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The Robert Penn Warren Collection at Emory University: A Personal Account

RONALD SCHUCHARD

The first seminar paper that I wrote in graduate school was on Robert Penn Warren's *Blackberry Winter*. I don't know what the professor thought of my essay, for the only written remark was "This has always been one of my favorite stories." Perhaps the fact that I did not ruin the story for him was meant to be sufficient response. My own love of *Blackberry Winter* led me to teach Warren's stories, poems, and novels in introductory courses as a teaching assistant, but when I began to write my dissertation on T.S. Eliot I had not yet discovered Warren's great admiration for his work. When I became an assistant professor at Emory University, my colleague, the late Floyd C. Watkins, had just finished a book on Eliot, *The Flesh and the Word*, and had turned his critical interests toward Warren. Over the ensuing years Warren's work was prevalent in the department as Watkins interviewed and corresponded with him in the process of publishing *Robert Penn Warren Talking* (1980), *Then and Now: The Personal Past in the Poetry of Robert Penn Warren* (1982), and *Talking with Robert Penn Warren* (1990). Warren told him that before he wrote his own *Portrait of a Father* he twice read the book that Watkins had co-authored with his father, *Yesterday in the Hills*. As a result of their friendship, Warren allowed Emory's Robert W. Woodruff Library to hold a unique, semester-long exhibition of the manuscripts and elaborate revisions of his *Brother to Dragons: A New Version* (1979).¹ Warren opened the exhibition with a reading and generously inscribed our copies of his work. Before his retirement, Watkins placed all of his Warren material in Special Collections, including his correspondence with Warren from 1976 to 1988; his correspondence with Andrew Lytle, Caroline Gordon, and other of Warren's friends; Warren's holograph annotations on Watkins' typescripts; transcripts of interviews; working notes, clippings, sound recordings and other materials pertinent to further research. Moreover, he substantially endowed the Watkins American Literary Manuscripts Collection to ensure the continued growth of the Warren papers.

¹ The exhibition, entitled "The Imaginative Past: The Poetry of Robert Penn Warren," was held in 1983 and also included letters, clippings, and other materials collected by Watkins for his research on *Then and Now*.

Meanwhile, one of the unexpected highlights of my career occurred when James Olney, editor of the *Southern Review*, invited me to speak on Eliot at LSU's celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the journal. When I stepped to the lectern in the Union Theater, I felt my knees buckle as I saw Warren, Brooks, and Welty seated together, looking up at me from the first row. To be present at that august, historic occasion, to shake Red's hand and chat about Eliot, and to contribute to the commemorative volume was for me a great personal fulfillment.²

Later, when I was preparing *Eliot's Dark Angel* for publication (1999), I had occasion to examine Emory's Warren collection, which had silently grown beyond my knowledge. To my astonishment, I came across the unpublished typescript, recently acquired, of Warren's PBS television obituary for Eliot in 1965. His remarks came from years of deep reading and compassionate comprehension of Eliot's work, and they so encapsulated the heart of what I felt in writing the book that I brought part of the obituary forward as the sole epigraph. When to my delight the book received the Robert Penn Warren / Cleanth Brooks Award for 1999, I read the passage at the presentation ceremony at Western Kentucky University. Now, forty years after Eliot's death, it bears even more aptly upon the perception of Eliot in our time:

Our age was forced, by his inimical genius, to become aware of inner tensions which it would have preferred to ignore, to sharpen the terms of its most troubling dialectic. That genius forced us, with particular severity, and regardless of our personal opinions and dogmas, to look at the ambiguities of our age and to struggle to make sense of them, or pass beyond them. Consider the *Four Quartets*. Who else, in that noisy and angry time, tried to define the anguish of the need for stillness? [. . .]

His [Eliot's] power lay in the capacity to see the world as a personal drama of ultimate meanings. The shadow of our unspecified human story – the need to move to meaning and toward peace though the ruck of the world – was at the center of his work, and even for those who doctrinally or temperamentally had little sympathy for him the dramatic force of the implied story was nigh overwhelming. He had a charisma of any man who is struggling for reality.

The serendipitous discovery of that document made me curious to explore the new additions that had come in under the umbrella of the Watkins collection. These include William Bedford Clark's correspondence with Warren from 1979 to 1986 (23 letters), and with Watkins from 1989 to 1990, together with a typescript of Clark's *The American Vision of Robert Penn Warren*, with critical notes and commentary by Watkins. I was also pleased to discover that the papers of the Georgia poet and novelist David Bottoms contain 29 letters and postcards (1979 to 1987) from Warren, who had judged Bottoms' first book, *Shooting Rats at the Bibb County Dump*, as the winner of the Walt Whitman Award for the Academy of American Poets, with a generous citation in the press release. In reply to Bottoms' note of thanks, Warren wrote on 13 April 1979, "I truly appreciate – am overwhelmed by – your note. I believe in the book, a real streak of originality & strength. A great future to you. My decision was a prayerful one." In his last letter of 23 February 1987, after the publication of *Under the Vulture-Tree*, Warren writes, "Your last book certainly doesn't make me change my mind. Except to feel more firm & fixed in my opinion – for whatever that is worth."

² The conference was held October 9-11, 1985, and the proceedings, with copious photographs, were published as *The Southern Review and Modern Literature 1935-1985*, ed. Lewis P. Simpson, James Olney, and Jo Gulledge (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988).

It came as no surprise to find that Warren appears as one of the major correspondents in the archive of James Dickey (including 41 letters from Warren and carbon copies of 17 letters from Dickey to Warren, 1968 to 1986), but one discovers in the letters the depth of a long and lasting friendship.³ The correspondence begins with Warren's acceptance of Dickey's wish to dedicate "Under Buzzards" to him, and ends after Warren expresses his concern over Dickey's surgery for a subdural hematoma. Dickey, sorry that he cannot write a longer letter for fear of overtiring himself, replied on 23 July 1986: "But do understand, Red, how very much your good wishes mean to me. Who is to say that they were not the very things that got me through all this? I prefer to think that they were, for there is no other way I would rather come back from an encounter with the Dark Man, and go on living, now, and write some more; whatever I can." Dickey's files also reveal his personal admiration of Warren's achievement, with saved articles, clippings, and posters of conferences on Warren, together with Dickey's prepared remarks and lists of readings from his works.

One of Warren's major correspondents during the last twenty-five years of his life was his friend Marshall Walker, an itinerant Scots (Glaswegian) professor and critic who wrote his first letter to Warren in July 1964 from South Africa and the last in 1987 from New Zealand, after visiting the Warrens in Vermont. The 76 letters contain 35 from Warren, copies of most of Walker's to him, and several to and from Eleanor Clark Warren before and after Warren's death. "I first met RPW through his writing," wrote Walker, "but then he became a friend, an exceptional one, of course, whom I continue to miss acutely." The letters range from the critical reception of *Flood: A Romance of Our Time* (1964) and work on *Who Speaks for the Negro?* (1965) to personal, family, and travel matters; from Walker's interview, articles, and book on Warren to the loss or health of friends: the funeral of Allen Tate, a visit to Katherine Anne Porter, "on her death bed clearly." Walker had taped an interview of Warren at his home in Fairfield, Connecticut, on 11 September 1969; parts of the interview appeared in journals, the complete text in his book, *Robert Penn Warren: A Vision Earned* (1979). The original tape of the interview is included in the collection, as are Warren's emendations on the typed transcription. Also present are twenty-nine photographs taken by Walker between 1968 and 1987, comprised of slides, black and white photographs (negatives) and color prints (negatives) of Warren, his family, his dogs, and his study in Fairfield; of the house in West Wardsboro and of Warren and Walker on a forest walk there in 1979; of Warren and Eleanor in Vermont in 1987.

