

# ROBERT PENN WARREN: GENIUS LOVES COMPANY

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***Robert Penn Warren: Genius Loves Company*, edited by Mark Royden Winchell (Clemson, SC: Clemson University Digital Press, 2007), pp. vi + 122. \$ paper.**

**A**t least since the dawn of the Romantic era, it has been assumed that the poet lives a lonely life, isolated in his garret. Nevertheless, writers are not invariably hermits and misanthropes. As human beings, they crave the company of other human beings; as artists they need the stimulation of other artists. Norman Podhoretz once wrote that for Edmund Wilson, the Republic of Letters had “an existence at least as palpable and concrete as the Republic of France.”

In many ways, Robert Penn Warren was a model of the writer as social animal. As a precocious sixteen-year-old sophomore, he began attending meetings of Nashville’s Fugitive group. Decades before creative writing workshops had become a fixture on university campuses, these gifted amateurs would meet on alternate Saturday nights to exchange drafts of poems they were writing. The critical attention no doubt improved their verse, while the shared sense of community solidified their commitment to the literary life. Even a selective account [such as this] of Warren’s most important literary associations during such a long and active life could fill a good size book.

—Mark Royden Winchell

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