CHIEF JOSEPH OF THE NEZ PERCE: AN AFFIRMATION OF HUMAN VALUES

BEATRICE SAVARESE ST. CLAIR

CHIEF JOSEPH OF THE NEZ PERCE:
AN AFFIRMATION OF HUMAN VALUES

by

Beatrice Savarese St. Clair

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Humanities
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Florida Atlantic University
Boca Raton, Florida
December 1990

CHIEF JOSEPH OF THE NEZ PERCE:

AN AFFIRMATION OF HUMAN VALUES

by

Beatrice Savarese St. Clair

This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor, Dr. Howard Pearce, Department of English and Comparative Literature. It was submitted to the faculty of the College of Arts and Humanities and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:

Howard Pearce
Chairperson

Mary Faraci

John A Clifford, Jr.

Mary Faraci
Chairperson, Department of English and Comparative Literature

J F Schwall
Dean, College of Arts and Humanities

Sheila A. Mahoney
Dean of Graduate Studies

12/4/90
Date

ABSTRACT

Author:	Beatrice Savarese St. Clair
Title:	Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce: An Affirmation of Human Values
Institution:	Florida Atlantic University
Thesis Advisor:	Dr. Howard Pearce
Degree:	Master of Arts
Year:	1990

Robert Penn Warren's Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce dramatizes essential human values in individuals, in their relationships to nature, and in the structural elements of the poem, affirming their necessity for living a fulfilled life. By representing Chief Joseph as exemplar of mankind, Warren creates a symbolic example for all to recognize and copy. The presentation of nature parallels the fortunes and misfortunes of human beings. As man's relationship with nature deteriorates, universal principles of truth, justice, and personal integrity decline. The structure of the poem mirrors life, creating tension. By encouraging reader participation and introspection, an idea of order emerges, and this order can be maintained in the individual who possesses essential human values.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

Introduction

In the poem Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce, Robert Penn Warren relates the story of one of the last Indian tribes' fight for justice against white man's law. Betrayed by broken promises and treaties, Chief Joseph's non-treaty Nez Perce, after three months of fighting, engaged in a final battle with the United States Cavalry in 1877 only miles from the Canadian border and freedom for the Nez Perce. In an eloquent speech addressed to Colonel Howard, Chief Joseph surrendered on October 5, 1877. Warren traces the plight of the Nez Perce as they struggled to survive under white man's domination.

Filled with conflict, strife, and tension, the poem recreates the struggle of a man to live in keeping with a just moral and ethical code of values within himself, toward others, and between himself and the environment in which he lives. The poem reiterates the perennial human struggle for freedom and dignity; for spiritual and physical survival. Warren's foresight into environmental concerns and his ever-present theme of an individual's lack of essential

human values being the cause of the degradation of society reverberate in the poem. In Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce, Warren dramatizes the essential human values as represented in an individual, as seen in the conditions in the world he lives in, and as reflected within the poem's purposely variant structure.

Critics have largely treated the poem as an Indian apologist's version of one of the last great Indian Chiefs and his battles with and betrayal by white society. Carolyn Kizer writes, "This book is a mistake. . . . Mr. Warren is writing about my Northwest and my Indians" (8). Although less personally involved, Andrew Shelley finds a simple motive in the poem: "One could say that the ambition of the poem is to restore to the Nez Perce something of their homeland of Wallowa" (99). Such comments attest to these readers' surface responses to the poem. Critics' refusal to acknowledge Warren's poem for the serious, thought-provoking work that it is, is indicative of individuals refusing to acknowledge and accept a part of their own history. In Warren's message lies one of his fundamental beliefs--that to live a better life one must accept and acknowledge the past. In Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce, he extends this needed acceptance to include all of human history. But as a moralist, Warren dramatizes an even more universal message in his poem. Individuals must come to realize that the

forsaking of essential human values has a far greater effect than the repudiation of the past. Warren is saying that humanity must rediscover these values before conditions in our world are irrevocably decayed, before immorality becomes the norm, and before our very lives become so totally disoriented that any semblance of an ordered existence becomes virtually impossible.

One way Warren represents essential human values is by presenting Chief Joseph as exemplar of mankind. Warren is not immortalizing Chief Joseph nor merely voicing a tribute to his memory. He is creating a symbolic example for every reader to recognize and, he would hope, to copy. Warren embodies in Chief Joseph respect for tradition, heritage, and parental obligations; firm convictions and beliefs; proper values attached to material gains. Warren uses Chief Joseph to inform us of past injustices to mankind in a very emotionally influential way. By example he hopes to restore essential human values, Chief Joseph representing the individual capacity to embody essential human values vital to all humanity.

A second way Warren dramatizes essential human values is in his presentation of nature. Both the apparent and actual deterioration of nature parallel the decline of human values. One might say Warren has placed Nature in a

dilemma. On the one hand she struggles against herself and the natural deterioration of time; on the other she struggles with man-induced deterioration. Nature begins as Edenic in the poem and then becomes uncharacteristically harsh as the Nez Perce are displaced and relocated. Warren presents a side to Manifest Destiny that we in our "enlightened" age are unwilling to acknowledge--at its core is human prejudice. The policy itself seems to be buried as belonging only in the past, but the past influences the present: nowhere is this principle more evident than in the environment. Warren's sense of the disappearance of pristine lands is powerful. Apparent in Warren's poem are the paradox of the environment being both friend and foe and the impact of the Manifest Destiny policy changing a once fruitful environment into a barren one. Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce dramatizes the effect a lost natural environment can have upon essential human values. The images of both nature and the individual are grounded in tension. The contradiction between the ideal--the Edenic past and the heroic virtues of humanity in that world--and the real--deteriorated nature and human beings--generates conflict, tension, and the need for resolution.

Finally, the structure of the poem is designed to create tension, a tension capable of resolution by heeding what the poet has to say. Warren alternates form between

poetry and prose; syntax between fragmented and flowing; and tense between past and present. The first eight sections of the poem are written in past tense. In the final section, Warren takes us to the present as he tells of his visit to the site of Chief Joseph's surrender. It is in this final section that we begin to realize the full impact of Warren's work. This shifting and consequent jostling of emotions in the reader are mimetic of Chief Joseph's turbulent conflicts and emotions, and this condition is universal. Underlying this seemingly hectic presentation, however, is the idea of order. Warren's message emerges:

> There is only
> Process, which is one name for history. Often
> Pitiful. But, sometimes, under
> The scrutinizing prism of Time,
> Triumphant. (63)

In the midst of chaos there can be peace, if an individual remains firm to his convictions and does not forsake essential human values. If "Warren creates by projecting temperament," as Harold Bloom attests (3), then Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce clearly reveals his passion for undisturbed nature, his revulsion against immorality, and his conviction that in order to live one must accept his past with all its ugliness.

CHAPTER II

Chief Joseph as Representative of Humanity

In Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce, Warren focuses on the cruxes and ironies of history. According to John Burt, for Warren history becomes "a matter of conflicting habits of thought and socially entangled moral cruxes which we must attempt . . . to see from within" (16). In Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce these "conflicting habits of thought" and "socially entangled moral cruxes" are apparent. Warren stresses the peacefulness of the Nez Perce; their "immaculate" honesty (4); their willingness to learn new ways, to share their land; and their ethical practices in war--"Coats, weapons, we take. / Scalps never" (17). Against these virtues he places the white man's domination, his disregard of the natural world in pursuit of material gains, his barbarism--"So a white man fired, / Killed only a baby" (18). Warren contrasts the founding fathers who forged our nation to what is found in most history books. Warren reminds us, if you will, of what a major part of our heritage as Americans is based on, especially with regard to our Native Americans.

Warren also reminds us that after we labeled or

classified all Indians as savages, we became savages ourselves in our pursuit, claiming our actions were for the good of America in our attempt to justify them. S. I. Hayakawa speaks of this self-congratulation by people with blocked or closed minds in his book Language in Action: "The fictitious 'Indian' inside their heads remains unchanged in spite of their experience. People like this cannot learn from experience" (156). Preconceived notions of Indians in the past mirror preconceived notions of Jewish, Polish, Italian, and Indian peoples today. Warren's comment on the human vice of prejudice underlies much of the poem. By extrapolating the human being from the Indian and removing our culturally tinted glasses, perhaps clearer conclusions as to the human values he possesses can be drawn.

Chief Joseph himself evokes an array of responses. He is credited with starting a war and yet considered weak because he held out for peace. Military men admired him for his skillful strategy yet damned him for the Nez Perce victories. In his later years, he "appealed to the tenets of a truly natural justice and to notions of equality similar to those on which the very constitution of the United States is supposed to rest. Yet, at the same time, he was known through his participation in the Nez Perce War as an enemy of those same United States" (Gidley 19).

Contradictory currents of opinion are what Warren believes history and the individuals who make up history are made of. Before we become complete individuals we must acknowledge the good and the evil that exist both in the world and within ourselves. How we use this knowledge determines the individual's character, which in turn affects our cultural character and history. By our recognizing in Chief Joseph's character Warren's ideal man, he becomes Warren's exemplar for all mankind to emulate. Chief Joseph represents, in the individual, essential and vital human values.

Joseph's innocent existence revolves around absolutes. The signing of a treaty is forever binding upon him and embodies a sense of personal honor and commitment: "Now in ink was promised the Winding Waters <u>forever</u>" (7; emphasis added). Even the blatant disregard of the treaty by the white man does not lessen its importance to him. Chief Joseph also considers promises made to his dying Father as irrevocable and absolute.

> "My father held my hand, and he died.
> Dying, said: 'Think <u>always</u> of your country.
> Your father has <u>never</u> sold your country.
> Has <u>never</u> touched white-man money that they
> Should say they have bought the land you now stand on.
> You must <u>never</u> sell the bones of your fathers--."
> (9,10; emphases added)

Throughout his life, he strives to uphold his father's dying words. His respect for his father and his heritage never

desert him but serve as goals in his pursuit of a meaningful life. Chief Joseph's strong sense of loyalty to his tribe and to his father are the dominant factors underlying his actions. A sense of failure brought about by the forced removal from his land continues to plague Joseph throughout his life. During moments of contemplation and reflection he remembers his wife and "how her eyes gleam in dream-darkness, forever" (53; emphasis added). His belief in living a life of unalterable absolutes reaches even into death. Chief Joseph's sense of absolutes is powerful and deeply ingrained. Still maintaining a life of unchangeable absolutes in the very face of defeat, he proudly asserts:

> *"From where the sun now stands, I will fight no more forever."* (46; emphasis added)

Although provoked many times while living on reservations, Chief Joseph proves his words true.