A smaller but very important collection to arrive was that of Arthur Hawley Scouten, a history educator and editor who corresponded with Warren from 1944 to 1987 (10 letters). In describing their correspondence, Scouten writes that "the best letter I had from Warren was lost; I believe it was stolen from my desk one day when I was showing it to some students at the University of Pennsylvania. It was a reply dated in June 1945 to my letter saying that Tony Thomason had committed suicide by jumping from the 24th floor of the University of Texas Tower, in May 1945. Warren was drunk when he wrote it, and ink is smeared all over the letter. In one sentence, Warren quoted from Shakespeare's sonnet – 'An expense of spirit in a waste of

³ Two of the carbon copies of Dickey's letters to Warren appear in *Crux: The Letters of James Dickey*, ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli and Judith S. Baughman (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999). The originals of two other carbon copies are included in the collection at Yale.

shame.”” In his annotations for the letters, Scouten describes Thomason as “an alcoholic poet, & Warren dearly loved him.” The Scouten correspondence includes letters from Allen Tate, Thomas Hazzard Thompson (“of Amarillo, Texas . . . a protégé of Thomas Wolfe, but when Wolfe went to Europe, he sent Thompson to Baton Rouge to complete a novel under Warren’s supervision”) and Alton Parker Thomason (Tony Thomason) about Warren’s work. Thomason’s letter includes the typescript of a partial article, “Letter to an Agrarian Poet,” ostensibly written to Warren; in it he discusses Warren’s literary reviews and experiences in Baton Rouge. A letter from Cleanth Brooks of 1 June 1940 discusses the perceived factionalism at LSU and the subsequent departure of Warren from that institution. Brooks addresses Scouten as “Joe,” a nickname given to him by Senator Huey Long.

There is a separate collection of six letters (photocopies, 1976-87) from Warren to Thomas Thompson, mainly regarding personal family matters; a series of six letters and cards (1980-81) from Warren to Ted Wojtasik, regarding Katherine Ann Porter; and two letters and a postcard (1975-77) from Warren to a former acquaintance, Robert G. Cowser of the University of Tennessee, Martin, regarding past days in Guthrie and Clarksville.

Textual scholars will take great interest in the presence of Stuart Wright’s collection of fifteen volumes of Warren’s poetry, from *Selected Poems 1923-1943* (1944) to *New and Selected Poems* (1985), each of which has been corrected, revised, annotated, and usually dated by Warren for Wright, who served as Warren’s literary executor and editor of his complete poems until June 1988. At that time Warren appointed a new literary executor, but, according to Wright, between then and his death in September 1989 Warren never indicated that Wright should not continue as editor of his complete poems. When Wright wrote to Warren’s agent about the completed manuscript after his death, he was informed that as he was no longer Warren’s executor no volume would be published under his editorship. Thus, as the edition had no authority, Wright, deeply affronted after two years of editing, determined to close the edition. Nonetheless, the fifteen volumes, presented to Wright outright by Warren, represent most if not all of Warren’s final revisions. Four of the volumes were originally inscribed presentation copies to Eleanor and their son; as Warren pulled the volumes from the shelf for revision, these inscriptions were subsequently crossed out, reinscribed “Corrected copy for Stuart” or “Stuart Wright – corrected copy,” and dated 5/23/87 (eight volumes) and 5/25/87 (one volume) in Warren’s hand. The 1979 edition of his long narrative poem *Brother to Dragons* (marked “Third and Last Revision”) is again heavily reworked, as are poems in such volumes as *Rumor Verified* (1981) and *Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce* (1983).⁴ In *Being Here* (1980), Warren crossed through “Tires on Wet Asphalt at Night,” writing “Bad poem” in the margin; “Eagle Descending,” writing “Cut / Not good” in the margin; and section 6 of “Synonyms,” writing “Cut” in the margin. He also crossed out “Empty White Blotch on Map of Universe: a Possible View,” writing “Bad /Omit this poem” in the margin, but then decided that the poem “must be kept” in light of his discussion of the poem in “Afterthought.”

II

⁴ A second, less extensively revised, paperback copy of *Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce* has a brief TLS from Warren to Wright laid in, suggesting that Wright may have played a collaborative role in the revisions: “Here is the revised text of Chief Joseph. If you have any notion for other revisions, please let me know. Please!”

A short time after reviewing the preceding collections I received a call from Steve Enniss, then curator of manuscripts, now director of Special Collections and Archives, that some material had arrived that I should want to see at once. He greeted me with a copy of the Boni and Liveright edition of Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), which the library had not previously possessed, and I thought that its shining acquisition was the worthy cause of the urgent call. But when I opened the book, I discovered otherwise in awe; it was inscribed, in his hand, "Robert Penn Warren, / Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee / May 28, 1923." It was indeed a palpable pleasure to hold Red's copy, with a few pencilled notes on a free end paper, but on the next page there was a library stamp, "Mitchell College Library." Could he have given it to some little-known college library, or what? Enniss then revealed to me the provenance of the book and the collection in which it had just arrived, the papers of Emma Brescia Gardner, Warren's first wife, the Italian-American "Cinina," whom he had secretly married in 1929 and divorced in 1951.

Warren scholars had searched unsuccessfully for Cinina's papers for years. Watkins had himself tried to trace them in California, where her father, the Italian composer Domenico Brescia (1866-1939), was professor of music at Mills College and where Red had met her after entering Berkeley as a graduate student in the autumn of 1925; the papers were still undetected when Joseph Blotner published his biography of Warren in 1997. After Cinina and Warren divorced, she married Burton Hathaway Gardner, took a PhD from Columbia in 1957, and from 1963 to 1967 served as chair of the language department at two-year Mitchell College in New London, Connecticut. When she died in 1969, Gardner deposited her papers at the college library in a large Electrolux vacuum cleaner box. It was stored uncataloged in the basement, where it languished for years, until its discovery by Mitchell College librarian Barbara van der Lyke, who later brought it to the attention of William Bedford Clark, just as he was completing the first volume of Warren's *Selected Letters*. "I felt like I was looking into Tut's tomb," Clark said of first opening the long-lost collection. Clark soon notified Floyd Watkins and Steve Enniss of the find: "I have worked in this collection and am overwhelmed by its historical and biographical value," he wrote to Enniss on 14 July 1998. "It is unique, as you might expect, filling in many gaps in our understanding of Warren and his early life."⁵ Steps were immediately taken to acquire the papers, which Mitchell College wished to place in a research library better able to serve them. Suspecting that the collection might first be offered to Yale, Watkins himself wrote a compelling letter to Mitchell College with a successful rationale for placing them at Emory. The collection originally contained at least thirty-seven books that had belonged to Red and/or Cinina, one of which was *The Waste Land*; they had been stamped and appropriately shelved in the library upon reception, but they were retrieved by library staff as part of the Gardner Collection, which finally found its permanent home in the Watkins American Literary Manuscripts Collection in May 2000.

