Chapter 8

Moses in the Wilderness   *Wilderness*, 1961

Chapter 1  It is 1863 in a Jewish community in Bavaria. Adam Rosenzweig’s father, Leopold, has just died. He had, in the eyes of his older brother, deserted the faith of his fathers to fight for the secular ideal of human liberty in the Berlin uprising of 1848. He had, in the eyes of his son, deserted that idealism when, at his brother’s urging, he renounced his hope in the improvement of the human condition to return to strict observance of the Mosaic Law six months before his death. Adam, who suffers from a deformed left foot, had, coincidentally, conceived at the very moment of his father’s recantation the idea of a “clever” boot that would conceal his deformity, thus enabling him to join the fight for human liberty—specifically, to get past the examining officers and join up with the Union army in the American Civil War. Despite his father’s repudiation of his secular hope, at least Adam still has the text of the poem his father wrote about his desire to “be worthy of what he loves”—which proved truer to those ideals than did its author.

Chapter 2  On a ship bound for America with recruits for the Northern forces, Adam’s deformity is revealed when the ocean’s surface “twitches” and he loses balance. The recruiting officer, Duncan, is especially irate because his own bad leg is revealed when the ocean twitches again. He accuses Adam of trying to steal free passage, knowing he would not be accepted into the army.

Chapter 3  Duncan tells him he won’t be allowed to disembark with the rest but will have to work off his passage without pay and be thrown off the ship on its return to Europe. Later, a sailor explains to Adam how he can jump ship in America without getting caught.

Chapter 4  On the streets of New York City, Adam, bearing the address of Aaron Blaustein, a friend of his uncle’s, is caught up in the draft riots. He sees a black man hanged on a lamppost. He falls into a cellar about to be flooded to drown other blacks inside, and loses consciousness.
Chapter 5  Adam is rescued and brought to the richly furnished houses of Aaron Blaustein, who had come to America forty years before to ply the trade of a Jewish peddler. Now quite wealthy, he has lost his son, Stephen, in a Civil War battle and asks Adam to become his adopted son. Adam declines, asking only for his help in getting to the front lines.

Chapter 6  Blaustein has rewarded Mose Talbutt, the black man who was trapped in the flooded cellar with Adam and who rescued him, with a job under peddler Jedeen Hawksworth, and has granted Adam's wish to get to the scene of battle by doing the same for him. The three are rolling south through Pennsylvania on two wagons.

Chapter 7  They camp for several days near the farmhouse of Maran Meyerhof and her dying husband, Hans, in whom Adam sees his own father, for he too had fought in Germany in 1848 for revolutionary ideals. Adam is tempted to stay on with the Meyerhofs as a hired hand and perhaps succeed Maran's husband when she becomes a widow.

Chapter 8  But he continues with Hawksworth and Talbutt as they make their way south. They stop to view the Gettysburg battlefield and share a jug with a Mordacai Sulgrave and some others charged with the task of reburying the dead, by states. Jedeen reveals to Adam that when he was run out of North Carolina for defending a black man in court he had done it to spite his father.

Chapter 9  Encamped in Virginia, where Hawksworth is sutler to the army, Adam is teaching Mose how to read and write. He learns from a newspaper that Aaron Blaustein has died.

Chapter 10  Mollie the Mutton, a camp prostitute, is being flogged on the bare rump for plying her trade, and Adam finds he cannot watch. The commander of a black regiment recognizes Mose Crawford, a.k.a. Talbutt, as a deserter. Hawksworth covers for Mose but confirms the truth of the accusation by discovering the brand of a W (for "worthless") on his thigh.

Chapter 11  The next morning, Adam discovers that Mose has murdered Jedeen and stolen his money belt; he secretly buries the body. The camp is breaking up and heading out for the Battle of the Wilderness. Adam at first joins the wagon train but then drops out.

Chapter 12  Lost in the woods, Adam stumbles upon the cabin of Monmorancy Pugh and his wife, where he bargains for lodging and for Pugh to guide him to a ford in the river. He says he wants to catch up with the army to sell them things from his wagon. The next day the woman takes him aside, gives him an unloaded pistol, and warns him that Pugh may try to kill him on the way to the river.

Chapter 13  Pugh's wife was right, but Adam successfully disarms him and compels him to take him to the ford. Once across
the Rapidan, Pugh discovers that the pistol was not loaded, but does nothing about it. Adam pays him and he leaves.

**Chapter 14**  
Alone in a glade in the woods, Adam listens to the distant sounds of battle.

**Chapter 15**  
Eight rebel soldiers burst into the glade and raid Adam's wagon for food. One steals his boots, and is dismayed when he finds the left one impossible to wear. Union soldiers suddenly appear and kill or chase off the rebels—except for the one Adam himself shoots with a rifle one of them has dropped. Adam is again alone and rejoices in the knowledge that "We always do what we intend."

Warren's seventh novel tells the story of a son who tries to live up to a precept his father abandoned just before he died. Leopold Rosenzweig "had told his son that there was no nobler fate for a man than to live and die for human liberty" (7), and had nearly given his life to that struggle in the revolution of 1848, having fought at the barricades and suffered imprisonment before returning at last to his family in broken health. But to his son's dismay, Leopold, in the end, had capitulated to his brother's importunate demand that he return to the Mosaic Law, which held that it was blasphemy to engage in secular politics, to invest one's efforts in the hope for a better world (or, for that matter, to join the goyim in such a struggle) instead of trusting in God's plans for a messianic future. Leopold's deathbed assent, in his son's view, "undid the meaning of his . . . life and martyrdom" (14). But this retreat from idealism, this withdrawal of "the gift given long ago to the son" (9), this death of the father ("The father's body had needed six more months to die [after his recantation], but Adam knew that the father's self was already dead") made possible the birth of the son: "when his father's self had died, his own self had been born. . . . [W]hile the father was bearing the pain of his death, the son had borne the pain of his birth" (9, 17). Despite the considerable gulf between Isaac Sumpter's selfish savoir faire and Adam Rosenzweig's altruistic naïveté, *Wilderness* picks up where *The Cave* leaves off, with the rebirth—the birth of the self—of its filial protagonist, and his ensuing journey: Isaac to a career in New York, Adam to the New World.