In an arena conducive to disgrace and abandonment of his heritage, Chief Joseph struggles to remain absolute toward his belief in justice. When the white man attempts to "Americanize" him by building him a home he proudly states: "No foot of mine ever crossed that doorsill" (52; emphasis added). Belief in giving one's word and living accordingly was of utmost importance in maintaining manhood to the Nez Perce. The influx of white settlers and gold-miners supported by a far-removed government threatened this existence. Confronted with this dilemma, to hold to

principle or to compromise, Joseph is forced to attempt both and in so doing is swept up in a physical and emotional war that culminates in an awareness of the harsh realities of life. The reality that life contains both beauty and ugliness threatens Joseph's fundamental belief in absolutes, but Chief Joseph remains firm in his belief in justice and truth, refusing to become one of life's victims.

Warren's attitude is characterized by Charles Bohner: "The Founding Fathers envisioned a nation of free men. What they got were men enslaved to materialism who in their blind pursuit of prosperity hastened toward the annihilation of the self" (152). As a dramatization of this vulnerability, Chief Joseph is tempted several times to sell his "self," but he acts by his principles. When Howard is sent to remove the Nez Perce from Wallowa to the Lapwai reservation, he tempts Joseph to forsake his land and to disobey his father's dying words. Joseph refuses, saying:

> "to that spot
> Where he was nursed, he must,
> In love cling." (14)

Joseph remains true to the initial agreement between nations, to his father's last request, and to the land in which he was born. He does not forsake his origins nor his sense of right and duty. Warren is perhaps illuminating the days when a man's word had meaning and inviting us to rediscover the sense of worth one receives from giving his

word and honoring it.

Another temptation occurs when soldiers pursue Chief Joseph's band who are peaceably attempting to move to the reservation. There has been a raid on white settlers, and without proof or justification the soldiers pursue Chief Joseph. No attempt is made to understand the ways of the Nez Perce; how each band is led by a different chief. "There were peace chiefs and war chiefs" (Spinden 242), and the raid has not been by Chief Joseph's braves. "Innocent until proven guilty" obviously did not apply to Indians. Chief Joseph is tempted to discard his personal sense of right and justice as the soldiers approach, intent on blind revenge. He maintains his integrity and offers peace:

> The white flag approached,
> With the hearts' true invitation. (17)

In a display of prejudice, or at best a lack of human values, the flag is unjustifiably fired upon; but Chief Joseph remains true to his word--to his promise--and continues moving his people toward the reservation.

At another time when, after leaving the Wallowa Valley, they enter the Bitterroot Mountains and believed "we were free" (22), Chief Joseph is tempted again to discard his sense of justice by the excessive hostilities shown toward his people. The magnitude of the atrocity against the peace-seeking Nez Perce is almost impossible to fathom:

"Near dawn they struck us, new horse-soldiers. Shot
Into tepees. Women, children, old died." (23)

Once again, Chief Joseph focuses on his intent to lead a peaceful and fulfilling existence. His dream is to live in peace in Wallowa. Retribution or revenge is not a requirement to fulfill this dream, but survival is.

After recovering from the attack, he says of himself and his people:

"We dreamed of the mountain where one drop of dew
At noon yet hangs at the pine-needle tip
And speaks back to no sun. We dreamed." (25)

This dream--to live in peace in Wallowa--never is abandoned by Chief Joseph. Throughout his life on different reservations, Chief Joseph never relinquishes his "self," never sells his people or his soul, and continues trying to see the terms of the original treaty fulfilled until his death. "Joseph and his people occupied a dimension of suspended time, always awaiting the major decision that they be allowed to reurn to the Wallowa Valley" (Gidley 17). They live in "no time," the time between the ticks of the clock. Under Joseph's leadership and persistence for justice, he and his people struggle against the forces of assimilation and annihilation by the "magnanimous" white man.

Chief Joseph is physically separated from Wallowa, and he suffers from losses on both a tribal and a personal

level; but Warren does not portray a defeated man. He instills in Chief Joseph the human values of hope and patient persistence that good will defeat evil in the end. Monroe Spears's comment, "Joseph's main function is to suffer. His only alienation is physical" (658), is somewhat narrow in scope. Joseph's main function is to set an example for all to emulate. Warren places Joseph in very real-life situations to enforce the concept that Chief Joseph's responses to life's unfair circumstances can be imitated.

Chief Joseph belongs to a peaceful tribe, "Not once had we shed white blood" (7), yet he engages in battles. He and his people have a reverence for their dead and their burial sites, "Where sacred bones lay, and we knew them sacred" (7), yet are forced to abandon these sacred places. They also have a reverence for nature, "For we knew the sacred wheel of the seasons" (7); yet though confronted with her harshness and yearning for her comfort, they do not abandon this reverence. The unpredictable nature of life is not unknown to Chief Joseph; still he endures and maintains a purposeful existence.

In Chief Joseph Warren dramatizes the very real and delicate human emotion of pride and the sense of elation and manhood he feels when he is proud of himself for his own

accomplishments. Pride in the accomplishments of the tribe as a whole, too, is an essentially natural and positive emotion. Chief Joseph speaks of the white man's attempt to surprise the tribe; calling them "Fools" he adds:

> "At dawn they came to surprise us.
> Surprise!--It was theirs." (16)

And again Chief Joseph exhibits pride in his tribe's efforts at eluding the soldiers as he speaks of Sturgis pursuing clouds of distant dust "hell-bent for the spooks" (30). Prideful laughter rings in his voice as he speaks of the "braves now galloping north, and coiling their lariats-- / Laughing" (30).

An individual's pride in himself, however, is a delicate emotion to balance. After the battles of White Bird and Clearwater, Joseph yearns to return to Wallowa, "But the Great Spirit turned his face away / From the land of the Winding Waters we loved" (19), and he wonders whether this abandonment was because of his pride. He feels "proud to sit in the council / With war-chiefs" (19-20). A young chief, he sits quietly, listening with respect. Joseph is not always a warrior--"Sometimes in battle I took care of those / Too old, too young, or too sick" (20)--but he does fight: "But I, too, down the length of the death-tube have peered, / Squeezed trigger, seen blood spurt, have rallied / My braves" (20). But later when his name is linked to war and death, "My heart in my bosom would tighten. / Would

shrink" (20); he does not feel very proud of himself then. A daring and young Chief Joseph advises in council that he

> "would stand, fight, and die, if only
> In dream of my sacred land, but the chiefs
> In council said *no*. Looking Glass said *no*.
> And I heeded their wisdom. What right had I
> To die--to leave sick, old, young, women--merely to flatter
> My heart's pride? For a true chief no self has." (21)

Chief Joseph does not follow his own desire to enjoy a momentary selfish pride at the cost of others. Acknowledging his desire for triumph in battle as a selfish end, he thinks of others first and resists pride's temptation.

Chief Joseph is a man who tries to allow for the goodness in others. Giving the white man's "Father" the benefit of the doubt he speaks:

> "What if the Father, though great, be fed
> On lies only, and seeks not to know what
> Truth is, or cannot tell Truth from Lie?" (9)

He is generous and believes in the goodness of others until forced to believe otherwise. This idealized vision of others is in sharp contrast to feelings in the hearts of many today who appear all too eager to believe the worst.

Consequently, Chief Joseph, given this instinctive trust in others, feels the bitter pangs of disappointment as the white man encroaches upon Indian land:

> "But they knew where they went, and we knew.
> This knowledge, like lead of a rifle, sagged heavy in

flesh--
Healed over, but there. It ached in the night." (9)

Although promised the land by treaty, Joseph watches the white man trespass and feels a sense of betrayal rising within. Still, he takes no aggressive action, but seeks to solve the problem peacefully and in accordance with the values he lives by.

Chief Joseph is filled with deep-rooted troubles and struggles within himself to make right and just decisions. He remarks:

"One finger I touch
To my brow. Trace lines there. Then lay
A hand to my breast.
. . . . . .
Oh, how can such two Truths kiss in your heart?" (13)

The truths of the head and the heart "kiss," but clash. The "brow" knows the disappointing actuality, while the "breast" knows the ideal truths of what ought to be. In his mind, Chief Joseph knows "How bodies, dead, in moonlight would shine" (13), yet in his heart he cannot forsake Wallowa and his promise to his father. These "Truths" cannot "kiss" in his heart. Filled with conflict--his heart telling him one thing, his reason another--he struggles to find a solution. But the choice is made by others. Chief Joseph knows of "the strange gun that spits bullets like hail" (15), and when Howard offers the rifle instead of "peace-talk" he has no choice. He is forced to leave Wallowa and break his promise to his father. But Chief Joseph does not rebel or

become embittered, rather he remarks: "So my chin to my chest dug deep" (14). This response is both realistic and natural to Chief Joseph, who strives to live within the constraints of society and according to the constraints of his soul. He realizes the situation is out of his immediate control and acts accordingly. It is this acceptance that Warren is asking us to emulate.

William Havard writes, "Warren . . . looks for meaning not solely to the external record of man but to his internal capacity for feeling, thinking, willing, and acting" (195). In Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce Warren dramatizes these internal capacities in Chief Joseph and contrasts them against his two major antagonists, General Howard and Colonel Miles. At the core of Chief Joseph's feelings, thoughts, dreams, and actions are essential human values. These values revolve around a basic goodness, a desire for the preservation of life, and a general sense of good will. Always present is the desire to live a peaceful and meaningful existence for him and for his people. Joseph's external accomplishments are secondary--"Histories name him a genius" (53); "That noble head. In bronze it was cast" (54)--and are given in passing. It is his basic belief and desire to live a fulfilling life that Warren evidences from the first pages of his poem to the last.

Joseph's feelings, his capability for feeling and feeling deeply, are evident. He speaks, "'Oh, who will speak!' cried the heart in my bosom. / 'Speak for the Nimipu, and speak Truth!'" (13). Joseph not only feels deeply that his people need someone to speak for them, but that someone must speak the Truth. Even though he feels deeply, he does not swerve from the fundamental human value of speaking the truth.

His thoughts also stem from basic principles of right:

> "I--
> I only a dot in dimness--think
> Of my father and yearn only
> That he can think me a man." (52)

On the reservation nearing the end of his life, his thoughts are of his father, of his past life, and of principles of obedience. Captured and alienated, he yearns only to be thought a man by his father. He does not think of revenge against his oppressors. He does not seek to blame others.

