

**ROBERT PENN WARREN'S *INTERNAL INJURIES*:
"A PICNIC ON THE DARK SIDE OF THE MOON"**

A Thesis

by

MARYLOUISE SAMAHA

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

August 2006

Major Subject: English

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ABSTRACT

Robert Penn Warren's *Internal Injuries*:

"A Picnic on the Dark Side of the Moon." (August 2006)

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Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. William Bedford Clark

Robert Penn Warren has a facility for transforming region and history into fiction and poetry. His novel *Flood: A Romance of Our Time* (1964) and his poem sequence "Internal Injuries" (1968) stand out insofar as they share a leitmotif; that is, he uses images of imprisonment to represent the loss of free and responsible selfhood under a technocratic dispensation. He is the quintessential loneliness artist, as can be heard through the voices of his characters.

His literary criticism is a testament to his concerns about how one comes to reconcile oneself to place. His theory of literature provides us a unique window on what it means to discover oneself in the tumult of a rapidly changing landscape. The use and misuse of technology to augment one's relationship to place and self is my overriding concern. In Fiddlersburg, the town in *Flood*, melodrama hangs in the air like rotting perfume. All that will remain once the town is flooded is the penitentiary.

In "Internal Injuries," Warren's poem-within-a-poem sequence about the loss of self within the modern city, Warren invokes the penitentiary to represent and speak for the loss of self and the feeling of lonesomeness. *Flood* speaks to "Internal Injuries" in

the sense that Warren oscillates between the discovery of self in *Flood* to the loss of self in “Internal Injuries.”

I give my observation of how Warren’s critical work forms a dialogue with his creative work, offering insight as to how the oldest maximum-security penitentiary in Kentucky speaks to the lost and found selves of Warren’s world. Finally, I deal with the problem of modernity and Warren’s perennial concern about the alienation of the self and how he wrestles with it from a deeply personal and experiential perspective. The reader will find that Warren’s critical and creative works form a kind of *inside* passage.

To George

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Every age, as it produces its own poetry, needs to produce its own criticism, its own type of exegesis and apology.

Robert Penn Warren, *A Plea in Mitigation*

Much of Robert Penn Warren's impressive body of work is an eloquent *cri de coeur* by a man whose perennial concern has been the alienation of the self in an industrialized society. In *Lonelier than God*, Randy Hendricks notes that Warren's "literary oeuvre" is peopled with wanderers that "represent at least one response to the poet's sense that people living in the modern age must try to live responsibly *against* a technological society that exacts the price of self"; the self becomes lost because the "symbiotic relationship with others and the past" that once existed is no longer available (Hendricks' emphasis).¹ Many of Warren's characters are in the proverbial right place at the wrong time.

Jack Burden's lament, in Warren's Pulitzer Prize-winning *All the King's Men* (1946), that "there were pine trees here a long time ago... [before] the bastards got in here and set up the mills"² segues almost two decades later into *Flood: A Romance of Our Time* (1964), a novel in which Warren directly and comprehensively confronts the

This thesis follows the style and format of *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

¹ Hendricks, *Lonelier than God*, 1. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *Lonelier*.

² Warren, *All the King's Men* (1946 reprint), 2. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *AKM*.

limits and powers of technology and its effect on the displaced person. *Flood* opens with Bradwell Tolliver returning to his hometown of Fiddlersburg, Tennessee after a long absence. What troubled him was similar to what troubled Jack Burden. It was “not so much what was not there” but “what was there”³: a new, concrete highway and a garish motel perched atop the bluff where a grove of trees once stood. Brad is a man who has lost his past insofar as the landscape he remembers is no longer accessible except through his memory. In *Robert Penn Warren and the American Imagination*, Hugh Ruppersburg notes that in Warren’s fiction and poetry “alienation, loss of self, dehumanization, the threat of cultural obliteration” are all symptoms of a modernity that Warren’s characters experience on their way to self discovery.⁴

In his 1974 Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities (later published as *Democracy and Poetry*), Warren defined the “self” as “the felt principle of significant unity.”⁵ By “significant” Warren means “the self as a development in time, with a past and a future” (*DP*, xiii). Brad returns home to find himself lost; through the events that unfold, he comes to discover a new self. In “Knowledge and the Image of Man” (1955), Warren states that man exists in the world “with continual and intimate interpenetration, an inevitable osmosis of being, which in the end does not deny, but affirms, his identity;” ultimately, man comes to “discover new values” – that is, “a new self.”⁶ In the same essay, Warren states that the *new self* may feel “not only love for the world, but also fear

³ Warren, *Flood: A Romance of Our Time*, 4. Hereafter cited in the text as *Flood*.

⁴ Ruppersburg, *Robert Penn Warren and the American Imagination*, 174. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *Imagination*.

⁵ Warren, *Democracy and Poetry*, xii. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *DP*.

⁶ Warren, “Knowledge and the Image of Man,” 182-192. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as “Knowledge.”

and disgust” (“Knowledge,” 245). Such is the case with Blanding Cottshill in *Flood*, who echoes a variation on Warren’s theme from “Knowledge and the Image of Man.” Cottshill believes “things are tied together different. There’s some spooky interpenetration of things, a mystic osmosis of being” (*Flood*, 423). In *The Poetic Vision of Robert Penn Warren*, Victor Strandberg notes that “an awakening to this truth typically provides the structure for Warren’s fiction and poetry alike.”⁷ One might argue that the same “truth” permeates Warren’s criticism.

Warren’s poetry in large part derives from his claim that man exists in the world with “continual and intimate interpenetration” (“Knowledge,” 241) that ultimately defines who he is. In “Internal Injuries,” Warren’s poem-within-a-poem sequence from *Incarnations: Poems 1966-1968*, the characters and the predicaments they find themselves in bear a striking resemblance to the characters and situations in *Flood*, and in “Internal Injuries,” Warren explores a theme similar to that of *Flood*. There are even parallel details in both texts. The narrator informs the audience that the convict Jake “has toughed it through for nigh forty years” in prison and cannot now “remember why / He had cut” his mother’s throat.⁸ He has a vague memory of where he comes from and only a nightmarish intimation of where he is going. That he is dying of intestinal cancer is telling in that Dr. Calvin Fiddler in *Flood* cares for a patient in the local prison infirmary who is dying of the same disease.

The second part of the poem sequence deals with a woman who has been struck

⁷ Strandburg, *The Poetic Vision of Robert Penn Warren*, 192. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *Vision*.

⁸ Warren, *The Collected Poems of Robert Penn Warren*, 236. Unless otherwise noted, Warren’s poetry will be cited from *Collected Poems*. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *CP*.

down in a city street “by a 1957 yellow Cadillac” (*CP*, 245). She is being peered at by “three construction workers,” who view her as a “technical problem” (p. 245) rather than as a human being who is capable of bleeding. In *Robert Penn Warren and American Idealism*, John Burt states that in Warren’s poetry and prose his characters are made to “appeal to a higher law” that promises nothing more than a shadowy existence in a world where mediation is not possible.⁹ What I am suggesting is that Warren’s poetry and prose – in this particular instance, *Flood* and “Internal Injuries” – may function as a kind of *higher* criticism insofar as both works in their variety of rhetoric and content are paradigmatic of Warren’s capacity for portraying what he refers to as the “authenticity” (*DP*, 47) of existence. In *Democracy and Poetry* Warren states, “the individual is one pole of the existence of the self, and the other [is], society, or more specifically, community” (p. 47). Ruppensburg notes that “Internal Injuries” is representative of a “contemporary urban life” that signifies all that “has gone wrong in America” (*Imagination*, 105). *Flood* and “Internal Injuries,” he suggests, deal specifically with the loss of self and community against the backdrop of a new industrialized world. Before delving into an analysis of *Flood* and “Internal Injuries,” it will be instructive here to take a brief look at the problems Warren wrestles with in his critical works and how they relate to his poetry and prose.

In “Knowledge and the Image of Man,” Warren tries to make some sense of what has become of his world. In surveying the contemporary scene, he takes a backward

⁹ Burt, *Robert Penn Warren and American Idealism*, 29. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *Idealism*.

glance at the American frontier:

Looking back, we can applaud the sturdy independence, the faith in democracy and destiny, and the lethal efficiency of the long-rifle leveled at the Redcoat. We can relish the juicy rambunctiousness and wild poetry and courage of the frontier, and see the pathos of its loneliness, malaria, and degradation. But this does not mean that, in the end, we have to take Davy Crockett as a philosopher superior to Immanuel Kant. (“Knowledge,” 239)

Warren admits that though such populist egalitarianism is an exaggeration of “what happened in 1933” with the New Deal, “it is uncomfortably close” (“Knowledge,” 239). In “Knowledge and the Image of Man,” Warren encourages man to pull himself up from his purportedly fallen state by feeding on the world: “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” (p. 242). He speaks evocatively. It is not enough that the tree is a “tree of knowledge.” It precipitates a “fall.” Man’s knowledge causes him to fall and fall again, before he can get “a *sort* of redemption” (p. 242; emphasis mine). Either he is redeemed or he is not. Which is it? For Warren, it is *both*, in that man is not whole until he experiences both sides of his nature. Warren “describes [knowledge] in terms of exhilaration,” posits Burt, “rather than sad repose, as if it were not the grim consolation of exile but a variety of return” (*Idealism*, 49).