That continuity is underscored by a fresh allusion to the biblical event that had so disturbed Isaac Sumpter in *The Cave*—Abraham's obedience to God's command to bind Isaac upon an altar and sacrifice him—articulated in the prayers said over Adam's father's grave: "'O Thou who speakest and doest, of Thy grace deal kindly with us, and for the sake of him who was bound like a lamb! He said the words aloud, and wondered what they meant to him, to Adam Rosenzweig" (5). In trying to determine what relevance
these words might have to his own situation, Adam continues on to the end of the prayer—"Have mercy upon the remnant of the flock of Thy hand, and say unto the Destroying Angel, Stay thy hand"—and sees himself as that remnant, standing "where my father once stood." Indeed, he is, as throughout the novel he will seek to do what his father, before that death-bed renouncement, would have done, standing where he once stood, on the front lines of human freedom. But the rest of the allusion to Isaac is surely lost on Adam Rosenzweig, for the father's sacrifice of his son has no particular resonance in his life or his father's when considered only in the context available to Adam. It need not, however, be lost on the reader who comes to this novel fresh from The Cave; for what is alluded to here, I believe, is not just the biblical Isaac but the one from Tennessee, who found a way to a new life, like Adam's, the long-delayed birth of the original self ("Little Ikey . . . could at last be totally himself"). Isaac, too, tries to make out the meaning of a difficult paternal text (his own name), and then sets out on a journey in which he is not as totally alone as he had intended, for Isaac Sumpter's solitude on his journey to rebirth is spoiled by the presence of the old derelict in the airport waiting room with the paper parcel and by the mixed-up newspaper pages that confront him with the textual outcome of his fictive inventiveness (the public fuss made about the unborn child that never was); later, hieratic (which is to say, fetal) eyes will stare down upon him from the wall of his Big Media office. To pursue the parallel, then, and realizing that immediately after Adam's birth on the occasion of his father's death he, too, will set out on a journey to America to fight for freedom in the Civil War, we need to ask if he is accompanied on that voyage by anything like that which dogged Isaac's steps.

Adam Rosenzweig, naive young innocent that he was (at twenty-nine), surely could not have been hugging under his coat some "treasure" akin to the forgotten guilt of the mad killer in "Crime" whom Sumpter so resembled; nor is it possible to imagine him trailed by anything like the mysterious old man and his newspaper-borne account of a fetus emblematic of the murder Isaac had committed in order to invent that unborn child. On the contrary, Adam's problem is that for the longest time he seems incapable of doing wrong to anyone; only in the final pages of the novel can he bring himself to kill an enemy soldier, and when he does, it comes as a complete surprise. Yet some parallel does exist, for Adam does carry some baggage on his journey, the satchel given him by the uncle who had persuaded his father to return to the Law, a satchel containing a text Adam never opens and nearly forgets about until the end of the novel. It is the seddur, the prayer book that, in this context, stands for another text, the Law of Moses for whose sake his father betrayed his secular hope.

As his father's text—the Law his father came finally to own up to owning—in the possessive, not the objective, genitive sense, the prayer
book in the satchel is a kind of paternal text. What parallel there is to Isaac in The Cave encourages us to look for some equivalent to the paternal text of his name, the one-word text his father gave him and that he spends what we see of his life trying to decipher. Adam’s first name is as much a text from the father as is Isaac’s, and in a symmetrically opposite way; for, just as Isaac had been puzzled by his father’s choice of a name bearing not only a hint of filicidal intent but also being a strangely Jewish name for a Christian boy (it had that effect on Rachel Goldstein, who first thought he was a coreligionist [123]), so Adam was aware, if not puzzled, by the implications of his father’s choice: “ ‘Adam,’ ” he told Mose Talbutt, “ ‘means, simply, man. . . . But it is not a usual name for Jew to be called. My father gave me that name because he loved mankind and wanted men to be fully man. . . . He gave me that name because I might try to be a man in the knowledge that men are my brothers’ ” (91-92).

Yet there is another paternal text in Adam’s possession, not just the prayer book from the Mosaic paternal text (more grandfatherly, as we will see, than paternal), but a text his father actually wrote. It was a book of poetry that expressed his never-satisfied desire to live up to an ideal that was to characterize his son’s encounter with the world and his memory of his father. When Adam repeated the prayer said over his father’s grave and wondered what the words about Isaac (“him who was bound like a lamb”) could mean to him, he also murmured the opening lines of his father’s poem:

If I could only be worthy of that mountain I love,
If I could only be worthy of sun-glitter on snow,
If a man could only be worthy of what he loves.

The poem sums up the book, and the thrice-spoken worthy sums up the poem, in Adam’s consciousness. For his whole voyage to America and his hope of engagement in the Civil War with its struggle for human liberty is a quest for worthiness. When, for example, he gazes on the mutilated corpse of a black man hanged from a lamppost in the New York draft riots by those who were unwilling to be conscripted to fight for the sake of blacks, he finds to his dismay that “He had not been worthy of the pain. Ah, that was his guilt” (57). And when he tells Mose Talbutt about why his father gave him his name, he asks him to call him Adam (which Mose refuses to do, preferring to call him “Slew,” on account of his foot) to “help me be worthy of my name” (92).

With this poem we have, at last, a paternal text in a very real sense—not one falsely attributed to a father (Scrogg’s handbill), nor one the father should have written but did not (Amantha Starr’s manumission papers), nor one so delicately poised on the verge of intentionality as to consist of a
gesture whose only message is to call into question whether it is in fact a
text (Willie Stark's wink), but a real text, one we can read and try to interpret, one we can watch the son trying to interpret and live up to.