Warren enforces the importance of tradition and heritage as essential human values. According to Marilyn Callander, "A concept of immortality is in evidence here. A brave son, who is true to his fathers, becomes one of the fathers who watch" (31). Warren reemphasizes how the past lives in the present through family relationships. The "sacred wheel of the seasons" (7) becomes the sacred wheel of history, becomes the sacred wheel of tradition and

heritage. The importance of allegiance to tradition and heritage is embodied in Chief Joseph. As a moralist, Warren advocates a stricter society, a society bound to its past, and a more controlled individual, an individual bound to his past, emulating parents in their goodness and wisdom and living by their example. Warren's realistic view of life, however, is not lost in the characterization of Chief Joseph and his allegiance to his heritage; even Joseph is forced to disobey his father's request never to leave Wallowa.

Joseph's strong loyalty to his clan and to his father is emphasized throughout the poem by his staunch desire to remain in Wallowa, his determined march towards Canada and safety for his people, his refusal to acquiesce to the white man's ways, and by his persistent hope that justice shall prevail and his people be allowed to return to Wallowa. It is the reason behind Joseph's strong sense of loyalty that is of importance. He desires to remain in Wallowa because that is where his people have always lived and because of his promise to his father. He does not seek the material gains the land offers. He desires to reach safety and Canada, not for his own sake, "For a true chief no self has" (21), but for the good of his people. He desires to remain true and proud of his heritage while living on the reservation and does not accept the white man's "hospitality," wearing his native dress, sleeping in his

native ways. His refusal does not represent revolt against the white man and their ways, but allows him to become a symbol of hope and pride for his people. Chief Joseph's actions are not selfish or malicious. They are predicated by a need and performed in accordance with his inner sense of right and justice. He is not passive, he does fight, but he does not instigate the fighting. In fact, Joseph does everything in his power to keep from fighting. And after the battles are over and he is placed in captivity on a reservation, his actions are grounded in justice--to obtain the fulfillment of his dream for his people to return to Wallowa.

In contrast, Warren opposes these internal motivators of Chief Joseph to those of Howard and Miles. We realize the different premises that govern their lives. Howard and Miles react where Chief Joseph acts. To react is to respond with a counteracting force or influence, but to act refers to doing something voluntarily. After war is precipitated, Howard pursues Chief Joseph. Forced to retreat through the Bitterroot mountains, Chief Joseph encounters white settlers. He does not react to their being white and therefore the enemy, he acts instead upon the basic values of integrity, trust, honor, and justice. He is "friendly with settlements, / Trading with farmers . . . Not killing, laughing together" (22). Chief Joseph voluntarily chooses

to allow essential human values to govern his life. After his capture, he is not spiteful or filled with revenge. He states, "'It makes my heart turn sick when I / Remember all the good, kind words / And broken promises'" (49), but he voluntarily chooses to act to restore his people to the Wallowa Valley, "to see / The terms of surrender maintained" (48). He does not react to the white man's injustice with physical or mental retaliation.

In contrast, Howard and Miles react in response to situations. The basis for their reactions is a combination of the pressures exerted on them by both military authority and the governmental policy of Manifest Destiny. Human dignity and personal integrity are forced into the far recesses of both men's minds. Only after injustice and violations of essential human values do their inner selves rise in the form of a nagging conscience.

When Chief Joseph seeks a resolution early in the Nez Perce War, Howard's response is definite and impersonal--"no peace terms" (21). After the surrender, orders are issued that Chief Joseph and his band of Nez Perce are to be used as examples.[1] This imperative is apparently acknowledged and accepted by Howard. Without regard for personal values, he dismisses Chief Joseph and his band of Nez Perce.

The reactions of Miles, though more personal in nature, evidence a lack of integrity, honor, and respect. He receives orders, "One by / Horse, one by boat.--And the heart of Miles at Keogh / Flares like a rocket" (35). His reaction is utterly emotional. There is no thought given to circumstances, no voluntary decision made. Both men's reactions are outside their "selves" as if they are committed to a higher authority (and not even one of a positive influence in their case).

In Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce, Warren is illuminating the difference between obedience to one's inner self and obedience to things or other people. Both Howard and Miles lose their souls to their pursuit of worldly gains and recognition. Warren leaves both men, however, in a state of hope, a state of a new realization of values neither had before. In the contrast, Warren presents a dramatization of hope in that the past can be accepted and acknowledged as being past, but our present and future lives can be changed. We can change and rediscover the values we have lost and thereby live a better life. The acquisition of fame and recognition received from shallow victories does not outweigh the inner sense of peace and satisfaction one obtains when the values of personal integrity, truth, and honor guide our lives.

In contrast to Chief Joseph, Howard is already scarred from prior battles: "they call him Chief One-Arm" (13). He persists in his role as warrior and obedient soldier, pursuing Chief Joseph relentlessly. The role he plays is that of a totally obedient servant to an authority other than himself.

Warren quotes an excerpt from a book Howard later published:

> *I think it a great mistake to take from Joseph and his band of Nez Perces Indians that valley* [Wallowa]. (10)
>
> . . . . . .
>
> And possibly Congress can be induced to let these really peaceable Indians have this poor valley for their own.[2]

If Howard inwardly feels this way, why does he pursue Chief Joseph so relentlessly? His actions belie his feelings. In short, Warren is saying, he sells his "self." His sense of personal integrity is contradicted by his adherence to an outside influence. He is not being true to his inner sense of right and justice.

Howard takes pride in his military expertise--"His heart is military. / Is inflamed with love of glory" (33)--and after pursuing Chief Joseph without success for many weeks he becomes "the butt / Of every newspaper," which intensifies his pursuit: "Pursue! He will! The old wound / Aches." But eventually subservience to a higher authority

prevails. Warren characterizes Howard's "heart" as his dominant force, suggesting that his mind is not his own:

> His heart is iron. He has seen much blood. But
> Against his will, his ambition, the heart
> Melts in his breast. It
> Suffers a flame of logic that
> Vindictively flares through the straw
> Of ambition. (34)

In contrast to Chief Joseph's dilemma, Howard's dilemma revolves around who will reap the reward of defeating and capturing Chief Joseph. The issue does not involve a sense of justice, a desire for peace, or even any thoughts of other human lives that may be lost in the process. But Warren leaves us with hope for Howard's future. Just before Chief Joseph surrenders,

> Howard, almost
> As soft as a whisper, promises him [Miles] the
> surrender.
>
> And hearing his own words, he knew a pure
> And never-before-known bliss swell his heart. (42)

Where does this "never-before-known bliss" come from? Did he basically not believe in the cause he was fighting for, not believe in the "justice" he was ordered to administer, and despite everything was he glad that he was not the individual who enforced such injustice? Does he defy his higher authority and for once in his life follow his own sense of right? Or does he merely admire Chief Joseph and his band for their fighting capabilities in war, their military "expertise?" Perhaps Howard does become aware of essential human values he has never before known. Warren

gives us no amplification of Howard's rediscovery of human values. History tells us he avoids giving any assistance to Joseph or his people.

In further contrast, Warren dramatizes Miles as a much more aggressive personality than Howard. Miles is a "groveling hem-kisser of the draggled skirts of glory" (35). His vices are perhaps the result of having been "A general once-- / But only of state militia. Now only / A colonel--regular, but rank reduced" (35); but justified he is not. He suffers more perhaps because his victory, which he was so intense in getting, turns so unexpectedly shallow. Like Howard, Miles pursues worldly rewards without regard for personal integrity, honor, or justice. We wonder if it is not his pangs of conscience that in later years cause him to become Chief Joseph's greatest ally in attempting to return the Nez Perce to Wallowa: "And was it the friendship of Miles that got Joseph to Hayes / To fill the presidential ear with his old story?" (49) The word "friendship" prompts Warren's use of the rhetorical question. Is he being sarcastic or planting a seed of doubt? Nevertheless, Warren's dramatization of Miles is one of a changed man and offers the possibility of a rediscovery of vital human values.

Allen Shepherd writes: "Joseph is by inescapable

contrast so notably heroic--he is such a good, brave, intelligent, reflective, balanced man that he is (among other things) very little like them [Howard and Miles] or the rest of us" (23). The fact that Howard and Miles may appear more real as human beings than Chief Joseph, appear more understandable as characters, points to a deficiency in our practicing universal values. Warren is attempting to awaken in us a hunger for intrinsic values, a oneness with nature, a way to cope with the pressures of the world we live in. If Howard and Miles represent the road mankind is traveling (by being easier to relate to) then Warren is asking us to take Chief Joseph's path.

Warren asks us to explore the costs involved in making America what it is today. "He consistently recommends a view of life that takes account of contradictions and mixed motives" (Ellman 693). This premise is evident in Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce. On an individual level, he contrasts Chief Joseph's life--with no contradictions and pure motives--against the lives of Howard and Miles--lives filled with contradictory actions and mixed motives. He dramatizes essential human values in the life of Chief Joseph against their absence or confused manifestation in Howard and Miles.

In Warren's dramatization of Chief Joseph, he has

placed him in real life situations possible of being recreated and faced daily by all humanity. Warren's exemplar--embodying respect for tradition, heritage, and parental obligations; firm convictions and beliefs; proper values attached to material gains; respect and reverence for the natural environment; a sense of personal integrity, pride, and trust--is Chief Joseph.

CHAPTER III

Nature and the Individual

In Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce nature does not cease "to be protective and all-providing" as Andrew Shelley claims (99). Warren adapts his representation of nature according to its inhabitants to dramatize the importance of one's native environment and the impact a lost natural environment can have upon essential human values. Nature is represented as benevolent or threatening depending on whether people are in accord with it--at home--or are strangers to the land. According to Warren, nature and the individual are interdependent. Warren writes of "man seen against the background of nature--man who is not 'adjusted' to nature and can never be adjusted--who must live in an agony of will, and who finally in his need projects upon nature itself the struggle with circumstance that engages his own heart" (Brooks 19-20). As man feels alienated from life, his life being influenced by the disassociated or uncaring and impersonal actions of others, he tends to reproduce this feeling of alienation in the environment: as if in mastering nature he brings order and meaning to his own existence. There is tension between nature and the individual. Warren's belief is that this tension is

universal, created by man's alienation from nature. Nature is a part of life, and man needs to cultivate a relationship with nature to experience order and fulfillment in his life. The Nez Perce have a relationship with nature, but when they are captured and displaced, severed from their native environment, they suffer a loss of essential values. This loss is seen today. In Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce, Warren dramatizes a relationship with nature that is vital to mankind as a source of strength and virtue; the harmful effects of differing cultural views regarding this relationship; and the far-reaching effects the severing of this man-nature relationship has upon all humanity.

