2005

Contents

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Contents
Volume V
2005

Editors’ Foreword vii

ROSANNA WARREN
Places: A Memoir 1

The daughter of Robert Penn Warren and Eleanor Clark recalls a series of moving images and moments and, as a noted poet in her own right, offers a unique perspective on her father’s verse.

GABRIEL WARREN
A Son Remembers 9

The Warrens’ son, a sculptor with a keen eye for natural forms, recalls the important role of place in his family’s life and shares a sequence of evocative photos.

PETER DAVISON
Questions of Swimming, 1935 (For Robert Penn Warren) 14

In an eloquent meditative lyric, one of our leading poets pays tribute to a friend and mentor he knew from childhood.

CHARLES EAST
Memories of Warren 16

A distinguished editor and Southern man-of-letters recalls his early discovery of Robert Penn Warren, his first meeting with the poet-novelist, and his later attempts to persuade Warren to publish his verse play Proud Flesh, forerunner of the prize-winning novel All the King’s Men.

LEWIS P. SIMPSON
Robert Penn Warren and the South 22

One of the most acclaimed students of the Southern mind, a critic and editor who came to know Warren well and earned his deep respect, revisits the importance of region and identity in the author’s life and work.

WILLIAM BEDFORD CLARK AND JAMES A. GRIMSHAW, JR.
A Conversation with Lewis P. Simpson 25

The co-editors of this journal interview Professor Simpson on a wide range of issues pertaining to Warren, his place in the American canon, and the present state of literature in the academy and the culture at large.

JOSEPH BLOTNER
Robert Penn Warren, Cleanth Brooks, and the Southern Literary Tradition 48

The illustrious biographer of Faulkner and Warren provides an overview of the role the Southern tradition in American letters played in the making of Warren and Brooks, both of whom he knew as friends as well as subjects of professional interest.
Paul V. Murphy

*Divorcing Robert Penn Warren from the South*

The author considers Warren’s place in American intellectual history, which is at present problematic. He argues that Warren must be seen as more than a “Southerner.” Though he dealt with Southern materials and saw himself as an uprooted exile and wanderer, Warren emerged from a modernist ethos and went on to write in an existentialist idiom. His career was played out on a world stage.

Mark Royden Winchell

*Understanding Whittier; or, Warren in the Aftermath of Modernism*

Although the textbooks he edited with Cleanth Brooks virtually defined the New Criticism, Warren’s critical essays moved beyond close reading and frequently challenged the standards of high modernism when it came to assessing literary excellence. This was particularly true during the last three decades of his life, when his poetry also reflected a turn from strict modernism. His discovery of Whittier’s poetry in the 1970s revealed new depth and unsuspected complexity in the work of that “fireside sentimentalist” and demonstrates how far Warren was prepared to go in fashioning a “newer” criticism.

Ronald Schuchard

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

The Special Collections division of the Emory library is home to a vast array of materials of remarkable value to the study of Robert Penn Warren, and this account provides a useful running guide to those extensive holdings.

Harold L. Weatherby

*Warren’s Willie Talos: Reflections on a Name*

In choosing Willie Talos as the original name for his strongman governor in All the King’s Men, Warren was explicitly drawing upon Edmund Spenser, but his allusion to the Faerie Queene remains puzzling. Spenser’s “robotic” character would seem to have more in common with a dehumanized figure in the novel like Sugar Boy, who is often presented in mechanistic imagery. Warren’s ultimate decision to change Willie’s name from Talos to Stark seems a wise one.

Stephen Burt

*R. P. Blackmur and Randall Jarrell on Literary Magazines: An Exchange*

Letters between Warren’s acquaintance Blackmur and his close friend and onetime protégé Jarrell on the state of American literary magazines enrich our sense of the literary milieu in which the three worked.

John Burt

*Brother to dragons*

Brother to Dragons is a poem that turns chiefly upon guilt over racism and slavery, but many of its most intense passages concern sexual guilt. The poem returns obsessively to the subject of sex because sex provides it with a way of thinking about how the highest and lowest aspect of human nature are inextricably bound together in it. The inextricable duality of love is a model for a similar inextricable duality the poem discusses in political idealism. The way the desire for purity shades into sadism is a model for the ways efforts to purify the political world also come to grief.

About the Center

About the Circle

About the Birthplace