CHAPTER V

IDEA AND IMAGE IN WORLD ENOUGH AND TIME
Most novels of Warren are epigraphed with citations from texts which are significant by themselves. Whether these epigraphs suggest the primary theme of the novels or not is a question the reader has to decide. Talking about the epigraph of *World Enough and Time*, Warren tells Ruth Fisher:

That's a more elaborate case of trying to let the epigraph interpret the book. The hero in *World Enough and Time* is a young man trying to create a world for himself, not belonging to this world. He wants to find a cause that will justify a violent and heroic act, as it were. He wants to create a romance for himself to be in. (The book is, in a way, about the pathology of romanticism)

And Spenser talks about antique times in this quotation. Also, this reference is to Book Five, of Artegall and justice, the Knight of
Justice. And this young man — of an antique time — is trying to perform justice. He is being the just avenger. So this is a little commentary on the theme of the book.  

In the above citation the most significant words are "world", "romance," "justice," and "pathology". Except the word "pathology", the other three words, "world," "justice", and "romance" recur often in *World Enough and Time*. To notice the significant fusion and bring to the fore the undercutting irony suggested by the pathology of romanticism, a few observations on the narrative strategy Warren employs in the novel are necessary.

In 1944 Katherine Anno Porter placed in Warren's hands the documents connected with the famous Beauchamp Sharp case of the early 19th century. The documents constitute Jeroboam Beauchamp's Confession and Warren's careful study of the Confession made him think of the political struggle of the time as a kind of mirror he could hold up to the personal story. Whether Warren has succeeded

in making the political struggle reflect the human intricacies of the personal story depends on the perspective a reader can use in analysing the novel. The narrator while narrating the story of Jeremiah Beaumont lets the character himself talk so that the narrator's point of view and characters' confessional statements fuse to create a text in which the tone is not always consistent. Perhaps it is the tonal inconsistency that leads to the idea that there is something pathological about the hero's romantic agony. Moreover, the series of betrayals we have in the novel suggest that the kernel idea that runs through Warren's fiction, including the novel under consideration, is put in the mouth of Willie Stark, who says:

Yeah, I'm Governor. Jack, and the trouble with Governors is they think they got to keep their dignity. But listen here, there ain't anything worth doing a man can do and keep his dignity. Can you figure out a single thing you really please — God like to do you can do and keep your dignity? the human frame just ain't built that way.³

3. Warren, All the King's Men, p. 43.
Jeremiah Beaumont's expiation which is placed at the end of the novel amply demonstrates the truth of Willie's observation. He mentions three errors which devastated his prospects of achieving an integrated selfhood. The first is that he tried to justify himself not by the world which he denied but by the idea. As he puts it, "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." He remembers the views of John Locke on human understanding and feels that a piece of gold (the idea) would lose its colour, weight and malleableness and loses worth by being placed "in the cold and silent dark beyond the stars" (505). The second error which follows the first consists in man's using "the means of the natural world, and its dark ways, to gain that end he names holy by the idea" (505). The result is that "Skrogg for his idea of justice had, in the end, sent Fort to my knife." The third error is a consequence of the first two. It is "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" (506). In the process of analysing his

own errors', Jeremiah Beaumont realizes that "There must be a way whereby the word' becomes flesh. There must be a way whereby the flesh becomes word. Whereby loneliness becomes communion without contamination. Whereby contamination becomes purity without exile. There must be a way, but I may not have it now. 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! But at least I know now that life tells no lies in the end, for all the lies, single and particular will at least speak together in a great chorus of truth in many voices" (506). The concluding part of the preceding citation unmistakably suggests that all lies ultimately transform themselves into truth and this is the terrible logic of life. This is the knowledge that Willie Stark, in spite of his political cynicism, realizes in the end. This sober insight into the actualities of life appears less glamorous than his attempts to validate his idea by unlawful means. The meticulous details and the profusion of dark images in the novel make it appear that it is an indirect comment on the pathology of romanticism.

