. The final meaning of the book may be focused in the character of Jack Burden, but the action of All The King's Men is focused in Willie Stark. His emergence from the rural fastnesses of his state to his final position as its governor is one of continual movement and involvement.

Paradoxically, this frantic quality attending Willie's political rise underscores an important tenet of Warren's philosophy. Willie never acquires any meaningful knowledge, knowledge which might lead to a realistic awareness of himself and others. In this sense, he does not move at all. Like all the novel's major characters, Willie denies responsibility for his actions and refuses to recognize any moral

obligation from his experiences. Yet, in the physical meaning of the word, Willie does act, and with tremendous energy and capacity amasses a great deal of political wisdom. This is the irony which Warren builds throughout the book. For at the core of his being, Willie is as devoid of self-knowledge as Jack Burden, or Adam and Anne Stanton.

In tracing the evolution of the problem of knowledge in the character of Willie Stark, it would perhaps be best to review and comment on Willie's life as it unfolds in the novel. This is the method by which the observations and interpretations of Jack Burden reveal to us what we know of Willie, and we must assume that this is the way Warren meant for him to be known. In addition, the significance of Jack Burden's struggle cannot be adequately defined until he is seen in relation to the theme of knowledge as it is illustrated by Willie Stark.<sup>1</sup>

All The King's Men begins in medias res, and the first picture of Willie Stark is that of the successful governor hurtling over the countryside in his car. Willie is returning to his father's farm in Mason County, flanked by reporters and associates, for purposes of publicity. The faithful retinue surrounding Willie gives evidence of his power. He is "the Boss," tough, cynical, and shrewd. He bullies the crowd at Mason City and they love it. He intimidates Tiny Duffy, the lieutenant governor, and Duffy "wet his lips" in submission. Even Jack Burden finds it his job to prop up Willie's aging, stench-ridden dog for a "faithful hound"

photograph.

But this Willie Stark of power contrasts sharply with the Willie Stark Jack Burden remembers from their first meeting in 1922, the Willie Stark of humility. At that time Willie was County Treasurer of Mason County and had come "to the city to see about the bond issue" for a schoolhouse. Willie had entered the backroom of Slade's pool hall and Burden remembers that it was "the Boss."

Only it was not the Boss. Not to the crude eye of the homme sensuel. Metaphysically it was the Boss, but how was I to know? Fate comes walking through the door, and it is five feet eleven inches tall and heavyish in the chest and shortish in the leg and is wearing a seventy seersucker suit which is too long in the pants....<sup>2</sup>

The important point which Warren has Burden make in this passage is that "metaphysically," or essentially, Willie Stark remains unchanged throughout the course of the novel. Before he dies, Willie indicates that his philosophy has undergone a transformation, but this fact is never revealed in terms of action, and, ultimately, Willie Stark's character is grounded in action.

Burden's statement emphasizes a perplexing duality in the figure of Willie Stark. To the casual reader it would seem that Willie does not only discard his rural naiveté and his "Christmas Tie," the outward manifestations of his "redneck" background, but that his fundamental character, including his philosophy of life, is also changed. When Willie begins his political career as Mason County Treasurer,

he is conscientiously devoted to serving the people honestly and efficiently. More than that, Willie is an idealist. But the picture which the reader receives of Willie Stark, the governor, is totally different. His administration is corrupt; he uses coercion and blackmail to attain his ends, and he himself might be conventionally regarded as an immoral person. Far from being an idealist, he appears to be both a pragmatist and an opportunist.

Warren, however, persists in displaying conflicting and puzzling facets of Willie's character, facets which at the same time seem to deny and affirm the fact that Willie has changed.<sup>3</sup> But when these characteristics are viewed in the light of Warren's philosophy, they serve to reiterate the theme of knowledge in All The King's Men by demonstrating the fact that Willie does not change. He is not the same person at the end of the novel that he is at its beginning, but the base of his character (that he is a man of action) is not affected. Willie struggles toward a definition of this basic character in its relation to the world. Since his search for this knowledge is incomplete, it leads him into the blind alley of denying responsibility for his actions, and, ultimately, he is destroyed.

Not only is the character of Willie Stark an enigma for the reader, it is also a mystery to the other major figures in the novel. When Anne tries to explain her affair with Willie to Jack Burden, she says, "You've known him all these years and you don't know him at all." Later, when Jack is alone, he considers this.

So I walked on, and after a while I remembered how she had said I had never known him. And the him was Willie Stark, whom I had known for the many years since Cousin Willie from the country, the Boy with the Christmas Tie, had walked into the back room of Slade's old place. Sure I knew him. Like a book. I had known him a long time.

Too long I thought then, too long to know him. For maybe the time had blinded me, or rather I had not been aware of the passing of time and always the round face of Cousin Willie had come between me and the other face so that I had never really seen the other face. Except perhaps in those moments when it had leaned forward to the crowds and the forelock had fallen and the eyes had bulged, and the crowd had roared and I had felt the surge in me and had felt that I was on the verge of the truth. But always the face of Cousin Willie above the Christmas tie had come again.

But it did not come now. I saw the face. Enormous. Bigger than a billboard. The forelock shagged down like a mane. The big jaw. The heavy lips laid together like masonry. The eyes burning and bulging powerfully.

Funny, I had never seen it before. Not really.<sup>4</sup>

Earlier, when Jack had asked Anne why she became involved with Willie, she had indicated a similar confusion in her answer. "He wasn't like anybody else. Not anybody else I'd ever known. And I love him. I love him, I guess. I guess that is the reason."<sup>5</sup> Finally, Adam Stanton's inability to fathom the depths of Willie Stark leads him to accept Willie's offer of director of the new hospital and eventually to assassinate Willie in the Capitol building.

From what has been said, one must assume that there is validity in the assertion that Willie's character is one of a conflicting duality. But valid as this may be, it is not



an artistic flaw in the novel; rather it is evidence of Warren's skillful handling of a complex philosophical problem which reveals the author's close concern with a cardinal question of life: how can a reconciliation be effected between the ideal and the real, or, to put it in terms of character, "the man of idea" and "the man of fact?"<sup>6</sup>

Willie Stark, the man of fact, becomes an enigma through the corruption of his idealistic principles. As Warren explains his conception of Willie in "A Note to All The King's Men,"

My politician would be...a man whose personal motivation had been in one sense, idealistic, who in many ways was to serve the cause of social betterment, but who was corrupted by power, even by power exercised against corruption. That is, his means defile his ends. But more than that, he was to be a man whose power was based on the fact that somehow he could vicariously fulfill certain secret needs of the people about him.<sup>7</sup>

In his article Warren comments further on the figure he has created and reveals, by implication, the significance of Willie's own search for self-knowledge. "But over against his power to fulfill, in some degree, a secret need of those about him, the politician was to discover, more and more, his own emptiness and his own alienation."<sup>8</sup>

Willie's inability to come to grips with the problem of knowledge foreshadows the frustration of his emotional dependents. Jack and Adam and Anne are all searching for fulfillment, or self-knowledge, and each thinks that he finds it in the character of Willie Stark. Each is unable

to see the incompleteness of Willie's own search for self-knowledge. In Willie's action, Jack finds the answer to his passivity; Adam sees an opportunity to do good by becoming director of the hospital and is willingly blinded to the fact that he cannot isolate himself from a world which includes political corruption; Anne finds in Willie, the man of action and fact, the love denied her by Jack Burden, the romantic idealist.

The question arises, "What are the elements which lead to and define the position of Willie Stark in the theme of knowledge?" On one level, Willie is a victim of what Jack Burden comes to call "the terrible division of his age," the clash between the idea and the fact, or between idealism and pragmatism. Warren's own comment gives credence to this view; one of the persons who stood in the background of the creation of Willie Stark "was the scholarly and benign figure of William James."<sup>9</sup>

As has been mentioned earlier, however, Willie is an idealist at the beginning of his political career. His first disillusionment comes when he loses his office as Treasurer of Mason County for attempting to stop political graft in the construction of the new school building. Willie's efforts to explain the facts to the voters are met with skepticism and irritation. But when a faulty fire escape collapses and several children are killed, Willie is redeemed and becomes a sort of local hero. His idealism remains unshaken.

Subsequently, Willie comes to believe "that he stood

in a special relation to God, Destiny, or plain Luck."<sup>10</sup> It is, therefore, an easy matter for Tiny Duffy to convince Willie that he should run for governor. Actually, Duffy represents the interests of another candidate, Joe Harrison, who wants to capitalize on Willie's recent popularity to split the rural vote of his rival. Jack Burden explains that though Willie is unaware of being a pawn, his unawareness is not due to ignorance. His idealism has come between him and his picture of the real world.

He wasn't really in touch with the world. He was not only bemused by the voice he had heard. He was bemused by the very grandeur of the position to which he aspired. The blaze of light hitting him in the eyes blinded him...

He knew something about human nature, all right. He'd sat around the county courthouse long enough to find out something. (True, he had got himself thrown out of the courthouse. But that wasn't ignorance of human nature. It was, perhaps, a knowledge not of human nature in general but of his own nature in particular, something deeper than the mere question of right and wrong. He became a martyr, not through ignorance, not only for the right but also for some knowledge of himself deeper than right or wrong.) He knew something about human nature, but something now came between him and that knowledge. In a way, he flattered human nature.<sup>11</sup>

Willie's campaign for governor betrays this same lack of contact with the real world. His speeches are a dry and lifeless rehashing "of facts and figures he had dug up about running the state." Willie, "in trying to live up to his notion of a high destiny," reveals his idealistic view of the world. But when his campaign begins to

falter, Willie worries and asks Jack Burden what he has been doing wrong. Burden replies, "Tell 'em anything. But for Sweet Jesus' sake don't try to improve their minds."<sup>12</sup>

Unconvinced, Willie answers, "Yeah, I know that's what some folks say...Do you think it's true?"<sup>13</sup>

Willie is determined to meet the world on his own terms, and he continues to campaign in the same plodding way as before. An idealist, he denies the factual truth of the world about him, and for this denial he suffers the boredom of his audiences. His tour worsens, but at its nadir, Sadie Burke supplies the disillusioning truth which changes Willie's life and rearranges his philosophy. When he discovers that he has been a political tool, Willie, in rage, denounces the Harrison ticket in a manner which becomes characteristic of his later speeches.

...there was Willie flinging the sheets of his manuscript from him so they swirled about his feet and beating on his chest and shouting how the truth was there and didn't need writing down. There he was, with the papers about his feet and one arm up, the coat sleeve jammed elbow high, face red as a bruised beet and the sweat sluicing, hair over his forehead, eyes bugged out and shining, drunk as a hoot owl, and behind him the bunting, red-white-and-blue, and over him God's bright, brassy, incandescent sky.<sup>14</sup>

In his disillusionment Willie finds his power. He withdraws from the primary, and in a series of emotionally charged speeches urging an end to political oppression he helps to elect the opposing candidate, MacMurfee. Willie, who is accepted as a saviour by the rural population,

promises that he will run in the next election if MacMurfee does not correct the political situation. In 1930, Willie capitalizes on the incumbent's inaction and wins an election described by Jack Burden as "hell among the yearlings and the Charge of the Light Brigade and Saturday night in the back room of Casey's saloon rolled into one...."<sup>15</sup>

Out of this chaos emerges the new, fully-formed dual character of Willie Stark, the Willie who tells Jack Burden, "there ain't anything worth doing a man can do and keep his dignity."<sup>16</sup> Symbolically, the figures who represent Willie's divided character are Sadie Burke, the shrewd, political opportunist, and Hugh Miller, the idealist.

In the background of the picture, under a purplish tumbled sky flecked with sinister white like driven foam, flanking Willie, one on each side, were two figures, Sadie Burke and a tallish, stooped, slow-spoken man with a sad, tanned face and what they call the eyes of a dreamer. The man was Hugh Miller, Harvard Law School, Lafayette Escadrille, Croix de Guerre, clean hands, pure heart, and no political past.<sup>17</sup>

Willie Stark, the man of action, has found his idealism unsuited for coping with the practical affairs of the world. But part of the paradox of Willie's character is that he never completely separates himself from his former convictions. Thus, a sole remaining vestige of Willie's old idealism is symbolized by Hugh Miller, the Attorney General. Though Hugh Miller's function as prosecutor for the state is an important one, it must be observed that his role is actually

secondary. For Hugh would never have gained office if Willie had not adopted the political opportunism represented by Sadie Burke.