Already in the opening chapter we find Adam Rosenzweig interpreting these lines by trying to obey their specific call to worthiness, refusing to return to the room where his father's body had lain, refusing to honor him according to the custom his uncle wants him to observe, preferring to “look at the mountain to honor him,” the mountain his father loved. The novel itself begins with that mountain, its first words anticipating the words of the poem: “If the mountain had not gleamed so white... If the sky above that glitter of snow... If none of these things had been as they were, he, Adam Rosenzweig, might have fled inward into the self... He might have been able to go back into that house behind him” (3-4). Instead, he went to America, hoping that despite his twisted left foot he could march, fight, and maybe die to set men free.

His crippled foot, on the face of it, already made Adam unworthy, for it rendered him technically ineligible to enlist in the Union army. He tried to make up for that lack, and conceal it, with a special boot he had invented and commissioned to be made, for which “the idea had come to him that very instant... his father had repudiated his own life,” the pain the boot would inflict in its straightening effect being the “pain of his birth,” begun “while the father was bearing the pain of his death” (16-17). But his encounter on shipboard with Sergeant Duncan, whose job it was to swear in the enlistees who had been given free passage to America in exchange for their military service, effectively removed that disguise. By a strange symmetry, Duncan himself suffered from a lameness in his left leg which he, like Adam, wished to conceal and which was the sign of unworthiness—only more genuinely so. For Duncan had broken and run at the first battle of Manassas, receiving a knee wound ignominiously from behind, in mid-flight. When the surface of the ocean just happened to heave, to give “a little mysterious twitch” (20), as the narrator puts it, at the moment Adam was to step forward, it threw him off balance so that “his left foot came out in that twisting motion which, during all those months, he had so painfully conquered” and the “ingenious” but useless boot was left dangling for all to see. “At that moment the ocean twitched again,” and it was Duncan's turn to display to all the assembled hands and enlistees what was wrong with his left leg by falling down into a sitting position, “ass-flat on the deck.”

From the way the story is told, it appears that Adam might have passed muster if Duncan's impairment had not also been so embarrassingly revealed, or at any rate if Duncan's cowardice had not made him “so sensitive about Adam Rosenzweig's special deformity.” Given the profits to be made in supplying willing cannon fodder for the war effort, Adam's lameness alone might not necessarily have kept Duncan from allowing him to enlist.
"If all these things had not happened in their unique pattern, then things might have been all right, after all" (22).

What had to happen was that the previously calm sea should just happen to break its rhythm, twice, at those particular moments, and that Duncan should be so hypersensitive about his wound, that his sudden anger at Adam is partly prompted by the irrational fear that he is mocking him. But although the narrator speaks of the unique pattern of these conspiring events, another voice, speaking through the narrator's, hints at a more pervasive pattern, one discernible only in the larger context of Warren's novels. For there is an extraordinary insistence in the narration on the ocean's "little mysterious twitch," a word that occurs seven times in three pages here, often enough to remind us of its locus classicus in Warren, the scene in *All the King's Men* that led Jack Burden to his doctrine of The Great Twitch.

The original twitch belonged, we remember, to the face of the old man Burden picked up on the highway in New Mexico, a face "which seemed as stiff and devitalized as the hide on a mummy's jaw [where] you would suddenly see a twitch in the left cheek.... You would think he was going to wink, but he wasn't...." And we may recall, too, that Jack was encountering a reenactment of the event that had been troubling him: Had Willie Stark really winked at him in Slade's back room back in 1922 or had it just been an involuntary twitch? The reason we should be reminded of it here is that, while the whole point of the hitchhiker's twitch was that it seemed to be leading up to a wink that never came, what happens in *Wilderness* is that this "mysterious twitch" should by rights have likewise been followed by a *wink*: "There was, in fact, no logical reason why Mein­herr Duncan should have been so outraged by Adam Rosenzweig's physical defect. He knew that the examiners did not really examine. He knew that he himself had winked at, and passed farther along, some rather poor spec­imens" (22; emphasis added). Bear in mind that in both instances it is the simile of a hide that does the twitching—"the hide on a mummy's jaw" in the case of the hitchhiker, a "mysterious twitch like the twitch on a horse's hide" (21) in the case of the ocean. So, if the hitchhiker was repeating the paternal gesture Stark had or had not made, then does Mein­herr Duncan in some way play a father's role for Adam (as another Duncan—Duncan Trice—had done for Cass Mastern)? If so, then he is not the only father figure Adam will encounter on his journey. Aaron Blaustein, who tries to adopt Adam as his son, clearly falls into this category; so does Hans Mey­erhof, by whose deathbed Adam will feel "as though, again, he sat beside a dying father.... but who, in dying.... would not repudiate the old truth" (120). That some of the other men in Adam's story—Jedeen Hawksworth and even Mose Talbutt/Crawfurd—are also stand-ins for his father is less apparent but will be the burden of this chapter to prove. What Ernest Jones, drawing upon Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* but speaking less
of dreams than of the way myths and literary works behave like dreams, calls “decomposition” seems to be at work here. In this process “various attributes of a given individual are disunited, and several other individuals are invented, each endowed with one group of the original attributes. In this way one person of complex character is dissolved and replaced by several, each of whom possesses a different aspect of the character which in a simpler form of the myth was combined in one being. . . . A good example . . . is seen by the figure of a tyrannical father becoming split into two, a father and a tyrant” (131).

