Chapter 5

Beaumont’s *World Enough and Time*,
Dream 1950

**Chapter 1**  Jeremiah Beaumont was born in 1801 in western Kentucky. His father, who taught him to read from a primer he wrote himself, did not prosper, and died. Young Beaumont went to a school run by the eccentric physician Dr. Leicester Burnham. He spent several summers with his maternal grandfather, the wealthy Morton Marcher, but they had a violent falling-out when he tried to make Jeremiah renounce his father's name in order to inherit Runnymede, Marcher's estate. Later, the boy briefly came under the spell of the preacher Corinthian McClardy; in the aftermath of one revival meeting, he ran into the woods in his enthusiasm and lost his virginity to a snaggle-toothed hag who was crouching there. When the boy was seventeen, Burnham introduced him to Colonel Cassius Fort, who offered him an apprenticeship in his Bowling Green law office.

**Chapter 2**  In Bowling Green, Jeremiah becomes friends with Wilkie Barron, who tells him about Rachel Jordan, a young woman whom Fort had seduced, and who gave birth to a stillborn fetus. Beaumont breaks with Fort and tries to court Rachel, who at first rebuffs his advances.

**Chapter 3**  Wilkie introduces him to Percival Skrogg, a man devoted to “pure idea” and the editor of a Frankfort newspaper dedicated to the Relief party (those in favor of changing the debtor laws for the sake of the indebted). They induce him to join them on election day at Lumton, and manipulate him into taking part in the traditional violence at the polls. His persistence with Rachel finally pays off: she at last takes him to the grave of her stillborn child and says she will marry him if he swears to kill Cassius Fort.

**Chapter 4**  Jeremiah writes to Wilkie asking if he would serve as second in a duel with Fort. Barron asks him not to attack Fort because of his usefulness to the Relief faction. Beaumont goes to Frankfort, tells Fort that Rachel wants him dead, and tries to provoke him into a duel, without success. Fort leaves town the next day and Jeremiah can't find him. In Lexington, Wilkie introduces him to Senator Madison,
who reminds Jeremiah of Morton Marcher. Mrs. Jordan dies; touched by
Jeremiah’s apparent tenderness with her dying mother, Rachel kisses him
for the first time; they make love that night and marry without Beaumont
killing Fort.

Chapter 5  Jeremiah enters into a partnership with
Josh Parham to survey and purchase western lands. The political situation
heats up, the Relievers wanting to unseat the state court that has ruled the
replevin law unconstitutional. Rachel announces that she is pregnant. Jer­
emiah reads in the newspaper that Fort has returned from a long absence in
the East, which reawakens his determination to kill him, even though Rachel
now says that was never what she wanted. Beaumont has a dream in which
he struggles in vain to identify certain trees and sees a murdered body
whose face he cannot identify but which he knows must be Fort’s. Wilkie
and Percival come to tell Jeremiah that Fort has gone over to the anti-Relief
side and to persuade him to run for the legislature. To do this, Beaumont
must give up his partnership with Parham, an anti-Reliefer. While cam­
paigning, Jeremiah is handed a handbill that accuses Fort of having seduced
Rachel; he burns it. Beaumont loses the election. Rachel’s pregnancy ends
in stillbirth when she reads another handbill, purportedly from Fort, claim­
ing that the father of the first stillborn child had been a slave on the Jordan
farm.

Chapter 6  Wanting to find out who had brought that
handbill, Jeremiah asks at the local tavern what messenger had come to his
house on a sorrel horse in his absence, for the man had dropped his hand­
kercrchief on the front porch (a detail Beaumont has invented to justify his
inquiry) and he wants to return it. A Tim Adams had come with the letter,
though he owned no handkerchief; a stranger had asked him to deliver it.
Rachel, blaming her premature delivery on the handbill and its upsetting
contents, now again wants Jeremiah to kill Fort. He gets Captain Marlowe
and his wife to look after Rachel and the farm and sets off for Frankfort.
There, he takes a room at Caleb Jessup’s and, after dark, lures Fort out of
the house he was staying in, and stabs him to death, making sure before he
strikes that Fort recognizes him. He escapes capture, returns to Jessup’s,
and the next day begins the trip home. He triumphantly tells Rachel the
deed is done.

Chapter 7  Four men come to take Jeremiah back for
questioning. They have a handkerchief bloodstained from a nosebleed that
he inadvertently left at Jessup’s but someone planted at the murder scene.
Beaumont secretly destroys it in a fireplace during the journey. Madison
agrees to represent him and the court of inquiry begins.

Chapter 8  A Sugg Lancaster, who falsely claimed to
have heard Jeremiah utter threats against Fort, has come up with two hand­
kcrchiefs, a bloodstained one to replace the one Beaumont burned and a
clean one of the same design. He tries to bribe Marlowe into testifying that the clean handkerchief is one Beaumont had lent him. But Marlowe informs Jeremiah, who instructs him in a letter to Rachel to play along with Lancaster in order to discredit him at the trial.

Chapter 9 At the trial, Beaumont's lawyers' skill in casting doubt on the false testimony of Jessup, Lancaster, and others at first makes it appear that he will be acquitted. But Marlowe produces the letter in which Jeremiah had told him what to say, and Wilkie Barron appears as a witness for the prosecution to report Beaumont's threats against Fort. The jury finds him guilty. When he returns to his cell, Rachel is there.

Chapter 10 Rachel had been arrested for complicity in Fort's murder, but after her appearance in the court of inquiry the proceedings are stopped. Beaumont gets the idea that if he confesses and makes public the handbill in which Fort had claimed that a slave was the father of the child the governor will pardon him. He confesses to his lawyers, and they try to find a copy of the handbill, even looking in his house for the one he received, but cannot. In their prison cell, Jeremiah and Rachel fall into a "black honeymoon" of lust, interrupted only by his writing the story of his life and her composing poems. The jailer, Munn Short, tells the story of how, back in pioneer days, he "died" and was brought back to life by Perk, the older man whose young wife he had seduced.