The frustration of the idealist committed to action and the ultimate rejection of his ideals is a problem which finds a place in much of Warren's fiction. It is a problem central to the author's philosophy and to the theme of knowledge, and finds, perhaps, its most explicit expression in World Enough and Time, the novel immediately following All The King's Men. Jeremiah Beaumont, the principal character of World Enough and Time, is an idealist somewhat similar to Willie Stark. Jeremiah, at the end of the novel, is able to analyze the events of his life and to detect three great errors of his idealism, each one following in logical necessity from the one before it. The errors of Jeremiah Beaumont may be shown to parallel the errors in the career of Willie Stark.

'...it is the first and last temptation to name the idea as all, which I did, and in that error was my arrogance, and the beginning of my undoing and cold exile from mankind...So, I ask, what becomes of the idea, if we place it apart from our warm world and its invisible fluids by which we live?'

...a second error, which must always follow from the first when we find that the idea has not redeemed the world: the world must redeem the idea...'man will use the means of the natural world, and its dark ways, to gain that end he names holy by the idea, and ah! the terror of that, the terror of that.'<sup>18</sup>

...But there is a third error, he says, that follows from the second: to deny the idea and its loneliness and embrace the world as all...'to seek communion only

in the blank cup of nature and innocence  
there.<sup>19</sup>

Willie Stark, who has previously named "the idea as all," finds he must employ the "dark ways" of the world in order to "redeem the idea." Once he becomes governor, however, he commits Jeremiah's third error by adopting a deterministic view of the world. Part of the complexity of Willie Stark's character is that, outwardly, he never completely denies the idea even though his concept of life may be shown to be deterministic. Actually, Willie retains the idea only as a rationalization for his corrupt actions.

Once in office, Willie comes to regard the world in much the same way as did the eighteenth-century rationalists who saw God as an indifferent watchmaker and the world as a watch. When Byram White, the State Auditor, is caught embezzling government funds, Willie defends him in order to protect the administration. He tells Hugh Miller, who wants to prosecute Byram,

'My God, you talk like Byram was human! He's a thing! You don't prosecute an adding machine if a spring goes bust and makes a mistake. You fix it. Well, I fixed Byram...Hell, Byram is just something you use, and he'll sure be useful from now on.'<sup>20</sup>

In another passage, Willie demonstrates just how far he has fallen from his former idealistic view of mankind when he replies to Jack Burden's doubt that he will be able to find any means by which to blackmail Judge Irwin. Willie says,

'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.'<sup>21</sup>

In conducting his gubernatorial duties, Willie also gives evidence of his deterministic philosophy; the result is a sort of ethical relativism. Willie tells the people, "I shall live in your will and your right."<sup>22</sup> But it is Willie who determines the right. In fact, in one speech he beats on his chest and proclaims that the truth is in his heart and does not "need writing down."<sup>23</sup> Since the law of the state, however, does need to be written down, Willie glibly admits he has "packed" the Supreme Court and it now endorses his efforts to reconstruct a law which is like last year's pants, "always too short and too tight for growing humankind."<sup>24</sup> Willie tells Adam Stanton that mankind has never had a concept of what was good or right; man just "began to make Good up as he went along."

'He made up what he needed to do business, Doc. And what he made up and got everybody to mirate on as good and right was always just a couple of jumps behind what he needed to do business on. That's why things change, Doc. Because what folks claim is right is always just a couple of jumps short of what they need to do business. Now an individual, one fellow, he will stop doing business because he's got a notion of what is right, and he is a hero. But folks in general, which is society, Doc, is never going to stop doing business. Society is just going to cook up a new notion of what is right. Society is sure not ever going to commit suicide. At least, not that way and of a purpose.'<sup>25</sup>

Through his increased knowledge of the world and its



ways, Willie Stark has reached the point where he is unable to ascertain any suprahuman or absolute sanction of the Good. He commits Jeremiah Beaumont's third error and "embraces the world as all;" he "seeks communion only in the blank cup of nature," or determinism. Thus, Willie's progress toward knowledge is static. Ironically, though Willie acts with a feverish intensity, he does not move toward any meaningful knowledge, knowledge which would make him aware of his responsibilities as a human being. He deserts every particular moral code and relies upon expediency. According to Willie, only through evil may good be achieved. As he explains to Adam Stanton,

'Goodness. Yeah, just plain, simple goodness...You got to make it, Doc. If you want it. And you got to make it out of badness... And you know why? Because there isn't anything else to make it out of.'<sup>26</sup>

As has been pointed out earlier, Warren assumes that "Life being Motion toward Knowledge" is an insufficient concept of life. An individual must move toward knowledge of the good, and this can be done only when he accepts his responsibilities in a world containing both good and evil. In Brother to Dragons, "R.P.W." says,

For if responsibility is not  
The thing given but the thing to be achieved,  
There is still no way out of the responsibility  
Of trying to achieve responsibility.<sup>27</sup>

Even though Willie Stark often speaks of doing good, the fact that he refuses to accept any responsibility for those

actions which he commits in order to achieve good indicates that his knowledge is incomplete. The good end does not justify the evil means. Willie makes tremendous progress for his state in a material sense, but he actually enlarges on the prior political corruption and the subjugation of the people in making this progress. Thus, Willie's actions, as well as his moral knowledge, are sterile. They cannot be productive of any meaningful or lasting good since they are not done in an awareness of responsibility.

In his article, "Knowledge and the Image of Man," Warren has emphasized the importance of the creative act over just any act. The knowledge which a man derives from his experiences does not have for its end "the life of contemplation," but "the moment of action, of creation, in our world of contingency."<sup>28</sup> Actions which are not creative or constructive are not actions taken in awareness of responsibility, or in movement toward knowledge. Like Willie's, they are actually evidence of passivity, merely acquiring or receiving.

Previously, it has been stated that Willie Stark's concept of the good is only an empty rationalization, designed to justify his evil actions. When Willie first becomes governor, Hugh Miller, the conscientious Attorney General, is the symbol of this rationalization. Hugh represents the desire Willie once had to end corrupt politics in the state. But when Willie refuses to let him prosecute Byram White, Hugh resigns. The original picture of Willie

Stark as governor is left with only Sadie Burke, the symbol of political opportunism. No sooner is Hugh out of the office, however, than Willie replaces him with something else, another symbol of his old idealism, a magnificent "free hospital and health center," which is to be untainted by any political graft.<sup>29</sup>

Undeniably, the hospital will do some good in the sense that it will alleviate much physical suffering, but in order to make the hospital possible, Willie must continue his corruption as governor of the state. For Willie the hospital does not represent any growth of moral strength, but a salve to soothe the pain of incompleteness in his life.

Actually, Hugh Miller and the hospital serve a dual purpose in the theme. Not only are they the symbols of the deficiency in Willie's life, but they also stand as the ultimate argument for the presence of an absolute, though perhaps unknowable, good. In Brother to Dragons, "R.P.W." says that the evil man's

...heart-deep need  
To name his evil good is the final evidence  
For the existence of good.<sup>30</sup>

Hugh Miller and the Willie Stark Hospital give evidence of Willie's subconscious need for self-fulfillment, but occasionally the conflict manifests itself in his consciousness; and at such times Willie becomes almost inarticulate in his frustration. Jack Burden says that once he asked Willie a question. It was after Willie's speech in front

of the Capitol.

I asked him the question. I asked, 'Did you mean what you said?...You said your strength was their will. You said your justice was their need. All of that.'

He kept on staring at me, his eyes bulging, his stare grappling and probing into me.

'You said that,' I said.

'God damn it,' he exclaimed, violently, still staring at me, 'God damn it--' he clenched his right fist and struck himself twice on the chest--'God damn it, there's something inside you--there's something inside you--'

He left the words hanging there. He turned his eyes from me and stared moodily into the fire. I didn't press my question.<sup>31</sup>

The "something" inside Jack Burden which makes him ask the question is a growing discernment of the paradox of Willie's character, a sense of confusion Burden shares with the other major figures of the novel. There is another question which Jack Burden plans to ask Willie, but never does. Willie wants his hospital to be free of political corruption. In a moment of meditation, Burden wonders,

Now if Willie Stark believed that you always had to make the good out of the bad, why did he get so excited when Tiny just wanted to make a logical little deal with the hospital contract? Why did he get so heated up just because Tiny's brand of the Bad might get mixed in the raw materials from which he was going to make some Good?... That was scarcely consistent. It was not at all consistent. I would have to ask the Boss about it sometime.<sup>32</sup>

Despite his philosophical inconsistencies, Willie continues to follow his belief in determinism and to govern

his actions by its dictates. As with Jack Burden, it is only when Willie cannot escape the admission of his own responsibility in the events of the world that he at last comes to question the adequacy of his personal philosophy. Such an admission comes through the shock of experience. Willie's corruption eventually leads to a climactic situation involving his son, Tom. Willie has told Jack Burden to gather evidence to blackmail Judge Irwin. After a long search, Burden finds proof of disreputable political dealings in the Judge's past, and Willie demands that they be used to obtain the Judge's influence in silencing a possible scandal about Tom Stark's illegitimate child. Faced with the documents, Judge Irwin commits suicide and Willie is forced to protect his son by sacrificing the hospital contract to stop the blackmail of his political rivals. But Tom, an undisciplined football hero, breaks training and is dropped from the squad. When Willie uses his political power to force the coach to reinstate Tom, the boy is injured in the next game; his spinal cord is crushed and, paralyzed, he is doomed to an early death.

Conscience-stricken and no longer able to ignore his responsibility in these events, Willie realizes with Jeremiah Beaumont that determinism "is what man cannot endure and be man."<sup>33</sup> Willie makes an effort to curb his political and personal corruption and to change the course of his life. The morning after Tom's fate is known, Willie cancels the hospital contract. In answer to Burden's unasked question,

Willie says, "You got to start somewhere."<sup>34</sup>

Ironically, it is when Willie truly begins to live by acknowledging his complicity in the human situation that he sets in motion the events which lead to his assassination. Willie ends his affair with Anne Stanton, but Tiny Duffy, who has suffered a personal loss on the hospital contract, is prompted by Sadie Burke (Willie's previous mistress), to inform Adam of his sister's relationship with the governor. Ultimately, Willie is killed in the Capitol lobby by the enraged Adam Stanton.

The rapidity with which the final scenes are interwoven serves to illustrate Cass Mastern's belief that every man's act involves every other man and that an individual cannot escape his past. Though Willie tries to reform his life, he cannot avoid the responsibility for his former actions. As Jack Burden tells Anne Stanton:

I tried to tell her how if you could not accept the past and its burden there was no future, for without one there cannot be the other, and how if you could accept the past you might hope for the future, for only out of the past can you make the future.<sup>35</sup>

Similarly, Thomas Jefferson, at the end of Brother to Dragons, realizes

That the dream of the future is not  
Better than the fact of the past, no  
matter how terrible.  
For without the fact of the past we cannot dream the future.<sup>36</sup>

Because Willie Stark is a man of action and violence, his responsibility to the past is finally exacted in terms of violence, and he is destroyed.<sup>37</sup> But there may be "hope for the future," and this is Willie's deathbed realization. His final words to Jack Burden are,

'It might have been all different, Jack...  
If it hadn't happened, it might--have  
been different--even yet.'<sup>38</sup>

Willie's recognition of the fact that "It might have been all different," that determinism is not the answer to man's search for self-definition, is also the final knowledge of Jeremiah Beaumont.

'All I can have now is knowledge. But if  
we can have knowledge, if we can know the  
terrible logic of life, if we can only  
know!...that is all we need: knowledge.  
That is not redemption, but is almost  
better than redemption.'<sup>39</sup>

Before he dies, Willie is able to accept his place and his responsibility in the terrible complexity and duality of human existence. His dying admonition, "You got to believe that," has a significant effect on Jack Burden's eschatology and will be discussed in a later chapter.

The importance of Willie Stark's relationship to the major characters in the novel has been generally underrated by critics who have dismissed him as a poorly-drawn figure, contributing only ambiguity to the plot. What they have failed to note is that Willie is a vital cog in Warren's

theme and must of necessity be an enigma. He is the character in whom the other characters seek fulfillment, and the incompleteness of his knowledge is their incompleteness. It is Jack Burden who makes the final statement of Warren's theme and philosophy. As the narrator of the novel, Jack is unable to derive any meaningful knowledge from the character of Willie Stark (until the end of the book), and this inability provides the context of the story.