Adam’s father is, to be sure, a character of some complexity. He represents an ideal that may well be unattainable and places a perhaps impossible demand on the son: the call to worthiness that he himself renounced by returning to the Law, and, by denying the poem he wrote in favor of the more ancient text of his fathers, a denial of authorship to become a mere reader again. Like the inscription on the mother’s gravestone in Band of Angels that seems both to negate and affirm, to deny at the very moment it names, Leopold Rosenzweig’s life sends a mixed message to his son. And even if Adam, as he seems to do through most of the novel, were to base his interpretation on the text his father left behind rather than on the final moments of his life that contradicted it, he would find that the paternal call to worthiness is betrayed by the other gift his father left him, the imperfect foot that will prevent him from legally enlisting in the Union army to carry out those inherited ideals. “And my father, he thought, he betrayed me. He looked down at the twisted whiteness of his poor foot. He stared at it. My father, he thought, that is what he gave me” (303). But it only keeps Adam from battle because of the intervention of Sergeant Duncan, and only then because of the intervention of two twitches and a wink that never occurred (which is to say, by the intervention of a greater force field than that of his own story). Duncan’s tyrannical withholding of the wink is thus in line with that part of the paternal complex that makes it impossible for Adam to live up to what another part of that complex demands of him. It is important to note that Adam’s realization that his father betrayed him by giving him an imperfect foot comes only at the end of the novel; it is only then that he feels “that he was on the verge of a great truth . . . that everything he had ever known was false” (303). Until that moment he does not see his father as a tyrant making an impossible demand (thus allowing Duncan to play the part of the father who says no); instead, from the moment Leopold renounces his idealism he merely ceases to exist: “The father’s body had needed six more months to die, but Adam knew that the father’s self was already dead.”

Adam’s encounter with Aaron Blaustein seems in certain respects to bear out the observation Jones goes on to make in the passage quoted above: “The tyrant who seeks to destroy the hero is then most commonly the
grandfather, as in the legends of the heroes Cyrus, Gilgam, Perseus . . .” (131). Blaustein is not Adam’s grandfather, only a friend of his uncle’s, but their meeting recalls in a number of ways an earlier meeting in Warren between a young man and his maternal grandfather, Jeremiah’s encounter with Morton Marcher in World Enough and Time. It will be recalled that Marcher wanted to adopt Jeremiah as his heir, but only on the condition that he renounce his father’s name. A struggle ensued, in the course of which Jeremiah warded off his grandfather’s silver candlestick with the cane he had wrested from the older man’s grasp, but only after “the lighted candle fell from it to the table,” as if the flame (“the flame of the sperm candle” into which Marcher had stared before he said he wanted an heir worthy of the estate) embodied the paternal virility that now would not be passed on. There is no hostility evident in Adam Rosenzweig’s visit to Aaron Blaustein’s home, where he shows up after his arrival in New York and his brush with death in the draft riots, but something like a variation on that earlier drama is played out before “the great gilt mirror above the screened fireplace” (recalling the “great mirrors streaked black and with peeling gold frames” [16] which Jeremiah saw when he entered Runnymede) and “the great bronze of Perseus meditatively holding the head of Medusa” (67). That even this statue may allude to the Greek myth is suggested by the fact that Perseus killed his grandfather, Acrisius (accidentally, with a discus; in an analogous scene in Warren’s last novel, the younger protagonist will find a life-size copy of a matching statue—the Discus-Thrower—in the home of the grandfatherly Dr. Stahlman [61]), and that Acrisius tried, as did Morton Marcher, to keep his daughter Danae away from prospective suitors (thus her insemination by Zeus had to take the form of a surreptitious golden shower). “He stole her,” Marcher exclaimed to his grandson, calling Jeremiah’s father a blackguard and a bankrupt—words that whipped Jeremiah into an almost murderous fury, leading to the aforementioned struggle with cane and candlestick, and culminating in the extinction of the candle and Beaumont’s breaking his grandfather’s cane on the dead hearth. Now Jones’s commentary on the myth of Perseus, as it happens, draws out aspects of the story that parallel in a remarkable way the generational struggle Warren recounts:

[The grandfather] opposes the advances of the would-be suitor . . . and even as a last resort locks up his daughter in an inaccessible spot . . . . When [the] grandfather’s commands are disobeyed or circumvented his love for his daughter turns to bitterness and he pursues her and her offspring with insatiable hate. When the grandson in the myth . . . avenges himself and his parents by slaying the tyrannical grandfather it is as though he realized the motive of the persecution, for in truth he slays
the man who endeavoured to possess and retain the mother's affections, i.e. his own rival. Thus in this sense we again come back to the primordial father, for whom to him the grandfather is but an *imago* . . . (136–37)

The counterpart to Marcher's sperm candle, whose fall and extinction presage the extinction of his paternity, is Aaron Blaustein's cigar, whose extinction and replacement and eventual definitive extinction parallel the rise and fall of his hopes of persuading Adam to take the place of his dead son.

It was when the conversation turned to conscription, to the necessity of drafting unwilling men into the Union army to replace the first, now dead, wave of eager volunteers, that Blaustein first lit up. "Aaron Blaustein lighted his cigar, shut his eyes and inhaled the comfort of the smoke. 'And,' he said, 'when the heroes are dead, you have to fill the ranks some way. Even with ordinary mortals?'" (70). The apparent connection between the pleasure of smoking the cigar and the salvation to be found in such drafted replacements continues. He "closed his eyes, and let the smoke float from his nostrils. 'Yes,' he said, opening his eyes, looking down at Adam, 'only conscription can save us. Conscription and—' He paused, then took a step toward Adam. 'What ship did you come on?' he demanded" (70). Conscription and what? The sudden gaze at Adam, the step in his direction, and the question that seems to change the subject all suggest that in fact the subject has not changed at all, that the request Blaustein is going to make—that Adam take the place of his dead son—is what he was not able to express in the blank following "and—." Indeed, he will not make the request for a few pages more. Before he broaches that subject this cigar will die, prematurely. "'I really am not that bitter,' he said, looking at his cigar, now dead, but not making any motion to relight it" (73). He continues to hold it in his fingers, neither relighting it nor throwing it away, until he comes to the point of revealing to Adam that his son, one of that first wave of heroes, had fallen at the Battle of Chancellorsville.

He flung the twisted, crumpled cigar to the red carpet, and stared down at it.

"My son was killed," he said dully. He sat down. . . . "I did not think I could live."

He looked down at the broken cigar on the red carpet. "You know," he said, and lifted his dark face beseeingly to Adam, "I cannot die." (75–76)

If the cigar's fall parallels his son's death, then his decision to replace it with another prepares the way for the delicate request he is about to make.

Very carefully, he took out his cigar case, and prepared and lighted another cigar.
He drew in the smoke, exhaled it. He inspected the cigar.