Warren establishes a relationship between man and nature vital to a fulfilled life and dramatizes the physical and moral degradation of the culture that relies on this relationship when a dominant outside force interferes. Before the white man's settlements, the Indians' spiritual as well as practical compatibility with the mountains surrounding the Wallowa valley meant that their environment played an active role in their lives. Warren, knowledgeable of the Nez Perce's methods of horse breeding, in practice long before their meeting with the white man, writes: "Their ponies, crossed / With the strong blood of horses, well-bred, graze / Richly the green blade" (3).[3] Horse breeding no longer played an important role in

reservation life, and the Indians, whose daily work habits revolved around horse breeding, were suddenly confronted with idleness.

The Indians' strength and virtue derived from and were sustained by the natural forces that surrounded them, the beneficent power that the environment gave to them because of their belonging to its care. And the individual as well as the nation owed allegiance to that source, which even provided personal identity. Chief Joseph speaks of how, as a boy, he received his Indian identity going into the mountains to await a vision that would "Come to protect me and give forth my true name" (5). This ceremony exemplifies the Indians' interaction with nature in the practice of religious rituals and underlies some of the alienation the Nez Perce would experience living on reservations apart from their homeland.

The Nez Perce belonged to the Dreamer Cult, for whom the earth was the mother of all things. "This was a cosmic faith that affirmed immortality for all life. The earth was created perfect and complete: "therefore it should not be disturbed by man" (Beal 32). "Every plant and animal had been sacred to them. . . . They still thought that the white men were very sinful to drive away or kill the creatures of the field and then to wound the earth with the blades of

their plows" (Johnson 14). Envisioning reservation life, Chief Joseph speaks:

> "We must live afar with a shrunk-little heart,
> And dig in the ground like a digger of roots." (14)

He foresaw the betrayal of the Indians' truth by the contradictory way the white man saw reality. "It was the Bureau of Indian Affairs policy to encourage Indians to exploit the natural resources of the reservations so that the reservation would become self-supporting. . . . The Indians would thereby pay for the Bureau that had been appointed to govern them" (Gidley 47). The Indians would be expected to yield their understandings, which had existed from time immemorial, to the expediency of white man's economy.

Another way Warren represents the disruption of the relationship the Nez Perce have with nature is with animal imagery. When the Nimipu are in the Wallowa Valley, Warren creates the context of natural harmony. Warren describes the land of the Nez Perce as

> their land, and the bones of their fathers
> Yet love them, and in that darkness, lynxlike,
> See how their sons still thrive without fear. (4)

While still in their native land the Nez Perce "thrive"; they flourish, prosper; their goals are realized. The effect of the Nez Perce being forcefully removed from their native lands by the insistence of a distant and insensitive government caused the ensuing rebellion of the Nez Perce,

which ultimately resulted in many deaths and their placement in Leavenworth as a punitive measure. The harmony between man and nature and between men was severed. Warren reflects this dis-harmony with the ominous image of insects associated with death:

> Insects unremitting
> Were whirring or sizzling like lust in the blood;
> Or the sound the lust of murder makes
> In the deep of your heart before the stroke. (47)

To amplify the effect of this unnatural environment, Warren uses factual representation to reinforce what he has said poetically:

> *"the bad effects of their location at Fort Leavenworth manifested itself . . . in the death of more than one quarter of the entire number."* (48)

The Nez Perce do not "thrive" at Leavenworth. Nature's animals are now annoying insects carrying the sounds of death. Warren's presentation of the Leavenworth environment is noticeably void of any evidence of flourishing or prospering and makes vivid the reality of the Nez Perce being displaced from their natural environment.

Additional animal imagery, other than the lynx-insect contrast, reinforces the Indians' sense of a oneness with their native environment as opposed to their deprivation in an alien world. In their homeland they are at one with the animal world: Indian boys like "The otter at gambol . . . [who] dive, / Beaverlike" (3); Indian scouts "owl-eyed, deer-eared" (16); and Chief "Looking Glass, / A war-chief

with paw of cougar, and cunning / Of fox" (18). Even Chief Joseph has "ears / Pricked forward for wisdom, as the wolf pricks ears / At a rustle on soft wind" (20). In contrast, this animal imagery is a part of their past life or is debased after the Indians are living on the reservation in an unnatural and strange environment. Chief Joseph speaks: "I sit, coals simmering, / A dying animal humped with no motion" (52). Severed from their native environment Indians are no longer like otters or beavers, owls, deer, cougars, or foxes, alive in a natural environment--they are simply dying animals. Through animal imagery, Warren emphasizes the loss of vitality that results from the Indians' loss of their natural environment.

The environments of the two worlds, the natural versus the strange, are as starkly contrasted. Warren describes Wallowa as "The Land of the Winding Waters," "The Land of the Nimipu" ("The Real People") (3). In comparison to the "Winding Waters" of Wallowa, he describes the alien environment of Leavenworth as a "fat lagoon . . . / With dead fish floating . . . / And all water foul for cooking or drinking" (47). The thriving "Winding Waters" have become the "fat lagoon" with foul water. The prosperous, vibrant culture of the Nez Perce becomes listless and still in Leavenworth.

Another means of contrasting the two environments is the structural device of repetition. Warren uses the word "land" five times in the first four lines to emphasize the importance of the land to the Indians and to the reader. By comparison, the word Warren repeats to describe the unnatural environment of Leavenworth is "stink." He writes: "the stinking river," "that stinking land," and "sacred in stink" (51). In the place of exile life's stink is everywhere--in the environment that surrounds them and in their very lives.

The salmon who "Unfailing at falls-leap, leap great stones" (3) at Wallowa, is an image dramatically opposed to that of the "bellies of dead fish" (51) at Leavenworth. The instinctive drive of the salmon "seeking, seeking, / In blind compulsion, like fate, the spawn- / Pool that blood remembers" (3), metaphorically expresses the need of the Nez Perce to return to Wallowa, their native land. This "inner drive" is stirred by their removal from their homeland: "Joseph sits, can stir . . . only by permit" (51). In captivity, Joseph sits awaiting permission to visit his birthplace, his homeland. The antithetical images function both for rhetorical contrast and for revelation of psychological state. Warren writes

> "Joseph prayed, but could not die.
> And living, lived for one thing only--to see
> his people
> Again in their high land,

Where men love earth and eath loves man." (48) Secure in the common knowledge of the ways of the salmon--how, at the point of death, they must return to where they were born in order to propagate their species--Chief Joseph feels the powerful need to return to his native land.

Essentially, cultural differences regarding the environment and the sustenance it provided were the forces behind the severing of the Nez Perce relationship with nature. When an individual loses touch with his environment he is separated from an essential part of life. His values change from the communal to the individualistic. The value he places on relationships, on love, togetherness, closeness are replaced by a different set of values, a value system predicated on things, objects, and material gains. Chief Joseph speaks: "The earth, my mother and nurse, is very sacred to me: too sacred to be valued, or sold for gold or for silver" (14).

Merrill Beal writes: "The force of at least six hundred horses charged forward with the same speed and precision that had broken the power of the Sioux and Cheyenne nations" (214). It was sheer mass which caused the removal of Chief Joseph from his native environment and the physical and spiritual degradation of a nation. The basis

for this enforced removal was not predicated on human needs but on greed for gold--for things, objects, material gains. Any conquered, exterminated, or even exiled culture reveals the universal harm of conquest, the loss of essential values whether lost in the vanquished, in the vanquisher, or in the act of vanquishing itself. Honorable and salubrious relationships on all levels, between cultures, between individuals, between nature and the individual, are vital. Observing the collapse or destruction of these relationships opens our eyes to differences, our hearts to our fellow man, and our minds to new possibilities for life.

Removing Chief Joseph and his band of Nez Perce from their natural environment of Wallowa caused the final breakdown of the Nez Perce culture, and Warren portrays this splintering in Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce. Warren appears to be attacking a contemporary belief that Indians enjoy living on reservations because they can preserve their native cultures. "The whole thrust of Bureau of Indian Affairs policy . . . was to break down Native Americans' cultures and to make Indians over into surrogate whites who would enter the mainstream of American life" (Gidley 15). Chief Joseph remarks: "They built me a house" (51), and again in the next paragraph: "They built me a house--me a chief" (51). Chief Joseph can not understand why he is being asked to abandon his instinctive cultural behavior.

Essential cultural differences between peoples breed misunderstanding. John Burt's comment upon this misunderstanding is simple: "Sometimes one culture really does have a different habit of mind from another" (15). Chief Joseph ponders the white man's attempts to make him a farmer "as though I were one / Of the white half-men who scratch in the ground" (51). Chief Joseph can not understand why the white man would purposely inflict hardships and unnatural changes upon him and his people, and he questions "The Great spirit Chief" in search of an answer. Printed in the North American Review were his words: "Many of our people sickened and died, and we buried them in this strange land" (430).[4] Warren's insert continues the words of Chief Joseph:

> *"The Great spirit Chief Who rules above seemed to be looking the other way, and did not see what was being done to my people."* (48)

One thing being done to the Nez Perce was a severing of their ties to their native culture and environment. This severing manifested itself in drunkeness, idleness, and eventually death. The cooperative Nez Perce who befriended the Lewis and Clark expedition now appeared totally uncooperative with the government's attempt to "Americanize" them. The thriving culture of the Nez Perce in the Wallowa Valley was now a stagnated and dying culture in Leavenworth, Kansas.

Differing cultural views of nature is an insufficient reason for severing man's relationship with his environment. The beneficial qualities of the Nez Perce's territory are not realized by the white man. An entry from the Journals of Lewis and Clark reveals that the Nez Perce help the expedition on their push westward (5). The same environment, fertile and productive to one culture, is viewed as fatal by another. In Section IV Joseph makes this point:

> "To your belly the plant of the camas is kind.
> Women gather the root on the camas prairies.
> . . . . . .
> But only for us. The white man spits on it,
> Blaspheming." (25)

For the Nez Perce the camas prairies provided sustenance. In contrast, the white man found this food barely edible. But the Indians' natural environment, "Land sacred to the band of old Joseph" (3), sustains them spiritually and physically:

> The Salmon leaps, and is the Sky-Chief's blessing.
> The Sky-Power thus blessed the Nimipu
> And blessed them, too, with
> The camas root, good to the tongue, in abundance.
> (4)

Failure to understand this duality of nature, the white man sees the Nez Perce environment as barren and unyielding. And when the Nez Perce are captured, displaced, and relocated into strange lands, the environment becomes totally unfriendly, barren and unforgiving--just as the environment of the Nez Perce's territory appeared to the white man.