A final evaluation of Willie, in the light of Warren's basic ideas shows him to be a complex and masterfully-drawn character, illustrating conflicts pertinent to a reader of the twentieth century. The fact that Willie is revealed through the eyes of Jack Burden, who struggles to understand him, merely intensifies the importance Warren places on the conflict of idealism and pragmatism, "the terrible division of our age," in the general scheme of his philosophical assumptions. Willie Stark may be a demagogue, but to condemn him for this, though Warren certainly does not indicate that he favors demagoguery, is to misunderstand Willie's essential character and his function in the novel. In Brother to Dragons, "R.P.W." observes "How the wicked man, even in wickedness, but seeks God, after all."<sup>40</sup> Though in different words, this is part of the final knowledge of Cass Mastern from his long search for salvation: "'...there is always a kind of glory, however stained or obscured, in whatever man's hand does well.'<sup>41</sup>

In a material sense, Willie does well; and this leads,



paradoxically, to his "glory," his concluding realization of his responsibility as a free agent. He was doomed, but he "lived in the agony of will."<sup>42</sup>

### CHAPTER III

#### ADAM AND ANNE STANTON AND THE THEME OF KNOWLEDGE

All The King's Men is primarily the story of Jack Burden, and, secondarily, it is the story of Willie Stark. But there are two other major characters who contribute significantly to the development of the plot and to the theme of knowledge. They are Adam and Anne Stanton, son and daughter of the former Governor Stanton and part of the aristocratic society of Burden's Landing. One learns that they are the childhood friends of Jack Burden and that Jack had once planned to marry Anne, but somehow the marriage had never materialized. At the time the novel takes place, Adam is a famous surgeon, and Anne, after a series of unsuccessful engagements, has devoted her life to charity work.

Despite the fact that Adam and Anne Stanton are never revealed in the same depth as are Jack Burden and Willie Stark, the importance of their roles is not difficult to see. It is Adam who destroys, and is destroyed by, Willie; Adam as "the man of idea," is the other half of Willie Stark. Anne Stanton, in becoming Willie's mistress, helps to set in motion the final tragic events of the novel. The fulfillment

she attempts to find in Willie and her insistence that Jack Burden should want something from life emphasize, by contrast, the incompleteness of Jack's existence and his struggle toward self-awareness. What final knowledge Jack derives from the events of his life and Anne's enables him to face the future with her with some hope.

Both Adam and Anne are drawn into the story because they are seeking something which Willie Stark can offer. Adam, the idealist, sees in Willie's plans for a hospital a chance to do good; and Anne, for the same reason, approaches Willie in an attempt to obtain state funds for her charities. Yet these motivations constitute only one level (the level of plot) of the attraction Willie holds for Adam and Anne. A second level, more important to the meaning to the novel, shows the relation of the Stantons to the theme of knowledge. For Adam and Anne, like Jack Burden and Willie Stark, are searching for self-knowledge and are frustrated by their own incompleteness. The superficial power, success, and self-assurance of Willie Stark, the man of action and fact, blind them, and he momentarily represents a possible fulfillment of their needs.

Because of the interpenetration of the roles of Adam and Anne Stanton with those of Willie Stark and Jack Burden, this chapter will be devoted to a discussion of the Stantons' relation to the theme of knowledge. But Adam and Anne are not just complementary characters; each one plays a distinctive and individual part and has a complex set of values to

contribute to the theme of the novel. For this reason, it is impossible to handle the Stantons effectively as a single unit. In order to lessen confusion, and in order to focus more profitably upon their individual struggles, I feel that Adam and Anne Stanton should be treated separately under chapter sub-headings. The inherent unity of their roles requires no special pleading and should be apparent from specific references in each section.

#### ADAM STANTON

At the end of All The King's Men, after the deaths of Adam Stanton and Willie Stark, Jack Burden adopts the tone of an impersonal, omniscient narrator and explains the significance of the relationship between the corrupt governor and the impeccable doctor.

He had seen his two friends, Willie Stark and Adam Stanton, live and die. Each had killed the other. Each had been the doom of the other. As a student of history, Jack Burden could see that Adam Stanton, whom he came to call the man of idea, and Willie Stark, whom he came to call the man of fact, were doomed to destroy each other and to yearn toward and try to become the other, because each was incomplete with the terrible division of their age.<sup>1</sup>

As has been noted in previous chapters, "the terrible division of their age" is the conflict Warren describes between the man who gives his allegiance to idealism and the man who denies the idea and adopts the world as all.

Adam Stanton is the other half of Willie Stark, the

half which desires, but is unable, to sustain the idea and yet continue to act amidst the complicity of the world. Correspondingly, Willie's involvement with the world and its ways illustrates the incompleteness of Adam Stanton. For in order to act and still retain the idea, Adam must try to isolate himself from a world which is not ideal. Both Adam and Willie deny an aspect of knowledge which would involve them in the paradox of human existence; each adheres to an extreme and the success of his commitment is the index of his destruction.

Although the opposing world-views of Adam Stanton and Willie Stark are of the first importance in discussing the theme of knowledge, there are certain basic similarities of character which the two men possess and which provide the substance of their conflict. The clash between Adam and Willie is displayed in their differences, but it achieves intensity and depth of meaning in their likenesses. In the beginning, both men are idealists. Early in his career, Willie is disillusioned and discards his idealism, but Adam successfully avoids early disillusionment and sustains his beliefs. Both are men of action, Willie in the political sphere and Adam in the medical, where he has "more folks screaming for him to cut on them than he had time to cut on."<sup>2</sup> In addition, the actions of Willie and Adam are originally motivated by a desire to do good. Finally, as the quotation at the first of this section indicates, both men are incomplete in their knowledge.

However, there are differences in the characters of Willie and Adam, differences which define their positions and initiate their conflict. Willie's idealism stems from a desire to erase the deprivations of his rural background, while Adam's is the outgrowth of a sense of nobility passed on through his aristocratic heritage. When Willie rejects his idealism to gain the end he calls good, he immerses himself in the world and names it as all. Adam refuses until the end to sacrifice his ideals and, thus, isolates himself from the world. Adam becomes "the man of idea" and Willie, "the man of fact."

The incompleteness of their philosophies forces each man to construct a justification, or rationalization, for his position. As discussed in the previous chapter, Willie creates symbols of his idealism to ameliorate the actuality of his corruption. Adam does just the opposite; in order to compensate for the isolation of the idea, he surrounds himself with the certainty of science and conditions of human squalor. Once, as Jack Burden leaves Adam's apartment, he wonders why the doctor lives in a slum tenement when he could obviously afford better quarters. He decides that Adam,

...snuggled up to Life, to keep warm perhaps, for he didn't have any life of his own-- just the office, the knife, the monastic room. Or perhaps he didn't snuggle to keep warm. Perhaps he leaned over Life with his hand on the pulse, watching from the deep-set, abstract, blue, clinical eyes, slightly shadowed, leaning ready to pop in the pill, pour the potion, apply

the knife. Perhaps he had to be close in order to keep a reason for the things he did. To make the things he did be themselves Life. And not merely a delightful exercise of technical skill which man had been able to achieve because he, of all the animals, had a fine thumb.<sup>3</sup>

Burden's comment serves to illustrate that Adam is in the world, but not of it. God-like, he "leaned over Life"; he does not partake in it.

The fallacy of Adam's philosophy and the incompleteness of his knowledge is that he takes an unrealistic view of existence. As a scientist, he adopts a picture of the world in which good and bad may be distinctly categorized with mathematical precision. The good is always good, and the bad is always bad, and there is never any confusion in which the two might meet and overlap. Anything which tends to invalidate this picture, Adam simply ignores.

In two separate, but thematically related passages, Jack Burden describes the evolution of Adam's philosophy. First, Adam is an idealist because of his aristocratic background. And, second, Adam finds in science a concept of the world which will endorse and strengthen his idealism. Jack tells Anne that:

'...he is Adam Stanton, the son of Governor Stanton and the grandson of Judge Peyton Stanton and the great-grandson of General Morgan Stanton, and he has lived all his life in the idea that there was a time a long time back when everything was run by high-minded, handsome men wearing knee breeches and silver buckles or Continental blue or frock coats, or even buckskin and coonskin caps, as the case may be--for

Adam Stanton isn't any snob--who sat around a table and candidly debated the good of the public thing...he is a romantic, and he has a picture of the world in his head, and when the world doesn't conform in any respect to the picture, he wants to throw the world away. Even if that means throwing out the baby with the bath. Which... it always does mean.<sup>4</sup>

. . . . .

'Adam...is a scientist, and everything is tidy for him, and one molecule of oxygen always behaves the same way when it gets around two molecules of hydrogen, and a thing is always what it is, and so when Adam the romantic makes a picture of the world in his head, it is just like the picture of the world Adam the scientist works with. All tidy. All neat. The molecule of good always behaves the same way. The molecule of bad always behaves the same way.'<sup>5</sup>

Thus, Adam Stanton's concept of what is always right or morally good is shown to be as deterministic a concept as Willie Stark's. Because Willie can ascertain no absolute good, he creates a good relative to the particular situation and based on his assumption that there is only evil in the world. Adam Stanton, however, does have an absolute concept of the good; it is that which conforms to the known laws that govern scientific phenomena. The fact that Adam assumes such laws are knowable and governs his life by them indicates his devotion to a deterministic philosophy.

The extent of Adam's thoroughgoing adherence to the abstractions of science and the isolation of idealism is revealed in Jack Burden's physical description of him. Adam has "clear, deepset, ice-water-blue, abstract eyes";<sup>6</sup>



and his mouth, when he is not smiling looks "like a nice, clean, decisive surgical wound, well healed and no pucker."<sup>7</sup> When Adam does smile, his smile is one which expresses apology. Jack says that it begs forgiveness "for not being like me, for not being like everybody else, for not being like the world."<sup>8</sup> In addition, Adam's physical features are indicative of his moral conceptions. Evil is that which is malformed, or out of adjustment. From the isolation of his ivory tower of abstractions, Adam can look on the world with eyes that are "a reproach to all uncertain, twisted, and clouded things."<sup>9</sup>

In blind obedience to his absolute idealism, Adam commits an error as great, if not greater, than Willie's. Adam's isolation from the world is in reality an attempt to avoid responsible moral choice in the human existence beset with uncertainties and paradoxes. Unlike Willie's, however, Adam's actions never make him a despicable person. His relation to the world is always in the capacity of doing good. He is gentle and kind, and in his generosity he often fails to charge his patients for his services. He has "the name of a softy in the trade. And after he got money, people took him for it if they had a story that would halfway wash."<sup>10</sup> But the good which Adam does is not the result of a sense of moral obligation and kinship with the human lot. On the contrary, Adam, who sees science as an absolute, would claim to have ultimate, or God's, knowledge. His good actions isolate him rather than identify him with

humanity. Once when Jack Burden tells Anne that Adam works hard in order to do good, she replies,

'Oh, I don't know--and I shouldn't say it--I shouldn't--but I almost think that the work--even the doing good--everything is just a way to cut himself off.'<sup>11</sup>

Adam uses the world to justify his idea of the good, while Willie uses the idea of good to justify his use of the world. The primary force of Adam's error is, thus, directed inward to his self-destruction; and in his final act, the assassination of Willie Stark, one may see that he is the most hopelessly lost of all the major characters in the novel.

Ultimately, it is Adam's desire to give meaning to his idea of the good by involving himself, through good actions, with the world, and Willie's desire to justify his corrupt actions by creating symbols of the good, which bring the two characters together. Adam's fame as a surgeon leads Willie to offer him the directorship of the Willie Stark Hospital. Adam, repulsed by the idea of association with Willie's corrupt administration, refuses even though he receives the governor's assurance that there will be no political entanglements. Adam is attracted by the idea of doing good, but he does not want to mingle the good with the bad of Willie's governorship. He tells Jack Burden, "A thing does not grow except in its proper climate, and you know what kind of a climate that man creates."<sup>12</sup>

For a while, Adam's refusal settles the question.

Jack Burden leaves town and secures the final proof of the bribe which Judge Irwin had accepted years before. But the documents also reveal that Governor Stanton, Adam's and Anne's father, had known of the bribe and had refused to act on his knowledge in order to protect his old friend. When Anne begs Jack to convince Adam that he should accept the directorship, Jack realizes that the only way to break through Adam's idealism is "to change the picture of the world inside his head," to prove to him that his father had been involved in Irwin's crime. Jack gives the photostats to Anne and she takes them to Adam. In a scene of raging disillusionment, Adam says of his father, "Damn his soul to hell!" Three days later, he agrees to accept the directorship.