"These cigars are very expensive," he said. (76-77)

He then reveals to Adam, who earlier that evening had glanced admiringly at himself in the mirror of his room, dressed in a coat Aaron had lent him, that the coat he is wearing was his dead son's. With a "cold terror," Adam suddenly realizes that he had known that already, and "felt a thousand filmy strands being cast over him," that he was about to be caught in the trap Blaustein had so carefully prepared. Aaron then popped the question, and "dropped to one knee before Adam, letting the cigar fall from his fingers..." This time the fallen cigar is still burning, like this would-be father's hope offered in all its vulnerability, the hope that his paternal line will not die out; this fatherly desire is laid bare at last, but in such a way that it must risk the son's rejection:

Adam, sitting there in his sickening disorientation, stared at the cigar on the floor. He saw the red carpet about the lighted end of the cigar scorch to brown, then to black... He saw the red winking of the blackened strands of the fabric as they were consumed and parted... Adam rose abruptly from the chair. He thrust his left foot forward from under the touch of the old man crouching there, and ground his boot on the cigar and the smoldering spot of the carpet. (78-79; emphasis added)

Adam's abrupt and violent gesture is untypical of his otherwise passive character and, though clothed perhaps in the guise of protecting the carpet from further damage, is nevertheless the definitive stamping out of the winking paternal flame. This rejection of an enfeebled father's pleading offer provides an interestingly symmetrical counterpart to the rejection Adam himself had suffered at the hands of the tyrannical father (Meinheer Duncan) who would not give him the wink of acceptance. Adam realizes the ultimate violence of his gesture here near the end of the novel, when he sees that he was responsible for Aaron's death from a heart attack a few months later: "he thought how, if he had stayed with Aaron Blaustein, Aaron Blaustein would not have died" (301). And thus what happened that evening in the shadow of the bronze Perseus was, in the end, as violent, indeed, more so, than the struggle between Jeremiah Beaumont and his maternal grandfather. Marcher, as it happened, did not soon die and may in fact have had a subsequent heir to fill the place Jeremiah refused; for he subsequently married "a sluttish wench from the inn" and gave his name to a son that, though he might not have been his, did have a long line of descendants, including an associate professor of French at a midwestern university.

But if Adam plays Perseus to Aaron's Acrisius, in what way does he live out the episode enacted in the statue itself, which depicts the conquer-
ing hero “meditatively holding the head of Medusa”? Before severing that head from its body Perseus could not look at it without risking being turned to stone, and had to have recourse to Athene’s shield, because of whose polished surface he was able to accomplish the task by looking at the reflection of that horrible face. Freud saw female genitalia in the petrifying head of Medusa, both because “becoming stiff means an erection” and because “To decapitate = to castrate. The terror Medusa induces is thus a terror of castration that is linked to the sight of something . . . [I]t occurs when a boy, who has hitherto been unwilling to believe the threat of castration, catches sight of the female genitals, probably those of an adult, surrounded by hair, and essentially those of his mother” (“Medusa’s Head,” 212). The statue’s proximity to the mirror and the hearth puts it in touch with the elements of its own story, if in the mirror we can see the reflecting surface in which Perseus stole a glance at Medusa and in the hearth, the womb, the feminine genital space that Freud saw, ultimately, as the mother’s. Jeremiah Beaumont’s furtive glimpse of Mrs. Jordan, Rachel’s mother, who stood in the shadows of the hallway in such a way that she was just visible out of the corner of his eye in the mirror above the fireplace, in World Enough and Time, seems now, in retrospect, a glance at Medusa, as before it had seemed a vision of his own mother. Later, when Mrs. Jordan lay dying and she did remind him of his mother, he saw her lips move, soundlessly: “It was, he thought, as though a statue tried to talk”—as though, now that the presence of the statue of Perseus and the head of Medusa in Aaron Blaustein’s drawing room and the parallels between Adam’s confrontation with Aaron and Jeremiah’s with Marcher have clarified the analogy between Beaumont and the slayer of Medusa and Acrisius, she had become a very particular statue, one that in life had had the power to turn whoever gazed at her into stone.

Which is to say that Medusa appears in Warren’s texts already transformed into art, of which the bronze in Blaustein’s drawing room is one instance and the bare rump of Mollie the Mutton another. Not that the Irish prostitute’s backside, “big . . . fer them legs,” was a work of art, but the treatment it receives in the novel is such as to arrest our attention, for it functions for Adam as the equivalent of what Perseus could only gaze at indirectly. Tied face down over a length of log, she was to receive “[t]en on the bare doup” for plying her trade in the Union camp where Adam found employment as a sutler’s assistant. In that position, with a stick laid across the back of her knees so that she couldn’t move and her dress thrown up over the back of her head, her sex may well have been visible, but for the prurient leers of the audience her bare buttocks would suffice. Adam, however, found it impossible to look. At first, he “found himself staring at the woman’s shoes,” which, like that part of her he could not bear to see, “looked too big.”
But the pain of staring at the shoes was too great. If they had not been turned inward, pigeon-toed, it would not have been so bad. No, he couldn't bear to look at the shoes.

He carefully looked at the faces of other men. They were all staring at the woman, some avid and intense, some with schooled detachment, some with idiotic grin and wet lips. They were all different, the faces, but the eyes of all were fixed there where he, Adam Rosenzweig, did not dare to look. (205—6)

As Perseus could only look at Medusa through the image reflected in Athene's shield, so Adam wisely substituted its reflection in the spectators' eyes for a view of the thing itself. That the thing itself was very close to being what Medusa's head may ultimately stand for certainly helps to sustain the illusion.

