

# "To Love So Well The World"

A Festschrift in Honor  
of Robert Penn Warren

Edited by  
**Dennis L. Weeks**

Peter Lang

R.P.W. and T.S.E.:  
In The Steps Of The (Post) Modern Master

Victor Strandberg

At first look, contrasts appear to outweigh resemblances. On one side we see a man who not only stayed in the USA but who, despite a graduate education at Berkeley, Yale, and Oxford, never outgrew his Tennessee/Kentucky back-country accent. On the other side, we have a man who migrated out of the Mississippi Valley as soon as could do so, and then out of New England as soon as he could do that, in pursuit of his ideal self as a London social climber. Over here we have a New Deal Democrat in politics and a free thinker in religion; over there, the royalist who in the middle of life's way was baptized into the orthodoxy of the Church of England.

There are also sharp contrasts in personality. The healthy appetite for booze, sex, and outdoors life that activates much of Warren's fiction and poetry plays off against Eliot's preference for life in the cosmopolis and his asceticism, which produced a vow of celibacy at age 38 that Eliot maintained for thirty years. And yet, in the end the contrasts seem superficial, the affinities profound. In the lives and works of these two men, the Nobel laureate of 1948 and the Poet Laureate of 1986, what stands out most prominently is the overlap of common ground covering a span from the first decade of the century to its last, from the Modern to the Postmodern era.

Underneath the surface discrepancies, their common ground begins with biography. Thanks to the letters and the books by Lyndall Gordon and Peter Ackroyd, more is known about Eliot than we know about Warren, a discreetly private man whose authorized biography is now being written by Joseph Blotner. What we do know includes some significant points of resemblance. To begin with childhood, Eliot's ground theme of loneliness may trace back to his upbringing as the youngest child of a

couple old enough to be his grandparents (Charlotte Stearns Eliot was 45 when the poet was born); Warren, as a child, actually did spend his summers alone with a grandparent, a figure who enters his poetry much more pervasively and vividly than do his two younger siblings. Through his school years, Warren's precocity was an isolating factor, allowing him to graduate from high school three or four years ahead of his age peers. During and after college, both men experienced their first taste of artistic community as their talents flowered under the tutelage of a Modernist master, with Ezra Pound inviting Eliot into his London circle, and Allen Tate leading Warren into the Fugitive circle. Conversely, at the outset of their careers, both men bumped into bad marriages that deepened their theme of guilt and loneliness.

Eliot's marriage got worked into his poetry with startling immediacy, given his theory of the "impersonality of art" in "Tradition and the Individual Talent." In "Gerontion," Eliot barely disguises his reproach to Vivienne in his pun on her adultery (with Bertrand Russell): "I have lost my passion: why should I need to keep it / Since what is kept must be adulterated."<sup>1</sup> So, too, the voice of Vivienne Eliot unmistakably enters "A Game of Chess"—"My nerves are bad tonight. Yes, bad. Stay with me. / Speak to me. Why do you never speak. . . . / I never know what you are thinking." Warren's early poem, "Cold Colloquy"—which was his projected title for a whole volume of poetry—does something similar for another intimate relationship:

She loitered to hear his heart's pouring-out. . . .  
 She hearkened, eyeless and sunk like the uncarved stone,  
 Till the light in his face, an empty candle, was blown. . . .  
 She turned, a puzzlement on fair features wrought  
 That of words so freighted with woe so little she caught.  
 She turned; with fair face troubled thus she would go . . .  
 To stand apart, pondering, as one who grieves  
 Or seeks a thing long lost among the fallen leaves.

Although Warren was reticent about his marriage to Emma Brescia, the few details we do know suggest an Eliotic analogy. Eliot's wedding in June, 1915, to a woman he had known barely two months may have been a reaction to the death of Jean Verdenal in the Dardanelles campaign, to whom he later dedicated *Prufrock and Other Observations*; Eliot met Vivienne at almost the same time that Verdenal died—in April, the cruellest month, 1915.<sup>2</sup> Warren's romance with Emma Brescia also involved a third party.

