

# Self Identified in Robert Penn Warren's *The Cave*

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**Abstract:** Robert Penn Warren a major writer greatly known and widely read has contributed tremendously variety of works to the realm of literature. His novels throws light on man's life and its journey in which man has to know himself as well as define himself through creating an identity. The vision of self-realization and self-knowledge is substantiated in the novels of Warren to uphold man's virtue. The novel *The Cave* depicts how most of the characters attain self - knowledge through self-correction and enables them to identify themselves. The rescue activities at the cave bring all the characters together by making them understand their inter-relationship, liberty, bond of sin and suffering that unites them.

**Keywords:** self realization, transformation, virtue.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Robert Penn Warren a prominent American Poet, Novelist and a Literary critic was one of the founders of New Criticism. Warren is the only writer to have won Pulitzer Prize for both Poetry and Fiction. Robert Penn Warren's productivity was equal to his versatility and he made a distinguished contribution to fiction, poetry, history, literary criticism and social commentary.

Warren is best noted for his remarkable works like *All the King's Men* (Pulitzer Prize), *Night Rider*, *Flood*, *The Cave* and so on. Through all of the novels, the protagonist aims to attain the true being of selfhood through self-awareness and realization. The conflicts and paradoxes faced by the characters of Warren encounter with deep twisting strain of life.

*The Cave*, like all of Warren's novels deal with people who have enslaved themselves and strive hard to attain self-realization and gain self-identity. There is no as such a protagonist in this novel whereas there are several major characters of nearly equal importance. The novel sets in motion when Mont Harrick and his lover Jo-Lea, spot Jasper Harrick's boots and guitar near the cave, followed by the activities concerned with the attempts to rescue Jasper.

Jasper Harrick, a Korean veteran who has failed to find himself even in combat, returns home to Tennessee and takes to exploring caves, reassuring his mother that "in the ground atleast a fellow has a chance of knowing who he is" (241).

Mont Harrick and Jo-Lea goes into the forest with the intention of making love, at the sight of the boots and guitar Jo-Lea runs to Harrick's house to convey the message of what they seen. Jack Harrick and Celia Harrick, Jasper's father and mother are in their house along with the preacher Mac Carland who has come there to pray for Jack Harrick as he is dying out of cancer. On seeing Jo-Lea running so madly her father Timothy Bingham, a bank manager also reaches the place to find out what has happened as Mont explained the sight to them, the preacher calls his son Isaac Sumpter for the rescue operation so all the main characters assemble at the spot, before the cave.

Isaac Sumpter was looking in for an opportunity to make easy money as well as to become a hero. As he had a broken love affair which resulted in debauchery and drunkenness, Isaac made use of this opportunity to make money and gain fame. He called for the press and media to make the rescue operation of Jasper more sensational. People gathered in numbers outside the cave, meanwhile Jasper dies inside the cave.

Jack Harrick explains to Celia that he has been ignorant and slow in self-knowledge as some backward boy she had taught in school. But now Jack has caught up his lessons and admits with shame that "living is just learning how to die and dying is just learning how to live" (403). Jack Harrick also knows it is his own weakness which makes him dream, the dream of Jasper Harrick. He thought about himself and said "I am an old nigh – illiterate, broke- down black smith, sitting here in the middle of the night, and my boy is dead" (388). Jack Harrick attains his self-identity with its weakness and limitations and he won over his fear of death and Jack is ready to die.

Mr. Timothy Bingham, father of Jo-Lea through witnessing the actions of his daughter such as running to Jasper's family and alerting them about his entrapment in the cave sympathizes with his daughter. Jo-Lea's mistaken confession near the cave front of everyone that she was the girl whom Jasper had made pregnant and that she is afraid of going to her own house because of the guilt. Timothy recollects the sin that he has committed joining with his wife in insisting Jo-Lea to abort the child when he witnesses the efforts taken in front of the cave during the rescue operation made him to realize how important it is to save a life. This incident gave him the courage to stand against his wife which resulted in an argument and she was sent to her father's place whom she valued more than Timothy himself. He also agreed to give his

daughter in marriage to her lover. Thus Timothy Bingham arrives at his realization on life and gains his identity through the death of Jasper at the cave.

## II. CONCLUSION

According to Warren a “Cave” which is dark and deep is a dominant symbol of the novel represents the man’s heart and mind that is deep and dark. Warren also reveals the depth to which man has to descend to get self- knowledge and all the struggles and difficulties of attaining it. Man needs to explore himself to find the sunlight that is his true self. More than anything else *The Cave* illustrates the attainment of self-knowledge and the consequent transformation of the lives of people in their journey towards virtue. Thus self- identity is the only way to realize one’s true self, good or evil.

### References

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