Chapter 11
Old Buck's Golden Shower: Or, the New Perseus  
A Place to Come To, 1977

Book I

Chapter 1  Jediah Tewksbury recalls the death of his father, who stood up on a mule wagon to urinate and, being drunk, fell off. The wheels passed over his neck. Jed, who appears to have been born circa 1917, was eight at the time.

Chapter 2  His mother sells the farm and they move to nearby Dugton, Alabama, where she finds work in a canning factory. Boys at school tease Jed about his father's having died, as they jokingly tell it, while masturbating, but later, in graduate school, he turns the tale to good social advantage. In Nashville in 1951 an unexpected phone call from Rozelle Hardcastle prompts Jed's recollection of the time she had made him take her to the senior prom even though he was immune at the time to her considerable charms. He later learns that she had done it to spite her boyfriend.

Chapter 3  This chapter and the next recapitulate Jed's past between high school and Rozelle's phone call. He attends a miserable Alabama Bible college, good only for the Greek he learned there (Latin had been his salvation in high school). After graduation he talks his way into graduate school at the University of Chicago, befriended by the imposing Dr. Heinrich Stahlmann, who introduces him to the imperium intellectus—the cosmopolitan life of the mind, detached from history. But Stahlmann becomes increasingly dissatisfied with this academic ideal because of its irrelevance in the face of the Nazi horror then overrunning Europe and takes his own life. From a news clipping his mother sends, Jed learns that Rozelle has married a much older, and wealthier, man in Florida, Michael X. Butler.

Chapter 4  Jed joins the army, serving with Italian partisans behind German lines. In 1946 he resumes his studies in comparative medieval literature at Chicago. A letter from his mother informs him
that Rozelle's husband has drowned in a boat accident; Rozelle was steering. Displacing Perry Gerald in her affections, Jed marries Agnes Andresen of Ripley City, South Dakota, whose death from cancer a few years later will make it possible, as if it were a Faustian pact, for him to write a brilliant article on "Dante and the Metaphysics of Death." He accepts a post at a college in Nashville.

Book II

Chapter 5 There is a return to Rozelle—now Mrs. Lawford Carrington—on the telephone: having heard of Jed's arrival in the Nashville paper, she invites him to Sunday supper with friends. Among them are Bill Cudworth, a lawyer who has come home from New York, and his wife, Sally; young, intelligent Maria McInnis; and the fiftyish Mrs. Jones-Talbot, Lawford's aunt. Carrington is wealthy (though from Rozelle's Florida inheritance) and an artist; Jed realizes that a sculpted head of a woman in orgasm is Rozelle.

Chapter 6 Jed drifts into dating Maria and gives Mrs. Jones-Talbot a weekly tutorial in Dante.

Chapter 7 Cudworth is trying to get Jed to buy a neighboring farm, and Jed senses that his new friends are expecting him to marry Maria McInnis. He appreciates their friendship but is in no way inclined to put down roots in Nashville. Lawford Carrington unveils a new sculpture: the bronze head of an older man with his mouth open as if to scream. Asked to tell an Alabama story, Jed recites the death of his father. Later the next day he finds Rozelle waiting for him in the dark, at his house.

Chapter 8 Maria tells Jed in a letter about the skeleton in her closet—her mother is insane—and that, now she has heard him tell the story about his father, she has found the strength to live her own life; she is leaving town for a while to find herself. Jed and Rozelle begin a torrid affair; he continues to be part of the Carringtons' social circle so as not to arouse suspicion.

Chapter 9 Jed asks Rozelle to leave her husband. She insists she loves Jed but refuses.

Chapter 10 The Friday Dante sessions with Mrs. Jones-Talbot continue—and the afternoon trysts with Rozelle. When Lawford goes to New York to exhibit his sculpture, she invites Jed to spend the night.

Chapter 11 Rozelle flies to New York to join her husband; on her return, she tells Jed that the reviews were bad and that Lawford has taken to drink and to abusing her sexually. She adds that the sculpted head of the screaming man was molded on the death agony of her husband who drowned in Florida.
Chapter 12  Jed witnesses Mrs. Jones-Talbot's stallion Dark Power performing stud service; inspired by the sight, she and Jed wind up in bed together. She hints at something fishy about the death of Rozelle's first husband.

Chapter 13  Jed, in Florida to give a lecture, does a little investigating concerning Rozelle's late husband. Upon his return, Rozelle tells him that Lawford, with whom she had been having an affair, was on the boat when the sail knocked Butler off; Lawford may or may not have tried to catch him, but he clearly had not thrown the life preserver in time (claiming that Butler had suffered a heart attack and it would have done no good). Lawford had set off in the dinghy, ditched it, and swum to shore, pretending that his own sailboat had capsized and keeping his presence on Butler's a secret. He then married Rozelle. Jed, no longer in love with her, quits his Nashville job and leaves for New York.

Book III

Chapter 14  After a penurious summer in Paris, Jed is offered a position at the University of Chicago. Sometime later he reads in the newspaper that Lawford has died of a heroin overdose, and that "a swami had been indicted for trafficking in dope"—a reference to a turbaned Hindu poet who had been present at numerous Carrington parties when Jed lived in Nashville. Rozelle was free of suspicion.

Chapter 15  Jed marries Dauphine Finkel, who had been his mistress years before, in graduate school, and is now a photographer of some repute. They have a son, Ephraim; but in a few years she leaves him, citing feelings of emptiness. His academic career prospers; in 1976 he is invited to Rome for an honorary degree. He looks up his old partisan comrades.

Chapter 16  Jed has a reunion with Rozelle, who just happens to be in Rome. She has married the "swami," who is actually a southern black who taught himself Hindi in India and is now fantastically wealthy from arbitrage. She had allowed Lawford to fall in love with another woman in Nashville, whom the swami supplied with drugs; it was a double suicide. In a letter from Perk Simms, his mother's husband, Jed learns of her death.

Chapter 17  Jed spends a summer in Paris, goes on a Canadian canoe trip with his grown-up son, Ephraim, then takes the trip to Dugton to visit his stepfather and his mother's grave. In the end, he writes to Dauphine asking if they couldn't get together again.

A Place to Come To, like Meet Me in the Green Glen, begins with the spectacular death of a buck—Buck Tewksbury,
that is, the father of protagonist Jediah. On his way home one night he stood up in his wagon, as was his custom, to relieve himself on the hindquarters of the nearer mule; but, being drunk, he fell off, and both left wheels passed over his neck. "Throughout, he was still holding on to his dong" (3), which was reputed to have been the biggest in the county. This dying gesture gave rise to some uncertainty at his funeral as to what exactly his last act had been:

"All his r'aren and skirt-tearen round Claxford County and he ends like tryen to jack off in the middle of the night on the gravel on Dugton Pike."

"Naw," Mr. Tutwayler sepulchrally uttered, "naw, he must of been standen up to piss. . . ." (7)

A few months later, nine-year-old Jed is humiliated by a schoolyard raconteur who has opted for the fancier version: "'... and his daddy, he stood up in the wagon and—' and here he dropped a hand down to crotch level, but held out from his body, '—and jacked off—' he made a motion with his hand, '—and fell in the road and killed his-self!'" (20). It was at this moment, Jed says, that "I had discovered my hatred of my father" (24).

Yet later Jed would realize that "I should have been grateful to the wicked father" for dying that way, since "He was, through that very schoolyard scene, in its very pain, to provide me later with the first—I almost said, only—social success I was ever to know" (21). For Jed was to make a considerable social splash among his fellow graduate students at the University of Chicago by acting out, "in much the same spirit as his old torturer of the schoolyard, the hilarious episode of his father's death, complete with hand on hypothetical dong and the lethal plunge" (22). It was to make him popular with the Yankees, particularly with Dauphine Finkel, who comes over to sit beside him immediately after the performance, evidently curious "as to what the Son of Old Buck—as I had fondly termed my father in my little interlude—would be like in the clutch" (23). She becomes his mistress, and though they do part company for a while, she eventually becomes his wife and the mother of his only son. That marriage will suffer divorce, but in the last pages of the novel Jed, as old age approaches, seeks a final reunion with the woman the story of his father's death had first won him.