Ownership of the land, too, is an issue vital to a culture's identity and health. The Indians' fate rests on legalistic determinations of what a treaty is, what it implies, and how it binds each party. Warren includes part of the first treaty with the Nez Perce, the Nez Perces Cession of 1855 (6-7), telling of the boundaries of the land allotted to the Nez Perce, the land that was Wallowa. "A treaty is a binding international agreement between two or more sovereign nations ("Abrogation" 1). The white man wanted the Nez Perce to live where they had always lived, "but our sacred land / They trod. They spat on our earth" (7). The conflict is expressed as antithesis: Wallowa is paradise to the Nez Perce--spat upon by the white man. Original treaties were seldom adhered to, and a new treaty was proposed in 1863, creating greater tension. Some of the Nez Perce agree to the new treaty, some do not; some of the white men support the new treaty and its binding effect on all Nez Perce and some do not.

These conflicting emotions between and within the opposed sides produce a twofold tension. The source of that contention rises from the importance of the native environment to the Nez Perce, the interrelation between that land and the native inhabitants in the maintaining of essential human values of honesty, trust, and justice. There is conflict not only between opposed cultures but also

within the Nez Perce themselves. Chief Joseph remarks:

> "Even so, our young braves, they swallowed their rage,
> Like bile that burns in the belly, and waits.
> No, not ours it was who brought the great grief,
> But young men of Chief White Bird." (15)

But the white man sees no distinction between the tribes of the Nez Perce. Chief Joseph tells us, "on *our* trail, horse-soldiers in darkness came" (16).

Warren appears to be saying that the loss of essential human values is evident not only when individuals are in fact separated from their natural environment, but even when threatened with this separation. And this conflict is apparent not only in the individuals who are displaced, but also in the individuals enforcing their displacement.

The mobilization of the Indians took the form of enforced treaty policies and brought about enviromental and moral destruction. The United States policy of Manifest Destiny, "the self-fulfilling prophecy that Indians would disappear, either through physical attrition or assimilation into the white society," weighed heavily on all Government treaties with the Indians (Indian Water Rights 1).[5] In 1873 a reversal by President U. S. Grant promised that the non-treaty Nez Perce were the rightful possessors of the Wallowa Valley.[6]

> *It is hereby ordered that the trace of country described Nez Perces Cession, 1855 be withheld from entry and settlement as public lands and that the same*

> *be set apart as a reservation for the roaming Nez Perces.* (8)

Warren undercuts any elation or satisfaction that might be read into Grant's decision of 1873. Warren metaphorically equates law with mist. The suggestion is that like mist, a phenomenon of nature, the law is a phenomenon of the white man. The law lacks sufficient substance to stand up to the winds of time, to the "dawn wind." Chief Joseph is fearful that when he awakes tomorrow, the law, "like mist in the day's heat," will disappear (8). Laws do not always reflect the necessary principles of life that individuals should exhibit and cultivate toward one another. Warren asks us to remember the price paid in attaining our nation's early goals both with regard to the environment and to individuals, goals sought under the umbrella of governmental authority.

Warren uses the universal principle of Truth to create tension and contrast fundamental moral beliefs between cultures. Philip Balla writes: "The English word for truth . . . derives from the Anglo-Saxon for tree, "treow," indicating how originally and deeply a sense of roots, branches, and continuities mattered to English speaking people. By the nineteenth century whites had apparently forgotten such lessons of the language" (274). Warren writes of Indians "Not lying, not speaking with forked tongue" (4). The prose statement that precedes these lines

is spoken by Jean Baptiste le Moyne de Bienville and opens with *"Their honesty is immaculate"*.[7] Elements of misunderstanding and conflict become apparent when Chief Joseph says, "and my voice / Was saying the Truth that no / White man can know" (14). A man of absolutes, Chief Joseph becomes disillusioned with the white man's desire to speak the truth. Referring to Miles, Warren writes, "Only one man . . . might / Speak out the truth" (49), and only then because of "an uneasy conscience" (49). Chief Joseph seems to understand that basic differences exist between cultures, and his reverence for his native environment is not, and possibly could not be, shared by the white man.

The lack of understanding between cultures and the lack of basic principles of trust and honesty are further illustrated by the rhetorical question, "But what is a piece of white paper, ink on it?" (9). Warren continues in quest of "Truth," or rather in quest of what is not a "Lie." Images of the "whiteness" of Truth appear as "white paper," "face, white," "white spot," "white cover of cloth," "white clouds," and are followed by the prose insert: *"But no recollection of former services could stand before the white man's greed"* (9). Greed becomes in fact the "whiteness" of Truth. Basically, it is "in order to protect the greed of whites . . . [that] the Federal Government orders its cavalry to remove the Nez Perce tribe from its

ancestral lands in Washington State" (Balla 273). But it was a greed not just for land and its gold, but for the white man's race itself, for the total belief in Manifest Destiny at all costs, that the white man forced the alienation of the Nez Perce from their homeland.

Chief Joseph comments: *"I believed General Miles or I never would have surrendered"* (44). And the poet, remembering, envisions Chief Joseph thinking: "of things outside / Of Time, in some / Great whirling sphere, like truth unnamable" (63). The essential values of truth and honesty are realized in Chief Joseph. His actions substantiate his reverence for truth, and his relationship with his native environment enhances and supports his principles.

Warren does not give this respect or reverence for Truth to the white man. Chief Joseph speaks: "What if the Father . . . seeks not to know what / Truth is, or cannot tell Truth from Lie?" (9). During negotiations for surrender at Bear Paws we are told of "Miles / violating a flag of truce" (42). And Warren writes, "Joseph's words, / Translated, were published-- / The fraud of, the suffering of, his people, the lies" (50). The periodic structure of "the lies" emphasizes the white man's lack of truthfulness. Warren develops this reverence for Truth in the Indians and

the lack of reverence in the white man. In so doing he reinforces the Indian's respect for their land, their heritage, and their integrity in contrast to the white man's disrespect for and apparent loss of these values.

Removing an individual who has established a spiritual and functional relationship with his environment is forcing upon him a living death. It is like placing him in exile, separating him from life. He suffers from a loss of spirituality. Ceasing to be self sufficient, his physical needs grow and his existence increasingly depends on others. This principle can be seen today as "many people look on Indian reservations as internment camps in which Indians were confined and forgotten by their European conquerors. Others see the reservations as wildlife sanctuaries where a threatened species of mankind is protected for future generations of superior species to behold. And others view the reservations as temporary holding pens where atavistic Indians are allowed to live out fantasies of a long-dead lifestyle until such time as they can be willingly or unwillingly brought into the 'mainstream of American life'" (Tribal Government 1). Chief Joseph is aware that his people can not survive estranged from their natural environment; deprived of the ways of life they knew, they will cease to function, to exist.

The problem of what to do with the Indian still exists.[8] Determining what to do with displaced people existed yesterday and will most likely exist tomorrow. Unknowingly, modern advancement in the form of technology and mechanization under the pretense of man's ideas of progress have contributed to this lack of personal fulfillment Warren attributes to the loss of a relationship with nature. The final section of the poem is dotted with references to man's ideas of progress: "Route 87," "the Honda creeping slow," "Tires now grind gravel," "We turn left at the sign" (58-59). Perhaps it is one of Warren's hopes in writing this poem to instill in us a genuine concern and a purposeful pursuit of solutions to problems rooted in our disregard for the environment. Warren writes:

> You tear through briars
> Shoulder-high. Snake Creek is near-dry, only
> A string of mossy-green puddles where Joseph,
> In the same season,
> Had once found water fresh for people and horse
> herd. (60)

Warren attributes the disappearance of fundamental values to the disappearance of the natural environment. Without a relationship with nature, man's value systems become distorted. We need the natural environment to sustain our sense of values.

Andrew Shelley writes, "This is a very ambitious poem, for the struggle to find a place for the Nez Perce is equivalent to America's struggle to feel at home in the

place it occupies" (99). Most Americans have inner struggles regarding themselves, the environment, and Indians. Some of us are willing to deny these problems, saying that Indians want to live on reservations because they want to preserve their culture, habits, native dress, and thus are living in harmony with nature on reservations. As Warren would write, this denial is "pure horse-fart." Displaced, Indians are eking out a bare and unnatural existence. Their original cultures are disappearing and being forgotten forever.[9] Today extinction threatens almost every Indian nation's cultural heritage. But the problem is deeper than this. Commercial and residential land uses have combined to reshape the Indians' native homeland so that, even if they were liberated from governmental controls, they would be unable to return to their native lands--to their Wallowas--which simply do not exist.

Michael G. Simms believes, "The tragedy of the Native American is a story told many times, and our failure to respond to it with more than conventional sympathy is a continuing part of the tragedy" (402). Warren is writing with the hope that we extend Simms's comment beyond our Native Americans and apply their plight, their cultural and moral disintegration, to all mankind who are being confronted with the loss of their native lands. The loss of a natural environment and the subsequent disintegration of

cultural and moral values has, if not a permanent effect, certainly a long range effect on those who experience it.

In an interview with Marshall Walker, Warren remarked, "Man's role in nature, as being part of nature, is no longer felt and this is tied to the sudden passion now in America to save something. . . . This effort is important; don't forget that there are many people who actually hate the idea of the green place, the hill, the woods, the stream; they hate it with a passion, loathe it because they are afraid of it, are afraid of it because they don't understand their relation to it" (260). In Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce, Warren hopes that

> when the traffic light
> Rings green, some stranger may pause and thus miss
> His own mob's rush to go where the light
> Says go, and pausing, may look
> . . . . . .
> into
> His own heart. (64)

Warren establishes the vital relationship of the Nez Perce with their native environment and dramatizes results of this severed relationship both through animal imagery, metaphor, repetition, and through representation of the impact a dominant culture's enforcement of its ways has upon a much less powerful nation. Through contrast he creates tension between nature and the individual that exists only when the individual is out of his natural environment.

Warren establishes the necessity of an individual's and a culture's relationship with nature and explores the resulting conflict of cultures based in their understanding--or failure to understand--this relationship. The disappearance of human virtues becomes manifest in Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce as the result of losing touch with one's native land.

CHAPTER IV

Structure as Symbolic of Life

John Burt believes that Warren strives "to produce a satisfactory form--not a rigorously symmetrical form but a form that does justice to the ironies, the dissonances and unexpected harmonies, of experience" (12). The form of Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce supports this belief. In life's experiences, there is irony, dissonance, and the unexpected harmony that provide the strength and basis for continuance. The structure of Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce parallels this view of life. Within the poem is an idea of order, order which can and does exist in the midst of chaos--the unexpected harmony. The structure of life can reflect this order if an individual remains firm to his convictions and does not forsake essential human values.