Yet, in the context of the novel, even this scene is a substitute for something else, precisely that something else for which the thing itself stands: castration. This pilloried victim recalls another, the hanged black man Adam saw when he arrived in New York at the height of the draft riots. "It hung there like an empty sack, with the top tied together and the loose part of the top fluffing out and falling to one side, over the tight cord. That was what it first reminded him of. His mind clung to that image as long as possible" (44). What Adam first saw of Mollie, some time before her public punishment, was a similarly shapeless parcel, tied at the neck with a cord: "The form was swathed in an army blanket, much patched, fastened at the neck with a cord. From under the shapeless huddle of blanket the feet moved in the mud. The feet wore army shoes, in obvious disrepair. The head was wrapped in a turban..." (166). Those shoes would later be the part of Mollie on which he would try to focus his attention in the effort not to look at that which he would have found more troubling, a substitution that proves unsuccessful because of what was wrong with her feet: "If they had not been turned inward, pigeon-toed, it would not have been so bad." Similarly, the mutilated feet of the hanged man claimed so much of Adam's attention that they apparently distracted him from the even more horrible mutilation that is never named but must have been the ultimate aim of his executioners. The way the text describes those feet suggests that the narrator, at least, is not unaware of the castration the victim must have undergone: "Then he saw that one last, slow, tumescent drop was falling from one foot. He looked at the foot. The toes had been cut off" (45). Just as Mollie’s feet could stand for her sex, so does this tumescently dripping foot stand for what else must have been cut off, which Adam neglects to notice, or chooses not to see.

When Adam recounts what he had seen of the hanged man to Aaron Blaustein, the way he begins suggests what he may have found most signif-
significant: “It was a lamp post. He was hanging on a lamp post. They had cut off his toes and—” (58). Now this persistent attention to feet has another basis other than just that of his aversion to looking at actual castration. For Adam, to stare at this amputation was tantamount to beholding castration for a very personal reason, as his own left foot stands (not very well, given its infirmity) for his penis. At the close of the novel, in the glade in the Wilderness where so many things are finally revealed to him (that he was responsible for Blaustein's death, that his father “betrayed” him by “what he gave me”—the foot lame from birth), he will come close to realizing even this, when he looks at his bare feet and calls them “stupid, ugly, unlovable children” (300). “Children,” in the book Warren will later imagine his father reading (“Freud on dreams . . .”, in the poem “Reading Late at Night . . .”), “in dreams often stand for the genitals; and, indeed, both men and women are in the habit of referring to their genitals affectionately as their ‘little ones.’ . . . Playing with a little child, beating it, etc., often represent masturbation . . .” (392). The tumescent quality of what drips from the mutilated foot, and the fact that the body of another riot victim will soon “lay across the very toes of Adam Rosenzweig” (50), already underscore the threat the hanged man's fate must have posed to Adam's unconscious. Pursuing the later connection to children would be superfluous were it not that the narrative itself moves in the same direction, in the immediate aftermath of the scene in which Adam gazes at the body. “He went across the street and sat on the curb, staring at the body. Perhaps it would happen yet. . . . Three children, very dirty, frowzy-headed, and unkempt, two little girls about seven and nine dragging a naked-butted boy of some two years, came and stood to stare up at the body. He rose again, and went toward them, waving his arms, he did not know why” (46). If Wilderness recalls Freud's book on dreams when it shows us Adam calling his feet children (a connection further underscored when he focuses his attention on the foot of little Hans, Maran Meyerhof's infant: “One of the baby's feet gave a little rhythmic kick, over and over” [113]), after having already set up the analogy between the hanged man's mutilated feet and his unnarrated castration, then this sudden appearance of three children tempts us to recall another observation from the same source: “In any case the number three has been confirmed from many sides as a symbol of the male genitals” (393). The analogy is strengthened by the fact that the central figure here is a half-naked boy, his parts exposed (particularly that part of the body Mollie had also to expose), being dragged against his will by two females to the scene of castration, with the result that, not only are these intruders upon Adam's meditations (his staring at the body and his waiting “for something to happen” in his heart) genital both by virtue of being children and being three, but at the same time they represent the fear, and the danger, of castration itself.
What is it Adam is waiting for as he stares at the body on the lamp-post, deep in the meditation which the children interrupt? As so often happens in Warren, the moment a protagonist feels on the brink of an insight may also be the moment readers aware of a larger context can make their own discoveries. Thus it was when Jeremiah Beaumont kept returning to the childhood memory of the beech tree, and dreamed about the trees whose name he knew but could not remember, making it possible for us to discover the ultimate significance of their name. Given, then, the parallels between Mollie and the hanged man, what is there to see in their juncture that Adam’s patient expectancy should encourage us to seek but that he could never know (since, for one thing, he could not yet be aware of their parallels)? The children may be a clue. Adam’s first vision of Mollie, as we have seen, was of a shapeless huddle tied at the neck with a cord, which is strikingly reminiscent of the empty sack tied at the neck with a tight cord that was his first impression of the hanged man. Mollie is elsewhere described as a parcel (“nothing but a pore old broke-down parcel of Irish clap” [207]), a term not innocent of other connotations in the novel, for the narrative’s one description of an infant, Maran Meyerhof’s baby, is as “a soft ill-wrapped parcel” (117). And the fact that it is ill-wrapped sends us back to another bundled baby, one that was poorly, and strangely, wrapped, the child in disintegrating newspaper that appeared to Perse (and now we begin to suspect the significance of his first name) Munn in a dream.