Jeremiah, the only son of Jasper Beaumont and Hettie Marcher, feels even at an early age that "life was
empty and he would live for nothing" (9). His shyness keeps him aloof and he cultivates his imagination by reading books like *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *Franklin's Autobiography* for its lessons on how a man might master and use the world, and *Love's Surveying* which might lead to wealth or greatness. Perhaps, these books intensify his romantic bent of mind, wilful disregard of realities, his longing to live in a world of dream. What he learns from books is reinforced by his own discovery of the wide world "... and how men moved across it for a time and grew old and died and how the ball of the earth revolved on its appointed course and tilted in the awful emptiness of sky, season after season, forever .... the picture of a young woman tied cruelly to a post so that the bonds seemed to crush her sweet flesh and her face lifted up while the flames rose about her" (11), which he saw in the incomplete book of the Martyrs remains ever fresh in his mind. At times he feels like seizing "... her from the flame and escape with her from all the people who crowded about for her death" (11). A victim of strange fancies, "Jeremiah would lie awake and watch the stars and 'wickedly' wish he had no family to go back to and that he could stay forever in the forest, "shedding blood and feasting on the wild flesh" (16). When Hettie Marcher sends her son to Runnymede, her father's plantation, with the hope that he would be his grand-
father's heir and bring her "wealth and pride", Jeremiah withstands the pressure of his wealthy grandfather and all the pleasures of the world. His grandfather's proposal to adopt him and make him the owner of his estate do not tempt Jeremiah. When Marcher curses his father, he tells him that he "would leave his house and be happy to go where men were honest to make their living, bankrupt or no, and where old men were not proud to wickedness and did not waste their lands and themselves to lie with a bottle or black wenches" (24). Jeremiah's pride makes him quit Runnymede and embrace the dreariness of the cabin and scrub farm. His father's death in the bitterness of worldly failure and sick hope and his grandfather's bitter life in the midst of wealth make him renounce the values of the material world. "It came to me," says Jeremiah, "that I would not wish to live and die thus, and that there must be another way to live and die" (25). Intending to live outside the world, he searches for his hope in secular books, "in the patterns of famous men, the passions of poems, and the severe thoughts of philosophy" (26). Exposed to desperate influences quite early in life, he grows sceptical. His trials to seek shelter in religion result in disillusionment as he finds it perverted to the satisfaction of physical desires. Under the influence of Corinthian McClardy, an extreme representative of revivalist
religion, he finds himself in the embrace of a "snaggle-toothed hag" and runs away" with the horror of contamination and betrayal" (34). He comes home with "neither the wealth of the world nor the riches not of this world ... and to the world as it was, with which, if he was to live, he would have to make terms" (35). Considering Jeremiah to be a boy of unusual "intelligence and integrity" (40) Colonel Cassius Fort, a leading lawyer and politician, invites him to his law office at Bowling Green, to study law. Jeremiah moves into the visible world after his mother's death. Wilkie Barron, a student of law, a man of another order, who has 'total confidence in the world"(43), enters the otherwise peaceful life of Jeremiah. Narrating the miserable story of Rachel Jordan, Wilkie emphasizes that she is the girl for Jeremiah.

Rachel's tale of "selfless passion, innocent trust and dark betrayal" (60) and wilkie's provoking words urging Jeremiah to feel honorable rage intensify his romanic predilection and he decides to defend her honor. The news that his mentor and guide, Fort, seduced her shatters his little belief in the goodness of the world and he wonders, "Ah, where was the greatness of life? Was it only a dream? Could a man not come to some moment when, all dross and
meanness of life consumed, he could live in the pure idea? If only for a moment?" (62) Jeremiah's irrepressible fancy fuses Rachel with "... the young female bound to the stake ... in the picture in the old book of the Martyrs" (78). Even before Jeremiah wins Rachel to his side, Wilkie tries to induct him into politics of Kentucky and puts him on the path of violence with his statement that "what makes a man most worthy in a woman's eyes" is "a stout heart and nerves of steel and daring deeds (85). Pleased with Jeremiah's act of courage, Wilkie praises him before Madison and Fort, the pillars of Relief party. The very name of Fort triggers Jeremiah's hatred, and Wilkie tries to cool him down saying, "... what you have in mind is another matter. It is a matter of grave import but it is personal. If I deal with Fort now it is for the goodness of a cause in which he is strong. We must put aside personal feelings and criticism for the good of the state and for justice." Though he finds some justice in Wilkie's words, Jeremiah feels" ... that each man must live the justice that is deepest in himself. If he can find it" (106). During his stay at Rachel's place, at times Jeremiah becomes a victim of rage and helplessness. His failure to act leads him to introspection. He sees "the paradox and doubleness of life" (114) and says:
I would have held as enemy and struck down the man who was a betrayer and whose shadow seemed to perform the very act before my jealous and stricken eyes. But was he my enemy? For the very act that made him my enemy had brought me to that room and into the presence of her whom I know as all my good. For had Rachel Jordan not been betrayed I had never known her. Should I not kiss his hand in gratitude? I stood puzzling the conceit, but suddenly I saw that though it held a truth, the truth itself was but another trap to snare my foot and hold me back from the way I was set upon (114).

The paradox and doubleness of life which he perceives, runs throughout the discourse in terms of "truth", "lie," "trap", "world", "justice" and "cause." Imagining Rachel to be "... the soul of truth, but truth caught in the pain of the world to feel forced to lie and in the lie to compound the pain" (115), he decides to force the truth out of her. Desperately she swears that, "she would fling herself into the river rather than live longer in a world where all was against her..." (118) and orders him to quit the place. When the warmth of his love begins to melt her frozen heart and silent suffering, she narrates her story. Without attributing
villainy to Fort, she firmly says" ... he was no villain... it was just something that happened. To him. To me. Something that happened to me. It was nobody's fault" (122).

