CHAPTER – VI

A SUMMING UP
In this chapter I have attempted to synthesise the critical views on Warren's Poetry as carried out in the foregone chapters. Chapter I is devoted to a probe into Robert Penn Warren, the man as an artist and the social milieu of his Times when the Americans were preoccupied with America as the French were preoccupied with France and the Russians with Russia. American Literature evolved into an immense panorama of futility and anarchy. Southern Literature has been persistent in its Protestant orthodoxy and humanism. Man is not an irresponsible puppet or an automation. He may not always behave ethically but he is powerful and must be held responsible for his deeds. Warren makes this point amply clear in his writings. His Lilburn in *Brother to Dragons*, has acted devilishly, but none other than Lilburn is held responsible. Two themes are very distinct in Warren's works—the need for self-fulfilment to be achieved only through self-recognition and the inevitability of contamination by the world when one steps out of the prison of 'self'. His novel, *Meet Me in The*
Green Glen, provides a particularly striking example of this dynamic duality between the desire for a normative time and the fear of temporal liberation and fixity.

Chapter II probes into Robert Penn Warren's quest for identity. As a Southerner and a Formalist, Robert Penn Warren's writing is philosophical and intellectual. It is the literature of irony and ambiguity and the search for self-knowledge. The search for self-knowledge and historical identity is nowhere more clearly perceived than in The Ballad to Billie Potts. The theme of The Ballad of Billie Potts is drawn from the folk history of Warren's home country. Warren's poems, like the poems of many other great poets, begin in pain, progress through darkness to death, perfectly aware of the often inexplicable violence and suffering that human flesh is an heir to its earned and integrated vision. His poems, in general, end on the note of rebirth, truth, selfhood and even joy. It is a progress that is quite evident in The
**Ballad of Billie Potts,** as young Billie has to scamper in pain and fear to the wild West where he is tempered in the forge of human reality.

Chapter III is my scrutiny into Warren's conception of the Original Sin. Much of his poetry seems to be inspired by John Donne and other English Metaphysicals, including T.S. Eliot. The influence of Eliot is especially seen in the method as well as the content in many of his poems, especially, the early ones particularly apparent in *The Return: An Elegy.* The idea of oneness becomes an acceptance of a universal complicity in later poems such as *Brother to Dragons.* Warren has outgrown extraneous influences and developed a unique poetic voice of his own. He has given transcendent meaning to native sources by drawing expanded patterns out of traditional forms. This can be best seen in the blend of the dramatic and the meditative lyrics that have been constantly worked over again and again to bring forth highly crafted long poems.
In his universe, as in “Reading Late at Night”, or theological understanding of the “Original Sin”, lies the loss of innocence and the awakening of the spirit to the mysterious forces of life, death, good and evil. There are specific similarities between Jung and Warren. Jung’s view, that imitations of an immortality depends upon an undiscovered self, has a great deal of relevance to *Brother to Dragons*, when the Unconscious Self appears as minotaurs, serpents, catfish and Lilburn Lewis. The use of the word “shadow” also indicates a subconscious and unrecognised guilt in one’s psyche. Warren’s poetry seems to indicate two paths to knowledge. One, to be opened up by the Conscious, Rational Mind leading to Time’s ocean-bottom, the knowledge of Naturalism, and the other, largely ignored by the Age of Reason - the path of the Unconscious and Intuition - leading to the knowledge of Intuition and Instinct - which draws the entire animal kingdom together. Warren’s “Original Sin” seems to be related to the origin of species. It may be tempting to assume that the
entire blame for man’s depravity is entirely Adam’s. And, we are answerable in some formalistic sense to Adam’s ghost. However, for Warren, there is no doubt about the criminality of human beings. It is not about their guilt that he is uncertain. He is only uncertain about man’s innocence.