What reconciliation and closure the novel offers in its conclusion thus involves a return to the fruit of that original fiction about the father—a story that, when first invented in the schoolyard, brought the discovery of "rage at the father who had brought it all upon me" (21) but would later inspire filial gratitude for what was, in effect, Jed's only paternal legacy. "I should have been grateful," he realized, paralleling Jeremiah Beaumont's gratitude and rage at reading the handbill he thought Fort had written ("grateful . . . with . . . the gratitude of a good son to a father").
Jed's reworking of his father's story is based on a physiological ambiguity that finds resonance in ancient myth; it is not for nothing that Jed, fascinated early on by the study of Latin and Greek, goes on to pursue the kind of classical education that will enable him to appreciate such an allusion. The myth in question is one evoked by an insistent background detail that is repeatedly connected to the memory of his father's demise—the golden shower of "the torrent of gold-bodied August sunlight, perfectly transparent but somehow as substantial as lava, pouring inexhaustibly down from the sky" (8), seen as he heard his father's contemporaries debating the nature of his last gesture on the day of the funeral. That gold, lava-like torrent will be remembered years later when, fighting with Italian partisans behind enemy lines in World War II, Jed will recall "the men, the weeping child, the golden lava of sunlight pouring down" (9), and, still later: "I could close my eyes and see the scene of the child weeping . . . with summer sunlight pouring down like golden lava" (84).

There are two remarkable things about this golden torrent. One is that it echoes what his father was in truth—if not in fiction—doing: urinating. The son had on at least one other occasion seen him do so, even though then, too, the gesture had also evoked his sexual potency. Riding back from town on the mule-drawn wagon with his father, Jed had seen him stand up, "fumbling at the front of his overalls to extract his member . . . clutching his great member . . . crying out in manic glee: 'Got the biggest dong in Claxford County—and what the hell good does it do me!'

. . . And now, in the midst of the wild mirth, he was relieving himself on the hindquarters of the near mule, playing the stream on that target, a gleaming arc in starlight . . ." (15). And on yet another occasion, Jed had witnessed a genuinely golden stream fall on the same spot—this time from a different, though still paternal, source: "Then he had spat, the long golden stream of amber—tobacco juice, that is—lancing precisely out to spatter on the off-rump of the near mule" (227). The other remarkable thing about the golden torrent is that by calling attention once more to the image of a golden shower, and giving it a celestial origin (the sun in fact is the father in Flood), it evokes in a more particular way the locus classicus of all such golden showers: Zeus's insemination of Danaë, his successful penetration of the concealment in which her father, Acrisius, had placed her.

In a remarkably down-home way, Warren rewrites that myth while keeping intact the original double nature of Zeus's golden yet seminal stream. And he does so by having Jediah Tewksbury rewrite what—given all that has happened in Warren's previous novels between fathers and sons—we have a right to call the paternal text: the father's unwitting gift to the son, an event that becomes a text (if it was not, as in Wilderness, one already) by dint of the son's reworking it into a rewarding narrative.
It is not the first time the myth has surfaced. In *Wilderness*, Adam Rosenzweig came to, after lying unconscious from hunger and exhaustion, to discover a "great bronze of Perseus meditatively holding the head of Medusa" in Aaron Blaustein's house. When Jed Tewksbury recovers consciousness from malnutrition and whiskey in the house of Professor Heinrich Stahlmann, what happened then will come close to happening again: Blaustein's living room had had a "great gilt mirror above the screened fireplace," while Stahlmann's is similarly furnished with "a fireplace, very large" featuring "an extraordinary hearth" (62) surmounted by "an enormous mirror" (60). But more to the point is the circumstance that while Blaustein's living room had its statue of Perseus contemplating the head of Medusa, in Stahlmann's there is "a life-size copy, in white marble, of the Venus de Milo, and . . . a matching copy of the Discobolus" (61). One statue matches, in the context of Stahlmann's house, another; but within the larger context Warren's novels consistently construct for themselves, the second of these matches yet another statue; for, in the myth to which Blaustein's statue alludes, Perseus, in the sequel to his decapitation of Medusa, is a dangerous thrower of the discus. After his heroic labors, Perseus returned to Argos in search of his mother's father, Acrisius. But his grandfather fled at his approach, fearing the prophecy that he would die by his grandson's hand; the same prophecy had made him keep his daughter, Danaë, shut up in a tower (or underground, in another version of the myth) so that she would not conceive a son. The oracle was nevertheless fulfilled when Perseus, taking part in the funeral games of another son for another father, threw a discus that missed its target and fatally injured Acrisius.

It is possible that the wagon wheels that were the instrument of Jed's father's death—he hit "the pike in such a position and condition that both the left front and the left rear wheels of the wagon rolled, with perfect precision, over his unconscious neck" (3)—are a latter-day version of that discus. Be that as it may, in the context of *Wilderness* I argued, quoting Ernest Jones, that Perseus's unwitting slaying of his grandfather could be viewed in an oedipal light: "When the grandson in the myth avenges himself and his parents by slaying the tyrannical grandfather . . . he slays the man who endeavoured to possess and retain the mother's affections, i.e. his own rival . . . the primordial father, for whom to him the grandfather is but an *imago.*" What happens to Jed and Heinrich Stahlmann lends support to this view. For one thing, Stahlmann had a curious name for his house: the "Castle of Otranto." Jed recalls that it was "a reference that, at the time, escaped me" (59), though he "did sense that everything around me [in Stahlmann's house] was generous with mysterious meaning" (62). Jed never does say what sense he made out of the allusion to Horace Walpole's novel about a father who profits from his son's untimely death to steal his bride.
We are, however, given enough clues to draw our own conclusions. If Stahlmann said his castle was Otranto, then he was giving a quite different message to Jed than what his otherwise fatherly solicitude conveyed.

Their first encounter was not, in fact, without its hint of violence. Jed, hoping that if he could demonstrate his prowess in classical languages the eminent professor would allow him into his classes at the University of Chicago, lay in wait for Stahlmann on the street outside his house, tracking him as he kept up his vigorous pace and running the risk of being taken for an assailant. The professor was armed with an impressive alpenstock, and Jed noticed "the way he clutched the walking stick well down below the head" (58), as once his father had been "clutching his great member, with a force that must have been painful, waving it at the stars" (15). "What do you want, sir?" he demanded in a firm voice, his stick now grasped at the head . . . " (58). Jed responded with the opening lines of the *Aeneid* in Latin and—perhaps with greater relevance—a chorus from *Oedipus at Colonus* in Greek. Despite Jed's Alabama accent, the professor was appropriately impressed and took him under his wing, not only arranging his acceptance at the University of Chicago but also giving him a job and living quarters in his "Castle of Otranto." Jed became for Stahlmann, who was childless, not only a disciple but a son.

But two events cast a shadow on this idyll of paternal and filial devotion. One is Stahlmann's suicide—like Judge Irwin, he shoots himself neatly in the heart. The other is the strange delight with which Jed kills another German professor. Immediately after Stahlmann's death Jed had volunteered for the army; three weeks into his service with Italian partisans, it was his duty to interrogate a captured SS lieutenant who, as it happened, "had been a classical scholar—an *Assistent* at Göttingen" (80). He was troubled then (and would still be long afterward, as Jed would confess to Mrs. Jones-Talbot [235]) by the fact that there was more than military necessity on his mind when he shot the German in the back of the head. Just before he pulled the trigger, he had, "in a tone of ironic question," set his victim up for a classical allusion: "... *dulce et decorum est?* I was hating the bastard" (82). The hate seems to have originated from something other than an abhorrence of Nazis; evidently it had more to do with the manner in which his prisoner had recited to Jed the rules of the Geneva Convention, with all the authority of a German classics professor condescending to speak to a less-than-adequate student—"in the tone he must have used in dealing with dullards at Göttingen" (81). Jed saw it as jealousy: "I had hated him simply because I envied him" (83). But the coincidence of attributes between his victim and the fatherly (or grandfatherly, given the allusion to Perseus's lethal discus) German professor under whose roof Tewksbury had been living for the last two and a half years, and from whom
he had suddenly been orphaned, suggests another interpretation, although it is not one of which Jed ever seems consciously aware.