Maran’s child is worthy of interest for another reason: it displays something like a father’s wink: “[W]ith abandoned truthfulness [its head] flopped over against her breast. Adam could see that the lid of the one eye visible to him was drooping.... The baby’s name, he remembered with sudden precision, was Hans—Hans, like the father” (177). Adam will spend several days, on a pause on his way south as assistant to the sutler Jedeen Hawksworth, talking with the infant’s dying father, who had fought in the same European revolution as Leopold Rosenzweig. In him he will see an idealized version of his own father, one who had not rejected his secular idealism to return to the Law. “He felt as though his life were curving backward on itself.... He felt as though, again, he sat beside a dying father, a father who had handled a musket at Rastatt but who, in dying.... would not repudiate the old truth” (120). It is Meyerhof’s eyes that most catch Adam’s attention, for the body was so wasted by illness that they were the only thing still alive: “the body was nothing more than a heap of bones, lying almost as starkly obvious as they would lie on the earth, if a spade.... broke open the coffin..... Life showed only in the eyes” (119). They would sporadically glitter with “astonishing brilliance, as though some great excitement, some commanding thought, were taking hold,” yet that semblance of meaning behind their glitter was, he realized, not caused by “anything that had passed between them” (Hans and Adam) but was “only some
fluctuation of the fever or the transitory flicker of some old event in that fading brain" (120). Like the twitch on the mummy-hided face of the old man that Jack Burden thought was the prelude to a wink, this phenomenon of seeming thought, this glitter in the eye, is purely physiological, empty of meaning and intent. Like the mummies Sweetwater was reminded of by the fetus in Sue Murdock's womb, whose eyelids were squinting in their preserved state “because there was nothing under them any more,” these old eyes have the look of intent (“like the faces of the fetuses, the same look, intent, contorted, the same invincible, painful abstraction”), but inside they are as empty as Duncan Trice's coffin in Cass Mastern's fantasy (“I had the impulse to hurl the coffin to the ground and see its emptiness burst open”), a fantasy Adam comes close to sharing when he looks at Hans's dying body and thinks of how it would not look any different “if a spade, some years from now, broke open the coffin.”

The hanged man, once Adam got past the image of an “empty sack” (an image “to which his mind clung . . . as long as possible”), gave a similar semblance of thoughtfulness for purely physiological reasons: “the head, hanging pensive, quizzical, abashed” (44). This pensiveness and quizzicality recall the wise puzzlement of Sweetwater's mummylike fetuses (“faces . . . intent and, for all their wisdom, contorted in profound puzzlement”). And it may also remind us of the way in which Hans's eyes showed a glitter of astonishing brilliance that seemed to reveal “some commanding thought” but was in fact the result of some kind of synaptic twitch. The hanged man is thus the site of the intersection of a great deal of imagery: of fetal fathers and phallic feet, and of thoughtful yet puzzled expressions that give the deceiving semblance of intent. Likewise puzzled, though more sure that we are, we have reason to wonder if the text of these intersections, like the thing it represents, only seems to mean something when in fact that was never its intent. In other words, in retracing these parallels (and thereby bringing into play much that happens elsewhere not only here but in the rest of the Warren corpus), do we run the risk of altering the text? Perhaps so, but this risk of rewriting a received and paternal text is anticipated by the novel itself, for Wilderness is the story of a son who tries to be true to his father's poem. And this may offer some comfort and assurance that there is an intent behind what we think we see that, like an all-seeing father, already knew this rewriting would happen.

For Adam Rosenzweig's quest for the worthiness his father's poem first named will culminate in his discovery of a rewritten paternal text, specifically, in his encounter with the debased incarnation of the paternal text to which his father had betrayed his own poem to return, the Law of Moses. “You have lived without the Law,” his father's older brother (who had raised Adam during his father's thirteen-year imprisonment, and was thus a second, rival father) had told Leopold Rosenzweig; “I have prayed
that you may die within the Law” (8). Now Adam will find that rewritten paternal text in the person of a Moses—Mose Talbutt, his fellow assistant to Jedeen Hawksworth—upon whose skin a letter has been inscribed, an initial that stands for the very word most able to contradict the word that best sums up the text his father had written, the thrice-expressed “worthy” of his poem: “On the man's right thigh, puckering and crinkling crudely up from the dark slickness of skin, was the brand. It was a big W... ‘You know what that is?’ Jed Hawksworth demanded, turning to Adam. ‘Reckin' that's one letter your prize scholar can read. W—W for worthless! That's what the Yankees put on 'em. Put on a soldier that ain't worth a damn.'” (217). Mose's true identity was discovered by Hawksworth, who had reason to suspect it already (from the commander of a black regiment's having recognized him), when he tore off the underclothes Mose would never remove and revealed the guilty letter. His real name was not Talbutt but Crawfurd, and he had deserted from the Union army. But this revelation of hidden identity, of the Crawfurd beneath the Talbutt—like those other moments in Warren when the protagonist discovers one thing and the reader something else—may remind us not only of the constancy of his first name but of its identity with that of the author of the received paternal text that Leopold Rosenzweig in his last days adopted as the palinode to the poem he had written, the Law of Moses. If one Moses can stand for another (if there is a reason for Mose's first name and this is it), then the text that contradicted the father's poem (the Mosaic Law, transformed by its black incarnation into a palimpsest, a rewritable text) is now canceled out by something like the very text it annulled. The degree to which it is something like (as “worthless” is like “worth”), like the degree to which Mose's name is like that of the author of the Law, is what gives impetus to this interpretation, to the sense that behind this similarity of situation and name there is some semblance of intent. But neither the nature nor even the existence of that intent is clear; much more apparent than either is the fact that both this reading and its sense of its own liability to error seem to have been anticipated by the text itself, for what could be more tenuous than the official interpretation that the text offers us, Hawksworth's reading of this solitary W? Could it not just as well have stood for the opposite of what he says it did, for worth instead of worthlessness? Hawksworth, of course, knew what he was talking about if the letter is to be interpreted in its specific military context. But what does it mean in the context of the two paternal texts, Leopold's and Mose's, to which it seems to allude?

And what does it mean that the word for which it stands (or which it contradicts) should also appear in the name of this privileged interpreter? What, in other words, is the worth of this hawk? The publication a decade and a half after Wilderness of the poem Harold Bloom has termed “a deliberate and overwhelming self-interpretation of [Warren's] obsessive hawk-

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imagery” (review of *Now and Then*, 74) has made that question a little less difficult to answer. “Red-Tail Hawk and Pyre of Youth” is the story of the murder and subsequent preservation of the corpse of a hawk who bears an astonishing resemblance to the recurring and complex figure of fetus, mummy, and paternal text. Like the newspaper-wrapped infant in Perse’s dream, the hawk is “cuddled / Like babe to heart . . . . Like a secret, I wrapped it in newspaper.” As a “chunk of poor wingless red meat,” the body shares qualities with the stillborn fetuses of *World Enough and Time* (where Rachel’s dead child was “Nuthin but a pore little piece of meat” [204]) and *The Cave* (where what Jack Harrick fathered on Mary Tillyard was “a piece of something like a dime’s worth of cat meat from the butcher shop” [380]). As a preserved corpse (the object of the poet’s boyish taxidermy), the stuffed hawk has something in common with the mummies that the fetus Sweetwater imagined reminded him of; the fact that it was their eyes, with their semblance of intelligent intent, that made him think of their resemblance is not without resonance here, for the yellow eyes of the preserved hawk are what most haunt the poet: “the yellow eyes, / Unsleeping, stared as I slept” in the room where he had placed the hawk, like a text among texts, “on the tallest of bookshelves,” in the company of “Blake and Lycidas, Augustine, Hardy and Hamlet.” And later, after he had left home, books, and hawk behind, “with / Eyes closed I knew / That yellow eyes somewhere, unblinking, in vengeance stared.”