According to my colleague Lionel Stevenson, who had been a graduate student at Berkeley at the time Warren arrived there, Warren took Emma away from another graduate student, with the result that both he and his rival—who married quickly on the rebound—suffered through difficult marriages. What we know of Emma Brescia indicates that she was a vivacious, talented young woman of a rather delicate sensibility that later deteriorated into mental illness. In short, she resembled Vivienne Eliot.

Allen Tate, who knew the wives of Eliot, Scott Fitzgerald, and Warren, thought all three women were envious of their husbands' artistic careers and sought to sabotage them. Wallace Fowlie, a friend of the Warrens during their stint in Iowa City and Bennington, admired the forbearance of the man towards his wife's habitual belittling of his talent.<sup>3</sup> But both artists sustained a further parallel: their unfortunate first marriages were followed by a very successful second marriage, to Valerie Fletcher and Eleanor Clark, respectively, which made Warren a father in middle age and made Eliot at long last a happy man.

Yet another biographical affinity of Eliot and Warren is their deliberate choice to live in exile from their native region. Turning his back on a prospective professorship in philosophy at Harvard, Eliot chose to go on establishing his communal life among the London literati, even if it meant grubbing through years of poverty. In a recent piece of scholarship, Lewis Simpson tells how Warren similarly chose to abandon the South, to live far North in Minnesota and New England from age 37 on.<sup>4</sup> Although Warren's immediate motive was the refusal of the LSU administration to match an offer of a promotion from the University of Minnesota, Simpson found that the poverty of Southern culture was the essential thing. The final blow—Warren told Wallace Fowlie—was being informed that the state's subsidy for *The Southern Review*, which he and Cleanth Brooks had raised to international eminence from 1935-1942, was to be diverted to a new sports facility, despite appeals from famous literati including T. S. Eliot (whom the then President of LSU did not recognize). In that last year of his Southern domicile—1942, the year after W. J. Cash's *The Mind of the South* and Agee and Evans' *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*—Mencken's "Sahara of the Bozart" must have seemed to Warren a more accurate portrayal of Warren's native region than the fantasies of the Agrarian manifesto. Like Eliot, Warren felt compelled to seek a collegial artistic community a long ways from home.

The correlation between the two poets' spiritual biographies and their poetic careers is substantial. In their earlier work both poets portrayed what William James called the Sick Soul state, dramatizing the self as an

empty husk living in a ruined world, and both illustrated what James called a Divided Psyche, in their poetry of conflicting voices. For Eliot, the division initially lay between romance and realism, in "Prufrock," "Portrait of a Lady," and the "Sweeney" poems, but it soon turned into something more lasting and substantial, the dichotomy between an unbeliever's intellect and his religious desire ("If there were only water among the rock / . . . But there is no water"). According to his friend Floyd Watkins, Warren displayed a similar dichotomy: "Once I put the question as bluntly as I could to Warren, and asked, 'Red, what is your belief about God?' He replied directly that he cannot believe but that he has a great yearning." About a decade before the time of his death, Warren sent a letter, Watkins says, in which "he asked me to pray for his soul" (Watkins 31). His openness toward religious phenomena embraced a spectrum that ranged from acknowledging the Pentecostal tongues of his native hill country—which he considered "the real thing"—to hobnobbing with Roman Catholic cardinals in Rome, with whom he sought conversation in a certain bar that the cardinals liked to frequent.<sup>5</sup> In the end, Eliot and Warren received comparable final rites of passage, under the auspices of the Church of England in Eliot's case, and under those of the Episcopal diocese of Vermont in Warren's.

For both writers, a recurring sense of guilt focused on the figure of a woman. Most scholars have identified the initial victimized woman in Eliot's poetry as Emily Hale, whose correspondence of a thousand letters from Eliot remains to be opened in the year 2019; and later, we have good reason to think that Eliot's wife Vivienne enlivened the theme of guilt and alienation. But the figure of mother may also play a part in work like "Portrait of a Lady": "Well! and what if she should die / Some afternoon, . . . / Should die and leave me sitting pen in hand." There is also Eliot's sarcasm toward other likely surrogates for mother, such as the genteel ladies in "Aunt Helen," "Cousin Nancy," and "The Boston Evening Transcript."

