

12-2009

# Heroes with a Hundred Names: Mythology and Folklore in Robert Penn Warren's Early Fiction

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HEROES WITH A HUNDRED NAMES:  
MYTHOLOGY AND FOLKLORE IN ROBERT PENN WARREN'S EARLY FICTION

by

LEVERETT BELTON BUTTS, IV

Under the Direction of Thomas McHaney

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines Robert Penn Warren's use of Arthurian legend, Judeo-Christian folklore, Norse mythology, and ancient vegetation rituals in his first four novels. It also illustrates how the use of these myths helps define Warren's Agrarian ideals while underscoring his subtle references to these ideals in his early fiction.

INDEX WORDS: Robert Penn Warren, Night Rider, At Heaven's Gate, All the King's Men, Agrarianism, Southern Agrarianism, The Golden Bough, Norse mythology, Arthurian legend, Holy Grail, Cain, Wandering Jew, Vegetation Ritual

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LEVERETT BELTON BUTTS, IV

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2009

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December 2009

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, especially my wife, Tina, who had to spend many nights alone while I worked into the wee hours yet still encouraged me to keep working when I didn't feel like it and who stayed on my back to check my deadlines and, most importantly, to proofread my manuscript before sending it to my director instead of after. I love you, doll.

I also dedicate this dissertation to the memory of two men whose seemingly contradictory advice steered me throughout this project, but who, unfortunately, did not live to see its completion: to my grandfather who taught me that if something was worth starting, it was worth finishing and if something was worth doing it was worth doing well.

And to my friend, colleague, and mentor, Ike Simmons, who, whenever things got too stressful for me, would always steer me by the shoulder and say, "Hey man, let's go ride. You need a break." I miss you both more than I can say.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First I would like to thank the members of my dissertation committee for their encouragement and help in completing this dissertation: Tom McHaney, who continued to direct the project even after his retirement and whose advice was invaluable; Pearl McHaney, who took time out of her busy work schedule to read my work and, on a professional note, whose learner-centered teaching style has greatly affected my own; and Randy Hendricks, whose inspiration through the years has helped make me the scholar and the teacher I am today. Thank you all for everything. I hope I make you proud.

I would also like to thank Bert Couch for his insight into Frazer and his very helpful insight into chapters two and four. I could not have done as good a job without his assistance.

There were others whose patience and understanding made this document possible: my grandmother, who, especially after my grandfather's passing, was very understanding of the time I had to take away from my weekly visits to work on the dissertation and Deborah Condon, the director of Georgia Military College's Atlanta campus, who hired me as I was beginning my doctoral studies and not only tolerated my eccentric teaching schedule, but practically ordered me to put my studies first as an example to our students. Thank you both.





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## INTRODUCTION

### **Heroes with a Hundred Names: Mythology and Folklore in Robert Penn Warren's Early Fiction**

Although Robert Penn Warren's first novel was published in 1939 and his poetic production reached print in book form many times before that, it was two decades later that a book-length study of Warren's work appeared, Leonard Casper's *Robert Penn Warren: The Dark and Bloody Ground* (1960). This book, while discussing each of Warren's novels up to *Band of Angels*, provided little more than a plot summary and a cursory examination of a novel's major themes. Another fifteen years passed before Barnett Guttenberg published *Web of Being: The Novels of Robert Penn Warren* and argued for the prevalence of Heideggerian philosophy in Warren's fiction. Unfortunately, this book was published in 1975, two years before Warren released what would be his last novel, *A Place to Come To*, so this study, for obvious reasons, could not cover Warren's fiction in its entirety.

Then, in 1980, James Justus published what has since become one of the seminal books in Warren studies, *The Achievement of Robert Penn Warren*, which provides a comprehensive discussion of Warren's work. Justus not only covers all Warren's fiction, but his discussions of the novels also consist of more than simple summary and overview. Almost half the book is devoted to the fiction, and each chapter within this section provides an in-depth discussion of the themes, strengths, and weaknesses of each novel.

After the publication of Justus' book, scholarship on Warren's fiction increased dramatically. Several articles on Warren's fiction appeared in literary journals, and in 1990, Randolph Paul Runyon published *The Taciturn Text: The Fiction of Robert Penn Warren* that discusses Warren's fiction as part of a single larger narrative and in the process looks closely at

Warren's use of Freudian dream symbolism to draw connections between his fictional works. Also in 1990, Runyon published *The Braided Dream: Robert Penn Warren's Late Poetry*, which explores the same issues in Warren's verse. In 1992, Joseph Millichap, in *Robert Penn Warren: A Study of the Short Fiction*, explored how Warren's short fiction serves to illustrate his abiding interest in Southern history and his dedication to the craft of prose fiction.

In 1997, two books about Warren's fiction were published. Lucy Ferriss' *Sleeping with the Boss: Female Subjectivity and Narrative Pattern in Robert Penn Warren* applies feminist theory to Warren's fiction and narrative poems. Leonard Casper's follow-up to *The Dark and Bloody Ground*, titled *The Blood Marriage of Earth and Sky: Warren's Later Novels*, discusses the importance of spiritual communion in reconciling the Southern exile to the world around him. Finally, in 2000, Randy Hendricks' *Lonelier than God: Robert Penn Warren and the Southern Exile* examined Warren's use of the wanderer motif and its importance to Warren's philosophical, political, and historical ideas.

The first decade of the twenty-first century, too, has had its fair share of Warren scholarship. In 2002, Anthony Szczesiul published *Racial Politics and Robert Penn Warren's Poetry*, a study of how Warren's verse illustrates his changing attitudes on race relations and complements his essays on race and civil rights. In 2004, Patricia Bradley's *Robert Penn Warren's Circus Aesthetic and the Southern Renaissance* explored Warren's use of the circus motif in his fiction, poetry, and criticism. A year later, James Perkins discussed the importance of the Cass Mastern story on *All the King's Men*. 2006 saw Randolph Paul Runyon's follow-up to *The Braided Dream*, *Ghostly Parallels: Robert Penn Warren and the Lyric Poetic Sequence*, which considers Warren's poetry collections as cohesive wholes and Warren's poetic oeuvre as being intricately connected in much the same way as his fiction. Finally, Joseph Millichap's

2009 *Robert Penn Warren after Audubon* applies gerontology and developmental psychology theories to Warren's later poetry to see how the poet deals with issues of aging and dying in his later years.

Such diversity of recent approaches may lead one to wonder what more can be said about Warren's fiction, but one area that has escaped critical notice is Warren's subtle use of myth in much of his narrative writing. It is no surprise that Robert Penn Warren, a classically educated poet, was fascinated by myth. However, for Warren the word had a very specific meaning. As Everett Carter explains in "The 'Little Myth' of Robert Penn Warren," Warren's use of *myth* meant

a pattern of belief involving emotion, imagination, and intellect, which provides the uncriticized assumptions by which men conduct their moral lives [. . .]. The little myth of the artist is the personal pattern which the individual sensitivity imposes on its world, the big myth the pattern by which a society makes sense of its universe. (3)

In other words, Warren used the word myth to refer to the ideals that individuals and societies create in order to make sense of the world. Much of Warren's fiction, as Carter and many other critics point out, deals with the tension arising when these myths, the big and the little, the cultural and the personal, come in conflict with each other.

However, Warren also had a deep and abiding interest in the more traditional concept of myth as mythology and folklore of the recorded human past. Warren's library (part of which is held at Western Kentucky University's special collections in Bowling Green, Kentucky) reveals an abiding interest in such subjects. The presence in his library of *The White Goddess* by Robert Graves, several copies of *Le Mort D'arthur*, Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Bulfinch, W. B. Yeats' *Irish Fairy and Folk Tales*, *The Nibelungenlied*, Botkin's *A Treasury of Southern Folklore*, and *The Complete Tales of Uncle Remus* remind us that, like many modern and post-modern authors, Warren took an interest in all the rich mythic lore of the

human past. His library, in fact, is likely only the tip of the iceberg, since it cannot account for books he gave away, lost, or simply borrowed from college libraries or friends. He taught at many excellent colleges and universities where large collections of such materials could be easily perused.

Warren's admiration of T. S. Eliot also suggests an appreciation of mythology and its application to modern literature. In his college days, Warren, like many others, became fascinated with Eliot, going so far as to copy passages from *The Waste Land* on to his bedroom wall (Blotner 36). He also, according to James Grimshaw, memorized the poem and could recite it on demand into the 1930's (16). In his foreword to *The Collected Poems of Robert Penn Warren*, Harold Bloom claims that Eliot influences much of Warren's poetry, and this influence lasts from the early 1920's until Warren turns sixty and begins to "internalize" his poetry, focusing more on "time, [...] cultural and family history, and above all [...] himself" (xxiii).

Eliot's influence on Warren is relevant to our study here because of Eliot's identification in Joyce's *Ulysses* of what he referred to as the "mythical method" of writing (271). This method of composition, which Eliot also practiced, consists of drawing parallels between mythical characters and events and characters and events in the modern world in order to add meaning or irony to a literary text. Eliot sees the use of mythology in modern literature as "a step towards making the modern world possible for art" (271). According to this method, myth acts as "a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (270). As we shall see, Warren, too, employs this method liberally in his early fiction for similar purposes.

More evidence of Warren's interest in mythology and folklore is found in his friendship with Ralph Ellison. Scholars have already discussed the influence of folklore and Joseph

Campbell's myth studies on Ellison's fiction, but none have noted Campbell's influence on Warren's own work. The two writers met at a party celebrating the publication of Ellison's *Invisible Man*. From this point the two became fast friends, especially after visiting Rome together where, according to Ellison, the two "enjoyed an extended period of discussing literature, writing, history, politics [and] *exchanging folk tales*" (qtd. in Blotner 307, emphasis added).

In a similar way, one may cite Warren's great interest in and understanding of the fiction of William Faulkner, who had named his Oxford home Rowan Oak, out of James G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, and who yoked history and myth in ways that seem to have inspired Warren. And his long close associations with other twentieth-century poets who employed and even translated mythic material from all parts of the world are equally significant.

This is not to say that Warren's use of mythology has received no discussion at all. Several scholars have written about Warren's use of classical mythology: both Runyon and Hendricks mention the importance of Warren's use of Greco-Roman mythology to their understanding of Warren's themes. In "Medusa, the Movies, and the King's Men," Deborah Wilson cites Warren's use of classical myth, especially references to Venus and Medusa, to underscore the writer's *femme fatale* motif in the pseudo-hard-boiled narration of *All the King's Men*. More recently, John Burt has done an excellent job of showing elements of the Pasiphae myth in Warren's long narrative poem *Brother to Dragons*.

Comparatively little has been written, however, regarding Warren's use of myths from traditions other than the Greco-Roman in his fiction. A close reading of Warren's work reveals the presence of much varied mythic source material. For example, *Night Rider* borrows heavily from Arthurian and Holy Grail mythology, and each of the central characters in *At Heaven's*

*Gate* reenacts the legends of Cain and the Wandering Jew. Similarly, the plot development of *All the King's Men* closely mirrors the Norse apocalypse myth of Ragnarok while the plot and character development of *World Enough and Time* owes much to the ancient sacrificial rites of Diana at Nemi and to the corresponding vegetation myths as described in the opening pages of James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*.

It is this broader employment of myth and folklore that this dissertation considers. Close readings of Warren's narratives explore his texts as examples of mythopoeic composition drawing upon the world-wide fund of myth that was, both before and during his time as a writer, re-examined and re-interpreted in various ways as archetypal material or basal human stories. In this context I will specifically examine his use of those more obscure myths that have yet to be connected to his plots and his characters. Then, I will show how Warren's use of these myths aims to deepen and enhance Warren's literary themes, especially his interrogation of the agrarian ideals discussed, embraced, and sometimes rejected by Warren and fellow Southerners in *I'll Take My Stand* and in their later reflections upon that volume.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **Percival Munn and the Holy Grail: *Night Rider* and Arthurian Myth**

*Night Rider*, Robert Penn Warren's first novel, tells the story of Percy Munn, a local defense attorney and tobacco farmer who joins a tobacco growers' association to ensure a fair price for tobacco. When legal means prove fruitless, Munn is reluctantly drawn into the terroristic tactics of the Night Riders, a militant offshoot of the association. Munn, along with other masked riders, sets fire to the barns of his rivals and even commits murder to protect the interests of the association. Throughout this novel, Warren employs Celtic mythology.

The name of *Night Rider*'s protagonist, Percy Munn, immediately informs the reader that Grail myth will play an important role in the novel since Percy is clearly a diminutive of Percival, one of the knights who achieved the Grail Quest in Celtic/Arthurian myth.

However, the connections between Percy Munn, the protagonist of *Night Rider*, and Percival, the Grail hero, consist of far more than mere nomenclature. In the most popular versions of the Percival myth, Percival is described as "a pure fool" (Jung and von Franz 295). Since he is raised in the wilderness far removed from chivalric society, Percival remains unaware of the social niceties of knightly behavior and thus seems foolish to his contemporaries. He rides a workhorse to court instead of a fine stallion, he arms himself with a bow and a stick instead of a sword, and he wears rags instead of armor (Chretien 602-613). He also tends to take instructions literally. When his mother advises him to receive kisses and tokens of favor from ladies, for example, he forces a kiss and steals a ring from the first damsel he encounters (700-722). When advised not to question the acts of others, lest he cause offense, Percival simply accepts without question everything he witnesses regardless of how bizarre or inexplicable, a practice that ultimately leads to the continued suffering of the land and people when Percival



fails to question anything he sees during the Grail Procession (3585-3590). As a result of Percival's naiveté, nearly everyone he meets comes to regard him as an idiotic fool.

Warren's Percy Munn spends much of the early chapters in *Night Rider* overly concerned about looking the fool. When he thinks about defending Bunk Trevelyan, a local ne'er-do-well, against a murder charge, for instance, he worries that his client "might be guilty, and he himself was a fool to put his energies into such a case [. . .] People would laugh at him for a sucker" (27). When he tries to tell his wife about his election to the Association in an effort to convince himself that it is a good thing, he feels "convinced [. . .] of his own stupidity" (35). In fact, in nineteen of the twenty-three times the word *fool* appears in the novel, Percy Munn either speaks or thinks it, and in all but two of these incidents, Percy uses the word to describe himself.

Everyone else in the story utters the word *fool* only in conversation with Percy Munn so that the word becomes closely associated with his character. When Lucille Christian denies telling Benton Todd about Percy's membership in the Night Riders, for instance, she tells Percy that Benton is "not a fool" and thus figured it out just like everyone else in the community (248). Later, Dr. MacDonald (one of the Night Rider leaders) and Percy try to understand why Lew Smullin, who had nothing to gain from getting involved, warned MacDonald about the posse coming for him. Dr. MacDonald decides that Smullin was simply a "damned fool" (339).

Despite the impression he makes on his contemporaries, Percival is not really stupid. Mike Ashley, an Arthurian scholar, points out that Percival is simply an innocent who is ignorant of the rules of chivalry (411). Norris Lacy and Geoffrey Ashe claim that he is "naïve, charming, and slightly absurd" because his widowed mother removed him from civilization and took him into the wilderness after the death of his father (344). Similarly, Percy Munn was raised away from civilization, at least a day's journey by train from the nearest town, on his ancestral farm.

There is evidence, too, that like Percival, Percy Munn is the child of a widow. When she died, Percy's mother left Percy the farm, clearly implying that his father has already passed away (102).

Percival leaves his home to become a knight so that he may be turned "to chivalric service" (Wolfram 71). Percy Munn is a defense lawyer who, like a knight, is expected to protect those less fortunate than he. Indeed, chivalry played a large role in his taking a crucial murder case. He couldn't refuse a lady in distress: "He hadn't had to take the case," the narrator informs us, "the court hadn't assigned him to it. The Trevelyan woman had come to his office with her tale, and he was a sucker" (27).

There is some evidence that Percival also wishes to be a knight out of vanity. In several early romances, Percival seems more fascinated by the knights' beauty than by any chivalric code. In Chretien de Troyes' *Perceval*, for instance, after viewing passing knights in the woods, he tells his mother that he has seen

in the Barren

Forest, just now, the most beautiful

Creature—far more beautiful

Than God Himself or all

His angels. (391-395)

He then announces his intention to go "As fast as I can to the king / Who makes knights, no matter what!" (494-495)

This vanity finds echo in Warren's protagonist. Mr. Munn constantly tries to explain his involvement with the Association to his wife, May, as if her understanding and approval will

overcome his own doubts. As mentioned above, Mr. Munn worries that people will think poorly of him for taking the Trevelyan case. More telling is his reaction to a drunkard's suggestion the Mr. Munn fixed Trevelyan's trial:

Mr. Munn set his empty glass down on the bar, again caught a glimpse in the mirror of his own face with its smile, and with a full sweep of his arm smacked the man solidly across the mouth. Taken entirely off his balance, the man staggered back one step, and fell to the floor in a sitting position. (81-82)

These incidents imply, then, that Mr. Munn cares a great deal about how others regard him and that much of what he does is done to make others believe that he is a moral defender of the rights of all.

Percival's desire to be accepted into knighthood and the Round Table has dire consequences for those he holds dear. As Heinrich Zimmer points out in *The King and the Corpse*, when young Percival departs for Arthur's court he "[leaves] his mother to die of a broken heart. That [is] the first great crime of his innocence" (114). Similarly, when Mr. Munn rapes his wife on the night that he murders Bunk Trevelyan, she symbolically dies of a broken heart. She leaves him the next day, returns to her aunt's house, refuses to see him ever again, and effectively disappears from the narrative.

The *Didot Perceval*, a lesser known prose retelling of the Percival story, tells of an even darker consequence. Once accepted into knighthood, Percival, with false modesty, asks to be allowed to sit at the Round Table. When Arthur claims that there is no place for him, Percival attempts to sit in the Siege Perilous, a cursed seat kept empty in remembrance of Judas Iscariot. As punishment for this offense, all the land is laid waste (Matthews 293). Like Percival, Mr. Munn, though he claims not to want it, attempts to fill a vacant seat at his own version of the Round Table: the Association's board of directors (32). This act has similar dire consequences for the community including miscarriages of justice, barn burning, and murder.

Perhaps the most significant similarity between Percy Munn and Sir Percival lies in their shared inability to understand the portents of the world around them. When Percival enters the Grail Castle, he witnesses many mysterious wonders: He meets a wounded king who cannot be healed, he witnesses a young maiden carrying a bleeding lance, and he sees the Holy Grail paraded before him. While he wonders at these visions, he never asks about them. “[F]or courtesy’s sake,” Wolfram tells us, “he refrained from questions” (130). Chretien is more specific:

But again the boy was silent  
Not asking to whom [the Grail] was served.  
[...] for he never  
Forgot how clearly he’d been warned  
To beware of too much talking. (3293 – 3298)

The assumption, however, is that Percival should have known to ask about these things as they happened. When a ruby-hilted magical sword is placed in his hand, for instance, Wolfram informs us that “it was a sign to him that he should ask [about the Grail procession]” (131). According to both Wolfram and Chretien, after Percival leaves the now-deserted castle the next morning, he encounters a maiden cradling a dying knight who informs him that he has doomed everyone by his failure to ask about the Grail procession:

“Oh alas that my eyes behold you,” the sorrowful maiden cried, “since you were too faint of heart to ask a question. Yet you saw such marvels there—to think that you could fail to ask when you were in the presence of the Grail! [...] You should have felt pity for your host, on whom God has wrought such terrible wonders, and have asked the cause of his suffering. You live, and yet are dead to happiness.”  
(Wolfram 138 – 139)

Chretien's maiden has a similar reaction:

Ah how unlucky you are,  
For had you asked those questions  
You could have completely cured  
The good king of all his wounds:  
He would have become entirely  
Whole, and ruled as he should. (3585 – 3590)

All of the clues regarding what T. S. Eliot would call the Waste Land were there; Percival simply failed to recognize them, failed to show either concern or piety. Something very similar happens after Percy Munn attends an overnight Christmas gathering at Senator Tolliver's home with several members of the Association and their wives. During this visit, the discussion turns to a local tobacco farmer who received vaguely threatening letters for not joining the Association and instead selling his tobacco to the buyers independently. Several people express their approval of the threatening letters, but Senator Tolliver cautions against such behavior: "What the Association wants is justice," he claims, "but we must have it in an orderly fashion. We do not want to see the passions inflamed" (99). The next morning, Tolliver tries to enlist Percy's assistance in "keep[ing] the extreme sentiment of the Association under control" (111), but Percy fails to act.

Later, after Tolliver resigns from the Association, Percy understands in hindsight that "[a]ll the elements that were to combine in a more violent chemistry had been present [...] that Christmas at the Senator's" (113). In terms very similar to those used by the maiden and both narrators of Percival's tale, Percy Munn curses "his blindness, his stupidity, and his vanity" (113), the same qualities responsible for Percival's failure in the Grail Castle.

As with Percival, these qualities also prevent Percy Munn from asking an important question. He considers approaching Tolliver at his home to “ask him what his motives were” for leaving the Association and how a man could “behave as he had done” (125). He talks himself out of it, though, concluding that he doesn’t know the Senator well enough and assuming that the paternal relationship he imagined was simply an illusion the Senator nurtured, though why Percy would be important enough for the Senator to perpetrate such a ruse remains a mystery. Had Percy asked this question of the Senator, things may well have turned out differently since Senator Tolliver functions in *Night Rider* much like the wounded king in the Grail castle.

There are other similarities to the Grail Myth in *Night Rider*. According to Jessie Weston in *From Ritual to Romance*, an exploration into the evolution of Grail mythology and one of Eliot’s acknowledged sources for *The Waste Land*, Percival, arguably the most well-known of the heroes, was not the only one of Arthur’s knights to seek the Grail. In fact, many of the Percival tales are simply retellings of the exploits of Gawain, the earliest of the Grail heroes (12-13), while Galahad, a later incarnation of the Grail hero, appears to do away with or subjugate many tropes of Gawain’s and Percival’s tales. Not surprisingly, we find versions of both these heroes in Warren’s characters of Bill Christian and Benton Todd.

Of all the characters in Arthurian mythology, Gawain, perhaps, has the most varied portrayal. According to Lacy and Ashe, writers often characterize Gawain by his defects, “notably pride, impetuosity, and frivolity” (92). They further claim,

Sometimes, [. . .] he is courteous and heroic and passes alarming tests [. . .].  
Sometimes, however, he is made slightly comic. Sometimes, he is altogether less  
admirable, [. . .] a violent, vengeful person. He comes close to the Grail, but  
inconclusively[.] (308-309)

Much the same could be said of Bill Christian in *Night Rider*, whose family name resonates with the Grail story. Indeed, just as Gawain is the earliest warrior associated with Arthur and his

Round Table (Ashley 379), Mr. Christian is the first member of the Association we meet in the novel.

Also like Gawain, Mr. Christian shows courtesy towards his friends throughout the novel. When Percy first sees him in Bardsville, for instance, Mr. Christian offers him a ride through the crowded streets in his buggy (4). Throughout the first three quarters of the novel, he opens his home to Percy and allows him to spend nights there after raids rather than riding all the way back to his own farm. He allows Benton Todd, the son of his associate and friend Captain Todd, to court his daughter, often unchaperoned (168).

Like Gawain, Christian undergoes certain tests to prove his loyalty and his bravery. For example, he must take a secret oath and participate in a secret ceremony in an abandoned mill to prove his loyalty to both the Association and the Night Riders (151-156). His bravery is further illustrated through his participation in steadily increasing violence throughout the duration of the Tobacco Wars: he forces farmers who have not joined the Association to destroy their own tobacco fields, later he participates in barn-burnings, and finally, he takes part in the attack on the town of Bardsville and its tobacco warehouses.

There are other similarities with Gawain as well. As Ashe and Mancoff point out above, Gawain is often portrayed humorously, and if any one character provides comic relief for this novel, it would be Bill Christian: for example, his habit of naming his dogs, and even nick-naming his daughter, after old girlfriends illustrates his humor (167, 235). Christian has a natural ability for getting a laugh out of even the most somber of occasions. During the Association's organization meeting, for example, Mr. Sills solemnly begins to read a list of men who

might be depended upon to support the purposes and ideals of the Association of Growers of Dark Fired Tobacco. "Which purposes and ideals," Mr. Christian [interrupts] before the list [begins], "is to make those son-a-bitching buyers pay me what my tobacco's worth." (15)

Christian's behavior during Association meetings also serves to illustrate the third part of Ashe and Mancoff's description of Gawain: his violent and vengeful nature. Whenever Gawain's anger is roused by betrayal, he finds it almost impossible to control his emotions. For instance, in Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, when Gawain learns that Lancelot has slain his brother, he swears eternal vengeance despite Arthur's protestations that Lancelot's actions were unintentional:

“My kynge, my lorde, and myne uncle,” seyde Sir Gawayne, “wyte you well, now I shall make you a promise which I shall holde to be my knyghthode, that from this day forewarde I shall never fayle Sir Launcelot untyll that one of us have slayne that othir. And therefore I require you, my lorde and kynge, dresse you unto the warres, for wyte you well, I wold be revenged upon Sir Launcelot; and therefore, as ye wold have my servyse and my love, now haste you thereto and assay your frendis. For I promise unto God,” sayde Sir Gawayne, “for the deth of my brother, Sir Gareth, I shall seke Sir Launcelot throughout seven kynges realmys, but I shall sle hym, other else he shall sle me.” (Malory 659)

Even after the Pope commands Arthur and Gawain to make peace with Lancelot, Gawain's vengeful nature won't let him give in: “But full fayne [Arthur] would have bene acorded with Sir Launcelot, but Sir Gawain wold not suffir him; but to have the Quene he thereto agreed—but in no wyse he wold suffir the Kynge to acord with Sir Launcelot” (664-665).

Whenever he is faced with the possible betrayal of someone from within the Association, Mr. Christian, too, threatens personal violence. For instance, when Captain Todd warns that some members may be tempted to sell their crops directly to the buyers if prices continue to rise, Mr. Christian seems visibly angry and threatens to kill anyone who does so:

“Just let me get my hands on any two-timing bastard that sells one leaf outside after he's signed,” he said slowly and distinctly, his lips drawing back a little to show the strong, yellow teeth, “and I'll—” He jerked his hands apart with a quick, twisting motion. (42)

Even after the other Board members get him calmed down, Mr. Christian remains “silent and morose the rest of the afternoon” (43). At a later meeting, when Senator Tolliver claims that the



Association simply wants a fair price for its tobacco, that it doesn't wish to gouge the buyers, Mr. Christian's vengeful nature emerges more fully:

“The hell I don't [want to gouge them]” Mr. Christian shouted. “Who says I don't? I'd like to gouge their God-damned eyes out and feed 'em to 'em for oysters. By God, I would, and I'd pay money to do it. I'd like to cut their guts out and tie 'em in bow knots around their necks and hang the bastards on Christmas trees, for orphan children in hell[.]” (96-97)

Clearly, then Mr. Christian, like Gawain, finds it difficult, if not impossible to control his violent nature once his passions are aroused. “I just hate to think how easy it is to inflame my passions,” he says with a grin during an Association meeting (99).

Mike Ashley points out another similarity between Gawain and Mr. Christian. Besides being a “hothead,” Gawain is ironically also portrayed “as the intermediary” (382). According to Ashley, Gawain “is [. . .] amazingly persuasive” (380). This is equally true of Mr. Christian. Indeed, we have seen above how persuasive Mr. Christian can be to the other Board members. His tirades during board meetings are predominantly responsible for the Association's refusal of each offer the tobacco buyers make.

Similarly, when Percy Munn exhibits reluctance to further his involvement with the Association, Mr. Christian convinces him to walk with him to the meeting place, then simply ushers him inside with little argument (12-13). Later when Percy expresses doubts about joining the Board, he changes his mind due partly to “the bullying of Mr. Christian” (32). It would also appear that Mr. Christian's recriminations against Percy for voting with Senator Tolliver just before Tolliver turned on the Association are responsible for Percy's joining the Night Riders. Immediately after the narrator presents this diatribe, we learn that “[before] he went to bed that night, Mr. Munn had agreed to join the Free Farmers' Brotherhood of Protection and Control [the Night Riders]” (142-143).

The influence Mr. Christian exercises over Percy also alludes to the most important similarity to Gawain: the role he plays in Percival's world. Most scholars agree that Gawain was the first Grail hero to emerge; however, once Percival evolved into the role of Grail knight, Gawain's role became a kind of mirror to and mentor for the younger knight. According to Ashley, the Gawain of the Percival romances acts as "an ideal counterpart against which to measure the more spiritual attainment of Perceval" (382). Jung and Franz see an even closer relationship between Gawain and Percival: Gawain is "a sort of double" or "shadow brother" to Percival (213-214).

The same may be said of the relationship between Bill Christian and Percy Munn. Just as Gawain represents an earlier, or older, more hot-tempered version of Percival, the older Mr. Christian acts as a sort of overbearing, older brother for Percy Munn. He helps create the Association then persuades Munn to join. He sits on the Board of Directors, then raises Munn to the same status when a seat becomes vacant. He helps organize the Night Riders, then shames Munn into joining, too.