Chapter 11 Dr. Leicester Burnham arrives in Frankfort for a last glimpse of his former pupil. Jeremiah persuades him to procure him some poison, but his and Rachel's double suicide attempt is unsuccessful. Crawford, one of the false witnesses, comes to apologize and to tell them One-Eye Jenkins, Percival Skrogg's former bodyguard, can come up with a copy of the missing handbill for the right price. Wilkie Barron and One-Eye's brother, Lilburn, suddenly appear and rescue Jeremiah and Rachel from jail.

Chapter 12 Lilburn Jenkins escorts them on their flight west and delivers them into the swamp kingdom of the old hump-back river pirate La Grand' Bosse. There Rachel goes mad and Jeremiah drifts into a stuporous, though tranquil, existence. He begins to sleep with the Bosse's former mistress (and inherits his venereal infection); Rachel adopts the infant the Bosse had sired upon her. One-Eye Jenkins shows up with the news that he has the handbill. Lilburn steps in the door and aims his pistol at his brother, who kills him with a knife when Jeremiah interferes. Rachel stabs herself to death. Jeremiah and One-Eye set out for Frankfort, though Jeremiah does not really expect a pardon, only "expiation." On the journey, One-Eye tells him that Wilkie Barron and Percival Skrogg wrote the handbill, and that only one copy was ever printed—except for the proof copy he rescued from the fire. The next morning, Jeremiah pulls a gun on Jenkins and ties him up before moving on, but
One-Eye catches up with him, with Barron's help kills him, and takes his head to Frankfort as a trophy. Wilkie marries rich and prospers but keeps Beaumont's autobiographical manuscript and, because of the truth it contains about his own conduct, eventually commits suicide.

It is no secret that World Enough and Time, Warren's fourth novel, is based on actual events. In 1825 in Frankfort, Kentucky, Jereboam Beauchamp murdered Colonel Solomon Sharp for the seduction of Ann Cook. Though Beauchamp pleaded innocent, he was convicted of the crime; while he lay in jail awaiting execution he wrote a Confession, published in 1826, in which he told how and why he did it. It was in 1944 or 1945 that Warren says Katherine Anne Porter, who had an office near his in the Library of Congress, one day gave him a copy of Beauchamp's Confession, which he "had vaguely heard of . . . before" but had not read until that day (RPW Talking, 62). Leonard Casper correctly observed that "Warren's . . . version borrows all the details offered in the Confession" (143). Not only is Jereboam Beauchamp Jeremiah Beaumont, Solomon Sharp Cassius Fort and Ann Cook Rachel Jordan, but even the mysterious Sugg Lancaster is based on an actual person, Patrick Henry Darby, Caleb Jessup on a Joel Scott, William J. Garrison (whose name Beaumont announces, but as William K. Grierson, when he lures Fort outside) on a John W. Covington (whom Beauchamp similarly announces, but as John A. Covington), Hilton Hawgood (as the man who comes up to Beaumont and says he has made more accurate measurements of the footprint at the murder scene) on a George M. Bibb, and Jackson Smart (the "Scylla" whose house Beaumont had to pass on the way back home from Frankfort) on a Thomas Middleton. Furthermore, there really was a rumor that the stillborn child to which Ann Cook had given birth was black and therefore not his, one of the four men who came to take Beauchamp back to Frankfort really did lose the dirk, and Beauchamp really did burn the falsely incriminating handkerchief.

So close are the two versions of the story that the differences are likely to prove especially meaningful. The most obvious change is that while Beauchamp was hanged on schedule, Beaumont is rescued and escapes, for a while, to the West. Another difference, equally important but less remarked upon, is that while Sharp claimed the baby was black, Fort did not—though Beaumont thought he had and therefore murdered him. (Beauchamp, like Beaumont, had first tried to provoke Sharp into a duel but could not; it was only when he got news that Sharp was saying the dead child was fathered by a slave that he, like Beaumont, was goaded into killing him.)

Warren's relationship with his material in the case of this novel, as
with regard to the facts about Huey Long in *All the King's Men*, bears an interesting—and enlightening—resemblance to the relationship of Percy Munn's dream in *Night Rider* to the ballad of Pretty Polly he had heard sung just before he dreamed it. Like day residue—the "Poor fragments of the day"—that provides the raw material for a dream and is transformed into another story according to the hidden agenda of the unconscious, so these histories and stories undergo a transformation to become part of the ongoing dream that Warren's successive novels tell. That it is an ongoing dream is evident from the dream Jeremiah Beaumont has (and Jereboam Beaucamp did not), for it is remarkably similar to the one that came to Percy Munn:

That night he had a dream. He dreamed that he stood at the edge of a big woods, a forest, toward night, and the forest was full of shadow. It was fall or winter, for the trees were nearly bare. He seemed to recognize the place as some place he had seen in the West, but it was different, too, from any place he had seen in Kentucky, and he did not know the names of the trees. That fact was terrible to him, and he struggled in his mind to know their names.

Then he saw the form on the ground before him. He saw it with no surprise because at the moment of perception he knew that he had already known it there. It was a strong man's form, naked, lying on the back, and bleeding from a wound in the chest. He could not make out the face, no matter how hard he tried, but he knew that it was the face of Cassius Fort. He knew that if he could only make out the face, he would feel the great joy that all had been done for, but when he looked, there was only a patch of grayness that swam in his sight and made him think of the gray growth on the eyes of the blind and made him fear that it was coming on his own. So he would look quickly away to be confirmed in his vision.

Looking up thus, he saw Rachel, more beautiful than in life. She was kneeling on the ground, beyond the head of the bleeding form, and was staring at him with horror and reproach. He was compelled to speak to her, to justify himself, and tell her that now they could be happy. But the words would not come, though he thought he would strangle with the effort of speech.

Then, as he looked, he saw that her face was changing. The brown spot on her cheek was enormous and each instant was larger and more devouring. It was Rachel's face and was not Rachel's face. It was Rachel's face but it was also the face of the old woman, her mother, peering at him, spying on him from
the shadows. Then it was all discolored, but was still Rachel's face and the mother's face, but was another face as well, and he knew its name, but like the names of the trees it would not come to him.

Then she lifted her hands to her face, where the horror was increased by the fact that he saw Rachel's white bosom beneath. She said, staring above her hands, to him, "Look, what you have done to me."