Thus, there are two factors which lead to Adam's compromise with Willie Stark. The first is Adam's desire to do good by perfecting the hospital, and the second is Adam's disillusionment. But Adam's acceptance is only compromise; it is not reconciliation. In the scene in which Willie visits Adam's apartment, the doctor makes clear his unchanged contempt for the governor's dealings. Willie explains to Adam his assumption that the good can only be made out of the bad, "Because there isn't anything else to make it out of." Unswayed by Willie's logic, Adam reiterates his intention of taking the directorship, but this does not mean that he will endorse the governor's ethical judgments.

'What are you trying to convince me of?  
 You don't have to convince me of anything.  
 I've told you I'd take the job. That's  
 all!...That's all! And my reasons are  
 my own.'<sup>13</sup>

Although Adam's idealism is shaken, it is basically still intact. He refuses to grant the knowledge that good and evil may coexist and interpenetrate in the world.

When he is anonymously informed of his sister's affair with Willie, however, Adam suffers the final blow to his beliefs. His compromise with Willie has brought him into contact with the world and has been partially responsible for Anne's adultery. But instead of acknowledging this responsibility, Adam tries to re-establish his isolation from a tainted world. He repudiates his identity as a human being by denouncing, or judging, rather than sympathizing with Anne who begs his forgiveness. He tells her he will not "be paid pimp to his sister's whore."<sup>14</sup> This attempt to be separate from mankind rather than to seek identity is undertaken by another idealist, Thomas Jefferson, in Brother to Dragons. His sister, Lucy Jefferson Lewis, tells him that the individual's only hope for the redemption through self-knowledge lies in acceptance of the human role with its admixture of both good and bad.

For whatever hope we have is not by repudiation,  
 And whatever health we have is not by denial,  
 But in confronting the terror of our condition.  
 All else is a lie.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, Adam's final act of assassination is not an

attempt to avenge Anne's honor, but a selfish effort to preserve his idealism and isolation. He tells Anne that "if everything else was filthy a man didn't have to be."<sup>16</sup> In his assumption that he must kill the governor to redeem his idealism, Adam, for the first time, commits a bad act to justify his concept of the good. The utter hopelessness of Adam's search for knowledge is revealed in the irony of his adopting, at last, Willie's belief that the good end justifies the evil means.

Adam Stanton is the one major character of All The King's Men who fails to achieve some measure of self-knowledge. Even Willie Stark is finally allowed to realize his error before he is destroyed. Adam, however, dies without knowledge of his identity or moral responsibility as a human being. In World Enough and Time, Warren explains that an evil done by the idealist is worse than that done by the pragmatist. Jeremiah Beaumont, imbued with idealistic notions of Southern chivalry, feels that he must purify the world by killing Colonel Fort, who has seduced Rachel Jordan, a young woman entrusted to his protection. Jeremiah's passion for this act of vengeance is fired by Wilkie Barron, a pragmatist and man of the world similar to Willie Stark. The historian-narrator of World Enough and Time says of Jeremiah and his idealism,

The crime was himself, and that crime was worse than the crime of Wilkie Barron. Far worse, for Wilkie was but the world, either seed of the world or mask of the world, and it did not matter which, and

would justify himself only by the world. Far worse, for Jeremiah would justify himself, not by the world, which he would deny, but by the idea. The idea is all, he had thought.<sup>17</sup>

#### ANNE STANTON

Before beginning a discussion of Anne Stanton's bearing on the theme of knowledge in All The King's Men, I feel it may be best to summarize her role as it concerns the plot, or action, of the story. Anne is part of the childhood threesome which grew up together at Burden's Landing. We learn from Jack Burden, the narrator, that one day he came to think of Adam and Anne as separate people, and at that time he conceived an image of Anne in his head, one "that never got out" and which contributed an ever-increasing "brightness" and "meaning" to his life.<sup>18</sup> Later, he fell in love with Anne and they spent an idyllic summer together, vowing that they would, eventually, be married. However, for reasons which Jack Burden is incapable of explaining until the end of the novel, they did not marry. At the end of the summer, they returned to their respective schools and gradually drifted further apart. Jack Burden married a girl named Lois, whom he later divorced, and Anne returned to Burden's Landing to care for her father until his death. Then she became involved in charity work, was engaged to several men, but never married.

At the time the novel takes place, Anne lives in the same city with Jack and her brother. She meets Willie Stark

to ask him for state funds for her charity work, and from her association with Willie, she becomes his mistress. After Willie and Adam are dead, she returns to Burden's Landing where she marries Jack at the end of the story.

Primarily, it is in relation to Jack Burden and his search for self-knowledge that Anne's role derives its importance. If Adam Stanton reflects the incompleteness of Willie Stark, Anne Stanton reflects the incompleteness of Jack Burden. Her refusal to marry Jack is based on some secret knowledge of him which she, as a woman, can sense rather than articulate. The reader is aware of what this knowledge is, but Jack can express it from only his position as omniscient commentator on the events which took place.

I had not understood then what I think I have now come to understand...I lacked some essential confidence in the world and in myself. She came, as time passed, to suspect this fact about me. I do not know that she had words to describe the fact to herself. Or she only had the easy words people gave her: wanting to have a job, studying law, doing something.<sup>19</sup>

Jack Burden's statement is validated by Anne's remarks in the novel. Once she admonishes him not to be bitter about his parents' separation. In another passage, she defends her brother's career in the face of Jack's criticism by saying, "Leave Adam out of it...he does something anyway--something--."<sup>20</sup> When they were in love at Burden's Landing, Anne had first consented, and then refused to

engage in a sexual affair with Jack. She had not declined for any moral or social reason, but because she had become aware of Jack's irresolution; she had told him, "it's just because you're the way you are."<sup>21</sup>

It is in the importance of Anne's connection to Jack Burden and her function in the plot of All The King's Men that an artistic question concerning her character development arises. Often her actions seem poorly motivated. A prime example is her affair with Willie Stark. Her presentation in the novel is through Jack Burden's eyes, and early in the story Jack describes the image his mind has formed of Anne. The image is symptomatic of Burden's struggle toward knowledge and awareness. It is an idealistic picture of Anne as pure, inviolate, and regal. Since this is Jack Burden's concept of Anne Stanton, it also becomes the reader's. Thus, the shock of disbelief which Jack suffers when he discovers Anne's affair with Willie is also a shock of disbelief for the reader, and the latter may doubt that she is a convincing character. Warren's problem is to provide a sufficiently strong disillusionment for his major character, and yet keep Anne's actions credible. In order to gain the maximum effect of Jack's disillusionment, Warren must keep him (and, consequently, the reader) totally ignorant of any possibility of Anne's affair. Burden simply cannot narrate what he must, of necessity, not know.

The above is not an attempt to explain away what is obviously weak characterization, but an attempt to clarify



Warren's dilemma and to illustrate that, despite her inconsistencies, Anne is a prominent figure in the thematic structure of All The King's Men. What the reader must do is to reconstruct, from Burden's fragmentary comments, the significant facets of Anne Stanton's character and to evaluate her motivations in the light of the theme of knowledge. Once this has been accomplished, he will see that Anne, though weakly portrayed on the level of plot, is actually weak for the purpose of emphasizing the more thematically important struggle of Jack Burden. However, in her own role Anne demonstrates a vital part of the theme of knowledge, and it is in this role that she must first be considered.

Anne's relation to the theme of All The King's Men may be seen in Jack Burden's summary remark about the principal characters of the novel. After the deaths of Willie and Adam, Jack says, "Anne Stanton was among those left. And I was."<sup>22</sup> Because Anne, like Jack, is able to gain self-knowledge from the events of her life, she is one of the survivors who are capable of facing the future with some hope. The knowledge which Anne possesses at the end of the novel is similar to Jack's and indicates that she, too, has struggled toward an awareness of herself which she did not previously have.

The incompleteness in Anne Stanton's life is the result of her inability to define herself in terms of the world in which she must live. Her first attempt to meet this problem is her search for definition in her early love for Jack

Burden. But Burden is a passive individual who isolates himself from the world and has no desire to have a sense of purpose in life; Anne cannot achieve a feeling of usefulness, or self-fulfillment, by merging identities with him. Later, in caring for her father during his illness, and in devoting herself to charity work, she tries to fill the emptiness of her life. The futility of these efforts, and Anne's lack of satisfaction with herself, is evident in Jack Burden's description of her at thirty-five.

She kept her looks very well and continued, in a rather severe way, to pay attention to her dress. There were moments now when her laugh sounded a little hollow and brittle, the laughter of nerves not of mirth or good spirits. Occasionally in a conversation she seemed to lose track and fall into a self-absorption, to start up overwhelmed by embarrassment and unspoken remorse. Occasionally, too, she practiced the gesture of lifting her hands to her brow, one on each side, the fingers just touching the skin or lifting back the hair, the gesture of a delicate distraction.<sup>23</sup>

Anne's lack of self-fulfillment is intensified by her basic deficiency of self-knowledge. She does not know what she wants from life, except that, vaguely, she wants to have some purpose in living. In a significant conversation with Jack Burden, she reveals her frustration.

'Oh, Jack,' she said, '...I haven't done anything. I don't do anything. Not anything worth anything.' She wavered there and with a hint of distraction lifted her hands to touch her hair. 'Not anything. I don't want to play bridge all the time. And what little I do--that Home, the play-

ground thing--'

'There's always the Junior League,' I said. But she ignored it.

'--that's not enough. Why didn't I do something--study something? Be a doctor, a nurse. I could have been Adam's assistant. I could have studied landscape gardening. I could have--'

'You could make lampshades,' I said.

'I could have done something--something--'

'You could have got married,' I said.

'You could have married me.'

'Oh, I don't mean just getting married, I mean--'

'You don't know what you mean,' I said.

'Oh, Jack,' she said, and reached out and took my hand and hung on to it, 'maybe I don't.'<sup>24</sup>

(Italics mine)

This conversation, the only one in the novel in which Anne states the incompleteness of her life, takes place during the scene in which she tells Jack that she has met and had lunch with Willie Stark. Willie's dynamic character, his ability to drive toward and accomplish his goals, and, most of all, his seeming to have a worthwhile purpose for all he does, gradually attract Anne and loom before her as possible compensations for her needs. But Anne is not so weakly motivated as to become Willie's mistress for these reasons alone. Though she admires Willie, she is not unaware of his unsavory political reputation. From both her brother, Adam, and the society of Burden's Landing, she has inherited a vigorous disapproval of Willie's governorship. As with the other major figures of All The King's Men, it takes a crisis of disillusionment to force Anne into her error.

When she learns of her father's complicity in Judge Irwin's crime, and when Adam compromises his idealism to accept the directorship of the hospital, Anne is robbed of the aristocratic heritage which constitutes part of her opposition to Willie. She tells Jack Burden, "Then you told me--you told me about my father. There wasn't any reason why not then. After you told me."<sup>25</sup> Anne becomes Willie's mistress, and in this action disengages herself for a time from any progress toward the knowledge which could be her salvation.

Instead of accepting her situation and trying to live the best life she knows how to live within its limitations, Anne turns to the easy answer of a passive existence in adultery. Like Willie, Adam, and Jack, she acts selfishly, denying her moral responsibility as a human being. She seeks to satisfy her own needs and takes no thought of the effect her affair might have upon other people. As mentioned earlier, Warren assumes that the only good an individual can do, for himself or for others, comes with the knowledge that he is not an individual, but a member of mankind. In "Knowledge and the Image of Man," Warren has stated that, paradoxically, only when a person relinquishes his identity does he stand any chance of achieving it. By becoming Willie's mistress, Anne shields herself from an awareness of her moral obligation, and her progress toward self-knowledge is halted.

The characters of All The King's Men who seek to avoid

their moral responsibilities and retreat from self-knowledge find, ultimately, that their irresponsible actions demand a grim tribute. When Anne's relationship with Willie is revealed to Adam, he murders the governor and is killed himself. Previously, Anne has said of her affair, "I'm not sorry...Not for anything that's happened." But now she is unable to ignore the consequences of her failure to act responsibly. Besides her knowledge that she has contributed to both deaths, Anne is aware that Willie was returning to Lucy, and that her affair with the governor would not have ended in the marriage for which she had hoped.