While the Gardner collection includes family papers that shed much light on Cinina's life and character, including over 700 letters from her father (in Italian), it also preserves some of her

⁵ Gardner Papers acquisition file, Special Collections, Woodruff Library, Emory University. Clark notes that he was generously assisted by Barbara van der Lyke, then Director of Library Services at Mitchell College.

letters to and from Warren between 1927 and 1939, letters that reveal his devotion to her and provide a new perspective to previously unflattering depictions of their relationship and marriage.⁶ Also present are 70 letters from Ruth Warren to her son and Cinina (1929-1931), and a smaller correspondence of 26 letters from his father (1931-38), all of which enrich the biographical record.⁷ But of primary interest to literary historians, critics, and biographers are over 250 unpublished letters to Warren from his literary friends, editors, publishers, and contributors from 1929 to 1948. They fill in significant gaps and add much color to Warren's early writing, teaching and publishing life, the emergence of the Southern Agrarian movement, the publication of *I'll Take My Stand*, and the founding year of the *Southern Review*. The largest and most important correspondence is from Allen Tate (20 letters, plus one to Cinina before her marriage, one to Cleanth Brooks, and one from Merrill Moore), and while there are single letters from prominent authors such as F. Scott Fitzgerald, Thomas Wolfe, and Ford Madox Ford, the abiding interest of the collection comes from those correspondents who write occasionally out of the flow of literary and personal events – Caroline Gordon, Donald Davidson, John Crowe Ransom, Cleanth Brooks, Andrew Lytle, Merrill Moore, Albert Erskine, John Gould Fletcher, Katherine Anne Porter – or out of long-standing personal and literary friendships – Sydney L. Mellen, Dixon Wecter, Lincoln Fittzell, and Edward Donahoe. Further, there are numerous letters from editors and publishers, including Joseph Brewer, Louis Untermeyer, Malcolm Cowley, Alfred Kreyborg, Holger Cahill, Lambert Davis, Morton Zabel, Paul Rosenfeld, Bernard Bandler II, and Alan Strook, among others. Much of the correspondence grows out of, and looks back to, the extraordinary assemblage of talented writers at Vanderbilt University in 1922-23, all under the influence and mentorship of Donald Davidson and John Crowe Ransom, both of whom were founding editors of *The Fugitive: A Journal of Poetry*, the first issue of which appeared in April 1922.⁸ Most of the contributors to the early issues, including Tate, Merrill Moore, Andrew Lytle, and others, were to become lifetime correspondents of Warren. In characterizing Warren's correspondence in the Gardner collection, it is helpful to briefly recount events that led up to the earliest letters in 1929.

In November of his sophomore year at Vanderbilt, a momentous event occurred in Warren's intellectual life: T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* appeared in the *Dial*, and Donald Davidson loaned his copy to Warren. We know that he was immediately struck by the poem and started setting passages to memory and reciting them to friends. At the beginning of the second semester, Allen Tate returned to Vanderbilt from North Carolina and Kentucky, where he had been recuperating from a pulmonary illness. Fortuitously, Tate and Warren met by chance and began sharing rooms with Ridley Wills in Wesley Hall, where Warren hung murals of scenes from *The Waste Land* on

⁶ The first letter from Warren to Cinina in the Gardner collection, dated 2 October 1927, is included in *Selected Letters of Robert Penn Warren*, Vol. I, ed. William Bedford Clark (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 125-7; hereafter abbreviated *SL1* and cited in the text. Warren's letter to Domenico Brescia of March 1939 and four letters to Cinina of March-April 1939 are included in *Selected Letters of Robert Penn Warren*, Vol. II, ed. William Bedford Clark, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 190-1, 198-201, 203-04; hereafter abbreviated *SL2* and cited in the text.

⁷ William Bedford Clark has drawn on the letters of Warren's mother in "Letters from Home: Filial Guilt in Robert Penn Warren," *Sewanee Review*, 110 (July-September 2002), 385-405.

⁸ Emory recently acquired, through receipt of the Raymond Danowski Poetry Collection, Warren's own complete set of *The Fugitive* (1922-25), with each issue signed by Warren on the title page, otherwise unmarked.

the walls. “*The Waste Land* had come out by the time I went back,” wrote Tate. “I began an impertinent campaign in Eliot’s behalf in the South.” Tate’s campaign had been deemed “impertinent” by Ransom, with whom Tate entered into bitter public controversy over the poem in the *Literary Review* of the *New York Evening Post* for much of the year.⁹ In the midst of this controversy, Warren ordered a first edition of *The Waste Land*, inscribing and dating his copy on 28 May, just before his first contribution to *The Fugitive* appeared.¹⁰ After an absence due to his attempted suicide and recovery in Guthrie, Warren returned to Vanderbilt in the fall of 1924, when he would meet a not-yet-eighteen-year-old freshman, Cleanth Brooks. Tate had meanwhile graduated, taken a teaching position in a West Virginia high school, and met Caroline Gordon on a summer visit to Warren in Guthrie. That fall they would marry and move to New York. Tate, keeping Warren apprised of his free-lance writing career, would not meet Brooks for five years.

After graduation from Vanderbilt in 1925, Warren enrolled as a graduate student at Berkeley and soon met Cinina. The four years of his courtship there and subsequent time at Yale and New College, Oxford, are marked not only by letters but by the inscribed copies of publications that he regularly presented to her, including the first edition of *Fugitives: An Anthology of Verse* (1928).¹¹ In the spring of 1928, six months before beginning his Rhodes scholarship, he signed a contract for his biography of John Brown. Tate, meanwhile, had received a Guggenheim fellowship, and before his departure for London and Paris in August he sent Warren an inscribed copy of his new volume of poems, *Mr. Pope and Other Poems* (“To Red from Allen August 14, 1928”). Tate had, unsuccessfully, been sending copies of his poems (and Warren’s) to Eliot for publication in the *Criterion* since 1923, so after he arrived in London in September he arranged through Herbert Read to get himself invited to a *Criterion* luncheon.¹² If Tate had not yet impressed Eliot as a poet, he did impress him as a conservative Southern intellectual, one with strong views of the controversy over the secular New Humanism, in which Eliot had himself become engaged against his old mentor, Irving Babbitt, and his followers. In the following summer, Eliot would publish in the *Criterion* Tate’s essay, “The Fallacy of Humanism,” an essay that would effect the shape of an emerging movement as the former fugitives were beginning to become Southern Agrarians.¹³ Ransom was one of the first to write to Tate: “I have nothing but admiration for your ‘Fallacy of Humanism.’”¹⁴

⁹ Tate provides his account of the controversy in “Reflections on the Death of John Crowe Ransom,” in *Memoirs and Opinions 1926-1974* (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1975), 41-2.