For Warren, the tie between guilt and mother is too overt to doubt in the early poems. In "The Return: An Elegy"—a poem whose narrator imagines the funeral of his mother—the speaker catches himself saying, "the old bitch is dead / what have I said!" And "Revelation" begins with a subordinate clause—"Because he had spoken harshly to his mother"—followed by an extraordinary series of nightmare images: "The peacock screamed, and . . . all night, the buck rabbit stamped in the moonlit glade, / And the owl's brain glowed like a coal in the grove's combustible dark." In the 1930s, both writers took an unfashionably

theological view of such matters. According to Lyndall Gordon, in April 1936 Eliot asked Paul Elmore More to recommend a good treatise on original sin, while Warren was soon to exfoliate a poem with the title, "Original Sin: A Short Story," along with Willie Stark's Presbyterian catechisms on the world's dirt.

Beyond these chance resemblances of career and temperament, actual influence comprised a one-way arrow from Eliot to Warren, owing to the half-generation head start in Eliot's favor. Given that Warren was just seventeen when *The Waste Land* was published, it seems precocious of him to have responded immediately and with enthusiasm to such a formidable reading experience. Along with Allen Tate's testimony that Warren portrayed scenes from the poem on the walls of his room at Vanderbilt—most memorably the rat crawling through the vegetation—we have Warren's reminiscence in a 1972 interview:

[*The Waste Land*] was certainly a watershed in my life and the lives of many of my friends. It came out in November, 1922, in the *Dial* magazine. That's where I first read it. I was completely overwhelmed by it and didn't, I promise you, understand it at all. . . . But my generation—we memorized the poem and went around quoting it all the time. (Fisher 7)

When the Scopes trial was going on a few miles away in 1925, Warren ("to my everlasting shame," he says) did not go, because "my head was too full of John Ford and John Webster [two Eliot favorites] and William Blake and T. S. Eliot" ("The Art of Fiction," 29). Signs of Eliot's influence abound in Warren's early verse. *Kentucky Mountain Farm*, which Warren began publishing in 1927, borrows Eliot's collage technique and segmented form (originally seven, then five sections), plagiarizes the phrase "in fractured atoms" from "Gerontion," and dramatizes its own "Death by Water": "Think how a body, naked and lean . . . would go / Tumbling and turning, hushed in the end, / With hair afloat in waters that gently bend / To ocean where the blind tides flow." His other finest early poem, "The Return: An Elegy," which was published in the November, 1934, *Poetry* magazine, displays its debt to *Ash-Wednesday* in its intensely confessional tone, its need to expiate private guilt, and its uncommonly rich lyrical texture. In the late thirties, Warren appeared to be following Eliot's turn from poetry to drama, in so far as his first version of *All the King's Men* was a play modelled to some degree on Greek tragedy.<sup>6</sup> While Warren went on to develop Jack Burden as an Oedipus figure—the

detective who discovers his own complicity in parricide—Eliot based *The Family Reunion* on Aeschylus's masterwork, *The Oresteian Trilogy*.

Warren's apprenticeship to T. S. Eliot is evident also in the younger man's educational affinities. Like Eliot, Warren fastened upon the Renaissance as his primary professorial interest. At LSU he was a 17th-century man, immersing himself in the metaphysicals. Just as scraps of Marvell, Donne, Spenser, Milton, and Shakespeare appear from "Prufrock" through *Four Quartets*, so too we find their echoes scattered throughout Warren's fiction and poetry, including the extravagant instance of "Love's Parable"—a poem by Warren that is written entirely in the diction and imagery of a 17th-century metaphysical poet. Both poets expressed their debt to the French realist and Symbolist writers—most notably Baudelaire and Laforgue for Eliot, while Warren wrote poems of tribute to Flaubert and Valery. Most telling of all is the fact that both men learned Italian for the express purpose of reading Dante. Eliot's devotion to Dante shines through a span of poetry that stretches from the epigraph to "Prufrock," circa 1910, to the familiar compound ghost in "Little Gidding," circa 1943. Dante likewise keeps reappearing in Warren's work: in "End of Season" (published 1942), we read how "Dante's ducat smiling in the blessed clime, / with rushes, sea-wet, wiped from that sad brow the infernal grime"; in *At Heaven's Gate* (1943), Dante's Circle of Sins Against Nature formed the structure of the whole novel; in *All the King's Men*, Dante provided both the epigraph and a narrator who finds himself in a dark wood in the middle of life's way (Jack Burden, like Dante, begins his narration at age 35); in "Ballad of a Sweet Dream of Peace" (the most substantial entry in *Promises*, 1957), a Dantesque narrator is led towards the next world by a virgil-like guide; and, in 1977, the persona of Warren's last novel, *A Place to Come To*, is a Dante specialist, Professor Jed Tewksbury.