At that he knew that there was something which could be said to make all clear, but speech would not come, though the agony of effort grew greater. He felt cold, and a great desolation overcame him.

He woke at this point, with desolation still on him. (188–89)

Munn, too, had dreamed of a supine corpse whose face was, at least at first, invisible; and when it did become visible it assumed the identity of the man Munn had killed—as here, even without the face, Beaumont knows it belongs to the man he is supposed to kill. The face in Beaumont's dream belongs, as do several of the eventual multiple identities of the fetus in Percy's dream, to a father figure, for Fort clearly plays a paternal role in his life. When Jeremiah discovers the handbill purportedly from Fort claiming Rachel's first stillborn had been black, he says he felt "the gratitude of a good son to a father" (209). When in the dream he looks at where the face should be, Beaumont sees only grayness; the fetus at which Percy Munn gazed was also gray, "gray like the ones in the jars." Munn's wife was in his dream, presenting the dead fetus to him in her arms; Beaumont's wife is in his dream, calling his attention, with horror and reproach, to the corpse by which she kneels. The face of the fetus strove to speak; here, speechlessness belongs to the dreamer.

What these dreams make evident is that it is through the medium of a dream—Beaumont's—that the parallel between Warren's literary creation and the dreamwork of the unconscious most clearly surfaces—a dream, that is, within a dream; and a recurring one, as it already was—for Munn—the first time it appeared. Colonel Sharp's murdered body becomes Colonel Fort's in order to be the one in Jeremiah's dream so that the dream of the dead father may return once more, as it first had in Munn's dream, where its fetal quality masked the paternal identity. Sharp's and Beauchamp's story serves as raw material for what it is the unconscious in Warren's texts is forever trying to say, and once more finds the occasion of trying to say in World Enough and Time.

But in this instance the raw material (Beauchamp's Confession) becomes part of the recurring dream in yet another way. Not only is it plun-
dered for fragments to be reassembled for other ends, but because one of those other ends is the recurring story of a prior text, it also appears in the reassembled story in the form of just such a preexisting text—specifically, as a Bellerophostic one. Beauchamp’s *Confession* was published in the same year he was hanged, but in Warren’s version Beaumont’s manuscript falls into the hands of Wilkie Barron, who secretly carries it with him until it kills him by making him kill himself. In this regard, though more fatally, the manuscript parallels the brown paper package of Cass Mastern papers that Jack Burden unwillingly carried around with him and refused to open for a long time.

The narrator of *World Enough and Time* acknowledges its existence, but only as the fictive manuscript in Beaumont’s hand that Wilkie secretly preserved, not as the printed *Confession of Jereboam O. Beauchamp* that appeared in 1826 and was sold on the streets of Frankfort, Kentucky. “Here are the diaries, the documents, and the letters, yellow too, bound in neat bundles with tape so stiffened and tired that it parts almost unresisting at your touch” (3). This is, of course, as it should be, although Warren, when speaking in his own voice, readily acknowledged Beauchamp’s existence and that of his *Confession*. But the perhaps the most intriguing thing about the relationship of the novel to that earlier text is that it is in a dream—the kind of text where what is hidden can come to the surface—that we are given a hint of the existence of what the novel represses.

I am referring to the part of the dream that seems unmotivated by what is on Jeremiah Beaumont’s mind—the only part that has, to all appearances, nothing to do with his intention to murder Fort or with Rachel’s conflicting feelings about whether the deed should be done. It is almost the first thing he recalls from the dream: “He seemed to recognize the place as some place he had seen in the West, but it was different, too, from any place he had seen in Kentucky, and he did not know the names of the trees. That fact was terrible to him, and he struggled in his mind to know their names.” In the dream it functions (as something mentioned early on in a poem that is recalled again at the end functions in that poem) to form a parallel with the other face that came to coexist with Rachel’s mother’s face (which had already come to coexist with Rachel’s face). It, too, had a name: “he knew its name, but like the names of the trees it would not come to him.” And we may, and will, speculate on whose face that is. But why trees? And why names known but impossible to recall, as if repressed? And repressed by whom?

Much later, in that part of the novel most clearly not part of Beauchamp’s story, Beaumont’s flight to the West, Jeremiah and Rachel are led by their rescuer shortly before dawn “into a constricted valley, then up the stream where the valley narrowed like a gorge, with dank stone walling each side. Then suddenly, there was a little open space, with grass and a
few trees like great blobs of denser blackness. From the shape, Jeremiah decided that they must be beeches” (417). This time, unlike what happened in the dream, Beaumont has no trouble identifying the trees, despite the darkness; the trees are indeed darkness itself, more densely black than the night sky. But from the shape of things, the dream seems to have anticipated this identification scene: here he is on his way west, traveling from his Frankfort prison cell to the land of Boz on the banks of the Mississippi; while in the dream, the trees with the forgotten names seemed to be in “some place he had seen in the West.”

Yet dreams do not predict the future—unless it is a future that is already past, as it is for the real maker of Beaumont’s dream, who has also devised it so that in his youth Jeremiah actually became, for a moment, the tree he will recognize on the flight west and which, it appears, he will not be able to remember in the dream. It happened after a night of frost and freezing rain:

Next morning there was brilliant sun that made the whole landscape glitter. Beyond the door of the house was a big beech tree, “all shining and with the wide boughs brought low with ice.” He went to the tree and reached to pluck an icicle to put in his mouth. At that instant he thought how God made all things, and “my own strength seemed to pass away through my fingers into the very tree. I seemed to become the tree...” (29)

Why should Jeremiah Beaumont become a beech?