To borrow Burt’s phrase, there is a *variety of return* between Warren’s personal and public lives. What “Knowledge and the Image of Man” espouses directly correlates to what Warren stated over a decade earlier in “Pure and Impure Poetry” (1943): To

master the poem the critic must “eat it”; however, the liability in this approach is that “it lives [on] in you, and is assimilated into you, and you are different somewhat monstrous yourself for having eaten it.”¹⁰

Over two decades later in “Tale of Time” (1966), a poem about how a family copes with the passing of an elderly Black woman who had once worked for them and as a result had become a close companion, he tells the reader “You / Must eat the dead... completely, bone, blood, flesh, gristle, even / Such hair as can be forced” (*CP*, 190). Furthermore, if you “eat the dead,” as Warren suggests, “Immortality is not impossible, / Even joy” (p. 190) may come of it. Burt asserts (and rightly so) “that the cannibalistic language used here is rather close to that which Warren uses in ‘Pure and Impure Poetry’ to describe how poems are ‘assimilated’” (*Idealism*, 81). Though you are filled with “anguish” at the prospect, you *must*, urges the poet, “eat them [the dead] completely” in order to facilitate their safe passage into “immortality” (*CP*, 190). Before the poet presents the “solution,” the family “stand[s] in the street of Squigg-town,” where “The night freight is passing” and all they can do as it “disappears into the distance” is stand there and “weep” and wonder about how, in the “final estimate” (p. 189), they can preserve their memory of the woman. Burt notes that in Warren’s poetry, “the poetry itself is a crucial but dangerous thing one must approach as one approaches grief” (*Idealism*, 81). Warren’s creative work requires the participation of the audience insofar as one must be prepared to navigate the deeply personal terrain he sketches. In his analysis of *Flood*, Leonard Casper, in *The Blood-Marriage of Earth and Sky*, states “the

¹⁰ Warren, “Pure and Impure Poetry,” 3-28, 3. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *PI*.

principle communication... concerns man's compulsion to communicate; to confess, and be justified; to be shared by and known to others, beyond repudiation."¹¹ The title itself – “Tale of Time” – is ironic in the sense that it is as though Warren is inviting the audience to, as Casper astutely notes of *Flood*, come and listen to his confession about how he deals with *his* internal injuries.

What Warren was reporting was the Warren family's “deep engagement of spirit with the world.” It was “a vision of experience” (“Knowledge,” 553). Years later Warren confided to Floyd C. Watkins in *Then & Now* that “the episode about the old dying woman” in “Tale of Time” was “not fiction, even in detail.”¹² He stated to Watkins that “Seeley (Cecilia) had been a nurse and then, until she got married, our cook” (*Then & Now*, 149). “Tale of Time” represents Warren taking a backward glance at *his* past. In “Tale of Time,” as is often the case with Warren, the context is semi-autobiographical. Warren once stated in an interview with Richard Sale (published in *Talking with Robert Penn Warren*) that just because his poems “had literal germs” which were close to his own life it did not mean that they were necessarily “autobiographical in the rigid sense of the word” but, as he recollected, they were “tied to a realistic base of facts.”¹³ Though the poem in question invokes in grisly detail the eating of the dead, it is the poem itself that, for Warren, becomes “bread and meat” (*Talking*, 131). The metaphorical act, in this case of eating the dead, is what calls the audience “back to the world of prose and imperfection” (*PI*, 5).

¹¹ Casper, *Blood-Marriage*, 42. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *Blood-Marriage*.

¹² Watkins, *Then & Now*, 149. Hereafter cited in the text as *Then & Now*.

¹³ Warren, *Talking with Robert Penn Warren*, 130. Hereafter cited in the text as *Talking*.

Warren's concern for what the future held for America in the 1960s lends a certain pathos to his writing. The world is an imperfect place and Warren's metaphor of eating the dead in "Tale of Time" and his suggestion that poetry itself could be considered "bread and meat" represent a particular robustness on Warren's part. He is literally feeding his imagination and by doing so he is mitigating things that are beyond his control to change. In the same year that he produced "Tale of Time," he produced a piece of criticism that called for the tearing apart of poetry. In *A Plea in Mitigation: Modern Poetry and the End of An Era* (1966), he argued that "the death of the poetry of an age" implies "the possibility of a transcendence" wherein "the body of poetry is torn apart" in order to facilitate "a resurrection."¹⁴ *A Plea in Mitigation* was an address presented at Wesleyan College in Georgia to a group of students. It is not often cited by critics; however, I believe it speaks to Warren's indictment against the technocratic age. In *A Plea in Mitigation*, Warren declared the death of modernism. What the future holds, asserted Warren, will "emerge from poetry, not from debates about poetry" (*PM*, 1). He believed that in the 1960s, with the death of modernism, students were seeking "a language adequate to the new experience" (p. 1) they were having. Modern poetry, as Warren saw it in the 1960s, "gave us language and images for only its own time and not for eternity" (p. 2), which tended to make the students of the 1960s feel like refugees from history. This is much like Bradwell Tolliver in *Flood* insofar as he loses his historical compass on his return to Fiddlersburg. A concrete pond at the Seven Dwarfs

¹⁴Warren, *A Plea in Mitigation: Modern Poetry and the End of An Era*, 3. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *PM*.

motel had replaced the meadow he knew as a boy. Ruppensburg calls the image of the Seven Dwarfs the “all-encompassing symbol of national self-decay and narcissism” (*Imagination*, 175).

Warren anticipated *A Plea in Mitigation* in “Pure and Impure Poetry,” which echoed similar concerns: “Remaining faithful to the complexities of the problems” (*PI*, 28) any given age must deal with and “refus[ing] to take the easy statement as solution,” (p. 28) are the only viable options for defining one’s context. For Warren, the old “hand-me-down faith” and “ideals” (p. 28) of his predecessors were no longer a part of the usable past, as he had clearly stated over two decades earlier in “Pure and Impure Poetry.” Poetry, for Warren, was a way of determining what the future held insofar as it served as a compass for reading the direction history was headed. However, he warned “for reader and writer alike, the need for the revolution is a need to discover identity – to locate oneself on the vast and shifting chart of being” (*PM*, 2). Hendricks, in *Lonelier than God*, refers to “Warren’s technique” as a “de-emphasis of history and an emerging emphasis on knowledge through myth” (*Lonelier*, 162). Inasmuch as Hendricks’ analysis may be an overstatement, discovering oneself through poetry and the arts in the midst of an ever-changing landscape is a theme that would concern Warren throughout his career, notwithstanding history’s role in the creation and dissemination of myth or art per se.

Modern poetry, whose “Founding Fathers were Eliot, Pound, and Yeats,” was “an alienated art” (*PM*, 4), according to Warren. With its roots in alienation it tried to “make a virtue of its defect” (p. 4), which led to an even more alienating effect, the loss

of an audience. It lost its audience to technology. Warren summed it up this way: “The 20th-century poet, even the most popular, cannot compete [with mass media], and the primary reason is not in the poet. The expectation of the audience has changed. It wants its journalism in prose, and it prefers TV to, even, the novel” (p. 4). Whatever the future holds is inscribed in the body of poetry a given generation produces. In “A Plea in Mitigation,” Warren’s quarrel with technology becomes accelerated. Warren problematizes his claim that modernism produced alienation. He adds an all-out assault on technology to the mix.

Warren would suggest something similar to what he had previously stated in *A Plea in Mitigation* to another group of college students in “The Use of the Past,” his 1973 Franklin Lecture delivered at Auburn University. He believed that the past and the present were tied together by technology:

Might a sense of the past indicate to us that modern technology is, instead of being “modern,” very old-fashioned indeed – that it took off from old-fashioned science, from science based on the machine model, and has carried that model into the hearts of men, without ever revising its basic image in the light of subsequent developments in scientific thought? ... Might not an understanding of the origins of various kinds of modern alienation be a step toward curing the disease? ... The study of the past might free us from our delusion that “progress” – which is shorthand for technology operating in the world – is automatic. For, in spite of our pride in progress as *our* achievement, as something that we have made, we have come, paradoxically, to abjure all pride and to trust “progress” as

the thing that has made us, to bow abjectly before its power, which we take to be automatically beneficent.¹⁵

On the eve of America's Bicentennial, Warren stood before another group of college students – as he had done a few short years before at Wesleyan College – to remind them that science was invented by humans and not the obverse. Warren once stated at a 1956 gathering with his fellow Fugitives classmates from Vanderbilt University, “machines disintegrate individuals, so you have no individual sense of responsibility and no awareness that the individual has a past and a place” (*Talking*, 20-21). The capacity of poetry to document history's victories and defeats and treat them equally as a product of an age, were a central concern of Warren's poetry and prose.

More alarming for Warren, however, was the role technology played in the *razing* of American consciousness. What Warren espoused in “The Use of the Past” was not far off the mark from what he had called for in *A Plea in Mitigation*, wherein he stated that “the needed exegeses” for understanding his predecessors have been “made and absorbed” (*PM*, 12). Warren tells the students at Wesleyan College “every age, as it produces its own poetry, needs to produce its own type of criticism” (p. 12); therefore, what was once “fashionable” (p. 12) for a given age becomes outdated for the next. Warren believed that “the formal schematizations, the over-refinement of terms... the academic mass production of ‘certified’ critics” (p. 12) were products of the past, which proved counterintuitive. The disciples of “New Criticism” and “modern poetry” were left “waiting for a revelation” (p. 12). But Warren was intuitive enough to know that *the*

¹⁵ Warren, “The Use of the Past,” 29-53, 45. Hereafter cited in the text as “The Use of the Past.”

revelation would not be televised.