Carrying her guilt, Anne Stanton returns to Burden's Landing. At the end of the novel, she indicates that her movement toward self-knowledge and an awareness of responsibility has followed the same pattern as Jack Burden's. In a penultimate scene, Jack tries to tell her of the time when he believed that there was no such thing as responsibility for one's actions. He says,

'...You know what I mean?'  
 'Yes,' she said.  
 'Like hell you do,' I said.  
 'Maybe I do,' she said quietly.  
 'Not the way I mean. You couldn't.'  
 'Maybe.'<sup>26</sup>

The credibility of Anne's quiet insistence that she does understand is strengthened by her reply to Jack's statement of his final knowledge, that only if one accepts responsibility for the past may he have any hope for the

future. Anne says, "I believe that, for if I had not come to believe it I could not have lived."<sup>27</sup>

## CHAPTER IV

### JACK BURDEN AND THE THEME OF KNOWLEDGE

The point of view which Warren employs in All The King's Men is that of the first person narrator. Jack Burden, the central character in the novel, tells the story and both observes and participates in the action. He is a wisecracking intellectual who serves as Willie Stark's private secretary and "historian" and whose primary function is dredging up blackmail material which Willie uses to coerce his political opponents. Though a large amount of the story deals with Jack's experiences and thoughts in his secretarial capacity, he is not himself a truly active character; and in this respect he differs from the other major figures of the novel. Yet, it is partially because of his passivity that Jack becomes the focal point of All The King's Men. His awareness of the complexities of the problem of knowledge so engulfs him that he is paralyzed; unable to cope with the dilemma he conceptualizes, he finds that he is able only to describe and comment on what happens around him, and to try to derive, from the lives of other people, some principle of order by which he may govern his own life.

This last function of Jack Burden, that of commentator, is most vital to the theme of the novel. For in his own search and intellectual musings, Jack intensifies the problem of knowledge by examining its aspects as they pertain to the other characters. As noted in the previous chapters, he questions Willie's philosophic consistency in the light of the governor's contradictory statements; he is able to analyze Adam's romantic idealism and to prescribe the most effective means of breaking through it; and though he never fully understands Anne Stanton until the end of the novel, it is Jack's commentary which delineates Anne's struggle for self-definition. In the end, it is the knowledge which Jack is able to gain from observing the lives of the other characters, as well as the knowledge he derives from his own experiences, that allows him to arrive at a suitable self-definition for himself. And Jack Burden's final answer is, in actuality, the answer which completes the dramatization of the assumptions in the novel. The theme of knowledge is depicted in its totality in the character of Jack Burden; and once the theme is clearly stated, it more adequately reveals the incompleteness of Willie, Adam, and Anne as well as Jack. It does more than reveal, however, for, in the final analysis, the theme of knowledge shows itself as part of a comprehensive philosophy which has as its end a clarification of man's position in the world.

Jack Burden's quest for knowledge and self-definition takes place on three distinct planes in All The King's Men.




The first plane, idealism, parallels the original philosophic positions of Willie Stark and Adam Stanton. The second plane appears after Jack has undergone a major disillusionment and consists of a belief in determinism, or, in "the world as all." Again, Jack's development may be seen to be similar to that of Willie and Adam. But the third plane of Jack's philosophical progress separates him from the governor and the surgeon, for it involves an understanding and acceptance of human responsibility. Before he dies, Willie demonstrates that he has partially glimpsed this final truth; however, his previous corruption has so thoroughly doomed him that he is never allowed to translate his knowledge into meaningful action. Adam, of course, dies totally ignorant of any self-awareness or of his obligations as a human being. Even Anne Stanton, who is one of the survivors of the events of the novel, and whose final knowledge corresponds to Jack's, is so scantily presented that she offers no satisfactory articulation of her struggle and its results. Thus, the achievement of knowledge and self-definition and its realization in action is fully expressed only in the character of Jack Burden.

In order to understand this achievement completely, one must view the step-by-step process which Burden undergoes in attaining first one philosophical level and then the other. However, before such an analysis is begun, an important aspect of Jack's character must be examined. The figure of Jack Burden reveals, throughout the novel, one

dominant and significant trait, passivity. In possessing this trait, Jack is different from Willie, Adam, and Anne. The latter are almost always described in an active attempt to come to grips with their individual problems. It is true that, eventually, all three reach a point of moral and physical stasis resulting from their erroneous philosophical assumptions, but Jack Burden never reaches such a state because he never leaves it. In fact, he consciously avoids action because he knows that it leads to responsibility. This is not to say that Burden does not act, in a sense. Certainly, as Willie's secretary, he is quite active, and the events of the novel testify to his continual movement. But none of Jack's actions are meaningful in that they lead to an awareness of his responsibility to himself and to others.

The importance Warren attaches to meaningful action, action which leads to knowledge of oneself, over just any action may be seen in Jack's description of his research on Judge Irwin, "It was a perfect job, marred in its technical perfection by only one thing: it meant something."<sup>1</sup> Ironically, the one meaningful act which Jack commits in the novel, an act which eventually forces him to admit his incompleteness, is originally undertaken because, at the time, it means nothing to Jack. He has so completely rationalized his association with Willie that he can separate his research from its ultimate end of blackmail. This is why Jack can so glibly ignore his long friendship



with the Judge; Jack sees his research simply as a relatively meaningless though more challenging event in a series of other meaningless events, none of which he has ever allowed to involve him with the world as a responsible person. In the end, however, like Willie, Adam, and Anne, Jack finds that a denial of responsibility leads only to a greater involvement with the world.

The first plane of Jack Burden's philosophical progress is his idealism; and though it spans several years and many different situations, it has its foundation in his early love for Anne Stanton. Appropriately, Jack describes this love while he is driving frantically west in order to escape responsibility for the "obscure and necessary logic" by which he feels he has handed Anne over to Willie. In becoming Willie's mistress, Anne has destroyed the idealistic image of herself which Jack Burden had formed years before. At that time, he had not even been in love with Anne, but he says, "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,  
under the dark greenish-purple sky, with  
the white gull passing over.<sup>2</sup>

Later, Jack is able to tell that he is in love with Anne when he recalls the highly-romanticized picture of her floating in the water.

Ultimately, it is this concept of Anne which is the partial cause of Jack's losing her love. Jack is unable to

violate Anne while they are alone in his mother's house, because at the moment that he must act, he remembers the image and knows "that everything was wrong, completely wrong."<sup>3</sup> His failure to make love to Anne results in a sort of disillusionment for him, and he rationalizes his momentary paralysis rather than face the reality of his indecision. He decides that his inaction had been a virtue.

I suddenly had the feeling of great wisdom: I had acted rightly and wisely. Therefore we had been saved. And so my luck became my wisdom...and then later my wisdom became my nobility, for in the end, a long time after, I got the notion that I had acted out of nobility.<sup>4</sup>

Jack proves that his rationalizing is not based on any sincere moral convictions when, later, he tries to make love to Anne again. She refuses, and her excuse indicates her awareness of Jack's idealism and indecision; she says, "It's just because you are the way you are, Jackie."<sup>5</sup> Afterwards, when Jack's idealism is destroyed because he has lost his image of Anne, he is able to look back and see the essential truth in her evaluation of him and to understand the terrible significance of their failure to consummate their love.

Years before, a young girl had lain there naked on the iron bed in my room with her eyes closed and her hands folded over her breast, and I had been so struck by the pathos of her submissiveness and her trust in me and of the moment which would plunge her into the full, dark stream of the world that I had hesitated before laying my hands upon her and had, without

understanding myself, called out her name. At that time I had had no words for what I felt, and now, too, it is difficult to find them. But lying there, she had seemed to be again the little girl who had, on the day of the picnic, floated on the waters of the bay, with her eyes closed under the stormy and grape-purple sky and the single white gull passing over, very high. As she lay there that image came into my head, and I had wanted to call her name, to tell her something--what, I did not know. She trusted me, but perhaps for that moment of hesitation I did not trust myself, and looked back upon the past as something precious about to be snatched away from us and was afraid of the future.<sup>6</sup>

Jack's fear of the future and desire to cling to the past are actually manifestations of his attempt to avoid responsibility. And, in the present, Jack effectively skirts responsibility by remaining inactive, by never doing anything which might mean something. Jack knows that if he accepts responsibility, he must face the reality of the world and this will ultimately destroy his idealistic concept of life. In relation to this idealism, he says,

I had got hold of the principle out of a book when I was in college, and I had hung on to it for grim death. I owed my success in life to that principle. It had put me where I was. What you don't know don't hurt you, for it ain't real. They called that Idealism in my book I had when I was in college, and after I got hold of that principle I became an Idealist. 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.<sup>7</sup>

Besides supplying a name for the guiding principle of his life, Burden's stay at college also initiates another

major conflict between his idealism and the reality of a world which demands responsibility for one's actions. The conflict arises from the subject of Jack Burden's doctoral dissertation, an editing of the journal of Jack's Civil War ancestor, Cass Mastern. The significance of Jack's historical research becomes evident when he describes the relationship between his roommates and himself at college.

They had this in common: they were all hiding. The difference was in what they were hiding from. The two others were hiding from the future, from the day when they would get degrees and leave the University. Jack Burden, however, was hiding from the present. The other two took refuge in the present. Jack Burden took refuge in the past.<sup>8</sup>

The past is the story of Cass Mastern who betrays his benefactor, Duncan Trice, by engaging in an affair with Duncan's wife, Annabelle. In despair, Duncan commits suicide, first hiding his wedding ring under Annabelle's pillow where it is discovered by a female slave who guesses the lover's secret. Annabelle, who cannot bear the silent accusation of the slave's presence, sells the woman downstream; and Cass, realizing that the horrible chain of events has all come from his "single act of sin and perfidy," sets out to buy her back and partially redeem himself. Cass fails, but devotes his life to trying to make some atonement for his sin.

When the Civil War begins, Cass, worthy of a higher position, volunteers as a private. Around his neck he bears

his guilt in the form of Duncan Trice's wedding ring which Annabelle has given him. In his journal, Cass writes,

'I must march with these men who march... for they are my people and I must partake with them of all bitterness, and that more fully. But I cannot take the life of another man. How can I who have taken the life of my friend, take the life of an enemy, for I have used up my right to blood.'<sup>9</sup>

Previously, in disillusionment and despair, Cass had written, "But the world is full of good men...and yet the world drives hard into darkness and the blindness of blood."<sup>10</sup> however, in his suffering as a common soldier, and through carrying a gun he will not use, he discovers a certain pride in identifying with his fellow men. He writes, "It is not hard to love men for the things they endure and for the words they do not speak."<sup>11</sup> Dying at last in an Atlanta hospital, Cass dictates a final letter to his brother Gilbert in which he reveals the success of his search for knowledge and salvation; he says, "Remember me, but without grief. If one of us is lucky, it is I...."<sup>12</sup>

Fascinated by his study of Cass Mastern, Jack tries to "discover the truth and not the facts" about his ancestor's life. But the truth of Cass Mastern's life is his recognition of his sin and his acceptance of responsibility, the very truth which Jack is trying to avoid. He abandons his dissertation; "Then, when the truth was not to be discovered, or discovered could not be understood by me, I could not bear to live with the cold-eyed reproach of the facts."<sup>13</sup>

Again faced with reality, Jack escapes by entering one of several periods in his life which he terms the "Great Sleep." Sleeping approximately two-thirds of every twenty-four hours, Jack finds that he can successfully avoid past, present, and future. Later, Jack employs the same technique when he can no longer stand his marriage to Lois. Eventually, he leaves her in the same manner he left his dissertation; he simply walks out and never comes back. When his job as a reporter demands compliance with the Chronicle's political leanings, Jack, who is in sympathy with Willie Stark's candidacy, finds his idealism confronted once again. He reacts typically by quitting his job and beginning another period of the "Great Sleep."

He is aroused when Willie becomes governor and offers him a job; Jack discovers that he no longer needs the benefits of the "Great Sleep." Just as Willie represents fulfillment to Adam and Anne, he does the same for Jack. Jack's incompleteness is his failure to accept responsibility and to overcome his inaction. And, in Willie, Jack finds a man of action seemingly directed by idealistic principles. By identifying only with Willie's original desire to gain the good end, Jack can ignore his own responsibility in contributing to the governor's very unidealistic means. As an historical researcher, Jack says that he is interested only in the "truth,"<sup>14</sup> but as he has demonstrated in his early encounter with Cass Mastern's story, Jack is concerned with the truth as just an abstract, idealistic principle which has



no consequences in the world of reality. In the same manner in which he denies the effect of the truth of Cass Mastern's life, and its logical implication in his own life, Jack denies the results of the truth he unearths for Willie's blackmail.