Warren prefaces his poem with three quotations. The first, magnanimous in nature but ignorant of reality, is an idealistic statement by Thomas Jefferson: "Our brothers, the red men, we consider ourselves as the same family" (x). According to Hugh Ruppersburg, one of Warren's fundamental themes in his "treatment of American history [is] the

annihilation of Jeffersonian idealism by the greed of those more concerned with economic gain than the forging of a democratic nation" (76). Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce explores the theme of history's mockery of Jefferson's words. Jefferson's words as a preface bring the thoughts to mind: as we read of Chief Joseph we realize that for too long humanity has been subordinate to the dominance of avarice and racial arrogance.

In contrast, the next quotation, by William T. Sherman, supports total eradication of the Indian: "The more we can kill this year, the less will have to be killed the next war" (x). This statement mirrors Warren's own belief that "human history is a story of the constant revision of values, and . . . the martyr in ice . . . is not necessarily the creature most worthy of emulation" (Who Speaks 427-28). Generally, the images of America's soldiers are idealized; most are legendized as heroes. Inclusion of Sherman's words warns each individual to ask himself whether the preservation of fundamental values is being maintained or disregarded by those who hold power over us.

The third quotation is by the Indian Chief Sealth: "When the last Red Man shall have perished, and the memory of my tribe shall have become a myth among the white men . . . the White Man will never be alone" (x). This

statement represents one of Warren's basic principles of the past, its involvement in the present. There is no escape from the past. Realistic in its understanding and insight into the tendency of human nature, the comment blends the two preceding statements and awakens in the reader the difficulty of moral definition. The first two statements are radically opposed; together they become disturbing, whichever view one supports. By including the words of Chief Sealth, Warren is saying that individuals must live with their own personal memories of actions whether willfully performed by them or by someone supposedly representing their will. Memories are unassignable. Only by remaining true to essential human values can an individual experience order.

The division of the poem into nine sections suggests the chapters of life that make up history. Except for Section IX, the sections, written in the past tense, are continuous, and tell the story of Chief Joseph and his band of Nez Perce. In Section I we learn of the importance of the land (the Wallowa valley) to Chief Joseph. Sections II through VI relate the cavalry's pursuit of Chief Joseph and the battles they fight. Section VI dramatizes the final battle, the Battle of Bear Paws, and Joseph's surrender. One example of order existing in the midst of chaos is seen in the sections that narrate battles. During the intense

pursuit of Chief Joseph and the many battles and skirmishes that take place, Chief Joseph never loses sight of trying to live in peace, to escape to Canada, to avoid war whenever possible, to hold firm to his convictions. Chief Joseph maintains a sense of order by not yielding to the pressures of battle. Section VII narrates Chief Joseph's life on different reservations and his relentless pursuit to return to Wallowa--his relentless pursuit of order for his life and the lives of his people. In Section VIII, Chief Joseph reflects upon his life and his efforts to return to where he began--Wallowa. The Section relates his death and contains the irony of his coffin being "thrust beneath the expensive monument / Of white generosity" (57). Only after Chief Joseph's death do the white men look upon him and his people with generosity. These "generous thoughts" result in giving an Indian with a strong love of the land, of Nature, an Indian who places no value on material things, an "expensive monument" to mark his grave. Section IX shifts to the present "a century later" (58). The poet returns to the site of the final battle and mentally re-enacts Chief Joseph's final surrender, his thoughts, and his desires for future generations. The structure, episodic in its division into separate sections, and sequential in the telling of its story, reflects life. Individuals lead separate lives; lives combine to produce life, which, over time, becomes history.

Underlying this basic pattern of disruption and continuation is a circular pattern, a return to the beginning. This circularity suggests continuance and gives the poem's message a sense of permanence. Viewed in its entirety, the poem is circular, with the poet returning to the beginning of the end for Chief Joseph and his band of Nez Perce. After eight sections of narrative in the past tense, Section IX, written in present tense, records the poet flying out to visit the site of Chief Joseph's surrender and serves to unite the past with today. The final section reinforces Warren's themes of the importance of history, of heritage and the influence of the past on the present. The circular pattern of our daily existence is seen in this final section. Section IX begins at sunrise, ends at night, and encompasses two days. The Section works to combine the present (sunrise) with the past (night) into a meaningful future. Both the past and the present are separate, each a distinct part in our lives, but they need to be united for a meaningful life.

The poetic mode of the poem also reflects life. The poetry is disrupted by prose passages, yet they do not disrupt the poetry. One has a tendency to assign a higher degree of credence to a prose statement complete with documentation, accepting its validity and authenticity, than to a passage of poetry. The prose passages substantiate

poetry with fact. The effect on a reader reading poetry being suddenly confronted with a prose statement is startling and disturbing. The emotional swings brought about by these prose inserts reflect life's emotional swings. The effect of the prose is to "sharpen the sense of betrayal and outrage" (Donovan 828) and to "add additional perspectives to the tragic story" (Publishers Weekly 95). Joseph speaks poetically:

> "I lie here as always,
> In my own tepee, at peace with all men.
>
> But think of your father's eyes in his darkness.
>
> The sun rises up. No end to the dream's stink." (12)

With empathy we visualize a peaceful man having tormenting dreams of not living up to his father's expectations. When he awakes, he knows the truth of his dream. With these emotions on our minds and in our hearts, we read:

> *I call him* [the Indian] *a savage, and I call a savage something wholly desirable to be civilized off the face of the earth.*
> Charles Dickens (12)

The impact of contradictory attitudes and racial arrogance strikes us. We look for a means to justify Dickens's comment. Through poetry Warren presents in Chief Joseph a man tormented by the contradiction between the trust placed in him by his father and the realities of life. Through prose he sharply focuses on these realities. The prejudice against the man, the judgment and sentence, outweigh all reason when we have identified through the poetic drama with

Chief Joseph.

Another way the prose mirrors life is through inconsistent messages. The quoted passages reveal the white men's ambivalence toward the Indians and Indian Policies. The Oregon Superintendent of Indian Affairs expresses concern regarding the relocation of the Nez Perce to *"where they cannot find their usual means of subsistence"* (10). The concern is genuine, and his insights as to the culture of the Nez Perce show a knowledge of their ways. A quotation from the Superintendent of Indians Affairs for Washington Territory warns of the impossibility of restraining miners from invading the Indians' territory (11). This quotation reflects the frustration of many who sided with the Nez Perce in a fight lost before it began. Differences of opinion regarding the Nez Perce (with the exception of Dickens's) are subtle. Warren quotes from the Marker placed on White Bird Battlefield, "34 men gave their lives in service for their country" (18). The total does not include the lives of Indians lost in the battle. Miles "official communique" states: "We have had our usual success" (43), implying a nonchalant attitude toward the defeat of Indians and the loss of Indian lives. The oscillation and chaos in the hearts and minds of those wielding power are obvious. Warren builds tension in his poem by highlighting "the contrast between the ambiguous

motives of the white leaders and the noble integrity of" Chief Joseph (Cotter 718). In an era when Indians were not even considered men, Chief Joseph stands out because of his personal integrity and loyalty to basic principles. In the past men were serfs, slaves, and nonentities. Today men are designated as titles or as members of gangs or simply as numbers. Warren is not questioning the necessity for these dehumanizing practices. He tells us to look inward in order to survive and surpass life's dehumanization of the individual. He tells us that by our looking inward and remaining firm to essential human values order can be maintained in a world with no apparent regard for the individual.

The mixture of poetry and prose adds to the paradox of these conflicting views and harshly enlightens those comfortably, however ignorantly, asleep in the present. During Chief Joseph's visits to Washington,

> He told
> The bounty white men had sometimes paid
> For a red scalp--the going rate,
> One hundred dollars per buck, fifty
> Per woman, only twenty-five for a child's. (49)

The passage would seem a poetic ploy to evoke melodrama except for the following statement from The Portland Oregonian:

> *A party of miners returned to Owyhee from a raid on Indians with twenty scalps and some plunder. The miners are well.* (49)

The insensitivity of the facts reinforce the truth of the poetry. Skeptics are abruptly silenced. The disregard for the value of human life is blatant. There is a disturbing implication that, if history regarding Native Americans has been massaged to the point of misrepresentation, by extension this fate could befall us as individuals. We must face the realities of our past, accept them, and pursue a life based on firm convictions rooted in a full consciousness of human values.

Warren's concern with structure might even extend to the way lines of poetry manifest design. Discounting the prose inserts, the middle line of poetry reads: "And receive surrender!" (34). "And" as a conjunction implies an antecedent; "receive" implies personal involvement; and "surrender," used as a noun, implies an instance of surrendering, an instance of yielding oneself over to someone or something else perhaps implying acceptance of surrender as if it were a bestowed gift or a necessity. This Chief Joseph does. This we are to do. If we can surrender to the influence of our past, surrender to the influence of our heritage, surrender to the influence of nature, we can experience fulfillment of life despite the evil that has gone before us and the errors of our forefathers. The central line of the poem thus is "doubled" in impact, pointing toward the events of the past and toward

us. One way to surrender and experience fulfillment of life is through knowledge, and one reason Warren writes Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce is to give us knowledge of America's past. Warren asks, "What is love?" and answers, "One name for it is knowledge" (Audubon 30). An awareness that knowledge is composed of both good and evil is essential to understanding Warren's definition, and in Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce, Warren asks us all "To know" (64).

Rhetorically, Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce reflects the questioning and challenges that are inherent in our forming judgments and in our need to live ethically. Life's choices, problems, and dilemmas are all evidenced in the rhetorical question. The use of the rhetorical question does not as Andrew Shelley claims "dramatize an author's bafflement with his given subject matter" (98). Such a statement begs the question of a poet's motive and accomplishment. A poet, particularly one of Robert Penn Warren's stature, should be granted the poet's capability to choose every word, space, punctuation mark"--anything that comes along to excite the imagination" (Brooks & Warren 473). The rhetorical question is a means to involve the reader in the poem--to add the touch of personal involvement--because "the imaginative involvement of the reader is essential to poetic effect" (Brooks & Warren 125). Different poets use different techniques, one

characteristic of all Warren's poetry being his use of the rhetorical question to stimulate reader response.