In “A Plea in Mitigation,” Warren was telescoping an audience “who prefer [red] TV to, even, the novel” (*PM*, 4). From Warren’s perspective, advancements in technology were enhancing the public’s experience; it was becoming “the business of science” (p. 4) to tell the truth, which tended to give the poet pause. Warren would extend and problematize his argument in *Democracy and Poetry*. He asks that his audience view the two essays in *Democracy and Poetry* as “meditations” (*DP*, xvi) on the link between poetry and selfhood in that “the poetic act, whatever the content, represents an assertion of the self”(p. xvi). He uses American literature to illustrate how it could function as a “diagnostic” tool for viewing “our actual achievement over the years in democracy” (p. 3). Warren illustrates his theory with critiques of diverse writers from Emerson and Whitman to Dreiser and Faulkner. He locates “the decay of the concept of self” (p. 3) as the central theme of American writers. However, as his analysis progresses, his focus shifts from the “diagnostic” to the “therapeutic role” (p. 3) of poetry. Warren contends that inasmuch as “what poetry most significantly celebrates is the capacity of man to face the deep, dark inwardness of his nature and his fate,” it also documents his failure to bring to fruition the dream of “a world in which the self could fulfill its possibilities” (p. 31-33), as espoused in the Declaration of Independence. In *Democracy and Poetry*, Warren boldly asserts that poetry is as much a documentation of a defeat as it is a celebration of a victory. Warren believes everyone is culpable, especially “the men who run society” (p. 32). Poetry documents the casualties of a society fueled by technology.

“For the American writer,” says Warren, “at least until the First World War, the quarrel was not, in general, with his world but with what had been made of his world” (*DP*, 34). Warren reminds his audience of America’s hypocrisies hidden beneath the surface of its rhetoric:

It should be remembered, that the United States, not the England of soap-boilers, was the bourgeois nation par excellence, in which, it might be said, the values of trade were transmogrified into the ideals of freedom; and it should be remembered, too, that European slogans have always sounded somewhat exotic here, and often irrelevant. It might be very romantic to shout “Down with the bourgeoisie!” But who, exactly, would the shouter be shouting about? He would be shouting about almost everybody he knew, including, certainly, the majority of the American “proletariat,” with its passion for freezers, color TV, and eight-cylinder cars. And to compound confusion, he would be shouting about a segment of his own soul – and, in a long-range view, the very forces that, ironically, had given him the freedom to shout. Long before the bad news from France and the exquisites of *fin de siècle* London had reached us, we had patented our own version of alienation. (p. 34-35)

In its retelling of events, poetry becomes the bearer of bad tidings. Because historical kernels lie behind poetry’s account of the disintegration of the self in an industrialized society, poetry itself will have to be handled a little more roughly. Warren scrutinizes democracy by exposing its hypocrisies and pomposities.

From Warren’s perspective in 1974, Americans had landed “in the realm of It”

where “in our contact with technology and big organization ... we are numbers on cards” whose “identity bleeds away; and, in all organizations, the individual is regarded as an expendable, because replaceable, part” (*DP*, 57). Warren viewed life as an “oscillating process” between doing and seeing and what poetry provides is a framework “from which we can consider the world of technology” because “once the oscillation, the vibrance, the dialectic ceases, life, as we know it and esteem it, will cease” (p. 93). Here again, Warren broaches the subject of alienation and the ultimate demise of the self in a society dependant on technological advancements to augment its experiences. Warren’s criticism, however, is not self-contained. The opinions aired in his criticism bleed over into his poetry and prose. His criticism is tied to his creative work by way of the common bond they share – that is, they are both historically self- reflexive.

Warren’s criticism supplies us with sufficient evidence that the disintegration of the self in an industrialized society is a recurring theme in his work. Poetry *and* prose provided Warren a framework for expressing his ambivalence toward technology and the rise of big organizations. If our literature can be used as a diagnostic and therapeutic tool, as Warren suggested in *Democracy and Poetry*, then *his* poetry and prose clearly provide us a candid glimpse of what he thought of rapid advancements in technology and the extent to which they were applied and misapplied by bureaucrats during his time. In the following chapters, I will look at two works – *Flood* and “Internal Injuries” – in which Warren uses prisons and images of imprisonment to represent the loss of a free and responsible selfhood under a technocratic dispensation.

CHAPTER II

MODERNITY AND THE LANGUAGE OF LONESOMENESS:

WARREN'S *FLOOD*: A ROMANCE OF OUR TIME

But the trouble was not so much what was not there. It was what was there.

Robert Penn Warren, *Flood: A Romance of Our Time*

Warren once stated in an interview that his novel *Flood: A Romance of Our Time* (1964) was a story about “what is home” (*Talking*, 111). He expanded his definition further by saying that “ultimately home is not a place, it’s a state of spirit, it’s a state of feeling, a state of mind, a proper relationship to a world” (p. 111). What emerges from *Flood* is how people who are displaced from their homes come to discover their “proper relationship to a world.” Fiddlersburg – Warren’s fictitious name for the town in *Flood* – is about to be flooded because the Tennessee Valley Authority is building a dam. Bradwell Tolliver, hometown boy and successful Hollywood screenwriter, returns to Fiddlersburg at the request of Yasha Jones, a Hollywood producer, who has commissioned him to write a script loosely based on *I’m Telling You Now*, a collection of short stories Brad published during his years in college. Brad’s insistence that their “beautiful moving picture” also be about “the pen” (*Flood*, 173) is revealing. The Fiddlersburg penitentiary stands as a beacon over the town. Though Yasha has commissioned Brad to write the story of his growing up in a small, rural community, the subject of *I’m Telling You Now*, Brad can only write variations on the theme of “lonesomeness” (p. 173.) and the feeling of being *penned*. Brad explains to Yasha the

relationship between Fiddlersburg, the penitentiary, and lonesomeness:

“The only reason everybody in Fiddlersburg does not get himself in the pen out of lonesomeness is because Fiddlersburg is a kind of pen already, and everybody knows already he is with folks who are as lonesome as he is ... Hell, the South is the country where a man gets drunk just so he can feel even lonelier and then comes to town and picks a fight for companionship. The Confederate States were founded on lonesomeness. They were all so lonesome they built a pen around themselves so they could be lonesome together.” (p. 165)

Brad has been away from Fiddlersburg for over twenty years, trying to run away from his lonesomeness, when Yasha finds him and requests he return to write the script. Upon returning, Brad faces what he has been fighting all these years, his alienation. However, he has to go through several episodes of recognition and reversal before he can reconcile his self to himself.

Brad left for school at Darthurst College and never said goodbye to his friend and mentor Izrael Goldfarb. Unfortunately, “Izzie” died while Brad was away at school. Brad reveals the truth to Leontine Purtle, a blind girl who grew up in Fiddlersburg. He is guilt-ridden for never saying goodbye. In *I'm Telling You Now*, he provided an ending where he returns to the grave of Goldfarb to bid farewell, but as he later reveals to Leontine: “I never went back. I just made it up. I had to end the story some damned way” (*Flood*, 231). However, when Leontine tells Brad that it “doesn’t matter ... that [he] just made it up,” Brad feels “trapped. He even felt a constriction of breath” (p. 231). Leontine now knows the truth, and that makes Brad uncomfortable. The irony is

that Leontine too once felt trapped.

After Leontine hears a recording of Brad's *I'm Telling You Now* on the phonograph, she no longer feels "clogged up like a drain pipe in the sink or something" (*Flood*, 232). She tells Brad that his story "made [her] want to reach out and touch the world" (p. 232). Leontine's discovery makes Brad feel even greater guilt for never saying goodbye. He becomes angry with her and asks her "'what's it like to be blind?'" (p. 232). Leontine's reply speaks volumes: "'Being you is like being blind'" (p. 232), she tells him. Brad is blind to his real intent for returning to Fiddlersburg. Though he says he is there to write a film script, he is really there to expiate himself. Now that he has returned to Fiddlersburg, he must *make up* for having *made up* his ending. He plans on exhuming Izzie's grave and moving it to higher ground before the flood comes. He must say his goodbye in order to relieve himself of the burden of guilt he feels.

Never saying goodbye to Izzie, however, is not the only reason Brad feels guilty. He returns to Fiddlersburg "in conscious shame" (*Flood*, 3), as he recollects in the opening chapter. Brad comes to feel shame a number of times throughout the novel. He is a prisoner to his emotions. But his uncontrollable urge to be cruel to people is what keeps him in a perpetual state of penitence. On his trip to the airport in Nashville to greet Yasha, he finds himself in a state of melancholy to the point of transferring his discontent onto the gas station attendant when he pulls his Jaguar XK-150 in for a fill-up (p. 8). Brad is troubled. When he passed this spot twenty years before in 1941, the gas station was not there, nor was the gaudy Seven Dwarfs Motel adjacent to the station (p. 4). John T. Hiers, in "Buried Graveyards: Warren's *Flood* and Jones' *A Buried Land*,"

states that *Flood* is paradigmatic of an individual's fight for "integrity in the face of rapid urbanization and mechanization."¹⁶ The "willow tangle" and the "clump of dogwood" that were once there have been replaced by a motel "done in the style of a fairy-tale illustration," with "a mulatto" not a "dwarf" (p. 5) tending the gasoline pump. The mulatto is dressed in "brown jerkin serrated at the bottom, with little bells at the points, and tights with the right leg red and the left yellow" (p. 5).

In an attempt at conversation with "Jingle Bells," as Brad has christened the mulatto, Brad implies that there must have been some "high old times" (*Flood*, 5) at the Seven Dwarfs. However, his attempt at "animal camaraderie" (p. 5) fails. Jingle Bells gives Brad a response worthy of his query. "'Yassuh ... mought be'" (p. 5), the young Black man blankly replies and continues "wiping the windshield" (p. 5). Brad "expect[s] the man to grin" (p. 5) but when he does not comply, Brad continues his interrogation, asking the man whether "'they have to pay you much to wear those trick pants'" (p. 6). Still there is "no grin" (p. 6). This frustrates Brad to the point of feeling foolish. It is Brad's turn to be penned. Jingle Bells has turned the tables on him. Brad cracks and apologizes, "'Damn it ... I didn't mean to be offensive'" (p. 9). He has lost the feeling of being in control, as he did with Leontine Purtle.