The most recent version of the Grail Hero is Galahad, who emerged into Grail legend in *La Queste del Saint Graal*, written around 1200 (Weston 18, Jung & Franz 32). It is significant, then, that his representative in *Night Rider* is the youngest member of the riders, Benton Todd. From the first, both Galahad and Benton Todd share many similarities. Both are the sons of great men, noble warriors. Galahad is the son of Lancelot, the greatest knight of Arthur's court:

for in all turnements, justys, and dedys of armys, both for lyff and deth, [Lancelot] passed all other knyghtes—and at no tyme was he overcome but yf hit were by treson [or] other enchauntement. (Malory 151)

Benton Todd's father, Captain Todd, is equally an accomplished warrior. Rarely does an Association gathering pass without some comparison between the tobacco situation and Captain Todd's experiences fighting Yankees, usually against superior numbers:

Mr. Munn remembered how somebody sometime had told him how Captain Todd once down in South Tennessee held a ford on a frozen creek all night and half a day with just forty or fifty men against a company of cavalry. That must have been in the last winter of the war when Hood was trying to get what was left of his army out of Tennessee. Anybody ought to have seen then that everything was folding up, going to pieces. But Captain Todd and his men had lain out there in the brush and rocks all night, waiting for the next rush at the ford; and all the next morning, too, when it got light enough to see how many there were on the other side and how many more were coming up. (43-44)

Like Lancelot, Captain Todd also seems the most self-possessed, confident member of the Association's Board:

Captain Todd sat among other men, aware, it seemed of a ripe secret security that he could count on, out of the swirl and reach of the general excitement, supported by a confidence different from the confidence in events and circumstances that would be subject to change and accident and the casual appetites and weaknesses of people. He was like a great gray boulder, still unsubmerged, in the course of some violent, flooded stream. You knew that when the flood season was past and the waters had lost their turbulence and had shrunk back into their normal and modest bed, the boulder would be there still, still itself and solid as ever. (44)

Therefore, just as Galahad is the only son of the most chivalrous and heroic knight in Arthur's court, Benton Todd is the only son of the most courageous and honorable member of the Association's Board. There are, however, more similarities between the two.

Like Percival, Galahad is most often portrayed as a youth. According to Tennyson, "none / In so young youth was ever made a knight / Till Galahad" (185). However, where writers primarily portray Percival as a young fool, they portray Galahad's youth as sublimely innocent. In Tennyson, he is a "boy-knight" clad in "white armor" symbolizing purity and innocence (185, 184). The Vulgate Cycle of Arthurian tales (of which *La Queste del Saint Graal* is the second volume) portrays Galahad as the "purest knight in the world" (Ashley 361). According to Lacy and Ashe, Galahad "is handsome, and skillful in combat, but his chief quality is chastity" (307). This chastity, according to Heinrich Zimmer, is the chief means by which Galahad "the immaculate" is allowed to achieve the Grail Quest (180).

Like Galahad, Benton Todd is portrayed as an innocent. Though he is an adult law student when he enters the narrative, he is always referred to in childlike terms. For example, throughout most of the novel, the narrator refers to him simply as Captain Todd's "boy." We do not even learn his name until Chapter Seven. Munn, especially, considers Benton in these childlike terms, and even finds fault with his Galahad-like innocence: "More and more the very sight of Benton Todd grew to irritate Mr. Munn. He was a nice boy, Mr. Munn was sure of that, and smart enough, but Mr. Munn blamed his youth, his innocence, and his apparent conviction that you could just go out and set everything right because you were right" (243). Similarly, Lucille Christian cannot consider him a true candidate for her affections because "he's just a kid" even though he is older than she (244).

Benton's courtship of Lucille Christian also seems to mirror Galahad's chastity. For example, even though "[by] the middle of June everybody knew that Benton Todd was courting Lucille Christian, hot and heavy" (169), the courtship appears as little more than innocent puppy love. While we do not know definitively whether or not Benton is chaste, Mr. Christian's willingness to allow him to sit with his daughter at night unchaperoned certainly implies that Mr. Christian, at least, considers Benton less than sexually threatening (168). Additionally Christian refers to the "calf eyes" Benton Todd makes when he looks at Lucille (242). The description of Benton following Lucille as she does her chores further implies the innocence of Benton's attraction:

Benton Todd, when he came to the Christian place, would follow Lucille Christian around the house while she was occupied, or pretended to be occupied, with her tasks. She would go out to see that the evening's milk was properly put away, or that a basket of eggs was ready to be carried in to town early the next morning, or to help with cooking the supper. 'You can come on,' she would say to Benton Todd, 'if you want to,' and he would follow her. She would give him things to hold, pans or baskets or dish towels [. . .] Then as likely as not, she

would go off and leave him standing with the basket of eggs or the damp towel; or he might follow her about, still faithfully carrying the object. (242)

Like Galahad, then, Benton Todd is innocent and chivalrous. He truly wishes to do good in the world as Mr. Munn's complaint points out.

Benton Todd's name reveals a final similarity to Galahad, the only Grail knight to die in the achievement of his quest. His last name, *Todd*, sounds very close to the German *tod* or *tot*, death. Thus Benton Todd literally translates as "bent on death." And indeed, the fate of young Todd bears this out; he bleeds to death when he is shot as he and the other Night Riders flee Bardsville after their successful raid on the tobacco warehouse there (294).

And so we have our three Grail heroes, the oldest, Mr. Christian, represents the earliest hero, Gawain, Percy Munn stands in for Percival, and young Benton Todd corresponds to the latest version of the grail hero: Galahad. The connections between Warren's novel and the Grail myth do not end with Percy Munn's, Bill Christian's, and Benton Todd's similarity to the Grail heroes, though. The connections are numerous and suggest that Warren had knowledge of the many versions of the legend, perhaps through Eliot's famous source Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*. According to Weston, each version of the Grail story shares certain features with the other. She discusses at length such elements as the Waste Land motif, the Fisher King, and the freeing of the waters, all of which find their parallels in *Night Rider*, as they do in Eliot's much earlier poem.

One of the most enduring aspects of the Grail myth is the Waste Land motif. According to Lacy and Ashe, the Waste Land is a "[r]ecurrent feature of the Grail stories. The basic theme is that the country around the Grail Castle in Arthur's time has become barren because of an enchantment or sacrilege" (405). One aspect of the Waste Land that finds its way into Warren's novel is the idea that as a symptom of this barrenness, the land is also plague-ridden. When

Lucille Christian visits Percy at Willie Proudfit's home, for example, she claims that her father has been sick, "But there's been a lot of sickness round Bardsville" (431).

Most of these accounts of the Waste Land credit a debilitating drought for the barrenness and plague. Weston points out, for example that in the Gawain and Percival Grail myths, "the misfortune which has fallen upon the country is that of a prolonged drought, which has destroyed vegetation, and left the land Waste" (19). Similarly, Tennyson refers to the Waste Land as the "land of sand and thorns" (191). This certainly sounds like the Bardsville, Kentucky, of Warren's *Night Rider*. For example, the murder of which Bunk Trevelyan is accused came about as a result of a drought:

Bunk Trevelyan [. . .] had quarreled with the man named Tad Duffy about a spring. *Water was getting low in the well on the place* Trevelyan had and they were using the spring to get drinking water from. *The branch on the place was about dried up* and they had to get water there at the spring, too, for the stock. (51-52 emphasis added)

When Trevelyan discusses the water-stealing incident with Mr. Munn, he explains pulling his rifle on Duffy this way: "Any man might a-done hit, finden the bastud down tote-en water off yore place and hit a drouth" (58). Later, Mr. Christian, to show how ornery the Sullins family is, relates the story of requesting a drink of water from one of the Sullins women: 'She got me the water all right. Not fresh, though, and a well right there in the side yard in plain sight. And when I got me a second dipperful, she got that Sullins look on and said, "You know, they say it promises a drouth in this section, and our well never does so good in a drouth."' So I just poured what water was left back in the bucket' (107).

The drought, the plague, and the barrenness of the land in the Grail stories are almost always linked to some misfortune having occurred to the Grail-Keeper, whose castle lies in the midst of the Waste Land (Weston 56). In *Bulfinch's Mythology*, the Grail-keeper names himself King Pecheur (Bulfinch 83). However, this is more a title than a name since *pêcheur* is French

for *fisher*. Therefore, the Grail-keeper is the Fisher King, which is demonstrated when Percival first encounters him outside the Grail castle:

At evening he came to a lake. There fishermen, whose domain these waters were, had cast their anchor. When they saw him ride up they were close enough inshore to hear quite well what he said. One man he saw in the boat whose apparel could not have been richer if all lands had been subject to him. Of this fisherman he made inquiry . . . [of] where he might find lodgings . . .

[T]he fisherman said, "I myself will be your host tonight." (Wolfram 123)

The Fisher King's title has a double meaning. Where *pêcheur* means *fisher*, *pécheur* is French for *sinner*. King Pecheur, then is both the fisher king and the sinner king as evidenced when Percival next encounters him and notices a horrible wound in his host's groin where he had been "struck through the two thighs" (Goodrich 80). According to Bulfinch this wound is punishment for the King's lust:

[A]t length one of those holy men to whom [the Grail's] guardianship had descended so far forgot the obligation of his sacred office as to look with unhallowed eye upon a young female pilgrim whose robe was accidentally loosened as she knelt before him. The sacred lance [the spear which pierced Christ's side at the crucifixion] instantly punished his frailty, spontaneously falling upon him and inflicting a deep wound. (Bulfinch 85)

Weston also posits a sexual indiscretion as cause for the Fisher King's wound; she claims "that the wound of the King was a punishment for sin, he had conceived a passion for a Pagan princess" (115). The primary characteristics of the Fisher King, then, are his connection to the land and the lust that has made him unworthy of his sacred calling.

If *Night Rider* works as a retelling of the Grail Myth, then, the Fisher King must have a representative in it, and indeed it does in the character of Senator Tolliver. One of the first clues that point to Senator Tolliver as the Fisher King is found in Chapter Four when the narrator provides the history of his rise in politics. He is a moderately successful tobacco farmer who "rode much about the country, talking to the farmers and *fishing* and hunting with them. Then he

went into politics, and was elected to the state senate” (91 emphasis added). Even after he enters national politics, Tolliver “still rode around the country *and went fishing* and hunting with the farmers” (92 emphasis added).

The Fisher King is guilty of lust, his wound a result of impure thoughts, and here also we see parallels with Senator Tolliver. Early on Percy remembers that Tolliver has quite a reputation as a ladies’ man in Washington: “They say he’s hell with the women, [Mr. Munn] thought, when he’s off away from home. Not much chance for carrying on in this section, not for a prominent man. But Louisville and Washington, he made up for lost time when he got up there, they said” (106). It would appear, too, that regardless of his chances to “carry on” when he is home, Tolliver doesn’t shy from trying anyway. Lucille Christian reveals as much during her last conversation with Percy: “All the time he was coming out to see papa. Before the bust-up. He was after me. He’d put his hands on me every chance he got. He’d say, ‘My dear girl, my dear Lucille—’” She spoke mincingly, twisting her mouth in mimicry. “That’s what he’d say, ‘My dear girl, my dear girl—’” (442-443).

Like the Fisher King, Tolliver also suffers from a strange affliction. Mr. Munn notices this as he watches the Senator speak against the bombing of Bardsville after having had to be assisted onto the back of the baggage truck:

Senator Tolliver was now speaking, but Mr. Munn hardly attended to what he was saying. He was, instead, comparing that man who now stood there on the baggage truck *somewhat stooped, sallow, graying splotchily*, with the man who had stood on the platform, under bright bunting and brilliant sunshine, that day of the first rally. [. . .] For a moment or two the Senator’s voice would rise, full and sonorous and compelling as it had been that August afternoon; *then it would falter*. [. . .] My God, Mr. Munn thought, he’s not the same man, it’s a different man. (301-302 emphasis added)

Tolliver’s condition worsens throughout the novel until Percy confronts him in Tolliver’s bedroom. Here, Tolliver moves “painfully” and speaks “tiredly (455, 456). His sunken eye



sockets show lids that are wrinkled and veiny (457), and his “long [and] bony” fingers shift aimlessly on the bedclothes (455).

If Senator Tolliver represents the Fisher King, the Grail Keeper, what is this Grail he fails to protect? Grail scholars agree that there exists a sympathetic relationship between the Fisher King and the land. If the King thrives, so too does the land, and, conversely, if the King suffers, so too does the land. “[In] the Grail King,” Weston writes, “we have a romantic literary version of [...] the figure of a divine or semi-divine ruler [...] upon whose life, and unimpaired vitality, the existence of his land and people directly depends” (58). According to Weston, the Grail hero must either bring the Fisher King back to health or put him out of his misery by freeing the pent-up waters, and thereby ending the drought and revivifying the land (19). The method of freeing these waters invariably involves retrieving the Grail and bringing it back to its rightful place.

However, what precisely this grail is remains a mystery as authors seem unable to come to any consensus. The most common depiction of the Grail is as a chalice, usually silver or gold and gem-encrusted (Chretien 3226-3239). Here the Grail represents either the chalice used by Christ during the Last Supper or the chalice which caught Christ’s blood after his side was pierced on the cross (Tennyson 182, Bulfinch 85). *La Queste del Saint Graal* claims that it is the not the cup, but the dish upon which Christ broke bread at the Last Supper (276). Malory claims simply that the Grail is a “holy vessell” (503). Wolfram von Eschenbach depicts it as a stone come down from heaven (251-252). One thing remains the same in every tale, though; the Grail has the power to heal mankind and the land if certain conditions are met (Lacy and Ashe 317).

Senator Tolliver, of course, has nothing to do with the drought, unless one regards what may be Warren’s intent through Eliot’s “mythical method.” Water has almost always been a symbol for life in mythology. In Mesopotamian mythology, water is sprinkled over Ishtar and

Tammuz so that they might return from the underworld and renew the land (Frazer 379).

According to Greco-Roman mythology, in order to pass from life into death one must cross the River Styx. In the Catholic Church, as well as other liturgical faiths, Holy Water is used as protection from evil. In many faiths, Christian and Pagan alike, water is employed to wash away sins and renew one's spiritual life (Frazer 629). And in the Grail myths, the goal of the Grail hero is to free the waters and thereby bring life back to the land, its people, and its king. The emphasis on preserving or protecting life cannot be denied.

In *Night Rider*, as in the Grail myths, the land is divided, and the Grail King, in the form of Senator Tolliver, hopes to heal the rift. Once again, brother has turned against brother as the Association of Growers of Dark Fired Tobacco fight against the tobacco buyers in an attempt to get a fair price for their hard-won goods. While it seems almost impossible that such an agreement will be reached, Senator Tolliver is almost always open to negotiation.

Where Mr. Christian wants to humiliate the tobacco buyers as well as get a good price for his crop, Senator Tolliver preaches fairness:

“We’re not trying to break the tobacco companies.” [Tolliver explains when Mr. Christian goes on one of his tirades] “Not that I’m trying to talk you gentlemen into accepting this offer. But we aren’t trying to break them. What we want is a fair price. Just a fair price. When they offer us that I’m in favor of doing business with them. We just want to be fair[.]” (96)

Senator Tolliver also cites fairness and a desire to bring peace to the land as his reasons for voting in favor of accepting a later proposal:

[Tolliver] said that the time had come to sell, that now was the time to forget the past and to think of the future. [The Association] had won a victory. No one could deny that. And next year a greater victory. And to reach an agreement with the companies would do much to relieve the tension which had resulted in those irresponsible acts of violence in Hunter County which had so embarrassed the Association. He felt it his duty, as a citizen and as a member of the Association board, to vote for an immediate acceptance of the several offers. (117)

Even when he resigns from the Board of Directors, Tolliver cites his desire for peace as one of his major concerns: “it is my firm belief,” he writes in his resignation letter, “that the policy I have supported is the one of reason and peace and would be endorsed by an overwhelming majority of the actual members of the Association itself” (120). Sadly, though, Tolliver resigns from the Board rather than continue his struggle to bring fairness and peace between the tobacco growers and the tobacco buyers, leaving the responsibility to his protégé, Percy Munn.

In much of Grail mythology, the Grail hero is a kinsman of the Grail Keeper. In *La Queste del Saint Graal*, for instance, King Pelles, the Grail Keeper, is Galahad’s maternal grandfather (272). Wolfram’s Parzifal is the nephew of Anfortas, the Fisher King, through Parzifal’s mother (444). Randy Runyon, in *The Taciturn Text*, illustrates that this familial relationship exists symbolically between Mr. Munn and Senator Tolliver (13). From the moment Mr. Munn is appointed to the Association’s Board of Directors Tolliver often refers to him as “My boy” (Warren *Night Rider* 31, 32, 112). More importantly, Tolliver places his hand on Percy’s shoulder in a manner the narrator describes as paternal (112). Tolliver clearly sees Percy Munn, then, as his symbolic son and protégé, someone onto whom he can pass his legacy.

Percy, clearly sees his relationship to Tolliver in similar terms. When Percy first tells his wife of his appointment to the board, not only does he mention Senator Tolliver first and in the chief place, he pauses between Tolliver’s name and the others to imply that he was originally only going to mention the Senator and added Mr. Christian and Mr. Sills as an afterthought: “Senator Tolliver,” he began, “and Mr. Christian and Mr. Sills came by this afternoon. They came to tell me I’m on the Association board” (35). Clearly then, the appointment has much more importance for Munn coming from Tolliver than from anyone else. Munn’s wife picks up on Munn’s feeling for Tolliver, too, as she reveals after Tolliver leaves the Association when she

explains to Percy why she never said anything against the senator: “you liked him so much and thought so much of him, and looked up to him the way you did. I didn’t want to say anything, when you felt that way” (128).

Once the Grail hero has healed and/or released the Grail Keeper from his duties, he must take on the family responsibilities and don the mantle of the new Grail Keeper. That Tolliver likewise expects Percy to follow in his footsteps is made clear almost from the start. Of the three men who visit Percy in his office at the beginning of Chapter Two, Percy has known Mr. Christian the longest, yet it is Senator Tolliver who gives Percy the news of his appointment to the board (31). When Tolliver introduces Percy and his wife to his sister, he also subtly encourages Munn to follow in his footsteps by entering politics:

“Matilda, this is May, the wife of my good friend Percy Munn, I’ve told you so much about.” [Tolliver] stretched out his hand paternally and laid it on Mr. Munn’s shoulder. “The coming boy,” he declared, and patted Mr. Munn’s shoulder. “We’ll have him in Congress yet.” (93)

The Fisher King/Grail Keeper fails in his task, and it falls to his descendants to redeem the Grail. Senator Tolliver gives up the fight for compromise with the buyers after his failure in Chapter Five. He leaves the meeting in defeat, never to return. It is here that his illness, curiously, begins. After the vote comes out against him, Tolliver’s demeanor changes instantly. His face turns “gray” and “suddenly loose” (118). He appears “strained, as though from loss of sleep,” and he walks “slowly” (119). Every time we see the Senator from this point forward his health seems progressively worse until the end of the novel when he seems completely unable even to get out of bed.

By rights, Percy should take over the reins of Grail-Keeper and fight for compromise and peace and against violence. Tolliver seems to assume that he’ll do just that when he once again touches Percy’s shoulder after the vote and says conspiratorially “Well boy, [. . .] we did the best

we could” (119). Significantly, he does not contact Percy and convince him to leave the Association with him. Though Percy interprets this as a betrayal, another explanation might be that Tolliver feels that he has left the Association in capable hands. He may assume that since Percy joined him in “doing the best we could,” Percy will continue to fight in Tolliver’s absence for compromise and an end to the standoff. Sadly, however, this does not happen. Instead of bringing peace and healing to the land, Percy contributes to the increasing violence, destruction, and death in the Tobacco Wars.

According to Weston, and many other subsequent Grail scholars, the source of the Grail myth “is to be found in the Vegetation Ritual, treated from the esoteric point of view as a Life-Cult” (154). The purpose of this ritual is to renew the earth and bring forth new life. Significantly, it takes place either at the end of winter or the beginning of Spring. It may be interesting to note that shortly after Percy takes his oath and joins the terroristic Night Riders, spring arrives. The initiation ritual, then, represents a perverted Grail Ritual where rather than swearing to uphold peace and the natural order, members have sworn to bring destruction upon the land and those who defy them.

Rather than taking an oath to carry out the obligation that has been handed down to him, Warren’s Percival takes an oath to support and participate in the violence of the Night Riders under the misguided idea that doing so will help the Association obtain justice for the farmers (155-156). From this point forward, Munn spirals further and further away from the chivalric ideals which supposedly brought him to the Association and which led him to practice law.

If Percy Munn’s first name implies a kind of Grail quest, his surname speaks to this spiraling away from chivalric ideals. According to [ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com), the surname Munn derives from the Gaelic *Ó Muineaog* or *Ó Manacháin* both of which mean “a descendant of monks.”

Since traditionally monks cannot marry, Munn's name then implies lust and the breaking of holy vows. Percy's surname also has blatant references to lawlessness and chaos. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, for example, a *Mun* was a member of a particular street gang active in seventeenth century London. A *mung*, similarly, is a confused mess. Both of these possible meanings for Percy's last name are particularly appropriate for his character. Instead of upholding law and order and striving to maintain peace and brotherhood, Percy Munn, as a member of the Night Riders, helps thwart and destroy the natural order and throw the community into chaos.

However, the *OED* provides another possible meaning for Munn that cannot be ignored and that differs greatly from the two mentioned above. The name may also refer to the word *mund*, which the *OED* defines as "a protector or guardian." This meaning of the name implies that while Percy Munn does fall from the chivalric ideal, his Grail Quest is not entirely a failure. The final scene of the novel certainly suggests this.

Here we find our Grail hero entering the dilapidated Grail chapel (in this case the cabin Tolliver has been living in since Night Riders burned down his mansion) to bring healing or release to the maimed Fisher King. In a scene which seems ripped straight from Wolfram's *Parzifal*, Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, or *La Queste*, Percy Munn confronts the frail Senator and promises to put him out of his misery: "I'm going to kill you," [Mr. Munn] declared. "It'll be a favor to kill you. A favor to you. If I didn't kill you, you'd lie here in this house and be nothing. Nothing: and you thought you were something" (456). When Percy finds himself unable to kill Tolliver, however, the senator shifts "his head on the pillow, weakly, like a sick man. 'Give me a drink of water,'" he says (457-458).

Under the watchful gaze of Tolliver's sister, Percy

turned, and while he lifted the pitcher with his right hand, with the other dropped the revolver into his pocket. [. . .] The water made a muted gurgling noise, spilling into the glass. (458)

He next hands the glass to Tolliver, waits while Tolliver drinks, and departs the cabin. Almost immediately, soldiers, who have been tipped off by Sylvestus, Willie Proudfit's nephew, gun him down in the woods outside Tolliver's home.

One may see Percy's demise as indicative of a failed Grail quest. After all, shouldn't a successful quest end with Percival surviving to take on the mantle of Grail King? Anyone thinking this may be overlooking some very important points. Not all successful Grail quests end with the survival of the hero. In *La Queste*, for example, Galahad dies, and his spirit ascends to heaven after his achievement of the Grail:

Returning then to the table, [Galahad] prostrated himself on hands and knees before [the Grail] ; and it was not long before he fell face downward on the flagged floor of the palace, for his soul had already fled its house of flesh and was borne to heaven by angels making jubilation and blessing the name of Our Lord. (283)

The sound of the angels' jubilation gives us the first indication that Percy's quest is a successful one as it mirrors, in Percy's death scene, the sound of the soldiers' voices, which sound "like the voices of boys at a game" (460).

But the successful Grail quest, one might further argue, restores the land to its natural balance. No such thing appears to happen in *Night Rider*. Again one must look closely at the ending. The purpose of the Grail quest is to restore the plague-ridden land to fruition, and Percy's death represents a first step towards reestablishing law and the natural order. After giving the Fisher King a sip of water, he is shot by soldiers sent to Bardsville to put an end to the Night Riders' violence. Because he is an officer in the Night Riders, Percy's death weakens that organization.

More importantly for Grail mythology, Percy, who by scraping tobacco fields and burning barns and warehouses full of tobacco has come to represent violence against nature, is literally killed by the nature he has terrorized: He dies in the woods, betrayed by a man whose name, Sylvestus, literally means “woodman” (Arthur 288). That Sylvestus represents an avenging nature spirit is further implied when one notes the similarities between his name and that of Diana’s consort, Sylvanus, a protective god of the woods and agriculture (Frazer 162, 539).

In *The Achievement of Robert Penn Warren*, James Justus claims that Percy Munn represents one of T. S. Eliot’s Hollow Men, someone so devoid of personality and conviction, that he may as well be an empty shell (160). He writes that Percy, who never finds out who he is and comes to realize that he is actually nothing, lives as a failure at all he turns to, and dies a meaningless death (172). Percy may indeed live and die as a failure; however, when the natural cycle emphasized by the Grail mythology is taken into account, it becomes clear that Percy’s death is far from meaningless and, by removing him as a threat to nature and peace, it does achieve something: the chance to restore balance to the natural world.



## CHAPTER TWO

### **Wandering Jews and Spiritual Cains: Robert Penn Warren's *At Heaven's Gate***

Robert Penn Warren's second novel, *At Heaven's Gate* (1943), tells the story of three people's search for identity in the New South of the 1920's. Jerry Calhoun wants to deny his rural upbringing and his clumsy father by embracing the world of real estate finance, represented by his boss, Bogan Murdock, CEO of Meyers and Murdock. Ironically, Jerry's fiancée and Bogan's daughter, Sue Murdock, similarly wants to deny her past because though privileged, she regards her father as crass and shallow. She runs away from her family by throwing herself into the arms of three men: Jerry, Slim Sarrett, and Jason Sweetwater. In alternating chapters, Ashby Wyndham, an itinerant country preacher, tells how he came to find his calling and how he wound up in jail as an accessory to murder.

The narrator describes the hand of Slim Sarrett, Sue Murdock's friend from college, as looking "as though it were a warrior's hand laid on a sword hilt" (1), suggesting a continuation of the Arthurian myths found in Warren's first novel. Sarrett is knight-like in his stance as he watches the Murdock horses. In *The Achievement of Robert Penn Warren*, Justus points out another connection with Arthurian myth and with modernist representations of contemporary life in terms of the "mythical method" described by T. S. Eliot:

Warren's second novel establishes the New South as a homegrown wasteland. The novel is studded with physical and spiritual images of disease, perversion, filth; and its characters are dominated by movers and shakers who keep one eye on public relations and the other on schemes for maintaining wealth and power through abstract finance. (180)

As in *Night Rider*, then, we have another example of the land destroyed by neglect or violation of the natural cycle: "The values associated with southern Agrarianism—integration of personality, mutual responsibility, and general harmony of man and nature—are conspicuously missing," Justus writes, "in the lives of the major characters" (180).

While the novel may well be set in a wasteland, the narrator quickly alerts us that Arthurian myth will play only a passing role in this novel. Shortly after the description of Sarrett's hand the narrator undercuts the chivalric imagery by claiming that while watching the Murdocks' horses with Sue and her brother, "Slim Sarrett had just stated that he did not care for riding" (1). The word chivalry derives from the French *chevalier*, "knight," which shares the same root as *cheval*, "horse," so chivalry was deeply involved with horsemanship. By blatantly rejecting horse-riding, then, Sarrett symbolically rejects chivalry. The narrator thus sets the stage for a world without knighthood and thus perhaps a world without chivalry or even questing heroes.

This is not to imply that Warren simply evokes mythical imagery in order to immediately dismiss it. Indeed, the New South Justus compares to the Arthurian wasteland could just as easily be compared to the fallen post-Edenic world found in the Judeo-Christian legends of Cain and The Wandering Jew.

In his review of *A Place to Come To*, Warren's final novel, Gene Lyons notes that Jed Tewksbury, the novel's protagonist, feels that by leaving his mother "he has committed some breach of the spirit and is condemned to travel the world alone in search of himself, [...] The Wandering Country Boy as Wandering Jew" (4). Much has been written about Warren's tendency to people his novels with aimless wanderers. Randy Hendricks, for example, has devoted an entire book to the subject. He even comments on the similarities between the Wandering Jew and the tramp of Warren's short story "Blackberry Winter" (46). The idea of a poor sinner forced to walk the world in search of redemption seems a perfect metaphor for the Post-bellum South and its search for identity in the years after Radical Reconstruction. What

may be surprising, given this, is that so little has been written about the similarities between the characters of *At Heaven's Gate* and the legends of the Wandering Jew and Cain.

According to Sabine Baring-Gould, author of *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages*, the earliest written mention of the Wandering Jew was in the thirteenth century by Matthew Paris. In it, the protagonist, a porter of Pontius Pilate named Cartaphilas finds himself doomed to wander the earth after committing an unpardonable sin: he slapped Jesus as the Savior went on His way to the crucifixion (20). In his collection of Wandering Jew Legends, George K. Anderson cites several other myths that claim the Jew was a cobbler named Ahasuerus cursed to wander for eternity after he beat Christ when He stopped to rest outside his house on the road to the crucifixion (46). The core of the legends of the Wandering Jew, then, lie in the protagonist committing an attack on God or His representative and being cursed with eternal wandering as punishment.

Several characters in *At Heaven's Gate* act as representatives of the Wandering Jew. For example, each time Ashby Wyndham (whose name slightly resembles that most commonly given to the Wandering Jew, Ahasuerus) commits some unforgivable act, he almost immediately and for no discernable purpose begins wandering. After his brother, Jacob, refuses to sell their home place, for instance, Ashby beats him in the face, knocking him to the ground, and “walk[s] down the road and suck[s] the blood out of [his] knucks where they was cut” (122). This marks the beginning of Ashby's compulsion to wander.

