CHAPTER VI

MANTY'S DISCOURSE: A CRITIQUE OF BAND OF ANGELS
The Chief character of Band of Angels, Amantha Starr, Warren's first female protagonist, faces the problem of self identity quite early in her life. Well-loved, greatly indulged, and spoiled daughter of Aaren Pendleton Starr, a Kentucky planter, she finds her protective world crumbling with the sudden demise of her father. His unexpected death and the shocking revelation, at her father's raw tomb that she is a mulatto shatter her claims to identity. She indulges in willful self-deception and refuses to accept that she is the product of miscegenation and believes that something is wrong somewhere and it will be rectified soon.

Caught in a frightful situation, she fails to rise to the occasion. The unexpected turn in her life that makes her "a chattel, a non-person, the thing without soul" leaves her blind to the facts of life. In a blind fury, she hurls daggers at her dead father, saying, "he had always betrayed me, in

every act, from the act of my begetting to the act of his
death" (72), forgetting that he was "a most attentive parent"
(18). Perhaps her protected childhood and pampered girlhood
fail her to gather enough strength to accept and face and
truth.

Cast out of a white world, she finds the world
chaotic and too big for her and feels lost in it "as though the
bigness recedes forever, in all directions, like a desert of
sand." She longs to be "free from the lonely nothingness" (3)
of being only herself. Her feeling as though she is suspended
in the vacuum of no identity disturbs her and a sense of
nothingness and loneliness nags her.

Her cries of anguish, "Oh, who Am I? (3), "Why,
I'm Amantha Starr" (4) and "If I could only be free" (3),
reflect her bewildered state and desire to define herself.
The first two paragraphs outline the theme of the discourse.
The problem seems to be the identity of Amantha Starr in the
philosophical sense. It is in this context that the years of
Civil War are important. Amantha, who has black blood and a
white skin virtually struggles between what is black and what
is white not only in terms of colour but in terms of metaphor.
Amantha, daughter of a white master and a black slave, is kept in the dark about her mixed blood till her father's death. The sudden shocking proclamation saddens her. Not having courage to face adversity, Amantha succumbs to self-pity and strongly wishes that someone come to her aid and save her from the miserable plight. To herself, she is only "poor little Manty" (139). Once she becomes a slave, a part of her father's property, which is so small that it could not meet the demands of the creditors, she feels the need to define herself. The moment she realizes it, the struggle begins. In a way, she repudiates her father, the cause of her ruin. Perhaps, Amantha is too young and immature to find a solution to her problem. She places her destiny in the hands of men incapable of facing the challenge. They are the band of angels — Hamish Bond, Tobias Sears, and Rau-Ru — who fail to define her.

II

Alec Hinks, son of a much dissatisfied woman, walks out of home and unwittingly walks into the world of darkness as he could not bear the harangues of his nagging mother, who longs to define herself in terms of slave-holdings and aristocratic origins. Before his departure, he exposes her lies and declares that he will "wallow in niggers ... ass-deep
in niggers" (182) to her satisfaction. Ironically, it comes true as he plunders African villages for slave-booty, becomes a slave trader, and commits outrages against humanity. When he feels the pinch, he returns to society, assuming the name Hamish Bond.

Hamish buys Amantha at an auction impulsively in a mood of pity and altruism. Though he defends her honour, Amantha remains blind to his kindness and concern. She dreams of escaping into "a world of white faces" (109) and observes everything to run away when the time comes. Concentrating on the possibilities of flight, she does not notice that she is not treated as a slave. She stoops to the level of perfecting a particular smile, which, she believes, would work as "oil on the lock" (122). After her unsuccessful attempt to flee the place, she accuses Hamish of setting spies on her. Hamish, who never loves her but pities her as she is little and young, immediately declares, "you don't have to stay here if you don't want to. I am sending you away" (130). He means what he says, though it fails to convince Amantha.

Under unforeseen circumstances Hamish makes love to her and instead of hating him, she strangely finds some sort
of security and comfort in the company of that aging cotton planter. Unmindful of what happened, Hamish gives her manumission, papers and money to go to Cincinnati to lead a free and independent life. Instead of seizing the opportunity, she rushes down the gangplank and joins Hamish, perhaps momentarily satisfied with her lot as his mistress. She fails to exert moral and physical strength to face the world all alone. Her inability to define freedom and slavery precisely lands her in confusion and she fails to make use of the opportunity. She does not hold herself responsible for her failure to go away and try her luck elsewhere. She continues her lacklustre life with Hamish and proclaims, "... what you are is an expression of History, and you do not live your life, but somehow, your life lives you, and you are, therefore, only what History does to you" (134). The preceding citation may be construed in two ways. One is the deterministic view that a man or a woman is what history makes of him or her. It may also be interpreted as the force and sweep of events over which humanity has no control. Amantha Starr seems to find some pretext or other to shift the responsibility of taking the decision to somebody else or some invisible force. The later events which she narrates and explains reinforce the point.
After living with Hamish, who has "kindness like a disease" (110), Amantha says, "I had known Hamish Bond for a long time, and I guess he had been nothing but a bulk, a voice, a protecting warmth in the darkness, a pressure on my body. He had not been real, just a dream I was having, a dream I had to have and cling to" (163). Their life together fails to establish any bond between Hamish and Amantha. To him she "was nothing but a dream which he had been having, and had to have for his own need" (163).