Because in his earlier, historical incarnation he was a Beauchamp—a name that, in a state where the second syllable of Versailles, for example (a city between Lexington and Frankfort) is not pronounced *sigh* but *sales*, was pronounced in the same way that the name of the falls the beech glade and cave overlook in Warren’s subsequent novel *The Cave* is spelled: *Beecham’s Bluff* (139, 376). (There is a Beacham, too, in Warren’s last novel, of which more later.) Jeremiah, it turns out, can read but cannot correctly pronounce the language from which his name, and that of his historical prototype, derives; he certainly cannot recognize it when it is correctly pronounced. This becomes apparent when he enters the kingdom of the Gran Boz (La Grand’ Bosse) and asks a French-speaking boy what that name means. “‘Eel-eel,’ he said, and that is the way Jeremiah transcribes it for us... ‘eel bow-sue.’ ‘And what the devil is that?’ Jeremiah asked sharply” (425–26). When he later gets to see the Gran Boz and his enormous hump, Jeremiah tells us:

I suddenly knew what was the name of the creature, what Jenkins and the other had meant by the name Gran Boz. I remem-
bered from my days with Dr. Burnham that in the French tongue the word for hump is *la bosse*, and therefore knew that what they meant to name him was The Big Hump, and that what the child had said was not gibberish but *il est bossu*, he is hump-backed, the defect of understanding being in my ear that did not well know the language in the living mouth.” (430)

Jeremiah’s memory of the day he became a beech is an insistent one, returning twice in the narrative. When he is crouching outside the house in Frankfort, waiting for Fort to appear so that he can murder him, “he remembered how . . . he had touched the bough of the ice-ridden beech and had felt his being flow out into the shining tree . . . and down the trunk into the secret earth. . . . That memory was important to him now, for it seemed to verify him, to say that all his past was one thing . . . that all had moved to this moment” (238). And when he is first brought into his underground prison cell “he thought of that morning in his youth, long back, when . . . he had touched the bough of the ice-ridden beech and had felt all his being flow into it, into the tree, and into the earth downward . . .” (315). Could it not be said that it was when he came closest to being Beauchamp—at the moment just before he committed his crime and began to enter upon the punishment which Beauchamp, at least, would not escape—that Beaumont felt “verified” by the memory of his kinship with a beech, felt that all had moved toward the moment when, under the guise of fulfilling his personal destiny, he was actually fulfilling his fictive one?—that, by a powerful twist of textual irony, he was becoming someone else at the very moment he thought he was being most himself?

That last recollection triggers another one on Beauchamp’s part that might deepen our understanding of what it means for Jeremiah to feel himself flowing down the trunk of that beech into the secret earth. The rekindled feeling of wanting to extend his roots down into the earth, having become a tree, reminds him of his childhood exploration of caves and in particular of the time he had crawled into a narrowing passage until he could go no farther. He had lain there and taken some delight in, as he put it, the “inward smell of earth’s bowels” (315). He found it “‘a smell cleanly and rich, not dead and foul but pregnant with a secret life, as though you breathed the dark and the dark were about to pulse.’” It is not difficult to imagine that this is a voyage deeper into the past than he may realize, that the pregnancy and pulsing secret life is that of his prenatal existence. His insistence on the cleanliness of this space makes it possible to interpret his comment earlier in the novel, when he first ventured into the house of his maternal grandfather, Morton Marcher, that he felt a great homesickness “and wanted to be in the clean room of his mother” (16).

That visit to Marcher’s Runnymede was characterized by enormous conflict between the opposing claims of mother and father, for his grand-
father will offer Jeremiah his estate on the condition that he renounce his father's name. The scene in the cave that he recalls in the dark of his prison cell places him in the same kind of conflict, allowing him in that instance to retreat from the demands of his father by taking refuge in something like the dark interior of his mother. “And while I lay there,” Jeremiah recalls, “I thought how I might not be able to return, but would lie there forever, and I saw how my father might at the moment be standing in a field full of sun to call my name wildly and might run to all my common haunts to no avail” (315). The same disposition of players—the paternal figure above, in the realm of light, and the son below, crouching in subterranean darkness—appeared when Marcher first spoke to Jeremiah: “We leaned down at the boy as though ‘Peering down a well’... Then he prodded the boy with the stick as he would prod an animal. ‘Git in the light,’ he ordered” (17). Throughout this episode, Marcher will brandish his gold-headed cane (as Jeremiah’s defense attorney, Madison, whom he thought bore a strong resemblance to his grandfather, would later brandish his), the apparent symbol, together—as we are about to see—with power over fire, of his authority. It is precisely these two emblems—the phallic rod and the flame of a sperm candle—that come into play when Jeremiah and Marcher square off over the issue of whether Beaumont’s recently deceased father was, as Marcher puts it, a worthless blackguard and bankrupt.

The old man had leaned back to puff on his cigar and “‘stared at the flame of the sperm candle in the candlestick’” (21) before he announced to his grandson that he intended to make him master of Runnymede after his death, that he considered him worthy of such a bestowal, but that if a suitably hot-blooded heir had not been found he would have sooner “‘burn down with his own hand the house he had built in his strength and let his bones rest in the ashes.’” The proper use of fire keeps coming up in this passage, prefaced by Marcher’s threat to go after the cook with a beech bough because she burned the dinner, and culminating in a struggle at the hearth. Before it begins, we are told that Jeremiah’s father had had the weakness to die overcome by something like fire, “the fever that burned him up in his strength” (20), wherein we may catch a proleptic echo of the words Marcher will use to say what he would do if he had no one to leave Runnymede to.

Marcher had hated Jeremiah’s father because he had stolen away his daughter. “‘He stole her,’ he cried, and leaned at me over the table, ‘away from her home and proper kind. Had I been in Lexington I had whipped him down the public street’” (22). Now this is precisely what Jeremiah later threatens to do to Cassius Fort, toward whom he will feel such filial gratitude: “‘I will horsewhip you in the streets of Frankfort, tomorrow, before the eyes of the town’” (131)—thereby carrying out the father-punishing gesture his grandfather had first proposed, and against which he had origi-
nally recoiled in horror. No doubt Fort became the object of Beaumont’s oedipal hatred, replacing his own beloved father, yet he later confesses that “Men have laid low their fathers only because they were fathers” (462).