Jack is able to keep his idealism pure by separating himself from the governor's corrupt practices and by shifting responsibility to Willie's shoulders. Jack insists on this necessary division when he corrects his step-father, who has called him a politician; "I'm not a politician, I'm a hired hand."<sup>15</sup> Later, when Jack's mother asks him not to become involved in any of Willie's corruption, he says, "I don't know what those people, as you call them, do. I'm very careful not to ever know what anybody anywhere does any time."<sup>16</sup>

Corollary to Jack's assertion that he is not responsibly involved as Willie's researcher is Jack's need to ignore the essential evil in Willie. As he does with Anne, Jack clings to an early idealistic image of Willie Stark which emphasizes the original Willie, an honest citizen trying to put an end to corrupt politics. During the period of his idealism in which he is associated with Willie, Jack sees the governor as an embodiment of an abstract principle of the good. Willie Stark is never Willie Stark to Jack Burden, but "Cousin Willie," who dynamically sets out to establish honest government. Jack is by no means totally ignorant of Willie's methods, but he effectively rationalizes their separateness from the good end.

Thus, by working for Willie Stark, Jack vicariously fulfills the incompleteness of his life. Willie's originally idealistic purpose and his tremendous activity offset Jack's lack of purpose and inaction. Also, Willie provides a convenient scapegoat to bear the burden of responsibility.

Anne's affair, however, destroys Jack's image of her and, at the same time, destroys the idealistic image of Willie Stark. Because of Jack's self-willed isolation and commitment to inaction, he "had not been aware of the passing of time and always the round face of Cousin Willie had come between me and the other face so that I had never really seen the other face."<sup>17</sup> Now, Jack can no longer deny the knowledge of Willie's character which reveals the evil in his nature.

I saw the face. Enormous. Bigger than a billboard. The forelock shagged down like a mane. The big jaw. The heavy lips laid together like masonry. The eyes burning and bulging powerfully.

Funny, I had never seen it before, Not really.<sup>18</sup>

Jack abandons his idealism and moves to the second plane of his philosophy partly because of his altered concepts of Anne and Willie. Their affair arises from the research Jack has done on Judge Irwin; thus, Jack finds it almost impossible to continue to assert the meaninglessness of his actions. Anne says that after Jack had told her of her father's part in Irwin's crime there did not seem to be any reason why she should not become Willie's mistress. Shocked, Jack resorts to the previous rationalization of his actions,

"I only told her the truth...and she can't blame me for the truth!"<sup>19</sup> This time, however, the standard answer fails to absolve his sense of guilt and give him peace of mind. He continues to wonder,

But was there some fatal appropriateness inherent in the very nature of the world and of me that I should be the one to tell her that truth? I had to ask myself that question, too. And I couldn't be sure of the answer....<sup>20</sup>

With the bases of his idealism gone, his romantic images of Anne and Willie, Jack is aware that he must actively construct a new philosophy which will provide for a denial of responsibility and action. His knowledge that he has contributed to Anne's and Willie's affair "was too horrible to face, for it robbed me of something out of the past by which, unwittingly until that moment, I had been living."<sup>21</sup>

Jack's first reaction, however, is to escape, and he drives to California where he lies on a hotel bed, trying to resummon the healing power of the "Great Sleep." Though the "Great Sleep" proves insufficient, it does produce a "dream that all life is but the dark heave of blood and twitch of the nerve."<sup>22</sup> Jack's faith in this deterministic principle is the ultimate result of the extreme desire to escape, "When you flee as far as you can flee, you will always find that dream...."<sup>23</sup> Secure in his new knowledge, "the secret source of all strength and all endurance," Burden decides that he can return to Anne, and Willie, and his job.

...you might as well go back, after all, to the place where you belong, for nothing was your fault or anybody's fault, for things are always as they are. And you can go back in good spirits, for you will have learned two very great truths. First, that you cannot lose what you have never had. Second, that you are never guilty of a crime which you did not commit.<sup>24</sup>

Jack calls his new philosophy the "Great Twitch," naming it after a nervous disorder in the face of an old man who rides east with him from California. Previously, Jack had coveted the mystic awareness of a great wisdom which he had detected in other people's lives, but now he feels that he possesses their "secret knowledge."

I had often envied people. People I had seen fleetingly, or some people I had known a long time, a man driving a long, straight furrow across a black field in April, or Adam Stanton. I had, at moments, envied the people who seemed to have a secret knowledge...I did not think that I would ever have to envy anybody again, for I was sure that now I had the secret knowledge, and with knowledge you can face up to anything, for knowledge is power.<sup>25</sup>

Ironically, Jack, like Willie, is sure that determinism is the final knowledge while, actually, it is a denial of knowledge since it avoids admission of the individual's responsibilities as a human being. Jack's continued incompleteness and passive existence are revealed in his assumption that isolation from the world of reality is still desirable. When he returns home, Jack congratulates himself, saying, "Everything was fine just the way it had been before I left, except that now I knew the secret.

And my secret knowledge cut me off."<sup>26</sup>

Though Jack is outwardly successful in convincing himself that Anne Stanton was "simply a name for a peculiarly complicated piece of mechanism which should mean nothing whatsoever to Jack Burden,"<sup>27</sup> the tragic events arising from his research on Judge Irwin gradually force Jack toward awareness. When he confronts the Judge with evidence of his crime, Jack is momentarily able to see the danger of viewing truth as a cold abstraction in the world of reality.

For 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.<sup>28</sup>

By assuming that he would not be caught in its undertow of responsibility, Jack had separated truth from the stream of life.

When Irwin commits suicide, however, and is revealed as Jack's real father, Jack is at first "numbed," and in spite of his previous sensing that truth cannot be abstracted from life and responsibility, he retreats to the warm security of determinism. He describes himself "as the blameless instrument of justice," along with Mortimer L. Littlepaugh (the man who had lost his job and killed himself as a result of Judge Irwin's crime).

I...speculated upon my responsibility. It would be quite possible to say that I had none, no more than Mortimer had. Mortimer had killed Judge Irwin because Judge Irwin had killed him, and I had killed Judge Irwin because Judge Irwin had created me, and looking at matters in that light one could say that Mortimer and I were merely the twin instruments of of Judge Irwin's protracted and ineluctable self-destruction. For either killing or creating may be a crime punishable by death, and the death always comes by the criminal's own hand and every man is a suicide. If a man knew how to live he would never die.<sup>29</sup>

But what Jack had originally conceived of as a meaningless act of research grinds on, implicating and involving beyond his power to deny or stop it, and Jack's "secret knowledge" begins to waver. When he learns that he is Irwin's sole heir, Jack says,

The whole arrangement seemed so crazy and so logical that...I burst out laughing and could scarcely stop. Before I stopped, as a matter of fact, I found that I was not laughing at all but was weeping and was saying over and over again, 'The poor old bugger, the poor old bugger.' It was like the ice breaking up after a long winter. And the winter had been long.<sup>30</sup>

Conscience-stricken, Jack approaches the third plane of his philosophy in his movement toward knowledge. He accepts his guilt for his research on Judge Irwin and tells Willie, "if you want any blackmailing done, get somebody else to do it."<sup>31</sup> For the first time, Jack indicates his awareness of the relationship between the work he does and its ultimate purpose. Willie gives him a harmless tax bill to work on and Jack says,

So the story of the Boss and MacMurfee, of which the story of Judge Irwin had been but a part, went on, but I had no hand in it. I went back to my own innocent little chores and sat in my office....<sup>32</sup>

Though Jack takes a major step toward knowledge by admitting his responsibility, he still lacks an essential awareness of the world and of himself; he remains passive, uncommitted to action.

X

I felt as though I were gradually withdrawing from the world around me. It could go its way and I would go mine. Or I would have gone my way if I had known what it was...But I would have to go on the money from Judge Irwin. And that particular money, which would have made the trip possible, was at the same time, paradoxically enough, a bond that held me here.<sup>33</sup>

It is actually a gnawing sense of guilt which prompts Jack's acceptance of responsibility and not a true awareness of his situation. He realizes that his involvement with Willie's corruption has led to his feeling of guilt; but instead of trying to make some positive atonement, he passively isolates himself, still giving at least lip service to his belief in the "Great Twitch." He is now willing to admit that good and bad may coexist and rise out of one another in the world of reality; but in the confusion of this knowledge, he does not see how the good act could, or should, be preferred over the bad act. To Jack, it is the relationship of events, viewed at their conclusion, which is important; there is no significance in the isolated act, "direction is all."<sup>34</sup>

His "theory of the moral neutrality of history" bears out this assertion; all is direction or process, and

Process as process is neither morally good nor morally bad. The morally bad agent may perform the deed which is good. The morally good agent may perform the deed which is bad.<sup>35</sup>

Jack's withdrawal and isolation from the world, however, are not sufficient protection; for his meaningless, yet ultimately significant, act continues to wreak havoc on the lives it has touched. Jack's exposure of Judge Irwin has also exposed Governor Stanton and resulted in Adam's compromised idealism and Anne's affair with Willie. And Adam's discovery that his sister is Willie's mistress results in Willie's assassination and Adam's death. Now, Jack's involvement and guilt are greater than ever before. Though Willie tells him that determinism is not the answer to life, that "it might--have been different--even yet," Jack barely heeds the governor's dying admonition. When Jack confronts Tiny Duffy and accuses him of his part in Willie's death, he realizes that his contempt for Duffy must also be contempt for himself and his contribution to the tragedy. He feels himself trapped in a "monstrous conspiracy whose meaning I could not fathom."<sup>37</sup> He and Tiny Duffy are

...bound together forever and I could never hate him without hating myself or love myself without loving him. We were bound together under the unwinking eye of Eternity and by the Holy Grace of the Great Twitch whom we must all adore.<sup>38</sup>



However, like Willie Stark, and Jeremiah Beaumont of World Enough and Time, Jack learns that determinism "is what man cannot endure and be man."<sup>39</sup>

And I heaved and writhed like the ox or the cat, and the acid burned my gullet and that was all there was to it and I hated everything and everybody and myself and Tiny Duffy and Willie Stark and Adam Stanton. To hell with them all, I said impartially under the stars. They all looked alike to me then. And I looked like them.<sup>40</sup>

Jack continues to live by abstractions, unwilling to bind himself, through action, to human frailness and complicity. It is only when he loses one of his abstract beliefs, the absoluteness of truth, and is able to tell Sugar-Boy the "true lie,"<sup>41</sup> that he begins to progress toward his final knowledge. Jack knows that Sugar-Boy will kill Duffy if he is told of the lieutenant governor's part in Willie's death. But, because of his own guilt, Jack is unable to set in motion the final, ironic justice on Tiny Duffy. Later, Jack is not sure whether he has done Sugar-Boy a favor, by saving him from an inevitable hanging for Tiny's murder, or whether he has "robbed Sugar-Boy of the one thing which he had earned out of the years he had lived and which was truly himself...."<sup>42</sup> Jack's indecision is the limitation of his knowledge as a human being and marks the beginning of his awareness. He continues his life of isolation, "hugging the aimlessness and anonymity about me like a blanket. But there was a difference now, in my own mind if

not in the circumstances of my life."<sup>43</sup>

Thus, the experiences of Jack's life finally make it possible for him to perform an act which he cannot justify by any absolute concept. His lie to Sugar-Boy is significant not because Jack knows he is doing good for the gunman, but because Jack is aware that he does not, cannot, know that he is doing good, and yet acts anyway for what he believes to be good. In the end, because Jack can recognize this dilemma in himself, he can more clearly see the struggle of Willie Stark and believe that Willie was a great man.

And believing that Willie Stark was a great man, I could think better of all other people, and of myself. At the same time that I could more surely condemn myself.<sup>44</sup>

Later, Jack lies to his mother when she asks if his father, Judge Irwin, had killed himself because he had been involved in some sort of corruption. Jack denies that he had tried to blackmail the Judge, but afterwards is afraid "I had lied just to cover up myself."

'Damn it,' I said out loud, savagely,  
'it wasn't for me, it wasn't.'  
And that was true. It was really true.<sup>45</sup>

When he lies to his mother, Jack performs his second meaningful act, also done in an awareness of his responsibility and human obligation and in denial of any isolated reliance upon an absolute concept. As with his lie to Sugar-Boy, Jack finds that he has strengthened his world-view and furthered his progress toward total awareness.