But then there is a great deal going on in the novel of which Jed is unaware. Take, for example, the scene in Nashville where Jed makes passionate love to Rozelle Hardcastle Carrington on a bed of beech leaves. He is wearing a raincoat, a "black slicker" (270), "and the black slicker, unlatched but still on its owner, outstretched like the wings of a monstrous black bat, wounded and fallen, heaved and flapped, stirring the carpet of bleached-gold beech leaves in its pain, while the rain fell" (271). Jed does not appear to be aware that he had earlier laid quite a bit of emphasis on the fact that Stahlmann owned a black cloak that Jed had first taken to be a raincoat. It was when he caught his first glimpse of the professor, outside a classroom (and before the incident in the street): "what, over his arm as he approached earlier, I had taken to be a dark topcoat or raincoat, had turned out to be a black cape that now, draped loosely over his shoulders, regally swayed and swung as he withdrew into infinite distance" (57). The fact that Jed wore a similar outfit when he made love to Rozelle would not be significant were it not for the fact that he had specifically spoken of Stahlmann's black cape as the emblem of his professorial authority and—what is more—of how ridiculous it would look on the back of a disciple who tried, without meriting it, to assume that mantle of authority. For, thinking of the cape on Stahlmann, he thought of poor Mr. Pillsbun, his classics professor at Blackwell College—Pillsbun, who had studied one summer with Stahlmann and who had pretended to have enough pull with his former professor to get Jed admitted to the University of Chicago (when Jed arrived on campus, he learned that no letter from Pillsbun had been received). Pillsbun, Jed was sure, must have secretly purchased a black cape like the one the master wore. "The cape, I suddenly knew, was what he had wanted most for his dream... And knew that at night, behind locked door and drawn shades, he would put it on. Standing there in his grubby little rented room, he would regard himself in the mirror" (57).

There is no indication that Jed grasps the irony inherent in his lovemaking costume. But that does not mean the irony isn't there. And one more detail from that scene deserves close attention, for it too provides evidence of connections in the novel of which the protagonist is unaware, as well as evidence of the continuity between Warren's novels and his poetry: the carpet of golden beech leaves that provide the setting for the heaving of that monstrous black bat. A few pages later, as it happens, a monstrous black "bat" of another sort will be engaged in precisely the same activity: the "big, black dong, rigid and looking like a baseball bat" (277) that belongs to Mrs. Jones-Talbot's stallion preparing to render stud service to a waiting mare. There, too, "the bright sunlight poured down" (276) as
it had, lava-like, when the son heard how his father died clutching his dong. The stallion’s black bat of a dong (a word whose only other appearances mark it as belonging to the father) and his prowess with the mare inspired Jed and Mrs. Jones-Talbot to go and do likewise, thus placing Jed in the role he had assumed six pages earlier of a lovemaking black bat, or rather the wielder of one.

Now the poem “No Bird Does Call,” appearing in the sequence Being Here: Poetry 1977–1980 (and thus contemporaneous with the publication in 1977 of A Place to Come To), unites the two major themes of Perseus and beech in such a way as to provide a long-awaited key to the puzzle of their presence in Warren’s fiction. The poet wanders into a hollow surrounded by beeches. It is a place reminiscent of the setting in The Cave near Beecham’s Bluff, where the entrance to the cave lay under the roots of “the biggest beech of all” (6), for in the poem the “roots of great gray boles crook’d . . . down / To grapple again, like claws, in the breathless perimeter / Of moss, as in cave-shadow darker and deeper than velvet.” There he lies down on the beech leaves’ “carpet of gold, for then / The hollow is Danaë’s lap lavished with gold by the god . . . .” Lying there “With closed eyes I fell so slowly . . . as though / Into depth that was peace, but not death . . . .” If the mother is Danaë, the poet must be Perseus, returning to the womb that is peace but not death; and, most remarkably, the father, source of the golden shower that lavished Danaë’s lap, is not only Zeus but the beech.

That he is a beech is consonant with the name of the father in the novel: “Old Buck—as I had fondly termed my father in my little interlude” (23; emphasis added). Though the name obviously comes from the buck that originally meant “goat” and has come to signify the male of many species, including deer, in Warren it is inextricably tied to the buck that means “beech,” a form of the Old English bóc, still present in such words as “buckmast” (beechnuts) and “buckwheat” (because of the resemblance of buckwheat seeds to beechnuts). In light of the way Warren’s sons consistently ground their identities in their father’s texts, it is significant that beech and book were originally the same word, the aforementioned bóc, because “inscriptions were first made on beechen tablets, or cut in the bark of beech-trees” (O.E.D.). There originally was, in other words, a textuality to beeches. So it is perhaps no accident that the boy in “Blackberry Winter” who made a footprint in the mud and then pretended to be reading someone else’s mark was also capable of imagining it imprinted on a beach: “as though you had suddenly come upon that single mark on the glistening auroral beach of the world. You have never seen a beach, but you have read the book and how the footprint was there.” We have seen how, in “Aspen Leaf in Windless World,” Warren himself muses upon beach-inscriptions, wondering if they form a text: “Look how sea-foam, thin and white, makes
its Arabic scrawl / On the unruffled sand of the beach's faint-titled plane. /
Is there a message there for you to decipher?" Is there not a message
for us to decipher in Warren's Buck/beech/beach/Beecham/Beauchamp
connection?

Nor is it any accident that the verb in the poem that tells what the
god did to Danaë to bring this Perseus into existence—lavish—should be
phonically and etymologically related to the likewise golden lava that
poured down from the sky the day Jed heard how his father died: "the
torrent of gold-bodied August sunlight, perfectly transparent but somehow
as substantial as lava . . . the golden lava of sunlight pouring down . . .
summer sunlight pouring down like golden lava." This insistent connection
between sunlight and lava may find its origin, given the contemporaneous
context of the poem's retelling of the Danaë myth, in the fact that Zeus was
originally a solar deity (Larousse, 98, 106); he was, in any case, god of the
sky (as Poseidon was god of the sea and Pluto, the underworld). And in the
golden shower itself, "which penetrates to the subterranean Danaë it is easy
to recognise the rays of the sun which germinate the seed buried in the
ground" (Larousse, 106). The curious fact underlying the connection be­tween lava and lavish is that the latter, like the former, is actually liquid,
deriving from "lavasse, lavache, deluge of rain. Cf. OF lavis torrent" (recall
"the torrent of gold-bodied . . . sunlight"), while lava, from lavare, to wash,
was originally "'a streame or gutter suddenly caused by raine' (Florio 1611),
applied in the Neapolitan dialect to a lava-stream from Vesuvius; hence
adopted in literary Italian" (O.E.D.), whence it acquired the fiery content it
has today. We should not forget that, when Dr. Stahlmann laid out a pro­gram
of study for Jediah Tewksbury, "It was his idea that I begin intensive
work in Italian . . ." (63; emphasis added).

Nor should we ignore that soon after Stahlmann's death Jed found
himself in the company of men from a volcanic Italian region. "A number of
the desperadoes," Jed says of his partisan comrades in the war, "were from
the city and zone of Siena, especially from the region of the great volcanic
cone of Monte Amiata . . ." (80). And their very identity is grounded in that
lava-based soil, as he learns when one of them tells him that his politica is
his terra. Jed asks if by terra he means Italy.

"'No, la mia terra.' He closed his hand over the fist and gravel,
his dirt, his terra, is whatever it was, and shook the clenched
hand at me to show possession—or the being possessed, iden­
tity or whatever you want to call it. 'La mia,' he added. He was
from that desert-like country near Siena, and that is one hell of
a patch of country to have to call la mia terra." (233)

When he returns to Italy some three decades later to pick up an honorary
degree in Rome, Jed travels to Siena to look up his wartime comrades. The
climax of this pilgrimage is his visit to Gianluigi, who has become a religious hermit—and has also come to incorporate a remarkable number of the qualities attributed to fathers in Warren's fiction. He is one-eyed; his face is "empurpled" (recall Brad Tolliver's fascination with the purple rage in his father's face and its echoes in the purple birthmark that, inspired by Yasha Jones's scar, he gives Digby) by scars from Nazi torture; and he lives in a cave below beeches (the cave entrance in The Cave lay beneath the roots of "the biggest beech"): "He lived in a cave in the great band of conifers below where the beeches start on the mountain" (356), a volcanic mountain, the Monte Amiata whose "great volcanic cone" defines the Sienese landscape. The Italian journey is thus a symbolic return to the father in a lava-incrusted landscape.

