

2012

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Joseph Millichap

Western Kentucky University, joseph.millichap@wku.edu

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### Recommended Citation

Millichap, Joseph (2012) "Robert Penn Warren and Photography," *Robert Penn Warren Studies*: Vol. 9 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/rpwstudies/vol9/iss1/5>

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## Robert Penn Warren and Photography

JOSEPH MILLICHAP  
WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

Robert Penn Warren's career and canon demonstrate his more than casual interest in photography, much like that of several Southern contemporaries. If not so directly as Eudora Welty, Zora Neale Hurston, and Ralph Ellison, who were all accomplished photographers, Warren became creatively engaged with photographic art during the 1930s and 1940s, along with other deracinated Southerners such as Erskine Caldwell, Richard Wright, and James Agee. Some of these literary figures were directly involved with books illustrated by photographs during these critical decades. For example, *You Have Seen Their Faces* (1937), combining Caldwell's non-fiction and Margaret Bourke-White's photography, became a national bestseller. In contrast, Hurston's *Tell My Horse* (1937) and Wright's *12 Million Black Voices* (1941) never have been widely appreciated, while *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941), a compilation of prose and photography by Agee and Walker Evans, was initially neglected. Welty's *Black Saturday*, a collection of her own stories and photos from 1935, could not even find a publisher. Warren never created a photo-text, but his later remarks about Evans recall how photographs from the 1930s opened the emerging writer's imagination to the power inherent in any art form to revise commonplace perceptions of personal and social reality. Evans and other photographers thus influenced Warren in his use of the photographic trope for an artistic transformation of the visual art of photography into the verbal art of literature.

The importance of photography to Southern literature during the 1930s seems determined by a regional convergence of social decline and cultural renaissance, but the photograph as a regional document has a more extended and contested history in the South. In 1984, novelist and critic David Madden posited three crucial periods of Southern history—the Civil War, the Depression, and the Civil Rights era—as the primary eras of

ongoing anxieties in regard to the photographic representation of the South. Madden concludes his influential essay on the history of Southern photography by noting that “from the start, many southerners feel, photographs exposed the South, at its most vulnerable, to staring, sometimes gloating, northern eyes.”<sup>1</sup> Katherine Henninger reexamines and extends Madden’s formulations in “A Short and Selected History of Photography in the South,” the second chapter of *Ordering the Façade: Photography and Contemporary Southern Women’s Writing* (2007). Henninger’s study demonstrates how recent women’s writing about the South employs photographic tropes, which she names “fictional photographs,” to deconstruct the region’s prevailing patriarchal narrative in cultural and literary terms. In support of her critical practice, Henninger also presents a theoretical discussion of the differences between the photograph as visual text and as verbal trope.<sup>2</sup>

Although Warren’s fiction and poetry are more readily identified with the Civil War and Civil Rights eras, he came of age as a writer during the Depression and was formed by it in many ways. Indeed, the interest in photography Warren shared with Southern authors in the 1930s and the 1940s may be attributed to the pervasive power of photography and film as graphic and popular arts during these decades. As a contributor to the Agrarian manifesto *I’ll Take My Stand* in 1930, Warren well might have read *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* in 1941. The photo book by Agee and Evans concerned the plight of the Southern tenant farmer, a situation that President Roosevelt proclaimed America’s number one problem even in the depths of a national depression. Moreover, Warren knew Agee’s work as early as 1935 when he solicited a contribution from the younger writer for the initial issue of *The Southern Review*.<sup>3</sup> Laurence

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<sup>1</sup> “The Cruel Radiance of What Is,” *Southern Quarterly* 22 (1984): 13.

<sup>2</sup> Henninger and most recent critical readings concerned with the photograph and the literary text are focused by two major theoretical works about this visual art form, Susan Sontag’s *On Photography* (1977) and Roland Barthes’s *Camera Lucida* (1980), to both of which I will return later in my discussion.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas J. Cutrer, *Parnassus on the Mississippi: The Southern Review and the Baton Rouge Literary Community, 1935-1942* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1984), 52.