One of the ways the chaos or tension created in the reader's mind by the rhetorical question can be ordered is by the recognition of why the question has been asked. In a rhetorical question Warren asks if we recall our affinity with nature:

> What does our blood,
> In arteries deep, heaving with pulse-thrust
> In its eternal midnight, remember? (3)

He says, "We, too," like the Nez Perce "belong / To the world" (3). Interaction with nature is essential to man's redemptive recovery of self. If man can realize that he is involved in an intimate, two-way relationship with the world, he will experience, as Richard Gray writes, an "osmosis of being, which in the end does not deny, but affirms, his identity" (10). Rhetorical questions, though creating momentary tension because of their indefinite nature--making no direct statement--do allow for an idea of order to exist within the reader who answers them.

Another use of the rhetorical question is to instill in the reader a sense of the bewilderment the Indian experiences toward the white man's greed for gold, his obsession with an inert mineral. The Indians' culture involved weaving nature into their daily existence, and

Warren expresses through nature images Chief Joseph's questioning of this white man's desire for something that does not "sprout," "bloom," or "bear." Joseph asks:

> "Does a grain of gold, in the dark ground, lie
> Like a seed-sprout? What color of bloom
> Will it bear?
> . . . . . .
> For all things live, and live in their nature.
> But what is the nature of gold?" (11)

Through association, we should be bewildered by our obsession with material gains. Warren is asking us to re-evaluate our sense of values.

Warren also uses the rhetorical question to explore the petty differences that sever cultures:

> "The white horse-soldiers, they mount from the left.
> We from right. Can that be a difference?" (12)

The tone of the passage is sincere. The words reflect the absurdity of closed minds. The rhetorical question signifies the unthinking ways we feel mere differences of custom to be signs of others' inferiority and asks us to evaluate our own beliefs.

The rhetorical question also reveals the depth of Chief Joseph's strong yet simple character as he asks,

> "What praise does man want but his manhood?" (20)

The question forces us to consider what praise we would hope for from others, from life; to consider what we are striving for, what goals we are trying to reach, and what praise we

will reap. The unassuming question of Chief Joseph rests on bedrock certainty--his values challenge us to consider our own.

In contrast to Chief Joseph's character, Howard's desperate thoughts of failure are revealed in the rhetorical question:

> What
> Then for him, for Howard! For his
> Long struggle, unflinching, over a thousand miles,
> For anguish, defeats, his dead lying under
> Unloving stars? (34)

The rhetorical question focuses on Howard's selfish concerns; in turn, we are to focus on our concerns.

The rhetorical question is a powerful device. It can invite reader participation and reader interpretation. Each reader is provoked through stimulation of his imagination to explore the answer he would give. The rhetorical question puts the reader in the speaker's place and invites him to search his own soul for an answer. By creating a disruption in the reading process, it allows, through conscious thought, an idea of order to emerge as we re-evaluate our values.

Other ways Warren induces introspection is with the poetic power of the dash and the syntactical effects of inversion:

> Ledge, sage clump, death peered, death came.
> Thirsty the sands of the canyon--oh thirsty! (17)

The forced pause created by the dash creates an intense feeling of reflection and remembrance. The experience is at once thrilling and horrifying. John Burt sees this same thwarted intensity "reflected in Warren's . . . tortured syntax, syntax wrought up with inversions" (7). Joseph relates: "Then vision, it came" (5). The pronoun "it," along with the inversion, creates a tone of discovery. The inversion is both suspenseful and satisfying. In a passage written as though the poet was creating a camera shot taken from high above, inversion creates a sense of nature's timelessness. Warren describes the canyon: "Where water, long back, had sliced at the high plain" (32). The interjected "long back" emphasizes the ordinarily unnoticed passage of time. To emphasize the mental anguish of Howard who, after realizing that another officer is better situated to capture Chief Joseph, is forced to issue orders to this effect, Warren writes: "Orders, identical, go out" (35). The inversion forces an impact that would be lost in the reading of "Identical orders go out." With the inversion, the emphasis is on "orders" and it is the "orders" that cause Howard's anguish.

Another sense of syntactical emphasis is accomplished by Warren's depiction of the environment as both friend and foe metaphorically and rhythmically. Warren writes: "Where

east, and north, the mountain wall broke, / Stone fingers, with nails, stretched out at the plain" (29). The Indians, like the lines, flow through the "hands" of the mountains. The same environment is depicted in sentence structure as tortuous for the white man:

> And Howard,
> In blunder and bumble--yes he was tough.
> Would winch wagons--unwheeled front or rear--two hundred
> Feet up or worse. Then down. (29)

The forced pauses between "would winch" and "unwheeled front" mirror the white man's struggles in the Indian's environment. The time taken to read the two sections parallels the way the opposed cultures exist in the same environment. The metaphor, rhythm, and statement are one. There is an orderly existence for the Indian in his natural environment despite the chaos, exemplified here by the white man or intruder who is out of his natural environment.

Regarding poetic form, Paul Fussell writes, "When a free verse poem does surprise us by introducing a moment of recognizable traditional rhythm, such a rhythm should be related to meaning" (85). When the Nez Perce are forced to exist out of their natural environment imprisoned on reservations, Warren abandons his frequent use of enjambment and writes in strict accentual meter using end-stopped lines (page 47 lines 1-14). The sudden shift to an accentual meter of four stresses per line coincides metrically with

meaning. The meter, confined within the lines, suggests the Indians confined within the reservation, and the closure of the lines reinforces the fences surrounding the Indians. The harsh consonants and jagged rhythms of the passage enact the Indian's response to this environment. The restraint felt in reading the end-stopped passage mirrors the restraint felt by the Indians. Charles Hartman writes, "nothing must violate the boundary of the line" (62), but if this uniformity is disrupted, the disruption should have meaning. Warren violates the end-stopped line in line four with the word "edges" and in line six with the word "wrath." Semantically it is the "edges" of the reservation that violate the Indians' sense of order and incur their "wrath," their sense of outrage. Warren violates the sense of line integrity but does not abandon metrical integrity, suggesting that the Indians do not abandon their sense of essential human values even though these values have been violated by their captors.

Warren uses adjectives to reinforce the possible resurgence of these values. The subtlety of Warren's message is seen in a comparison of two views of a scene that takes place when Chief Joseph surrenders. Chief Joseph turns to Howard, but Howard indicates that he is to surrender to Miles. Warren writes:

> Howard smiles as a friend. But
> Peremptory or contemptuous,
> Indicates Miles. (45)

Referring to the same scene, he later writes,

> and Howard, with what
> Compassion or irony, gestured to Miles. (61)

The gesture that was "peremptory" or haughty is now perhaps one of "Compassion." The "contemptuous" gesture or one filled with hate is now one of mere "irony." The adjectives have been softened. Warren is indicating that process, history, can mean progress. The edges of the past have been smoothed. The edges of today can also be smoothed over the passage of time, with the acceptance of the past and a re-evaluation of essential human values.

Warren has stated that if a "poem is to be insured against ridicule and parody," it must include "some kind of ironic counterstatement . . . that is, somehow include an ironical counterstatement to [the] principal emotional statement" (Daiches 98). This principle is vividly apparent throughout Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce. As a counterstatement to the seriousness of the cavalry immediately before the final battle, with their nerves on edge, Warren writes:

> Captain Hale jokes:
> "My God, have I got to go out and get killed
> In such weather?" (40)

Emotions before battle are strained, reality is introduced through humor. Later, as the poet visits the historic

battle site, the scene is recalled:

> There are markers screwed on with a name:
> . . . . . .
> including the jokester
> Captain Hale, who died in such weather. (61)

The somber emotions that arise when the poet walks through a past battle site are honestly invaded with the irony of war.

Warren's treatment of counterstatement is particularly impressive when Chief Joseph rides in a procession to dedicate Grant's tomb. The irony is clear--Chief Joseph honoring Grant who

> In his own hand, certified the land
> Of the Winding Waters to Joseph's people--
> "Forever." (56)

Initially, the emotional response is focused on Chief Joseph and the irony of the Indian cheated out of his land taking part in a procession to honor the man who cheated him. The counterstatement that follows, however, gives rise to new emotions. The white leader is seen bullied by other white leaders and the irony broadens to include not only the Indian Chief Joseph but all men as well:

> until some western politico, or such,
> Jerked him by the nose, like a bull with a brass
> Ring there for control? (56)

Again the rhetorical question forces the pause, which in turn forces the thought: if leaders are influenced with regard to the lives of Indians, could they also be influenced with regard to all men's lives?

For Warren, human imperfection is vast; "nothing that is available in human experience is to be legislated out of poetry" (Selected Essays 26). In Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce, Warren reaches into America's legendary past and describes Buffalo Bill, one of her folk heroes, as

> the magician who could transform
> For howling patriots, or royalty,
> The blood of history into red ketchup,
> A favorite American condiment. (55)

In these lines there is paradox in the apposition of "howling patriots" and "royalty"; in the metonymical use of "The blood of history"; in the ugly thought implied by "A favorite American condiment." (Does this modifier refer to "red ketchup" or "The blood of history," or both?) The cleverness of the passage amuses us; its realism pointedly reminds us of an era when essential values were denied by the "American Way" and the lack of values was justified for the sake of forging a nation. And in being reminded of what we were like in that era, we must consider what we are like in this.

Throughout the poem a sense of order is found in Warren's use of the word "star." The word is repeatedly used in conjunction with the three principle characters, Chief Joseph, Howard, and Miles. Each man's "star" is a mirror image of his own character. Howard thinks of "his dead lying under / Unloving stars" (34). The literal meaning is that he is thinking about his troops who have

died in strange lands but "Unloving stars" could also refer to men with hearts steeled in their selfish pursuit of notoriety and material gains, men like Howard.

Miles's "star" is a sense of power and recognition attainable by the capture of Chief Joseph.

> In the infinite black firmament inside
> His skull, a star, in explosion, blazes, bursts
> In the birth of worlds. (35)

His "star" is his own unrelenting quest for glory, his unbending determination for victory and acclaim--his "star" is his dream:

> Miles curses the cavalry, infantry, forward
> To follow that flare in his head. (37)

After the surrender and the "star" were his, Warren asks, "In his rising success, did something make Miles / Wonder what was the price of a star?" (49). Warren is asking us to consider the cost of our victories and what we have paid for. If in our pursuit of an "evil" we become more blood-thirsty, more ruthless than the evil itself, what have we won if indeed ours is the victory?

Chief Joseph's "star" has a somber tone. He states: "Remember your dead now lonely under / High stars with no name" (26,27) and notices the "Stars wheel in unfamiliar formations" (27). Literally he is speaking about being in strange lands, but "stars" could refer to people, people with ambition and purpose who once were powerful but who now

have "no name" and are "unfamiliar"; men like himself, a Nez Perce Chief living on a reservation,

> While forever stars spin what patterns
> The Great Spirit's heart defines. (52)

Chief Joseph acknowledges there will always be "stars" (people) influencing his life. As an individual he has little control over others. There is a tone of skepticism in the passage, a forsaking of Divine Providence, as he realizes he is "only a dot in dimness" (52). The passage suggests there are powers at work in our lives which are not understandable. Only the individual can maintain essential human values in his life.