If lava's paternity is stressed by this pilgrimage, its sexuality is suggested by what lava can do for Mrs. Jones-Talbot, the mother-figure with whom Jed once found himself in bed. It is, in fact, the lava of a certain Roman history: "The only trouble is that when you suddenly get old and have to go to bed early, there's less and less reason for going to bed at all. . . . I've taken up reading Gibbon—oh, what lovely, crystalline lava flowing over all the centuries up to your first old-lady snore when you drop the book" (385). Just as Danaë in the poem was lavished with gold, this other figure for the Warrenian mother finds lava the next best thing to sex.

The revelation the poem provides of the beech's paternal quality casts some light on what Jebb Holloway found in The Cave: the stalagmite that felt like a beech ("It was like a beech. . . . If you leaned up against this thing in the dark, durn it, you'd think it was a beech"). Recalling that the mouth of the cave was located under the roots of the biggest beech, an opening "flanked by the great humping"—a word that now reveals its sexual resonance—"gray roots of the biggest beech," remembering how powerfully the cave in The Cave functioned as maternal space, and aware that Danaë's lap was lavished with (and ravished by) beech leaves, we can now imagine what that beech is doing in that cave: it is the father's phallus in the mother's womb, a version of the primal scene in Warren's text (of which another is the father's golden shower).4

And it may illumine as well a minor but quite possibly telling detail concerning what happens between Jed and Mrs. Jones-Talbot. Jed had accumulated some debts during his graduate studies at the University of Chicago that he had not yet paid off when he accepted the teaching position in Nashville. Mrs. Jones-Talbot, Lawford Carrington's aunt, wanted to pursue her study of Dante, a specialty of Jed's, and was willing to pay for weekly tutorials. The minor detail in this instance is her friend Mrs. Beacham, who took part in the lessons too. Her name, in the context of the argument I have made concerning the locally correct pronunciation of the historical Beauchamp on which the protagonist of World Enough and Time was mod-
eled, as well as the Beecham's Bluff that marked the location of the cave in
The Cave—but most especially with regard to the paternity of the beech—is a
provocative riddle. An examination of exactly what it is Mrs. Beacham does—or
rather doesn't do—suggests the answer. Although she is an eager student ("The
middle-aged ladies," Jed reports, speaking of both, "worked so hard at the self-imposed task . . ." [215]), nothing she says is recorded, and more appears to flow from her absence than from her presence. The third time she appears she is no sooner mentioned than she "announced that she had to run . . . and was gone" (231). In the next sentence Jed notices that "The little fire that had been set to knock off the unseasonable chill had died, and the fireplace was a black geometrical hole. . . ." Quite possibly she left to allow her friend some time alone with Jed; she was even more thoughtful on the following Friday, for on that occasion, "before we settled down to work, Mrs. Jones-Talbot explained that my other pupil, Mrs. Beacham, would not be coming today" (272)—and this was the day that, inspired by the action of the stallion's big black bat of a dong, they wound up together in bed.

In terms of the plot, that outcome may in fact have been Mrs. Beacham's kindly intent. But on a deeper level, this chain of events suggest a somewhat different reading. Her earlier departure, as I noted, coincided with the disappearance of the flame in the hearth. Now in the struggle at the hearth between Jeremiah Beaumont and his grandfather in World Enough and Time, and at the moment in Wilderness when Aaron Blaustein tried to make Adam his son, we saw the significance of the extinction of a flame that was in fact paternal. Does that imagery carry over here? Jed's observation, at the same moment he saw the fire had died, that the fireplace was "a black geometrical hole" suggests that it does, for just a few pages before he had described the experience of making love to Rozelle Carrington as one of falling into a black hole: "I understood that the orgasm was like the 'black hole' of the physicists—a devouring negativity" (220).

There is evidence elsewhere in Warren for the femininity of a fireplace. In "The Unvexed Isles" Alice Dalrymple's throat and her cigarette paralleled the "black chimney throat" and its flame, while in "Prime Leaf" Edith Hardin was just as closely identified with her hearth. The hearth was, for Jed Tewksbury's mother, her ultimate weapon against his father's drunken rage: It was "onto the stone hearth" of their house that Old Buck one night "took a header" (as, by the way, he would later take "his header" on the Dugton road and fall victim to the wheels of his wagon) "and successfully laid himself out like a stunned beef," while Jed's mother "would sit and regard the finished product with a face as noncommittal as a boulder washed bone-white in a creek bed and then dried in the August sun when the drouth came" (4), an extended simile that draws out the passive power of the maternal hearthstone. Dorothy Cutlick handled her drunken father
in much the same way in *The Cave*. He too fell into unconsciousness on the stone of the fireplace as he rushed toward her, threatening violence: “his head nearly knocked a chunk of limestone out of the chimney.... He lay on the hearth, and she let him lie” (38).

At the time of his afternoon interlude with Mrs. Jones-Talbot, Jed was thirty-four and she was “fiftyish” (147). She was therefore old enough to be his mother—and quite possibly the age of his own, who had married young: “in the early days of marriage ... she [was] little more than a girl,” (17). What happened between Jed and Mrs. Jones-Talbot could only take place in the absence of Mrs. Beacham, whose name, despite the sex of its bearer, strongly suggests the power of the beech to stand for the father, who had to be evoked, yet absent, for the oedipal goal to be reached.

When Jed arrives in Nashville he discovers that he has not really left the Castle of Otranto, for the converted barn where Lawford and Rozelle Carrington do their entertaining is strangely reminiscent of the house Professor Stahlmann called by that allusive name. “There, at the south end, appeared a jungle of plants ... and at that moment, I had felt a disturbing sense of déjà vu, or reliving—until I remembered what now seemed such a poor little token of a jungle in the conservatory off the erstwhile dining room of Dr. Stahlmann's house” (132). There is more to this resemblance than even Jed realizes. The entrance to Stahlmann’s conservatory, which at the time had seemed to him “a wildly improbably surrealistic jungle dream,” was, we recall, “flanked by two mahogany pedestals, on one a life-size copy, in white marble, of the Venus de Milo, and on the other a matching copy of the Discobolus.” Now statues abound in the Carrington household, for Rozelle’s husband is a sculptor. Jed turns his attention to a new group Lawford has just finished:

There were six, each mounted on a black boxlike structure, all in a silvery metal of dull patina, all of the same subject: a pair of female arms. A plate of the same metal was attached to the nearest black stand. It read: BALLET: A SUITE.... The arms, and hands, too, I should add, spectrally suggested—not crudely, quite subtly, in fact—the ballet of love. (157–58)

Later, the other five pairs of arms will have “all leaped, by contagion, into more precise significance” when some joker adds a finishing touch: “in the middle of the circle defined by the forefinger and thumb of the silvery right hand of 'Number 5,' a splendid banana reared” (182–83). That contagion of complementary significance may not, perhaps, stop there, for these pairs of female arms supply precisely what the Venus de Milo in Stahlmann’s Castle of Otranto lacked: arms.

Later, another sculpted product of Carrington’s art will leap into a more precise significance of its own:
It was a man's head, in bronze, the head of an aging man... the big round skull almost bald, the head thrown back, eyes wide with outrage, the mouth straining open in a soundless scream...

“Oh!” Rozelle uttered, in a breathy exhalation, and in the long moment while she stared at the object... and while Lawford stared at her, there wasn't a sound. (183)

As Rozelle knew immediately, and Jed learned only later, the head frozen in the moment just before death was modeled on that of Michael X. Butler, Rozelle's rich and older husband who had drowned under suspicious circumstances. It is not clear whose fault Butler's death was, if anyone's, but clearly by creating this sculpture Lawford was trying to provoke some sort of shock of recognition from Rozelle, even a feeling of guilt. What he also accomplishes, without intending it, is to make Rozelle into a kind of Medusa who kills her lovers and turns them into stone.