¹⁰ Warren’s poem “Crusade” appeared in the second issue of *The Fugitive* (June-July 1923), 90-1. Warren was beginning to build his personal library that spring, inscribing and dating in similar fashion to *The Waste Land* his copy of Whitman’s *Poems* (“April 1, 1923”) and his copy of Arthur Quiller-Couch’s edition of *The Oxford Book of English Verse: 1250-1900* (“April 1, 1923”), both of which are among Warren’s books in the Gardner collection.

¹¹ Inscribed “For Cinina with Love, Red, February, 1928.” Other volumes include F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *All the Sad Young Men*, inscribed “For Cinina from Red, September 3, 1926”; Robinson Jeffers’ *The Women at Point Sur*, inscribed “For Cinina with Love from Red June 29, 1927”; and *The American Caravan*, inscribed “To Cinina with love, Red, August 1927 N.Y.”

¹² On 21 October 1928 Warren wrote to Andrew Lytle: “Allen gave me a detailed account of Eliot and his henchmen; he was greatly impressed by the leader of the gang, more than he expected to be, and likes some of the others” (*SLI*, 145). Tate’s letter has not survived.

¹³ The essay appeared in both *The Criterion*, 8 (July 1929), 661-81, and in *Hound and Horn* for Winter 1930. Tate later reprinted it as “Humanism and Naturalism” in *Reactionary Essays on Poetry and Ideas* (1936) and in *Memoirs*

It is a pity that the letters from Tate, Davidson, and others to Warren from 1924 to 1929 do not survive with his to them, probably the result of his frequent academic movements, but his secret marriage to Cinina in Sacramento in the summer of 1929 ensured preservation thereafter. The first letter in the collection is from Caroline Gordon on 21 June 1929 from Paris, informing Warren that Tate is working hard on his book on *Jefferson Davis, His Rise and Fall*, and that he is writing now on Gettysburg, “the only part of the book he takes any personal interest in.” Two days later, on the 23rd, Tate writes to inform Warren that the book is almost done: “There are fifty pages more to do, and I have been averaging twelve a day of late.” In a subsequent but undated letter, Caroline informs him that “Allen is putting the finishing touches on Davis. He expects to mail the ms July 2 or 3 and then we will pack and go somewhere . . . It will probably be to the south of France.” On the 30th, Tate, informing Warren that “your letter from the train is just here,”¹⁵ conveys some important news, perhaps the earliest reference to the Agrarian symposium: “I hear in a roundabout way that Don [Davidson] is projecting a symposium on the Southern tradition, and that [Gorham B.] Munson has succeeded in convincing Don that he is interested.” Tate went on at length to express his views of the directions the movement should take:

I believe that a definite society should be formed, something like the Action Francaise group, as a central point of departure. It should be committed to a hard and fast philosophy of literature and society, and should announce a political creed. . . . The society should issue manifestoes on important occasions of politics or literature or education. It should ultimately have a magazine, a quarterly possibly at first, then a weekly. The whole plan should be immense from the beginning; it should plan for nothing less than a whole revolution of the social order, and be contented if it can be vigorously active without results for ten years. I write this to you because it happens to be on my mind at this moment. If you are in communication with Don or John [Crowe Ransom] you might pass this part of my letter on to one of them – who stirred such treasonable ideas to the surface.

Warren did not receive Tate’s letter until he returned to Oxford in October, but he had meanwhile corresponded with Davidson about the proposed symposium. “Don is apparently suspicious of Munson,” he replied to Tate, “and lent a judicial, if not a wholly sympathetic, ear to my little oration of the subject of Gorham B. I was really in something of a rage that that son-of-a-bitch should try to exploit the Symposium – especially after his attitude of the past” (*SLI*,

and Opinions, recalling that it “created something of a furor when it appeared . . . Eliot wrote me that he thought my essay a ‘brilliant article.’ It may be – or may have been. I saw very sharply what was wrong with the neo-Humanists because I had already seen it in myself without acknowledging it: a philosophy of literature that had no validity without religious authority to sustain it. The essay, looked at from this angle, is an attack on myself; but it was easier to project it onto others” (xi).

¹⁴ Letter of 4 July 1929, *Selected Letters of John Crowe Ransom*, ed. Thomas Daniel Young and George Core (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), p. 179. Ransom volunteered his own view of Babbitt and the New Humanists: “I have never found him making any effective appeal to such a public as the collegiates; his doctrine hasn’t any blood in it, & is bound to go down against any competing doctrine. . . . I have been aware of the talk of late about a Humanistic revival, but have not followed it or believed in it; it’s like spinsters advocating culture & decorum. So I welcome, envy and admire your full and damaging exposition – if indeed I should not call it exposé” (180).

¹⁵ Warren was probably on the train to San Francisco, prior to his elopement with Cinina in Sacramento. The letter has not survived.

167). Soon resettled, he sent Cinina a copy of the first edition of Eliot's Ariel poem, *Animula*, inscribed "For Cinina, with much love, Red / October 24, 1929."

Several of the letters to Warren from Tate during this period, beginning on 16 October 1929, are missing replies to letters of Warren to Tate published in *Selected Letters*, and the contexts benefit greatly from juxtaposition.¹⁶ When, for example, Warren receives a joint letter from Tate and Gordon on 1 December 1929, Gordon informs him that she has "two new stories to show you. They are about niggers and cutting. You ought to like them," thus providing the context for Warren's published reply: "I look forward with great pleasure to Paris, your society, nigger stories with cuttings in them" (*SLI*, 176-7).¹⁷ Allen and Caroline had invited Red to join them in Paris for Christmas, and Allen wrote on 5 December to express delight at his acceptance. "I have just finished a long essay," he continued, "with the large title Confusion and Poetry. It lives up to the title by being a rag bag in which I pay off some scores I've had against some of the muddled heads of New York – Munson, Cowley, Wilson, with further compliments to the Humanists thrown in."¹⁸ Meanwhile, Warren had sent him a copy of his *John Brown: The Making of a Martyr*, published in November. On 11 December Tate wrote to tell him that he was now reading the book (the first of numerous letters to pour in from friends in praise), adding as an afterthought news of his first passing meeting with Cleanth Brooks, who was visiting Paris from Oxford on his own Rhodes fellowship: "Ran into Cleanth Brooks the other day for a few minutes, but he was leaving town the next day. Didn't get a chance to judge what his calibre is."

During the Christmas holiday visit with the Tates in Paris, Warren met Tate's friends John Peale Bishop, Ernest Hemingway, Ford Madox Ford (in whose apartment the Tates lived), and F. Scott Fitzgerald among others at a party. An intoxicated Fitzgerald succeeded in insulting not only Tate, who was asked if he actually enjoyed making love to his wife, but evidently Warren. In an undated and stained postcard in the Gardner collection, Fitzgerald sends an apology for his drunken remarks and behavior the previous evening: "A bitter old drunk begs your pardon for his

¹⁶ Tate's letter to Warren of 16 October 1929 is in reply to Warren's letter of "[Fall 1929]" (*SLI*, 166-69); Merrill Moore's letter of 10 November 1929 is in reply to Warren's letter of 22 October (*SLI*, 171-2); Tate's letter of 23 November is in reply to Warren's letter of 2 November (*SLI*, 172-4); Tate's letter of 5 December is in reply to Warren's letter of "[December 1929]" (*SLI*, 176-7); Tate's letter of 22 April 1930 is replied to by Warren on 19 May (*SLI*, 182-5); Katherine Anne Porter's letter of 26 May 1935 is in reply to Warren's letter of 10 May (*SL2*, 40-1).