Bergreen also notes that Warren applauded the younger writer's film criticism during the early 1940s. "Agee's observations about movies so impressed the Librarian of Congress [Archibald MacLeish] that he showed them to his friend Robert Penn Warren, who felt sufficiently moved by them to wish that this fellow Agee apply his formidable command of film technique and history to the making—not merely the reviewing—of movies."<sup>4</sup> Whether Warren was introduced to Evans's documentary photographs by *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* in the 1940s, he was acquainted personally with the photographer during the 1950s in New York. They were introduced by Warren's future wife, the attractive younger writer Eleanor Clark; she earlier had posed for Evans, who also had a discerning eye for female charm. The two men were both professional and personal friends by the time they were associated as artist/teachers on the Yale faculty in the 1960s. Later, Warren provided a laudatory and insightful dedication for a 1971 retrospective of the photographer's canon at the Museum of Modern Art, which then was published as an introduction for a portfolio of Evans prints in 1972.

I became aware of the relationships of Warren, Clark, and Evans in Belinda Rathbone's definitive study, *Walker Evans: A Biography* (1995); earlier Warren criticism does not mention it as far as I can discern. Evans often photographed the Warren family both collectively and individually in portraits of Eleanor Clark during the 1950s, pictures of the Warren children during the 1960s, and photos of the Warrens' celebrated dinner parties during the 1970s. Born in 1903, Evans was only two years Warren's senior, and the photographer's passing in 1975 must have troubled the writer who was then just entering his seventies and beginning to lose many old friends and colleagues to death during this period.

In her Evans biography, Belinda Rathbone cites Warren as an astute observer of his friend's photographs, but, as is often the case with his literary criticism, the writer's remarks prove more interesting for what they reveal about his own

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<sup>4</sup> *James Agee: A Life* (New York: Dutton, 1984), 281.

creative efforts. Writing in the 1970s, Warren located his initial realization of the photographer as artist in the example of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*: “The world that Walker Evans caught so ferociously in his lens thirty years ago was a world I had known all my life.”<sup>5</sup> At first, he recalled “pleasure in simple recognition,” but then “staring at the pictures, I knew my familiar world was a world I had never known” (284). A “veil of familiarity prevented my seeing it,” Warren goes on to say, concluding that “Walker tore aside that veil; he woke me from the torpor of the accustomed” (284). According to Warren, the formal simplicity and documentary realism of the photographic images that Evans made in the Depression South concealed narrative complexity and psychological symbolism akin to literary texts by Southerners such as William Faulkner (285).

Additional evidence of the influence documentary photography had on Warren’s views of his own art can be discovered in his fiction, both early and late. In my earlier study of Warren’s short fiction, for example, I noted that the long description of his protagonist that opens “The Patented Gate and the Mean Hamburger” is both “photographic and poetic,” especially for its setting on a Saturday afternoon in a Southern county seat during the Depression common to the work of documentary photographers such as Evans and literary observers such as Agee.<sup>6</sup> Although Warren’s story was not published until 1947, when the writer reworked his earliest short fiction for his collection *The Circus in the Attic and Other Stories*, his discussion of its genesis places it among his first fictions created during the late 1930s (97). The opening sentence of Warren’s story, “You have seen him a thousand times,” may recall the title of the photo book published by Caldwell and Bourke-White in 1937, *You Have Seen Their Faces*, and like it suggests that the viewer must look beyond the familiar social surfaces to see individuals with real insight (42). Recalling 1930s photographic practice, Warren’s description of his protagonist alternates a

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Belinda Rathbone, *Walker Evans: A Biography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995), 284; hereafter cited parenthetically in my text.

<sup>6</sup> *Robert Penn Warren: A Study of the Short Fiction* (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 42; hereafter cited parenthetically in my text.

long shot of Jeff York as a universalized type of the yeoman farmer with a close-up on the watchful eyes of this particularized example.

Warren's literary method here also adumbrates Roland Barthes's Latinate formulations in *Camera Lucida*, especially what he names the "studium" and the "punctum" of the photograph, terms that roughly translate as the general "study" and the particular "point" revealed within its visual grammar, or the "context" and "text" as he also calls them. Barthes's close association with literary theories of reader response should be recalled here; for the studium seems to be the general matter all observers can observe in a photograph, while the punctum seems to be that visual point within it discovered by an individual. "A photographer's punctum is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)" as Barthes puns in *Camera Lucida*.<sup>7</sup> Because such reactions must remain subjective, they can prove problematic in the criticism of photography. In a literary photograph, however, the writer creates both studium and punctum for the reader, as in the example of Jeff York from "The Patented Gate and the Mean Hamburger" or others in Warren's stories, novels, and poems.