Jed experiences something like that petrifying power at one stage of his own love affair with Rozelle, comparing himself to a man transformed into statuary by Vesuvius's lava, an image “suggested by the plaster casts at Pompeii of men who died even in some obsessive private concern... [a man] who, as he entered upon the long dark slide toward bliss, didn't even miss a beat as the ashes fell” (207). But in the end he does escape the Medusan glance of Rozelle, née Hardcastle (a maiden name that evokes both petrification and the Castle of Otranto), and returns to the woman—Dauphine Finkel—he had first won with his fiction about his father's death.

Who, then, gets Rozelle? The strangest sort of character: an American southern black who passes for Indian—the turbaned “swami” who had been a constant feature at Carrington parties and recited his own poetry in Hindi. But the oddest thing about him—from the perspective of a reading of Warren's novels that keeps encountering winks and other one-eyed looks—is that he winks at the protagonist: “I swear to God,” Jed tells us, “that as my eyes momentarily engaged those of the swami, he almost winked—or maybe did wink—and gave some sort of complex smile that seemed to be full of ironical dimensions involving, among other things, camaraderie, amiable contempt and brotherly knowingness—as though he were just trying to indicate that if I didn't mess with his racket, he wouldn't mess with mine” (253–54). Carrington later dies from an overdose of drugs supplied by this “swami” to Amy Dabbitt, who had become Lawford's mistress; when Rozelle and Jed cross paths in Rome in 1976, she reveals that she is very happily married to the former swami, who is now fabulously wealthy. That Jed should lose Rozelle to the man who winked at him parallels what happened to Brad Tolliver in Flood when he lost his bride to one-eyed Ramon Echegaray—or rather to his memory, for the Spaniard
was already dead. We saw there that, because both Echegaray’s one eye and the space left when the father (and God) left were called a “black hole,” Echegaray was a version of the one-eyed father—the father who, like Mortimer Sparlin at the Seven Dwarfs Motel, has a prior claim on the son’s bride. The fact that Sparlin was black—as is the “swami,” despite his disguise—makes it quite likely that the same symbolic logic is working itself out here. And thus the prophecy embodied by the name of Stahlmann’s house, a place Jed found recreated in the house where Rozelle lived—the Castle of Otranto where a father steals the bride of his son—is finally fulfilled.

This is not the first “Indian” to give a Warren protagonist a one-eyed look. In his 1969 poem Audubon: A Vision, “The Indian, / Hunched by the hearth, lifts his head, looks up, but / From one eye only”—having lost the other when an arrow rebounded off his bowstring—and silently warns Warren’s protagonist of the murderous intent of the woman in whose cabin they have sought shelter: “he becomes aware / That the live eye of the Indian is secretly on him, and soundlessly / The lips move, and when her back is turned, the Indian / Draws a finger, in delicious retardation, across his own throat.” The Indian was not lying. Audubon sees the woman honing her knife and knows that he must leap up and defend himself before it is too late, but “He cannot think what guilt unmans him, or / Why he should find the punishment so precious,” as though he wanted to die at her hands. Three men enter just in time to save him. Later, when he gazes on the woman hanged, he has his Perseid moment: “the face / Is, he suddenly sees, beautiful as stone, and / / So becomes aware that he is in the manly state.” She is Medusa, her beautiful stoniness a displacement for the stoniness she inflicts on those who gaze upon her—which is precisely what happens to Audubon, who gets an erection from the sight of her face.

Jediah Tewksbury, too, finds his Medusa in the end. And when he does she tells him she is his mother. Many years after the events in Nashville, having returned at last to the place “where I always started my thoughts” (385), the castlelike house where Stahlmann had lived near the campus of the University of Chicago, he saw ahead of him on the sidewalk the “classic shape” of an immigrant grandmother. And then he was suddenly aware of two youths, one struggling with her shopping bag, the other with her purse. He hurried to her rescue but was no match for the young men, and was in fact knifed by the one who was trying to grab the purse. The last thing he recalled seeing before losing consciousness was a vision of the youth “as he leaped, rather as he seemed to drift with ineffable, slow, floating godlike grace—godlike, truly, it seemed—to the hood of the nearest halted automobile, to stand beautifully balanced there with the purse—like Medusa’s head hanging from the hand of Cellini’s Perseus in Florence. . . . I remember thinking how beautiful, how redemptive, all seemed. It was as though I
loved him. I thought how beautifully he had moved, like Ephraim, like a hawk in sunset flight" (387). At least one circle is closed here, for the woman's purse in this Perseus's grasp becomes the mystical icon of horror that stands for—as it does in Wilderness—what Freud suggested women's purses can also sometimes represent (The Interpretation of Dreams, 393, 419). But this allusion to the myth of Danaë's son is also overlaid by another legend, a biblical one. At least that is suggested by the names the immigrant grandmother insists on calling Jed in the hospital, before she dies: "figlio mio" and "Giuseppino, which is Little Joseph" (388). And although Ephraim is Jed Tewksbury's son by Dauphine Finkel, and who increasingly occupies his thoughts in these closing pages of the novel, the father of the Ephraim for whom Jed's son is (directly or indirectly) named is precisely who the old immigrant grandmother says he is, Joseph, son of Jacob, famous for his knowledge of the science of interpreting dreams.

Now the biblical story of Ephraim involves, of all things, another error made by a dying parent. Joseph thought Jacob would be wrong to give his formal blessing to Joseph's son Ephraim who, being the youngest, was not entitled to receive it. As Jacob's sight was dim, Joseph thus placed Manasseh at his right hand and Ephraim at his left, so that he would bless the appropriate son. But Jacob was not about to be manipulated by his son as he himself had once manipulated his own blind father by disguising himself as his brother Esau, although by avoiding such manipulation he was repeating his act of dispossessing the rightful heir. Jacob crossed his hands.

And when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand upon the head of Ephraim, it displeased him: and he held up his father's hand, to remove it from Ephraim's head unto Manasseh's head. And Joseph said unto his father, Not so, my father: for this is the firstborn; put thy right hand upon his head. And his father refused, and said, I know it, my son, I know it; he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great: but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations. (Gen. 48:17-19)

So Ephraim not only took precedence over Manasseh against Joseph's wish, but he—and Manasseh—took precedence over Joseph himself, for Jacob turns his grandfatherly blessing into a fatherly one:

And now thy two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, which were born unto thee in the land of Egypt before I came unto thee in Egypt, are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine. And thy issue, which thou begetteth after them, shall be thine, and shall be called after the name of their brethren in their inheritance. (Gen. 48:5-6)
Thus Joseph's sons became Jacob's sons, and attained a rank of seniority more exalted than Joseph's. "In consequence of their adoption by Jacob, Joseph's two sons acquire the status of Jacob's sons, on a par with that of Reuben and Simeon (Jacob's oldest)" (Speiser, 357). "In the first blessing of Jacob, Joseph was replaced by his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, thereby doubling Joseph's portion" (Wintermute, 986), for Joseph's descendants would now receive both what Joseph was entitled to and what his two sons would inherit as sons of Jacob. On the one hand, Joseph is dispossessed by his own sons in terms of seniority among the sons of Jacob, but on the other, he gains, as he will have more to pass on to his later descendants.

In addition, Joseph is granted a small compensatory inheritance in the final verse of chapter 48: "Moreover I have given to thee one portion above thy brethren, which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow." Speiser observes that for this troublesome passage "no plausible solution is in sight." The chief difficulty is the word shechem, here translated as "portion," but which really means "shoulder." It could mean the shoulder of a mountain, either as a common noun or a place name, and thus allude to a conquest on Jacob's part for which there is no other record. Yet even this last bit of an inheritance, which appears to be Jacob's attempt to compensate Joseph for what he lost in the deal, seems to have worked its way into Warren's text. For the thieving youth who became, for Jed, a vision of his own son left his mark in the form of a wound in Jed's shoulder (386); that scar, inscribed by the son on the body of the father, is what Jed will inherit from this encounter with the future.

This allusion has consequences for Tewksbury's vision of the youthful thief as Perseus, Ephraim, and sunset hawk — which is to say, in the context of the hawk imagery in Warren's poetry, as father. (We saw this in Night Rider and Wilderness, as well as how the "Red-Tail Hawk" was simultaneously father and infant progeny.) The purse-snatcher is even more obviously a vision of the father because of his graceful leap "to the hood of the nearest halted automobile, to stand beautifully balanced there with the purse," like Perseus with the head of Medusa. For this clearly echoes the opening paragraph of the novel, in which Jed's father stands, somewhat less gracefully balanced, on a historically earlier vehicle ("standing up in the front of his wagon") and enacted the godlike gesture of making a golden shower. Like father, like [grand]son.