According to Anderson, the Wandering Jew “has a wife and child (or children) whom he must abandon because of the curse” (48). This is also true of Ashby. After losing his job for participating in a strike, Ashby finds himself with no means of support:

I went down to Cashtown and tried to get it. But they wasn't nuthin. I tried the Atlas Iron Company and they wasn't nuthin. I went plum down to the coal mine,

and they said that they didn't have no use for me. It taken me a day to git down there and a day to git back after night. *I left Marie with Frank [the baby] home and nobody there, but I had to git down and see.* I went to Tomtown. It was the same. (213 emphasis added)

Alone, these wanderings appear perfectly understandable: In the first event, Ashby is dazed after the fight with his brother and wanders about for a mile or two. After his firing, Ashby must look for work. In the legend, the Wandering Jew feels what Anderson terms a “consuming disquiet” that drives him to wander (169). Asby’s violent temper is certainly a symptom of disquiet, but he also feels driven to wander for no special reason at all. Such a consuming disquiet occurs twice in Ashby Wyndham’s tale. During his wife’s labor, for instance, when he believes she is going to die something compels him to leave his house:

I seen her lay and twist. I heard her yell. *And it come on me to just turn my back and walk out the door* and leave her lay. I seen myself walk off down the mountain where it was dark and no stars to speak of, and it was quiet and no yellin. (170 emphasis added)

Though he fights this urge at first, the next time it falls upon him, while watching his wife grieving after his son’s burial, he gives in:

I stood up and I went out the door. That night when Frank come into this here world, I stood and seen his Mammy layin there and heard her yell, and it come on me to walk out of that air house, and it night time, and walk and keep on walkin where it was dark and there wasn't no yellin or nuthin. It come on me but I never done it. But this time when I seen her layin there with her eyes shet [. . .], I up and went out the door. I never made up my mind to git out. I didn't even know I had done left. One minute I was standin lookin at her lay and the next I was out in the dark and I was runnin up the road with my feet hitten on the froze hard ground [. . .] I never knowed how I got there. (215-216)

Where he runs is also significant. When he realizes he has left his house, Ashby cannot stop running. He “run[s] on the Mountain,” not “carin where. Just so [he is] runnin” (216). Folktales from all over the globe often feature the Wandering Jew walking, standing, or sitting on a mountain overlooking a city (Anderson 72-105). As he runs over the mountain, his clothes

are snatched and torn by rocks and brambles (216), causing him to appear even more like the Wandering Jew, who is most commonly described as wearing ragged clothing (Anderson 49).

In almost all accounts the Wandering Jew seeks redemption. In *Innocents Abroad*, Mark Twain mentions the Jew's habit of standing near the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (383). As early as 550, a report emerges that the Wandering Jew is a monk in Cyprus (Anderson 13). Roger of Wendover mentions in 1228 that the Wandering Jew was converted and baptized into Catholicism (2:513-514). Folktales abound in sixteenth and seventeenth century Spain and Portugal of the Wandering Jew as "a missionary of the Christian faith" (Anderson 28).

Ashby attributes Frank's death to God's wrath at his earlier behavior towards Jacob. Thus he begins to seek redemption by trying to find Jacob after Frank's ghost sentences him to much the same punishment that Jesus gives to the Wandering Jew: to wander and to spread God's Word:

You can walk in the world, [Frank] said. Till you find [Jacob]. He is walkin in the world amongst strangers, and you can walk in the world. You can ast folks. You can tell folks how it was with you, and how you lifted up yore hand agin him and them others, and how no man ought never to. You can ast have they seed him. And the Lord will lead you and put yore hand in Jacobs hand. (217)

It is important to note here that Frank's suggestion that Ashby inquire about Jacob wherever he can mirrors several Eastern European folktales in which the Wandering Jew often enquires of passers-by if they have seen Christ, if Christ still lives, or if Christ has returned (Anderson 34, 71-72).

Most of the earliest forms of the Wandering Jew legend mention Ahasuerus' inability to tolerate swearing or taking the Lord's name in vain out of a sense of guilt for his offense against the Savior (Anderson 48). In what is probably the most influential of the Wandering Jew documents, the 1602 pamphlet *Kurtze Beschreibung und Erzählung von einem Juden mit Namen Ahasverus*, we learn that

[w]hen anyone cursed in the name of God's sufferings and wounds, he would tremble at it and reproach that man with fierce zeal, saying "Miserable man! Miserable creature! Wilt thou then take in vain the name of God and His martyrdom? If though hadst seen and heard how sorely the Lord Christ was wounded and tortured for thee and me, as I saw it, thou wouldst rather torture thyself than thus His name!" (qtd. in Anderson 46)

Similarly, Ashby Wyndham cannot stand to hear his brother's name and be reminded of his crime. When Maria laments for Jacob, for example, Ashby grows angry at the stirring up of guilty feelings:

It made me mad for fair. I told her. I said, *I do not want to hear you naming his name. Not no more.* What is betwixt me and him is betwixt me and him, and not nobody else. Not nobody. That was what I said. It looks lak a man cannot bear and endure to look in the lookin glass when somebody has helt it up to him. He cannot bear to see his pore sinful face. *She named Jacobs name and it was lak she helt up a lookin glass for me to see my sinful face.* (144 emphasis added)

Similarly, when thinking back on the fight with Sweetwater, Ashby also feels guilt for fighting with a man who was trying to help him. "I am sorry," he writes, "and grieve I used a chunk on Sweetwater. I ought never kicked him. I ought never lifted up my hand agin him in no way. [. . .] It has come to me Sweetwater was a good man" (193).

One of the most striking similarities between Ashby's story and versions of the Wandering Jew legend involves the prostitute Miss Pearl. After traveling for a year, Ashby arrives in a place called Hulltown. One Sunday evening, as he passes a brothel, he feels drawn to witness to Miss Pearl and Claude, her client sitting on the porch. "The Lord just laid it on me to come in," he explains, "and ast did you have the peace of Jesus in your heart" (261). This angers Claude, and he beats Ashby nearly senseless. Afterwards, Miss Pearl has Claude arrested, nurses Ashby back to health, and gives up her life of sin. This sounds remarkably like a scene from a 1916 novel by Charles Brumm in which an unconscious Ahasuerus "is found lying in a street,

attended by a repentant whore, who resents a policeman's statement that the victim is dead" (Anderson 344).

In several variations of Ahasuerus' chronicles, he has a female traveling companion. For example, in Wolfgang Madjera's 1905 play, *Ahasver*, Ahasuerus' true love shares the same name as Ashby Wyndham's wife: Maria. In the mid-nineteenth century, Edgar Quinet names Ahasuerus' wife Rachel and portrays her as Ahasuerus' constant companion (Anderson 414). When Maria helps Ashby give away their possessions, she "walk[s] down off the Mountain" with Ashby, and accompanies him throughout his journeys, and thus becomes a representation of this Wandering Jewess (233).

Sue Murdock also shares many similarities with the Wandering Jewess. In what Anderson terms "the most celebrated single literary treatment of the Legend of the Wandering Jew" (232), Eugene Sue's *Le Juif errant*, a very different Wandering Jewess appears. Here is a Wandering Jewess who wanders separate from Ahasuerus, though they meet at intervals. Similarly, a Ukrainian folktale posits that the Wandering Jew and Jewess are unable to find rest in any town or city, but each must wander alone from village to village seeking rest.

Like these Wandering Jewesses, Warren's Sue Murdock never stays very long with any of her lovers (each of whom also resemble some aspect of the Wandering Jew), though she does tend to travel the same circles and run into them even after she has moved on to another. Sue's constantly changing lovers are also reminiscent of the 1921 novel by Henry Champly, *La Juive errant*. In this novel, the title character, Nohomi, marries the man who rapes her; then, when he dies, she must marry his brother according to ancient Hebrew tradition. This begins a long cycle of deaths and marriages as Nohomi moves from brother to brother, from brutal rapist to demon worshipper, to miser, and finally to false Messiah, never truly finding peace or happiness.

Just as the Wandering Jewess cannot find rest in any city, Sue cannot find full contentment anywhere. Her father admits that Sue exhibits a “restlessness” and unhappiness at home, and believes her marriage to Jerry Calhoun will help her overcome these things (132-133, 110). At first, Sue does indeed seem to be content with Jerry. She leans contentedly on his arm as they drive aimlessly throughout the countryside, and after telling him she’ll marry him, she even admits, “I’m happy, Jerry,” but she undercuts this when she then wonders, “Why can’t we be happy, Jerry?” (127) Shortly after this, she walks out on Jerry in part because he will not leave town with her and start life over separate from her father (152).

Later, the “unchangingness” of Slim Sarrett’s studio parties “comfort” her (242), but this comfort only lasts so long. Once she becomes Slim Sarrett’s mistress, she does “not ask herself whether she [is] happy or not” (251). Eventually, her restlessness returns when she discovers that Slim is not only bisexual but the product of a traditional middle class family rather than the self-assured child of adversity Sarrett claimed he was (259).

Sue comes closest to contentment with Jason Sweetwater. Where she felt obligated to live up to Slim Sarrett’s expectations, Sue feels comfortable doing what she wants with Sweetwater. When he invites her to a labor meeting, for instance, she feels confident enough to stay home (298). She can speak seriously with him about her family and his past one minute and the next playfully flirt with him (286-289). However, once she becomes pregnant with his child, and he refuses to marry her, she returns to her previous state of alcoholism and biting cynicism (318, 355).

Jerry Calhoun’s story also resembles versions of the Wandering Jew legend. Many of the comments about Jerry by the novel’s narrator could just as easily apply to the Wandering Jew: Like Ashby Wyndham, Jerry often feels compelled to wander. When he stares out over his



employer's yard, for instance, the narrator claims that "[l]oneliness seized upon him, sudden and unspeakable" and "while the other men stood there talking, he felt the impulse to walk away from them, across the lawn, beyond the trees to the open fields, simply and casually; across the valley" (34). Many legends claim that The Wandering Jew cannot be confined, even by a jail cell (Anderson 26). This is true, too, of Jerry Calhoun, who stays in jail only a few hours before he is bailed out by his friend and taken home by his father.

However, Jerry Calhoun most resembles Joseph Cartaphilus, the protagonist of what many believe to be the first written account of the Wandering Jew (Anderson 18). In this version, Joseph Cartaphilus spends his wandering years not necessarily searching for redemption. He converts to Christianity fairly early on and wanders from religious community to religious community in Asia Minor discussing the life of Christ (19). Admittedly, this doesn't sound much like Warren's young up and coming financier on the surface, but a closer reading of both the legend and the novel reveal some important similarities between the two characters.

In his discussion of the Cartaphilus version of the myth, Anderson claims that this version of the story "stresses Cartaphilus' preternatural gravity of conduct, his taciturn nature, [and] his austere living" (19), all aspects of Jerry's character throughout the novel. Jerry exhibits austere living by growing up poor in a farmhouse slowly falling to ruin and by trying to avoid spending money frivolously in adulthood. He shows gravity similar to Cartaphilus' by rarely smiling or laughing in the novel and by exhibiting nothing but contempt for Sue's college friends, whom he considers frivolous and phony: "It looked like they would yammer on forever [. . .] And while they yammered, he looked at them, and they were sure a crummy lot to look at, and he thanked God he'd never got mixed up with any outfit like this when he was in college" (103).

Anderson further points out that what distinguishes Cartaphilus' legend from later Wandering Jew accounts is that, even though he wanders through Armenia and the Near East, Cartaphilus is more an "awaiter" than a wanderer, never becoming the world traveler that Ahasuerus is (19). Here again we see a parallel in Jerry Calhoun. We rarely see Jerry actually do anything. He spends most of his time waiting for things to happen to him. He invests his money in land deals and waits for them to pay off. When the firm of Meyer and Murdock begins to falter, Jerry does nothing to save himself; he simply waits for things to fix themselves. When the authorities arrest him for fraud, he makes no attempt to make bond; rather, he sits in his cell until his friend Duckfoot Blake bails him out. Even when his fiancée leaves him, he does nothing to find her until her father gives him her address out of the blue.

Comparing Warren's Slim Sarrett to the Wandering Jew proves problematic when one considers that Ahasuerus traditionally seeks redemption for his sins while Sarrett never shows remorse for anything he does. When his lie about his parentage is discovered, he never acknowledges it (255). When Malloy catches Sarrett in a compromising position with a male friend, rather than show embarrassment, Sarrett beats Malloy almost senseless (258). Most importantly, when he murders Sue, Sarrett simply steals her money, flies to New York, and writes a poem (377-378). None of these things seem to indicate a relationship to The Wandering Jew.

However, as with Jerry Calhoun, a closer reading reveals interesting similarities. For example, Sarrett shares several physical similarities with the Wandering Jew. Most accounts of Ahasuerus describe him as having a "lank form and ragged clothing" (Anderson 49). Warren's Slim Sarrett, as his name implies, has just such a physique. He is "tallish" (26), and his hands are "long" (3). His sweater is "worn," and his pants are "thin," "unsuitable for the season," and

“wrinkled about his shanks” (26). Like the Wandering Jew, who “can be visible or invisible at will” and often appears or disappears mysteriously (Anderson 26, 102), Sarrett often appears suddenly behind people without anyone having seen him enter (*Heaven’s Gate* 97). Several versions of the Wandering Jew legend also remark upon his “strange powers of speech” (Anderson 177). Similarly, Sarrett speaks with “an even, detached voice” (*Heaven’s Gate* 97), yet whenever Sarrett speaks, however softly, his audience stops and listens.

Of all the Wandering Jew variations, though, Sarrett seems to resemble the title character of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “A Virtuoso’s Collection.” Hawthorne’s narrator describes this Jew “as one of the hardest and coldest men of the world” (284). His touch is “without a single heart-throb of human brotherhood [. . .] like ice” (297). He seems “to lack sympathy with the spiritual, the sublime, and the tender” (284). He even claims to have “learned to despise all things” in his tenure on earth (284). “The soul is dead within him,” the narrator tells us (297).

Much the same could be said for Slim Sarrett as he constantly performs cruel and brutal acts without any show of remorse or misgiving. He flirts with the librarian but ignores her if he runs into her on campus because she is “ugly and sick-looking with a blotched skin” (199). He beats Malloy mercilessly when Malloy teases him about being a homosexual (258). Most disturbingly, though, when his former lover laughs at his attempt to rape her, he strangles her, steals her money, and flies to New York with, other than the ambiguous hotel scene cited above, scarcely a look back (361-363).

Jason “Sweetie” Sweetwater, the Marxist activist and final lover of Sue, lies at perhaps the opposite end of the spectrum from Slim Sarrett. Where Sarrett closely resembles the self-centered and self-serving Wandering Jew of Hawthorne’s “A Virtuoso’s Collection,” Sweetwater

seems to represent a more humanitarian Wandering Jew, more concerned with improving the lot of his fellow man than with finding redemption.

Three years before Karl Marx wrote his manifesto, Eugène Sue published *Le Juif errant* (232). Though the Jew appears infrequently in this novel whose main purpose is to criticize the Jesuits, when he does, he increasingly finds himself identifying with the working class: He preaches against imperialism, he fights for decent wages for the workingman, he even argues for unions and better working conditions for women. Indeed, according to Anderson, Sue's novel represents the first occurrence of the Wandering Jew as a champion of the world's oppressed (234).

This is not the only incidence of a humanitarian Wandering Jew, though. In 1878, Paul Féval published his novel *La fille du Juif errant* in which Ahasuerus acts as an altruistic defender of liberty. In 1884, however, Jean Richepin's poem "Le Juif errant" is consciously Marxist. In it, Ahasuerus has turned his back on Christianity and identifies himself forever with the proletariat.

As a Wandering Jew figure, Sweetwater seems to act as an amalgamation of Sue's and Richepin's versions. Like Richepin's Jew, Sweetwater has turned his back on Christianity. Ironically, Sweetwater feels betrayed by God when He doesn't strike him down for blaspheming within the walls of the church. As a child he sat in his father's empty church and

whispered over and over again, the evil, filthy words he knew, which blacken man and shame God. His lifted face, a square, blunt little child's face, was smooth and pure, as he sat there under the filtered light of the afternoon, with the eyes squinched tight shut and the lips moving.

But nothing happened. [. . .] He felt like crying, he felt betrayed—the tears burned at his eyes—but he did not cry. [. . .] He left the church, carrying his betrayal, his emptiness, carefully as though not to spill his emptiness, as one is careful not to slosh a brimming bucket. (290)

Though Sweetwater is an adult when he physically leaves his father's house, his spiritual wanderings begin here, as he abandons his father's church, and continues through his short-lived

college career and his years at sea and in the Marines until he embraces communism. Then like both Richepin's and Sue's Wandering Jews, he shows up mysteriously and becomes a champion for the workingman. When we first meet him, for example, Ashby Wyndham attends one of Sweetwater's rallies:

Nobody knowed where he come from but he come there short after me.

[. . .] But he said the Company had plenty of money. He said he knowed it had plenty. He said he knowed who got the money and it was them rich fellers what taken the money from the Company. He said they was rich fellers what taken the money what by rights ought to come to them as had bought a piece of the Company and to us what worked for the Company. He said he knowed. He said if everybody quit workin for the Company all of a sudden and didn't nobody work for them, then they would have to pay us good. They would have to pay us more than afore. He said it was ourn and that was the way folks done to git paid better. He got folks to listen to him, and them as listened to him talked to other folks. Three weeks and everybody quit. It was a strike, what they called it. (189)

Sue's Wandering Jew, though, meets with only limited success. In the novel, Ahasuerus' main goal is to keep a family treasure out of the hands of the Jesuits and to protect the family. By the end of the novel, all but two of the family members are dead, and, while the Jesuits have failed to obtain the treasure, it is only because Ahasuerus had to destroy it in a fire. Sweetwater's actions are similarly disastrous for those who rely on him. Ashby Wyndham loses his job for taking part in the strike. Sweetwater's unborn child is aborted when he refuses to marry Sue, the mother. After Sweetwater beats Slim Sarrett and kicks him out of Sue's apartment, Sarrett attempts to rape Sue and murders her instead while Sweetwater is out cooling off from an argument with her.

These are only the most fully realized of Warren's Wandering Jews. *At Heaven's Gate* has many more. John Lewis Longley, Jr., notes that Duckfoot Blake compares Sue Murdock's father, Bogan, to a vampire when he claims that "[w]hen Bogan Murdock looks in the mirror, he

don't see a thing" (18). However, this claim ignores the context of Duckfoot's statement, which incorporates several references to Wandering Jew folklore:

Bogan Murdock ain't real. Bogan is a solar myth, he is a pixy, he is a poltergeist. Son, [. . .] you can't put ectoplasm in jail. But Bogan Murdock ain't even ectoplasm. He is just something you and I thought up one night. When Bogan Murdock looks in the mirror, he don't see a thing. (373)

According to Anderson, "Slavik folklorists [. . .] insist that the whole legend of the Wandering Jew is a lunar myth" (74). Additionally, much Wandering Jew folklore contains references to the Jew's supernatural insubstantiality. In a fifteenth century manuscript by Antonio di Francesco di Andrea, for example, the Jew appears and disappears at will (Anderson 26). Like Murdock, the Jew is often portrayed as middle-aged with "a stern and resolute glance" (80). Just as figuratively Murdock doesn't cast a reflection, many accounts of the Wandering Jew claim he doesn't cast a shadow (184).

In addition to the many incarnations of the Wandering Jew, the major characters of *At Heaven's Gate* also share many similarities with Cain, whom one might consider the first Jewish Wanderer. According to the Bible, when Cain slew his brother, he was cursed by God to be "a vagrant and a wanderer on earth" (Genesis 4.8-12). When Cain complained that such a curse would surely encourage others to kill him, God adds further that "if anyone kills Cain, Cain shall be avenged sevenfold" (4.15). This prohibition against killing Cain has given rise to the legend that Cain cannot die and thus walks the world until Doomsday (Mellinkoff 15).

This certainly fits the major characters of Warren's second novel. Each has in some way betrayed his/her family. Ashby Wyndham, the itinerant preacher who narrates the alternating chapters of the novel, presents one of the clearest analog of Cain. For example, like Cain, Ashby's wandering begins when he strikes down his brother, Jacob, in wrath after Jacob refuses to sell the family homestead in order for Ashby to support his pregnant wife, Marie:

By God, I said, and I looked in his face, and I knowed he would not sell never for no mans price. But that was not it. It was some other thing come on me lookin at him.

By God, I said and I give it to him. *I give it to him on the side of the head.*

*I stunned him flat.*

He laid on his back I ain't sayin how long, not lookin at me, just up at the sky and blinked lak a baby you put him in the light. Then he rolled on one side and got up, and stood there and looked at me.

You sellin, I yelled at him, but it did not matter what I yelled for I knowed he was not sellin and I never waited for him to say. It was on me and I was blood guilty in my heart. I give it to him agin.

*I give it to him in the mouth, and he lay there and I seen the blood come out of his mouth. [ . . . ] Then I turned my back and left him layin and started down the big road. (121-122 emphasis added)*

Even though he does not kill Jacob, Ashby still leaves his childhood home with his brother's blood quite literally on his hands: "I walked down the road fast. I reckn I'd gone a mile and I looked down and seen *my hand was bloody*. I reckon *I cut them on his teeth*" (122 emphasis added). Also like Cain, Ashby initially shows no remorse for his sin: "I wish I had kilt him," he says aloud as he walks away sucking the blood off his hands and spitting into the road. "By God, [ . . . ] I wish I had kilt the bastard" (122). As mentioned earlier, this begins Ashby's compulsion to wander.

If one reads Cain's punishment as arising from a betrayal of the family (as opposed to simply fratricide), each of the major characters resemble the Cain legends as much as or more than they do the Wandering Jew legends. Sue Murdock runs away from her controlling father after berating her mother for the elder woman's failure to stand up to her husband. Jerry Calhoun spends the entire novel trying to deny his family and become more like Sue's father. Slim Sarrett, Sue's next lover, symbolically kills his parents by creating what he considers a better

story about his origins. When Sue's final lover, Jason Sweetwater, loses his religion, he turns his back on his preacher father and becomes a Marxist.

The Bible remains silent on exactly how Cain slays Abel; however, most artistic representations of this event show Cain braining his brother with a club or an animal bone (Mellinkoff 36-38). Louis Ginsberg posits that Cain killed his brother by throwing rocks at him (57). Similarly, a sculpture by Otto Waldner in Hünstetten, Germany, depicts Cain striking Abel with a fist-sized stone. Here again Ashby Wyndham provides a connection to Cain when he attacks Jason Sweetwater, one of his figurative brothers in the labor strike. During the demonstration, Sweetwater calls Ashby's cousin, Private Porsum, who speaks on behalf of the mill owners, a liar. This angers Ashby and he attacks Sweetwater in much the same way he had earlier attacked his literal Jacob:

*I give him a jolt on the side of the head. He come down on his knee, and I give it to him agin. But he was tough. [ . . . ] He nigh throwed me and me beatin on him. But I snaked him with my leg and we come down. He got my arm twisted and nigh broke it and me beatin on him. He would broke it if I hadn't laid holt to a chunk of rock. I never knowed I grabbed it. I give it to him right in the face. He slipped his holt and I seen blood on his face. (192 emphasis added)*

Similarly, Jerry Calhoun uses a piece of brick to kill his dog. As a child, his puppy fell into a well, and when it would not cooperate with his attempts to rescue it, Jerry grew frustrated and "grubbed an old brick from the sod, and with the icy assurance of hatred, or something like hatred, hard in him now, leaned far over to observe the small target, which was the animal's head, in the middle of the glimmer-fractured blackness of the water. The one brick did it" (41). When his father later tries to reassure him that he did the right and merciful thing, Jerry knows that the words are "lies" (42). Admittedly, Jerry kills an animal, not a person, but the animal presumably trusts him, and as a pet might at least be considered an extended member of his family. Admittedly, Jerry does the only thing he can do by killing the puppy he cannot save, but



the narrator makes it fairly clear that his motive lies more in “the assurance of hatred” than in any sense of futile pity (41).

Another important consideration in the Legend of Cain is the cause of the murder. Cain slays Abel after anger gets the best of him during an argument. According to the biblical account, Cain lured his brother to the fields, where he “attacked his brother Abel and murdered him” (Genesis 4:8). However, other sources of the Cain legend are more specific about the source of the brothers’ quarrel. In Lord Byron’s retelling of the Cain legend, the brothers argue over the futility of making sacrifice to the Lord (III.i.276-315). In Louis Ginsberg’s collection of biblical legends, Cain and Abel argue over whether or not Abel has the right to let his sheep graze on Cain’s land (56).

Similarly, the three actual murders in Warren’s novel occur after angry confrontations. Sue Murdock’s grandfather, Lem Murdock, assassinates his political rival, Moxby Goodpasture, after Goodpasture publicly accuses Murdock of being a war profiteer during the Civil War and a scalawag during Reconstruction (86). After another argument with Jason Sweetwater in which he once again refuses to marry her, Sue Murdock grows angry and frustrated. She leaves her apartment shortly after Sweetwater storms out and aborts her pregnancy, killing her unborn son (357). Slim Sarrett, as mentioned above, strangles Sue in her bed when he misreads her laughter as disdain for him and his attempt to rape her (362).

According to the biblical account, Cain goes on to found the first city, named after his son Enoch (Genesis 4.17). There, Ruth Mellinkoff suggests, he might remain in safety (47). Just as Cain leaves his farmland for the city, each of Warren’s Cain figures leaves the agrarian home of his or her parents to wander aimlessly in the city. Sue Murdock moves from her father’s horse ranch for a run-down apartment in the seedy part of town. Jerry Calhoun leaves his ancestral

farmhouse for increasingly nicer apartments and a well-paying job. Jason Sweetwater grew up the son of a country preacher, but he now travels from city to city stirring workers to rebel against their management. Even Slim Sarrett, though he did not grow up on a farm, did leave his parents in rural Georgia for first Nashville, then New York (256).

The biblical account of Cain gives no indication that he ever seeks or finds redemption in his travels. However, just as in the Legend of the Wandering Jew, many versions of the Cain legend feature the first murderer seeking redemption for his sin. We certainly see this aspect of the Cain myth in Ashby Wyndham's statement. Ashby does ultimately seek redemption in the life of an itinerant preacher. Lem Murdock at least seems to regret his murder of Moxby Goodpasture. He spends the entire novel suffering from a case of senile dementia in which he relives the event, feeling the need to explain his actions to random visitors (20). When Sue asks him about the murder directly or when young children reenact the murder in front of him, he weeps silently and uncontrollably (116, 274). By the end of the novel, Jerry Beaumont, too, seems at least to feel guilty for his resentment and embarrassment towards his father, especially for wishing his father dead (387-388). While the novel ends with the hope that Jerry may seek redemption, we never actually see any acts of contrition.

In his discussion of Cain as a precursor to the Wandering Jew, Anderson maintains that rather than seeking redemption, Cain spreads misfortune and brings disaster to wherever he wanders (97). This, too, finds its echo in Warren's novel. None of the other Cain figures in Warren's novel seem to experience repentance or attempt redemption. Jason Sweetwater, one assumes, continues on as always with his labor activism when he is no longer suspected of Sue's murder, moving on to the next town and the next labor dispute. Bogan Murdock continues to use

the tragedy of his daughter's murder to play on the public's sympathy and avoid prosecution for his role in attempting to swindle the state government (373).

Slim Sarrett, though, leaves the worst disasters in his wake when he flies to New York. It apparently is not enough simply to murder his former lover; he steals her money and valuables only to throw the jewelry into the sewer as he leaves her apartment (363). Then, when an innocent black man is accused of her murder, he allows him to be arrested, fully knowing that a black man accused of killing an affluent white woman can only hope for one of two outcomes: lynching before the trial or an automatic guilty verdict and the death penalty. Sarrett, once cleared of Sue's murder, simply goes to New York, checks into a hotel, and begins drafting his next poem (377-379).

Indeed, of all the Cain figures, Slim Sarrett represents the most pompous versions of the unredeemed Cain. In her discussion of the different interpretations of the mark of Cain, Mellinkoff discusses what she terms "the most intentionally distorted interpretation, Cain's mark" put forth by the title character of Hermann Hesse's 1919 novel *Demian* (87). In this novel, Max Demian, the narrator's existential mentor describes Cain not as a sinner, but as almost a personification of Nietzsche's Superman:

The first element of the story, its actual beginning, was the mark. Here was a man with something in his face that frightened others. They didn't dare lay hands on him; he impressed them [...] [He] struck people as faintly sinister, perhaps a little more intellect and boldness in his look than people were used to. [...] So they did not interpret the sign for what it was—a mark of distinction—but as its opposite. (Hesse 29)

Demian, himself, seems to share much in common with Sarrett. Both speak contemptuously of their fellow man. Demian refers to the mass of humanity as weak and timid cowards (30, 32). Indeed, he sees in himself an affinity with his conception of Cain and feels himself superior to the mass of humanity (138).

Similarly, Slim Sarrett, sees himself as superior to the rest of the world. In class, Sarrett remains aloof and sets himself apart from others. He sits stiff and erect at his desk with a pile of books beside him separating him from his classmates. He neither participates in discussions nor takes notes but “maintain[s] a reserved, almost respectful silence, unless directly addressed by the professor” (199).