In the scene with his grandfather Marcher, when Jeremiah declares that if he were not his grandfather he would show him who was his father’s son, Marcher strikes him with the gold head of the cane, which the boy wrests from his grasp. The grandfather then “picked up the heavy silver candlestick before him, so that the lighted candle fell from it to the table”—a pivotal moment, the fall of the lighted candle coming just before the older man’s ultimate defeat at the hands of his younger adversary. Beaumont’s narrative continues: “and reached as to strike me with that, but I brought the stick down on it just above his hand so that he dropped it.” Now this, too, will find its echo in the confrontation with Fort. When Jeremiah’s intended victim emerged from the house, the narrator notes, “Fort was carrying no candle. If Fort had had a candle Jeremiah would have struck it from him” (239)—as if it were important that the patricidal stroke be preceded by an almost ritualistic removal of the flame, of the power over fire, from the hands of the father to be destroyed.

Jeremiah Beaumont, who as Rachel’s lover sought to enact a just vengeance and as a Reliefer sought to make his society more just, seems, in his relation to the paternal flame, to be a failed Prometheus. He can knock the fire out of Zeus’s hand but cannot hold on to it himself, much less bestow it on his fellow beings. Freud, in his essay “The Acquisition of Power over Fire,” saw in Prometheus, who gave fire to humankind rather than keeping it for himself, someone who could renounce his instinctual drives, since “The warmth radiated by fire evokes the same kind of glow as accompanies the state of sexual excitation, and the form and motion of the flame suggest the phallus in action” (297). Now Jeremiah seems peculiarly aware of fire’s eroticism, ever since seeing the picture of a young woman martyr about to be burned at the stake that first excited his sexuality. She was tied cruelly to a post “so that the bonds seemed to crush her sweet flesh and her face lifted up while the flames rose about her. . . . Sometimes looking fixedly upon it, my breath almost stopped and my bowels turned to water. Sometimes the strange fancy took me that I might seize her from the flame and escape with her. . . . At other times it seemed that I might throw myself into the fire to perish with her for the very joy. And again, my heart leaping suddenly like a fish, and my muscles tight . . . I myself flung the first flaming faggot and could not wait to see her twist and strive . . . to utter a cry for the first agony. . . . Then when I grew to be a big boy and knew the early stirrings of manhood, it was the picture come alive in my mind which disturbed my
One viewing was especially memorable: "'I held the old book on my knee and leaned over to study the picture by the light of the fire, for the candle was not yet lit. I stared at the page and felt the heat of the fire make the flesh of my face creep and tingle" (11). He did not hear his mother come into the room. She laid her hand on his shoulder and asked what it was he was looking at so intently. "'At her touch and words I felt a hatred for her and for myself’" and leaped from his chair, flinging the book into the fire.

Another mother and another hearth provoke a feeling of horror in young Beaumont when he witnesses the easy familiarity with which his friend Wilkie Barron hints at his sexual escapades to his mother. Mrs. Barron was sitting by the fire, "munching an apple," when the young men returned late one evening. Wilkie's winking answer to her asking where he had been so late elicited a teasing response, and after she tossed her apple core into the fire, mother and son "'fell to bussing and tickling'" Jeremiah observes, "'as if she had been one of the loose sluts of his pleasure!' Later that night Jeremiah lies awake thinking about how Wilkie's mother "'had known him returned hot from his pleasure... The thought was horrible to me'" (41). The apple in this objectionable mother's hand not only connotes Edenic temptation but the particular temptation into which Jeremiah had once fallen in a moment of hot religious ecstasy, which did not prevent him from literally tumbling into his first experience with a woman. He had run screaming into the woods, as had so many other worshipers from a religious revival, proclaiming the joy of salvation. But at length he stumbled and fell—right into the arms of an ancient crone from whose hideousness the darkness had at first spared him. The apple connection lies in what the narrator twice tells us about the "snaggle-toothed hag" was unfortunately not: "if the unresisting partner had been a buxom, apple-cheeked girl..." but "it was no apple-cheeked girl or pleasant wife" (31).

A certain oedipal configuration emerges, principally in Beaumont's murderous attitude toward some of the fatherly men in his life—Marcher, Fort, Madison—but also, as the dream makes apparent, in the way his wife's face fades into another, more maternal one, and then into one he claims not to be able to recognize ("It was Rachel's face but it was also the face of the old woman, her mother, peering at him, spying on him from the shadows. Then it was all discolored, but was still Rachel's face and the mother's face, but was another face as well, and he knew its name, but like the names of the trees it would not come to him...”). There is not much doubt that the face must be his mother's; the only mystery is why Beaumont doesn't seem to realize it. When he first saw Mrs. Jordan's face it was in a mirror, a "peering face, hung back in the shadows as though belonging to no body
but floating motionless in the medium of the shadows like something drowned. . . . Covertly studying the face in the mirror, he relished the fact that it belonged to the dark house and unexplored rooms . . .” (102). The house itself is clearly part of what Beaumont desires. When he first arrived there to court Rachel he paused before knocking, marveling at the great quiet and imagining her to be under some “terrible enchantment” and that he would find her “in the innermost dark of the house” (64), as if her connection to that house were part of his interest in her.

Beaumont’s fascination for interior space soon finds some satisfaction when he notices, upon entering, that the hall “was wider than he had anticipated from the exterior of the house,” and his esthetic sense is aroused by the way “the stair curved gracefully ‘toward the upper region where my interest lay.’” That upper region undergoes a shift in meaning, for on this first visit it is Rachel’s realm, from which she does not descend to greet him but sends word that he is welcome to avail himself of the library in her absence; while later, as they begin to spend long evenings by the fire alone in the downstairs library, the upstairs becomes the domain of Mrs. Jordan, from which she will sneak down to spy upon them in the mirror, and in the end the place where she will retire to die. In dying she will come to resemble, strangely, the bewitched, paralyzed captive that Jeremiah had first imaged Rachel to be, in that moment in which he had paused before entering the house. Rachel, then, would have lain in the innermost part of the house “with eyes closed and breast scarcely moving with breath” (64); while as she lies dying Mrs. Jordan likewise imitates la Belle au bois dormant—it was “as though a statue tried to talk” (143). Jeremiah will even, impulsively, kiss the dying Mrs. Jordan and say, “I love you.” When, on the next page, he repeats these words to Rachel, he does so twice, with the apparent proviso that the Jordan house is somehow a concomitant of that love: “‘nobody ever loved anybody in this house, not here. . . .’ He grasped her firmly. ‘I love you,’ he said, ‘And in this house. . . . I love you. And in this house’” (145). He possesses her that night in the library, Mrs. Jordan is soon buried in the beech grove, and Jeremiah marries Rachel and moves into the house, the estate becoming a substitute for the inheritance he had missed acquiring when he could not agree to his grandfather’s terms, his mother’s ancestral home.