He feels lost in time because the sylvan scene he recalls is gone. A perverse modernity in the form of a fairy-tale motel has taken its place. The Seven Dwarfs Motel occupies the space wherein the "untrodden bluegrass" (*Flood*, 4) twenty years prior Brad had made love with his wife, Lettice Poindexter, before they were divorced. To think

¹⁶ Hiers, "Buried Graveyards," 2, 97-103, 97. Hereafter cited in the text as "Buried Graveyards."

something as garish as the Seven Dwarfs occupied the place he once had “to avert his face” (p. 4) from when passing seemed inconceivable:

[Now], the trouble was not so much what was not there. It was what was there. The creek was there, but it flowed decorously between two banks where stones were mortised into the earth; and on a boulder a cement frog, the size of a young calf and the color of Paris green, with a mouth gaping as richly bright as a split liver on a butcher’s block, crouched. On another boulder a gnome, dwarf, brownie or some such improbability, with a cement beard painted snow-white, sat studiously fishing. The line with which the creature was fishing was a real line. It wavered with the motion of the stream. The water in the stream looked real. But the water lilies were definitely cement.

Bradwell Tolliver wished that the water did not look real. What always worried you was to find something real in the middle of all the faking. It worried you, because if everything is fake then nothing matters. (p. 4)

Jingle Bells thought Brad was “faking” his Southern accent; therefore, when Brad interrogated him with his line of questioning, Jingle Bells replied with what he thought Brad expected to hear. After Brad’s departure, Jingle Bells speculates on the nature of faking:

He wondered what had made Mac [Brad] lay on that fake Southern accent. Hell, the Jag even had California plates. Who did Mac think he was kidding, try to be so God-damned Confederate?

The man in the trick pants shrugged. Let Mac have his fun faking the accent.

He had his own fun faking it. Even experts didn't give him a queer look any more. Maybe nobody was expert enough to detect any flaw in your accent if you were saying what they wanted to hear.

“Yassuh, boss,” the man in the trick pants murmured, and looked up at the enormous Black face on the second sign, with the bloated minstrel-show lips; and winked. (p. 10-11)

Brad finds something at the motel, only to be disturbed by it. Jingle Bells wiped Brad's windshield as if he were trying to wipe Brad out of the picture. Brad's appearance at the motel seemed as incongruous to Jingle Bells as the Seven Dwarfs Motel did to Brad.

What the two men together share is their insensitivity to the other's pain. One man is on the outside looking in while the other is on the inside looking out. The “transparent, but real, barrier of History” (*Flood*, 6) that separates them is modernity; both Brad and Jingle Bells are relying on technological advancements to augment their experiences with the world. Their real identity has been muted by their encounter with modernity. Brad in his Jaguar XK-150 with California license plates coasts through life disguising his true origin. Jingle Bells' identity is just as specious as Brad's: Jingle Bells came to Tennessee from Chicago on his fancy Lambretta motorcycle to attend Fisk University in Nashville (p. 10). His real name is Mortimor Sparlin and he claims to have come to school in Tennessee “because he wanted to know what it felt like to be a Negro in the South” (p. 366). Though Brad is not faking his Southern accent, he is faking his desire to connect on a human level. Brad was looking for “animal camaraderie” (p. 5). Jingle Bells, on the other hand, was faking his accent but had no desire to connect with

Brad on any level after he had relegated himself to ironic minstrel status. Their empty gestures are insufficient forms of communication.

Neither man has the advantage. They inflict pain on others to divert attention away from the vacancy they feel inside. Moreover, Brad's bantering about "high old times" (*Flood*, 5) at the Seven Dwarfs is ironic in that later in the novel Brad returns to the motel to have a high time of his own with Leontine. Jingle Bells likewise recollects the "one piece of tail" (p. 11) he once got at the motel. He wishes he had told Brad about his rendezvous with the woman in the "three-year-old Rambler" with the "Indiana plates" (p. 11) with whom he was once intimate at the Seven Dwarfs, but he was stifled by Brad's obnoxiousness. Jingle Bells found the idea of having a one-night-stand at a cheap motel in Tennessee alluring: "He would never have bothered with it back home, but being in Tennessee had given the situation an added relish, or at least a challenge, even if the car ... did have Indiana plates and not local ones" (p. 11).

Jingle Bells will not undermine Brad. His fear lies in the fact that he, like Brad, is vulnerable. Jingle Bells is not from the South. He relegates himself to a minstrel role and in doing so denies Brad the opportunity; his motive for coming to Tennessee is as much a sham as Brad's is for returning home. If Jingle Bells is timid about revealing his true identity, it is because he intuits what Brad had previously observed: "to find something real in the middle of all the faking" (*Flood*, 4) would be disturbing. Jingle Bells can retain his dignity if he fakes. Brad is querying a *persona*, not a young Black student from Chicago. If this is how "a Negro from the South" (p. 366) is treated, Jingle Bells would rather continue playing the ambiguous role of minstrel. Brad tells Yasha

that he believes “ ‘the heart of the race problem ... is not guilt ... it is simply that your Southerner is deeply and ambiguously disturbed to have folks around him who are not as lonesome as he is’ ” (p. 166). The fact that Jingle Bells misleads Brad about his identity makes him appear to be as lonesome as Brad. Perhaps Jingle Bells is searching (like Brad) for *his* “proper relationship to a world” (*Talking*, 111), as Warren suggested was the underlying thesis of *Flood*. Jingle Bells wishes he had taken the opportunity to shut Brad up: “Maybe he should have told Mac ... standing in broad daylight by the highway slab ... just Yankee to Yankee, how Yankees get together down in Tennessee” (*Flood*, 11). He acts out with the woman from Indiana because she was easy prey in her tawdry Rambler. Brad, on the other hand, intimidated him with his “dark glasses” and his “seventy-five-dollar panama” hat (p. 8), cruising in from the west coast in his Jaguar XK-150 with the top down.

When Brad returns to the Seven Dwarfs on another occasion, with Leontine, he tries to avoid having a conversation with Jingle Bells because he would rather no one know he is taking the young blind girl to the motel for an interlude. Jingle Bells is the only one who recognizes Brad and Leontine at the motel. As Brad wheels “in far to the right of the pumps,” Jingle Bells approaches them with little enthusiasm. After Brad registers, Jingle Bells escorts them to a rented room with a “candy cottage” theme, but this time – unlike the first time he and Brad met at the station – Jingle Bells seizes the opportunity to taunt Brad:

“Ain’t you seen de sign out dar? Sayen how we got de fust in de South?

Massage bed. ‘Lectric. Dey sort of jounce and slounce. Wiggle and wagggle.

Git out de kinks. Ain't you seen de sign?" Then not waiting for a reply: "Know what dey calls hit? De Lazy Man's Dee-light! Hee-hee." (*Flood*, 358)

Brad declines Jingle Bells' invitation to use the electric bed, nor does he care to watch the TV that Jingle Bells has deftly turned on, along with the "pink-shaded bed light" (p. 358). For this is where modernity has led Brad: a fairy-tale motel has replaced the "willow tangle" that was once there, and the "enclave of untrodden bluegrass" (p. 4) has been replaced by an electric bed.

Earlier in the day, Brad had noticed that the town's "clock, above the maples, was frozen at 8:35" (*Flood*, 350). He wondered "eight thirty-five when?" (p. 350). When he could not come up with an answer, "he stood there and did not know where he was going. And, he thought, did not know where he was. For he looked around him and did not know what Fiddlersburg was" (p. 351). Before Brad departs from the Seven Dwarfs for the second time, he will have undergone a change. He will realize where he is and who he is. The Brad who goes in is not the same Brad who comes out. Once he and Leontine are settled in the room, he sees his face in the mirror and reflects upon

all the things and all the years that were behind that face ... For Bradwell Tolliver, at that instant, was not here. He was leaning on the window ledge of his old room at home, a thousand years ago ... staring into the spring moonlight that fell over the silver river and all the land beyond ... But now, as again he touched his fingers to his face, *he knew where he was. And who he was.* There had been a promise in that moonlight that spread over all the world westward without end. (p. 360; emphasis mine)

For a moment Brad had faced backward to a time long before he had been exposed to the celluloid saviors and Hollywood heroes of the West. But no matter how far back he leans – “a thousand years ago” – he cannot escape where he is at this moment. The realization of knowing *where he was* and *who he was* brings on “a cold burst of awareness” (p. 362).

Knowing his proper relationship to Fiddlersburg is important for Brad insofar as it will facilitate his writing of the film script. Yasha senses Brad’s inability to capture the likeness of Fiddlersburg in his script as in *I’m Telling You Now*. Yasha tells him that inasmuch as his writing is “‘nothing more than expert,’” it does not reflect Brad’s true feelings toward Fiddlersburg: “‘It is not you,’” Yasha tells Brad, “‘it is only that *you* who is an expert’ ” (*Flood*, 341; Warren’s emphasis). Yasha calls Brad’s script “‘a parody of what happened’ ” (p. 342) in Fiddlersburg, in contrast to what he wrote in *I’m Telling You Now*. Yasha echoes Warren’s opinion that home is “a feeling ... a proper relationship to a world” (*Talking*, 111).