The description of Sarrett’s manner in class seems innocuous until read closer. Sarrett maintains an “almost” respectful silence in class. This implies, then, that the silence, while not overtly rude, is decidedly *not* respectful. Similarly, the narrator claims that Sarrett remains silent “unless directly addressed by the professor” (199). Here, again, wording is all, as this description implies that Sarrett not only refuses to converse with his classmates, but he ignores the comments of his professors unless spoken to directly. This further implies that Sarrett believes he knows more about the course materials than the faculty, a belief he states outright when discussing his Shakespeare paper with Sue:

“That dry-balled, pismire-headed, old Timsey will not understand a word of it, and will therefore give it an A+. He will be afraid not to. Since the time he gave me a C on a paper, and when the paper was published in *The Bookkeeper* I sent him an inscribed issue of the magazine. But I have not taken advantage of his stupidity and timorousness. I have indulged myself by giving this subject careful thought, because it interests me deeply.” (196-197)

These attempts to set himself apart from others imply that Slim Sarrett seems to see himself as a Cain figure as defined by Hesse. Likewise his fabricated story of growing up the son of an abusive sailor and a common prostitute serves only to give him an air of dark and tragic mystery, and though he rarely mentions his boxing himself (unless threatened with physically violence), he clearly enjoys the vague and ominous sense of threat his boxing successes have on his audience.

Just as Demian takes it upon himself to mentor Emil Sinclair, the narrator of Hesse's novel, and help him on his way to self-knowledge, Warren's Sarrett attempts to educate Sue Murdock and expand her intellectual horizons. When Sue takes him as her lover, he immediately begins to take charge of her intellectual growth as if she were incapable of doing so herself. Rather than discuss Sue's interests or ideas, Sarrett gives her books he thinks she should read and discusses them with her (238). Sarrett, in effect, creates Sue's intellect to suit his own interests. He talks about the books *he* wants her to read. His "leading questions" about them subtly "lead" the formation of Sue's opinions (238).

Demian believes that his "distinctive" mark of Cain allows him the power to control the world and bend it to his will. For example, when he changes seats in the classroom with no repercussions he explains that he has willed the teacher to allow it: "Even now something bothers him secretly every time he has to deal with me," Demian explains, "for he knows that my name is Demian and that I, a D, sit way back in the S's. But that never penetrates his awareness because my will opposes it" (58-59).

Warren's Sarrett also manipulates the people around him "like a director" (204). "This world was held together by Slim Sarrett," the narrator claims,

He had created it. If Slim Sarrett had not existed, the special combinations of that world would not have existed. Most of the people who came to his studio had met each other there for the first time, and most of them never saw each other elsewhere. When a new person came, Slim prepared the situation carefully, defining the new person privately to each of his friends, not overtly, all at once, but by meticulous whetting of curiosity, appeals for opinion which he had already planted and nurtured, confessions, tinged with humility but qualified by irony, of what he himself had learned from the as yet unknown guest, little criticisms, hints at a secret which he had fathomed—all done as scrupulously and as cunningly as a dramatist prepares the entrance of his hero. [. . .] He watched over the new relationships and combinations, spiritual and physical, like a mother. (204)

Even his development of Sue's intellect exemplifies his need to control those around him. During his parties, for instance, he controls when and how Sue participates in the discussions by drawing her in against her will:

“By the way,” Slim Sarrett would say, in the midst of the talk, “Sue was saying something about that the other day that I thought rather interesting. She was saying—” but he would stop, and turn to Sue, almost with an air of discovering her presence, “—oh, how did you put it, Sue, how was it exactly?” And he would turn again to the company saying, “I want the exact phrase—that was important.” Then everybody would be quiet, and would look at her, waiting [...] and for the flicker of an instant she hated his guts for that, for by God, she wasn't a child. (239)

One wonders how much Sue's ideas are merely Sarrett's own.

Sarrett even controls the vices of those around him. He subtly devises the affair between Malloy and Alice Smythe out of nothing more than selfish curiosity: He “had been piqued by the profound lack of interest they had shown in each other” (204). Sarrett controls Sue's drinking habits and subtly “encourage[es] her to drink” even when she has no real desire to: “At the studio, when people were there, he would lean sympathetically toward her with a fresh drink in his hand before she had really finished the former one. [...] Or he would come to her apartment in the evening and bring a bottle, and mix drinks for her” (251).

For Hesse's *Demian*, this mark of Cain, this mark of distinction, allows him to flaunt others' rules. He changes seats in class without permission, for example, He encourages Emil to simply take whatever he wants. Similarly, Warren's Sarrett doesn't sit to read the periodicals in the library. He stands in front of the shelves forcing everyone to see him. His raincoat is “draped” over his shoulder, whatever he reads is “poised” in his hands, and when he finds something of interest, he reads it aloud “making no concession to the sign [. . .] which said *Silence Please*” (199).

For Demian, the prestige of Cain's mark even goes so far as to absolve him of murder. No longer does Cain represent the sin of fratricide, but the virtue of strength overcoming weakness:

So a strong man slew a weaker one: perhaps it was a valiant act, perhaps it wasn't. At any rate, all the other weaker ones were afraid of him from then on, they complained bitterly and if you asked them: 'Why don't you turn around and slay him, too?' they did not reply 'Because we're cowards,' but rather 'You can't, he has a sign. God has marked him.' (30)

Indeed, Demian sees nothing wrong with cold-blooded murder. When his friend, Emil, is blackmailed by a schoolyard bully, for example, he advises Emil to simply kill him: "[You] ought to get rid of this bastard!" he tells Emil. "If there's no other way of doing it, kill him. It would impress and please me if you did! I'd even lend you hand" (41). When Emil balks at this, Max agrees to find a better way of handling the bully, but admits that "killing him would be the simplest. In cases like this, the simplest course is always the best" (41).

This blasé attitude towards murder certainly fits Slim Sarrett's character as evidenced by the calm and collected manner with which he handles the aftermath of his murder of Sue because she laughed at him:

He flexed his arms and worked his hands together. Then he carefully examined the apartment, pulling out drawers here and there and disordering or rumpling the contents. To perform these operations, he covered his right hand with a handkerchief. In the top drawer of the bureau, he found the purse. He took out the roll of bills, still fastened with the rubber band, He held them in his hand a moment, then put them into his pocket. In a box in the drawer he found two rings and a bracelet. These articles, too, he took. Then he left the apartment. (362-63)

On his way home, he wraps the jewelry in newspaper and discards them in the sewer, congratulating himself upon the idea: "Nobody would ever find those things there," he tells himself (363). "Yes, it was an excellent idea" (363). And when an innocent man is arrested for the murder, Slim never blinks an eye. He simply boards a plane for New York and starts his life anew.

Where Sarrett differs from Hesse's interpretation of Cain, though, is that while he does not accept responsibility or seek redemption for his crime, he is not entirely guilt-free as his behavior in his hotel room implies. As he composes his poem, he paces his hotel room until he hears someone outside, at which point, hands clasped at his chest, he listens until the feet pass his door, worrying that "somebody [is] in the corridor, somebody [is] coming" (379). Then he resumes his pacing, hands in an attitude of prayer mouthing inaudible words (379). His concern that someone is coming for him implies fear of being caught; his prayer-like stance implies regret but not necessarily repentance. He still, after all, remains in New York writing his poem and continues to allow an innocent man to be punished for the murder.

Each protagonist, then, and several secondary characters, resemble both the Wandering Jew and Cain. The question remains: Why would Warren choose The Wandering Jew and Cain as templates for the characters in his second novel? What cultural meaning do these associations have? We have seen how the characters have, like Cain, violated familial responsibilities, and we have seen several examples of the kind of exile, shame, and wandering attributed to the Wandering Jew. However, both Cain and Ahasuerus commit heinous offenses against God. But in Warren's novel, with the possible exception of Sweetwater, none of Warren's characters commit an open offense against God. What, then, is Warren's purpose? What possible meaning does he expect his readers to glean from these allusions?

The story of Cain, who was denied the agrarian paradise of the Garden by his parents act, who killed his herdsman brother Abel, and who goes on to found the world's first city seems especially appropriate for Warren at this stage of his life. Much of Warren's adult life was shaped by an unfortunate injury when a piece of coal carelessly tossed by his younger brother, William Thomas, put out his left eye (Grimshaw 2-3). This, of course, put an end to his dreams



of a naval career and set him on the road from the rural Guthrie, Kentucky, to the urban Nashville, Tennessee. The myth of exile and wandering embodied in the legend of the city man Ahasuerus, though, also fit Warren's own sense of displacement as he wrote the novel first during an extended stay in Rome, Italy, and later as he negotiated a change of schools, leaving his position at Louisiana State University to teach in the fledgling Writers Workshop of the University of Iowa (Blotner 187). However biographically appropriate these allusions may be to Warren's life, though, to be truly worthy of discussion, they must serve some other, thematic purpose.

In "*At Heaven's Gate: The Major Themes*," John Longley points out that each of the major characters of Warren's novel has violated the natural order in some way (14). Bogan Murdock rapes the land for material gain. Jerry Calhoun participates in this rape by working for Murdock and denying his humble rural past. Even Ashby Wyndham acquiesces in Bogan Murdock's violation of nature by leaving his ancestral home to work for one of Murdock's subsidiary companies. Sue Murdock profits from her father's violation of nature by living off the interest of the inheritance that her father's company invested for her. More importantly, Sue commits her own violation of the natural order by having an abortion when Sweetwater refuses to marry her. Sweetwater commits a similar defiance of the natural order by refusing to marry the mother of his unborn child, passively allowing her abortion by walking out on her after an argument in which she declares unequivocally that she will abort the child (355). Finally, Slim Sarrett violates the natural order on several levels, most specifically through his aberrant sexuality and his blasé murder of Sue.

Perhaps these are the very offenses for which Warren's characters are cursed to wander, remaining at—or outside—Heaven's gate. For Warren the Southern Agrarian, violations of the

natural order would constitute a metaphorical slap in God's face just as painful as Ahasuerus' beating of Jesus on his doorstep or of Cain's murdering his brother. In many respects, Warren the agnostic would find the offenses against nature an even worse sin than that of physically hitting a mythic deity. Either way, *At Heaven's Gate* functions, like *Night Rider* before it, as a cautionary tale against defying nature's cycle.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **Twilight of the Boss: *All the King's Men* and Norse Mythology**

In *All the King's Men*, Warren's third novel, Jack Burden, a newspaper reporter turned political blackmailer, tells the story of his employer, Willie "The Boss" Stark, and his rise from naïve local politician to corrupt Southern governor. During the course of Willie's story, Jack also relates his own tale of innocence lost and faith in mankind regained. As the two stories intertwine, Warren illustrates the importance of accepting the past and one's responsibilities to the world. However, as James Justus points out, this is more than simply another novel about the Southern political machine (192):

Into this study of a southern demagogue, went not only the example of Huey Long but also Warren's wide reading in Dante, Machiavelli, Elizabethan tragedy, American history, William James, and his observation of the very real day-to-day melodrama of [economic] depression in America and fascism in Italy. (193)

Warren, in an interview with William Kennedy, claimed that he based the character of Willie Stark more on Shakespeare's Julius Caesar and Coriolanus than on Huey Long (88). Noel Polk, in his afterword to the restored edition of *All the King's Men*, suggests that Warren was also at least partially influenced by Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* when he originally gave Willie the surname of *Talos*, the name of Spenser's "mechanical man attendant upon the Knight of Justice" (636). Polk further points out that *Talos* refers to the Greek myth of Talus, the bronze man whom Hephaestus created to guard the island of Crete:

[He] circled the island three times a day, throwing boulders at the ships that tried to land. He was thus the powerful protector of the island before he was outwitted and slain by Medea, who came to Crete with Jason and the Argonauts. (636)

In both possible allusions, that of Spenser and that of Greek mythology, *Talos* seems a particularly appropriate name for Warren's protagonist. In Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, Talus acts as judge, jury, and executioner for whomever he perceives as unjust or sinful (V.i.12 1-6). His

sentence is always the same regardless of mitigating circumstances: death. Thus the pursuit of justice through Talos always ends in bloodshed. Talus, in fact, tends to bring death to whomever he approaches. According to some versions of the myth, whenever a visitor did manage to land on Crete, Talus “would greet the visitor, becoming red hot and embracing the person to death” (Mercante 810). Like these two metal men, Willie’s passion to help the forgotten “hicks” of his state often ends in dissension and bloodshed, as well as political corruption.

Since Warren changed the name of his protagonist (Polk 636), an in-depth examination of the significance of the former name may seem moot, but if Warren included references to classic Greco-Roman mythology in his earlier drafts, one feels justified in searching for other myth cycles to see if they survive in the finished 1946 edition. The Cass Mastern story appears to be a good, though not obvious, place to look.

As he prepares to research the life of his childhood father-figure, Judge Irwin, Jack Burden gives us the clue we need to begin looking for hidden references to myth: “When you are looking for the lost will in the old mansion,” he says, “you tap inch by inch, along the beautiful mahogany wainscoting, or along the massive stonework of the cellarage, and listen for the hollow sound” (Warren 229). According to Burden, there you find the weakest part of the structure, the hollow sound, and, rather than assume a flaw, you look again for its purpose. The hollow sound is not always a poorly constructed wall, but a hidden compartment concealing important information. The Cass Mastern chapter, which has seemed a needless digression to some readers, a throwaway chapter, has just such a hollow sound.

Other than thematic echoes to the larger narrative, the Cass Mastern material appears to bear no relevance to the rest of the plot. Civil War historian Clifford Dowdy, for instance, claimed that the story “seemed [. . .] to have no place in the novel” (qtd. in Perkins *Cass Mastern*

4). It is never mentioned or reflected upon in any other version of the Willie Stark story: Warren's own stage versions, both the 1949 Robert Rossen and the 2006 Steven Zaillian film versions, and the 1981 opera *Willie Stark* all omit it entirely. Even the first and second British editions of the novel expurgated the Cass Mastern chapter.

The chapter, however, is vitally important to Jack Burden's narrative. Warren always insisted it was central to the novel (Perkins, *Cass Mastern* 10). Recent critics, such as James Perkins, willing to give the chapter closer readings, have agreed that the material is far more than just a good story stuck in the middle of a novel. I argue that the Cass Mastern chapter is, in fact, indispensable and that it gives us the first hint that Warren draws from Norse mythology as a basis for much of the action.

This chapter traces Jack Burden's decision to drop out of graduate school when he could not finish his history dissertation on the journals of his supposed great uncle, Cass Mastern who died in the Civil War after the battle of Atlanta. Burden loses faith in the project when he fails to grasp Mastern's understanding of the world as "all of one piece" and that one's actions will invariably affect others (Warren 200). The bulk of this chapter tells the story of Cass Mastern and his journey to this revelation and on the surface bears little relevance to mythology except for one telling detail.

In 1846, Cass's older brother, Gilbert, brings Cass to Valhalla, his plantation, to begin Cass' education (Perkins "Chronology"). In Norse mythology, Valhalla, or "Hall of the Slain," is where the Valkyries take all warriors killed in battle. Odin, the chief god of the Norse pantheon, presides over the hall and watches as the slain warriors fight daily outside the hall in practice for Ragnarok, the Norse Apocalypse (Jones 317). What strikes one about Warren's use of the Norse name is that it does not seem to fit in the Mastern story any better than the episode fits in the

novel. Valhalla is the abode of the valiant dead, but neither Cass nor his brother constitute what one would ordinarily consider notable valor: one sleeps with his best friend's wife, causing his friend's suicide, and refuses to fire a shot the entire time he serves in the war; the other is a shrewd businessman who manages not to fight in the Civil War at all. Does the reference suggest Cass Mastern's fate, that he is to die in the war? Then why not name Cass' plantation Valhalla instead of Gilbert's? The name Valhalla, in fact, seems superfluous, a false allusion. The idea of Valhalla, however, is not irrelevant to the rest of the novel, and the name of Gilbert's plantation is what encourages the reader to look for other references to Norse mythology.

When Willie Stark first decides to build the free hospital, he says, "I'm going to build me the God-damnedest, biggest, chromium-platedest, formaldehyde-stinkingest free hospital and health center the All-Father ever let live" (Warren 148). *All-Father*, here, in the mouth of the rural Southern politician seems almost as out of place as *Valhalla* in the Cass Mastern story. The Christian god of Southern protestantism is frequently referred to as "God the Father," but not the All-Father. That title belongs not to Jehovah, but to the primary Norse god Odin (Guerber 17).

Early in Willie's tenure as governor, he goes to Chicago on business and has a liason with a figure-skater who is one of "a bevy of 'Nordic Nymphs' in silver gee-strings and silver brassières" performing in an ice show (149). As with Warren's use of "Valhalla" in the Cass Mastern story and of "All-father" cited above, there seems no good reason to describe these skaters as "Nordic," but a pattern of imagery has nevertheless presented itself.

When Jack Burden learns of the affair between Anne Stanton, whom he loves, and Willie Stark, he travels west to California and lies drunk in a hotel room for days. During this time, he discovers what he calls The Great Twitch—the idea that whatever happens in the world occurs

involuntarily like a spasmodic twitch and can therefore be no one's fault or responsibility. The next day, he picks up an old hitchhiker:

The only thing remarkable about him was the fact that while you looked into the sun-brittled leather of the face, [...] you would suddenly see a twitch in the left cheek, up toward the pale blue eye. You would think he was going to wink, but he wasn't going to wink. The twitch was simply an independent phenomenon. (Warren 332-33)

Burden's specificity here is noteworthy. The twitch isn't simply under the old man's eye; it's under his left eye. Jack is not so specific in another instance. In 1922 at their first meeting, "[Jack] could have sworn [Willie] gave [him] a wink" (18), but he doesn't note which eye, apparently a detail important only in the encounter with the hitchhiker.

We might recall that Warren lost his left eye as a young man (Grimshaw 2), a fact that may later have alerted him to something of mythological significance. According to Norse myth, Odin gave up his left eye to drink from the well of knowledge (Carey 214). Odin often travels the world disguised as an old man or beggar. In the Lay of Harbard, for instance, he disguises himself as a lowly ferryman and taunts Thor when the thunder god seeks passage over a river (Crossley-Holland 116-120). In the Lay of Grimnir, Odin appears at King Geirroð's court as Grimnir, an old beggar, in order to test the king's hospitality (Crossley-Holland 59-64). In the Volsungasaga, Odin takes the form of an old, one-eyed man and challenges Sigmund, destroying Sigmund's sword (MacKenzie 311).

The hitchhiker, then, may represent both an Odin figure symbolizing the knowledge Jack Burden has gained by sacrificing another vital organ: his heart. For in order to accept the notion of the Great Twitch, Jack must first deny his feelings for Anne. The hitchhiker, though, is not blind; he merely has a twitch under his left eye. This suggests that Jack's new idea is flawed, as is made clear by the end of the novel when Jack abandons The Great Twitch theory in favor of

the Web of Being, the idea that we are all connected and our actions necessarily have repercussions on others.

There is, however, another character in the novel who shares many more similarities with Odin. Jack first describes the hitchhiker as appearing like “he was going to wink, but he wasn’t going to wink” (Warren 333). This phrase hearkens back to another ambiguous wink, that which Willie may or may not have given Jack at their first meeting. When Randolph Runyon, in *The Taciturn Text: The Fiction of Robert Penn Warren*, refers to this wink as Willie’s “one-eyed” text, one can’t help but be reminded of Odin again, who is frequently referred to as “Odin One-Eye” (Crossley-Holland 248).

The Boss in fact has other physical similarities to the All-father. Since Odin represents the Norse Sky-god, he is often portrayed as wearing a cloud-gray kirtle and a blue hood as well as a wide-brimmed gray hat slanted to cover his missing eye (Hamilton 308, Crossley-Holland xxvi). When Jack Burden first meets Willie in Slade’s poolhall, Stark is dressed similarly: a seersucker suit (which is most commonly either grey/white striped or blue/white striped), a blue-striped tie, and a grey felt hat (Warren 16). While Willie is not using the hat to hide a missing eye, the “wink” occurs under the brim of this hat. Willie also shares Odin’s command of language. Odin was the god of poetry and a masterful poet in his own right (Hamilton 309). His uncle taught him the nine songs he would need to win the mead of poetry, and once he had drunk from the mead, Odin became the patron god of all poets (Crossley-Holland 191). Indeed, one of Odin’s titles is God of Eloquence (Graves 260). Donald MacKenzie, in his retelling of Norse myths and legends, reveals that when “Odin drank of the song-mead he composed poems which for sweetness and grandeur have never been surpassed” (26). Like Odin, Willie has a gift for language, as Sugar-Boy, Willie’s stuttering bodyguard, points out after Willie’s death:



“He could t-t-talk so good,” he half mumbled with his stuttering. “The B-B-Boss could. Couldn’t nobody t-t-talk like him. When he m-m-made a speech and ev-ev-everybody y-y-yelled, it looked l-l-like something was gonna b-b-bust inside y-y-you.” (Warren 446).

Odin learned the art of eloquence by double-crossing the giants and drinking their mead of poetry, and inversely, Willie’s eloquence emerges after his first drunken binge and his oath of vengeance when he learns that Joe Harrison’s “fat boys” (as Jack Burden refers to them), in order to split the “hick” vote, have played him for a fool by convincing him he has a chance to become governor (Warren 89).

One of Odin’s other names is Father of Battle (Crossley-Holland 248), since he is also the Norse god of war, and according to the Prose Edda, one of his greatest joys is spreading strife (Campbell 45). Similarly, strife follows Willie throughout the novel. From the moment he is elected governor, Willie’s strong-arm politics force his policies and civic changes through the state congress. Twice threatened with impeachment during his tenure, he escapes through blackmail and bullying. Even before his rise to power, when he was not The Boss but just Cousin Willie from the Country, Willie shows signs of spreading strife. As county treasurer, he accuses the local political machine of awarding the school contract to a construction company with ties to the Commision Chairman instead of to the company with the lowest bid. Jack’s editor sends him to Mason City to interview “that fellow Stark [...] who thinks he is Jesus Christ scourging the money-changers out of that shinplaster courthouse up there” (Warren 55).

The reference to Jesus reveals yet another similarity, ironically, between Willie and Odin. Both Jesus and Odin represent sacrificial gods. In addition to sacrificing his left eye, Odin, like Jesus on the cross, hung spear-pierced on a tree, giving up his life as divine sacrifice (Crossley-Holland 15). Willie, one might say, sacrifices himself for his goals, and like Odin’s first sacrifice of his eye, Willie’s first sacrifice is relatively minor. He gives up his dignity when he allows

himself to be run out of office instead of backing down on the school contract issue. However, the night before the Upton barbeque, when Willie swears vengeance against the “fat boys,” he gives up something more than just his dignity.

Only Sadie Burke, Willie’s campaign manager, seems to recognize this moment for what it is when she tells Willie “[Y]ou thought you were the lamb of God, [...] but you know what you are? [...] Well, you’re the goat [...] You are the sacrificial goat” (86). Sadie’s words here reveal a clearer recognition of Willie’s character than has anyone else so far. He is not a Christ-figure, despite the words of Jack’s editor; he is the pagan scapegoat. Before he can achieve his vengeance on Harrison, MacMurfee, and the other “fat boys,” he will have to sacrifice more than just his pride.

When Willie discovers the truth behind his first gubernatorial campaign, Jack tells us that he “reached over to the table and picked up the bottle [of liquor] and poured out enough into a glass to floor the Irish and drank it off neat” (Warren 87). Heretofore, Willie has been a staunch teetotaler, refusing even a beer in Slade’s pool hall when Jack first met him, claiming his wife Lucy “don’t favor drinking” (20). Taking the drink now implies more than simply turning his back on sobriety; it further implies turning his back on his own morality and, by extension, on Lucy, his moral compass. In order to become governor, then, Willie quite literally sacrifices himself and emerges from his drunken stupor the next day a changed man. Like Odin, who sacrificed himself to himself on Yggdrasil the World Tree in order to gain knowledge and power over others (Crossley-Holland 15-17), Cousin Willie from the Country must die in order to be reborn as The Boss.

Randolph Runyon acknowledges this in *The Taciturn Text* in his discussion of the scene. He refers to Willie’s drunken slumber as a “deathlike sleep” during which Willie’s “miraculous

metamorphosis” occurs (65). Indeed, when Willie passes out on the bed, he very much resembles a corpse laid out for viewing: he lies on his back with his “hands crossed piously on the bosom” as if he were “a *gisant* [a sculpture of the deceased] on a tomb in a cathedral” (Warren 89). Even more tellingly, Sadie asks Jack where she should “ship the remains” (90). Until Willie rises for the barbeque a changed man, the aptly named Jack Burden even refuses to refer to Willie as a person; instead he is “the item” on the bed (89) or “the carcass” (91).

The next morning, after the Boss takes a bath (his symbolic baptism), Jack offers Willie another drink to shake his hangover (94). The willingness with which the new man drinks Jack’s liquor implies that, like Odin with his mead, Willie has emerged from his symbolic death a transformed man.

As Gwyn Jones points out in *The Vikings*, Odin “was no Christ who hung on the tree for others. He sought his own gain—dominion and knowledge” (320). This, too, fits the novel, where, despite the words of Jack’s editor, Willie is no Christ. Like Odin, Willie seeks his own gain, as he admits in his first successful political speech when he tells his own story in third person: “He didn’t start out thinking about all the other hicks and how he was going to do wonderful things for them. He started out thinking of number one” (97). Later, even Jack comes to realize this, as he reveals when he tells his mother that “Willie is interested in Willie” (134).

Even the free hospital, Willie’s attempt to have one humanitarian accomplishment uncorrupted by politics, is at its heart one more example of Willie’s use of his power for self-serving ends. In reality, Willie wants the hospital to be the best in the world in order to give him a better image and to prove that he isn’t completely corrupt; otherwise, why name it the Willie Stark Hospital? He inadvertently admits his selfish ends when he awards the building contract to Gummy Larson, a politically influential building contractor, to keep his son Tom’s affair out of

the newspapers, and warns Larson not to cut corners: “For it’s mine,” he declares, “you hear—that’s my hospital—it’s mine!” (385).

When MacMurfee, one of Willie’s “fat boy” rivals, offers to keep Tom’s role in Sybil Frey’s pregnancy quiet in exchange for Willie’s endorsement of MacMurfee’s Senatorial campaign, Willie balks because he wants the Senatorship (352). Rather than make the deal with MacMurfee, rather than sacrifice his own political ambitions to save his son, Willie makes the deal with Larson, awarding him the hospital contract in exchange for his promise to call off MacMurfee (384). Even though Willie rails and whines and claims that he had to make the deal, that the “sons-of-bitches” made him deal (384), the fact remains that no one “made” him deal with Gummy Larson. His political career was simply more important to him than his uncorrupted hospital. As Jack Burden so succinctly puts it: “The fact was that the Boss was the way he was. If MacMurfee had forced him into a compromise, at least MacMurfee shouldn’t be the one to profit by it. So he did business with Gummy Larson” (381).

While Warren’s use of *Valhalla* in the Cass Mastern episode seems inappropriate to that story, the abode of the Norse gods certainly fits in the overall narrative of Willie Stark. In Wagner’s *Rhinegold*, the first opera in the four-part cycle of *The Twilight of the Gods*, Albrecht the dwarf sacrifices love for power, setting into motion a tragic chain of events that will result in the death of Odin and the Germanic pantheon even as these same gods prepare to enter their new abode in Valhalla (Wagner 70-72).

Willie envisions the hospital as the best in the world with every convenience imaginable:

I’m going to have a cage of canaries in every room that can sing Italian grand opera and there ain’t going to be a nurse hasn’t won a beauty contest at Atlantic City and every bedpan will be eighteen carat gold and by God, every bedpan will have a Swiss music box attachment to play “Turkey in the Straw” or “The Sextet from Lucia,” take your choice. (148)

Odin sees his structure as a wonder to behold. It has “glittering walls” and is “Strong and lordly,” “holy,” and “glorious” (Wagner 19). Jack Burden claims that Willie wants the hospital as a symbol of power so that people will vote for him and “bless [his] name” (Warren 247). Similarly, Odin believes that Valhalla will provide “unending power” and “endless renown” to him and the other gods (Wagner 19). Willie expects that the hospital “will be there a long time after I’m dead and gone and you are dead and gone and all those sons-of-bitches are dead and gone” (Warren 247). Odin likewise considers Valhalla an “eternal work” (Wagner 19). That is not the way it works out in either *All the King’s Men* or Wagner’s great work.

A similarity that is, perhaps, more integral to our purposes lies in how both structures came to be built. Though Wagner’s account of Valhalla’s construction differs slightly from the surviving myths, all sources agree that Odin hired giants to build his fortress. Admittedly, Willie wants nothing to do with the politically corrupt Gummy Larson, who as had been pointed out already is a “fat boy” who can use his pull to keep other “fat boys” (namely MacMurfee) in line. However, in the end, Willie believes himself forced to deal with the “fat boys” and awards the contract to Larson.