Prejudiced by Wilkie's words, Jeremiah sees Fort as a villain, in spite of Rachel's confession. When she rejects his proposal indicating that she would have accepted his love had he come when she was young and loved the world and before they ruined her and her world, he declares, "one world is ruined ... but we will make another" (124). He promises to bring her peace by destroying her past.

Rachel's complex and nervous outburst "Kill Fort," immobilizes his being. According to the narrator "astonishment" is the word Jeremiah uses. Believing that all men of honour would favour his enterprise as no man could "... clasp a wife to his bosom when one who had wronged her still breathed the same air" (126), he sets out to take revenge on Fort. Wilkie tries to dissuade Jeremiah saying that Fort "... was carrying the fight for the good of the State and for the salvation and very livelihood of thousands" (130), but fails in his attempt.

While reading the conclusion to the third chapter of the novel, I am reminded of a similar situation in Shakespeare's
Much Ado About Nothing. When Claudio dishonours Hero and refuses to marry her, there ensues the following dialogue between Beatrice and Benedick.

Bene: Come, bid me do anything for thee.

Beat: Kill Claudio

Bene: Ha! not for the wide world.5

Benedick's initial response to Beatrice's firm demand exemplifies the character's steadiness and dispassionate view of honour, justice, and morality, but he ultimately agrees to challenge Claudio. When we think of the situation in the novel under consideration, we are not impressed by the contrast between Jeremiah Beaumont and Benedick but by the distorted romantic vocabulary of Jeremiah. The verb 'struck' and the images, "the clap of thunder," "the flash of lightning," "the bolt that rips the summer tree" phrases like 'blood freezes on the stroke," 'joy and terror fused in a recognition of magnificance" (125) illustrate the point. Although the narrator's tone is firm and tries to communicate the urgency of the crisis, the excerpt from the original document destabilizes it. Synchronizing with his

obsession is Jeremiah's eagerness to don the robes of Artegall, Spenser's Knight of Justice.

The sudden death of Rachel's mother leads to their unconditional marriage and domestic and conjugal felicity. Jeremiah's avowed purpose seems to lose its urgency in the wake of the material prosperity and marital happiness. But Jeremiah gives undue importance to what people think of him, though he professes himself to be a creature outside the world. He feels like strangling the person who says he "married a castoff trollop because she was rich" (180). He entertains the doubt that Rachel may share the view of the world that he had come to her for her lands. He decides to become wealthy to show his manhood in the world "in the way the world would understand, for a man must find a way to be a man" (182). Rachel's pregnancy makes him think in a practical way and he works hard to make his progeny rich and great. The precarious stability of the family is disturbed by the political events. The politically motivated pamphlet accusing Fort of heartlessness and betrayal and publicizing the past of Rachel, the victim of his treachery, and the handbill of Fort denying the charge levelled against him and accusing Rachel of miscegenation result in the miscarriage of Rachel. Unable to bear the agony of having lost the child for the
second time, Rachel accuses Jeremiah for not avenging Fort and threatens to kill him with her own hands. This sets Jeremiah to serious thinking and he feels:

The world had taken the mission away. The world had absorbed it, like a cup of fresh water spilled on the parched ground of August.

But what was the world? It was nothing. But the very nothingness was what absorbed and drew you in. And the nothingness had many faces, and many smiled. There were wealth and great place and ambition and lust of the flesh and ease. He had been saved from them, and had passed them by, as easily as he had repudiated the estate of old Marcher, the tasty person of Silly Sal at Bowling Green and her kind, the patronage of Colonel Fort at the law, or the comforts of the common life. But those things were not all the world.

There were more insidious traps, the satisfactions of work and the turn of the seasons to show the fruit of his labor, the vanity of self-justification in his attempt to become great and prove to all men that he did not live by his wife's lands, his gratitude to Fort for favour and kindness,
the labor for a general good and the justice of Relief, his joy in the love of Rachel, his hope for the future and the child. He saw them for what they were, traps, traps baited with tainted meat (227).

Even in this introspective passage the actualities of life and the visible world are labelled traps and it is in this context we notice that the visible world and the idea are different and the idea is more significant and authentic than the world. The narrator tells us:

He had lived so long with the idea that that alone had seemed real. The world had seemed nothing. And because the world had seemed nothing, he had lived in the way of the world, feeling safe because he held the idea, pure, complete, abstract, and selffulfilling. he had thought that he was redeemed by the idea, that sooner or later the idea would redeem his world.