Given the enormous influence of Eliot on the Modern period at large, it is not too surprising that the younger Warren seemed at times to be walking in the steps of the master. Well into the 1960s, Eliot was still being cited as a common denominator by many other writers—he appears in Nabokov's *Lolita*, in Updike's *The Centaur*, and in Bellow's *Herzog*, for example, and it is not too surprising that as late as *Democracy and Poetry* (1974), Warren devotes a half-page footnote to analyzing the alienation of J. Alfred Prufrock.<sup>7</sup> In 1966, however, the year after Eliot died, Warren published a pamphlet, *A Plea in Mitigation: Modern Poetry and the End of an Era*, in which he announced "the end of a poetic era, the end of 'modernism,' that school of which the Founding Fathers were Eliot, Pound, and Yeats." Here he defined "the need for revolution" as "the need to

discover identity—to locate oneself on the vast and shifting chart of being." "We are now waiting for a new revelation," he went on to say (Eliot 1, 2, 12).

In the year 1992 we can look back a quarter-century and declare a name for the new revelation—Postmodernism. Concerning one of the major arguments about Postmodernism—whether it is a rupture with Modernism or an outgrowth and continuation of it—Eliot and Warren furnish impressive evidence of the latter description. That is to say, these quintessential Modernists present evidence that within their thought and work, the Postmodern lay dormant and waiting.

Most notably, the two artists anticipated three important Postmodern postulates. First, we see in Eliot and Warren a transition from the figure of the artist isolated in cunning and exile to a conception of literature as an active agent for social change. To his own question, "what made modern poetry 'modern'?", Warren answers: "The most obvious fact about modern poetry is that it is an alienated art," but as we shall see, neither Warren nor Eliot rested in this notion of literary apartheid (*A Plea in Mitigation* 4). Their second Postmodern postulate is the concept of the self as a social construct that is unstable and non-unitary. And third, their willingness to erase the line between high art and popular culture suggests a Postmodern sensibility.

Concerning the use of literature for social change, Eliot differed from Postmodern critics like Frederic Jameson, Terry Eagleton, and Raymond Williams in the sort of social change he wanted: that is to say, Christian rather than Marxist. But his insistence, in "Religion and Literature" (1935), that "the 'greatness' of literature cannot be determined solely by literary standards" is a principle of criticism that they—the Marxist Postmoderns—repeated emphatically a generation later (Eliot, *Selected Prose* 31). Four years later, in "The Idea of a Christian Society" (1939), Eliot critiqued the capitalist system with a vigor that any Marxist of today as well as any ecological activist would endorse heartily:

We are being made aware that the organization of society on the principle of private profit . . . is leading both to the deformation of humanity by unregulated industrialism, and to the exhaustion of natural resources, and that a good deal of our material progress is progress for which succeeding generations may have to pay dearly. (*Selected Prose* 207)

In *All the King's Men* Jack Burden offers a memorable analogue to those Eliotic sentiments in his portrayal of the ravages of a capitalist/industrial economy:

There were pine forests here a long time ago, but they are gone. The bastards got in here and set up the mills . . . and paid a dollar a day and folks swarmed out of the brush for the dollar. . . . The saws sang soprano and . . . the clerk wrote in his big book . . . and all was merry as a marriage bell. Till, all of a sudden, there weren't any more pine trees. They stripped the mills. . . . There wasn't any more dollar a day. The big boys were gone, with diamond rings on their fingers and broadcloth on their backs. But a good many of the folks stayed right on, and watched the gullies eat deeper into the red clay.(2-3)