It is only when she comes to know that Hamish: is an impostor and his plight is no better than hers as he does not know who or what he is, she begins to hate him. His narration of his shameful past including the description of his ferocity in plundering African villages for slave-booty, blows off the bubble of her momentary peace. After disclosing his past to Amantha, Hamish says, "I got everything I ever set out to get. And you know, it was always just like something getting tighter and tighter around you" (164). She pays a deaf ear to what he says and refuses to be united with him sexually as she feels that it makes her a party to his guilt. He forces himself on her and finally he sends her away when his confederacy topples. At the time of departure Amantha says, "... I saw a part of my life whirl away, like a leaf
blowing in the wind, and I didn't feel anything" (218). Though she is released from Hamish, the questions "where would I go? where would I belong?" (219) trouble her. Her liaison with Hamish does not help her define herself. Tobias Sears, a new Englander and captain in the Union Army, accidentally meets Amantha at the time of her confrontation with a corporal and rescues her from his attack. He is an Emersonian, an uncompromising idealist, and has "nobility like a disease" (225). On observing his interest in her, she says that, "there are some persons who perform an act for simple decency, and then because of that act feel committed to the person who has received their kindness" (224), and declares she does not want to have it. In her heart of hearts she longs for a liaison with him as he appears to be a saviour. She hopes, "He would come again, step down from the golden mist, high-faced and smiling from his victorious cloud, and save me" (251).

Manty fails to guard herself in spite of the advice given to her at school by Seth Parton, an ascetic and a theology student, not to be deceived by "...the small and foolish goodness of a person" (37). She considers Tobias to be her saviour and she longs to define herself in the "brilliant whiteness" (241) of Tobias. The arrival of Seth as Tobias's friend makes her restless and his insistence on revealing the truth to Tobias frightens her.
Manty's suffering is mostly due to her inability to accept her mixed blood. She feels as though "I saw myself, the stain of the black blood swelling through my veins — Yes, I actually saw some such picture in my head, a flood darkening through all the arteries and veins of my body — no, a stain spreading in a glass of clear water" (227-28). She doubts that Tobias may not accept her on coming to know her as a half-caste. She marries him assuming that he has proposed to her even after knowing the truth about her from Seth. Thinking that "His own clarity and freedom had made me free. Free from everything in the world, all the past, all my old self, free to create my new self" (234), she considers that it is Tobias and not Hamish that made her freedom possible. Tobias leads her into the white world. To her "He looked like the statue of a Greek athlete, and every muscle swelling strong and true in the white marble ... He looked like a beautiful, strong, narrow-hipped statue walking toward me in the dusk of the room, setting his white feet down" (237).

The war and reconstruction and the capitalistic puritanism work on Tobias and he decides to lead Negro troops and serve the cause of freeing the slaves. He insists on a blue-gum command and seeks a new identity in the cause
of the black man. Finding him engrossed in his work, Manty waits and feels:

Waiting to know what? To know my life, myself. It was as though your life had a shape, already totally designed, standing not in Time but in Space, already fulfilled, and you were waiting for it, in all its necessity, to be revealed to you, and all your living was merely the process whereby this already existing, fulfilled shape in space would become an event in Time. (265)

When Manty shifts the responsibility of acting with integrity and courage to a non-existent person and takes shelter under the pretext of the invisible historical forces, she seems to create a rupture in her discourse. Lacking the integrity of the self that gives her insight into the interior of Hamish Band, she now talks in terms of a predestined design. Life, in this sense, becomes a process in which she is caught. In terms of the narrative discourse, she is waiting not for unfulfilled destiny and unrealized design but for a meaningful existence.

To make her life mean something, she works as a teacher to the Negro children, but she fails to be one among them. At Oberlin, as a student, under the influence of
reformers, she tells her father that he was damned. "I told him that he jeopardized my soul by making me live on black sweat. I told him he ought to get rid of his slaves" (30). The Negro children make her feel "...a total defilement, a crawling foulness on my scalp, a pricking of skin down my spine, a twitching revulsion to my last nerve-end" (250). Loyalties to both Negroes and whites result in a conflict and she feels restless.

