

# World Enough and Time Short Guide

## World Enough and Time by Robert Penn Warren

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



# Contents

<a href="#">World Enough and Time Short Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Social Concerns/Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Techniques.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Literary Precedents.....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">Copyright Information.....</a>	<a href="#">7</a>



# Characters

Warren's characterization of Beaumont is thorough and relentless, almost to the point of tedium. The reader follows Beaumont from his early and unsatisfactory relationship with a dominating father, through his years as a promising law student and his naive hero worship of the affable Colonel Fort, to his fateful marriage to Rachel Jordan, and his efforts to avenge Rachel's honor in a duel with the unwilling Fort. Beaumont is seen maturing during some years of happiness with Rachel, while living as a peaceful planter; but his unwillingness to accept a commonplace happiness in the presence of what he considers a monstrous injustice to Rachel motivates the second half of the novel.

Beaumont's desperate clinging to his idealism, in the second half of the novel, and his residual naivete, however, frequently arouse skepticism and impatience in readers. It seems rather surprising that despite some legal experience, the same Beaumont who carefully plans his murder of Fort and tries to create an alibi, should nevertheless be continually shocked and outraged at the prosecution's use of lies, half-truths, and scandalmongers in its efforts to convict him. In fact, Beaumont's trial — which Warren intends to be symbolic of the routine injustice of the world — is protracted in the novel to a wearying extent.

The final half of the novel is redeemed primarily by the concluding sequence, when Beaumont, after his escape from jail, finds himself in the empty and timeless world of the river hideout of a notorious brigand, the "Grand Boz," and realizes that returning to civilization, telling the truth, and accepting the hangman's rope, is preferable to losing mind and identity in the wilderness. If Beaumont is at times a tiresome and exasperating tragic hero, he nevertheless wins the reader's final respect.

Although Warren's cast of major characters is somewhat limited, it is generally quite satisfactory. Rachel Jordan is an attractive and perverse heroine, quite credible as a woman who inspires a transcendent passion in a romantic such as Beaumont. In depicting her retreats into cowardice and uncertainty, even her lack of faith in Beaumont, Warren is unsparing of her character's flaws.

Similarly, Colonel Fort is one of Warren's best "hollow men," an affable charmer and seducer of women, an able politician, yet withal rather shallow and cowardly, and totally incapable of facing Beaumont in a duel. Percival Skrogg, the political fanatic, whose concern for "Relief" of Kentucky's impoverished farmers involved Beaumont in the jungle of Kentucky politics, is also effectively drawn, although the presence of the battle over "Relief" frequently serves as a distraction rather than a reinforcement of Warren's theme of the injustice of history.

## Social Concerns/Themes

World Enough and Time is subtitled "A Romantic Novel," but this description is in part ironic. The novel recreates a famous tragic series of events from the early history of Kentucky, a story that has been called, appropriately enough, "The Kentucky Tragedy." Its resolution is tragic indeed, for the novel traces the degradation and death of its hero in its final half. However, World Enough and Time, whose title is taken from Andrew Marvell's poem, "To His Coy Mistress To Make Much of Time," describes the lives of two very passionate lovers, whose blend of romantic idealism and passion bring them to destruction: hence, the novel may be called aptly a "romantic novel," because its protagonists embody the spirit of romanticism.

Warren's epigraph for the novel is taken from a description of Edmund Spenser's knight Artegall, the hero of Book V of *The Faerie Queene*. Artegall is the knight of justice, who, along with his squire, Talos, administers a violent reckoning for those who have transgressed against the laws of God and Gloriana, the Fairy Queen. Since Warren has on one occasion compared Willie Stark to Talos, his implicit parallel between Artegall and Jeremiah Beaumont, the hero of *World Enough and Time*, establishes a philosophical link between this novel and *All the King's Men* (1946; please see separate entry), its immediate predecessor.