But where does this leave Jed? Like Joseph, it appears, he is the disinherited testator, getting only a wounded shoulder for his pains. Not only younger than his son (as Joseph became "younger" than his sons, who were made as "old" as his eldest brothers, Reuben and Simeon), he is the son of his son, who is now the father — as the protagonist in Warren's poem "The Leaf" is "the father / Of my father's father's father."

There is also an analogue to this in the novel, the "teaser," the horse
who may well be under the impression that he is about to do to the mare what only the black stallion has the right to perform. "But the gentleman in the case, he is only a stand-in," Mrs. Jones-Talbot explains. "It's not for him, poor fellow." (275). Jed does get to do it, of course, though he does not know it, at that moment, as he will soon spend the rest of the afternoon in the bed with Mrs. Jones-Talbot. But in a sense he does not, for she too, as we have seen, is a stand-in. And she is not the only one, for the almost clinical description of the copulation of Dark Power and the mare serves more than the purpose of graphic realism; the more graphic it is, the more allegorical it becomes, the more the two horses become symbols for the players in a kind of primal scene. We have seen how Dark Power's "big black dong . . . looking like a baseball bat" recalls the "dong" that Jed's father had displayed in death and the big black bat Jed himself seemed to become when, wearing a raincoat like his adopted father's, he made love to Rozelle on a carpet of gold beech leaves. To that picture we could add another feature of Old Buck's last moments, the fact that he was spilling his golden stream, as was his habit, "on the hindquarters of the near mule, playing the stream on that target." Mutatis mutandis, the black stallion approached his task from the same perspective, as Warren's graphic account makes clear.

But what the mare is doing at the time is perhaps the most striking instance of a graphically depicted reality that is at the same time a haunting, and recurring, image with larger implications.

The mare's bound tail had lifted.

"She's a-blinken," Uncle Tad said.

Then I saw what he meant. The tail of the mare being lifted, the aperture about which all the ritual centered, was indeed blinking, with a flash of inner flesh-red visible at every blink. Blinking—there was no other word for it. (275)

The closing of the eye, be it wink or blink, has been at issue for a long time in this reading of Warren's fiction. It began, with Willie Stark, as a father's ambiguous sign; more recently, in Flood (and, somewhat less prominently, in The Cave), it has been seen as the father's mark, the sign that he has already been there. In A Place to Come To it becomes the mother's ambiguous sign in precisely the same way that it was the father's in All the King's Men—that is, the wink is a message its sender refuses to authenticate, as Jed will learn from his stepfather, Perk Simms:

"She could stop anything she was doing . . . and just for a second give you a look that made you feel you and her had a wonderful secret. Sometimes I might be helping her make up a bed on Saturday and she'd give me a wink, and then pretend she hadn't never." (393; emphasis added)
Like Jed's mother, Rozelle had a way with her eyes: "eyelids drooping ever so little in a way to remind me of the biblical words 'she taketh thee with her eyelids'" (128-29). So, in a different way, did Jed's first wife, Agnes Andresen, who used her eyeglasses to get him to propose: "She still had the horn-rims on and drove the sharp corner through fabric and flesh... while she twisted the spikelike corner of the horn-rims into the bleeding wound, I was taking a deep breath, and saying, 'Listen... what about marrying me and just forgetting the hell out of this little Perry?" (90-91). The Perry in question was the boyfriend Agnes left for Jed, the Perry Gerald who could well, as he told Jed after Agnes's death, have loved her better. There must be more than a coincidence behind these echoing names, Perry and Perk, Jed's first and last rivals, both of whom share the first three letters of Perseus (as did the original dreamer, Percy—or, as his friends called him, Perse—Munn). As Jed's son, in his fleeting vision of the thief of the mother’s purse (the mother who claimed she was Jed's mother), becomes the Perseus the manner of Jed's father's death had promised Jed would have been, so does Perk displace him from that mythic role: he is the only man to see the mother’s wink, just as Perseus was the only man to see Medusa’s gaze—by reflection, in Athena's shield—and live.

As the lover of Jed's mother, Perk was privileged to gaze upon the nakedness that Jed first discovered, to his horror, when he came home from college unannounced. Finding there a whiskey bottle and two glasses, one lipstick-stained, he at first thought he must be in the wrong house. Then he heard a sound, turned, and saw her. "She stood there with her long black hair down loose... holding the robe tight over herself with both hands. I looked down at her feet. I wasn't ready yet to look at her face" (52). In Wilderness Adam Rosenzweig, encountering his Medusa—the naked Mollie about to be flogged—had taken exactly the same evasive action: "Adam found himself staring at the woman's shoes. He thought that if he kept his eyes firmly fixed on the shoes he would be all right.” Jed eventually did look at her face, and then looked down and realized his mother's nakedness: “I looked from her face down to the hands that were clutching that silky-pink robe together, and I knew, quite suddenly and quite coldly, that there wasn't a stitch under it. I knew this as clearly as though, even while I was gazing into her face, she had drawn the garment apart to expose what was beneath, and then, instantly, but somehow deliberately, had again closed the cloth over what I had seen” (52).

Freud insisted that what was visible, and petrifying, in Medusa was maternal: "in the myth it is the genital of the mother that is represented" ("The Infantile Genital Organization," 174n4). "The terror of Medusa... occurs when a boy... catches sight of the female genitals, probably those of an adult, surrounded by hair, and essentially those of his mother" ("Medusa's Head," 212). Warren leaves little doubt about the Medusan quality of
Jed’s mother, for that long, unconstrained hair is very much in evidence: “She stood there with her long black hair down loose...” In a (literally) striking earlier scene, “her black hair” was likewise “flying loose” when she had hit him on the nose, and broken it, with his own shoe (46). It had happened when he was a teenager and had come home drunk, fresh from having consorted with a black prostitute in the poor section of town; the attack was apparently a punishment for that expression of his sexuality. Jed bore the mark of what was essentially a castrating gesture—Freud points out in *The Interpretation of Dreams* that “Comparisons between nose and penis are common” (422)—for the rest of his life. His mother never forgot it either, recalling her handiwork in nearly every letter she would write him in the years to come:

“I aint had no call to break no more noses yet, ha ha. I do not mean to make no joke how I broke yore nose. I am sorry I done it. But it seemed like something I had it in me to do at the time. Have you tole the new wife how it is broke and who?” (98)

“Anybody broke yore nose lately?” (159)

This destructive contact with his own shoe is yet another variation of Seth’s “discovery” of the footprint that was in fact his own, in “Blackberry Winter,” and Angelo Passetto’s loving embrace of the “leetle feet” and the ice-formed footprint that turned out to be the image of his own, in *Meet Me in the Green Glen*.

This journey through Warren’s fiction began with a dream to be deciphered and will draw to a close with three more, one in *A Place to Come To* and the other two evoked by it. Just as he is about to fall into a love affair with Rozelle Hardcastle in her husband’s Nashville mansion, Jed Tewksbury will feel imprisoned in a dream: “For a fleeting instant I stood in the middle of the floor, my feet on the rose-and-gray geometry of the deep-piled rug, and heard my heart beating. It was, for that instant, like being powerlessly trapped in an indecipherable dream” (157). He may not be able to decipher the rose-and-gray geometry of that fireplace rug (“On the other side of the chimney was another fireplace, much smaller, with easy chairs gathered round on a great rug of rose and gray in geometrical deign” [132]), but we can see that it anticipates the “black geometrical hole” of Mrs. Jones-Talbot’s fireplace (231), which itself echoed the “black hole” that orgasm with Rozelle Hardcastle turned out to be (220)—“a devouring negativity” that entraps him, as does the indecipherable dream. The geometry of the rug seems to be part of what draws him, just as logic of another sort—the logic of dream—draws us further into the meshes of these interlocking images.
But what about the rose and the gray? Rose immediately suggests Rozelle Hardcastle, who has become Rose Carrington. It recalls, too, something about the robe Jed's mother wore that parted to reveal her nakedness: "She stood there with her long black hair down loose, wearing a new-looking pink silk robe with pink roses sewed to it. . . . I could almost feel how that slick silky pink stuff would slip and slide on the bare skin" (52; emphasis added). The loose hair that contributed to the Medusa effect of this naked mother will be evoked in the sentence that immediately precedes the one that places Jed on that rose and gray rug: "It is as though you half-expect to turn around and find a woman there, innocently naked, hair loose, face illumined by tenderness and desire, one hand with a warning finger laid to the lips. For a fleeting instant . . . " (157; emphasis added). It, too, may be part of the dream.