Before Brad visited the Seven Dwarfs Motel with Leontine, his relationship to place was misguided. Though the Seven Dwarfs did not exist when Brad wrote *I’m Tell You Now*, he was thinking about adding it to his film script about the flooding of Fiddlersburg. He describes his idea to Yasha: “‘I can see it now. As Fiddlersburg, with its wealth of Southern tradition, unassuming charm, homely virtue, and pellagra, sinks forevermore beneath the wave, the Seven Dwarfs Motel will rise in spray, glimmering like a dream’ ” (*Flood*, 38). In *The Achievement of Robert Penn Warren*, James H. Justus finds it “revealing that Tolliver in his vulgarized screen-play can connect the

survival of the motel, but not the prison, to the flooding of the town.”¹⁷ It takes the carnivalesque motel to inspire Brad to write his film script, not the flooding of the town. Brad’s not saying goodbye to Izzie now takes a back seat to the ironic little motel. Leontine is right in saying Brad is blind.

Yasha senses Brad’s lack of feeling for Fiddlersburg, and thus he rejects Brad’s script based on *I’m Telling You Now*. Justus asserts that Brad’s “unacceptable script will also condemn the writer to ... a moral drift” (*Achievement*, 293). It is Yasha’s sense that Brad’s desire to use the Seven Dwarfs in his script is more of an avoidance of the true meaning of *I’m Telling You Now* than an engagement with it, which could potentially make his script more interesting.

Yasha read Brad’s book of short stories long before he had discovered a newspaper article noting that “a little town in Tennessee, dating from pioneer times, would be inundated for a great dam” (*Flood*, 101). The article about the flooding of Fiddlersburg reminded him of Brad’s book of short stories about the town. Now that Yasha is in Fiddlersburg and the flooding of the town is imminent, he learns about the more intimate details of Brad’s past. Prior to coming to Fiddlersburg and meeting Brad for the first time, Yasha was unaware of Brad’s relationship to the Fiddlersburg penitentiary. His intuition tells him that there is more to Brad’s book. Something “shone through all the documentation” (p. 103) of Brad’s writing of *I’m Telling You Now*. After spending time with Brad’s sister Maggie, Yasha finds out the unsavory

¹⁷ Justus, *The Achievement of Robert Penn Warren*, 293-294. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *Achievement*.

truth: Maggie's husband, Brad's brother-in-law, Doctor Calvin Fiddler, was sentenced to the penitentiary over twenty years ago for having murdered his wife's lover. Although Maggie does not explain the details of her husband's incarceration, she does insist that Yasha see "the pen" because, as she puts it, "it's the real heart of Fiddlersburg" (p. 109).

Yasha believes that if he and Brad move away from the superficial " 'plottiness' " of life, as he calls it, their picture will give "the impression of the mysterious inwardness of life" (*Flood*, 127). Again, this is Warren calling attention to the "deep, dark, inwardness of [man's] nature and his fate" (*DP*, 31), which is what Yasha finds when he visits the penitentiary. Moreover, *Flood* speaks to what Warren commented on in his seminal essay "Pure and Impure Poetry," in that one of the elements that summons the reader "back to the world of prose and imperfection" is *irony* (*PI*, 5). What Yasha finds at the penitentiary is that the structure is "an-tee-quated" (*Flood*, 154), as Mr. Budd, the deputy warden, puts it. The more modern part of the building was constructed by "old Colonel Fiddler," who was once " 'Governor and made 'em do something for Fiddlersburg,' " explains Mr. Budd (p. 154). Doctor Calvin Fiddler has been sentenced to an institution that was built by his grandfather. Mr. Budd has been appointed by the warden to show Yasha and Brad around because he has other business to attend to.

Since Mr. Budd "was the officer of discipline and welfare" (*Flood*, 153) it seemed befitting that he show the men around. Mr. Budd tells Yasha that *he* is " 'the executioner for this here state. *I* am the guy that throws the switch,' " he says (p. 162; emphasis mine). He raises his right hand to show the two men the hand that "throws the

switch” for “ ‘twenty-five bucks a throw’ ” (p. 162). Mr. Budd tells Yasha that Calvin would have “ ‘been outa here long back’ ”(p. 157); however, he tried to break out, which added more time to his sentence. The deputy warden gives Yasha his thoughts on why men try to break out of prison. Those who try to break out, Mr. Budd tells Yasha, “ ‘don’t really want out. They want something but it ain’t out. They want in’ ” (p. 158). Mr. Budd shares with Yasha his theory as to why folks find themselves behind bars:

“You know why they got in in the first place? ... It is because they are lonesome. Some folks are born lonesome and they can’t stand the lonesomeness out there. It is lonesomeness in here maybe, but it ain’t as lonesome when you are with folks that knows they are as lonesome as you are.” (p. 158)

Yasha never asks for the details of Calvin’s crime. That would be a distraction. He is trying to get a feel for the place Maggie calls the heart of the town. After hearing Mr. Budd’s version of lonesomeness, Yasha realizes that the key to the town is not just the penitentiary, as Maggie believes, but, as her brother has always known, it is lonesomeness.

What Yasha comes to understand is Brad’s relationship to lonesomeness. The deputy warden echoes the same thoughts about the penitentiary and lonesomeness that Brad confides in Yasha about the South and lonesomeness:

“Folks say ‘the South,’ but the word doesn’t mean a damned thing. It is a term without a referent. No – it means something, but it does not mean what folks think it means. It means a profound experience, communally shared ... it is lonesomeness ... it is angry lonesomeness ... Hell, no Southerner believes that

there is any South. He just believes that if he keeps on saying the word he will lose some of the angry lonesomeness.” (*Flood*, 166)

When Yasha enters the prison infirmary where Calvin is attending to one of his fellow inmates, Brad says he will “ ‘sit this one out’ ” (p. 156). Brad is not prepared to see Calvin, nor is he ready to see what lonesomeness feels like on the other side.

Brad will eventually return to the penitentiary, at Calvin’s request however. On his return to the prison, Brad discovers that Calvin is not the same boy he grew up with in Fiddlersburg and later attended college with. For Calvin appears to be “a boy grown gray” (*Flood*, 277). Calvin has spent most of his life in institutions. He went from the university to medical school and, finally, the penitentiary. While Brad has been out in Hollywood, Calvin has been in the penitentiary where the only “ ‘serious doctren’ ” he will do is care for an “ ‘old guy ... dyen of cancer of the gut,’ ” as the deputy warden puts it (p. 277). Calvin describes his time in prison as “ ‘a picnic on the dark side of the moon. The side other people never get to even see’ ” (p. 280). Calvin is *on the dark side of the moon* by his own volition. He has refused all visitors, with the exception of his mother, for his tenure at the penitentiary. The penal system was not enough punishment for Calvin. He inflicts a kind of perverse punishment on himself – that is, by not allowing himself contact with the outside world. He enjoys his picnic on the other side.

Unfortunately for Calvin, being in prison is not enough for him to block the memory of his past life. While he is in prison, he encounters an “old geezer with cancer of the duodenum” (*Flood*, 280) whom he takes care of by giving morphine injections for

the pain. The irony in this is that Calvin's father died from "failure complicated by narcotics" (p. 293). Calvin shares with his father, Doctor Amos Fiddler, the inability to practice medicine – for different reasons however. Like the deputy warden tells Yasha and Brad, " 'the only serious doctren' " that Calvin will attempt is to inject his fellow inmate, who is dying of stomach cancer, with morphine to stop the pain. After his father's financial failure, the elder Fiddler turned to narcotics, which led to his failure as a physician. Calvin, on the other hand, was a failure as a husband, which drove him to murder. Inasmuch as his father's death was a virtual suicide, Calvin's withdrawal from the outside world is a metaphorical suicide. Rather than use the morphine to put an end to his life in prison, he uses it to stop his fellow inmate's pain. In the penitentiary, Calvin feels free. It is his own "private picnic," as he tells Brad (p. 285). Unlike Brad, though, Calvin earns a kind of redemption from treating the old man with cancer.

After his visit to see Calvin, Brad "yearned for the simplicity of purpose, the integrity of life, the purity of heart" (*Flood*, 290) that Calvin had found inside the penitentiary. But Brad was outside trying to make sense of his life while waiting with all the town's folk for the flood to come. Leonard Casper contends that "one returns to his origins" in order to be "relocated, redirected by anxious hope, never by certitude, toward some final unknown destination" (*Blood-Marriage*, 45). The penitentiary will not be flooded. Once the town is flooded the penitentiary will become an island to itself. Brad no longer needs to find the grave of Izzie. Now it is more important for him to find where his past and his present intersect. However, Brad's redemption never comes. As the townfolk gather for a goodbye ceremony before their homes are flooded, Bradwell

Tolliver stands facing the lake where “for a moment, he mistook the brightness of moisture in his eyes for the flicker of sun, far off, on the chrome and safety glass of cars passing on the new highway, yonder across the lake” (*Flood*, 440). Brad did not recognize his own tears. The sun’s reflection on cars had replaced the human emotion of weeping.