Eliot's major writings on the social significance of literature, *The Idea of a Christian Society* and *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1948), found their analogue in Warren's *Democracy and Poetry* (1974). The first of the two essays in this volume, "America and the Diminished Self," repeats almost verbatim Eliot's insistence on the primacy of social identity. Whereas Eliot said, in *The Rock*, that "There is no life that is not in community," Warren remarked in *Democracy and Poetry* that "the self is possible only in a community."<sup>8</sup> "Eliot, and even Pound at his nuttiest," Warren goes on to say, "were concerned with the fate of society in a way that would have been totally incomprehensible to Gautier or Rimbaud" (DP 35). Postmodern Marxist critics would note with satisfaction that in *Democracy and Poetry* Warren cites Marx (*The Eighteenth Brumaire* in DP 65), Engels (*Basic Writings*, ed. Lewis Feuer in DP 66), and Raymond Williams (*Culture and Society* in DP 53). Like Eliot, Warren rejects the autonomy of art, or art for art's sake school, in this work of his elder statesman period: "I flinch," he says, "from those who, like Henry James, would assume art to be the justification of all life, as well as from all others . . . who refuse to recognize the hard costs of mere survival for many millions of human beings, the cost in grinding effort and irremediable pain. How can anybody who has lived through the Great Depression, or even walked through parts of Appalachia or a slum, feel otherwise?" (DP 91).

With respect to the Postmodern shibboleths of race, class, and gender, Eliot and Warren during their early careers displayed condescension toward putative social inferiors as a consolation for their Sick Soul

condition. For Eliot, the social inferiors are vulgar figures like Bleistein and Sweeney, ethnic types whose purposes are generally accomplished in a low-class brothel. In Warren's case the offended party was more likely to be black, though the poet managed to offend Jews as well in "Pondy Woods," where a talking crow calls Christ "the jew-boy" and tells a runaway black murderer, "Nigger, your type ain't metaphysical." Both poets eventually received their poetic come-uppance, Warren's at the hands of a black poet who declared, "Cracker, your type ain't exegetical," (qtd in Baker 72) and Eliot in a poem by Hyam Plutzik, "For T.S.E. Only":

You called me a name on such and such a day—  
 Do you remember?—you were speaking of Bleistein our brother,  
 The barbarian with the black cigar, and the pockets  
 Ringing with cash, and the eyes seeking Jerusalem,  
 Knowing they have been tricked. Come, brother Thomas,  
 We three must weep together for our exile.  
 You, hypocrite lecteur! mon semblable! mon frère!

In their mature years, both Warren and Eliot made some amends for their ethnic transgressions, Warren with *Segregation* and *Who Speaks for the Negro?*, and Eliot in a letter to Ezra Pound (dated August 1954) saying he would not tolerate Pound's insults towards Eliot's religion, which included the Jewish religion (Lyndall 341).

So far as class and gender are concerned, it would seem fair to say that Warren and Eliot divided the issues between them, with Warren the better spokesman for class and Eliot for gender. The empathy in Warren's proletarian portraits—the hanged woman in "Audubon," the "Old Nigger on One-Mule Cart," Ashby Windham in *At Heaven's Gate*—clearly exceeds anything in Eliot's *oeuvre*; but conversely, Eliot's portrayals of the predicament of being a woman exceed anything in Warren. As specific instances of Eliot's proto-feminist empathy, we have the desperate loneliness of the woman in "Portrait of a Lady," of the Vivienne-surrogate in "A Game of Chess" ("Speak to me. Why do you never speak"), of the typist who is sexually assaulted in "The Fire Sermon," and of the entrapped housewife in the pub scene who got an abortion ("She's had five already, and nearly died of young George"). Eliot's recurrent use of the Nightingale myth—featuring the brutally raped and mutilated Philomela—comprises an indictment of phallogentric patriarchy as powerful as anything in the Postmodern Woman's Movement.