Both Odin and Willie regret the deals they make and immediately consider breaking them. In fact Odin agrees to the bargain only after Loki, the trickster, guarantees that he will ensure that the giant fails to live up to his end of the bargain (Colum 7). In *The Rhinegold*, while Loki doesn’t promise to keep the giant from finishing the work, he does promise to find a way for Odin to break the bargain (Wagner 22). Similarly, after Willie has made his deal with Larson, he promises Jack that he will destroy Larson once the hospital is built: “I’ll rip him [...] I’ll rip all of ’em. All of ’em who put their dirty hands on it. They do the job and when it’s over I’ll rip

'em. Every one. I'll rip 'em and ruin 'em. By God, I will! Putting their dirty hands on it. For they made me, they made me do it" (Warren 386).

However, there is one very important difference between Willie's hospital and Odin's Valhalla. Valhalla is both the home of the gods and the abode of slain warriors, who represented the aristocracy of Nordic society (Crossley-Holland xvii). The hospital, though, is a place where "anybody, no matter he hasn't got a dime, can go" (Warren 247). Where Valhalla provides a glorious afterlife for the upper class, the Willie Stark Hospital allows the poor, lower class respite. Odin, then, unlike Willie, acts as patron of the aristocracy and upper class (the Old Money of Jack and Willie's era).

If the inhabitants of Odin's hall imply his patronage of Norse aristocracy, there is other evidence as well. Helene Guerber, for example, describes Odin as the "progenitor[] of royal races" (377). Kevin Crossley-Holland cites the Lay of Harbarth as evidence that "Odin championed the nobly born—kings, warriors, and poets" (xxvi). Indeed, the Lay claims outright that Odin "Gets [...] all earls slain by edge of swords" (24.3). Willie, on the other hand, protects the rednecks, the hicks, and the rural farmers, the domain of Thor in Norse mythology.

In his history of Viking culture, Gwyn Jones claims that irascible and boisterous Thor "was a god with whom the peasant [...] ranks could identify" (321). This is borne out in the mythology. If the Lay of Harbarth specifies Odin as the protector of nobility, it is equally clear on Thor's role. Where Odin receives the souls of slain nobility, Thor receives "the breed of thralls" (24.4). According to Helene A. Guerber, these thralls received treatment in Thor's hall equal to that of the warriors and nobles in Valhalla much as the poor will receive equal treatment in Willie's hospital (66). Lee Hollander, translator of the *Poetic Edda*, claims that Thor illustrates his protection of the yeoman farmer when he takes umbrage with the mysterious

Harbath for “disturbing the work of the farmers” by bringing war to their shores (80). So closely is Thor associated with farmers, that many scholars and folklorists claim that he may have begun as simply an extraordinarily large and strong farmer around whom tales were woven until this figure reached godhood (Tolkien 50). Even this supposed development of the Thor myth mirrors the story of Willie’s rise from humble farmer “who was just a human, country boy” to the most powerful man in the state (Warren 98).

Like Thor, Willie concerns himself with helping poor farmers. His political agenda revolves around helping the rednecks and hicks of his state. As a lawyer he often defends the lower class in “chicken-stealing cases and stray-hog cases and cutting scrapes” (Warren 103). Later he successfully represents “a gang of workmen [who] got hurt when some of the rig collapsed on a bridge the state was building [and] some independent leaseholders” who are being exploited by an oil company (103). As governor, he constructs roads between the rural communities and the towns so the farmers can successfully get their crops to market, he improves the school systems in the outlying parts of the state, and, of course, he begins building the free hospital.

Willie shares more with Thor, though, than his championship of poor farmers. “Of all the gods,” writes Guerber, “Thor was most feared by the Jötuns [giants], for he was continually waging war against the frost and mountain giants, who would fain have bound the earth forever in their rigid bands, thus preventing men from tilling the ground” (251). Like Thor, Willie is on a crusade against the giants of his time: the “fat boys” (Warren 77), the “fat heads” (88), and “the big boys who make a real lot of money” (134).

Thor’s hammer, Mjolnir, is particularly appropriate for seeking comparisons between Willie and the Nordic god. In nearly all myths of Thor’s struggles against the giants, he slays

them with his magic hammer. For instance, Jones claims that the giants “know [Thor’s] hammer well when it comes through the air, for it has cracked many a skull of their ancestors and kindred” (321). Just as Thor uses his hammer to destroy giants, Willie vows to “nail [Macmurfee] up if he don’t deliver” (Warren 102). “Hand me the hammer,” he yells, “and I’ll nail him” (102), and this becomes a slogan for his whole campaign:

You ask me what my program is. Here it is, you hicks. And don’t you forget it. Nail ’em up! Nail up Joe Harrison. Nail up anybody who stands in your way. You hand me the hammer and I’ll do it with my own hand. Nail ’em up on the barn door! (102-3)

If Willie so closely resembles Odin and Thor, it stands to reason that other characters in *All the King’s Men* have Nordic cognates as well. For example, Willie’s wife, Lucy, bears a startling resemblance to two Nordic goddesses: Freyja and Frigg. These two goddesses are often confused among ancient accounts that often blend the two figures into one (Crossley-Holland xxxi). In Germany, for example, the two goddesses were considered one and the same (Guerber 138). This confusion is easy to understand when one considers that Frigg was Odin’s wife, but Freyja was married to Od, about whom literally nothing is known, though he is often equated with Odin (Crossley-Holland xxx). Their resemblance to Lucy, however, goes beyond their marriages to an Odin figure.

For instance, Jack Burden describes Lucy as “birdlike” when he first meets her (Warren 67). Later, when she grows tired of Willie’s political and moral corruption, she moves to her sister’s chicken farm (166). This association of Lucy with birds underscores her relation to Freyja who owns a falcon-skin cloak that transforms her into a bird whenever she wears it (Crossley-Holland xxx).

Both goddesses protect home and hearth. Frigg was the Nordic personification of wives and mothers (Crossley-Holland xxxi). Similarly, Freyja’s hall, Folkvang, houses not only her



share of slain warriors, but all “pure maidens and faithful wives, that they might enjoy the company of their lovers and husbands after death” (Guerber 139). Lucy, too, seems devoted to marriage and family. She despises anything that could threaten her homelife. She doesn’t “favor drinking” (Warren 20). Though she must know that Willie is less than faithful, she does not divorce him. She merely moves out to the country with her sister (166). When she learns that her son Tom may have fathered a child, her only solution is for him to marry the girl (355).

In Wagner’s *Ring of the Nibelung*, Fricka, Wagner’s blend of Frigg and Freyja, shows disdain for Odin and his attempts to cheat fate by orchestrating the affairs of man (101-102). Lucy seems similarly contemptuous of Willie’s interference in others’ affairs for his own ends. When Jack explains that Tom’s affair has caused political problems for Willie and that he is looking for solutions to avoid a wedding, Lucy grows disgusted:

“Oh, God,” she breathed again, and rose abruptly from the chair, and pressed her clenched hands together in front of her bosom. “Oh, God, politics,” she whispered and took a distracted step or two away from me, and said again, “Politics.” Then she swung toward me, and said, out loud now, “Oh, God, in this, too.” (Warren 355)

According to many sources, Frigg “possessed the knowledge of the future” (Guerber 46). In the matter of her son, at least, Lucy would seem to have a similar ability. When a drunken Tom crashes his car into a highway culvert, Lucy berates Willie for allowing their son to run wild and prophecies that Willie “will ruin him” (Warren 244). Then she adds, “I would rather see him dead at my feet than what your vanity will make him” (244). Later, Tom does indeed become ruined when he sustains a spinal injury during a football game that leaves him paralysed from the neck down and unable to care for himself (406). When Lucy, who must care for Tom alone, finds him dead of pneumonia, the rest of her prophecy comes to pass (449).

Freyja appears in other representations in the novel as well. Despite her halls being the abode of virgins and faithful wives, Freyja personifies not wife and mother like Frigg, but lover

and mistress (Crossley-Holland xxxi). Clearly, then, the appropriately-named Sybil Frey, one of Tom Stark's mistresses and mother of his alleged child, represents this aspect of the goddess Freyja. According to Kevin Crossley-Holland, Freyja is often portrayed as "free with her favors," having slept with giants, humans, and even sold herself to four dwarves in exchange for a necklace (xxx). Sybil, likewise, is anything but chaste; after all, the biggest argument against Tom's paternity of her child is that he "had been just one of a platoon" of lovers (351).

Sadie Burke, Willie's fiery mistress and political advisor, also resembles the goddess of mistresses. Her connection to Freyja becomes clearer still when one remembers that since Freyja takes a share of the battlefield slain, she, like Odin, also represents war (Crossley-Holland xxx). Similarly, it is Sadie's keen political insight, which helps Willie fight the fat boys and get elected and which keeps him in office when his power is challenged. "[W]ho made that son-of-a-bitch what he is today?" she is fond of asking, "Who made him Governor? Who took him when he was the Sap of the Year and put him in big time? Who gave it to him, play by play so he couldn't lose?" Of course, her role in orchestrating Willie's murder also underscores Sadie's warlike nature and suggests a link to Freyja, Goddess of War.

As one should expect, given the other associations, the narrator Jack Burden resembles multiple characters from Norse mythology. For instance, according to Norse mythology, Odin keeps two pet ravens, Hugin ("Thought") and Munin ("Memory"), whose job it is to fly over the world every day and bring the All-father news of all that happens in the world of men (Guerber 19). At least two passages in the novel equate Jack with birds. Anne Stanton's pet name for Jack is "Jackie-Bird" (Warren 300), and as an adult, Jack talks Adam Stanton out of resigning from Willie's hospital by chattering "as gay[ly] and sprightly as bird song" (347).

Textual evidence suggests that Jack represents more than a generic bird; he is quite literally linked with ravens. *Jack* refers to the male of many types of birds, including the raven's cousin, the crow. There are further similarities to Odin's ravens specifically. As a student of history and thus a culture's collective memory, Jack represents Munin, but as an investigative reporter entrusted with discovering Truth, Jack must rely on critical thinking skills and thus represents Hugin. Additionally, Jack describes himself as "that newspaper fellow who is a sort of secretary to Willie" (Warren 265). However, Jack is far more than "sort of" a secretary.

While one may note that a secretary is a type predator bird, when Jack refers to himself as Willie's secretary, he is clearly using the word's more prevalent denotation as one who does routine office work. In its purest sense, though, a secretary does not merely answer phones, file records, and make appointments. A secretary literally keeps the secrets of another; he is a confidante. When the novel begins, Jack has "fill[ed] an awful lot of little black books [...] and put them in a safety deposit box when they [have gotten] full because they aren't something to leave around and because they would be worth their weight in gold to some parties" (Warren 23). Significantly, Jack's name, also implies that he is more than just a secretary for Willie. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, besides a male crow, *jack* may refer to either a manservant (a type of secretary) or a detective, whose job is the opposite of that of a secretary: instead of keeping secrets, he discovers them for others. This is certainly an appropriate name for Warren's narrator, whose job as Willie's secretary and personal detective is, like Odin's ravens, to discover all he can about Willie's associates and rivals and provide that information to Willie upon demand while helping Willie to protect his own secrets.

Filling as Jack does a position that in the 1930's is becoming more and more the purview of women suggests another connection to Norse mythology: Loki. Just as Jack fills a feminine

position in Willie's administration, Loki constantly appears as a female. He takes on the form of a mare in order to prevent the timely completion of Asgard by seducing the giant's workhorse (Guerber 242). In the guise of an old woman named Thok, Loki refuses to shed a tear for Balder, thereby ensuring the god's continued death (230). Disguised as a handmaiden, he accompanies Thor to the land of the giants to retrieve Thor's hammer (85).

Indeed, Loki often accompanies and assists Thor with most of his adventures (236). In much the same way, Jack, as Willie's secretary and friend, accompanies the governor almost everywhere and does whatever he can (including blackmail) to keep Willie out of trouble and to accomplish Willie's ends. In fact Jack most resembles Loki through the methods he employs to accomplish Willie's goals. According to Crossley-Holland, Loki represents the Norse version of a trickster god, and thus relies on cunning deceptions to achieve his ends rather than open and direct means (xxix). Similarly, Jack silences Willie's opposition most often through implied blackmail rather than through direct threats or bribery. When Adam Stanton, morally upstanding brain surgeon and Jack's childhood friend, threatens to resign as the director of Willie's hospital after being offered a bribe, Jack's cunning shines as he convinces his childhood friend to stay.

When Jack learns that Adam has written a letter of resignation after Hubert Coffee attempted to bribe him into recommending Gummy Larson for the hospital construction contract, his first idea is to have Coffee arrested for attempting to bribe a government official. However, this fairly straightforward approach has the unfortunate problem of requiring Adam's sister to testify, which will almost certainly result in the revelation of her affair with Willie of which Adam is ignorant. Instead, Jack concocts an elaborate scheme to convince Adam to help frame Coffee in a second bribe:

First, [Jack explains] I had to enlist Adam on the side of righteousness by getting him to agree to swear out a warrant for Coffee. [...] Then I had to lead him to the

discovery, which had to be all his own, that this would involve Anne as a witness. Then I had to play the half-wit and imply that this had never occurred to me before. The danger was, with a fellow like Adam, that he would get so set on seeing justice done that he would let Anne testify, hell and high water. He almost did that, but I painted a gory picture of the courtroom scene (but not as gory by half as it would have been in truth), refused to be party to the business, hinted that he was an unnatural brother, and wound up with a vague notion of another way to get Coffee for a similar attempt in another quarter—a vague notion of laying myself open for Coffee to approach me. I could put out a feeler for him and all that. So Adam dropped the idea of the charge, but retained the implied idea that he and the Boss had teamed up to keep things clean for the hospital. (347)

Finally, just to make sure Adam doesn't change his mind, Jack takes the letter of resignation and tears it in half with an offhand remark.

While Jack's cunning is clearly his greatest similarity with Loki, one aspect of Loki's character prohibits full identification with Jack. According to Helen Guerber "Loki was the embodiment of evil in the minds of the Northern races" (237). Jack Burden is many things: chief among them a cynical, self-serving ass, but few if any would describe him as "evil." Loki eventually turns his back on the gods and betrays them, bringing about their twilight and the end of the world. Jack Burden, on the other hand, remains loyal to Willie throughout the novel. As we shall see, though, there is someone close to Willie who better fits this description of Loki.

If Warren based many of his characters on figures from Norse mythology, did he have some special objective in mind for his story? Indeed, much of the novel works as a retelling of the Norse Apocalypse myth, Ragnarok. At least two incidents reveal that Warren is working specifically with the Ragnarok myth. After Willie wins the Democratic primary in 1930, Jack describes the political scene in Apocalyptic terms:

But it wasn't a primary. It was hell among the yearlings and the Charge of the Light Brigade and Saturday night in the back room of Casey's saloon rolled into one, and when the smoke cleared away not a picture still hung on the walls. And there wasn't any Democratic party. There was just Willie, with his hair in his eyes and his shirt sticking to his stomach with sweat. And he had a meat ax in his hand and was screaming for blood. (Warren 103)

Reading *All the King's Men* closely with a mind towards Norse myth, one recalls that Erda, the Seeress of the first poem in the Poetic Edda, says that Ragnarok will be an “axe-age” and a “wolf-age, ere the world crumbles” (Voluspa 44.4-5). The second reference to Ragnarok in *All the King's Men* occurs when Hugh Miller, Willie's uncorrupted Attorney General, resigns from the administration, and Willie makes a subtle reference to the second part of Erda's prophecy by telling him “You're leaving me alone [...] with the sons-of-bitches. Mine and the other fellow's” (Warren 147). For Willie then, the axe-age and the wolf-age have come.

There were two versions of the Ragnarok myth readily available to Warren when he wrote *All the King's Men*: the “traditional” version as retold by 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century writers Snorri Sturluson and Saxo Grammaticus and Richard Wagner's Germanic version as portrayed in his operatic tetralogy, *The Ring of the Nibelung*. Not surprisingly, Warren draws from both.

According to tradition, the death of Balder, Odin's son and the god of summer, presages Ragnarok (MacKenzie xxix). Similarly, the end of Willie's reign as governor begins with his son's actions:

So the summer went on, [Jack writes] and we all lived in it. It was a way to live, and when you have lived one way for a while you forget that there was ever any other way and that there may be another way again. Even when the change came, it didn't at first seem like a change but like more of the same, an extension and repetition.

It came through Tom Stark. (Warren 349)

There are some very important similarities between Balder and Tom. In addition to being favored sons of powerful fathers, both are well-loved by the masses. “Balder,” writes Edith Hamilton, “was the most beloved of the gods, on earth as in heaven” (309). Indeed, when Balder dies, every being in the world—plant, animal, man, and god—weeps for his return with the single exception of Loki (Crossley-Holland 160-161). Just as Balder is the fairest of the gods, Tom is “the damnedest, hottest thing there was [...] Oh he was the hero, all right, and he wasn't

blundering or groping” (Warren 388). Balder is both hero and god, and Tom Stark is similarly worshipped because of his heroic prowess on the football field. Every Saturday, at every game, “the stands cheered, Yea, Tom, Tom, Tom, for he was their darling” (Warren 391).

These similarities notwithstanding, Tom Stark actually becomes a reverse image of Balder. According to Snorri Sturluson, Balder is the best of the gods and only good can be spoken of him; he is the wisest god, the most merciful, and the “sweetest-spoken” (qtd in Crossley-Holland xxviii). He never fights but prefers conciliation and peace (Guerber 232). In short, Balder is, according to Helene Guerber, “the pure and radiant god of innocence and light” (214). Tom, on the other hand, is anything but innocent. He is a cocky, hard-drinking womanizer. As Jack explains, by the time Lucy moves in with her sister, Tom has “discovered that something besides pasteurized milk came in bottles and that approximately half the human race belonged to a sex interestingly different from his own” (Warren 166). He drives drunk and permanently disfigures a female passenger when he wrecks his car (243). Later, he and his teammates get in a bar fight with some locals, injuring one teammate so badly that he must stay out of football for several weeks (389), and with “a platoon” of others, he participates in communal sex with a co-ed, and possibly fathers her child (351).

However, the manner in which the two sons—Balder and Tom—bring about their fathers’ downfall is similar. Balder’s death begins a chain of events which lead directly to Ragnarok (Jones 318), the “twilight” of the gods. It is not death, but new life, in the form of the child Tom may or may not have fathered on Sybil Frey, that begins Willie’s demise. Since all other avenues for keeping Tom’s reputation intact short of a shotgun marriage are exhausted (or at least those options The Boss is willing to consider), his father has no choice but to compromise his principles and give the hospital building contract to Gummy Larson (Warren

380-381), one of the “fat boys,” which brings us once again to the hospital as Willie’s Valhalla and parallels to the second version of the Ragnarok story.

In Richard Wagner’s late 19<sup>th</sup> century operatic retelling of the Ragnarok myth, Balder never appears. Wagner retells the myth of Valhalla’s construction, in which two giants, the brothers Fasolt and Fafner, build the hall. The contract is the same as in the traditional myth: the giants agree to build the hall within a prescribed time in exchange for Freia’s hand (20). However, in Wagner’s version of the myth, the giants finish the hall, and Odin must find some way to cheat them of their reward without explicitly renegeing on their deal, which was sworn upon Odin’s staff and is, therefore, unbreakable without dire consequences. Odin accomplishes this by stealing the cursed gold ring from the evil dwarf Alberich the Nibelung (who in turn had stolen the gold from which the ring was made from the care of Odin’s Rhinemaidens) and giving it to the giants in lieu of Freia. This act, which repeats the theme of gold over love, spells the doom for the gods in the shape of Alberich’s revenge, for “if once the ring \ returns to the Niblung \ He conquers Walhall for ever” (108).

If the hospital represents Willie’s Valhalla, then it is interesting to note that, just as Odin’s breaking of his oath with the giants begins the downfall of the gods, Willie’s breaking of the deal with Gummy Larson (one of the “fat boys”) leads directly to Willie’s murder, for it provides Tiny Duffy with a strong enough motive to betray him. Duffy, himself, plays many roles in Warren’s Ragnarok. As one of the original “fat boys” (literally and figuratively) who torment Willie politically, Duffy represents one of the giants who continually fight with the Aesir for the domination of Midgard. Indeed, when Duffy tumbles off the stage during Willie’s first successful political speech, Jack Burden tellingly refers to him as a “five-acre tract of sweating humanity” (Warren 99). However, just as Willie represents more than one version of



the Nordic gods, Duffy represents other Nordic antagonists as well. As “Tiny” and common by background, he resembles the dwarf Albericht. Also, just as Albericht sacrifices love for power, so, too, does Duffy sacrifice loyalty, first to Joe Harrison then to Willie, in order to remain near the politically powerful.

After Willie’s death when Jack confronts Duffy about his part in Willie’s murder, he compares Duffy to a poodle he heard about:

There was a drunk had a poodle [Jack explains] and he took him everywhere with him from bar to bar. And you know why? Was it devotion? It was not devotion. He took that poodle everywhere just so he could spit on him and not get the floor dirty. Well, you were the Boss’s poodle. (439)

The image of a dog at the feet of an alcoholic, brings to mind Odin’s wolves, Geri and Freki (“ravenous” and “greedy”) (Mercante 355), whose attributes could just as easily refer to Tiny Duffy’s character.

Duffy also represents another, more important, wolf in Norse mythology: Fenrir, the giant wolf born of the trickster god Loki and the giantess Angurboda (Mercante 74). During Ragnarok, Fenrir is one of the gods’ major antagonists. The gods raised Fenrir in Asgard from a cub, hoping that he would thus grow tame (Guerber 97); however, as the wolf increased in strength and girth, the gods likewise grew wary of him and bound him with a magic rope (98). Fenrir never forgets this betrayal and waits bound and fettered for Ragnarok and his revenge (Crossley-Holland 37).

Similarly, Duffy, hired as Stark’s lieutenant governor, endures disgrace and abuse from the Boss until he can take no more and rebels. Jack understands this when, after comparing Duffy to the spit-upon poodle, he adds, “And you liked it. You liked to be spit on [...] That’s what I thought. But I was wrong, Tiny. Somewhere down in you there was something made you human. You resented being spit on. Even for money” (Warren 439).

During Ragnarok, it is Fenrir who kills Odin, as foretold by Erda, one of the three Norns who sees the fates of all: “the wolf will seize Allfather between his jaws and swallow him. That will be the death of Odin” (Crossley-Holland 175). Similarly, Duffy is most responsible for Willie’s murder, even though Sadie Burke gave him the idea, and Adam Stanton pulled the trigger,

Tiny Duffy [...] had killed Willie Stark as surely as though his own hand had held the revolver. [...] Sadie Burke had put the weapon into Duffy’s hand and had aimed it for him [...] But what she had done had been done hot. What Duffy had done had been done cold. (Warren 436)

An obvious difference between Fenrir and Duffy arises here. Fenrir directly kills. Duffy acts indirectly, tricking Adam Stanton into shooting the Boss in the Capitol building, but even this chain of events finds its parallel in Norse mythology and reveals yet another role Duffy plays in Warren’s retelling of Ragnarok.

Like Duffy, Loki, the trickster god and foster brother of Odin (Mercante 550), finds himself ridiculed and abused by the gods. For example, when Brokk the dwarf smith sews Loki’s mouth shut, Loki runs away from the gods in pain; as he yelps from the pain of ripping the stitches out of his mouth, Loki seethes at the sounds of the gods laughing at his predicament (Crossley-Holland 53). Understandably, Loki, like Duffy, grows to resent the ridicule and abuse he suffers from the gods. After he unstitches his lips and as he listens to the sounds of mirth at his painful expense, Loki “dream[s] of revenge, and slowly his lips curl[] into a twisted smile” (53). Similarly, in Wagner’s Ring Cycle, after Wotan (Odin) sneers at Loki’s desire to keep his promise to return the ring to the Rhinemaidens and strides into Valhalla, Loki

Feel[s] a temptation

To turn and destroy them;

change to flickering fire,

and burn those great ones

who thought [he] was tamed (Wagner 71)

And like Duffy, Loki eventually gives in to this temptation, and the manner of his revenge closely mirrors Duffy's.

Though Loki resents all the gods, Balder catches most of his ire. Edith Hamilton simply claims that Loki "always hated the good and was jealous of Balder" (310). Helene Guerber is more specific; according to her, Loki "was jealous of Balder [...] who so entirely eclipsed him and who was generally beloved, while he was feared as much as possible" (221). Loki is at heart a coward, like Tiny, and when Loki decides to kill the object of his hatred, he manipulates another into striking the fatal blow.

When Frigg learns that Balder's fate is to be killed, she takes oaths from every plant, animal, and mineral not to harm her son. She neglects, however, to take an oath from the mistletoe because it was "so small and weak" (Colum 136). When Loki learns of this oversight, he goes to Balder's blind brother Hoder, who stands to the side as the other gods throw spears and rocks at Balder, watching them glance off him without a scratch. When Hoder admits that he has nothing to throw at his brother and no sight with which to aim, Loki gives him a sprig of mistletoe and offers to guide his hand (137). Hoder tosses the mistletoe dart into Balder's chest, and his brother falls dead.

Tiny Duffy's orchestration of Willie's murder almost exactly mirrors Loki's murder of Balder. When Willie breaks the hospital deal with Gummy Larson (after months of Duffy's begging and cajoling the Boss to make the deal), he adds insult to injury by forcing Duffy to tell Larson himself:

"You tell Larson," he said. "Larson is your pal, and you tell him." He punched Tiny's front with a stiff forefinger. "Yeah," he said, "he is your pal, and when you tell him you can put your hand on his shoulder." Then the Boss grinned. I had not

expected a grin. But it was a wintry and uncomfortable grin. It put the seal on everything that had been said. (Warren 410-411)

This proves to be the last straw for Duffy. Rather than lose Larson's bribe money and suffer more indignity from the Boss, he decides Willie must die. However, like Loki, Duffy lacks the courage to do the deed himself. Instead, just as Loki tricks Hoder into killing Balder, he goads Adam Stanton, Tom's surgeon and the brother of Willie's mistress Anne, by telling him about Willie's affair and claiming that despite this Willie wants to fire Adam from the hospital for crippling Tom (414). In a fit of rage, Adam tracks Willie to the Captiol building and guns him down in the hall (420).

Warren's Ragnarok is in full swing, then. According to Norse myth, Odin will be killed by Fenrir the Wolf, Thor by the Midgard serpent. We have already discussed Willie's resemblance to both Odin and Thor and Duffy's relationship to Fenrir the Wolf. However, given Willie's role as Thor, it doesn't stretch credibility to see in Duffy, the snake in the grass, a representation of the Midgard serpent as well. Odin and Thor, though, will not be the only gods destroyed during Ragnarok. Almost all the gods will perish, and again we see a parallel in Warren's novel.

By the end of the novel, nearly all the major characters have perished or been nullified. After gunning Willie down, Adam Stanton is in turn shot to death by Willie's body guard, Sugar Boy (421). Judge Irwin, Jack's childhood father-figure and hero, commits suicide shortly before Willie's death (370). A few months later, Tom Stark, the Boss's son and college football hero, dies of pneumonia (449). Though she doesn't die, Sadie Burke checks herself into a sanitarium and later leaves the state (440). Sugar Boy finds himself unemployed after refusing to work for Duffy's administration (441). Even Duffy, who inherits the balance of Willie's term, is politically dead: he will never be re-elected or even nominated for a second term (441).

One of the defining features of Norse mythology is its cyclic nature (Crossley-Holland 234). Ragnarok is more than merely the destruction of the world; it is a new beginning. A very few gods, including the returned Balder and Hoder, survive the last battle, rebuild Asgard, take the names of their parents, and begin again to order the cosmos (MacKenzie 184). Ragnarok, thus, ends on a hopeful note. This, too, is mirrored in Warren's novel as evidenced by the epigraph from Dante's *Divine Comedy*: "As long as hope still has its bit of green" (Purgatorio, III.135) which directly refers to the ever presence of hope.

The ending of the novel also has its hopeful bit of green. Just as the younger generations of Norse gods take on the names and roles of the older gods, Willie's grandson, the alleged child of Tom Stark and Sybil Frey, carries his grandfather's name (451). More importantly, Lucy Stark, who acts more like Willie's mother than his wife (89), is now literally Willie Stark II's mother and raises him in the same circumstances as Willie was himself raised, as one of the rural poor. Willie the Younger, then, like the younger gods of Ragnarok, seems poised to take over the role Willie left behind.

The gods are not the only beings to survive Ragnarok, however: mankind comes through the conflagration as well. During the final battle between the gods and giants, all of mankind is destroyed except for two people: a man, Lif, and a woman, Lifthrasir, who flee to Mimir's wood and take refuge from the raging fires destroying the world in Yggdrasil the World Tree that nourished and protected the world through its creation and now survives its destruction (Guerber 367). After the fire dies and peace is restored, the two emerge unscathed from the charred Yggdrasil and rebuild human civilization (Colum 199).

Only two of the major characters truly survive in Warren's novel relatively intact. After Willie's assassination and during the ensuing fallout, both Anne Stanton and Jack Burden take

refuge in Burden's Landing, where they both grew up and to which they return throughout the novel for refuge from the world outside. When the dust has settled, Jack, now married to Anne, emerges from the sheltering woods of Burden's Landing to begin anew: He finishes his doctoral dissertation on Cass Mastern and re-enters politics as an advisor for Hugh Miller, Willie's uncorrupted Attorney General, who plans on running for governor (Warren 462).

Warren's adaptation of Nordic myth, then, serves to underscore the lessons Jack learns through the experience of his own Ragnarok. One cannot hide from the world by pretending that what one doesn't see likewise doesn't exist (Jack's Brass-Bound Idealism), nor can one simply pretend that no act is truly voluntary and therefore all acts are blameless (The Great Twitch). The only way to live in the world is to understand that all things are part of what Jack terms the Web of Being, that one's actions affect everyone.