The Jordan house changes its identity for Jeremiah in a way that parallels the sequential fading of faces in his dream, for the deepest recesses of the house at first enclose Rachel, then her mother, and at last his own mother, to the extent that by possessing the house he succeeds where he had failed six years before in the struggle that concluded with his breaking his grandfather’s cane on the stone of the dead hearth. In the dying Mrs. Jordan he in fact reports catching a glimpse of “‘his own mother ‘come from the long past and far places to lie dying at last in the arms of a pious son’”
Beaumont's Dream (143), a mother who after her death had lived on in her son's memory as if she were merely farther back in the house, out of sight, as if she had gone "'into a farther and colder room to give me peace'" (39).

If the Jordan house is a new Runnymede for Jeremiah, so is the Gran Boz's island, where he not only finds the peace of "the 'black inwardness and womb of the quagmire'" (439; emphasis added), but where he also feels "'that I had previously lived that moment. . . . Then I knew what echo had risen from the hallowness of memory. I had felt thus on that day long ago when I had first entered the house of my Grandfather Marcher . . ." (423).

The scene of the battle at the hearth, where Jeremiah wrestled his grandfather's cane from his grasp and caused him to drop both candle and candlestick, reverberates throughout the novel, as if nearly every encounter with an older male were a variation on that original struggle. Like Morton Marcher, the attorney Madison had a gold-headed cane, and when he first met him Jeremiah "was suddenly reminded of the day when he had first met his grandfather. . . . He almost expected Mr. Madison to tap him with the gold-headed stick" (132). When Madison travels to Beaumont's house (the former Jordan house) to look for the handbill Fort was supposed to have written, Jeremiah is troubled by the thought of him "in that dark house" with Rachel. "He had been in the house with her," he repeats, as if it were a mystery he could not fathom. Madison brandishes his cane in suggestive ways, on one occasion "intently tracing the whorls of a knot with the point of his stick" (355), and on another "leaning toward [Rachel] over his firmly planted stick . . . while a flush grew under his swarthy skin" (356).6

While Beaumont awaits trial in the relatively relaxed confinement of the first of his two jails, the Marton house in Frankfort, a Captain and Mrs. Marlowe occupy his own house, on his invitation, to care for Rachel and the farm. It is reported that Marlowe would sit by the fire of an evening with the two women and that he "spat in the general direction of the burning log and half the time fell short and fouled the hearth" (300). This gesture was to be repeated by the jailer Munn Short, who "clumped across to spit in the dead fireplace" (313) of the Marton house on the morning when he came to announce that Jeremiah had to be put in a real jail, the underground cell that would remind him of the caves he had explored as a child—and that because of those associations joins the list of reincarnations of maternal space, a site that is both the mother's womb and final resting place. But it is curious that his first "jail," the Marton house, whose hearth Munn Short befouled in the same way that Marlowe had defiled the Beaumont/Jordan hearth, should have a name composed of an inversion of the two middle syllables of Morton Marcher's name, as if it, too, were another version of the original Runnymede—of that maternal space.7

Jeremiah Beaumont had had no choice on his way home after mur-
dering Fort but to pass by what he called his “Scylla,” Jackson Smart’s house by the side of the road. Hospitable to a fault, Smart would let no man walk past his front porch without inviting him in for a drink, no matter how inconvenient to the traveler. In his haste to get back to Rachel, Jeremiah had no desire to stop and be interrogated on the latest news from Frankfort. But there was no road around the place, and though Jeremiah tried to slink by unnoticed on the far side of the road, he was hailed and tried to put the best face on an awkward situation. The Jackson Smart episode is an instance of something it could be taken to stand for in the novel: the need for the story, no matter where its own inner drive may want to take it, to return from time to time to the historical narrative it has adopted as its origin, its need to negotiate its own passage by referring at times to certain preexisting coordinates, certain landmarks along Beauchamp’s original journey. Thus Jereboam Beauchamp, too, did in fact have to pass, as he put it, “through the straits of Scylla” (36), the house of an inconveniently hospitable Thomas Middleton, on his way back from Frankfort. Yet at the very moment when the narrator of the novel pretends to be quoting the original text, the true nature of the novel’s relationship to that original can be most revealingly glimpsed: “long before he came abreast of the porch he saw that it ‘accommodated a congress as numerous as a flight of wild pigeons settling in a beech wood’” (247). Beauchamp had said nothing about beeches.

When beeches appear in World Enough and Time they ultimately lead to origins, whether they define the final resting place of the woman whose house Jeremiah sought to possess—the grove where Mrs. Jordan was buried (as if the beech grove were that “more distant room” where Jeremiah’s mother, for whom Mrs. Jordan comes to stand, could in the end be found, the uterine origin to which he would like to return)—or the place in his dream with trees whose names he knew but could not remember until he journeyed west and discovered they were beeches. Or they might evoke the tree from his childhood he remembered both at Fort’s door and in his prison cell, which ultimately led him to recall the bowels of the subterranean chamber that had a cleanliness like that of his mother’s room for which he longed on a visit to Runnymede. Here, too, at Jackson Smart’s house, we are brought into contact with an origin, one the novel perhaps seeks to conceal at the same moment as it appears to call attention to it, the Beauchamp whose name it hides in both the name of its protagonist and the name of the tree.