For example, Warren's final novel, *A Place to Come To* (1977), opens with a scene in the 1930s, the first person narrator's early memories of his father's death that he quite consciously compares with the documentary photographs he has come to appreciate during his much later marriage to a professional photographer of "both news and art."<sup>8</sup> In Jed's memory of it, the earlier funeral seems almost unreal to him, as if it were "a picture seen in one of those books of photographs of the South published during the Depression years," perhaps *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (13). Jed Tewksbury concludes the review of his life that becomes the narrative of *A Place to Come To* much closer to the novel's present at the funeral of his mother's second husband, a sort of down-home surrogate father.

<sup>7</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 27; hereafter cited parenthetically in my text.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Penn Warren, *A Place to Come To* (New York: Random House, 1977), 332; hereafter cited parenthetically in my text.

Yet the fictional setting of Dugton, Alabama, has not changed much in the interim: “The scene was the same as that of one of the more famous photographs by Walker Evans, but a generation of damage later” (391).

Again like his narrator in *A Place to Come To*, Warren seems to appreciate more fully the mediated image of the South both in his own and in the cultural consciousness. As if in evidence, the novel includes a number of photo and film images that Jed analyzes with a new-found perception as he reviews his life, much as Warren was doing in these same years in his poetry. Jed’s graduate school mentor is summoned up by the pictures and artifacts of his education and career displayed in his study, such as “photographs taken in Greece (not the ‘artistic’ sepia ones, of course) . . . back when he was still wrapped up in classical archeology” (65). Later, while recalling the country home outside Nashville where he lived while teaching at Vanderbilt, Jed recalls the yeoman farmer who lost the place, much like Jeff York in “The Patented Gate and the Mean Hamburger,” who reminds him, as did his own father, of “pictures by Brady, and other such photographers, of Confederate prisoners” (178). All of Warren’s slightly autobiographical narrator’s memories are described by means of a photographic trope. They become “faded and archaic as old photographs found in the attic” (21), like the childhood pictures of his parents Warren recreated in his later poems shaped by his own aging, life-review, and questioning of his fate, such as “Old Photograph of the Future” from his final volume.

Let me return to the chronological order of Warren’s canon, however, to consider his initial treatments of the photographic trope in his first published novels, *Night Rider* (1939) and *At Heaven’s Gate* (1943). The former, like the two unpublished novels which preceded it, presents fewer and less striking photo images than the latter, which offers not only more photos but more carefully organized patterns of them as images and symbols. Warren’s engagement with Evans’s photography by way of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* in the early 1940s, midway between these two novels, perhaps helped to affect these differences. A most salient instance of the photographic

trope in *Night Rider* is the protagonist's extended comparison of his monotonous married life to a dog-eared stereopticon photo removed from the bi-focal viewer that transforms it into three-dimensional life. In response to an interviewer's question about the South of his youth, Warren provides another striking stereoptical image of regional history when he said that "A different feeling toward the present event and the past event somehow overlap in what was like a double-exposure photograph almost. . . . The real world was there and the old world was there, one photograph imposed upon the other," much like the somewhat autobiographical Jed Tewksbury's narrative vision in *A Place to Come To*.<sup>9</sup>

In *At Heaven's Gate*, Warren arranges fictive photographs in a pattern of public and private views used by the central figures, Jerry Calhoun and Sue Murdock, who negotiate their conflicted personal relationship through glimpses into their public and private personas seen in newspaper photos and family portraits. Jerry meets Sue, the spoiled daughter of powerful businessman Bogan Murdock, after emerging from rural obscurity during the 1930s as the star quarterback at the local university to become her father's protégé in the bond business. Early in the narrative, Warren describes Sue's frustrated visit to the newspaper files at the public library seeking out some insight into "Bulls-Eye" Calhoun: "She studied the pictures, but they did not tell her what she had come to find out."<sup>10</sup> The news photos all show the public poses of a "football hero," not what she desires to know: that is, the real person who "was off the picture . . . or behind the picture" (50). Conversely Jerry imagines that he understands what is underneath Sue's "smooth, gold-colored, expressionless face" when he views her portrait at "twelve or thirteen" in the Murdock family album: "the face, which was lifted a little, as though in expectation, the eyes wide and candid, the lips parted slightly" (106). Warren later hints at some dark paternal experience that compels Sue into a series of hurtful male

<sup>9</sup> *Talking with Robert Penn Warren*, eds. Floyd C. Watkins, John T. Hiers, and Mary Louise Weaks (Athens: U of Georgia Press, 1990), 124.