¹⁷ Caroline's remark in the letter justifies the editor's note, "Not a gratuitous remark. Likely a reference to Gordon's stories 'Summer Dust' and 'The Long Day'" (*SLI*, 177, n.7).

¹⁸ Tate's "Confusion and Poetry" appeared in the *Sewanee Review*, 38 (April-June 1930), 133-49. Tate continues his assault on "the deficiencies of Humanism" by accusing Babbitt, More, and their New Humanism followers of a confusion of religion and poetry. Their new "poetic religion," he argues, "enjoins the poet in some cosmic sense to face Life, existence . . . because that is what he believes in." Tate identifies Malcolm Cowley as one of their adherents who believes that "there is a tendency now in America among writers to face America, and not to run away from it with Eliot and Pound and Hemingway. What Mr. Cowley fails to see, I believe, is that the new tendency is, on the surface, a recovery from the post-bellum hysteria of the Thirty Americans and their *Civilization in the United States*. Below the surface, it may turn out to be a reversion to our uncritical state of mind before the war" (145). "Mr. [Gorham B.] Munson tells us that we must be perfect as men, and he understands the relation through a Behavioristic gloss upon Buffon's 'Style is the man' – without telling us, however, that Sainte-Beuve wrote a hundred years ago, and Mr. Edmund Wilson now writes that sort of 'Behavioristic' criticism to perfection, but without the label" (146).

conduct of last night & assures you that whatever he may have said was simply an impersonal unpleasantness that has no foundation in any reality.” Warren may thus have been ironically amused to receive Wecter’s letter of Christmas day: “I hope you and Allen & company are having a high day today, and look forward to hearing a verbal account.”

Eliot’s essays on “The Humanism of Irving Babbitt” (1928) and “Second Thoughts About Humanism” (1929), and his own attack on Babbitt and his followers in “The Fallacy of Humanism,” led Tate, who returned to New York in January, to pay a visit to Babbitt at Harvard. “He’s a grand old man who simply makes you eat out of his hand –” Tate wrote to Warren on 18 February 1930, “but you observe that he can listen only to his own ideas and that he fundamentally doesn’t understand anything.” The primary purpose of the letter, however, was to draw Warren into the New Humanism controversy and to participate in a symposium being organized in response to Norman Foerster’s *Humanism and America* (1930), in which Eliot had been allowed the only antagonistic essay, “Religion without Humanism.” Tate wanted Warren to take up the Eliot-Tate stance against the Humanism of Babbitt’s friend Paul Elmer More. “I asked C. Hartley Grattan to get you to contribute an essay on P.E. More to a symposium round the Humanists symposium now out. I see that he is announcing the book as ‘essays in opposition’ which means to him ‘sociological’ and ‘economic’ criticism of Humanism. If he alters the title of the book I will contribute.” Though Tate and Grattan were unsuccessful in getting a contribution from Warren, Tate allowed Grattan to reprint “The Fallacy of Humanism” in the volume.¹⁹

On 23 January Tate wrote to inform Warren of Robert Shafer’s attack on “The Fallacy of Humanism” in *the Bookman*. In a vituperative article entitled “Humanism and Impudence,” Shafer ridiculed Tate’s understanding of the Humanists’ attitude toward religion, characterized him as “a mere talking mole!” and associated him with “other buffoons of the literary arena.”²⁰ “For the last section of his article,” Tate wrote to Warren, “he will apologize or I will crack his head; I’m giving him a reasonable time to decide which he prefers. Then I will answer the argument of his essay.” On 18 February he wrote to say that he had answered Shafer: “I saw the thing as two distinct issues – the critical which the written reply meets, and the personal, yet to be settled perhaps by horsewhip. My reply is unreadably dull because every emotional word was blue-pencilled.” Dixon Wecter, after receiving similar correspondence about the controversy from Tate, wrote to Warren: “I should dearly love to see the sport of horsewhipping a humanist. Dr. S[hafer], while the welts are arising, will probably continue to shout ‘Babbitt is beautiful.’” Wecter further informed Warren that he had just met Edmund Wilson, “who seems to be a little puzzled that all such nice people should fall out with each other over humanism. I went up to New Haven for a day, saw little Howard [Baker] (who is all agog over humanism).”

Meanwhile, the smouldering plans for an Agrarian symposium were heating up. “The Southern movement grows apace,” Andrew Lytle had written to Warren at New College on 30 January 1930. “In two weeks I will write you in detail what we have been doing, and my friend,

¹⁹ Grattan’s collection was entitled *The Critique of Humanism: A Symposium* (New York: Brewer and Warren, 1930). Warren deferred to Bernard Bandler II, an editor of *Hound and Horn*, who criticized More’s position in “Paul Elmer More and the External World” (281-97).

²⁰ See *The Bookman*, 70 (January 1930), 1-10. Thomas A. Underwood gives a narrative account of the ensuing controversy in *Allen Tate: Orphan of the South* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), 202-03.

although I know you don't think it now, I see a practical way of overthrowing the scalawags." In the following months plans were laid and essays commissioned for the historic volume *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition*. On 23 April Davidson wrote to Warren about the preparation of the book and included a typed copy of the title page and table of contents, which shows that the original title of Warren's assigned essay was "The Negro and the Agrarian Community," with an accompanying description: "Surveys the history of the negro in America, and finds that his natural equipment is for an agrarian economy." On 23 April and 4 May, Davidson, fearing some overlap of treatment, also wrote to John Gould Fletcher, who was writing on "Education, Past and Present," urging him to confer with Warren on the subject of Negro education. Fletcher forwarded Davidson's letters to Warren and then wrote to him personally on 29 April to say that he did not want to trespass on his essay and asking if he intended to write on Negro educational schemes. On 10 May Fletcher described what he intended to cover in his essay; on 27 May, with his own work nearing completion, he wrote to Warren from Paris:

If I can help you here with your essay on the negro, please let me know. The point you want to hammer home is, as I see it, that it is no good making the negro into an inferior kind of white man: and that is what the present system is doing at Harlem and elsewhere.