Brad’s suggestion in the beginning of the novel that he and Yasha’s “beautiful moving picture” be about “inside-outside” (*Flood*, 173) is telling. Calvin, who is inside the penitentiary, is content with his identity; while Brad, on the outside, is guilty of what Yasha warned him against – that is, he has become “overwhelmed with the outward, moving multiplicity of the world” (p. 173). *Flood* anticipates what Warren stated in *Democracy and Poetry*, in that the art of literature – in this case, *I’m Telling You Now* – is what brings “man to face the deep, dark, inwardness of his nature and fate” (*DP*, 31). *I’m Telling You Now* is the story-within-a-story that sets *Flood* in motion. Brad’s returning to Fiddlersburg to reenact his past based on his book of short stories about his hometown and his eventual visit to the penitentiary are what bring Calvin to recognize who he is and where he is. Brad’s book helps Calvin to realize he has a meaningful life *inside* the penitentiary. Casper notes that Calvin “has been purged ... and fulfilled by years of medical practice in a prison whose silence has now become *le silence du bonheur*” (*Blood-Marriage*, 46). Conversely for Brad, his book of short stories serves a diagnostic role in that his recollecting the events of the past facilitates his recognition of his relationship to his hometown and the tragedy of the flooding of Fiddlersburg. He comes to understand, however painfully, that there is no room in Fiddlersburg for him or

the folks who have lived there all their lives. After the flooding of the town, the only thing that will remain is a human institution in the form of the penitentiary where there is room only at the unemotional, inhumane top or the emotional, inhumane bottom.

The capacity of literature to document history's victories and defeats and treat them equally, as a product of an age, is as we have seen a central theme in Warren's oeuvre. *Flood* demonstrates how literature can serve both as a therapeutic and diagnostic tool; however, on a more acute level it is an echo of various forms of *loneliness*, as many of the characters in *Flood* reveal, produced by advancements in technology: a community is about to be replaced with a dam; and the only vestiges that will remain are a half-flooded graveyard (there is nothing lonelier than a graveyard) and a penitentiary which bears the town's name. *Flood* was not Warren's final foray into the relationship of technology to the alienation of the self however. He would resurrect this theme in *Incarnations* (1968), a book of poems that includes the poem-within-a-poem sequence "Internal Injuries" – his treatise on the disintegration of community and the alienation of the self in an industrialized society. In the following chapter, I will look at aspects of "Internal Injuries" that speak to the theme of imprisonment and the loss of self within the context of the modern city.

CHAPTER III

ASPECTS OF IMPRISONMENT IN WARREN'S *INTERNAL INJURIES*

The theme of imprisonment and the loss of self that were the subject of Warren's *Flood* bleed over into his later work "Internal Injuries." In this chapter I will look at how the city functions as a metaphor for "a new and more dehumanizing prison" (*DP*, 32) than the one in *Flood*. Part one of "Internal Injuries," titled "Penological Study: Southern Exposure," is about a man in prison and part two, which takes the title "Internal Injuries" from the entire sequence, is about a woman in another kind of prison, which resembles the man's in that they are both trapped in concrete jungles created by technological wizards. They are both representatives of a displaced population marginalized by society's centrifugal force. Hugh Ruppersburg states that the man and woman "are given to us here as citizens of the modern world, the unsheltered victims of contemporary life" (*Imagination*, 106). Coming to section one of "Penological Study," "Keep That Morphine Moving, Cap," the reader is given a startling interior sketch of the penitentiary:

Oh, in the pen, oh, in the pen,
 The cans, they have no doors, therefore
 I saw him, head bent in that primordial
 Prayer, head grizzled, and the sweat,
 To the gray cement, dropped. It dripped,
 And each drop glittered as it fell,

For in the pen, oh, in the pen,

The cans, they have no doors. (*CP*, 236)

The reader, from the start, knows the worst that can happen. As Warren previously suggested of *impure poetry*, in his essay “Pure and Impure Poetry,” “The poet seems to say: ‘I know the worst that can be said on this subject, and I am giving fair warning. Read at your own risk’” (*PI*, 7). The warden tells Jake, the man in the poem, “‘You know we’re pulling for you’” (*CP*, 236) because the man is dying of stomach cancer. Jake has been in prison for nearly forty years, and he has forgotten why he slit his mother’s throat, which is what brought him “here to the pen, / Where cans, they have no doors” (p. 236).

The omniscient narrator tells us that “in the cheap motel” room down the road from the penitentiary, someone lies in bed sweating much like Jake, but for a different reason. The person in the motel room is waiting for the next execution to occur. This is the same motel where the undertaker passes through the door of a rented room to wait for a body after it has had “twenty-three hundred volts gone through” it, but “the customer is not John Barrymore” (*CP*, 239). As far as the penal system is concerned, the customer is just another number, a casualty of the hierarchical but efficacious system that keeps folks from committing crimes again. The narrator ponders: “But referring to Jake, how / Could they schedule a delivery, it might be next week, / Or might, if things broke right, be even tomorrow” (p. 239). The irony in the word “delivery” lies in the fact that Jake has been sitting in the can humped over on morphine where he has been trying to give birth to “The pumpkin” that “grows and grows” inside his gut, hoping

“That the truth will not be true” (p. 236). But the truth is Jake is going to die. Because he has cancer, it is hard to predict when. His death, unlike the death of those sent to the electric chair, is a slow one.

In “Night Is Personal,” section six of “Penological Study,” the narrator asserts that “Day is public. / Day / Is like a pair of pants you can buy anywhere, and do” (*CP*, 240). What Warren makes public is poetry’s capacity to “call us back to the world” (*PI*, 5) with all its imperfections. Jake’s nights are personal because they offer the only private moments he has in an institution where he is the subject of observation. For Jake “day is public,” not just because “in the pen, / The cans, they have no doors” but because his life is a matter of public record. Night is his only respite from the “Peeping Toms” (*CP*, 243) of day. The narrator gives us a hint of where Jake comes from, and as for where he is going, well, “nobody’s waiting to haul / Jake back to any cross-roads or creek” (p. 239). In the pen Jake has never been less alive and alone. He experiences the pain of isolation, and his only cure is the hope of being on “the threshold of the final narcosis” (p. 237). Warren records the “undocumentable inside” (*Talking*, 102) of his characters. Jake sits in the can remembering how he was when he first came to this place. He was desperate then, so why should it be any different now? Pain of memory is the burden Warren relies on.

In “The Event,” part two of “Internal Injuries,” a woman is struck down in a city street “by a 1957 yellow Cadillac driven by / A spic” (*CP*, 242). What this part of the poem sequence shares with part one is its facility for calling out to the reader “read at your own risk”: “*Nigger*: as if it were not / Enough to be old, and a woman”(p. 242).

The speaker is taking us to a place where the only freedom that exists is a corruption of freedom. Ruppensburg makes an astute observation in noting that the woman is “like Jake, facing death”; however, “the city where she lives [has] condemned her to a lonely, painful death” (*Imagination*, 108). She has no morphine to ease her pain. Her death, as Ruppensburg notes, “is not a death at all,” it is “an event” (p. 108).

In section five, “The Jet Must Be Hunting for Something,” the speaker contemplates the street-scene before him; he watches and waits trying not to surrender to the gravitational pull of the scene: “One cop holds the spic delicately between thumb and forefinger. / It is as though he did not want to get a glove dirty” (*CP*, 244). It is difficult not to get caught up in the momentum. The entire city is captured in a seamless gaze: “three construction workers are looking at you like a technical / Problem. I look at them. One looks at his watch” (p. 245). The speaker, in an effort to expiate himself, engages in an *internal* dialogue with the wounded Black woman lying in the street:

Just now, when I looked at you, I had the distinct impression that you
 were staring me straight in the eye, and
 Who wants to be a piece of paper filed for eternity on the sharp point
 of a filing spindle? (p. 245)

Everyone is “looking,” but no one is doing anything about the woman struck down in the street. The only reason she receives any attention is because she has put a halt to progress. It is more urgent to catch “the spic” who “tried to run away” (p. 244), because the social order has already relegated the woman lying in the street to a statistic like Jake in the penitentiary. She has been cataloged and “filed for eternity on the sharp point of a

filing spindle” (p. 245). Whereas “the spic” who is being held “delicately between thumb and forefinger” (p. 244) poses another problem: he “tried to run away” (p. 244).

Warren’s “raw edge of experience” (*CP*, 245) in “The Jet Must Be Hunting Something,” harks back to his ruminations in “Knowledge and the Image of Man,” where he contends that knowledge is “drawn from the actual world and charged with all the urgencies of actuality, urgencies not to be denied but transmuted” (p. 245), and one might add inscribed in the body of the world’s poetry. The speaker exclaims, “Oh, reality! / I do not know what the jet is hunting for. It must be hunting for something” (p. 245). The *something* that the jet is hunting for does not exist on the concrete below, because as the speaker of “Be Something Else” in section six tells us, “we / Know that the absolute is / Delusion, and that Truth lives / Only in relation – oh!” (p. 245-46). Truth exists in relation to *something else*. Truth exists in the subtle tension between disclosing and concealing. The something else turns out to be LOVE: “We cannot love others unless / We learn how to love / Ourselves properly” (p. 246). The jet is prowling, says the speaker. The jet is looking for another address, as the passenger of the car is doing in the final section of the poem’s sequence, “Driver, Driver.” Victor Strandburg believes the passenger’s “first panicked act is to beg the woman to ‘Be Something Else’” (*Vision*, 103). On the other hand, the passenger never takes any physical action. His only act is an *internal* dialogue with the woman.

The passenger insists that the driver ““hurry now”” (*CP*, 246). He wants to check-out from society like the jet up above. He tells the driver that he ““must change the address”” he is going to because he realizes “a place where nothing is the same” (p.

246) would likely be better than the “Tat-tat-tat” of the “Jack-hammers” pounding out a “code, like Truth or a migraine” (p. 247). The jack-hammers are signaling to him in *code*; what they are sending out is either a rescue signal or a warning. That Warren uses the word “Truth” in conjunction with the condition of having a “migraine” is indicative of the direction progress – that is, technology – is pointed: the “Tat-tat-tat” of the “Jack-hammers” is the mantra of the day. It is the physical equivalent of an *internal* problem, as the title “Internal Injuries” implies (p. 247).