Seth Parton, the object of her first and girlish passion at school, was a slave of self-sanctification. His desire to reach Christian perfection and his constant vigilance against sin forces him to suppress his passion for Manty. He warns her not to be deceived by "incidental virtue" and by "the small and foolish goodness of a person" (36). Later he joins the Oberlin command as he "was not so sure of the purity of his heart" (226). When he visits Manty as a father of two children, after several years - he preaches a different kind of morality. He argues," What is done in the heart is done already. And if the deed is done in the heart it should as well be done in the flesh that the vileness of the heart may be confirmed" (283). He comes out saying:

Once I sought immortal perfection in mortal life, for the Book says it is possible, and
I told you that we two should seek it together for our final joy, but I did not know what I know now, that only in vileness may man begin to seek and now to seek we must confirm that what vileness has been enacted in my heart (284).

Manty's negative approach to him makes him stoop to the level of black-mailing her. The knowledge that Seth has not revealed the truth about her to Tobias makes her uneasy and without any second thought she decides to disclose her past to her husband. This decision gives rise to a sense of joy, which she never experienced before. "It was as though some terrible grip that had been holding me all my life, like a closed hand, was, all at once, released" (291). Seth, who advocates perfection of joy, becomes instrumental in making Manty taste joy. He finds his release finally through Miss. Idell, and becomes a financier and makes a fortune.

Though Tobias says "you are what my deepest heart desires. More now than ever. More now than ever" (291), though he proclaims himself a liberator and a nigger-lover, though he advocates that "the black question and the white question aren't separable" (264), though he is for "a process of educating the Negro and white to live together in justice" (264) and though he says he "was more interested in being a
man than in being a gentleman" (24), he finds it difficult to accept her mixed blood. He breaks off love-making and pursues his Freedman's League concerns. When Manty realizes the truth she," ... felt a fear, a sense of betrayal, a sense that all my new joy of that afternoon had been a fraud, all his words a lie, all the release and surrender of my body a deception before an iron grip settled on me. Those bloody tortured fingers were the mark of betrayal, the lie" (293-94): His rejection pains Manty and she questions herself whether he has fled from her "In revulsion from a taint in my blood, in fear of the dark passion of my blood...in desire for some truth which was not in me to give or understand?" (345) The thought that her life is nothing and she"...had been nothing to Tobias Sears, nothing at all, nothing but the excuse for his magnanimity" (345) tortures her.

III

Manty abandons Tobias and joins Rau-Ru, who creates a dominion and becomes the leader of a band of swamp outlaws. He is one of the band of angels, a Negro who was brought up by Hamish Bond. He saves Manty from the onslaught of Charles in Hamish's house and runs away fearing the consequences of having beaten a white man. He reappears as Oliver Cromwell Jones, sees Manty as Mrs. Sears, and says
that it was not Mr. Lincoln who set him free but it was she. "Yes-You" he said, "you and that Charles. And then that man with the raw hide. Oh, Yes, if it had not been for you, I might have been there yet. Ass Kissing Old Bond. Oh. Yes, I was the K'la - I was the K'la" (270-71). The betrayal of Tobias sends him back to the swamp. As Rau-Ru says, Manty should have been on the nigger side and she has not got any other side to go to. But she cannot stand being a nigger. Feelings of attraction and repulsion sway her, and her behaviour changes accordingly. Feeling repudiated and denigrated, she seeks the shelter of Rau-Ru: Later she says, "I'm not nigger I'm White, and he made me come" (332). Leaving Rau-Ru, she comes home and reconciles herself to her position.

Wisdom dawns on Tobias rather late and he discovers that he deluded himself and demeaned his wife. Abdicating the role of a liberator, he comes back to her, saying that "it seems that I have lost the capacity to do good to anyone. But at least I have come back to you, if you will have me. For you, dear little Manty, are all to me" (346). Accepting him, she goes to the Middle West and grows old with a sense of boredom and disappointment. Her's is a "life frozen in quietness, in eternal statis, out of time, no past, no
future, no beat of the heart" (340). In the cemetery scene her confused thoughts seem to find coherent articulation: "...I did know that nobody had ever set me free. Nobody, not even my own father, leaving me to be snatched from his grave-side. Not Seth in the snowy woods. Not horrible old Mr. Maramaduke ... Not Hamish Bond - Oh, I could hate him for kindness! — giving me a scrap of paper in the end, offering me love in the end, ... Not Tobias, in the blue and brass of the liberator, who somehow had fled me, fled the very moment when I thought I might feel free, fleeing the moment of my truth. Not Rau-Ru, to whom I had fled but who had elected hate not love, and then, in the Boyd house had elected his own death instead of me" (362-63). The people, her father and all those who did not set her free appear on her mental screen, and she feels, "Nobody had helped me. Nobody had set me free" (363). She asserts:

... Except yourself, except yourself: and that thought meant that I had to live and know that I was not the little Manty - oh, poor, dear, sweet little Manty - who had suffered and to whom things happened, to whom all the world had happened, with all its sweet injustice. Oh, no, that thought, by implying a will in me, implied that I had been involved in the very cause of the
world, and whatever had happened corresponded in some crazy way with what was in me, and even if I didn't cause it, it somehow conformed to my will, and then somehow it could be said that I did cause it, and if it had not been for me then nothing would ever have happened as it happened, Hamish Bond would never have plunged from his cotton bale, Rau-Ru would never have waited in the ruined house while Jimmie pleaded with him to leave, Tobias would never have become the sad, sardonic slave of bottle and bitterness, the betrayer of women ... (364).