I had given my mother a present, which was a lie. But in return she had given me a present, too, which was a truth. She gave me a new picture of herself, and that meant, in the end, a new picture of the world. Or rather, that new picture of herself filled in the blank space which was perhaps the center of the new picture of the world which had been given to me by many people, by Sadie Burke, Lucy Stark, Willie Stark, Sugar-Boy, Adam Stanton. And that meant that my mother gave me back the past. I could now accept the past which I had before felt was tainted and horrible. I could accept the past now because I could accept her and be at peace with her and with myself.<sup>46</sup>

Jack's recognition of his involvement in the world, his final acceptance of responsibility, and his determination to act meaningfully are all evidence of his achievement of self-knowledge. He marries Anne and brings the "Scholarly Attorney," whom for years he had thought to be his real father, home to live out his few remaining days. Jack says, "Does he think that I am his son? I cannot be sure. Nor can I feel that it matters, for each of us is the son of a million fathers."<sup>47</sup> Jack is also determined to finish his dissertation on Cass Mastern, "whom once I could not understand but whom, perhaps, I now may come to understand."<sup>48</sup> When his work is completed, Jack, with Anne, plans to "go into the world, out of history into history and the awful responsibility of Time."<sup>49</sup>

These concluding words of the novel reveal the completeness of Jack's final knowledge. For the decision to act responsibly is, indeed, "awful." It is awful, but it is necessary. The tract which the "Scholarly Attorney" dictates

to Jack Burden emphasizes this fact:

Separateness is identity and the only way for God to create, truly create, man was to make him separate from God Himself, and to be separate from God is to be sinful. The creation of evil is therefore the index of God's glory and His power. That had to be so that the creation of good might be the index of man's glory and power.<sup>50</sup>

Thus, man who is separate from, and cannot know, God's will, or cannot possess "Complete Knowledge," must still strive to the best of his ability to act for what is good. Though Jack can now accept the "Scholarly Attorney's" belief, "I was not certain but that in my own way I did believe what he had said,"<sup>51</sup> there had been a time when Jack had argued with the "Scholarly Attorney" that knowledge and action were ends in themselves and that what was good, or right, was unknowable and, thus, unattainable.

In his earlier argument, Jack believes that the end of life is the achievement of knowledge. He says, simply, that "Life is Motion toward Knowledge."<sup>52</sup> He believes that knowledge cannot be moral, amoral, or immoral. The only way by which an individual might have knowledge of what is good and what is evil would be for him to stand, God-like, outside of time and view past, present, and future as one. But man cannot escape his temporal existence, and he cannot have the knowledge which lies beyond his temporality. This destroys the certainty of any absolute concept such as God or "Complete Knowledge," or even "Nothing," for as Jack Burden says, "God and Nothing have a lot in common."<sup>53</sup>

Jack, in his argument with the "Scholarly Attorney," also says,

If God is Complete Knowledge then He is Complete Non-Motion, which is Non-Life, which is Death. Therefore, if there is such a God of Fullness of Being, we would worship Death, the Father.

. . . . .

(For Life is a fire burning along a piece of string--or is it a fuse to a powder keg which we call God?--and the string is what we don't know, our Ignorance, and the trail of ash, which, if a gust of wind does not come, keeps the structure of the string, is History, man's Knowledge, but it is dead, and when the fire has burned up all the string, then man's Knowledge will be equal to God's Knowledge and there won't be any fire, which is Life.<sup>54</sup>

Thus, man, by the very condition of his being alive, cannot possess ultimate knowledge. And denied this knowledge, he cannot have an absolute principle upon which to base his actions and to detect their goodness or badness. Faced with this realization, Jack Burden had simply refused to act. Since he was aware of the fallacy of believing in abstractions without concrete reference, he had embodied his abstractions in images of Anne and Willie.

Willie Stark and Adam Stanton, confronted with the same problem of knowledge, had continued to act, but had reasoned in much the same manner as had Jack. Willie makes his absolute principle concrete through Hugh Miller and the hospital, and Adam does good in the name of the abstractions of science. Even Anne Stanton identifies doing something

worthwhile with becoming Willie's mistress.

By assuming that these man-made absolutes will fulfill their lives, the major characters of All The King's Men reveal that they are incomplete and that they are striving for knowledge. The reason that they seek knowledge and at the same time try to avoid it is that they are instinctively aware of the horrible paradox they would have to face by viewing their situations realistically. They would have to act decisively for the good without being aware of what it is. This would entail accepting responsibility and guilt for the inevitable wrong decisions they would make since their knowledge is incomplete.

The necessity of knowledge and the instinctive desire to avoid it are revealed in an analogy of Jack Burden's early in the novel. Man is doomed, in a sense, to acquiring knowledge, but knowledge in the world of reality is of both good and evil, and there is always an inner awareness which resists the knowing. Burden likens this situation to one in which a man hesitates before opening

...the telegram sticking out from under your door...While you stand there in the hall, with the envelope in your hand, you feel there's an eye on you, a great big eye...The eye knows what's in the envelope, and it is watching you to see you when you open it and know, too. But the clammy, sad little foetus which is you way down in the dark which is you too lifts up its sad little face and its eyes are blind, and it shivers cold inside you for it doesn't want to know what is in that envelope. It wants to lie in the dark and not know, and be warm in its not-knowing. The end of man is knowledge, but there is one thing he

can't know. He can't know whether knowledge will save him or kill him. He will be killed, all right, but he can't know whether he is killed because of the knowledge which he has got or because of the knowledge which he hasn't got and which if he had it, would save him. There's the envelope, you have to open the envelope, for the end of man is to know.<sup>55</sup>

An individual may try to resist knowledge of evil, but "the end of man is to know," and, ultimately, such resistance is futile. A person cannot live in the world and successfully avoid involvement. Like Willie Stark and Adam Stanton, he may, for a time, isolate himself from responsibility and justify his acts by some abstraction, but eventually he must pay the price for his refusal to accept the facts of his existence. Adam and Willie so completely devote themselves to abstractions and so totally commit themselves to action that they are doomed beyond any hope of salvation, and are finally destroyed. Jack and Anne, however, are less active characters and are able, in time, to see their error and save themselves. Cass Mastern had also been saved, and his final knowledge is similar to Jack's and Anne's. Jack, as an idealist, had not been able to accept the terror of Cass Mastern's realization, but at the end of the novel, Jack can see that Cass was aware of the inevitability of involvement with the world and knowledge of evil.

Cass Mastern lived for a few years and in that time he learned that the world is all of one piece. He learned that the world is like an enormous spider web and

if you touch it, however lightly, at any point, the vibration ripples to the remotest perimeter and the drowsy spider feels the tingle and is drowsy no more but springs out to fling the gossamer coils about you who have touched the web and then inject the black, numbing poison under your hide. It does not matter whether or not you meant to brush the web of things. Your happy foot or your gay wing may have brushed it ever so lightly, but what happens always happens and there is the spider, bearded black and with his great faceted eyes glittering like mirrors in the sun, or like God's eye, and the fangs dripping.<sup>56</sup>



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

Ultimately, the presentation of Warren's basic ideas in All The King's Men shows them to be similar to the tenets of modern existentialism. At the end of the novel, Jack Burden is aware that existence demands an "awful responsibility," and that choices, or decisions to act, are made in "an agony of will." This terminology itself is like that of the existentialist credo. A later work of Warren's, Brother to Dragons, makes even heavier use of a key existentialist term, "anguish." "R.P.W.," in the book, refers to "the human anguish,"<sup>1</sup> and the "anguish of isolation."<sup>2</sup> "Anguish" to the existentialist is the result of the realization that life can have no meaning beyond the immediate present and yet responsibility and choice must be exercised in the face of such meaninglessness. The existentialist lives in anguish because he chooses and acts without any reason for choosing and acting. He does not choose between good and evil, because there are no standards by which to define such abstractions. He merely chooses himself, or freedom, and, therefore, chooses to exist authentically. In Brother to Dragons, Warren shares the existentialist's

disgust for the person who does not choose in anguish, and does not live authentically. "R.P.W." says,

...For if the thing  
 Accomplished would seem to accomplish only its own  
 Inevitability, and the thing that exists  
 Would seem to fulfill only its own being,  
 And to be but the Q.E.D. of a fatal sorites,  
 Yet the accomplished was once the unaccomplished  
 And the existing was once the non-existing,  
 And that transition was the agony of will  
And anguish of option--or such it seems  
 To any man who has striven in the hot day and  
 glare of contingency  
 Or who has heard the breath of darkness stop  
 At the moment of revelation. And such it seems  
 To all who would lay a strong hand strongly on life,  
 And as for the others, let us wish them well  
 In the ineluctable sterility of their various  
 sanatoria  
 Where all the light is like a light from snow,  
 And hope that there's always somebody to change  
 the bedpans.<sup>3</sup>

(Italics mine)

According to the existentialist, a man affirms his existence when he chooses to assert his freedom in the anguish of his situation and act authentically. Since there are no standards for good or evil, it does not matter what he chooses, only that he make the choice in accordance with his freedom as an individual. At this point, there arises a significant divergence among various existentialist doctrines. Thus, Sartre, for example, maintains that the responsibility of the free choice is a social responsibility. A man who chooses freedom for himself, chooses it for all men and creates in himself a social obligation to see his choice carried out.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the Christian existentialist argues that the choice is, ultimately, a

choice for God and Christianity.<sup>5</sup> Warren's philosophy differs from both of these and aligns itself with what might generally be called the humanistic tradition, "the achievement of an admirable human life on earth rather than the preparation for a blissful life hereafter."<sup>6</sup> Warren maintains that chief among the traditional humanist values which would lead to an "admirable human life" is self-knowledge. In addition Warren assumes that this self-knowledge leads to an awareness of one's moral responsibility and obligation as a member of humanity. But knowledge must precede self-knowledge and moral strength, for only through knowledge may the individual authentically define himself in the world. In Brother to Dragons, "R.P.W." testifies to the power of knowledge and its ability to change the essence, or being, of the individual.

...knowing is,  
 Maybe, a kind of being, and if you know,  
 Can really know, a thing in all its fullness,  
 Then you are different, and if you are different,  
 Then everything is different, somehow, too.<sup>7</sup>

In another passage from Brother to Dragons, he says,

In that hell-broth of paradox and internecine  
 Complex of motive and murderous intensity  
 We call the soul, and from that  
Anguish of complication any act,  
 Any act at all, the bad, the good, affords,  
 Or seems to afford, the dear redemption of  
     simplicity:  
 The dear redemption in the mere fact of achieved  
     definition,  
 Be what that may.

Can man wish more than knowledge?<sup>8</sup>

(Italics mine)

Warren's use of the word "redemption" is not to be understood in strictly the Christian sense. Redemption in the above passage is the result of the attainment of self-definition in terms of a moral obligation to the world. At the end of World Enough and Time, Jeremiah Beaumont who wishes for Christian redemption, relief from the bondage and consequences of sin, does not find it, but he does gain knowledge.