It is in those eyes that the hawk is most alive, his vengeful intent made apparent. Yet, paradoxically, those eyes are the poet’s own creation: “glass eyes / Gleaming yellow” he had substituted for the unpreservable original “Gold eyes, unforgiving, for they, like God, see all.” Not gold but yellow and not flesh but glass, they are perhaps the most visible sign of the taxidermist’s artifice, of the absence of the real. In this regard they resemble the eyes in the mummies Sweetwater remembered, which squinted and thereby seemed intent “because there was nothing under them any more,” for there was nothing beneath the glass eyes either, only the skull “now well scraped / And with arsenic dried.” All that poor red meat gone too, replaced by “the clay-burlap body built there within.” As *Wilderness* makes apparent, where Hans Meyerhof’s eyes glitter with an astonishing brilliance that is merely the visible sign of a fading brain, this quality of seeming intent belongs to the eyes not only of Sweetwater’s mummies but of Warren’s fathers, too. In *Wilderness* a certain winking can be expected from a father’s eyes (withheld by Duncan, offered in the fading of Aaron Blaustein’s cigar), and in “Red-Tail Hawk” the hawk eventually becomes one-eyed (which is essentially what winking does), too: the poet returns years later and finds it, no longer on the bookshelf but still among books—though with a difference, for it now lies not only with Milton and *Hamlet* but with a text that he has since then written: “a book / Of poems friends and I had printed in
If the bookish company the stuffed hawk had always kept since it was first enshrined on that bookcase suggests that it was a text among texts, might the fact that it is now gathering dust in the company of poems like the one in which it appears mean that over the passage of time it has become something like the poet's poem, his text? as it already is clearly an object of his own making, a reconstructed version of a dead original, a model perhaps for the kind of rewritten (paternal) text that may be at the origin of what this poet writes: "the chunk of poor wingless red meat, / The model from which all was molded"?

It is true that in the hawk's present timeworn state, in its one-eyedness, the poet does recognize something of himself:

That night in the lumber room, late,
I found him—the hawk, feathers shabby, one
Wing bandy-banged, one foot gone sadly
Askew, one eye long gone—and I reckoned
I knew how it felt with one gone.

Like the secret, skeletal articulation in "The Circus in the Attic" that only Time can reveal, the fact that Warren is blind in one eye has had to wait a long time to become part of what is publicly known about him, part of that text of which he says, in Being Here, "it may be said that our lives are our own supreme fiction" (108). What is the significance of the fact that the poet shares this one-eyedness with the stuffed hawk that is his own creation, or recreation? It is more than a family resemblance. Warren would never have become a writer, according to the family romance his sister Mary tells, had it not been for the accident that led to his half-blindness, had not his brother Thomas thrown the rock in the air that sailed over the hedge to where Robert Penn was lying on his back, eyes open. It kept him from going to the Naval Academy, where he had already won an appointment and ultimately sent him to Vanderbilt University instead, where he came under the influence of such teachers as John Crowe Ransom and Donald Davidson and such friends as Allen Tate. One would like to think the writer in Warren would have won out over the admiral in him anyway, but certainly the accident intervened like a stroke of fate. Of more interest than the biographical fact alone is the articulation it finds in Warren's published work, of which his belated revelation in "Red-Tail Hawk" is a highly privileged example; for it is not just that this is the first time the secreted truth has broken through into direct expression in his text, but that it takes place in a poem where all the elements of the recurring pattern are present: the father as preserved corpse with paradoxically expressive eyes, as text (and rewritten text), and as newspaper-wrapped infant (and fetal) bundle.

The resemblance between the stuffed hawk and the poet is indeed a family one, though—as we now know—artificial, for this half-blindness
was not inherited from father to son. But the fact that the accident happened to the son alone and yet Warren's fiction is about fathers giving or refusing to give one-eyed looks to their sons, and fathers whose eyes give the semblance of intent when they don't necessarily mean to, suggests a hidden motive for that fiction, one in which the son projects his own one-eyedness onto the father, thereby giving him the enforced wink that was really his own, and so invents the text he will pretend to decipher.

A similar reverse inheritance is accomplished in "The Leaf," where the poet climbs up to the nesting place of the hawk and finds that "I am the father / Of my father's father's father. I, / Of my father, have set the teeth on edge. But / By what grape?" The fruit of such effort in Wilderness is the reappearance of the initial letter of the word, so insistently present in Adam's father's text, on the skin of a Moses, so that by such stigmatization the text of his father's father might be rewritten, reinscribed with the letter of worth or unworth that in his father's text it had, until now, effectively obliterated. That Adam was aiming, though without realizing it, at the grandfather is already apparent from the fact that he inflicts an eventually mortal blow on Aaron Blaustein—grinding the winking flame to extinction with his boot, refusing to be his adopted son, and later realizing that that refusal was responsible for his death—in the shadow of a mythic Perseus who (likewise unintentionally) killed his own grandfather. That Adam's ultimate grandfatherly target is the Moses whose text overthrew his father's is evident from Blaustein's first name, for what better scripturally sanctioned substitute could there be for Moses than Aaron, his brother and indispensable stand-in on that other wilderness journey?