Beaumont, the hero of *World Enough and Time*, has two other connections with *All the King's Men*: He is much like Cass Mastern, the hero of the tale within a tale set in the Civil War, and an idealist who comes to grief through his excessive romanticism; and he is like the shadowy idealist, Adam Stanton, who assassinates Willie Stark to avenge the honor of his sister and his family. Beaumont's romantic idealism leads to tragedy for himself and Rachel, as well as for his mentor and victim, Colonel Cassius Fort; but Beaumont's tragedy is the result of an obsessive pursuit of honor and justice, much like that of Mastern and Stanton in *All the King's Men*. Hence Warren may be described as viewing the tragic nature of history from the point of view of the idealist, or "man of idea," in *World Enough and Time*, in contrast to the emphasis on the pragmatism of Willie Stark, "the man of fact," in *All the King's Men*. Moreover, if the point of view of Adam Stanton had been slighted in *All the King's Men* (where Adam was chiefly depicted through his long moody sessions of playing romantic piano music), *World Enough and Time* provides a compensatory alternative by restricting the reader to Beaumont's point of view and the narrator's sardonic commentary on it.

## Techniques

Yet despite excellent characterizations and some of Warren's more impressive writing, *World Enough and Time* might benefit from some judicious editing and a tighter narrative technique. Although it is a very serious novel, rather than a pretentious potboiler (as some of Warren's critics have claimed), its length and the exasperating nature of the tragic hero make it less than an unqualified success.

Warren's narrative technique in *World Enough and Time* is adumbrated in *All the King's Men* by Cass Mastern's narrative, which is related in Mastern's florid nineteenth-century rhetoric, followed by Jack Burden's sardonic modernist commentary on it. Similarly, in *World Enough and Time*, Warren's narrative voice, alternately descriptive, compassionate, and sardonic, is played off against the romantic rhetoric of Beaumont's own narrative (a fictitious one created by Warren of course) of his life and crime. However, it is in the use of these dual voices that Warren begins to use some of the forced and melodramatic "high rhetoric," which has aroused a good deal of criticism of the later novels.

## Literary Precedents

The short Confession of the historical Jeroboam Beauchamp and the court records of the trial provided Warren with material for the story of Beauchamp, Ann Cook, and Colonel Solomon Sharp. Other American writers had been drawn to the "Kentucky Tragedy," notably Edgar Allan Poe in his drama *Politian* and William Gilmore Simms, the antebellum imitator of Walter Scott for the Old South in his novel, *Beauchampe* (1842). But such earlier treatments of the material probably gave Warren little more than an awareness of mistakes to avoid, especially the moralizing emotionalism of Simms.

The example of some of William Faulkner's stubbornly romantic young men, such as Quentin Compson in *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), and Charles Bon and Henry Sutpen in *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), may have been an influence on Warren in the creation of Beaumont. The name "Beaumont," though close to that of the historical Beauchamp, also suggests the Beaumont who wrote Jacobean tragedy, which is clearly an influence on some of Warren's novels and his dramatic poem, *Brother to Dragons*. Finally, though some critics have suggested that *World Enough and Time* was influenced by cinematic costume romance in the tradition of *Gone With the Wind*, Hollywood's romantic Technicolor films of the 1940s seldom exhibit the tragic spirit or the unhappy resolution found in Warren's novel. If one must invoke cinematic models, then surely the film noir tradition would be a better choice.



# Copyright Information

## Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Editor - Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Library of Congress  
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Includes bibliographical references.

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.

Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.

1. Young adults—Books and reading. 2. Young adult literature—History and criticism. 3.

Young adult literature—Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography—Bio-bibliography.

[1. Literature—History and criticism. 2. Literature—Bio-bibliography]

I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952

Z1037.A1G85 1994 028.1'62 94-18048 ISBN 0-933833-32-6

Copyright ©, 1994, by Walton Beacham. All rights to this book are reserved. No part of this work may be used or reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or in any information or storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the copyright owner, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, write the publisher, Beacham Publishing, Inc., 2100 "S" Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008.

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1994