<sup>10</sup> *At Heaven's Gate* (New York: New Directions, 1985), 50; hereafter cited parenthetically in my text.

relationships—with fraternity boys at first, next with the feckless Jerry, later with the fanatical labor organizer Sweetwater, and finally with the unbalanced intellectual Slim Sarrett, who kills her. So her pictures in the local paper include social occasions with fraternity men or Jerry, the picket lines with Sweetwater, and the murder scene in her apartment. *At Heaven's Gate* ends with Bogan Murdock striking a pose for a new family portrait which seemingly will erase Sue from memory. He then leaves for a news conference to address the bankruptcy of his company and the tragedy of his family—both of which have combined to destroy his surrogate son Jerry.

In Warren's only great novel, *All the King's Men*, Jack Burden's first-person narration also features photographic tropes for points of public and personal reference. Whether used in news prints or private portraits, photography both reflects and reinterprets life, thus recording and recreating its realities. *All the King's Men* opens in medias res on a drive back to Willie Stark's home place to provide the press with domestic images that will bolster the governor's falling popularity among his countrified constituency through the creation of what we would now call a photo opportunity. This one results in a comic scene as Jack maneuvers the family dog for homey effects. Such poses are repeated more often after the first lady leaves the philandering governor to return to their farm. "Two or three times the papers—the administration papers that is—ran photographs of him standing with his wife and kid in front of a henhouse or an incubator."<sup>11</sup>

In this opening instance, the Stark entourage stops to test the governor's hometown popularity at the local drugstore, and Jack notes the portrait photograph of Willie placed above the soda fountain like a secular icon, probably in imitation of the nearly universal pictures of President Roosevelt in public places during that same era. Early on, Jack compares Willie with "a picture about six times life size. . . . I had seen that picture in a thousand places, pool halls to palaces" (6). The graphic also is

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Penn Warren, *All the King's Men* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1946), 156; hereafter cited parenthetically in my text.

glossed by Stark's campaign slogan as a verbal text, "My study is the heart of the people" (6). As Jack settles into retelling Willie's story, he recalls by contrast the first time the politician's picture appeared in the big-city newspapers. In his initial political role as County Treasurer, he had been an uncorrupted young lawyer exposing down home chicanery in the shoddy construction of a district school that led to student deaths, and the caption on his front-page photo read, "KEEPS HIS FAITH" (64).

One of the people in the drugstore crowd, described by Jack as having "the kind of face you see in photographs of General Forrest's cavalymen," is not afraid to tell the governor of his portrait, "'hit don't do you no credit, Willie'" (6, 7). "The Boss" then studies his larger-than-life photograph, "cocking his head to one side and squinting at it," and gives a facetious excuse: "'I was porely when they took it. It was like I had the cholera morbus'" (7). This pseudo-scientific term for infectious gastroenteritis amuses Willie's audience for the moment. However, the whole sequence encapsulates Willie's growing distance from his study of the needs of the people he was elected to serve, even those he has known from his boyhood back home in Mason City. The responsive reader also senses Warren the author somewhere behind these images, studying news pictures of Huey Long to gain insight into the man he had seen but once in life.

Although newspaper photos of Willie abound in the present of *All the King's Men*, notably publicity shots with other Stark family members, the most arresting instance of photography in the novel concerns a photograph of Cass Mastern that Jack inherits from his own family's past. For him as for his creator, photographs seem to capture fixed moments in life by freezing the flow of time; yet they may be just bits of flotsam in the flood of history as well. At the beginning of the interpolated fourth chapter of the novel, Warren's perhaps autobiographical protagonist makes the acquaintance of his ancestor by means of a family "history" he intends to use for his dissertation in "History" at the state university. Warren spends several paragraphs describing an old photograph from Jack's viewpoint,

as his gaze is focused by the ill-fitting uniform of a Confederate infantryman, worn as a badge of Cass's suicidal "self-humiliation," and by "the pair of dark, wide-set, deep eyes which burned out of the photograph," much like Barthean punctuation points, in Cass's abnegation of his Southern heritage (161). Jack cannot complete his doctoral dissertation until he can come to terms with what the photo represents: "He simply sat there at the pine table, night after night, staring at the photograph, and writing nothing" (188). At the end of Chapter Four, Jack explains his writer's block; before he can understand life he has to learn what Mastern knew, "that the world is like an enormous spider web" (188).

