



# Selected Poems of Robert Penn Warren

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John Burt's Selected Poems of Robert Penn Warren is more broadly representative of Warren's poetry than any previous such gathering. More than two hundred poems from every phase grace the volume, a vehicle ideal for sampling or soaking in the finest of Warren's rich output.

With each poem, Burt has carefully located the version that constitutes Warren's final revision. His introduction gives an eloquent overview of the poet's career, touching on every published book of verse and highlighting significant lines. A "selected" collection in the truest sense, featuring several previously unpublished pieces, this treasure is at once new and familiar.

Burt showcases some very early verse, such as "The Bird and the Stone" and "Oxford City Wall", the only poem known to derive from Warren's days as a Rhodes scholar. There are also portions from the book-length poems, *Brother to Dragons* and *Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce*. Arranged chronologically, the selections run the course from darker, more self-consciously formal poems of the 1920s and early 1930s, including "Kentucky Mountain Farm", "Terror", and the most ambitious poem of Warren's early phase, "The Ballad of Billie Potts"; to a looser style and a fusion of personal and political concerns in the 1950s and 1960s.

Warren's late phase yielded more than half of his entire poetic opus. A new stylistic boldness elevates his poems to the sublime from 1968 to 1985, as exemplified in the intense "Island of Summer" sequence, the violence-filled "Natural History", and his most famous poem, "Evening Hawk". In his final working years there surfaces a kind of shadow autobiography in verse as well as a self-doubt that edges at times toward despair --as revealed in Warren's darkest meditation on American history, "Going West" -- before the calmer and more reflective mode of his last volume, which also contains the Hiroshima atom-bombing reconsideration "New Dawn".

At the heart of Warren's poetry is a celebration of man's intellect and imagination, his integral place within nature, and his relationship to time and the past; ultimately, joy coexists with the knowledge of life's many mysteries, including its tragedies. *Selected Poems*, a generous survey and a convenient compendium, is the shining portal to this greatly gifted poet.

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