Both Eliot and Warren also anticipated the Postmodern reaction against Eurocentric provincialism. In *The Idea of a Christian Society*, Eliot contradicts the Eurocentric bias of his time in a passage reminiscent of his studies in *The Golden Bough* three decades earlier: "without sentimentalizing the life of the savage, we might practice the humility to observe, in some of the societies upon which we look down as primitive or backward, the operation of a social-religious-artistic complex which we should emulate" (*Selected Prose* 207). Although both writers became known as apologists for an Old Order, Warren's Fugitive South and Eliot's Christian Europe, both evince lifelong sympathetic interest in alien cultures. Eliot, after working Buddhist and Hindu scriptures into *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets*, declared "the *Bhagavad Gita* . . . is the next greatest poem to the *Divine Comedy* in my experience."<sup>9</sup> Like Eliot studying Sanskrit and Buddhism, Warren also cast a very wide cultural net, reaching outside Western culture altogether in his penultimate book of poetry, in order to apotheosize the spiritual grandeur of Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce.

Our second postulate, about the unstable, decentered, non-unitary self, is easily demonstrated in both writers. Eliot's images of depersonalization remain, in fact, among the "cathartic utterances of the Age" (to quote the *Time* magazine eulogy): Prufrock preparing a face to meet the faces that he meets; the Hollow Men, headpiece filled with straw, wearing deliberate disguises like a scarecrow; *The Waste Land* speaker fending off Memory and Desire, feeding a little life with dried tubers—all expressive of the desire, stated in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," for "an escape from personality." Warren likewise took the struggle to achieve a unified self as a lifelong obsession, epitomized in Jack Burden's fantasy of "a family reunion for all the you's [that exist] with barbecue under the trees. It would be amusing to know what they would say to one another" (137). Warren expands this search for a stable self to polyvocal status in his later works by centering his text on a black woman and a Jew in two fictional works (*Band of Angels* and *Wilderness*), and—drawing from actual history—on an American Indian, an artist-hero, and a psychopathic killer in *Chief Joseph*, *Audubon*, and *Brother to Dragons*.

Implicit in Warren's organization of such texts is what Postmodern theory terms a binary opposition of subject matter: Warren's Southern regionalism versus the abolitionist John Brown, for example, in his first book, *John Brown The Making of a Martyr*; the noble President Jefferson versus his psychopathic nephew in *Brother to Dragons*; the redneck Ashby Windham versus the aristocratic Bogan Murdock in *At Heaven's Gate*. Behind these dialectical contraries stands a binary opposition in form,

between the high art of Modernist favor and the popular culture favored in Postmodern theory. On the Modernist side we have a highly developed respect for form on the part of Eliot and Warren, along with the Modernist's respect for the high-brow culture of the past—evident everywhere in both writers' allusions to the Bible and to epic writers of the past such as Homer, Virgil, Dante, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton. In both, we find frequent citations from a Babel of foreign tongues: Greek, Latin, Italian, French, German. In short, we have something of the Modernist high priesthood of Art, with admittance for Ph.D.'s only.

Yet even at their most erudite, both Eliot and Warren brought popular culture importantly into their works. In "Portrait of a Lady," the sophisticated young man gets merely a headache from Chopin, but is moved despite himself "when a street piano, mechanical and tired / Reiterates some worn-out common song." So, too, in *The Waste Land*, "the pleasant whining of a mandolin" in a public bar equates with the music of *The Tempest*, which "crept by me on the waters." Within a year of publishing *The Waste Land*, Eliot wrote the following tribute to popular music: "The working man who went to the music-hall and saw Marie Lloyd and joined in the chorus was himself performing part of the act; he was engaged in that collaboration of the audience with the artist which is necessary in all art . . ." (*Selected Prose* 225). Later, Eliot wrote drama rather than poetry with the specific intention of making his work more readily accessible to a popular audience. The fact that Eliot's poetry about *Cats* has become a sort of music-hall perennial would probably have greatly pleased this Modernist master had he lived to see it.