If notable instances of photographic tropes are found earlier in *At Heaven's Gate*, which is a preview of *All the King's Men*, more may be discovered later by Warren's contrasting of private and public photographs in the title piece of his only short fiction collection, *The Circus in the Attic*, a work that serves as a kind of coda to his great novel. The protagonist, Bolton Lovehart, is an artist manqué who starts out to write the history of his home town but instead creates a miniature circus that fills his study in the attic of his family home. Pictures of Bolton range from family portraits at the turn of the century to news photos of him in age when he sells off his circus to support home-front war efforts during the early 1940s. After the watershed of *All the King's Men* in Warren's personal life and professional career, photographic tropes appear in all of his later novels, save for the historical epic *World Enough and Time* (1949) set in frontier Kentucky, yet most of these later reiterations generally prove less frequent, patterned, or illuminating than the ones discussed above.

Like other aspects of his creativity, the most meaningful recreations of photography are revealed ever more often in Warren's poems, beginning with *Promises* (1957), which earned him the first of two Pulitzer Prizes for poetry with another to follow for *Now and Then* (1975). I think that the collection opening his work about aging, *Or Else* (1974), written at almost the same time as his Evans essay, provides the most significant

photographic tropes. For example, a Depression scene much like a photograph by Evans or some other documentarian is found in “Forever O’Clock,” in which Warren’s persona ranges from his disoriented present to a tenant farm in the past with a “gray board shack” bleached by “drouth” (much like those in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*) to a timeless future in an elongated last line suggesting eternity and death—“A clock somewhere is trying to make up its mind to strike forever o’clock.”<sup>12</sup>

Theoretical critics of photography such as Sontag and Barthes are fascinated by the philosophical relationship of this spatial art form to time, and both theorists use literary devices to express this ineffable affiliation. Sontag frames it concretely in terms of photographic practice: “Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time’s relentless melt.”<sup>13</sup> Barthes is more abstract in his theoretical position: “In the Photograph, Time’s immobilization assumes only an excessive, monstrous mode: Time is engorged” (91). The textual contrast seen in these paired quotations also proves significant for the consideration of Warren’s poetry, in which he often makes much the same contrast of uncapitalized “time” and capitalized “Time,” seemingly to contrast duration perceived existentially or intellectually.

The several private and public photographic tropes discovered in *Or Else* are all concerned with time/Time. For example, “I Am Dreaming of a White Christmas: The Natural History of a Vision” involves the subconscious imagery of dreams, as its settings triangulate a dark December night in the western Kentucky of the poet’s youth in the early twentieth century, a smoggy late summer evening in the New York City of his present in the early 1970s, and his timeless future as implied by a nocturnal autumn snowfall on Western mountains. The first eight of the twelve sections of “White Christmas” seem to be nightmare images from an appalling family photo album

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<sup>12</sup> *The Collected Poems of Robert Penn Warren*, ed. John Burt (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1998), 289-290; hereafter all of Warren’s poems are cited parenthetically in my text from this collection.

<sup>13</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1977), 15; hereafter cited parenthetically in my text.

revealing the past in all its irrevocable finality. Although the poet recalls his lost parents as if in a Christmas morning pose, they appear as “Through / Air brown as an old daguerreotype fading,” or in a scene from the past depicted in the chronological present through the mysteries of photography, decades after their death and dissolution (275). This obscure imagery suggests the early evening “smog-glitter” of hazy skies, “yellow as acid,” in late summer near New York City’s “Times Square” of the ninth and tenth sections, which are set in the present of the poet’s own age (279). Although the concluding snow scene takes place on the Nez Perce Pass somewhere in the mountain ranges that form the borders of Idaho and Montana, its visual imagery bears an ambivalent burden of obliteration.

In “Reading Late at Night, Thermometer Falling,” Warren as son imagines his own father at about the three score and ten he himself has almost achieved by 1974. The father’s later life was made lonely by his wife’s early death in 1931 and further diminished by his personal bankruptcy later in the Depression. Warren pictures him, living on as he did to age eighty-five in a dreary “old folks” home. Against this late image, he contrasts a memory from his own past when Warren remembers himself as a boy finding “an old photograph” (311), dated “1890” (312), of his father as a law student, posed with a hand on his textbooks, “eyes / Lifted into space. // And into the future” (311). That future never was to be, so the senior Warren tore up the rediscovered portrait to cast it “Into the fire” (312). His father’s poetic ambitions came to a similar fate: “Later, I found the poems. Not good,” in the view of Warren, by then a more accomplished poet himself (312). Yet the writer reminds us in his own poem’s philosophical conclusion that “Man lives by images,” in this case both visual and verbal ones through which the senior Warren lives on decades after his death in his son’s reminiscent art (312).