Osmosis of Being is articulated in most of Warren’s creative writing, usually implicitly, as when a character in “Promises”, is awakened to the book’s highest promise. The central importance of Osmosis of Being in Warren’s work is seen in connection with his predominant theme of identity or self-definition. And, this kind of osmosis is the final answer to the problem of identity, and indeed, the only answer in the world, as Warren sees it. His Osmosis is evoked in his early work by negative implication. In the fictions, Osmosis of Being is what the characters should be seeking, relating themselves in totality to Time, Nature and Society. Warren feels that the Freudian id or Jungian shadow which is
mainly what he is trying to get at, in his recurrent motif of Original Sin—the darker, more bestial part of the psyche, denied its place in reality. That is why an innocent idealistic figure like Jefferson, in *Brother to Dragons*, seriously hoping to make a noble effort to convey to all what a wonderful creature is mankind, or Tobias Sears, the Utopian Transcendentalist in *Band of Angels*; Adam Stanton, the physician to the poor in *All the King's Men*, are not about to think themselves brothers to dragons or indeed to concede any reality to a monster-self within. Clearly, Warren's osmosis requires acceptance of one's annihilation. The immediate price of osmosis is humility, which is not easy to come by. And, the ultimate price is death; a permanent consignment of the 'self' to the oneness of Time and Flesh. This may involve a final annihilation of the conscious ego, putting an end to the temporary and proud separation from the larger collective being, a condition desirable, and inevitable.
In Chapter IV, I have tried to formulate my views on Robert Penn Warren's metaphysics. He insisted that it is far better to be a part of the Universe, where life is eternal than in the crumpled world of sin and crime. He assumes that there is a real and not just apparent problem of evil as well as guilt. The problem of evil has been the concern of theologians, and it may also be called the problem of pain, the problem of unmerited suffering, that seems to be built into the nature of things when we think of Nature as teleological, explainable of the events by the purpose they serve. As to the problem of guilt, Warren believes that we have all wished more evil than we have been able to do, and The crucial point of life is not to obtain ease and security, but to perceive an ultimate purpose of one's existence, as poignantly depicted in "History" in *Thirty-Six Poems*, preceded by "Resolution", that states the poet's determination to probe ultimate reality, with particular respect to its sovereignty over reality as seen in "Grape-
Trader Time”. Warren’s later work, with two motifs: “from evil bloometh good” and “we learn some strength from this (kiss)”- from “Ransom”, like “Letter from a Coward to a Hero”, seems to have been occasioned by the news of the International Bloodshed. The references to Christ in these early poems are laced with heavy irony calculated to emphasise modern man’s feeling of deprivation and anxiety.

Throughout his earlier poems, Warren implies or insists directly that the crucial problem of life is not one of ease and security but that of resolving the ultimate purpose of one’s existence. For him, the ultimate purpose of life is a calm and resolute probing and the experience before death cuts off both. Through his later poetry, such as “Original Sin”, “Crime”, “Pursuit”, “Terror” and “End of Season”, Warren says that if there is nothing eternal within the ‘self’, it has nothing to do with the conscious, rational ‘self’ consigned to naturalistic oblivion. Warren’s continued concern with the theme of the
past in the present gives special significance to his poem "History". The past, when looked back to, is very encouragingly significant. So long as the goal or the final is not reached, there is direction in life, a direction towards the goal. Once the goal is reached, the pinnacle becomes an anti-climax. Another of Warren's themes is that of identity which MAN tries to maintain throughout his life. MAN can return always to his lost identity and if that return has been difficult and precarious, the achievement becomes all the more precious because through this man learns to assess his moral awareness.

Throughout his works, Warren has repeatedly indicated that MAN is capable of certain human values, of which virtue and self-sacrifice are what the soul is best capable of. However, he also insists that self-sacrifice is only a means to virtue and glory. It is in man's nature to sin. It is also in man's nature to seek self-knowledge and realisation. He can attain glory only through self-realisation and unflinching
acceptance of the truth. He must accept his modest place in the Universe with humility. He must sacrifice his mistaken arrogance that he is the ruler of all he perceives and take refuge in the lap of omnipresent and omniscient Nature. It is only through acceptance, sacrifice and humility that he can be redeemed from his perilous predicament.

In Chapter V, I have attempted to discover the Critical Canons and Poetics of Robert Penn Warren. His poetry is full of paradoxes, dense with specific images of the world's body. There is irony in his poems, but more often than not, the irony is directed at the poet himself. His poetry is an intermixture of the colloquial, easy, assured, humorous and serious, in rapid shifts, moving between the folk and the metaphysical. His poetry moves over the years towards vision and redemption. The poet makes use of the light imagery and the themes of the Sacramental Vision and Imagination, though he often substitutes the starlight for the moonlight in his later poetry. His concept of Imagination is precisely
Coleridgean. The Imagination organises what otherwise would be chaotic sensation and, contrariwise. It anchors the reason in images of sensation, so that the Imagination repeats in the mind - the eternal act of creation in the infinite 'I AM'. The Primary Imagination creates the world and the 'self'. The Secondary Imagination is the value creating capacity.

Warren's poetry, begins in pain, progresses through darkness to death, and then, perfectly aware of the often inflexible violence and suffering that human beings are the heir to, through their earned and integrated vision, ends in rebirth, truth, selfhood, joy and redemption.