But now he knew: the world must redeem the idea. He knew now that the idea must take on flesh and fact, not to redeem, but to be redeemed... So all would be easy at last. And in that thought he was at peace with the world. He was at peace, strangely, with Colonel Cassius Fort. He was
grateful to him, not with the old gratitude for favor and kindness which had pinched his heart, but with a new gratitude, more profound, like the gratitude of a good son to a father. He was grateful because Fort, with the last outrage, had showed him the truth (228).

Jeremiah plans the murder of Fort, executes it well and comes home. But he is suspected and taken back to Frankfort to face a trial. Fully convinced of Jeremiah's innocence, Madison and Hawgood, the famous lawyers from the two parties, come to his aid. Jeremiah executes everything so scrupulously that he is sure that the law cannot touch him. The trial gains political momentum and Jeremiah is proved guilty because of the suborned witnesses and the villian, Wilkie, who testifies to the motive of Jeremiah's personal revenge with the fear that his New Court party would be destroyed.

Jeremiah flees to the West with the help of Wilkie who delivers him and Rachel from jail "with a brilliant piece of improvisation, simple and daring" (450). Left with no option, Jeremiah and Rachel stay in the kingdom of Gran-Bez in wilderness. Sinking into the depths of human depravity, Jeremiah even thinks of getting rid of Rachel, who is no more
beautiful. The very thought fills him with anguish and he questions himself "Was it all for this, was it all for this" (479) that he sacrificed himself. The new place offers a kind of peace, a peace which he calls the "black inwardness and womb of the quagmire. It was a peace with no past and no future" (479). He succumbs to animal instincts, forgetting his noble mission, leaving the sickly Rachel slowly turning mad to vegetate. Drunkuinness and debauchery make him inhuman and Rachel's remonstrance fails to have any effect on him. When Jeremiah accuses her saying, "when I had done all for you," she retorts, "Not for me. For yourself. You came and you used me. You made me hate Fort and you used me. Oh, I didn't hate him, I loved him, and you used me. You used me to kill him (497-'98). After unravelling her heart, she kills herself asking forgiveness of Jeremiah. The death of Rachel opens his eyes and he knows what he would do. "He had known it without knowing it. It was a knowledge beneath knowledge, the "kind of knowledge that is identity" (502). He acknowledges his guilt having realized that Wilkie has manipulated him into Fort's murder that "crime for which I seek expiation is never lost. It is always there. It is unpardonable. It is the crime of self, the crime of life. The crime is I" (504-05). His desire to enter the human community remains unfulfilled as he is killed
on his way. Like most of Warren's ideamen, Jeremiah tries to show himself through some spectacular action. Being goaded by Wilkie Barron, he embraces the idea of justice and repudiates the world. He rushes to some action by the idea and under the grip of that idea he invites ruin on himself and involves others in the disaster.

World Enough and Time rests on an idea of perfection entangled in imperfection. The framework depends on the idea. Living in a world of dreams, Jeremiah refutes the world outside and his inner world is largely sustained by vanity. The idea seems to be real to him for a long time and the world seems nothing. Championing the cause of Rachel, a betrayed girl he has not seen, he lives in the pure idea for sometime, retiring from his legal career. His idea forces him to come back to the world he repudiated and he compels the world to redeem the idea. He successfully kills the seducer of Rachel, Cassius Fort, whom, he considers, a symbol of the world, but his project fails. Accepting Wilkie's help, he runs away from jail and is thrown into the wretched kingdom of Gran Bez. He shares the animalism of the people there, forgets humanity, and experiences some sort of peace. Rachel's suicide opens his eyes. With sufficient time and enough of world at his disposal, he realizes his
sin, longs for expiation, and hastens to become a part of the world and meets his death on his way back to humanity. As Warren in his essay on Conrad's *Nostromo* says, "man is precariously balanced in his humanity between the black inward abyss of himself and the black outward abyss of nature" and this precarious balance seems to be upset in the case of Jeremiah Beaumont, the protagonist of *World Enough and Time*, bringing his doom.

The novel under review appears more complex than it is largely because of what the title suggests and what the epigraph suggests. I have discussed the significance of the epigraph at the outset. After reading the novel, we may wonder how the epigraph is to be understood in terms of the title which is the very first line of Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress," a Carpe Diem poem. There is not a character in the novel who thrives on the proposition "Sieze the day." Wilkie Barron's young days to which Jeremiah was a witness comes very near to what the speaker says in "To His Coy Mistress." From this it follows that Warren would like the reader to see the novel morally from the perspective of Jeremiah and not from the perspective of a created character like Wilkie to realize that neither the pathology of romanticism nor the arguments of the speaker of "To His Coy Mistress" are adequate by themselves to provide a viable

world view. A celebration of the present in terms of the past is what is required. Most characters in the novel fail to realize this.