So may be the moment Mrs. Jones-Talbot drew off her kerchief——snatched it off, really—and tossed her hair loose in a quick, irritable motion. She flung the kerchief toward a chair, and when it fell wide, I made a movement to pick it up. 'Oh, leave it alone!' she burst out. When I proceeded to pick it up and lay it on the chair, she did not even notice the act, much less acknowledge it" (278; emphasis added). It is curious that Jed is so anxious to pick up the kerchief, given that Perse Munn was so concerned to retrieve his handkerchiefs from Thebes and that we have been so eager to pick up all the ones dropped since then. We saw in Perse's story that the newsprint falling off the bundle in his dream was part of a network of handbills and handkerchiefs; does this mean that here the dream has returned once more, to reveal what used to be a fetus but has now become Medusan hair?

That hair caused the death of the men who gazed upon it, but it did so by making them hard as stone—which is to say, according to Freud, that it gave them a sexual rise: "The sight of Medusa's head makes the spectator stiff with terror, turns him to stone. Observe that we have here once again the same origin from the castration complex and the same transformation of affect! For becoming stiff means an erection. Thus in the original situation it offers consolation to the spectator: he is still in possession of a penis, and the stiffening reassures him of the fact" ("Medusa's Head," 212). Jed did not die, but he did get an erection in the sequence of events that began when Mrs. Jones-Talbot "snatched"—a verb suggesting the snatch Medusan hair signifies—off her kerchief to reveal the same kind of loose hair that his mother had displayed the night he glimpsed her nakedness.

And it is at this juncture that the gray of that geometrical design comes into play. Jed's mother had worn a pink silk robe with roses on it; Mrs. Jones-Talbot's silk robe was gray—and so, of course, was her hair: "a long dark gray raw silk robe—or what looked like that—with dark red piping and sash. . . . Her gray-streaked hair had been brushed now, no
longer in the disorder left when she had snatched off the kerchief and flung it, so inaccurately, at the chair” (281). As Jed stood on that hearth-rug in Rose Carrington's house and felt trapped in an indecipherable dream, he was standing between the rose and the gray, the rose of his disrobing mother's robe and the gray of the coeval Mrs. Jones-Talbot's.

This is not the first time the reader will have seen the kerchief Jed was so persistent about picking up after Mrs. Jones-Talbot “snatched” it off her head to reveal her Medusan hair. In the scene, several chapters back, of the unveiling of Lawford Carrington's sculpted depiction of his wife's former husband's death by drowning, both the snatching and Jed's retrieval of the covering cloth had already occurred. It was not, of course, a kerchief, but “a white cloth, almost as big as a sheet, that shrouded” the bronze head until Carrington “snatched the cloth free, and flung it carelessly behind him in my direction. I caught it” (183; emphasis added). Now not only is that scene recalled by Mrs. Jones-Talbot's gesture, but the subject of the sculpted head will come up in their postcopulative conversation, with her suggestion to Jed that there was something not quite right about the official story that Butler's death had been an accident. In the very next chapter Tewksbury goes to Florida, the scene of the crime, and discovers the truth: that Butler had accidentally fallen off the boat when a boom swung around but that Carrington had intentionally not thrown him the life preserver in time.

Butler's death resembles Old Buck's in that they were both (1) accidental (2) falls (3) from a moving vehicle. The roundness of the life preserver that sealed Butler's fate because it wasn't thrown in time even resembles the wagon wheels that ran over Jed's father's neck, while both suggest the discus with which Perseus accidentally killed his grandfather. Just as the snatched-off kerchief repeats the moment in Perse's dream when the newspaper falls away to reveal what it concealed, so does the snatched-off white cloth that covers the statue. What it reveals in this instance is “the head of an aging man, perhaps an old one, the big round skull almost bald” (183). That baldness insists here, for just a few pages earlier it had appeared combined with carelessly tossed white sheets in the person of Bill Cudworth, as he recounted his experience of parachuting into Normandy on D-Day. "He was grinning at me ... with his strong-looking near-bald skull cocked to one side, one eye squinting quizzically" (175) and telling Jed about the only two times he had ever “felt real”: the first when he told his boss and prospective father-in-law that he was walking out of his comfortable Wall Street job to move to Tennessee, and the second when “the night sky was full of floating bed sheets like God-a-Mighty had inadvertently kicked over the laundry basket of the whole goddamned Heavenly Hotel, and I was counting for the pull on the rip cord” (174). Cudworth's quizzical, one-eyed squint joins the list of other Warrenian winks (along with the
“eyelids squinting because there was nothing under them any more” that belonged to the Indian mummies in *At Heaven’s Gate*). He winks at Jed, it appears (as did Tiny Duffy), because he has defied the father and gotten away with it—defied, that is, the prospective Wall Street father-in-law, who was doubtless as stunned as Aaron Blaustein had been when he heard Adam Rosenzweig decline the invitation to become his adopted son. In the process Cudworth achieves not only a sense of reality but eventually fatherhood, too. Just before he told Jed those two stories, he had announced to all of Carrington’s guests the happy news that his wife had been “knocked up” (171). So it is a father—a newly announced one—whose bald head we see beneath the white cloth of his parachute. If the falling white sheets from God’s kicked-over laundry basket anticipate the “white cloth . . . flung . . . carelessly” from the sculpted bald head later in the same chapter, both bald heads and both white cloths recall the “handkerchief/on great bald skull spread . . .” of another father, the father in Warren, his own father reading “Freud on dreams, abandoned/By one of the children,” in “Reading Late at Night, Thermometer Falling.”

Ultimately, despite our best efforts to keep autobiography out, it will, like the repressed, return. Although surely whatever appears in a poem, for example, can be analyzed in the same context as a work of fiction, especially in the case of such a writer as Warren, whose work in all genres is so remarkably of a piece, having the same underlying symbolic network. Still, we are analyzing the work, not the man.

So, in the light of that “bare hundred-watt bulb that glares/Like truth” above the handkerchief and the great bald skull, we need to trace one more set of connections. In *A Place to Come To* Warren twice names his protagonist a Joseph: by making him the father of Ephraim and by arranging for the Perseus-mugged woman to call him “Guiseppino, which is Little Joseph.” Now the Freud of the book the poet leaves behind for his father to read, the filial text given in exchange for the paternal one later named in the same poem—the “poems. Not good” which his father had written in his youth—also identified himself with Joseph, his biblical fore­runner in the art of interpreting dreams. “It will be noticed that the name Josef plays a great part in my dreams. . . . My own ego finds it very easy to hide itself behind people of that name, since Joseph is the name of a man famous in the Bible as an interpreter of dreams” (522n). Freud might also have mentioned that he shared something else with Joseph, a father named Jacob.

The remarkable thing is that the book Warren pictures himself as leaving for his father to read in “Reading Late at Night” provides not only a key to understanding his novels, obsessed as they are with dreams, but also a strangely prophetic anticipation of the opening scene of Warren’s last novel—what Old Buck was doing with his hand when he fell off the
wagon—and of the way it combines with the recurring image of the one-eyed father. It happens in a dream Freud has about his own father:

Once more I was in front of the station, but this time in the company of an elderly gentleman. I thought of a plan for remaining unrecognized; and then saw that this plan had already been put into effect. It was as though thinking and experiencing were one and the same thing. He appeared to be blind, at all events with one eye, and I handed him a male glass urinal (which we had to buy or had bought in town). So I was a sick-nurse and had to give him the urinal because he was blind. If the ticket-collector were to see us like that, he would be certain to let us get away without noticing us. Here the man's attitude and his micturating penis appeared in plastic form. (This was the point at which I awoke, feeling a need to micturate.)