Norse mythology, with its emphasis on personal honor, mirrors this idea. Because our fates are intertwined and dependent on the actions of others, be they gods, heroes, or common man, we cannot simply run away or refuse our roles. We can do nothing but act honorably in the face of difficulty. The aftermath of Ragnarok shows this, god and man working to rebuild what was lost and make it better. Just as Lif and Lifthrasir re-enter the world and start over in order to rebuild, Jack and Anne re-enter "the convulsion of the world, out of history into history and the awful responsibility of Time" (Warren 464).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### When the Bough Breaks: *The Golden Bough*, *World Enough and Time*

*World Enough and Time* tells the story of Jeremiah Beaumont, a poor law student from the wilds of Western Kentucky, who in the 1820's murders his estranged mentor and political rival Cassius Fort after receiving a scandalous broadside accusing his wife of having an affair with a slave. Escaping the gallows, Beaumont and his wife, Rachel, flee to the wilderness where Rachel descends into madness as Jeremiah descends into depravity.

Like *All the King's Men*, *World Enough and Time*, Warren's fourth novel, takes an historical incident and recasts it as a novel. However, though Willie Stark's career in *All the King's Men* closely mirrors that of Huey Long, Warren claims that he based Stark's character more so on other despots such as Julius Caesar and Coriolanus (Kennedy 88). *World Enough and Time* is based on Jereboam Beauchamp's nineteenth-century murder of Kentucky Attorney General Solomon Sharp, and to anyone familiar with the Beauchamp-Sharp Tragedy and Beauchamp's confession, it seems clear that Warren's retelling varies little from the source material until Warren allows his protagonist, Jeremiah Beaumont, to escape his cell and flee into the wilderness (Justus 500). By following the historical record so closely, Warren, one might think, leaves little room for mythology, and indeed at first glance, there appears to be none.

However, it is in the places where Warren diverges from the historical document that his references to mythology appear. For instance, Beauchamp's confession devotes only five paragraphs to his pursuit of Ann Cook's hand, but Warren devotes much of an entire chapter to Jeremiah Beaumont and Rachel Jordan's awkward courtship. During this time, Beaumont refuses to honor Rachel's wish for privacy and tries to manipulate her into telling him about her betrayal by Cassius Fort, an influential political figure and Jeremiah's mentor. When she shows the first

signs of crumbling resolve, Beaumont, in his journal, expresses regret for his own refusal to admit his desire for her until she confides in him about Fort: “for I could not say to her that I would conquer her country only to love in the end its queen more dearly, as Theseus took the Amazon Hippolyta” (Warren 108). Here Warren uses this comparison to the Greek hero’s abduction of and subsequent marriage to the Amazonian queen to illustrate Beaumont’s habit of couching every aspect of his life in grandiose and epic terms, a flaw that leads directly to his own misfortune.

Another clear reference to Greco-Roman mythology occurs when the narrator discusses Jeremiah’s ability to take on Rachel’s cause as if he were born to it and paraphrases *Hamlet*: “At the time the young woman was not even known to the younger man. Hecuba had been nothing to him and he nothing to Hecuba” (Warren 118). Here the narrator implies that, in much the same manner in which actors, when performing *The Trojan Women* can take pity on Hecuba without ever having known her, Jeremiah embraces outrage on Rachel’s behalf even though her betrayal occurred well before he ever met her. The narrator’s reference here to the fall of Troy, Euripedes’ tragedy, and Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* all serve to illustrate Jeremiah’s habit of exaggerating every situation to the level of myth in order to give him a more elevated sense of purpose.

Much later, when Jeremiah’s lawyer claims that whoever killed Fort unarmed in the dark had committed “a coward’s deed,” Jeremiah, who unknown to his lawyer is the murderer, again draws on Greek mythology to describe the effect these words have on him: he feels like “Icarus and the waxed wings melted in the sun’s heat and he falling through the horrible emptiness of air” (293-294).



Just as Warren's use of Valhalla, the Nordic Nymphs, and the All-father in *All the King's Men* implies other more subtle references to Norse mythology, so too do these blatant references to Greco-Roman mythology imply a more subtle use of mythology elsewhere in *World Enough and Time*. For example, when Jeremiah and his guards spend the night in a cabin on the road to Frankfort, another scene not mentioned in Beauchamp's historical confession, their host whispers to Jeremiah that if Jeremiah gives the word, he and some friends will ambush Jeremiah's captors "Afore Morfee's Station" and help Jeremiah escape (257). The name Morfee's Station reminds readers familiar with Warren's Mr. Morphee in *Night Rider's*, the member of the Association's board of directors whose resignation allows Percy Munn to join (32). In *The Taciturn Text*, Randolph Runyon claims that Mr. Morphee represents Morpheus, the Greco-Roman god of dreams (18). Since there is no Morfee's Station, Kentucky, we can assume that this, too, is a reference to the dream god.

Morpheus appears earlier in the text as well in yet another diversion from the historical record. In his *Confession*, Beauchamp mentions in passing that in order to relieve his family of the financial burden of his education, he "quit [his] course of learning [and] turned [his] attention for a time to making a little money by keeping a store" (4). Warren's Beaumont also turns to shop keeping as a means of income. However, Warren's scene is explored in much greater detail. Beaumont refers to the store as a "dusky cave" and Mr. Harrod, the store owner, as a "drowsy god of the cave waiting for his worshippers" (40). The wording here seems curious. Other than his position of authority over Jeremiah, Mr. Harrod seems to bear little similarity to a god, sleepy or otherwise. Yet Warren puts these words in Jeremiah's journal for a reason.

In *The Taciturn Text*, Randolph Runyon explains how Jeremiah's prophetic dream the night he learns that Fort has returned to Kentucky serves as the central metaphor for Warren's

theme throughout the novel (112-113). If we accept this, then Jeremiah's curious description of his boss as a drowsy god makes more sense. In Greco-Roman mythology Morpheus lives in a literal dusky cave and could almost certainly be described as "drowsy." In Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, Morpheus' cave exists in the perpetual "Half-light of evening's gloom" around which the land breathes "dark mists" (262). And Morpheus, himself, spends all his spare time sleeping unless his father Somnus, the god of sleep, wakes him to perform some service (263).

There are other references to Morpheus in this scene. Mr. Harrod wears a "bottle-green pigeon-tailed coat" and a "two-story beaver" hat and asks his patrons to spend "a couple of coon skins" in his establishment (40). According to Ted Andrews' discussion of the symbolic meaning of colors, green can symbolize miserliness, greed, or good fortune (50). It makes sense, therefore, for a merchant to wear this color. It also seems perfectly reasonable for a successful business man to wear a beaver-skin hat and ask his patrons to spend money. However, green is also a water symbol, as are both the beaver and the raccoon (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 451, Andrews 253, 305), and water is often used to represent dreams (Andrews 253). The beaver, in particular, represents building dreams as well as standing as a general water symbol (253). Like *Night Rider's* Mr. Morphee, who presages Percy Munn's dream, Mr. Harrod, Jeremiah's drowsy god of the dusky cave, represents Morpheus and foreshadows Jeremiah Beaumont's prophetic dream in *World Enough and Time*.

There are other references to Greco-Roman myth throughout the novel. Both Cassius Fort, Jeremiah's mentor and rival, and Wilkie Barron, Jeremiah's best friend, represent Janus, the two-faced god of portals. Fort, for instance, has two "public" faces: the face he uses "when he [makes] a speech to the market-day crowd at a settlement or to the half-drunk boys at a barbeque" and the face he uses "in front of the big folks who owned the land and the mortgages

and the bank notes” (41). Similarly, Jeremiah wonders which of the two Wilkie Barrons is the “real” Wilkie: “the Wilkie Barron who took his fun with Silly Sal [a local prostitute], who loved the quick and salty joke, and who bounced his old mother on his knee like a trollop” or the Wilkie Barron of “passion and conviction” enraged at the betrayal and dishonor of a young woman by Colonel Fort, the man who professed to help her (55).

According to Roman myth, Janus had two faces: one young and one old, one facing forward and one facing behind (Evans 145-146). His idol was placed over doorways as a guardian of both entrances and exits (Tripp 328). The linking then of Janus with both Colonel Fort and Wilkie Barron seems particularly appropriate since both men are responsible for opening doors for Jeremiah. Colonel Fort takes Jeremiah under his wing and trains him in the law, thus providing Jeremiah a literal passage from a life spent in rural Kentucky as, perhaps, a teacher’s assistant, to a brighter future practicing law in Frankfort. Wilkie, too, opens doors for Jeremiah. He introduces him to the inner circle of the New Court party after Colonel Fort resigns in favor of the Old Court, and thus begins Jeremiah’s political career by encouraging him to run for local office. However, besides providing Jeremiah with a course to a brighter future, both men also open doors to destruction and ruin for Jeremiah as well. Colonel Fort’s betrayal of Rachel Jordan and later resignation from the New Court movement and Wilkie’s manipulations of Jeremiah stoke Jeremiah’s resentment and desire for justice and pave the way for Jeremiah’s death at the hands of a bounty hunter.

Throughout the novel, Jeremiah returns to pondering the “real” Wilkie and Fort. This would imply that there is more to the Janus symbolism than simple references to the opportunities that Wilkie and Fort provide for Jeremiah. Sir James Frazer posits quite a different interpretation of Janus’ role than as “nothing but the god of doors” (192). He claims that Janus,

Dianus, Jupiter, and Zeus were all originally one and the same (191). For Frazer, then, Janus represents a sky god, and therefore the primary god, the Allfather if you will, of his pantheon. This identification of Wilkie and especially Fort with the supreme father-figure of Greco-Roman mythology seems far more significant than a connection with the guardian of entrances. Jeremiah idolizes Colonel Fort to the point of near worship, for instance. Indeed, when Jeremiah learns of Fort's betrayal of Rachel, though he claims he is incensed on behalf of Rachel, he acts as if Fort had betrayed him instead. His disappointment in Fort truly resembles a religious loss of faith. Similarly, when he turns away from Fort, Jeremiah begins to follow Wilkie's lead in much the same way, though his admiration for Wilkie never reaches the near-religious level of his idolization of Fort.

Another example of Warren's subtle incorporation of Greco-Roman mythology lies in his use of grape symbolism. Grape vines appear only twice in *World Enough and Time*, again in scenes that do not appear in the historical record. They first appear when young Jeremiah attends Corinthian McClardy's tent revival "to be sure of his salvation" (29). In the narrator's description of the scene, we learn that "Fox-grapes hung in great loops and festoons from the trees behind the rough platform for the preacher" (29). According to Frazer, "the vine with its clusters was the most characteristic manifestation of Dionysus" (449). As if to make this imagery clearer, the narrator of *World Enough and Time* later refers to Corinthian McClardy waving his arms "against the background of the flaming leaves, under the *pagan* festoons of grapes" (30 emphasis added). The trees from which the grape vines hang also serve as Dionysian symbols since Frazer further claims that Dionysus "was also a god of trees in general" (449). Indeed that the vines are literally in the trees and hanging from the branches still further supports the

Dionysian qualities of the scene when we take into account Frazer's claim that Boeotians referred to the god as "Dionysus in the tree" (449).

Nine years after publishing *World Enough and Time*, Warren published a children's collection of classical myths: *The Gods of Mount Olympus*. This work gives a simplified description of the Dionysian rituals:

In his travels Dionysus was accompanied by worshippers called maenads, women mad and exultant with wine. They did not worship their god in a temple, but rushed into the wild country, uttering delirious cries and waving their rods tipped with pine cones. They seized whatever animals they encountered and, in their frenzy, tore them apart [...] People were shocked by the shouting, the wild songs, and the violent behavior of the maenads. However, they did not forget that Dionysus was also a god of fertility and new life. (40-41)

This is about as far as Warren can go with Dionysian rites in a children's book. However, both James Frazer in *The Golden Bough* and Martin Nilsson in *Greek Folk Religion* discuss exactly how people were reminded of Dionysus' role of fertility god. In a sacred ritual, Dionysus was married to "the wife of the highest sacral official of Athens, the king archon" (Nilsson 34). Frazer posits that this marriage between god and queen may have been enacted with a human representative of the god and that the consummation was enacted at the wedding ceremony (164). This sacred wedding and consummation presaged frenzied orgiastic rites among the worshippers which often culminated in the ritual killing of animals and men (Mercante 290-291).

The grape imagery of McClardy's Meadow, then, is appropriate, for the revival that follows seems more like a Dionysian orgy than a Christian altar call. Like Dionysus' maenads, McClardy's congregation goes into a "frenzy," moving in "shakes and jerks" (30). According to Jeremiah's journal, "many [of the congregation] were taken by the various exercises, many shouted and fell down, many embraced and kissed, and some ran howling" into the woods, tearing their clothes and fornicating (30).

The second appearance of grapes in the novel occurs closer to the end, after Jeremiah and Rachel's escape into the wilderness. As they make their way through the woods, the narrator, in a deliberate echo of his earlier description of McClardy's Meadow, catalogs the trees and other plants they would have passed: "In the glades," he informs the reader, "the vine of the wild grape would loop and festoon the trees, even to the upper branches" (417). It is important to note that just before this description, the narrator remarks on how Jeremiah imagines his flight into the wilderness as a chance to be "born again" and find peace "as when he had gone to the meeting when he was a boy, and Corinthian McClardy [...] had loomed above the people and shouted how God was a bear treading the earth and breaking the thicket" (416). Indeed, just as Corinthian McClardy stands as a surrogate for Dionysus in the earlier scene, this scene has its Dionysus in the character of Gran Boz, the lecherous and drunken leader of the wilderness community to which Jeremiah retreats. Besides the obvious connection between Gran Boz's vices and Dionysus, Gran Boz is closely associated with the color red, which is sacred to Dionysus (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 794). He wears a "scarlet" coat (426), his eyes are "Streaked with red" (427), Rachel is made to wear a red ribbon in her hair (424), and the women around him wear red shawls (426). As before, the grape and Dionysus references are shortly followed by a scene of bacchanalian debauchery; this time, however, the occasion is not a spiritual revival, but a corn husking, and it is this corn husking scene towards the end of the novel which serves as the most intriguing reference to mythology in *World Enough and Time*.

On the evening of the husking, Jeremiah and his companions "gorge" themselves on roasted venison and drink "much" before returning to the fields to continue the work "by light of bonfires" (445). The night wears on, bringing with it "more drink and dancing to fiddles" (445). This very quickly leads to "vile merrymaking" as Jeremiah slakes his lust with one of his

neighbors near another copulating couple whose breathless pants merely add “relish [...] and profane delight” to Jeremiah’s own act (445). This Dionysian orgy comes complete with human sacrifice as a young man lay mortally wounded from a knife fight while his “life [bleeds] out” on a heap of old corn shucks mere inches from Jeremiah, his neighbor, and the other couple (445).

Reading this corn husking scene as a Dionysian fertility rite gains further credibility when one takes into account that, according to Frazer, “Dionysus was conceived as a diety of agriculture and the corn” (450). Even the bonfires that light the corn fields so that Jeremiah and his companions may work through the night have their cognates in ancient Dionysian rites: “We are told,” Frazer continues, “that in the land of Bisaltae, a Thracian tribe, there was a great and fair sanctuary of Dionysus where at his festival a bright light shone forth at night as a token of an abundant harvest vouchsafed by the deity” (450). It is Frazer’s contention, though, that this ritual is not particular to just the ancient Romans, but to all Aryan cultures. He spends much of *The Golden Bough* discussing similar rituals as they appear throughout Europe, Asia, and the Americas. Warren, too, intersperses his narrative with references to the mythologies and folklore of many cultures besides the Greco-Roman.

As in *All the King’s Men*, for example, there are many oblique references to Nordic mythology in *World Enough and Time*. Wilkie Barron, Jeremiah’s best friend and a supporter of the New Court, refers to John Rowan, the founder of the Relief movement and champion of the New Court cause, as “the giant-killer” and to Rowan’s adversary, John “The Duke” Wickliffe, as “the giant we will slay” (175). Admittedly, this phrase could as easily refer to the biblical story of David and Goliath. However, after reading Warren’s previous novel with an eye to Norse mythology, one notes the similarity between John Rowan, the slayer of Old Court giants, and

Willie Stark, who wishes to murder the political big boys, and thus see Wilkie's words as a reference to the Norse god Thor the giant-slayer.

Odin, too, appears in *World Enough and Time*. One-Eyed Jenkins, the cut-throat who helps Jeremiah and Rachel escape and who ultimately murders Jeremiah, suggests the one-eyed Odin. Indeed, just as Odin manages to break his oath to the giants building Asgard without, at first, seeming to suffer for it, Jenkins betrays Jeremiah's trust without immediate consequence.

Earlier, Odin in his guise of knowledge seeker appears in the form of Dr. Burnham, Jeremiah's teacher. It seems appropriate that a teacher would represent Odin the Nordic god of wisdom and poetry in Warren's novel, but Dr. Burnham has more in common with the Nordic sky god than merely his profession. In his academy, Dr. Burnham appears as an ageless god. He speaks "familiarily of the famous Romans, as though he called them by name in their boyhood" (13). Like Odin on his throne in Valhalla, Dr. Burnham sits in judgment of his charges on a "special chair" and uses "a five-foot ash rod" to keep his students in line (13). That the rod is ash is of particular importance. The ash tree was sacred to Odin since he impaled himself upon it to gain wisdom (Graves 57). It is from underneath this same ash tree that the three norns who weave man's fate dispense justice (168). Similarly, Dr. Burnham uses his ash rod to dispense judgment upon his students' performances.

The ash rod as a tool of knowledge also opens several other mythological references in Warren's work. For instance, according to one Greco-Roman myth, Zeus created men from ash spears (Mercante 108). The ash was also a symbol of secret knowledge for the Celts since druid priests used ash rods for divination (Graves 168, 198). Also according to different interpretations of the Ogham, the Celtic tree alphabet, the ash represents either the fourth, fifth, or sixth letter (Graves 202, 204). In fact, three of Ireland's Five Magic Trees (the Trees of Tortu, Dathi, and



Usnech) were ash trees (Graves 168). Finally, many Native American cultures also believe the ash represents higher wisdom (Andrews 48).

While Warren's first three novels seem to focus on one culture's mythology primarily, *World Enough and Time* uses equally various mythologies without seeming to settle on one predominant culture. By employing myths from the Norse, Greco-Roman, Celtic, and aboriginal cultures (the primary cultures Frazer discusses), he seems to suggest a comparison with James Frazer's seminal work on magic and religion: *The Golden Bough*.

*The Golden Bough* ostensibly seeks to examine the roots behind an obscure religious rite in ancient Nemi, a town about eighteen miles southeast of Rome which was the site of a grove of trees sacred to Diana Nemorensis (Diana of the Wood). According to Frazer, in this sacred grove a lone figure "prowled" day and night around the central tree of the grove with drawn sword (1). This man was the King of the Wood, the high priest of Diana, whose job it was to protect the grove until he should be bested in combat (1). It is this "strange rule of priesthood" that Frazer attempts to explain by examining similar customs and rituals in other primitive and contemporary societies (2). It is also this ritual that Warren mirrors through his three main characters: Colonel Cassius Fort, Jeremiah Beaumont, and Rachel Jordan.

Subtle references to Frazer's work appear throughout the novel. For example, as the narrator describes the "violent and lonely land" of Western Kentucky and the strength required to settle it, he claims that in order to survive there, the settlers "in a secret, ritualistic gluttony [...] had eaten the heart of every savage killed at the edge of the clearing or in ambush by the ford" (6). Clearly this reference to cannibalism is meant to be symbolic, meant to imply that the settlers of the untamed west had to become as violent as the people they displaced. This finds its echo in Frazer when he writes about literal cannibalism among ancient societies and contemporary

indigenous tribes: "The flesh and blood of dead men are commonly eaten and drunk to inspire bravery, wisdom, or other qualities for which the men themselves were remarkable, or which are supposed to have their special seat in the particular part eaten" (Frazer 576). Frazer also claims that "frenzied" worshippers of Dionysus likewise participated in cannibalism. It is therefore interesting to note that the only other time cannibalism is mentioned in *World Enough and Time* is during Jeremiah and Rachel's flight into the wilderness referenced earlier. When they stop for the night, Jeremiah notes the grape-smeared face of their guide: "He saw the face shockingly smeared and stained, [...] as though savagely painted for ritual, or as though it had fed on dripping flesh and the waste blood had caked about the muzzle" (417).

Another subtle reference to Frazer occurs with Warren's use of gravesites. Whenever Warren includes a description of a grave in *World Enough and Time*, the grave is either near or directly under a tree or group of trees. The graves of Rachel's father and stillborn child are within a grove of beech trees (114). The grave of Annie Barron, the wife of Jeremiah's landlord, lies at the foot of a cedar tree on grounds of Mr. Barron's farm (148). At first glance, placing graves in close proximity to trees seems fairly inconsequential. However, according to Frazer, many cultures hold that the souls of the deceased reside in trees that are planted on or near their graves in order to strengthen the spirits of the deceased and to keep the body from decaying (133). If this is so, then it implies that the spirits of the deceased have not moved on and explains why Rachel spends much of her time in the beech grove watching over the graves of her child and father, and how through constant proximity with his wife's spirit, Thomas Barron can love her "more now than he ever had before" (148).

Besides the corn husking orgy mentioned above, it is the prevalence of groves throughout Warren's novel that most strongly suggests the influence of *The Golden Bough* on *World Enough*

*and Time*. In addition to the already mentioned beech grove surrounding the Jordan graveyard, Jeremiah frequently fantasizes about dueling Fort in either a forest glade (117) or a “ritual grove” (150). Indeed, when Jeremiah first approaches Fort to challenge him, the confrontation occurs in “a grove by the river” in Frankfort (127). In his closing argument, Jeremiah’s lawyer refers to his and Rachel’s farm as a “sylvan retreat” (344). Finally, during their flight in to the wilderness, Jeremiah and Rachel take shelter within a beech grove (414).

It is important to note at this point that while groves appear frequently in the novel, whenever a specific type of grove is mentioned, it is a beech grove. According to Frazer, the beech is sacred to Diana (6). Indeed, though not stated outright, Frazer implies that the sacred grove at Nemi was probably a beech grove. Beech trees grew in another sacred grove to Diana in the Alban hills (9). If *World Enough and Time* represents an examination of the ritual sacrifice of the King of the Wood as described in *The Golden Bough*, then the Jordan graveyard would seem to represent a grove sacred to Diana as would the beech grove within which Jeremiah and Rachel take shelter as they flee from Frankfort into the wilderness. This latter grove even comes complete with an altar: Within the grove is a stone large enough for Jeremiah to prop the sickly Rachel against to rest (Warren 414).

There is a third beech grove found in the novel, though it takes some looking. According to Robert Graves, “The English word ‘book’ [...] comes from a Gothic word meaning letters and, like the German *buchstabe*, is etymologically connected with the word ‘beech’” (38). Since *beech* and *book* share a common etymology, then when Jeremiah and Rachel first have sex in her library, they are also having sex in a symbolic, though man-made, beech grove. Furthermore, since beech groves are sacred to Diana, it is not unreasonable to make the leap that Rachel, whose beech grove this is, represents Diana in the retelling of the Nemi ritual Warren has

created. Further support for this pairing of Rachel with Diana occurs when we learn that during her tryst with Fort, Rachel would “walk alone [...] in the woods by the river” (53). This calls to mind Diana’s abode in her sacred grove by another body of water, the lake at Nemi.

Jeremiah himself links Rachel with Diana Nemorensis. In describing his married life with Rachel, Jeremiah says that once, when a morning breeze blew her dress tightly across her body, revealing “the secret sweetness of her form,” he gazed with such rapture “as though [he] had been Actaeon come suddenly by the naked goddess by the pool” (149). The naked goddess is Artemis whom the Romans named Diana.

If Rachel represents Diana Nemorensis, then Jeremiah’s and Fort’s roles in Warren’s retelling of the ritual at Nemi begin to become clear. According to Frazer, the King of the Wood ritual involves the ritual murder of the old king by a younger contender. However, there is really more to it than this. The King of the Wood is more than Diana’s high priest; he is her husband as well. When he falls to the younger man’s sword, then, his rival takes over not only his role as priest, but his role as husband to the goddess as well.

A similar relationship occurs in *World Enough and Time*. Jeremiah first learns of Rachel Jordan from Wilkie after Fort has abandoned her and she has miscarried Colonel Fort’s child. In his role as Rachel’s first lover, Cassius Fort, then, seems to represent the older King of the Wood and husband to Diana. When he swears to avenge Rachel’s honor by challenging Fort, Jeremiah sets himself up as the young contender to the throne and Diana’s hand.

Indeed all three characters show remarkable similarities with their counterparts in other rituals throughout the globe that Frazer claims resemble that of the ritual at Nemi. For instance, in addition to Diana, Rachel seems to stand in for a number of corn goddesses, including Demeter. Not only does she own one of the best corn farms in the area, but during the fall

harvest, she literally looks over the corn crop: She will often “sit by a window [...] and look out over the lawn and garden to the fields where the corn was now browning toward harvest” (53).

Cassius Fort resembles very closely what Frazer terms a “departmental king of nature” (124). In his chapter on departmental kings of nature, Frazer posits that the King of the Wood may have been just such a king (123). According to Frazer, a departmental king rules “over particular elements or aspects of nature” until he proves unreliable and is put to death, usually by stoning or stabbing (124-125). If Fort serves as a departmental king, though, two questions arise: over what department does he rule, and how does he fail his office? Given that his chosen profession is the law, both as a lawyer and politician, and that he initially champions the Relief cause, it seems fairly evident that Fort sees himself as the paragon of Justice, “the lawyer and statesman bearing the fate of a people” (36). Even Jeremiah in his early days under Fort’s tutelage sees reading from Fort’s library as bringing him nearer “some far off mountain of Justice” (40). If Fort, then, represents a departmental king of justice, he clearly fails his office on two occasions: when he abandons Rachel and her child and when he leaves the Relief party.

Indeed, each time Fort fails in his office as departmental king of Justice, someone marks him for death. Before she will marry Jeremiah, Rachel makes him swear to kill Fort in retaliation for his dishonor of her (114). When Jeremiah solicits Wilkie Barron’s assistance, Wilkie begs him “to do nothing rash” since though personally reprehensible, publicly Fort is “carrying the fight for the good of the State and for the salvation and very livelihood of thousands” (119-120). However, when Fort switches to the Anti-Relief party, Wilkie’s tone changes. He refers to the Colonel as “the perfect Judas, consummate and complete [...] [a] Villain and sophist” (189-191). He expresses regret for his earlier warnings against rashness, begs Jeremiah to run for public

office in Fort's place, and when Jeremiah refuses, subtly attempts to spur Jeremiah to his old revenge through thinly veiled accusations of cowardice:

“When Rachel told you [of her pregnancy with Jeremiah's child],” Wilkie almost whispered, “when you knew, you were glad. Oh, you were glad for the child. But something else Jerry, something else. Were you glad, too, because now you did not need to go on? Because now you could escape from an oath which was a burden? Because now [...] you could turn your back with good conscience and seek your private gain in the guise of pride? In the guise of duty? And now, when the man you know to be a betrayer has betrayed again, you would turn ...” (192)

Though his words are cut off when Jeremiah flings him against the furniture, they have had their intended effect. Wilkie has virtually assured Jeremiah's taking up his old oath. When Wilkie helps design the fake broadside which has Fort accusing Rachel of miscegeny, Fort's death is all but inevitable.

Wilkie's words in this scene do more than merely illuminate Fort's role as a failed departmental king; they also underscore Jeremiah's role in the ritual. Note the manner in which Wilkie attempts to lure Jeremiah to politics: “You must run this year, in this county. [...] You can win. And you must. But more than that, it is known you were the protégé of Fort. Were trained by him. And if you announce for Relief that will have its effect” (191). Here Wilkie implies that as Fort's student, it is Jeremiah's duty to take up the banner Fort has dropped. It is time, in other words, for Jeremiah to supplant Fort in the Relief party. His words also underscore the paternal relationship that formerly existed between Fort and Jeremiah, which is directly mentioned earlier when Jeremiah writes in his journal that Fort helped teach Jeremiah the law out of “paternal kindness” (42).

This familial relationship between Fort and Jeremiah underscores Jeremiah's role as the contender to the throne in Warren's reinterpretation of Frazer's Nemi pageant. According to Frazer, after some departmental kings are slain, “the kinsmen of the deceased magician flee to the forest and hide themselves, for fear of being elevated to the invidious dignity which he has

just vacated” (125-126). If Fort, as implied above, is Jeremiah’s symbolic father, it seems fairly reasonable that the son, Jeremiah, would succeed his father to the throne, or in this case to his seat in the Relief party, once Fort resigned. Indeed, Jeremiah’s initial refusal of Wilkie’s request and his stated desire to return to his wife and farm (which, as we have seen, is located near a beech grove), symbolically work as his fleeing to the forest to escape his ascension.

