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*Shadowy Autobiography: Robert Penn Warren and Other Makers of  
American Literature*

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My new study considers the related literary genres of autobiography, criticism, and poetry as psychological modes encompassing the interplay of Warren's life and work in his later non-fiction prose. In *Robert Penn Warren after Audubon: The Work of Aging and the Quest for Transcendence in His Later Poetry* (2009), my focus was on the autobiographical sources of Warren's sublime later poems in his ongoing self-realization by way of age work, life review, and natural transcendence. At its conclusion, I proposed that Warren's later prose evolved in a parallel manner to his poetry, not just in his fiction but in his literary and cultural criticism as well. In this complementary effort, I trace these sorts of similarities in close readings of Warren's finest critical efforts, especially in his works concerning the half-dozen American writers who proved most meaningful for him in his later career. I believe my autobiographical approaches here yield significant new insights into Warren's many achievements as America's premier person of letters in the second half of the twentieth century.

As an autobiographical critic himself, Warren reads the American literary canon as a dialogue between the individual and his society, with himself for his own best example. My "Prologue" provides a theoretical background in terms of developmental psychology, especially in the life stages posited by Carl Jung and Erik Erikson, as well

as in recent autobiographical theory such as that of James Olney. My chronological consideration of Warren's life and work up to the mid-1960s then follows, with an introduction to my individual chapters on his critical and creative relations with William Faulkner, John Crowe Ransom, Herman Melville, John Greenleaf Whittier, Theodore Dreiser, and Nathaniel Hawthorne. My "Epilogue" considers Warren in his relations to other figures, in particular to female and minority writers, as seen in his critical introductions for *American Literature: The Makers and the Making* (1973). In my "Epilogue," I conclude with a reading of Warren's cultural criticism in *Democracy and Poetry* (1975), a summary of his late life and work, and a view of his place in the contemporary American literary canon.

Recent scholarship on Warren has developed some aspects of my readings here, but I believe that *Shadowy Autobiography: Robert Penn Warren and Other Makers of American Literature* presents many new possibilities in regard to his life and work. These revelations include the psychological and creative tensions between Warren's literal biography and his literary autobiography, relations he also applies to those other makers of American literature most important for him. In addition to an understanding of the tensions of self and society for the individual, Warren asserts the making of creative autobiography as the essential shaping act not just of literature but of all culture. In my view, the knowledge of himself that Warren achieves in his literary age work, both in poetry and prose, is significant as human wisdom still to be discovered by his readers.