Implications of death are inherent in the consideration of time, of course, and both Sontag and Barthes powerfully express their formulations about this complex relation. “Photography is an elegiac art,” according to Sontag, and she locates the truth

of her proposition in the concrete image of a death's head: "All photographs are memento mori" (15). Once again, Barthes inscribes his theory with abstraction and capitalization, as well as with philosophical and italicized diction: "Ultimately what I am seeking in the photograph . . . is Death: Death is the eidōs of that Photograph," with eidōs here defined as in Greek philosophy as a visual image of an ideal essence or form (15). Sontag considers this association of photography with death personally, like Warren, and it haunts Barthes's study, written as a memorial contemplation of his dead mother through real and recalled photographs. In Warren's later poetry, his poems of age-work and of life-review, a similar spirit of mortality hovers above his recreated photographic tropes.

Although examples of his literary photographs can be found in all four intervening collections, I will take my final example from Warren's last collection, the gathering published with the 1985 *Selected Poems* under the title *Altitudes and Extensions*. "Old Photograph of the Future" presents what seems to be a picture preserved in the Warren family album, a formal portrait in which the focus is on what the opening line describes as "That center of attention—an infantile face" (*Collected Poems* 566). Of course, the face belongs to the poet himself, some seventy-five years earlier, as he reveals in his fourth stanza. No wonder that this earlier image, then a countenance tinted "pink and white" in the studio, has become his visage, "Now faded, and in the photograph only a trace / Of grays, not much expression in sight," much like the one he now sees peering back at him from his mirror (566). The second and third stanzas next complete the photographic tableau of himself as an infant posed beside his proud parents. Their photographic details demonstrate the era of this family record: the infant "swathed in a sort of white dress" that matches his mother's, while his father stands apart "In black coat, derby at breast" (566, 567). Three quarters of a century later, "They lie side by side in whatever love survives / Under green turf, or snow" (567). Inspired by the family album, in his imagination "that child, years later, stands there" by the family plot in the local cemetery, "While old landscapes blur" with

tears as “he in guilt grieves / Over nameless promises unkept, in undefinable despair” (567). This recreated photograph, which seems to arrest an instant in real time, also evokes the abstraction of Time itself that so intrigues Warren, and his study of an old photograph in the present of his age reviews the narrative of his life and projects a future finally marked not only by the inevitability of death but the possibility of persistence.

Family pictures also could be a source of joy, however, and perhaps of transcendence in the face of both time and death. One of Warren’s final unpublished poems bears a run-on title more typical of his earlier efforts, “A Little Girl, Twenty Months Old, Faces the World: (Photograph, in color: mounted plastic oblong 5 inches high, seven inches long).” In fifteen lines, the dying poet contemplates his first grandchild, Katherine Phelps Scully, the daughter of Rosanna Phelps Warren, his own once little girl who was by then a new mother and a poet in her own right. In 2005, she presented the Robert Penn Warren Library at Western Kentucky University with the gift of her parents’ photograph albums, home movies, and other audio-visual materials. The real purpose of the Warren family photography seems to be a record of Rosanna and her younger brother Gabriel; as such Warren must have snapped many, though it appears that Eleanor Clark took most. The albums also document their friends, from old ones like Allen Tate and Cleanth Brooks to new ones like Saul Bellow and William Styron.<sup>14</sup>

In conclusion, let me suggest that Warren’s interest in photography may be one reason he was so widely photographed, often by important artists in the medium such as Walker Evans, his friend and colleague at Yale, John Szarkowski, long-time photography curator at the Museum of Modern Art, Annie Leibovitz, the photo-portraitist for *Vanity Fair*, as well as other noted literary photographers such as Jill Krentz, Nancy Crampton, and Dmitri Kasterine. Moreover, Warren generally took an impressive picture, as can be seen in the cover photos of his books and of the many publications about him. I am most

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<sup>14</sup> See my, “The Warren Family Gift of Audio-Visual Materials to the Robert Penn Warren Collection,” *RWP: An Annual of Robert Penn Warren Studies*, 6 (2006), 89-94.

taken by the later photographs, especially one of Kasterine's from 1985 when Warren published his final volume of selected poems at the age of eighty. One of them serves as the cover picture for my recent study, *Robert Penn Warren After Audubon: The Work of Aging and the Quest for Transcendence in His Later Poetry* (2009). Like the pose of Cass Mastern that so fascinates Jack Burden in *All the King's Men*, this one compels extended consideration. Warren's gaze stoically focuses someplace past the photographer and ultimately the viewer, across time into our shared human future adumbrated in his later poetry.