So too, Warren preferred popular forms—the romance in fiction, as Leslie Fiedler has pointed out, and books of verse sprinkled with songs, ballads, lullabies, nursery rhymes, and old-fashioned story-telling. More so than Eliot, Warren enacted the return to Common Speech that Eliot called for, with Warren frequently using back-country dialect in his fiction and poetry. And a Postmodern minimalism of effect sometimes characterizes the later work of each poet, as for example in Eliot's assertion that a straightforward philosophical statement can sometimes be great poetry.<sup>10</sup> Eliot's experiments in the poetry of philosophical statement are most salient in *Four Quartets*: "Time present and time past / Are both perhaps present in time future, / And time future contained in time past." Warren's analogue to this minimalist poetry is best seen in *Brother to Dragons*, where he spins out paradox in the plainest conceivable poetry of statement, much in the manner of the later Eliot:

The recognition of complicity is the beginning of innocence.  
 The recognition of necessity is the beginning of freedom.  
 The recognition of the direction of fulfillment is the death of the self,  
 And the death of the self is the beginning of selfhood.

The Postmodern idea of self-reflexivity is also a familiar trope to Eliot/Warren readers. Throughout *Four Quartets* Eliot threaded a running commentary on the writing of poetry—"Words strain, / Crack, and sometimes break under the burden, / . . . Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place," reducing poetry to "a raid on the inarticulate / With shabby equipment always deteriorating." The later Warren likewise gave free rein to bursts of artistic self-consciousness. In *Brother to Dragons*, for example, he described his error in trying to write that poem as a ballad. "The form," he says,

Was not adequate: the facile imitation  
 Of a folk simplicity would never serve. . . .  
 And so to put the story in a ballad  
 Would be like shoveling a peck of red-hot coals  
 In a croker sack to tote them down the road  
 To start the fire in a neighbor's fireplace.  
 You won't get far with them even if you run—  
 No, the form was not adequate to the material. (43-44)

Misconceptions about the New Criticism have tended to obscure the foreshadowing of Postmodern practice in these two high Modern writers. Warren's status as a Modernist rests largely on his promotion of the New Criticism in textbooks that transformed the teaching of literature in America, on his practice of that mode of criticism in his essays, and on his promotion of Modernist writers in his magazine, *The Southern Review* (1935-1942). Eliot's status rests likewise on his poetic practice and his propagation of Modernism in the journals he edited or otherwise influenced, most notably *The Criterion* (1919-1939).

On closer look, however, the precepts of both writers seem largely compatible with or even anticipatory of what we now call Postmodern theory. When Eliot, for example, says that "comparison and analysis are the chief tools of the critic," he is announcing a principle that bridges the Modern and Postmodern period.<sup>11</sup> His idea that the function of criticism is "elucidation of texts and the correction of taste" foreshadows Postmodern criticism in so far as the "correction of taste" has been crucial to a

major Postmodern enterprise: its attack on what it calls the literary canon. A notable contribution of Warren to such correction of taste was his effort to revise the canon in favor of John Greenleaf Whittier, a popular "hearth-side" poet who epitomized everything Modernism supposedly disdains: low-brow appeal to the masses, addiction to conventional forms, sentimentality, and simplistic moralism. (Whittier—Warren noted approvingly—enlisted his verse, Postmodern-wise, in "the war against wrong"). Eliot also revised the canon of his time, helping to rescue John Donne from obscurity and bringing the French Symbolist poets to Anglo-American attention, and later focussing serious attention on his Victorian forebears, Tennyson and Arnold.

To conclude, the parallels in the biographies, poetic practice, and cultural interests of Eliot and Warren indicate that in many ways the younger man followed the steps of his Modern/Postmodern master—though always, to be sure, in his own fashion. As literary gurus of enormous influence—Eliot through his poetry and criticism, Warren through his textbooks and journals—these two writers extended their range diachronically from the high Modern to the Postmodern, from the depiction of the alienated artist to the insistence that literature serve the ends of social reform. The "new revelation" that the world was expecting, in Warren's elegy for the Age of Eliot, turned out to reside in significant measure in the works of both men.