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MAN'S SEARCH FOR SELF-KNOWLEDGE

in the novels of

ROBERT PENN WARREN

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by
Marion F. Leveland
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This study has analyzed the plots and characters in the novels of Robert Penn Warren in relation to a unified and basic theme and has discussed the various techniques used by Warren to support his ideas. The novels are in chronological order: Night Rider, At Heaven's Gate, All the King's Men, World Enough and Time, Band of Angels, The Cave, Wilderness, and Flood. In each, Warren has taken easily documented episodes of political and economic conflict, and his characters succeed or fail, depending on how each reacts to or copes with this conflict.

Man's search for self-knowledge is the basic theme which Robert Penn Warren has chosen to develop in each of the novels he has written in the past thirty years. Like many earlier authors, poets, and novelists, Warren is concerned with understanding man as an individual American who must, somehow, fit into his very complex American society.

It becomes apparent as the study progresses that Warren is a writer of intense convictions with the talent to state and support his beliefs clearly and effectively. The reader is aware that, from Warren's point of view, man must live in an imperfect world by whatever principles he can find to believe in. To Warren, man must return to the law and order of an established society to find these principles, and man must combine the worlds of ideas and action in order to formulate his basic principles.

The study concludes that Warren's philosophy and his literary style have produced varying critical opinions, but despite

these critical reactions, the novels indicate that Warren has made a commitment as a Southern conservatist and in each of his writings has provided abundant support for his ideas. However, it also appears that Warren does not limit himself to the Southern point of view only, but has expanded his original position and enlarged upon his earlier Agrarian beliefs.

Warren is concerned with the society of the world as opposed to the society of self; and he believes that man must leave the world of ideas and enter into the world of action, imperfect though it may be, in order to find his identity as a person.

This study concludes, also, that Robert Penn Warren believes that man can succeed only when he can discover a self-identity, a self-knowledge. The Warren character who achieves even partial success has turned back into his past and his traditions, and found in these, the basic law and order on which he can build a new life. The character who fails in this search is doomed.