The passenger senses that the “Truth” will set him free, but first it will give him a “migraine” (*CP*, 247). He “must know ... must know, / ... / the secret” (p. 247) to the code. If the jack-hammer men know how to work the tools of technology, then they must know the “secret” to “what flesh is” (p. 247). The operators of the engine of American ingenuity are clueless because, as Warren states in another context, “machines disintegrate individuals, so you have no individual sense of responsibility and no awareness that the individual has a past and a place” (*Talking*, 20-21). Though the question of “what flesh is” is never answered in “Driver, Driver,” the internal imagery of the apocalypse to come is present in the “chyme and chyle” and “Time and bile” (*CP*, 246-47) of the passenger whose innards are churning from the corruption of consciousness he observes through the window pane of the car where he sits. Strandburg, drawing upon Warren’s “Knowledge and the Image of Man,” states that “there is no disgorging of the poisonous fruit of knowledge; once it is eaten, the Fall is irreversible” (*Vision*, 104). Strandburg believes it is “too late” (p. 104) for the passenger to change the address to where he is going because he has already been seen peering at

the woman's pain. However, the concept of gazing, with the hope of not being recognized in "Driver, Driver," is an echo from *Flood*. Warren's passenger shares with Brad and Jingle Bells from *Flood* a compulsion to gaze through the transparent barrier of a car's *windshield*. One might recall how Jingle Bells cleaned Brad's windshield with a blank gaze, as if the windshield could protect him from being recognized.

Warren echoes "Internal Injuries" in *A Plea in Mitigation*, when he states "that the malaise arises because we do not know the nature of our own experience ... For reader and writer alike, the need for the revolution is a need to discover identity" (*PM*, 2). In "Internal Injuries," Warren takes it to the street. The revolution will not be televised. Warren's poetry and prose and the world they mirror are like Jack Burden and Tiny Duffy in *All the King's Men*, insofar as they are "twins bound together ... by the common stitch of flesh and gristle and the seepage of blood" (*AKM*, 417). One cannot come into being without the other.

By the time Warren had written *Flood* and "Internal Injuries," the inequities of the world he had been exposed to in the 1960s and earlier had become committed to memory and – as he once stated in another context – were "ready to be absorbed freely into the act of imagination."¹⁸ The alternating current between Brad's epiphany in *Flood* – "he, being a man, had lived ... in the grinning calculus of the done and the undone" (*Flood*, 439) – and the jet's prowling the "distance like the raw edge of experience" in "Internal Injuries" (*CP*, 246), has been retained in the author's mind's eye. In speaking

¹⁸ Warren, "All the King's Men: The Matrix of Experience," 75-81, 80. Hereafter cited in the text as "Matrix."

of poetry Warren once stated, “experience fulfilled and redeemed in knowledge ... may involve not only love for the world, but also fear and disgust. The form is known, by creator and appreciator, only by experiencing it, by submitting to its characteristic rhythm” (“Knowledge,” 245-46). As we have seen in *Flood* and “Internal Injuries,” Warren has given in to the “characteristic rhythm” he speaks of, either from a creative perspective or from a deeply personal and experiential perspective.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION: A NON-OBJECTIVE POSTSCRIPT

Fiddler came from a movie columnist. I just happened to see the name on the column he had written. I said that's a good one. Put it down as Fiddler and Fiddlersburg.

Robert Penn Warren, *Talking*

In a 1969 interview with Richard Sale, Robert Penn Warren spoke of “a ninety-second glimpse” he had of a house in southwest Tennessee in 1931 that was a “germ of the Fiddler house” and Fiddlersburg in his novel *Flood* (*Talking*, 112). However, he did not complete the novel until 1963. During the period between the 1930s and 1960s, Warren collected various “germ scenes” as he called them (p. 118) that lent themselves to the writing of *Flood*. Moreover, there are recurring images and characters from *Flood* in “Internal Injuries” which tend to suggest a preoccupation on Warren’s part with particular places and events.

Two of the more obvious parallels, in both the novel and the poem, are the penitentiary and the old man dying of gut cancer. However, Warren’s treatment of them is different in each. In *Flood*, Warren uses the penitentiary as a foil. It stands as a backdrop to Calvin’s and Brad’s recognition of who they are and where they are, but in “Internal Injuries” Warren gives a sketch of the inside of the penitentiary. In the novel, the cancer patient’s name is never revealed, whereas in the poem sequence Warren gives him a name and a history.

What converges in *Flood* and “Internal Injuries” is Warren’s acute sense of awareness, not just of others, but also of who *he* is and where *he* comes from. The old

man dying of gut cancer in both works might very well have been Warren reaching back into his past when his mother died of gallbladder disease in 1931, the same year he passed an old house on a hill in Tennessee, which was a germ for Fiddlersburg in *Flood*.¹⁹ His mother had been suffering from ill health for an extended period of time; however, it was not until September 1931, when his father summoned him home from teaching at Vanderbilt that he came to know how severe her condition was.

Warren would later say in an interview that not until after his mother's death did he come to know his father well: "After my mother died, then he and I traveled a great deal together and got very intimate in that last phase of his life – about 1931 until his death in '56" (*Talking*, 250). Warren would return to his hometown of Guthrie, Kentucky, to visit his father; however, he never "understood the isolation [his father] imposed on himself" (p. 251). Similarly, Calvin Fiddler, in *Flood*, imposed an isolation on himself in that he would not receive any visitors at the penitentiary for twenty years, except *his* mother.

For Warren, the process of writing was tied to life, as he explained to Sale: "the poems were more directly tied to a realistic base of fact. They're more tied up with an event, an anecdote, an observation ... They were closer to me, closer to my observed and felt life" (*Talking*, 130). In a letter dated 27 May 1963, before the publication of *Flood*, Warren wrote to his friend Lon Cheney to inquire about the penal system in Tennessee. At that time Cheney worked for *The Tennessean* newspaper, which covered executions in Tennessee. He told Cheney that he needed "to catch up a few loose ends on his

¹⁹ Blotner, *Robert Penn Warren: A Biography*, 120-122. Hereafter cited in the text as Blotner.

novel;” therefore, he was writing to him “for answers to a few questions.”²⁰ Warren clearly let Cheney know that his “penitentiary is a purely fictional one in West Tennessee” but that he would “like to get the obvious things right.” He asked Cheney, “Who throws the switch in an electrocution in Tennessee? (In Kentucky the Deputy Warden does it as part of his routine duty, but gets a fee for each guy sent thus on his way.) What about Tennessee?” Mr. Budd, the Deputy Warden in *Flood*, told Brad and Calvin that he “was the officer of discipline and welfare” (*Flood*, 153) and that he was the man who “throws the switch” for “twenty-five bucks a throw” (p. 162). Warren would later give a nod to Cheney in 1968, when he dedicated the poem sequence “Internal Injuries” to him and his wife Frances (*CP*, 236).

Shortly before the publication of “Internal Injuries” in 1968, in a letter to Allen Tate, a fellow Fugitive member who attended Vanderbilt with him, Warren sent a draft of his poem. In the letter, dated 30 July 1967, three years after the publication of *Flood*, Warren revealed:

Some years ago when I was hanging around the Eddyville penitentiary, I saw, in the infirmary, the old coot on the can. He was dying of gut cancer, I was told, but had the half-delusion that if he could crap it out he would be cured. So he spent all the time possible there, groggy with morphine. The dialogue between him and the Warden is reported in the poem. I have been fiddling with it a long time.²¹

²⁰ Robert Penn Warren to Lon Cheney, 27 May 1963, Letters from Robert Penn Warren, Brainard Cheney Collection, The Jean and Alexander Heard Library, Special Collections, Vanderbilt University.

²¹ Robert Penn Warren to Allen Tate, 30 July 1967, Correspondence with Robert Penn Warren, Allen Tate Papers, Manuscript Division, Princeton University Library.

It seems Warren's poem is multi-purpose in that it simultaneously relieves him of his voyeurism that day at the Eddyville penitentiary and implements his desire to shake his audience out of its complacency. In the process, he makes what is already disturbing a little more disturbing. As he states in the poem, there are no doors in the can. The Eddyville penitentiary, which is actually the Kentucky State penitentiary, is endearingly called the Castle on the Cumberland. It sits at the farthest western corner of Kentucky where the Cumberland River and Lake Barkley converge. It has been the subject of much controversy over the years, ranging from the prison's conditions to its executions (the last occurring in 1962). Because the prison is located approximately an hour's drive northwest of Warren's hometown of Guthrie, Kentucky, it is likely he followed the drama surrounding the prison.

Warren had once taught at Vanderbilt University in Tennessee. Why did he use the Kentucky State Penitentiary for his research? He could have easily used the Tennessee penitentiary where his close friend Lon Cheney did his reporting. It is my sense that he could gain access to the Kentucky prison more easily. In an attempt to find out more about why Warren visited this particular penitentiary and what he was doing in the infirmary, I contacted Circuit Court Judge Bill Cunningham, who presides over Lyon County where the penitentiary is located. Judge Cunningham is the author of *Castle: The Story of a Kentucky Prison* (1995). He was born across the street from the Kentucky State Penitentiary, in Eddyville. His cousin was shot to death in the 1923 prison siege led by the infamous Tex Walters.