The negative emphasis and tone in the preceding citation suggest that Manty fails to establish her moral identity largely because she feels that either by accident or by will she is not involved in the tragic events of her own life. But the episode of the union between a successful young black man and his filthy garbage-man father, who deserts him as a child, brings a sudden and drastic change in Tobias and Manty too. Tobias says:

I envied Mr. Lounberry, not merely because he could honour his father, but because he could honour the father who had rejected him. Yet, that was the thing to envy. With that I felt some relaxing in my soul.
Maybe that could be learned, if I tried. Maybe Mr. Lounberry could teach me, if I tried (373).

This works like a miracle on Manty, and she says to herself that "I knew that my father had loved me. I knew it, as though my desire to honour him had brought me the knowledge." She is sure that her father "had not been able to make the papers out, or the will, that would declare me less than what he had led me to believe I was, his true and beloved child; he was afraid to hurt me, was seeking, hopefully, some way to send me North, keep me North see me established in a land far away, and he had not believed that he would die, soon ..." (373-74). She is confident that he hadn't betrayed her. Her acceptance of her past and her blackness sets her free and she is no more poor little Manty and she experiences the awfulness of joy.

IV

After carefully reading the novel, the reader realizes that Amantha does not achieve any kind of significant view of life. Most readers of the novel are not happy with the novel though it has a number of highlights like stylistic distinction and first person narration, which is appropriate to
the discourse. We come across in this novel the narrative motifs in Warren such as identity, freedom, quest and journey. The Southern plantation society, the threat of Civil War, the Civil War itself, the fall of New Orleans, the corrupt administration of Beast Butler, the Emancipation proclamation, and the New Orleans race riots are foregrounded in the novel so that if we skip the ending of the novel, the novel appears as Manty’s discourse.

At the very outset, Amantha asks herself, "Who Am I?" (3). The first few lines suggest that as in the other novels of Warren, especially *At Heaven’s Gate, World Enough and Time*, there appears to be a distinction between the visible and the interiorized world of the protagonist. The traditional motif in the American novel, the distinction between the head and the heart that runs through *The Scarlet Letter*, is seen in this novel too. But it may be transposed as intellect and conscience. As in the other novels of Warren, the father figure is prominent in this novel. Somehow the father and son/daughter relationship does not go well in Warren. In the novel under review the pattern is made more elastic. We come across a father-master and slave relationship. This pattern is evident in the case of Hamish Bond and Rau-Ru, the Negro whose life Hamish saves at the
risk of becoming crippled. Though a master, he treats him with fatherly affection. The father-master, who brings up Amantha keeps her in dark about her Negro blood. The liberating perspective is suggested in the epigraph from A.E. Housman "When shall I be dead and rid of the wrong my father did?" (1) Only when one dies to the self that is rooted in the world and is born to a different self can one be rid of the wrong. Amantha harps on the wrong that is supposed to have been perpetrated by her father. Till the end she remains blind because of her wrong notions. Imagining her father to be her betrayer, she seeks the aid of people like Hamish Bond, Tobias Sears, and Rau-Ru to find a solution to her problems, just because they save her from some predicament or other. Hamish saves her from the humiliations of slave market and she breaks off her ties with him when she realizes that his plight is worse than hers. The first one gives her physical emancipation, the second one gives her identity, and the third one tries to teach her self-acceptance. Her selection of Tobias, who saves her from the corporal, proves to be wrong as he is a slave to magnanimity and struggles long to release himself. In spite of his best efforts, Rau-Ru fails to create self-awareness in her.
At the end of *Brother to Dragons* Warren says, "The recognition of necessity is the beginning of freedom." In *Band of Angels* he seems to say that freedom is much more than recognition and it involves acceptance of personal responsibility and limitations of the self. At the end of the novel there is a suggestion of Manty's joy so that the way the novel is articulated is by itself liberating. By telling her story Amantha seems to have liberated herself, but a close reading of the novel shows that the moment of liberation is not convincingly articulated. There are traces of her willingness to die to this world and inherit a new world. In spite of this inadequacy the reader finds some sort of liberation, which may not be very affirmative but which gives a positive sense to Manty's Discourse.