All I can have now is knowledge. But if we can have knowledge, if we can know the terrible logic of life, if we can only know!...that is all we need: knowledge. That is not redemption, but is almost better than redemption.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, knowledge may be seen to be of primary importance in the dramatization of Warren's philosophical views. For the individual, knowledge may lead to self-knowledge and, ultimately, to the acceptance of moral responsibility. But how, one may ask, is knowledge attained? According to Warren, knowledge is the result of action. This establishes another point of correspondence between Warren's philosophy and existentialism, for primarily existentialism demands a commitment to action.<sup>10</sup> In accordance with the humanistic tradition, Warren assumes that the most desirable action is that taken in awareness of moral responsibility, i.e., good action. But there are no criteria by which the good may be identified, and good and evil may be mingled in every act. In Brother to Dragons, "R.P.W." says,

...For the origin of no human action,  
 No matter how sweet the action and dear, is ever  
 Pure like the flower. For if sweetness is there,  
 then bitterness too....<sup>11</sup>

Also, in another passage from the same book, the character  
 Thomas Jefferson says,

And the stench of action is not always sweetened  
 By the civet of motive, nor motive by good action.<sup>12</sup>

Still, the only way that a person may achieve knowledge  
 and a sense of moral responsibility is through the performance  
 of meaningful acts. Though he may not always be able to  
 perform a good act, he still must act and hope to gain  
 strength and moral awareness. It is his attitude toward  
 the action and not the action itself which is of primary  
 importance to the individual. Through his errors, he may  
 profit in knowledge and wisdom. Even the person who seeks  
 to avoid significant action can never totally isolate him-  
 self from the attainment of some self-knowledge, for life  
 implies motion. Again, in Brother to Dragons, "R.P.W."  
 states,

But we must argue the necessity of virtue;  
 In so far as man has the simplest vanity of self,  
 There is no escape from the movement toward  
     fulfillment.  
 And since all kind but fulfills its own kind,  
 Fulfillment is only in the degree of recognition  
 Of the common lot of our kind. And that is the  
     death of vanity,  
 And that is the beginning of virtue.<sup>13</sup>

The necessity of positive action is stressed to a  
 greater or lesser degree in all of Warren's fiction, but

it is especially important in relation to the theme of knowledge in All The King's Men. Though the vital role which action plays in the struggles of the major characters of this novel has already been demonstrated, a brief review should establish Warren's position on the matter and clarify his existentialist and humanist assumptions. Willie Stark and Adam Stanton are both men of action who try to deny responsibility for their actions. Though Willie realizes his error before he dies, his previous denial of responsibility has been so complete and his actions so corrupt that he is destroyed. Adam's avoidance of responsibility is even greater than Willie's, and though he commits only one really bad act, the assassination of Willie, he, too, is destroyed; but he dies without the final awareness which Willie possesses. Anne Stanton and Jack Burden are both less active characters than Willie and Adam. The fact that Anne and Jack avoid action as well as responsibility partly shields them from the necessity of having to recognize their obligations, but when they are inevitably forced into awareness, they accept it and are saved from destruction. Anne commits a major denial of responsibility only once, when she becomes Willie's mistress, but the tragedy which ensues from this act leads her to self-knowledge and moral strength. Jack Burden denies responsibility throughout the novel, but he is so dedicated to inaction that he becomes truly involved only through the consequences of his research on Judge Irwin. The horrible chain of events created by Jack's single act

demands that he admit his guilt and act responsibly. And in spite of the fact that he struggles to avoid this knowledge, in the end he finds that he must accept the final truth which Warren proposes in order to go on living.

## NOTES

## CHAPTER I

<sup>1</sup>Robert Penn Warren, "A Note to All The King's Men," Sewanee Review, LXI (1953), 480.

<sup>2</sup>Warren, "Knowledge and The Image of Man," Sewanee Review, LXIII (1955), 186.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 186-187.

<sup>4</sup>Warren, Brother to Dragons (New York, 1953), pp. 195-196.

<sup>5</sup>Warren, "Knowledge and The Image of Man," p. 187.

<sup>6</sup>Joseph Conrad, Lord Jim (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1958), p. 153.

<sup>7</sup>Warren, "Nostromo," Sewanee Review, LIX (1951), p. 376.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 391.

<sup>9</sup>Warren, All The King's Men (New York, 1946), p. 53.

<sup>10</sup>Warren, "Nostromo," p. 366.

<sup>11</sup>Cf. Leonard Casper, Robert Penn Warren: The Dark and Bloody Ground (Seattle, 1960), p. 49. Mr. Casper suggests that Warren has used the same "roughening" in his own poetry, specifically in "The Ballad of Billie Potts."

<sup>12</sup>Warren, "Melville the Poet," Kenyon Review, VIII (1946), 214.

<sup>13</sup>Casper, p. 49.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 49-50.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>16</sup>John Edward Hardy, "R.P.W.'s Double-Hero," The Virginia Quarterly Review, XXXVI (1960), 589.



<sup>17</sup> Everett Carter, "The Little Myth of Robert Penn Warren," Modern Fiction Studies, VI (1960), 5.

<sup>18</sup> Eric Bentley, "The Meaning of Robert Penn Warren's Novels," Kenyon Review, X (1948), 408.

<sup>19</sup> Roma A. King, Jr., "Time and Structure in the Early Novels of Robert Penn Warren," The South Atlantic Quarterly, LVI (1957), 486.

<sup>20</sup> John L. Stewart, "The Achievement of Robert Penn Warren," The South Atlantic Quarterly, XLVII (1948), 562.

<sup>21</sup> James Magner, S.J., "Robert Penn Warren's Quest for an Angel," Catholic World, CLXXXIII (1956), 179.

<sup>22</sup> Charles R. Anderson, "Violence and Order in the Novels of Robert Penn Warren," Southern Renaissance, eds. Louis D. Rubin, Jr. and Robert D. Jacobs (Baltimore, 1953), p. 209.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> King, p. 487.

<sup>25</sup> Robert B. Heilman, "Melpomene As Wallflower; or The Reading of Tragedy," Sewanee Review, LV (1947), 156.

<sup>26</sup> Anderson, p. 208.

<sup>27</sup> Bentley, p. 413.

<sup>28</sup> Stewart, p. 574.

<sup>29</sup> Heilman, p. 165.

<sup>30</sup> Robert C. Slack, "The Telemachus Theme," All The King's Men: A Symposium, ed. A. Fred Sochatoff et al (Pittsburgh, 1957).

<sup>31</sup> Elizabeth M. Kerr, "Polarity of Themes in All The King's Men," Modern Fiction Studies, VI (1960), 25.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>34</sup>Norman Kelvin, "The Failure of Robert Penn Warren," College English, XVIII (1957), 359.

<sup>35</sup>Oscar Cargill, "Anatomist of Monsters," College English, IX (1947), 7-8.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>37</sup>James Ruoff, "Humpty Dumpty and All The King's Men: A Note on Robert Penn Warren's Teleology," Twentieth Century Literature, III (1957), 128.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., pp. 129-130.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Warren, "Knowledge and The Image of Man," p. 182.

<sup>46</sup>Sam Hynes, "Robert Penn Warren: The Symbolic Journey," University of Kansas City Review, XVII (1951), 279.

<sup>47</sup>Warren, All The King's Men, p. 12.

<sup>48</sup>Though Warren does not insist that his philosophy can be understood only in theological terms (instead of "God," he uses, in several places, the words "Complete Knowledge" and "Nothing"), he often finds them, in our modern society, the most convenient expression of his assumptions. Sam Hynes (See note 46, supra) makes this same point and sees the attempt of Warren's characters to escape guilt (Original Sin) in the author's repeated use of the journey to the West.

<sup>49</sup>Warren, All The King's Men, p. 160.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 464.

<sup>52</sup>Warren, "Knowledge and The Image of Man," p. 187.

<sup>53</sup>Warren, All The King's Men, p. 12.

## CHAPTER II

<sup>1</sup>An interesting study of the thematic interrelationships between the characters of All The King's Men is John Hardy's article, "R.P.W.'s Double-Hero." Specifically, Mr. Hardy treats Willie Stark and Jack Burden as the "composite here...neither ...of whom is intelligible apart from the other."

<sup>2</sup>Robert Penn Warren, All The King's Men (New York, 1946), p. 16.

<sup>3</sup>Erwin R. Steinberg, in his article "The Enigma of Willie Stark," delineates the confusion surrounding the character of Willie, but Mr. Steinberg is unable to detect a unifying theme for the novel and concludes that Warren's "seemingly purposeful ambiguities" serve only to dissatisfy and frustrate the reader who is trying to understand All The King's Men.

<sup>4</sup>Warren, All The King's Men, p. 346.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 345.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 462.

<sup>7</sup>Warren, "A Note to All The King's Men," Sewanee Review, LXI (1953), 476.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 476-477.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 480.

<sup>10</sup>Warren, All The King's Men, p. 71.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 103-104. In view of Warren's expressed appreciation of Herman Melville's treatments of the "ironical dualities of existence," there would seem to be a significant parallel between the picture of Willie Stark, flanked by the figures of idealism and pragmatism, and the scene in Moby Dick in which the Pequod floats "in very poor plight" between the whale-head symbols of Immanuel Kant and John Locke. (New York, 1957), p. 325.

<sup>18</sup>Jeremiah's exclamation, "the terror of that, the terror of that," closely resembles the final utterings of another self-destroyed idealist, Kurtz, in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness; Kurtz says, "The horror! The horror!" Conrad's influence on Warren has been discussed in the previous chapter, but Seymour L. Gross' article, "Conrad and All The King's Men," Twentieth Century Literature, III (1957), 27-32, should be examined for its comparison of All The King's Men with Heart of Darkness. Mr. Gross analyzes the striking similarities between Kurtz and Willie Stark, each of whom "in trying to gain power for the purpose of doing good, has become intoxicated with the power itself."

<sup>19</sup>Warren, World Enough and Time (New York, 1950), p. 459.

<sup>20</sup>Warren, All The King's Men, p. 144.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 277.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 275.

- <sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 272.
- <sup>27</sup>Warren, Brother to Dragons (New York, 1953), p. 112.
- <sup>28</sup>Warren, "Knowledge and The Image of Man," Sewanee Review, LXIII (1955), 192.
- <sup>29</sup>Warren, All The King's Men, p. 148.
- <sup>30</sup>Warren, Brother to Dragons, p. 143.
- <sup>31</sup>Warren, All The King's Men, p. 278.
- <sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 276.
- <sup>33</sup>Warren, World Enough and Time, p. 459.
- <sup>34</sup>Warren, All The King's Men, p. 411.
- <sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 461.
- <sup>36</sup>Warren, Brother to Dragons, pp. 193-194.
- <sup>37</sup>William M. Schutte's article, "The Dramatic Versions of the Willie Stark Story," All The King's Men: A Symposium, ed. A. Fred Sochatoff et al (Pittsburgh, 1957), notes that Warren's play, "Willie Stark: His Rise and Fall," (1955) emphasizes the author's final concept of the character of Willie, "the inability of the dictator by an act of will to change the world he has created with his power or change his ways of action in it. Like other men he is caught in the maze he has contrived for himself."
- <sup>38</sup>Warren, All The King's Men, p. 425.
- <sup>39</sup>Warren, World Enough and Time, p. 460.
- <sup>40</sup>Warren, Brother to Dragons, p. 99.
- <sup>41</sup>Warren, All The King's Men, p. 199.
- <sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 462.

## CHAPTER III

<sup>1</sup>Robert Penn Warren, All The King's Men (New York, 1946), p. 462.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 254.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 261-262.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 263.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 250.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 248.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 261.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 252.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 274.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 413.

<sup>15</sup>Warren, Brother to Dragons (New York, 1953), p. 192.

<sup>16</sup>Warren, All The King's Men, p. 414.

<sup>17</sup>Warren, World Enough and Time (New York, 1950), pp. 458-459.

<sup>18</sup>Warren, All The King's Men, p. 126.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 329.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 221.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 317.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 428.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 327.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 223.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 345.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 460.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 461.

#### CHAPTER IV

<sup>1</sup>Robert Penn Warren, All The King's Men (New York, 1946), p. 203.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 313.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 315.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 316.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 328-329.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 198.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 199.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 242.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 120.

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

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 346.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 345.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 345-346.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 329.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 330.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 332.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 334.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 329.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., pp. 363-364.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 374.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 376.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 378.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 379.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 381-382.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 407.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 418.



<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 425.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 442.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Warren, World Enough and Time (New York, 1950), p. 459.

<sup>40</sup>Warren, All The King's Men, p. 442.

<sup>41</sup>The "true lie" is the name Warren (in his article, "Nostromo") gives to a motif in Conrad's works. It is told by the character who realizes that his beliefs are illusions, but are "infinitely precious...in the end, his only truth." The "true lie" is evidence of the final awareness of the meaning of life and "affirms the 'idea', the 'illusion'." Warren cites as a primary example of the use of the "true lie" Conrad's Heart of Darkness, a work whose influence on All The King's Men has already been noted (See note 18, Chapter II, *supra*). Marlow, the narrator whose struggle toward knowledge is similar to Jack Burden's, is unable to tell Kurtz's Intended that her beloved's last words were, "The horror! The horror!"; instead, he tells her, "The last word he pronounced was--your name."

<sup>42</sup>Warren, All The King's Men, p. 447.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 448.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 452.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 458.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 462.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 463.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 464.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., pp. 462-463.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 463.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., pp. 11-12.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 200.

## CHAPTER V

<sup>1</sup>Robert Penn Warren, Brother to Dragons (New York, 1953), p. 122.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 111-112.

<sup>4</sup>John L. Mothershead, Jr., Ethics (New York, 1955), pp. 309-310.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 310.

<sup>6</sup>Karl Beckson and Arthur Ganz, A Reader's Guide to Literary Terms (New York, 1960), p. 77.

<sup>7</sup>Warren, Brother to Dragons, pp. 127-128.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>9</sup>Warren, World Enough and Time (New York, 1950), p. 460.

<sup>10</sup>Mothershead, p. 312.

<sup>11</sup>Warren, Brother to Dragons, p. 56.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 214.

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