While Warren was struggling with his essay, which was competing with the completion of his novelette, *Prime Leaf*, Eliot's *Ash-Wednesday* was published in London; he immediately sent a copy to Tate, who sent his thanks and personal opinion on 17 May:

The copy of *Ash Wednesday* came yesterday when I was finishing up a long onslaught on the messianic pretension of Mr. Crane, and I have just got a chance to read Mr. Eliot's latest. I am very much obliged for the book. I suspect that the vitality boys will take great pleasure in the first poem, for there it appears that the Master has no balls at all, and they will say that the work lacks energy. I think otherwise, and that the poems are remarkably fine, particularly II, V, and VI. The style is new on the whole for Eliot, though some strains and some of the imagery of the *Waste Land* reappears.²¹

Eliot's new poem could provide but a temporary distraction as the pressure mounted to complete the volume. "I presume your essay has gone to Davidson," Fletcher wrote on 13 June. "Mine has long since done so." Not until 10 July, however, did Davidson write to confirm receipt, cordially affirming that he liked it but indicating briefly that "it will need a few little changes here and there, mostly verbal, caused by your remoteness from us of late – just a few little things to bring it, as you suggest, more closely in line with the general trend." Davidson, however, was concealing an antagonism that became evident as the essay circulated among other

²¹ Tate's article on Hart Crane, entitled "A Distinguished Poet," appeared in *Hound and Horn*, 3 (July-September 1930), 580-85. In his review of *Ash-Wednesday*, entitled "Irony and Humility" and published in *Hound and Horn*, 4 (January-March 1931), 290-97, Tate focuses on the irony of the first section: "And the irony has been overlooked by the critics because they take the stanza as a literal exposition of the latest phase of the Eliot 'case-history' – at a time when, in the words of Mr. Edmund Wilson, 'his psychological plight seems most depressing'" (295).

editors and contributors. “Your essay created a bitter controversy,” Tate informed Warren on 8 August:

Don was against, I was for it. He didn't like your 'sociological tone', and while I didn't either, I liked the cool and detached treatment throughout. Another thing I liked: a specific problem concretely discussed. Lyle [Lanier] who knows more about the 'negro problem' than any of us here says that some of your statements ought to be revised. I suggest that you get in touch with Don immediately or come by here for a few days if possible. It would clear the air enormously. . . . As to the title of the book, I raised last week one final and unavailing howl, but got consent to run a note to my paper disclaiming responsibility for it. The essays on the whole are good but they are mostly opinions hanging in the air.²²

There is no further correspondence related to Warren's revisions, but he evidently had proofs by late September. On 1 October, just as Warren and Cinina sent a formal announcement of their marriage to friends, Davidson wrote to say that he had been looking for Warren's corrections, regretting that since they had not arrived he must regretfully go to press without them. “I'm all the more regretful, as this leaves us without either approval or disapproval from you of the changes we earlier took the liberty of making in your essay.”

That autumn, while *I'll Take My Stand* was in press, Davidson began arranging debates on the industrial and agrarian question in the South. In one of these debates, Ransom debated the agrarian position against Stringfellow Barr, pro-industrialist editor of the *Virginia Quarterly Review*. It was the widespread and continuing interest of this debate that led Barr's friend and colleague at Charlottesville, Scott Buchanan, to invite Eliot, the Norton lecturer at Harvard for 1932-33, to the University of Virginia in May 1933 to extend his concept of tradition in relation to the “old tradition” of the South and the attempts of the Southern Agrarians to preserve it.²³ “I have been much interested,” says Eliot, obliging Buchanan in the opening lecture, “since the publication a few years ago of a book called *I'll Take My Stand* in what is sometimes called the agrarian movement in the South, and I look forward to any further statements by the same group of writers.”²⁴ Eliot's primary interest in the agrarians was the stance of Tate and others against the American New Humanists. In discussing the effects of secular Humanists on religious culture, Eliot made his notorious statement that in preserving a religious culture in an increasingly industrialized region “reasons of race and religion combine to make any large

²² Lyle Hicks Lanier contributed “A Critique of the Philosophy of Progress” to *I'll Take My Stand*. Tate appended a note to the first page of his essay on “Remarks on the Southern Religion”: “The writer is constrained to point out (with the permission of the other contributors) that in his opinion the general title of this book is not quite true to its aims. It emphasizes the fact of exclusiveness rather than its benefits; it points to a particular house but omits to say that it was the home of a spirit that may also have lived elsewhere and that this mansion, in short, was incidentally made with hands.”

²³ “As you probably know,” Buchanan had written to Eliot on 9 February 1933, “the group in Tennessee, that used to call itself the Fugitives and now calls itself the Neo-Confederates, have talked a great deal about this old tradition and the possibility of protecting and saving it. Allen Tate, for instance, has described it in terms of an indigenous paganism that never reached its proper intellectualization in Catholicism. . . . I have no fears about your sensitivity to the situation and the effectiveness of your communications.” Modern Archives Centre (L9.a), King's College, Cambridge.

²⁴ *After Strange Gods* (London: Faber and Faber, 1934), 15.

number of free-thinking Jews undesirable.”²⁵ To Eliot, still steeped in controversy with the New Humanists, and particularly with his secular Jewish friend Horace Kallen, any large number of free-thinking New Humanists – or any secular humanists, Christian or Jewish – would be intellectually undesirable, for in diminishing the role of religion in culture they would undermine the very project of reestablishing a traditional, religion-based culture. When Cleanth Brooks later revisited the occasion of the lecture, he insisted that Eliot’s remark was a free-thinking statement, not an anti-Semitic statement, as did Eliot himself on several occasions, but the damage was irreparably done and remains on exhibit in the ongoing debate of Eliot’s alleged anti-Semitism.²⁶

In the fall of 1930, Warren accepted an assistant professorship in English at Southwestern College in Memphis, where Albert Erskine, another of Ransom’s students at Vanderbilt, was with him as a graduate student and became business manager of *The Lynx*. From 1931 to 1934 the letters record Warren’s movement from Southwestern to Vanderbilt to LSU and the regular exchange of manuscripts, publications, and critical opinions among Warren, Tate, Fletcher, Fitzell, and other friends along the way. “The Lanier article is splendid,” wrote Tate on 1 June 1933, “and when I read it I did weep – because it is so much better than mine. You really damage him more than I did, and with less feeling.”²⁷ On 21 August Fletcher vented to Warren his exasperation over Tate’s recent article in the *New Republic*:

Allen’s article, burying the whole of American poetry, and repeating the Catholic funeral service over it . . . infuriated me, and though I like Allen personally, I felt it was up to me to reply. I got a letter from the *New Republic* informing me that my reply will not be printed, as another reply has come in – I suppose a Communist one. My reply was not Communist. It seems to me that this is the weakest article Allen ever wrote, and that he ought to be ashamed of it.²⁸

The frankness and generosity of the friends in their criticism of each other is refreshing as they follow each other’s writings from month to month. “I have just read your Stribling essay,” wrote Andrew Lytle to Warren from Murfreesboro on 13 February 1934. “It is splendid. I believe it’s as good as anything you’ve done in criticism.”²⁹ Their confidence in each other’s literary talent, critical integrity, and reliable judgement pervades the correspondence, and they carried that sustaining confidence and camaraderie into the founding of the *Southern Review*.

The story of that founding has often been recounted: how in February 1935 the president of LSU, James Monroe Smith, arrived in his black Cadillac at Warren’s residence on the outskirts of Baton Rouge; how, during the course of a back-road ride with Warren, Cinina, and Albert

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

²⁶ See Cleanth Brooks, “T.S. Eliot and the American South,” *Southern Review*, 21 (Autumn 1985), 914-23; here, 921. For an extensive discussion of this issue, see my “Burbank with a Baedeker, Eliot with a Cigar: American Intellectuals, Anti-Semitism, and the Idea of Culture,” *Modernism / Modernity*, 10 (January 2003), followed by responses from six critics and my reply, 1-70.