But there is yet another set of coordinates to be reckoned with here, for the novel appears to be aligned not only with its historical pre-text but with the novels that precede it. Like the Circus stories, the novels make a somewhat different, and perhaps larger, sense when considered together rather than separately; together, they constitute, I think, a text of their own, something like a buried narrative. We have seen, for example, how Night
Rider’s interwoven handbills, handkerchiefs, and fragmented newsprint reappear in At Heaven’s Gate and how the fetus in Percy Munn’s dream reappears not only there but in All the King’s Men. So it is not surprising that handkerchiefs and handbills should play as significant a role as they do in Warren’s next novel, World Enough and Time. What is rather remarkable is that there were already handkerchiefs and handbills aplenty in the Beauchamp Confession (and the contemporaneous Vindication of the Character of the Late Col. Solomon P. Sharp), which Warren claims not to have read until some five years after the publication of Night Rider. Not that one would want to dispute that claim, rather to marvel at his good fortune in finding an inspirational text that spoke so well to the unconscious agenda of his novelistic production.

In both Beauchamp’s account and Warren’s novel, the assassin is convicted of a murder he did commit by a piece of falsified evidence, a handkerchief—bearing drops of blood not from the murder but from an innocent nosebleed—that had been inadvertently left in the room where he spent the night in Frankfort but was planted at the scene of the crime by those anxious to secure a conviction. (And in both narratives there is a second handkerchief, which Beauchamp/Beaumont bound around his forehead to relieve the discomfort caused by the smoke of a large brush fire through which he passed on his way to Frankfort, and which he wore also to help secure his mask when he committed the murder.) Night Rider’s symbolic underpinning is in part based on the equivalence set up there between certain handkerchiefs and certain handbills (both from Thebes); here, Warren accomplishes a similar equation, for if a false appearance of a handkerchief can send his protagonist to the gallows, a false handbill that mysteriously appears on his doorstep can, he hopes, save his life. They are equally false, and they hold equivalent powers of life and death.

Before Beaumont’s murder of Fort, when Jeremiah and Rachel were expecting the birth of their child, domestic happiness (and the passage of time since the occasion upon which he had unsuccessfully tried to provoke Fort into a duel) had allowed Jeremiah to neglect his vow to kill her seducer. But one day, in Jeremiah’s absence, a stranger came by the house to deliver a handbill, purporting to be written by Cassius Fort. It claimed that the stillborn child of Fort’s seduction—a seduction already alluded to in another handbill that had surfaced in the recent election—was not Fort’s at all, as the child was black, its real father being a slave in the Jordan household. The shock of reading this printed fictional account causes the stillbirth of the child Rachel is now carrying. As their servant, Josie, later recounts, it was soon after she gave the handbill to Rachel that she heard her scream and fall to the floor. Josie ran upstairs and got her into bed, and then “It done come. . . . A-fore its time. Hit warn’t nuthin. Nuthin but a pore little piece of meat” (204).
The arrival of the handbill, with its horrible aftermath, was enough to awaken Jeremiah from his domestic torpor and steel him to the long-delayed task. "The night when Jeremiah stood in the dining room holding in his hand the broadside with Fort's name at the bottom, all was clear to him... He was ready to seize horse, and ride, and on the instant" (207). This handbill is, for Jeremiah, a paternal text, though what he doesn't yet know is that it is one of doubtful authenticity. He was grateful to Fort with "the gratitude of a good son to a father. He was grateful because Fort, with the last outrage, had showed him the truth" (209). Yet it was not the truth, for Fort had not written it. Percival Skrogg and Wilkie Barron had, and printed only one copy (save for the proof-sheet that One-Eye Jenkins rescued from the smoldering hearth), their object being to provoke Beaumont into assassinating Fort, who had betrayed their cause when he deserted the Relief for the anti-Relief side. Jeremiah is thus tricked into playing the role Adam Stanton played in *All the King's Men*, when Tiny Duffy called him up to let him know about Willie and his sister, Anne. Stark and Fort share a similar fate, as the fact that their names mean the same in German and French strongly suggests.

Mistaking the handbill for the public text it pretends to be, unaware that it is actually a message meant only for him, Beaumont is trapped in an error that symmetrically matches the contrastingly accurate interpretation Percy Munn made of Senator Tolliver's letter in *Night Rider*, for what Munn correctly saw was that it was a public text disguised as a personal one. And in his effort to determine who had brought the handbill to his house, Jeremiah Beaumont repeats the gesture *Night Rider*’s narrator performs and that makes the text of that novel subject to the same analysis Munn made of Tolliver’s letter. (What alerted Percy to the realization that the text of the letter was not what it appeared to be was the fact that it contained a sentence that “didn’t fit” with the rest; and we have seen that Warren’s first novel, likewise, was to contain a phrase that didn’t fit—the reference to handkerchiefs from *Thebes* presuming an earlier mention that was never made.) Like the narrator, Beaumont, too, drops a handkerchief:

Jeremiah tore himself from the bedside for an afternoon, and rode to Tupper’s tavern. Somebody had kindly brought a message to his house three days before, he announced casually, when he wasn’t home, and the messenger must have dropped his handkerchief, for one had been found on the porch. He wanted to return it, he said, and thank the man for his neighborliness. Did anybody know a man with a small sorrel horse? Then he exhibited a handkerchief, a big checked cotton handkerchief, rather worn and frayed. Or did anybody recognize this? They passed it from hand to hand. (210)
Any reader who looks back to find the earlier mention of the handkerchief that this passage seems to presume will be disappointed, for it isn't there. Of course, it is more likely that Beaumont made the whole thing up in order to justify his visit to Tupper's tavern. The excuse of wanting to return the handkerchief precluded his having to reveal the content of the message. That he did make up the story is apparent from the answer he got from the tavern regulars. Tim Adams had a small sorrel horse, they said, and had recently been seen talking to a stranger, but he “never had a snot-rag in his life . . . and if he takes a notion to blow his nose he don't hold with the foolishness of a handkerchief . . .” (210).

Nevertheless, a few pages later the handkerchief does show up, described in terms that make it impossible to mistake, yet the fact that it is the same handkerchief is not acknowledged (as, in some sense it could not be, given that the first one was, at the time of its appearance, a fiction): “a big, checked cotton handkerchief, quite old and faded with a stain at one corner” (229). Except for the stain, it answers to Beaumont's description. In fact, it is the handkerchief in which Beaumont had packed his belongings when he went to Frankfort and negligently left behind in the room at Jessup's where he stayed the night of the murder, and which his enemies planted at Fort's doorstep on the morning after the murder to make it appear that Jeremiah had dropped it there the night before. By a kind of poetic justice absent from the historical model (for Beauchamp, of course, mentions neither a mysterious messenger nor a handkerchief dropped at his door), the novel has Beaumont trapped at his trial by the same lie he introduced.