When I phoned Judge Cunningham's office to ask if he was available to meet

with me during my visit to Kentucky, much to my delight I found he was a great Warren fan. On my arrival to Eddyville, his assistant, Ms. Betty Austin, gave me directions to the courthouse in Smithland (a town just north of Eddyville) where I met with the judge. Once there, Judge Cunningham gave me a tour of the town. We drove up to Rocky Hill, the setting of Warren's long poem *Brother to Dragons* (1953). Rocky Hill was the home of Lucy Jefferson Lewis, Thomas Jefferson's sister, and her sons, who are the subject of *Brother to Dragons*. Judge Cunningham is disappointed that many of the old buildings in Smithland have been torn down – he refers to the loss of history and our failing sense of the past as the “neutering of America.” He has tried to retain as much of the old courthouse as possible. The old bell in the center of the original courtroom is still fully functional – upon entering, the rope hangs from the bell right up the center of the courtroom. The murals of some of the original settlers still grace the walls.

The next day, Ms. Austin made arrangements for me to meet with Warden Haeberlin at the prison to discuss any record of Warren ever visiting the prison. I was also given a tour of the facilities. Yes, “in the pen, the cans, they have no doors,” as Warren tells us in “Keep That Morphine Moving, Cap.” The Warden was curious about why I came to the prison. He told me that almost all of the cellblocks and the old infirmary have been remodeled. As for any record of Warren ever visiting the penitentiary, he told me, in *those* days, no one kept any records. He said he had to rush off; however, he left me in the company of his Senior Captain, Harry Whisman, who gave me a tour of the only remaining original cellblocks, as well as a tour of the infirmary. This was reminiscent, to me, of the episode in *Flood* when the Warden left

for other business thus turning Brad and Yasha over to the Deputy Warden, Mr. Budd, for a tour of the penitentiary.

As Captain Whisman and I passed through cellblock number ten (on our right), I saw the cells' "gray cement," and "the cans, they [had] no doors" (*CP*, 236). We continued to our left and out a door leading to the yard, where, in the distance, I saw the infirmary. Interestingly, on our walk across the yard, we passed rows of canna bushes that led us down to the infirmary. I felt like Bradwell Tolliver, when he visited Calvin Fiddler in the infirmary, for a moment:

So now, propped on his stick, by the canna bed – the canna leaves still pale, slick as cellophane, and just coming to shape, no buds yet – with the April sun prickling his shoulders under the cloth, Bradwell Tolliver swung his gaze over the big courtyard, over the brick walls, the squat corner towers, the sky itself; and wondered why the hell he had, in fact, come. (*Flood*, 404)

I, in fact, came to understand why Warren came to the prison. The canna bushes, the big courtyard, the brick walls; squat corner towers survived, though the old geezer dying of gut cancer had long ago passed. This is no sylvan scene. It *is* the penitentiary. Here, we are made to feel that April *is* the cruelest month. I came here to question, as T. S. Eliot once did in *The Waste Land*, "What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow out of this stony rubbish?"²²

In his interview with Sale, Warren stated that the three things that impelled him to write *Flood* were the image of the old house in Tennessee (presumably Grant's

²² Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 27-62, 29.

headquarters during the Battle of Shiloh), his having “seen one or two flooded-out places in the TVA system in Tennessee,” and “what happens to human relations in that context” (*Talking*, 112). The compelling part of what Warren tells Sale is his mentioning having seen places that were flooded by the Tennessee Valley Authority. The town of Eddyville was flooded in 1966; however, word of the impending flood began to circulate as far back as the 1940s. Today, there is “old” Eddyville, where the penitentiary is, and “new” Eddyville, the town built after the flood. The old Eddyville cemetery is partially under water. In *Flood*, Brad began his journey home with the hope of exhuming Izzie Goldfarb’s grave and moving it to higher ground before the flood came. It would have been hard for Warren to visit the penitentiary without hearing about the impending flood.

Warren had stated that he and his father traveled together between 1931 and 1956. It is my sense that in preparing for *Bother to Dragons*, Warren and his father passed through old Eddyville on their way to Smithland. In an interview with Floyd C. Watkins in 1979, Warren stated that he and his father visited Smithland two or three times, in preparation for the poem. He stated that the reason his father was included in the trip and ultimately the poem was because “he had some relation in his boyhood with that world, some tie to that world” (*Talking*, 348). As Warren stated to Sale in their interview in 1969, “poems were ... directly tied to a realistic base of fact” (p. 130). Passing through old Eddyville on his way to Smithland and seeing the graveyard on the hill near the Castle on the Cumberland, as well as hearing about the impending flood, were among the germ experiences Warren drew upon in preparation for writing *Flood*. I

feel certain Warren returned to the Kentucky State Penitentiary, rather than, say, the one in Tennessee where Cheney covered executions, because it stirred in him a sense of apprehension and indignation about what the future held.

Another correlation between Warren's poetry and his life can be seen in the Black woman's dilemma in "Internal Injuries." She has been struck down in a city street where she is seen as a "technical problem" (*CP*, 245). Her daughter is "off in / Detroit" (p. 242) and has not even written to her in three years; it is as if the daughter has forgotten the mother's name. This is an echo of something Warren stated to Louis D. Rubin in 1977: "Back in the 1960s I was traveling a great deal in the South, more than in the North," states Warren (*Talking*, 276). " 'More than one Negro,' " as Warren remarks, " 'told [him] that there's a personal relationship here [in the South], bad or good ... If a sheriff shoots you in Alabama, he probably knows your name. If a cop brains you in Detroit, he doesn't know your name. That makes a big difference' " (p. 276).

In his essay "Pure and Impure Poetry," irony is one of the elements Warren suggests is a part of *impure poetry*. The South is represented with a subtle cynicism in both *Flood* and "Internal Injuries." In *Flood*, Yasha Jones, the film producer, tells Maggie Tolliver Fiddler that he is a Georgian. Maggie exclaims, as if she feels a sudden twinge of kinship, 'Georgian!' However, Yasha explains, " 'Not that kind, I regret, ... and laughed. Georgia in Russia. Like Joseph Stalin' " (*Flood*, 103). It is ironic, because Warren uses Georgia as a canvas – in another context – in "Internal Injuries." We are told that when the Black woman, who was struck down in the street by a yellow

Cadillac, was “a child in Georgia” she had “a lard-can of zinnias bloomed by the little cabin door” (*CP*, 245). The zinnias are significant in that the elder Warren planted a bed of zinnias so that he could have fresh flowers to place on his wife’s grave each Sunday (Blotner, 122). Perhaps they remind Warren of his mother. The Black woman may stir memories of Seeley who worked for the Warrens, the same woman Warren wrote about in his poem “Tale of Time.” Warren’s poetry and prose form a matrix of experience, from images of the corruption of freedom in the fast-paced city to the rapidly receding landscape of the old South.

In *Flood*, Warren’s ambivalence toward technology is portrayed in various ways. There is the Seven Dwarfs Motel with its electric beds. Brad drives around in a Jaguar XK-150 convertible. Brad’s extravagant – and what some might view as egotistical – toy is juxtaposed with Jingle Bells’ Lambretta motorcycle, which would have been considered high-tech for the day. The penitentiary has been updated, but the town is about to become extinct. This is an image I saw first-hand. When I visited the penitentiary, it was remodeled. Ironically, however, the strip-center and the outlet stores that had been built in the 1960s on the road leading up to old Eddyville and the penitentiary – in an effort to relocate and replicate the little township further south – were empty. The only motels that exist are down the hill near the interstate highway. None of them are named the Seven Dwarfs.

In “Internal Injuries,” Jake sits in an institution waiting to die and no one really cares, except the narrator/reporter who, even as he waits for the story of the next execution to break (another nod in Cheney’s direction), cannot block the thought of what

it might be like if Jake were to be released out into the world where “nobody is waiting to haul / Jake back to any cross-roads or creek” (*CP*, 239).

I walked to the edge of the road near the penitentiary and I saw in the river, as the water lapped against the cement, the remains of old Eddyville. I climbed the hill behind the penitentiary and discovered gravesites in the over-growth of weeds. Standing at the river’s edge, as Brad did at the close of *Flood*, I saw that the penitentiary looked like a huge castle, like something one might see off the coast of Italy, a place Warren knew well.

One’s proper relationship to a world, as Warren once remarked, is the theme of *Flood*. *I’m Telling You Now* proved to be cathartic for Brad. When Yasha and Brad meet at the airport in the beginning of the novel, Yasha states what Warren would articulate in *Democracy and Poetry*; he tells Brad “ ‘books ... [are a] most useful therapy’ ” (*Flood*, 21). In true Warren style, Brad is bewildered by Yasha’s statement; he cannot be certain “whether [Yasha] was referring to the human condition or a personal kink” (p. 21). Brad’s response to Yasha is stellar: “ ‘*baggage is this way*’ ” (p. 21; emphasis mine). Little did Brad know, the *baggage* was his own.

Warren once stated that “criticism was a dangerous trade,” but in his scheme of things “so [was] fiction writing” (*Talking*, 113). It is dangerous for the critic insofar as he – if he is true to his craft – becomes the bearer of sometimes good and sometimes bad news. This had been Warren’s lament as far back as 1943 with the publication of “Pure and Impure Poetry,” wherein he stated that “remaining faithful to the complexities of the problems” a given age is dealing with and “refus[ing] to take the easy statement as

solution” (*PI*, 28) are the only viable options for defining one’s context. Whatever the future holds will be inscribed in the body of the work any given generation produces. In Warren’s words: “You are what you are. I was born and grew up in Kentucky, and I think your early images survive. Images mean a lot of things besides pictures” (*Talking* 237). *Flood* and “Internal Injuries” reflect that fact. For Warren, *Flood* and “Internal Injuries” are, to appropriate Calvin Fiddler’s phrase, “ ‘a picnic on the dark side of the moon.’ ”

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