²⁷ “Blind Poet: Sidney Lanier,” a review of Aubrey Harrison Starke’s *Sidney Lanier: A Biography and Critical Study*, appeared in *American Review*, 2 (November 1933), 27-45.

²⁸ Fletcher refers to Tate’s “Poetry and Politics,” *New Republic*, 75 (2 August 1933), 308-11.

²⁹ Warren’s essay, “T.S. Stribling: A Paragraph in the History of Critical Realism,” appeared in *American Review*, 2 (February 1934), 463-86. When Warren sent the manuscript to the editor, Seward Collins, on 1 December 1933, he described it as having an “emphasis on the type of social propaganda which is embodied in his novels” (*SLI*, 234).

Erskine, Smith charged them to confer with Cleanth Brooks and Charles W. Pipkin, Dean of the Graduate School, in starting a first-rate literary and critical quarterly at the university; and how Pipkin (“Pip”) became editor, Brooks and Warren managing editors, and Erskine business manager. After Warren began to send announcements to his literary friends, the first to reply was Howard Baker, writing on 4 April that he was “overjoyed at the prospect of the *Southern Review* and I’m not only willing but eager to contribute to it.” During the next two months similar letters arrived from Fitzell, Jesse Stuart, Dixon, and others. As authors accepted and manuscripts began coming in, so came the apologies for delays. “I imagine my friends must find my delays exasperating, and I am sorry,” wrote Katherine Anne Porter on 26 May:

Pale Horse and Pale Rider simply got side tracked for another story that I have had in mind for almost as long, and the two go along fairly well on alternate days [. . .] They are both longer than the usual short story, but I hope not too long for your magazine. I will surely have it there for your fall number [. . .] and delighted to have it there [Porter’s ellipses].³⁰

On 21 June Brooks informed Warren that all was going well and ready for press, “except that Allen Tate’s article has not come in, and I have not heard from him.” Four days later Erskine could inform Warren that half the material for the first issue was set in type. “There is nothing now to hold us up except Tate’s essay.” Plans for the second issue were well under way, he announced, with stories from Caroline Gordon and Katherine Anne Porter, articles by Kenneth Burke and Herbert Agar. Brooks then added a postscript to Erskine’s letter:

I have suggested to Pipkin two or three political articles which I shall write you about in a day or so with further suggestions. One that he seems to take to is to have Laski do an article on the general election which will come off in England later this year [. . .] The matter of articles of the sort that Agar is doing for this number is what troubles me most and, I am sure, you also.³¹

As July approached Erskine had all but given up on Tate. “The Tate essay has never come,” he wrote to Warren, “somewhat on the lines of my premonitions.” It was not to come: Tate missed the first issue. On 1 July he sent in place of the unwritten article a long poem, “Fragment of a Meditation,” which was held over for the second issue. “Everywhere I am asked for news of the first issue,” Tate wrote to Brooks with the submission. “I hope to see it soon. . . . And by the way, we are dreadfully hard up. If you could pay Caroline for the story Red accepted early last spring, she would be enormously grateful.” As Brooks and Erskine labored to put the first issue through the press, an equally tardy Thomas Wolfe finally responded to Warren’s invitation of 16 April: “I have an enormous amount of unpublished manuscript and many new things which I am eager to get at as soon as possible. I should be very glad if you would care to look at some if it and would appreciate it if you will let me know.” Despite this invitation for a general editorial review, and the fact that he was announced as a contributor to future issues, Wolfe never published in the *Southern Review*.

³⁰ In fact, Porter contributed another, much shorter story, “A Circus,” to the first issue of the journal. “Pale Horse, Pale Rider” did not appear in the *Southern Review* until the winter of 1938.

³¹ Brooks refers to Herbert Agar’s “Culture Versus Colonialism in America,” the lead essay of the first issue.

On 10 July the first covers of the new review came off the press, and Pipkin was delighted with the distinctive design and coloration that distinguished it smartly from its forerunner, the *Southwest Review*, which had been jointly published by LSU and SMU. “The *Review* will look glorious,” he wrote prophetically to Warren,

different in its cool greenery and black borders from the Baton Rouge [sic] days. I think we shall make history, all of us, with the *Review* – if we like. [. . .] I really believe the *Review* begins authentically, with not too much flair. This becomes the *Southern Review*, even though dated Baton Rouge. I noticed one comment on us: ‘Heil Huey’.

The bound issues were met with both exhilaration and exhaustion as they were delivered to the editorial workshop where Brooks and Erskine had given intense attention to every detail. “I hope you like the magazine,” Brooks wrote to Warren on 20 July. “Albert and I are exhausted – so please don’t find too many printer’s errors. I have found two.” Pipkin, more distant from the agonizing typos, was still waxing Southern eloquence: “Red, the *Southern Review* is mighty fine! We’ll just have to admit it. And make it better. I do hope we can reach an audience . . . As you often remarked the *Review* will just have to be a necessity for those we want to read it.”

Congratulatory letters arrived from friends and contributors, including John Peale Bishop, whose story “A Man Who Thought” had appeared in the first issue and who wrote Warren on 27 August to comment on the high standard achieved. Thereafter the letters are fewer, with only eighteen between 1936 and 1948, but these include six personal letters to Warren and Cinina from Katherine Anne Porter between 4 November 1937 and 31 March 1938. They are preceded by a letter of 2 September 1937 from Albert Erskine, relating to editorial matters of the next issue of the *Southern Review*, and describing a three-day visit with the Tates and Brooks. “K.A.P. claims to have two [stories] under construction, nearly finished. She was up at Tate’s, truly wonderful.”³² Though the smitten Erskine was twenty-one years younger than thrice-married Porter, they married in 1938. Andrew Lytle then fell in love with Brooks’ student Edna Barker, who was a proofreader for the review. As Lytle later wrote in recounting these marital events, “There was no limit to the influence of the *Southern Review*.”³³

III

The provocative nature of the correspondence in the Gardner collection prompts the reader to see the letters and books in relation to materials in other archives that complement, continue, and complete the intellectual interests manifest in them. In 1937 Brooks and Warren were at work on *Understanding Poetry* (1938), in which the poetry and influence of Eliot on the developing New Criticism was strongly evident. “I sent my commentary on *The Waste Land* to Eliot,” Brooks wrote to Tate on 7 April 1937, and Brooks quotes for him Eliot’s prompt reply that the essay “seems to me on the whole excellent, and very much better than H.R. Williamson’s which went

³² The two stories would have been “Old Mortality” and “Pale Horse, Pale Rider,” both of which appeared in the *Southern Review* in 1938.