Warren's novel improves upon the historical material he had to work with by taking a real handkerchief—since Beauchamp, too, was framed by the fiction of one dropped at his victim's door—and connecting it, by Beaumont's parallel and premonitory fiction of a dropped handkerchief, to a handbill that was only marginally present (marginally, because it does not appear in Beauchamp's Confession but in a document by another hand) in the original story but assumes a greater significance both in this novel and in the larger story pervading Warren's fiction. Beauchamp makes no mention, at least in print, of any handbill; what he does say is that he heard in “a letter from a gentleman,” whom he refuses to name (Kallsen, 20), that Colonel Sharp was claiming the child was black. The Vindication of the Character of the Late Col. Solomon P. Sharp, a highly suspect document written by Sharp's brother, however, quotes Beauchamp's jailer, John McIntosh, to the effect that Beauchamp had spoken to him of having received “an anonymous letter enclosing a handbill” (Kallsen, 355) in which Sharp made such a claim. Here indeed is a prior mention of a handbill; as with the handkerchief, Warren did not invent it, but he did adapt it to suit his needs, among which is that, apparently (whether he realized it or not), of
making these two elements fit into a symbolic network established in his first published novel linking handkerchiefs with handbills and fetuses. But the most significant difference between the historical narrative and the novel is that the handbill did not become for Beauchamp what it became for Beaumont, his last and best hope of escaping punishment for the crime of which the handkerchief helped convict him. " 'We'll not die,' " Jeremiah tells Rachel as they wait out the days until his execution. "And he began to explain very carefully how once the truth was known they would live, they would be pardoned, the Governor would pardon them, for he would not stand against the will of all good men, who would know how he, Jeremiah Beaumont, had acted in justice, how Fort had betrayed her and in the end had printed the handbill laying fatherhood to the black man and how no husband could suffer that" (364). Then begins a mad but fruitless search for another copy of the handbill. Surely there are others to be found elsewhere in the state, Beaumont reasons, not realizing that, as a personal message disguised as a public text, only one copy was ever printed. Only much later, on the way back from the Gran Boz’s wilderness kingdom, will he learn the truth, when One-Eye Jenkins tells him what really happened that night in Percival Skrogg’s print shop.

Like the only remaining copy of the handbill, the handkerchief with which it is linked is also burned in a hearth, when Jeremiah surreptitiously steals it from a member of the posse transporting him back to Frankfort for trial and burns it in a fireplace when no one is looking. This remarkable episode actually took place in Beauchamp’s account, too; but by inventing the story of Percival Skrogg’s printing of the phony handbill and its partly burned double (the proof-sheet One-Eye rescued from the fireplace), Warren gives a resonance to that fragment of history which it never had before, and could only have in his private universe.

The same can be said with respect to another detail from Beauchamp’s text. Beauchamp had burned the silk mask he wore for the murder in the hearth of the room where he stayed in Frankfort, and charred remnants were recovered and displayed at the trial. He does not say what he did with the second handkerchief (the one he wore on his forehead when he passed through the brush fire on the way to Frankfort and was still wearing when he committed the murder), though it appears that he effectively disposed of it somehow, for no mention was made of it at his trial. Warren’s version reverses the fate of these elements: Beaumont burns the green silk handkerchief (which, like Beauchamp, he wore through the brush fire and likewise as part of his disguise when he killed Fort) in the fireplace of the room where he spent the night in Frankfort, and gets rid of the mask by throwing it in the river. So in Warren’s retelling it is yet another handkerchief, together with the only other copy of Percival’s handbill, that gets burned in a fireplace—yet not so consumed that, like the handbill’s proof-
sheet, it does not have some afterlife. In the novel it is thus the charred remains of the silk handkerchief, not the mask, that are presented in evidence at the trial, in a scene that reenacts word for word the scene in Tupper's tavern where Beaumont had displayed the other handkerchief, the one he claimed the bearer of the handbill had left behind on his doorstep: "They passed it from hand to hand" (210); "Nathan Gregg gave it to the jury. The men passed it from hand to hand" (322). This echo heightens the irony of Jeremiah's lie about the handkerchief, which is already apparent when we learn that the handkerchief he allowed the tavern customers to pass from hand to hand is to be the very one that will, by a parallel lie, incriminate him at his trial. That scene at Tupper's comes back to haunt him—or us—at the trial when the other handkerchief retraces the hand-to-hand journey of the first, fictive one. On a level of which only the reader can be aware, that reenactment tends to strengthen the suspicion fostered by these echoing moments from Warren's several plots that ultimately we are talking, in all these instances, about the same handkerchief.

And about the same fetal wrapping, whether it be the newspaper enveloping the moribund child Percy dreamed of or the handbill a similarly named Percival printed that contained a (fictive) description of one fetus and brought about the death of another. For the silk handkerchief that was passed around at the trial survived to tell its tale only because, after he burned it in the fireplace in his room at Caleb Jessup's, Jeremiah had, rather carelessly, thrown some dirty water onto that hearth (after having washed out the socks he had worn, shoeless, in Fort's yard) before the charred remnants of that handkerchief had been entirely consumed. Beauchamp had made the same mistake, except that it was his mask that was thus incompletely destroyed. However, the addition of a small but eventually significant scene in the novel's version of Beaumont's arrival at the Jessup house makes Jeremiah's premature throwing of water on the hearth not only a reenactment of an event in the historical original, but a repetition of that earlier scene in the novel: He saw a young woman "changing ... a baby on her knees, flinging the soiled cloth to the hearth where it steamed most abominably" (226–27). The novel will use this verb again in telling how Jeremiah "flung the water into the fireplace" (243; emphasis added), thereby unintentionally saving the silk handkerchief from complete extinction. So the cloth that wrapped an infant comes to occupy the same place that the handkerchief he left behind him would occupy—as though Beaumont were acting out, unconsciously, the insistent logic of the dream.