According to Frazer, though, there are two prerequisites to taking over as King of the Wood, and slaying the current king is only the lesser. Kingship is bestowed not necessarily by slaying the king, but by marrying his wife, the goddess Diana/Artemis. There are at least two references in Warren’s novel tying Jeremiah to the mating of a god with a mortal (or semi-mortal). The first reference is Jeremiah’s previously mentioned comparison between his pursuit of Rachel and Theseus’ pursuit of Hippolyta. This comparison is problematic, however, since closer examination reveals that Theseus has more in common with Fort than with Jeremiah.

The only similarity with Jeremiah is that both characters seek fame: Jeremiah attempts to orchestrate his life into a drama which “was to be grand, with noble gestures and swelling periods, serious as blood [...] a tragedy, like those in the books he read as a boy” just as Theseus pursues adventure to “make an enviable name for himself” (Warren 5, Tripp 563). This comparison, though, could apply equally to Colonel Fort, and there are more, far more convincing parallels. As king of Athens, Theseus used his political strength to unite the divided and feuding townships which made up the city-state under one central democratic government (Tripp 568). Similarly, on the night of his death Colonel Fort claimed to have discovered a way to unite both the Relief and Anti-Relief parties and end the conflict: “I have found a way to reconcile the differences in our unhappy country,” Fort reportedly told his brother-in-law. “I have found a way to reconcile all. I have found a way to save the Constitution and yet satisfy all

in justice” (284). Jeremiah’s comparison of Rachel to Hippolyta cements Fort’s similarity to the Athenian hero. According to several myths, Theseus eventually grows tired of and abandons Hippolyta after she has borne him a son, Hippolytus (Mercante 824).

If Jeremiah’s comparison with Theseus and Rachel to Hippolyta are problematic, the second reference to a mortal’s union with the divine seems quite the opposite if far more subtle. Shortly before Jeremiah is scheduled to be executed, his old teacher, Dr. Burnham, arrives in town, and under the guise of a snake oil salesman, slips Jeremiah what should be a lethal dose of laudanum. In his guise as curative hawker, Burnham refers to his concoction as a “counterblast to Aesculapius” (397). According to Frazer, when Poseidon causes the death of Hippolytus, Theseus’ son by Hippolyta and Diana’s lover, Aesculapius, the Roman god of healing and medicine, resurrects him (5). Diana then brings him to her holy grove, where he remains in hiding under the name Virbius (5).

If Jeremiah bears only slight resemblance to Theseus, he seems a perfect fit for Virbius. Like Virbius, Jeremiah is young, three years younger than Rachel (46). Frazer describes Virbius as “chaste” (5), and while no virgin, Jeremiah is far from a womanizer. He will not visit Silly Sal, the local prostitute, with the other young men of his acquaintance (42). Though he did have “a sort of love affair” with an unnamed “young lady of charm and good prospects,” it was apparently very brief, and there is no indication that the affair ever went further than his reading her poetry (41). In fact, we know of Jeremiah having intercourse only once, with “a snaggle-tooth hag” in the heat of McClardy’s Dionysian tent revival, after which he feels nothing but “shock,” “distaste,” and “contamination” (31).

According to Frazer, Virbius is also “fair” (5). This means two separate things, both of which are applicable to Jeremiah: Diana’s lover is attractive and just. Jeremiah, too, might be



described as attractive. A crayon portrait shows his full jaw and “erect, square brow” (4). Eyewitnesses describe him as having good posture: he “holds himself straight like a horseman” and has a narrow, long waist (4). He dresses well and is “a robust young man” who seems older and more mature than his years (5). Given his pursuit of the law, his championing of Rachel’s honor, and his association with the Relief party, Jeremiah also shows a drive to fight injustice.

On first reading, Warren’s linking of Jeremiah to Theseus seems uncharacteristically careless. Theseus, after all, bears little if any true resemblance to him and has no immediate connection to the Nemi ritual; indeed, he more closely resembles Jeremiah’s nemesis, Colonel Cassius Fort. However, when we remember that Theseus is Hippolytus’/Virbius’ father and consider how closely Jeremiah resembles Hippolytus/Virbius, a deity directly linked to Diana and the ritual at Nemi, the problematic association with Theseus becomes somewhat understandable: it once again underscores the paternal relationship between Fort (Theseus) and Jeremiah (Virbius). Further, since Poseidon kills Hippolytus at Theseus’ request because Theseus believes his son to have dishonored Theseus’ wife, Jeremiah’s association with Theseus also emphasizes Jeremiah’s desire to kill Fort and avenge Rachel.

It seems evident that the three main characters of *World Enough and Time* (Rachel Jordan, Colonel Cassius Fort, and Jeremiah Beaumont) represent the three players in the Nemi ritual: Diana, the King of the Wood, and the young contender. If this is so, some account must be made for the contradictions between Warren’s interpretation of the ritual and Frazer’s description. One of the more subtle discrepancies is found in Rachel’s position as surrogate Diana. According to Frazer, both Diana and Demeter (whom Rachel also represents) are fertility goddesses. Rachel, though, cannot apparently carry a baby to term, having miscarried both Fort’s and Jeremiah’s children. Similarly, if Jeremiah represents the young contender to the King of the

Wood's throne, then once he kills Fort and marries Rachel, he should succeed to Fort's place in the Relief party. Instead, Jeremiah finds himself arrested, tried, and found guilty of murder.

Rather than being feted as the rising star of Relief, he finds himself on the run for his life in the wilderness of western Kentucky.

This turn of events, though, may be the result of two far more important disparities with the original ritual. According to Frazer, the contender challenges the King, kills him, and then he takes the goddess Diana as wife (1-2). Jeremiah, however, goes about it backwards: he marries Rachel then kills Fort more than a year later. Even his slaying of Fort represents a major departure from the ritual as related by Frazer. The ritual slaying of the King of the Wood occurs in Diana's sacred grove at Nemi. The murder of Cassius Fort, on the other hand occurs not in a sacred grove, not even in a forest, but on his doorstep in the middle of Frankfort, Kentucky.

In both of these cases, Jeremiah seems to understand that he is on some level flouting both convention and myth. When he initially vows to kill Fort, for example, he maintains that he must do it before he marries Rachel:

Any man [he reasons], however vile, would strike to defend a wronged wife. That was an "interested act" such as the world could understand and applaud. But Jeremiah sought the act "uninterested and pure," and apart from the world's judgment. He would take the wronged woman to wife only after he had defended her, not defend her because she was already, and by accident of things, his wife. (116).

Jeremiah desires, then, to perform an act of justice for justice's sake, with no hint of personal gain and outside the acceptable terms of the world. However, when Rachel's mother dies, Jeremiah foregoes his vengeance, marries Rachel, and very quickly settles into the peaceful life of a gentleman farmer.

When he does get around to slaying Fort, Jeremiah does so on Fort's own threshold (or more specifically the threshold of Fort's brother-in-law), in the middle of a city rather than in a

sacred grove. Of course, an easy response would be to claim that Warren is writing a realistic novel, and that it is unrealistic to hold Jeremiah accountable for not performing a ritual he never claimed to uphold. While there is something to be said for this idea, the fact remains that as the author, Warren certainly makes allusions to the ritual. Since Jeremiah doesn't profess to be a pagan worshipper of Diana of the Woods, it is all the more notable that whenever he or the narrator considers the slaying of Fort, it almost always occurs in a grove of trees, often on the banks of a body of water much like the Nemi ritual by Diana's Mirror as described by Frazer.

For instance, when Jeremiah first muses on his "great Purpose," as he refers to the proposed duel with Fort, the narrator launches into a hypothetical description of "the real content of the act": "Two men stand up and face each other at a few paces [...] at dawn in a glade or clearing, behind them the remaining mass of dark forest which had once covered the great central valley of a wild continent, before them a muddy track and a corn field" (117). Here the narrator draws a specific allusion to both the sacred grove of Diana and the corn field of Demeter.

When Jeremiah first approaches Fort to challenge him, he does so by the banks of the Kentucky River in Frankfort. He feels unprepared to speak so publicly, however, so they move: "down the frozen track beyond the last houses into a place where trees made a grove by the river" (127). According to the Kentucky Historical Society, beech trees are common in Frankfort, Kentucky, and grew along the river bank in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is entirely probable then that this "grove by the river" is another beech grove. Jeremiah, therefore, leads his prey out of the trappings of secular civilization and into a symbolic holy grove of Diana where he fails to complete the ritual by slaying Fort since the older man refuses Jeremiah's challenge to duel, and Jeremiah loses his nerve: "I was determined to [kill Fort]," he explains, "but I could not. It was

more than I could do, and in that way. [...] It was that I could not, with him on the ground before me and his face black in my grip on his throat and his breath making its sound” (130).

Later, after Jeremiah marries and settles into the routine of a gentleman farmer’s life, the narrator implies that Jeremiah, in the dark watches of the night “as he reach[es] to snuff out the candle,” unconsciously regrets his failure in the grove: “Did he still see Colonel Fort?” the narrator asks. “The solid bulk and sad face beyond the out-thrust pistol pointed at him, at Jeremiah Beaumont? That body or his own lying on the ground by some *ritual* grove, with the patch of red growing on the breast?” (150, emphasis added) By describing the scene of this hypothetical duel as a “ritual” grove, the narrator once again makes a direct connection with Frazer’s Nemi rite in the opening chapters of *The Golden Bough*. Therefore, it is all the more telling that when Jeremiah does finally decide to kill Fort, he returns to Frankfort, but he does not attempt to lure his rival to the ritual grove beside the river. Instead, he murders him on the doorstep in downtown Frankfort at the dead of night.

There is some evidence, though, that even here, Jeremiah attempts to inject some sense of ritual into his murderous act. Jeremiah’s mask, for instance, is particularly important. A mask serves the pragmatic purpose of keeping one’s features obscured during the committing of a crime; however, considering the care with which Warren has depicted other primitive rites elsewhere in the novel, one must take note of the ritualistic importance of Jeremiah’s use of a mask here. According to Frazer, when the inhabitants of Minahassa drive devils from their village, the men of the town obscure their faces by either blackening them with ash or wearing masks before taking up arms against their demonic foes (635). Before he goes into town to kill his own personal demon, ash from the smoke and fires outside Lawrenceburg blackens Jeremiah’s face and he also wears a mask he made from his mother-in-law’s skirt.

According to Frazer, masks and disguises have totemic significance. When one wears a disguise or a mask, he takes on the aspects of who or whatever the disguise represents, so, for example, when the Native American members of a secret wolf society don wolf skins and masks, they become wolves. Jeremiah's disguise serves a similar purpose. Each article of his disguise comes from each person Jeremiah feels Fort has wronged. His mask, as previously mentioned, is made from an old skirt of Rachel's mother (227). His coat had belonged to Gabbo the coachman whom the broadside allegedly written by Fort accused of actually fathering Rachel's child (226-227). The socks with which he intends to obscure his footprints are his own (227). Even the hat he took from an unsuspecting wood-cutter could be seen as representing the common people Fort betrayed by changing parties (though since the hat comes from a wood-cutter and thus a destroyer of groves rather than a protector, this also foreshadows Jeremiah's failure to maintain the natural order and correctly complete the Nemi ritual) (227). The murder weapon Jeremiah found in the Jordan farm shop, and thus represents Rachel herself (227). When he dons the disguise, then, Jeremiah symbolically represents the avenging spirit of all Fort has wronged.

According to Frazer's retelling of the Babylonian version of the Diana/Virbius myth, the goddess Ishtar and her dead lover Tammuz, whom she has descended to the underworld to rescue, are sprinkled with the Water of Life in order to return to the land of the living and set the natural order to rights (379). In Warren's novel, we see Jeremiah in a setting closely resembling the traditional image of the Judeo-Christian underworld: because of brush-fires and smoldering forests, "a heavy smoke lays over the land" and the air is "bad" (222). Ash hangs in the air covering everything. One man along the road even asks if Old Nick, a regional name for Satan, has set all the world afire (223). In this infernal setting, Jeremiah pauses "to bathe his forehead"

in a branch before continuing on to Frankfort to slay Fort and, he hopes, set his own world to rights.

This symbolic anointing may serve another purpose as well. In many cultures, sins are washed away by running water (Frazer 629), and thus before setting out on the warpath, many tribes require just such a purification to ensure the success of their venture (244). Later, after the deed is done, Jeremiah will perform two other acts of symbolic purification. First, he bundles his disguise, weights it with stones, and throws it into the Kentucky River as a kind of water purification rite in much the same way that many cultures throw representatives of Death into rivers after a purification ritual (Warren 239, Frazer 363). Afterwards, in a purification by fire, he burns his handkerchief in the fireplace of his boardinghouse (240).

The most significant ritualistic aspect of Jeremiah's murder of Fort, though, occurs just before the murder when Jeremiah attempts to become one with a tree. Once when he was younger, shortly after his Dionysian conversion in McClardy's Meadow, Jeremiah stood beside a beech tree outside his rural home, pulled an icicle from its limbs, and his strength "seemed to pass away through [his] fingers into the very tree" (29). He became one with the tree "and knew how it was to be rooted in the deep dark of earth and bear with [his] boughs the weight of glittering ice like joy. Then [his] substance seemed to pass beyond the tree into all the land around that spread in the sunlight, and into the sunlight itself" (29).

As he stands outside Fort's city abode waiting to kill him, Jeremiah leans against a lilac and tries to achieve a similar communion with nature to gain strength for his act. The wording in this passage is very important. This time, however, he does not become one with the earth, he only has the "fancy" of "growing into the ground [and] setting root like plants of the thicket" (235). Even when he removes his mask to set bare cheek upon a stalk of lilac, he merely

remembers the feeling of his soul becoming one with the beech when he was a boy (235).

Though Jeremiah himself does not consciously realize it, the close reader can clearly see that something in this tableau is amiss.

On some level, even Jeremiah must understand this. Otherwise why run all the way to the grove where he originally tried to challenge Fort just to dump his disguise in the river (239).

Surely, there were other, closer and more convenient places by the river where he could have disposed of any incriminating evidence. Having failed to slay Fort in the grove, Jeremiah returns there, symbolizing a last ditch effort to imbue his violent act with a kind of sacred legitimacy.

By marrying Rachel before he kills Fort, and more importantly, murdering Fort on his doorstep in the city instead of sacrificing him in the grove when he had the chance, Jeremiah perverts the sacred ritual. All the communing with bushes, purifications by fire and water, and visits to groves in the world cannot change that fact. Jeremiah, who claims to shun the world and its values, whenever given the chance to skirt them, invariably fails. When he could have lived in bucolic splendor and marital bliss working the Jordan farm, he leaves to murder Fort, not entirely because of his unfinished oath, but because the world intruded on him with a forged broadside designed specifically to draw him out. Even when given a second chance at freedom, in the camp of the Gran Boz, Jeremiah cannot long remain in the natural wilderness, but must still return to civilization to clear his name despite his claims to have little regard for the ways of the world.

Jeremiah's experience with the Gran Boz shows clearly that Jeremiah has failed to reenact the Nemi ritual and restore the natural cycle. Though the narrator claims that the Gran Boz is a bastardization of Le Grand Bosse, or Ole Big Hump (428), *boz* could just as easily be a bastardization of *bois*, wood. The Gran Boz, then, may also mean the *big wood*; thus the character stands as another representative of the King of the Wood. Indeed, he acts as king to his

group of refugees and cut-throats. He lives in the biggest cabin of the compound, and will only see visitors when he sends for them himself (425). No one may join or leave the community without his permission (430). Indeed, as Jenkins explains to Jeremiah, “this-here is Gran Boz’s place fer a fack and ever thing in here” (433).

There are other references to Gran Boz’s position as King of the Wood. His connection with Dionysus through the color red also links him to Osiris (Frazer 555). According to Frazer, both Dionysus and Osiris are vegetation gods closely linked with the King of the Wood at Nemi (492). More importantly, though, the Gran Boz appears always among or near trees. His camp is in the middle of the woods and surrounded by several trees important to various vegetative cults: oaks, maples, hickories, and sycamores (Warren 416-417). His cabin itself sits near a fallen tree and several saplings (425). When he betrayed the white settlers of the area to the Cherokees, he sat under a beech tree and watched the settlement burn (429). More importantly, though, the narrator describes the Gran Boz’s “scaled, armored, and horny back” as appearing “like a log” (429).

If the Gran Boz represents the King of the Wood, it stands to reason, then, that he would attempt to seduce Diana, as represented by Rachel, and that Jeremiah, representing the young challenger, would then slay this rival and take his place as leader of the community. This does not occur, however. The Gran Boz spurns Rachel instead: He touches her cropped hair then pulls away in disgust saying her head feels like a brush (427). Then, after he attempts to fondle her shrunken breasts, he sends her away “naming her Little Tits” (428). The Gran Boz’s disdain for Rachel implies that she no longer represents Diana. Her cut hair and shrunken breasts have effectively removed any femininity from her. This coupled with her inability to bear a child further separates her from the fertility goddess of the woods.



Significantly, Jeremiah doesn't even attempt to defend Rachel's honor or to avenge the insults she suffers. He claims that he "started forward to defend her" before Jenkins stopped him. However, once he leaves the Gran Boz's cabin, he simply sinks into apathy. He does not, as he did with Fort, plot intricate revenge plans or attempt to stab the Gran Boz in the dark. He simply has an affair with a local woman and contracts syphilis. Having failed to adequately reenact the ritual with Fort, it seems that Jeremiah has lost all claim to be the new King of the Wood and must content himself simply as one of the king's subjects, at least until he finds a chance to clear his name. Then, of course, he turns his back on what little peace he has found in the wilderness for another chance to improve his image in the eyes of the modern world, finding instead only death.

And herein lies Warren's point. By turning his back on the natural world as represented by the agrarian rituals Warren reconstructs within his novel, Jeremiah condemns himself. Each time he fails to uphold the ritual, misfortune falls upon him. He refuses to slay the King of the Wood in the sacred grove, his child is stillborn. He murders him instead in the middle of town during the dead of night, and he is arrested, tried, and found guilty of murder. He leaves the wilderness to clear his name, and he is himself betrayed and murdered.

Like the biblical Jeremiah's, Jeremiah Beaumont's story acts as a warning to the reader. The Old Testament Jeremiah warned the Israelites of the impending destruction of Jerusalem, but God's people did not heed his words and the nation fell to Babylon and lost its culture. In much the same way, *World Enough and Time* warns of the dire consequences of turning one's back on the land and embracing the trappings of modern civilization. Jeremiah is happiest when, as young husband, he works his farm with his wife. Though he often refers to his life with Rachel as cut off and separate from the world, he is active in his community, becoming a regular at the

local tavern despite his political differences with many of his neighbors. In short, when left to his own devices, Jeremiah lives a life similar to that laid out in the 1930 Fugitive Agrarian manifesto *I'll Take My Stand*, to which Warren was a contributor. He lives simply with his wife on their rural farm, tending his livestock, raising his crops, and participating in his community.

Indeed, Jeremiah's life is thrown into turmoil only when he allows himself to be influenced by the outside modern world, as represented most often by his friend Wilkie Barron, whose name, significantly, means "desire to be barren" since *Wilkie* is a diminutive of *William*, "desire" ("Wilkie," "William"). For example, Jeremiah feels driven to avenge Rachel only when Wilkie accuses him of being Fort's tool. He runs for office only after Wilkie shames him for remaining locked away in his bucolic paradise. He murders Fort when Wilkie sends the fake broadside. Finally, when Wilkie hires Jenkins to bring Jeremiah back from the wilderness, Jeremiah goes willingly for the chance to clear his name in the eyes of the public and dies as a result. Every time the sterile modern world, as represented by Wilkie, calls to Jeremiah, he sacrifices whatever peace he has achieved in his agrarian world to answer said call.

Warren's reimagining of Frazer's work underscores this flaw. "[W]hen the white man came," the narrator explains as the novel comes to a close, "the gods fled, either into the upper air or deeper into the dark earth. So there was no voice here to speak and tell the white men what justice is" (464). The ritual at Nemi, the ceremony of Demeter, and every other sacrament Frazer describes in the *Golden Bough* are all agricultural rites designed to bring on a good sowing or a bountiful harvest, to maintain, in other words, man's relationship to the land and nature. Whenever Jeremiah participates in these rites, he thrives. Whenever he ignores or perverts them, he suffers.

If, as Warren's agrarian prophet and cautionary hero, Jeremiah represents man, then Warren's message is clear. Turn your back on Agrarian ideals and embrace the modern industrial age at your own peril, for once destroyed, the land cannot come back. We are left with the haunting image of modern Kentucky with which Warren ends his book. Instead of the wild land where "a man might plunge into nature as into a black delirious stream and gulp it or be engulfed" with which Warren opens his novel (6), the world will mirror the bleak and sterile vision with which Warren leaves us: where

the only Shawnee in the country is a WPA mural on a post-office wall, and Old Big Hump and his brass cannon are lost in the mud of the swamps [...where] the literacy rate is one of the lowest in the nation, [...] and the Negro is emancipated and can vote and if he is smart he can even get paid for voting (just like white folks), and [...where] there are 31,788 miles of improved highway, [...where, in other words] things are improving as all statistics show and civilization is making strides, and we can look forward to a great future for our state. (463-464)

## CONCLUSION

### Warren and the Agrarian Myth

The various myths Warren employs in his fiction may at first appear to have little, if anything, in common except for their status as western cultural myths imported into American life. What, for example, does the Arthurian Grail legend have to do with the legend of Cain? How does the Wandering Jew relate to the god Balder or the King of the Wood? Three of the five, the Grail Myth, the Balder Myth, and The King of the Wood, however, are specifically agrarian myths derived from rituals enacted to ensure the return of vegetation in the spring and to maintain the natural order of the world.

In her discussion of the Grail ritual as it is portrayed in Arthurian literature, Jessie Weston points out that the central idea of the Grail ritual is that the life of the king is inextricably bound up in the health of the land and vice versa (58). She claims further that the ritual corresponds very closely to the agrarian rituals of Attis and Adonis (193). These rituals, as Frazer points out in *The Golden Bough*, reenact the deaths and resurrections of their respective gods of vegetation (403). Similarly, Frazer points out that the myth of Balder's death portrays the Norse deity as not only a god of spring, but of the oak as well (823). Frazer's discussion of Attis, Adonis, and Balder within a book devoted principally to exploring the significance of the Nemi ritual of the King of the Wood affirms the Nemi ritual as agrarian also.

The remaining two legends, those of the Wandering Jew and of Cain's fratricide, are also concerned with the importance of the natural order. Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew, has offended the natural order by humiliating God. As punishment, he is denied death and thus removed from the natural cycle of life. The legend of Cain, too, applies to agrarianism. By committing not only the first murder, but the first fratricide, Cain also offends the natural order, and like Ahasuerus,

must wander the world for eternity. However, Cain's relevance to agrarianism does not end here. Before slaying his brother, Cain had worked the land for his sustenance; he was a farmer. After his offense, Cain must wander the world as an accursed outcast. During this time, he founds the first city. Cities then, according to the Legend of Cain, were cursed from the beginning, having been created by the first murderer, who turned away from an agrarian lifestyle in favor of the city.

These agrarian myths, then, would have been of particular interest to Warren, who in the early 1930's, increasingly dissatisfied with the growing influence of urbanism and industrialism in the South, helped eleven other literary Southerners publish *I'll Take My Stand*, a collection of essays espousing the benefits of agricultural life and calling for a rejection of Big Business and Industrialism. In the introduction to this collection, poet Donald Davidson lays down a basic definition of Southern Agrarianism as a society "in which agriculture is the leading vocation [...] that becomes the model to which the other forms [of vocation] approach as well as they may" (xlvii).

Though he was a founding member of the Southern Agrarians, Warren wrote only two essays devoted to agrarian principles: "The Briar Patch" for *I'll Take My Stand* and "Literature as Symptom" in a subsequent volume, *Who Owns America?* Curiously, these two works directly discuss agrarian ideals only in passing. For example, while "The Briar Patch" does discuss the role of African Americans in a rural agrarian community, its primary focus seems to be the question of inter-racial relations. In the second essay, "Literature as Symptom," Warren focuses mainly on the role literature plays in society, claiming that literature reflects the values of the society in which it was written and illustrating how so-called regionalists might better their craft.

In neither of these two essays, however, does Warren really set down his own views on Agrarianism, a movement which Warren himself claimed had no central unifying theme:

“Agrarianism” is just a word [he explained to Thomas L. Connelly in 1982]. It did not describe in any basic fashion to my mind what the thing was about. It was like a tent with a menagerie, with fifty kinds of animals under it. Disagreement was more important than agreement. (214)

Indeed, according to Paul K. Conklin’s history of the Agrarian movement, Warren seems to have had only a passing interest in agrarianism as a political movement: “he never capitulated to any ideology or committed himself unreservedly to the Southern cause. And none of his essays, in *I’ll Take My Stand* or later, spoke directly to the philosophical issues” (59). Mark G. Malvasi, in his discussion of the Agrarian philosophies of John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, and Donald Davidson, even goes so far as to describe Warren as “the antithesis of Southern Agrarianism” because of Warren’s focus on the individual’s struggle to find meaning outside of the influence of community (16). However, both of these criticisms of Warren perhaps spring from an unfortunate misreading of Warren’s themes. Warren himself certainly did not shy away from his association with the Agrarians.

In a 1956 conversation with his fellow Fugitive poets (many of whom were also Agrarians), Warren claimed that a major concern for the Agrarians was “the disintegration of the notion of the individual in that society we’re living in [...] and the relation of that to democracy” (Fugitives 20). His Agrarianism, then, was more of a protest “against a kind of dehumanizing and disintegrative effect on your notion of what an individual could be in the sense of a loss of your role in society” (20). This sentiment was echoed years later in his conversation with Thomas Connelly, where Warren expressed his belief that “in the industrialized, mechanized world, [...] there] is a misunderstanding of man’s relationship to nature . . . using nature as a thing

to be exploited, as a tool of man and not as man having a relationship to nature which is both aesthetic and spiritual” (Connelly 214).

Both of these conversations occur decades after the Southern Agrarians disbanded. If Warren’s two prose efforts for the Agrarian publications bore at best only passing relevance to the Agrarian movement, one must look elsewhere in Warren’s writing to understand his personal definition of Southern Agrarianism. While Conkin claims that none of Warren’s essays dealt directly with agrarian philosophy, Charlotte Beck illustrates in *Robert Penn Warren, Critic* how much of Warren’s early criticism and reviews centered on his understanding of the writer in question as either upholding Agrarian viewpoints or presenting an idealized image of the New South and industrialism (26). For example, in his 1933 review of Aubrey Starke’s biography of Sidney Lanier, Warren painted Lanier as an unwitting dupe of industrialism because of his belief that science could assist nature in keeping the powers of industry and consumerism at bay: “Lanier,” Warren claims, “failed to perceive that the science he adored might become the handmaid of the industrial system he detested!” (qtd. in Beck 27).

The next year, in his review of three novels by T. S. Stribling entitled “T.S. Stribling: A Paragraph on the History of Critical Realism,” Warren, as Beck interprets him, treats Stribling “as a literary carpetbagger” who writes “primarily to attack aspects of southern culture—lynching, miscegenation, backcountry manners and language [...], even religiosity—from the standpoint of the northern liberal” (29). Indeed, claims Beck, Warren’s literary criticism of the early- to mid-1930’s “often displays an Agrarian subtext defending the South against all writers who have either exploited or denigrated the South or southern material” (30).

As the thirties waned, Warren began to distance himself from the Agrarian movement, but “he never fully abandoned some of his fellow agrarians’ ideas” (3). While Beck claims that

these ideas revolve around the proper function of literature and criticism (8), when read closely, much of Warren's criticism during the forties reveals some decidedly agrarian philosophical ideals more clearly than either of his "Southern Agrarian" essays. Take for instance his essay "William Faulkner" from 1946.

Early in this essay, Warren introduces the importance in Faulkner's fiction of the land and the role it plays in creating the "legend" of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County: The land's history is "a fate or doom" brought on by "an error or sin committed long ago and compounded a thousand times over" ("William Faulkner" 62). In order to understand this present state, then, one must understand the past, something few of Faulkner's characters can do. After developing his argument, Warren briefly steps away from Faulkner's created world to apply this idea to the external, real, modern world, not just the South:

The Faulkner legend is not merely a legend of the South [Warren writes] but of a general plight and problem. The modern world is in moral confusion. It does suffer from a lack of discipline, of sanction, of community of values, of a sense of mission. We don't have to go to Faulkner to find that out—or to find that it is a world in which self-interest, workableness, success provide the standards of conduct. It was a Yankee [William James] who first referred to the bitch goddess Success. It is a world in which the individual has lost his relation to society, the world of the power state in which man is a cipher. It is a world in which man is the victim of abstraction and mechanism, or at least, at moments, feels himself to be. (65-66)

For Warren, Faulkner's small-town world is not entirely devoid of virtue. Its virtues, though, are found "in people who are outside the stream of the dominant world, the 'loud world' as it is called in *The Sound and the Fury*" (67). These people, by and large, are defined by their relationship to the natural world (67). For Faulkner, there is ideally an interrelation, a kind of "communion," between man and nature and by extension a common bond between man and man (69), although this communion is often hindered by man's predisposition towards "the sin of use, exploitation, violation" (68-69).



In "Love and Separateness in Eudora Welty," Warren also argues agrarian ideals, though somewhat more subtly than in his essay on Faulkner. For instance, most of the Welty stories Warren discusses involve the protagonist going into the natural world to find a revelation about life. In "A Still Moment," Audubon discovers what it means to love the natural world by killing a heron in order to preserve it in a picture. The young girl in "A Memory" learns a "secret of life" by watching a crude family at the beach (Welty 93). William Wallace of "The Wide Net" sets out to find the body of his wife who allegedly drowned herself and winds up in a Bacchanalian fishing adventure on the river.