³³ See *The Southern Review Original Series, 1935-1942: A Commemoration* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1980), 15.

to rather fantastic lengths.”³⁴ “He goes on to say,” Brooks continued, “that he thinks such an essay valuable if it does not set up to represent the author’s method of composition – a matter I had already taken care of.” A reference in another letter points one elsewhere: after the volume began making its impact on the teaching of poetry in 1938, Tate, Merrill Moore, and Warren were among thirteen American poet-critics asked by the editors of *The Harvard Advocate* to contribute to a special issue on Eliot, and their little-known responses confirm how central Eliot and *The Waste Land* had been to them and other Southern writers since 1922. “At one time or another I have been under some great teachers,” wrote Tate,

but I have had only two Masters, and one of them is T.S. Eliot. My personal acquaintance with Eliot has been slight, being confined chiefly to correspondence; yet for about sixteen years I have been trying to learn everything from him that I can use. It is easy for a twenty-two-year-old boy to set up for poet; it is hard for him to subordinate himself to an awareness that poetry is greater than he is. That has been Eliot’s lesson, the one at any rate that he made me conscious of in 1922.³⁵

Writing both as a poet and a psychoanalyst, Merrill Moore tries to account for Eliot’s extraordinary influence on the writers of Moore’s generation by comparing *The Waste Land* to a dream, asserting that “it parallels in materials and architecture the way the unconscious works.” To Moore, Eliot goes so deep into the roots and sources of the unconscious self that he touches several layers of universal human experience. The unique architectural structure of the poem, he argues, aroused an endemic public feeling toward letters: “Once it was aroused by his feat of deep-diving (he brought up a pearl) it was secondary and inevitable that men should imitate and echo him.” Refusing to be intimidated by Eliot’s protective theory of impersonality, Moore was among the first to declare, thirty-three years before the publication of the facsimile edition (1971) of the manuscripts broke the seal, that “what he dived into was himself, his own personality” (45).

For his part, Warren was already beginning to formulate the larger perspective of the necessary place of the poet in the world that he would bring to Eliot’s obituary twenty-seven years later, a perspective related to Warren’s own aim as a poet-critic. Warren, fully immersed in Eliot’s poetry and in his literary, cultural, and humanistic criticism, declares that “the most important single contribution which Mr. Eliot has made to the cause of poetry is to define in his criticism, and to dramatize in his poetry, the terms upon which we may profitably discuss the relation of poetry to the whole life of an individual and to the general society in which that individual lives.” Strongly aware of Eliot’s religious position, and of the critical resistance to his pronouncements about the relation of religion and literature, Warren affirms his point of view:

The significance of his contribution remains, even if his particular solutions are not equally accessible to all. He has, at least, made the question come alive. And time may show that he, more than any other man of his period, has done something to heal the breach between poetry and society. (46)

³⁴ Quoted in Allen Tate, *Memories and Essays Old and New 1926-1974* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1975), 31. Henry Ross Williamson’s account of *The Waste Land* appears in his *The Poetry of T.S. Eliot* (London: 1933).

³⁵ “Homage to T.S. Eliot,” *The Harvard Advocate*, 125 (December 1938), 41.

A month later, in January 1939, Eliot brought the *Criterion* to a close, wondering “whether it would not have been more profitable, instead of trying to maintain literary standards increasingly repudiated in the modern world, to have endeavored to rally intellectual effort to affirm those principles of life and policy from the lack of which we are suffering disastrous consequences.”³⁶ Except for John Gould Fletcher, none of the Fugitives or Agrarians had succeeded in placing poems there; only Tate’s “The Fallacy of Humanism” and Howard Baker’s “Belief and Dogma,” a spin-off of the Humanist controversy, had made their mark.³⁷ Though the editors had invited contributions from Eliot, none of his poems appeared in the *Southern Review* – only his essay on “The Poetry of W.B. Yeats” for a special issue on Yeats in 1941, just before the journal closed. Nonetheless, it is evident that there was a significant synergy between the *Criterion* and the *Southern Review* as the editors strove to uphold common literary and cultural principles in their respective attempts to affect the mind of Europe and the mind of the South.

In tracing the Eliot thread through the fabric of the Gardner papers at Emory, I have tried, as a student of Eliot, to suggest to my students that a disinterested journey through an archive that seems only obliquely related to their own interests can unexpectedly alter and illuminate stale perceptions of literary relationships, influence, and history. Everything suddenly shifts, opens up, is reshuffled and recast in the mind. In the Gardner collection, this personal account of the archive could be rewritten by pulling and focusing on the substantial threads of Crane, Porter, Ransom, and numerous others. The discoveries command one to visit other Warren archives, where isolated and neglected materials suddenly take on their missing context and significance. In the Yale archive, for instance, one discovers not only Warren’s unpublished lecture on “Prufrock,” but his striking introduction of Eliot when he came to speak on “To Criticize the Critic: A Retrospective View of My Own Literary Criticism” in November 1961.³⁸ Admitting the density and difficulty of Eliot’s poetry, and describing how the library shelves “groan with the weight of the exegeses,” Warren takes the audience back to his personal discovery of *The Waste Land* in November 1922, in a way that he had not done before. “What now we tend to forget,” he said poignantly, “is that then there were no exegeses to tell you what the poem meant”:

But your heart told you, the tingling of your spine told you, your own mouth framing the grand syllables told you. Maybe, after all, you didn’t know what the poem meant, but you were young, and this poetry, you knew, was for the young, for you, your time, your moment. You knew what was the most important thing to know – here was indeed the voice of ‘il miglior fabbro.’

It was not, he declared, a poetry of despair, as an older generation warned; the young readers of that time knew intuitively “that the inwardness of the poem was, strangely, joy and energy”:

³⁶ “Last Words,” *Criterion*, 18 (January 1939), 273.

³⁷ Baker’s essay appeared in the *Criterion* for July 1933.

³⁸ Warren’s undated, seven-page typescript of “Prufrock – T.S. Eliot” and his untitled introduction (identified “Poetry Center – YHMA – November 23, 1961 on one draft) are in the Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University: YCAL MSS 51, Box 235, folder 4487, and Box 237, folder 4589, respectively.

Despair, in fact, is a particularly joyous and energizing subject to the young – when, through the magic of poetry, it speaks to the young of the pathos of their strength, the delicious tragedy of their confidence, the wisdom of their foolish courage.

Many of his fellow students who later taught the college courses and loaded the shelves with exegeses forgot that they were, like Warren reciting the poem at Vanderbilt, among “those erstwhile boys who had once postured against the rubble of history and mouthed that energizing eloquence to the stars.” What we must continually remind ourselves of, he said to the student members of his audience, is that

the exegeses could have been written only because of the dangerous magic of that eloquence. And that old magic is still there, lurking primordially in the dark between the closed covers of the bookshelf, as in a cave. Don’t take down the book. Don’t open it. It will get you again if you don’t watch out.

And so Warren, having personally introduced Eliot to a new generation of students through the memory of his own, welcomed Eliot to the lectern as “the man whom we might call the dearest enemy of the age.”

When, just over three years later, Eliot died, Warren revisited the introduction, one observes, and reworked some passages for his obituary of Eliot: “Consider the *4 Quartets*,” he drafted in the margin, obviously moved. “Who else, in these noisy & angry years, tried to define the anguish of the mind, of some stillness?” Warren’s final personal tribute to Eliot is what stays with us; it is of secondary interest that it dynamically links the two archives, but it reminds us how a curious Electrolux box found in the basement of a small college can lead us to reshape our portraits of Warren and his fellow artists.

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