Warren's "stars" are spun throughout the poem in apparent disarray, but they weave a web that patterns an important and essential message. We must stop and evaluate our "stars," "our selves," and the life we are so intent on pursuing. History does not disclose its alternatives. The best "stars" are achieved by looking inward not upward.

The structure of the poem, the division into distinct yet continuous sections, parallels life. Lives are distinct; life is continuous. Warren's variant structure portrays an underlying sense of order that works to instill a feeling of hope. The form of alternating poetry and prose reinforces the structure. Individuals strive to lead

"poetic" lives, lives without stress, problems, conflicts--lives that run smoothly. The prose passages represent reality. Reality conflicts with an individual's idealized vision of life, producing tension and the need for resolution. The syntax continues the parallel to life. The contrast of flowing lines--idealized life--and fragmented lines--reality--adds to the conflict and tension. The rhetorical questions mark our progress toward an idea of order by probing our comprehension and understanding. The tense shift from past to present represents resolution. In Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce an idea of order is established through knowledge and acceptance of all life's experiences. The structure of the poem is an affirmation of essential human values required to maintain this order.

CHAPTER V

Conclusion

Robert Penn Warren's Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce is more than an historical account of a native American Indian tribe and their chief. For Warren, Chief Joseph represents values and virtues for all to emulate. In the face of hostilities and hardships inflicted by others and confronted with temptations to forsake his heritage and homeland, Chief Joseph maintains a life of absolutes rooted in essential values. Through dramatization of Chief Joseph's life, Warren urges us to reawaken these values. Placed in real-life situations, Joseph successfully balances the human emotion of pride. His belief in the basic goodness of others survives disappointment; and, contrasted against others, he stands as Warren's exemplar for mankind.

We have accepted and played the role of superior to native Americans for so long that most of us would refuse the recognition of a role reversal in the poem. Chief Joseph lived by a standard few could maintain in the face of similar circumstances, and in writing Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce, Warren hopes to awaken the sleeping conscience of

proud but naive individuals who, with regard to Native Americans, believe the policy of Manifest Destiny sanctions any and all past actions.

As dramatized in Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce, Warren believes that a relationship with nature is vital in maintaining a fulfilled life. The Nez Perce live in close harmony with their native environment. Nature and human beings sustain each other. But disrupted and alienated, both cease to function naturally, both cease to flourish, both eventually deteriorate and die. The disappearance of the spiritual and beneficent in nature parallels the disappearance of trust, honor, and respect. The individual, estranged from the power and sustenance of his proper environment, loses his sense of oneness with nature and loses the strength of character necessary to a fulfilled life.

Finally, the structure of the poem mirrors life. The episodes of the separate sections, sequential in the telling of the story, reflect individual lives that make up history. The prose passages, which interrupt the poetry and bring inconsistent messages, represent life's disruptions. The numerous rhetorical questions prompt the reader's personal involvement, causing introspection with regard to life's choices, problems and dilemmas, the tension they

create being resolved by exploring the reason behind them. Through our own answers to the rhetorical question, our association with the speaker--the opening of our minds through personal involvement--an idea of order emerges. Introspection into life is induced through the use of inversion, the dash, metaphor, and rhythm, each forcing a pause, each forcing the reader to contemplate his own life. Warren also employs semantics and meter to convey to the reader a sense of the values Chief Joseph possesses. A sense of hope for a return to basic human values is portrayed through a change in adjectives--a change in attitudes. Warren maintains realism through counterstatement and irony, and by his use of the word "star" a sense of order permeates through the poem. This poetic manipulation, along with the representation of nature and the contrast of Indian and white man's cultures, disturbs us and produces a tension that begs for resolution. The shift in tense in the last section represents this resolution and prompts a deeper involvement for the reader. A line from Warren's poem "Natural History" speaks for many Americans today with regard to America's past injustices against the Indian. Referring to those who represent his conscience, the voice in the poem remarks: "They must learn to stay in their graves. That is what graves are for" (New 178).

Warren's poem cries out for a more serious reading. What we do not want to hear is often what we need to hear. Warren's poem is not about an Indian; it is about a man. Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce is one of Warren's strongest arguments for acceptance of our past; for acceptance of our heritage; for acceptance of our abandonment of nature; and for acceptance of our growing disregard for essential human values.

Notes

[1] General Sherman "invoked the exile sentence upon them, because 'there should be extreme severity, else other tribes alike situated may imitate their example'" (qtd. in Beal 266).

[2] This was in Howard's report dated 1875 and later included in his biography. (Oliver O. Howard, Nez Perce Joseph, (Boston, 1881), 31 (qtd. in Beal 37).

[3] According to R. P. Johnson (11), the Nez Perce are credited with the development of the Appaloosa.

[4] qtd. in Beal 33. Chief Joseph, "An Indian's View of Indian Affairs." North American Review. 128 April 1879.

[5] "The first of 370 Indian treaties . . . was with the Delawares on September 17, 1778." In 1784 the Secretary of War placed armed militia at the disposal of the Indian commissioners "for negotiating treaties with the Indians," and forced removal began just six years after the signing of the first Indian treaty. "Removal was justified by the Federal Government as a means of protecting the Indians from repeated encroachments of eastern white settlers" (Federal Indian Policies 4).

[6] "Grant, of course, was the vanquisher of another culture, that of the antebellum South, which suggests that Warren is exploring on several different levels a concern with conquered or disappearing cultures" (Ruppersburg 79).

[7] Jean Baptiste le Moyne de Bienville was an "explorer and French colonial governor of the vast Louisiana territory that then encompassed the world of the Nez Perce" (Fuller 30).

[8] "Indians, including those in Florida, are living in devastating poverty, many without phones, electricity and indoor toilets. . . . While the typical urban area has one doctor for every 500 people, Indian doctors on the average serve as many as 1400. . . . For Florida's Seminoles, one doctor . . . serves 2000 Indians on three different reservations. . . . The Miccosukees . . . have no doctor" (Petchel 26A).

[9] Regarding the preservation of Indian folklore Archie Phinney comments: "There exists a general feeling that ancient tales are vapid and uninspiring, or even puerile" (Intro vii).

Works Cited

Balla, Philip. "A Dance on the High Wire over an Abyss." Parnassus 12 (1984): 267-80.

Beal, Merrill D. "I Will Fight No More Forever": Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce War. Seattle: U of Washington P, 1963.

Bloom, Harold. Introduction. Modern Critical Views: Robert Penn Warren. New York: Chelsea, 1986.

Bohner, Charles. Robert Penn Warren. 1964. Boston: Twayne, 1981.

Brooks, Cleanth. "Experience Redeemed in Knowledge." Gray. 17-31.

Brooks, Cleanth, & Robert Penn Warren. Understanding Poetry. 4th ed. Orlando: Holt, 1976.

Bureau of Indian Affairs. "Federal Indian Policies . . . from the Colonial period through the early 1970's." Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Indian Affairs, U. S. Department of the Interior, n.d.

Burt, John. Robert Penn Warren and American Idealism. New Haven: Yale UP, 1988.

Callander, Marilyn Berg. "Robert Penn Warren;s Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce: A Story of Deep Delight." Southern Library Journal 15 (1983): 24-33.

Cotter, James Finn. Rev. of Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce by Robert Penn Warren. The Hudson Review Winter 1983/84: 717+

Daiches, David. "The New Criticism." A Time of Harvest. New York: Hill and Wang. 1962.

Donovan, Rhoda. Rev. of Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce by Robert Penn Warren. Library Journal 108 (1983): 828.

Ellman, Richard, & Robert O'Clair, eds. The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry. 2nd ed. New York: Norton, 1988.

Fussell, Paul. Poetic Meter and Poetic Form. Rev. ed. New York: Random, 1965.

Gidley, M. Kopet: A Documentary Narrative of Chief Joseph's Last Years. Seattle: U of Washington P, 1981.

Gray, Richard, ed. Introduction. Robert Penn Warren: A Collection of Critical Essays. New Jersey: Prentice, 1980.

Hartman, Charles O. Free Verse: An Essay On Prosody. New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1980.

Havard, William C. "The Burden of the Literary Mind: Some Meditations on Robert Penn Warren As Historian." Gray. 184-187.

Hayakawa, S. I. Language in Action. New York: Harcourt, 1941.

Johnson, R. P. Chief Joseph. Minneapolis: Dillon, 1974.

Kizer, Carolyn, Rev. of Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce by Robert Penn Warren. Washington Post. Book World Section, 26 June 1983: 8.

Petchel, Jacquee. "Health Care: Indians Suffer in Ailing System." The Miami Herald 23 Nov. 1989: 1A+

Phinney, Archie. Nez Perce Texts. New York: AMS, 1969.

Rev. of Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce by Robert Penn Warren. Publishers Weekly 223 (1983): 95.

Ruppersburg, Hugh. "Discovering America's History: Robert Penn Warren's Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce." South Central Review 5.1 (1988): 75-86.

Shelley, Andrew. "Serious Reservations." London Magazine April/May 1984: 97-99.

Shepherd, Allen. "Chief Joseph, General Howard, Colonel Miles: The Context of Characterization in Warren's Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce." Mississippi Quarterly 39 (1985-86): 21-29.

Simms, Michael Garcia. "Time and the Maker." Southwest Review 68 Autumn 1983: 400-02.

Spears, Monroe K. "Robert Penn Warren A Hardy American." Sewanee Review 91 Fall 1983: 655-64.

Spinden, Herbert Joseph. The Nez Perce Indians: Memoirs of the American Anthropological Association. II Part 3. New York: Kraus, 1964.

United Effort Trust. "Abrogation of Indian Treaties." Washington D.C.: United Effort Trust, n.d.

---. "Indian Water Rights." Washington D.C.: United Effort Trust, n.d.

---. "Tribal Government." Washington D.C.: United Effort Trust, n.d.

Walker, Marshall. Robert Penn Warren: A Vision Earned. Glasgow, Scot.: Harper (Barnes Import), 1979.

Warren, Robert Penn. Audubon a vision. New York: Random, 1969.

---. Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce. New York: Random, 1982.

---. New and Selected Poems 1923-1985. New York: Random, 1985.

---. Selected Essays. New York: Random, 1951.

---. Who Speaks for the Negro? New York: Random, 1965.