At work in these stories, according to Warren, is the sheer power of nature. The men hunting for the wife's body in "The Wide Net" lose sight of their mission not because of some flaw in their character, but because the river overtakes their spirit. "The river," claims Warren, "is simply force" (164). Like Faulkner, Welty's protagonists experience a kind of communion with nature. In "The Wide Net" and "At the Landing," for example, the river represents a world from which Welty's protagonists are "cut off" (165). Only total emersion into the natural world of the river will allow them to complete their tasks. William Wallace dives into the river and swims along the bed in search of his wife. Similarly, Jennie, the protagonist of "At the Landing," must venture into a "dark" forest that Warren describes as "like an underwater depth" in her quest to find the lover who has deserted her (166). Similarly, Audubon and his fellow wanderers first see the heron as they walk in the woods. This communion with nature is often frenzied and fraught with danger. William Wallace, after his journey to the bottom of the river, hangs a great catfish on his belt "like a river-god" and "prances" as if "in a saturnalian revel" (164). Jennie encounters a group of "wild" river people and must endure her own saturnalia as these men take her captive and gang rape her.

For Warren, much of Welty's fiction, like that of Faulkner, emphasizes a necessary communion with a wild and often violent nature that makes possible a better communion with one's self and fellow man. Whether Welty, city-born and raised, shares any agrarian traits with Faulkner is debatable, but Warren does not confine his focus on agrarian ideals simply on Southern or even twentieth-century writers.

Warren's reading of the poetry of Robert Frost, for example, also focuses in part on man's relationship to the natural world. His discussion of "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" begins with a contrast between the owner of the woods and the speaker, or as Warren puts it, "the man who uses the world and the man who contemplates the world" ("Themes" 122). Warren seems here about to begin another discussion on the difference between exploitation and communion, but he doesn't. He turns, instead, to the second stanza and the difference between the speaker and his horse who must wonder at the oddity of stopping on such a cold night with no sign of a farmhouse nearby. This stanza, according to Warren, illustrates the quality that separates man from the beasts of nature. "The act of stopping [to contemplate the beauty of the woods]," he writes, "is the specially human act" (122-123). In other words, only humans have the capacity to contemplate and appreciate the natural world.

This quality gives man another advantage over the beasts: the ability to choose and to resist, if necessary, sinking completely into nature. The ability to contemplate and appreciate nature brings with it the temptation to "surrender to the pull of the delicious blackness of the woods, [...] to forfeit the human definition, to sink into nature by another way, a dangerous way which only the human can achieve" (124). Instead, man must find a balance between his humanity and the pull of nature. He must, like the speaker of Frost's "Into My Own," "enter[] the dark wood but manage[] to carry his humanity with him" (125). To understand the dangers

inherent in sinking “into the brute [...] into nature, into appetite” (124), Warren turns not to Frost, but to the fiction of Ernest Hemingway.

Warren finds a way to tie agrarian ideals to this paragon of early twentieth century stoic masculinity. In Hemingway’s fiction, Warren sees a world which has turned its back on Agrarianism, a world “without supernatural sanctions,” a “God-abandoned world of modernity” (“Ernest Hemingway” 88). Hemingway’s world, according to Warren, is “loaded” with predators and is “drenched in blood” (89). “It is the world,” Warren states, “of Faulkner” (89).

Warren argues that Hemingway’s heroes, like Faulkner’s, exist outside the social order among the “discards of society” (89). They seem trapped by the modern world, longing “for the sense of order and assurance that men seem to find in religious faith” but becoming obsessed instead “by the meaninglessness of the world, by nothingness” (92). More often than not, Warren argues, the Hemingway hero does exactly what Frost warns against: sinking into the appetites of brute nature: turning to violence, drink, and physical love as a means to come to terms with the nothingness “of civilization gone to pot, of war, or of death” (95). For Warren, this represents man’s failed attempt to reestablish a communion with nature by embracing our natural but animalistic tendencies (102, 95).

“It is important to remember,” Warren writes, “that the sinking into nature, even at the level of drinking and mere sexuality, is a self-conscious act” (95). In other words, sinking into nature is, ironically, unnatural. It involves more of a repudiation of the natural world than an embrace of nature. Hemingway’s characters often wind up destroying nature in their own way, becoming hunters, fishers, or bullfighters for mere sport. For Warren, then, Hemingway’s fiction acts as a counterpoint to Frost’s poetry by providing an illustration of the dangers of completely abandoning our humanity and a right relationship with the natural world.

No discussion of agrarian ideals in Warren's criticism would be complete, though without discussing his seminal work on Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner." In a letter dated June 5, 1945, Warren's long-time friend and collaborator, Cleanth Brooks, comments on Warren's new reading of Coleridge's poem. "I regret a little," he writes, "that you did not bring in the Industrial Revolution as you did in a conversation with me; but I can see that that would be needless—you've cut beneath it, and it might bring the personal matter to too much focus again, or might put off the reader by making him think that your argument was to prove Coleridge an Agrarian" (Brooks 93). While it is not my intention to argue that Warren sees Coleridge (or any of the authors discussed here) as an Agrarian, Brooks' comment implies that, as in his other criticism, Warren's agrarianism does appear even in his criticism of Coleridge. Indeed, Warren's reading of what he calls the "primary" theme of Coleridge's poem certainly incorporates all of the aspects of man's relationship with nature that he discusses in his other criticism ("A Poem of Pure Imagination" 222).

For Warren, the primary theme of Coleridge's poem is "one of crime and punishment and redemption and reconciliation" (222). However, it illustrates this theme through the very agrarian ideas Warren discusses in his other essays. The crime, for example, is a crime against nature, underscoring the broken relationship between man and nature Warren sees in the fiction of Faulkner and that Coleridge would refer to as "the One Life," or as Warren describes it, "the notion of universal charity [...] in which all creation participates" (222). According to Warren, Coleridge sees Nature as a symbol for God and believes that through nature, man knows both God and himself (219). When the mariner kills the albatross, then, the act becomes "a crime against Nature a crime against God" (229).

As in his reading of Welty, Warren sees Coleridge's poem as also underscoring the notion that communion with nature, while necessary for salvation, may sometimes be repulsive. In order to find redemption for the pointless slaughter of the albatross, for example, the mariner must remain stranded with the corpses of his shipmates, tormented nightly by hideous water snakes surrounding his ship, for he cannot find salvation as long as he views these water snakes as repulsive "slimy things" (Coleridge IV.15). He must recognize that they are in their way beautiful "in their fulfillment of being" (Warren 254). He must understand, in other words that the water snakes, however repulsive, still "participate in the serene order of the universe" (254). "Like the stars and the moon," Warren writes, "which move unperturbed on their appointed business while the Mariner is fixed in his despair, the snakes [...] participate in the universal fullness of being" (254). Once he experiences this epiphany, the "ancient" mariner's heart fills with love, he blesses the snakes, and his journey home begins.

With the Mariner's return to civilization, Warren touches again on the importance of community he sees implied in Frost's poetry. It is not enough, for instance, for the Mariner to discover an appreciation and awe of the natural world. He cannot simply bless the snakes and be content to drift aimlessly upon the sea. He must return home and rejoin society. Just as he must bless nature before he is allowed to return, though, nature must bless him before he can fully enter society. Thus the hermit, whom Warren refers to as a "priest of Nature" (249), shrives the Mariner when the ship finds harbor, but even after his blessing, the Mariner cannot return completely to his old self. He must wander the world, giving his warning to any he fears may abuse nature.

This act, however, is not a punishment according to Warren's interpretation: the relationship between man and Nature that the Mariner has discovered and of which he preaches

in his wanderings “not only puts man in tune with the universe but puts him in tune with other men, with society: it provides the great discipline of sympathy” (255). Retelling his tale to those who need to hear it makes the Mariner more fully human as it reinforces his role in nature and gives his life a purpose that heretofore it had lacked.

Warren’s critical interpretation of these very different authors reveals a fairly coherent Agrarianism but one that transcends the Agrarians’ political views regarding the primacy of agriculture. He applies these ideas to texts that have much in common with the mythic works underlying his novels. Just as he would later explain to Thomas Connelly, Warren’s criticism implies his interest in a spiritual relationship between man and nature that modern industrialized society has ignored or lost.

In order to live a balanced life, Warren notes, man must, like Faulkner’s, Welty’s and Coleridge’s heroes, acknowledge and respect the beauty, the awe, and the terror of nature. He must be unafraid to immerse himself in the natural world despite the very real dangers lurking there. However, he must also, as Frost’s poetry suggests, balance this appreciation and immersion into nature with an appreciation of human society and the possibility of communion with his fellow man, lest he become, like, in Warren’s view, many of Hemingway’s characters, so immersed in brute nature that he cannot help destroying his own humanity in an attempt to deny the civilized world. For Warren, then, modern society per se is not set against nature. Warren’s agrarianism thus requires neither a complete embrace of nature nor an absolute denial of the world, but a balanced respect for both.

Of course, if this truly represents Warren’s views, it stands to reason that similar views would emerge in his own creative endeavors. It therefore may prove beneficial to examine briefly Warren’s poetry, since by Warren’s own admission, poetry was his primary interest

during the period in which he wrote his early fiction, so much so that he often considered turning his early novels into poems (Justus 49-50). Indeed, the themes Justus reads in Warren's early poetry seem to echo exactly the agrarian themes we have just deduced from Warren's criticism: "The training of the eye [...] to see further and more deeply into nature and man is the most dominant accomplishment [of his poetry]; but that training is followed by other important insights: the agony of the mind to make sense of history in the satisfactory definition of the present; the struggle of the heart to find joy, the self-transcending gift which earns man his right to participate in 'the One Life'" (55). When read with an eye for Warren's agrarianism, his early poetry especially illustrates many of the same points he discusses in his criticism.

Just a look at the titles of many of Warren's earliest published poems (which span from 1922-1943, at which point he spent almost a decade away from poetry) reveals an interest in nature and agrarian themes: "Wild Oats," "Autumn Twilight Piece," "Alf Burt, Tenant Farmer," "The Owl," "Kentucky Mountain Farm," "The Garden," "Garden Waters," "End of Season," "The Mango on the Mango Tree."

Anthony Szczesiul, in his book *Racial Politics and Robert Penn Warren's Poetry*, discusses what he sees as the preservation of negative racial stereotypes in Warren's early poems. He claims that these poems do little more than reinforce the idea of Negroes as "not as intellectually developed as whites, [...] 'more passionate,' more impulsive, and consequently more criminal" (17). While Warren may, indeed, be playing on racial stereotypes in these poems, when one reads them with Warren's agrarianism in mind, it becomes clear that Warren has something very positive to say about the Negro's relationship to nature.

"Pondy Woods," for instance, tells the story of Big Jim Todd, an African American man on the run from the law, presumably for killing someone in a bar brawl, who stops in woods to

catch his breath and is instantly berated by a buzzard who has been watching him. It is this diatribe that, according to Szczesiul and others, illustrates Warren's early racism. The buzzard tells Jim that his "breed ain't metaphysical" (33), that blacks are "more passionate / Than strong" (39-40), and thus "seize the hour" rather than think of consequences (39).

It is important to note, though, that the buzzard *tells* Jim this. Jim doesn't imagine that the buzzard thinks this; he literally hears the bird talk to him as he "Lay[s] low in the mud and muck / of Pondy Woods" (8-9). It is this one fact that concerns our purpose here, for despite the buzzard's claims to the contrary, if Jim hears the bird talk, he is inherently metaphysical. We see here a man literally listening to nature and comprehending its message even though the message is insulting and inherently painful. Jim has little chance to escape nature's indifference and mankind's cruelty, so the message seems to be that he should just give up. Jim understands the buzzard's message, and even though he is denied the chance to respond (55), it is this understanding of nature's message that is important.

Warren's choice of a black man as the protagonist of this poem may occur simply because he was inspired by an actual lynching of a local black man about which he had heard as a child, but is young Warren simply expressing the racist views so very prevalent in the rural South in which he was raised? Szczesiul certainly seems to believe this when he claims that these early poems "are explicitly racialized texts which differentiate the white race from the black race at a time when [...] this assumed racial difference formed the very basis of Southern culture itself" (21). If one takes Warren's agrarian views into account, however, another explanation is possible. A closer look at Warren's poem "Tryst on Vinegar Hill" will illustrate this.



This poem describes the sexual liaison between a young African American couple within a cemetery on Vinegar Hill. It begins by describing the special quality of the sky over the Negro cemetery. It seems more vibrantly blue

As if from that especial spot it drew  
A deep primeval clarity  
Up from the heart and desperate sinew  
Of niggers who once were buried there. (4-7)

The two lovers enter the scene and spend the remainder of the poem lying beside each other watching evening descend and making love throughout the night.

Admittedly Warren's use of pejorative racial terms predisposes one to read the entire poem as, at best, racist patronization, especially when the speaker refers to blacks as "the damnedest breed"—an expression of white misunderstanding and exasperation—who cannot understand the natural processes surrounding them (21), but in their ignorance, in this abode of the dead, can only laugh and make love.

However, taking Warren's agrarianism into consideration reveals something different in this poem. Blacks, according to the speaker, "see such things [as the processes of nature] and do not need / To know they see, or even guess" at the scientific processes going on around them (22-23). They do not have to understand what makes the tides move or what causes the seasons to change or what makes the world dark at night. They experience the natural world and enjoy it: "They only see, and their ripe innocence / Of laughter from dark lips in twilight now / Spills" (34-36).

Here, as in "Pondy Woods," we have African Americans in complete communion with nature. There is no metaphysical or scientific discussion of what makes nature nature, and no fear of death or the dead. There is simply enjoyment of the world and of the moment. When a

whippoorwill calls in the twilight, the only response is to enjoy its song and “lay / Lip to lip and heart to heart again” (44-45). Even the spirits of the buried dead, for instance, open the poem by “climbing” into the air and infusing the sky (8), making the firmament “More intimate[], more blue” (3). While the young couple makes love on the graves, the dead “timorously huddle” but “humbly watch the lovers” and “spread / Their fingers to the little spark / Of warmth the living bodies own” (47-50).

Here, then, we have an example of the communion between nature and people who work the soil. This communion is so intense, Warren implies, it continues even after death. Rather than lie silently in their graves, the black spirits interact with the sky and move closer to the warmth of the living.

Contrast this image of young lovers in nature with that of another of Warren’s early poems, “Bearded Oaks.” Like “Tryst on Vinegar Hill,” “Bearded Oaks” depicts the liaison between two lovers in nature. Here, the lovers recline, “waiting [...] in the grass [...] /Beneath the languorous tread of light” that filters down through the boughs of the oak trees above them (5). Immediately we see a difference between the two scenes. In “Tryst,” the poem opens with action: The spirits of the dead rise through the air in anticipation as the young lovers climb the hill toward the burial ground. The lovers who wait under bearded oaks, however, are two atolls, alive but rock-like and unmoving. Indeed the whole scene appears still and cold. Though clearly on land, the scene is described as subaquatic: The oaks are “subtle and marine” (1). The light that filters through the leaves “swims” above the lovers (3). The grass in which the lovers recline is “kelp-like” (7).

This aquatic imagery conveys a sense of “stillness” to the scene (16), which contrasts with the sweeping action occurring beyond the stand of oaks: “Passion and slaughter, ruth,

decay” (21). For the lovers, the oaks provide a screen from the negative influences of the outside world. After all, anger and argument have no place here: “All our debate is voiceless here,” the speaker claims, “As all our rage, the rage of stone” (25-26).

The lovers in “Tryst” do not come to the Vinegar Hill cemetery to be apart from the world, but to be a part of it. The first thing they do is to watch the sunset and nightfall over their little community (15-17). The land around them is not still, but full of life even as night descends. The young couple makes love, whereas the couple of “Bearded Oaks” simply reclines and waits. The young black couple pay full and positive attention to the world: beneath them supper smoke rises from the kitchens of the town, and above them crows fly north. Even when night has fully fallen, a whippoorwill sings and the couple returns to their lovemaking.

The scene of “Bearded Oaks,” provides no adequate retreat from the hassles of modern life. The couple here is not fully protected from the passion and slaughter outside; these things are only filtered and thinned by the oaks. They still “Descend, minutely whispering down” through the leaves to drift upon the ground (and presumably the lovers) like silt (22-23), and even though fear, here is “fearless,” so, too, is “hope [...] hopeless” (27). There is no love in “Bearded Oaks” either. Where the black couple of “Tryst” make love at least twice in the poem, at no time do the lovers in “Bearded Oaks” do anything but “wait” (5), “lie” (5), or “rest” (11). Here nature provides not a sanctuary from the turmoil of the outside world, but a reminder of what humankind has made of its basest passions.

One imagines “Tryst on Vinegar Hill” as rooted in Warren’s Kentucky childhood—a powerful source for his love of nature and his interest in a simple agrarianism. “Bearded Oaks,” though, seems to draw inspiration from Warren’s years in Louisiana, perhaps reflecting the large river plantations below New Orleans and the compromised “agrarianism” that the slave

plantation came to represent, including the “passion and slaughter” that built and maintained it and the terrible Civil War intended to prevent its demise.

The speaker of “Bearded Oaks” implies further that the changes from even this compromised agrarian world to a modern, technologically advanced world are also responsible for this sterilization of nature. Cities have grown too large to accommodate a sense of community, and thus modern man has grown isolated: He walks down “hollow” streets, his footsteps “echo” under “dead” lamps (29-30), much like the protagonists of Eliot’s early poems. Nature itself has grown wary of man: the glare of his automobile headlights “Disturb[] the doe that, leaping, [flees]” (31-32).

The oaks, then, do not provide a sylvan retreat from just the trials and tribulations of modern life. The speaker of the poem, one of the lovers, cannot even pretend that this time under the bearded oaks is anything other than a temporary escape from life—perhaps even a Freudian death wish—declaring “this hour’s term” in the woods to be “practice for eternity” (39-40). Nature is a life-giving principle for the couple on Vinegar Hill. For the couple under the bearded oaks, the retreat into the ancient grove seems plagued with guilt, repression, and intimations of mortality.

These two poems work together to illustrate Warren’s complex meditation on agrarianism. “Bearded Oaks” presents an image of the moral confusion modern man feels even in nature, something Warren sees in much of Faulkner’s fiction. Modern man cannot truly appreciate nature because, knowing human history, he has lost the necessary trust and awe of it. “Tryst on Vinegar Hill” illustrates the correct relationship with the natural world found “in people who are outside the stream of the dominant world” (“William Faulkner” 67), in this case, African Americans.

If “Bearded Oaks” illustrates the dangers of allowing modernity to erode our relationship with nature, “The Ballad of Billie Potts,” illustrates the opposing dangers of sinking too deeply into the natural world, the submission into primality that Frost seems to warn against. The poem tells the story of an innkeeper and his family who make a habit of murdering their more affluent clientele and, in a gruesome case of mistaken identity, ultimately butcher their own son. Their inn, though, is not in a city or even a town. It is a frontier inn, located “In the land between the rivers” in Western Kentucky (9), which in the late eighteenth century (when the story takes place) would be on the very edge of the wilderness, a last stopover (sometimes literally) for “folks bound West” (41).

When a likely victim stays at their inn, the Potts wait to kill him until he is well on his way through the western wilderness. Little Billie, for instance, approaches his quarry in the swamp (121), and a decade later, Big Billie unwittingly murders his son for money at a natural spring underneath a grove of trees (358).

More importantly, the speaker describes each member of the Potts family in animalistic terms. Big Billie Potts seems more bear-like than human: he is “big and stout / [...] His shoulders [are] wide and his gut [sticks] out” (1-3). Even when he speaks, his voice is so loud that it makes “the bobcat shiver” (5). His wife, who has no name, watches her patrons “like a cat” and “grabble[s] like a dog” in the ground when she disinters her son’s corpse (12). Little Billie, who is as “full of tricks as a lop-eared pup” (103), whickers like a horse when he laughs and howls like a dog when he is shot (19, 172).

“The Ballad of Billie Potts,” then, tells the sorry tale of people who have lived so long and so far away from civilization that they have become feral. Potts “ain’t sure he kin trust his neighbors” and thus feels a “mortal spite” for them (194-195). Estrangement from his fellow

man and the subsequent sinking into wild nature lead directly to the tale's grizzly end and serve as a warning to find balance between nature and community. Thus Warren illustrates in a different and more violent way than either Frost or Hemingway the "besavaging" nature of life beyond the boundaries of farm and village.

If Warren's agrarianism appears in his poetry, especially the poetry he was writing at the time he wrote his first novel and just before he turned solely to prose for a decade, it stands to reason that his fiction also carries with it what we can see as his interest in, and self-debate about, agrarian ideals. This debate is informed and carried out by the agrarian nature of the myths Warren employs throughout his early fiction. One would hardly call these myths idealized meditations on agrarian life, yet they do not seem to represent disillusionment. Rather they become in Warren's hands a complex set of allusions to the ambiguities of the human condition.

In *Night Rider*, for instance, Percy Munn embodies Warren's representative of the Grail knight Sir Parsival. According to Arthurian legend, Parsival came to represent one of the best of Arthur's knights, one who was pure enough in thought, word, and deed to achieve the Grail Quest, renew the Waste Land, and heal the ailing Fisher King. Warren's Percy Munn, as a defense attorney and board member of the Association of Growers of Dark Fired Tobacco, initially appears to represent knightly chivalry by taking up the defense of those less fortunate than he. However, as his story progresses, Percy moves further and further away from any connection to his namesake. Where Parsival renews the land, Munn destroys it by scraping tobacco fields and burning barns. Where Parsival takes care of those under his protection, Munn cold-bloodedly murders one of his clients and betrays the trust of his best friend. Where Parsival remains pure and honors the virtue of the fair sex, Munn has an affair with his best friend's

daughter and brutally rapes his own wife. Not surprisingly, then, Munn ultimately dies, gunned down in the woods. Removing him as a threat begins to restore nature's balance.

Similarly all of the main characters of *At Heaven's Gate* find themselves, like Cain and Ahasuerus, aimless wanderers (both literally and spiritually) after either participating in or profiting from some offense against nature. Ashby Wyndham, the itinerant preacher who narrates the alternating chapters, deserts his ancestral home and turns his back on his agrarian lifestyle after striking his brother down in anger. Jerry Calhoun participates in Bogan Murdock's exploitation of the land by working for Murdock. He further offends nature when, like Ashby Wyndham, he turns his back on his humble, agrarian past in pursuit of social acceptance, ultimately playing a significant role in his family's loss of the homestead. Sue Murdock, Bogan's daughter and Jerry's fiancée, similarly participates in Bogan's exploitation of the land by living off the proceeds, but she commits a more active violation of nature when she aborts her pregnancy. Finally, Slim Sarrett finds himself an aimless wanderer after violating what his culture calls the natural order first through his homosexuality and, more importantly, through his almost nonchalant murder of Sue.

In Warren's third novel, *All the King's Men*, the agrarian connections between Warren's plot and the myth he employs become a little more obscured but no less present. According to Norse myths, Ragnarok, the Norse Armageddon, begins with Odin's betrayal of the giants by refusing to pay them after they build Valhalla. While this literally compares to Willie Stark's betrayal of Gummy Larson after awarding him the Hospital contract, there is a deeper, more symbolic comparison as well. According to Helen Guerber, the giants (Jötuns) were personifications of natural forces (252). If this is so, then Odin's offense is not against mere giants, but against nature itself. Odin betrays nature in order to have Asgard as his seat of power.

In much the same way, Willie Stark betrays the trust of the poor rural farmers of his state in pursuit of greater and greater power. Willie becomes governor largely through empty promises to his rustic constituency to end political corruption and make their lives better than they are. However, Willie embraces political corruption and builds imposing architectural monuments to his power. Even his contributions to the rural poor are designed more to improve his image (and thus his power) than to truly benefit the electorate.

In Warren's fourth novel, *World Enough and Time*, Jeremiah Beaumont's murder and supplantation of Colonel Cassius Fort almost mirrors the ritual slaying and replacement of the King of the Wood, priest of Diana in Nemi, Italy, in Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. However, in order to kill Fort, Jeremiah must turn his back on all he holds dear: the rural country life of a farmer, the warmth of home, and the joys of fatherhood. When he does this, Jeremiah's cold-blooded murder of Fort becomes a pale imitation of the life-renewing ritual of Nemi, and all of Jeremiah's plans begin to go awry.

All four novels have one thing in common besides their use of myth to underscore their themes. In each novel, the protagonist meets his or her disastrous end after somehow betraying the natural world, usually embodied in the Agrarian ideals of working the land, honoring the family, and upholding tradition. Similarly, each of the myths and legends Warren employs in his novels underscores the symbiotic relationship between man and nature.

This symbiosis is mirrored in Warren's early novels. Almost all of Warren's protagonists become disconnected from their agrarian roots after coming under the influence of some aspect of the modern world, which "is in moral confusion" and suffers "from a lack of discipline, of sanction, of community of values, of a sense of mission" ("William Faulkner" 65).



Some lose their connection with the natural world when they allow themselves to be corrupted by the commercialism of the modern world. Percy Munn, for instance, begins to lose his way once Bill Christian recruits him for the Association of Growers of Dark Fired Tobacco and convinces him to use any means at his disposal (including threats and domestic terrorism) to ensure the best possible price for his tobacco crop. Similarly, Jerry Calhoun begins to resent his humble background when he sees the supposed advantages his poverty has deprived him of and accepts a position in Bogan Murdock's real estate finance company. Ashby Wyndham loses his brother when he tries to sell the family home and takes a job for Murdock's strip-mining company because it pays better than farming.

Other protagonists lose their way when they become involved, either wittingly or unwittingly, with the dirty politics of self-interest. Willie Stark sacrifices his honor and transforms himself from the morally upright and honest Cousin Willie from the Country into the corrupt and jaded Boss in order to win the gubernatorial race. Jeremiah Beaumont similarly allows himself to be drawn into local politics by those who wish to profit from his actions, and he gradually loses sight of the happiness he has found in his rural agrarian life on Rachel's farm.

If, as Warren asserts in "Literature as Symptom," literature reflects the values of the society in which it was written, Warren's early novels can be seen to reflect Warren's idea of the core values of Southern Agrarianism: the primacy of man's relationship to the natural world over his subservience to the dysfunctional and materialistic industrial world. Given the root cause of the protagonists' demise and the nature of the myths and legends Warren employs, it seems clear that Warren sees a deep connection between man and nature. Since each of his protagonists loses this connection with nature after being corrupted by commercialism and politics, it is reasonable

to assume that Warren sees these two entities as diametrically opposed to the principles of Agrarianism.

In *Robert Penn Warren: The Dark and Bloody Ground*, Leonard Casper asserts that one of the major concerns for the Southern Agrarians was “the fractioning of man by scientism” (15). Indeed Warren said as much in a conversation with the Fugitive poets when he claimed that Agrarianism was a protest “against a kind of dehumanizing and disintegrative effect on your notion of what an individual could be in the sense of a loss of your role in society” (Fugitives 20). This fractioning/dehumanization is apparent in Warren’s fictional protagonists as in the myths they embody: As soon as they come in contact with the corrupting influence of modernity, their connection to nature is severed and their very characters become fractured and impersonal. Percy Munn, the moderately successful young tobacco farmer, becomes Mr. Munn, the cold, detached, and murderous Night Rider. Cousin Willie from the Country transforms into The Boss. Slim Sarrett and Jeremiah Beaumont become murderers.

Warren’s use of myth and folklore in his early fiction serves to illustrate his vision of, and perhaps his growing debate with, Southern Agrarianism. According to the Agrarianism established by the former Nashville Fugitives and their friends, there exists between man and nature an intrinsic, symbiotic relationship. This relationship is endangered by the rising power of commercialism and industrialism, what Warren terms “the society of Big Technology and Big Business” (*Legacy* 8). In order for man to maintain his individual identity within this modern world, he must do all in his power to protect against these forces. If he fails in this, he loses sight of the importance not only of nature, but of the past and tradition. He begins to see these as commodities to be exploited or at least abandoned in favor of the modern temptations to wealth and power, however illusory they are. Sadly, Warren sees this as the current state of most people.

According to Warren, modern man “has lost his relation to society” and “is the victim of abstraction and mechanism, or at least, at moments, feels himself to be” (“William Faulkner” 65-66).

In his 1935 discussion of John Crowe Ransom’s poetry, Warren describes myth as “a fiction, a construct, which expresses a truth and affirms a value” (“John Crowe Ransom” 96). Similarly, T. S. Eliot’s mythical method involves drawing parallels between myths and aspects of the modern world. Warren’s use of myth in his early fiction performs both these functions. By recasting ancient myths in contemporary settings, Warren underscores the paltry existence man has made for himself in the pursuit of progress. Warren’s fiction, then, expresses the truth of man’s increasing alienation from nature and by extension from himself, and affirms the value of finding some way to balance our desire for material gain and our need for communion with the world. Thus myth acts for Warren in much the same way as Paul V. Murphy describes Warren’s book-length poem *Brother to Dragons*: as “a rebuke to modern Americans, whose faith in technology, science, rationality, in short, progress, caused them to miss the commonalities that they share with all those generations that have preceded them” (199).

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