The dream is patricidal to the extent that Freud's unconscious is expressing the disguised wish that his father "come to nothing." For that is the phrase he recalls his father once saying to him when as a boy he suffered incontinence in front of his parents.

One evening before going to sleep I disregarded the rules which modesty lays down and obeyed the calls of nature in my parents' bedroom while they were present. In the course of his reprimand, my father let fall the words: "The boy will come to nothing." This must have been a frightful blow to my ambition, for references to this scene are still constantly recurring in my dreams and are always linked with an enumeration of my achievements and successes, as though I wanted to say: "You see, I have come to something." This scene, then, provided the material for the final episode of the dream, in which—in revenge, of course—the roles were interchanged. The older man (clearly my father, since his blindness in one eye referred to his unilateral glaucoma) was now micturating in front of me, just as I had in front of him in my childhood. . . . Moreover, I was making fun of him; I had to hand him the urinal because he was blind. . . .

Like Freud, Jed Tewksbury made fun of his father's art of urination, reenacting in graduate school "the hilarious episode of his father's death" (22) in order to win friends and seduce women. And, like Freud, Warren's sons either have or encounter one-eyed fathers, for as we learn from Freud's interpretation of his own dream, his father was blind in one eye from glaucoma.

Furthermore, there is in Freud's dream as well as in the two accounts
of Jed's father's death—the one on the first page of the novel versus the one Jed will concoct when he makes fun of it—the same ambiguity about whether the urination was not in fact something else. Marianne Krüll points out, "From the Fliess correspondence, we know that Freud replaced all references to his own sexuality with 'drekkologikal' (fecal or urinary) statements, so that conscious censorship is probably the more likely explanation" of why Freud's father said "the boy will come to nothing" in the scene Freud tells us occurred in his parents' bedroom: "the discovery that his son, in whom he had placed such great hopes, was guilty of 'self-abuse' must have filled him with doubts about all his ambitious plans for Sigmund's future" (112). Krüll argues that

the various urination scenes in Freud's dreams, which he himself associated with ambition, must either have been screen memories for masturbation or else conscious attempts to censor the dream content. . . . Now, if these urination scenes were in fact masturbation scenes, then Jacob's reaction becomes much more understandable. He was afraid that "the boy will come to nothing." The association of masturbation with ambition is in any case much more convincing than that of urination with ambition. (112)

And thus the father who urinates in the dream may likewise be engaged in a much less innocent activity—which would account for why the dreamer hopes he and his father will pass unnoticed:

It is remarkable that, in his associations, Freud should have ignored an important element of the dream, the double attempt at concealment: "I thought of a plan for remaining unrecognized" and "the ticket-collector . . . would be certain to let us get away without noticing us." Might Freud as a child have surprised his father in the act of masturbation? Or had he perhaps merely come upon him during urination but had so startled him as to gain the impression that he had caught him in some forbidden act? (113–14)

Now if this dream strangely anticipates the way in which Warren's last novel gives such special—indeed mythic—prominence to the doubly charged image of the father's golden stream, as well as to the son's mocking use of that response to nature's call (whichever call it was), another dream in the "Freud on dreams" Warren gave his father anticipates just as uncannily the primal myth that we have found to underlie all of Warren's fiction, the very ambiguity of Burden's forever imponderable question: was it a wink or not? And it appears as a text printed on something very like Perse's handbills (which, like the one in Freud's dream, were stuck up as posters:
"Over at Thebes they got 'em all over the settlement, on walls and telephone poles . . ." and also the printed notice that Jeremiah Beaumont interpreted as a message from the father:

During the night before my father's funeral I had a dream of a printed notice, placard or poster—rather like the notices forbidding one to smoke in railway waiting-rooms—on which appeared either

- "You are requested to close the eyes"
- "You are requested to close an eye."

I usually write this in the form:

the

"You are requested to close eye(s)."

an

Each of these two versions had a meaning of its own and led in a different direction when the dream was interpreted. I had chosen the simplest possible ritual for the funeral, for I knew my father's own views on such ceremonies. But some other members of the family were not sympathetic to such puritanical simplicity and thought we should be disgraced in the eyes of those who attended the funeral. Hence one of the versions: "You are requested to close an eye," i.e. to "wink at" or "overlook." (352-53)

Freud had earlier recounted this dream with some significant differences in a letter to Wilhelm Fleiss dated 2 November 1896, in the immediate aftermath of Jacob Freud's death on October 23:

I must tell you about a very pretty dream I had on the night after the funeral. I found myself in a shop where there was a notice up saying:

You are requested
to close the eyes.

I recognized the place as the barber's to which I go every day.

(Origins, 171)

What can account for the fact that in 1900, when The Interpretation of Dreams appeared, the locale of the dream had changed from a barbershop to a railway station and that a new ambiguity had been introduced into the request to close the eyes, making it impossible to decide if one is supposed to close one or both? The editors of the Fleiss letters comment, with somewhat circular reasoning, that "Freud described this dream in slightly different terms, obviously with the aid of notes" (171n), apparently concluding that the 1900 version is more accurate because it is more detailed. But it is precisely the added detail—the alternative of one eye—that poses
the problem. Wouldn't the letter, closer in time to the context of the dream, have been the more accurate account? One can certainly, however, imagine an excellent reason for Freud's having changed the barbershop to a train station in the context of The Interpretation of Dreams, which is after all not just a scientific treatise but a literary work, and that is to tie it more closely to the other major dream about his father—which took place in a train station. Actually, in The Interpretation of Dreams Freud does not in fact say where he read the notice about closing the eye(s): by simply omitting all mention of a barbershop, and by saying that the notice is "like" the kind of notice one can see in a railway waiting-room, he is able to suggest the same locale in which the other dream takes place without actually lying. And for the same reason we can see why he might have wanted to add the part about closing just one eye, for the other father-dream made specific reference to his father's one-eyedness, although the result of that added detail is to create even more ambiguity in an already ambiguous text within the text of the dream. In the letter, Freud says that the command to close the eyes "has a double meaning. It means 'one should do one's duty towards the dead' in two senses—an apology, as though I had not done my duty and my conduct needed overlooking, and the actual duty itself" (Origins, 171).

In the Interpretation of Dreams version, Freud no longer speaks of the second of these alternative meanings, the duty of closing the eyes of the dead, but locates the ambiguity in the conflicting commands. "Here it is particularly easy to see the meaning of the vagueness expressed by the 'either—or.' The dream-work failed to establish a unified wording for the dream-thoughts which could at the same time be ambiguous, and the two main lines of thought consequently began to diverge even in the manifest content of the dream" (353).

Warren, as we have seen, introduces "Freud on dreams" into the text of "Reading Late at Night"; but the close connections between that poem, with its handkerchief-covered father's bald skull and the white cloth-covered ones in A Place to Come To, not to mention all the ways those connections stretch out to include images recurring in all his novels, compel us to ask how much of that book is in fact introduced there, both in the poem and in the wider context of his fiction. Was it just the method of dream analysis, the concept of the dream-work of the unconscious, whose relevance for an analysis of Warren's novels, and particularly of the way dreams flow in and out of his work, is undeniably genuine? Or is some of the specific imagery of Freud's book on dreams introduced into Warren's text as well? The parallels between Freud's dreams about his father and the one long dream about the father that Warren's novels (and some of his poems) appear to embody are strong enough to make us think it might be so.

Perhaps it is as impossible to know the answer to these questions with
any certainty as it is to determine whether what Willie gave Jack was a wink or not (or whether the command in Freud's second version of his dream was to wink or not, or even if the version with the wink is more accurate than the one without). Yet it is doubtless more prudent to assume that Warren knew well the text of which he spoke, the one he left behind for his father to read, than not. One thing he would surely have known is that the dream Freud experienced at the time of his father's death is the most important one in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. For in the preface to the second edition Freud says that the motivation for the entire book was his father's death:

> An equal durability and power to withstand any far-reaching alterations during the process of revision has been shown by the material of the book, consisting as it does of dreams of my own . . . by which I illustrated the rules of dream-interpretation. For this book has a further subjective significance for me personally—a significance which I only grasped after I had completed it. It was, I found, a portion of my own self-analysis, my reaction to my father's death—that is to say, to the most important event, the most poignant loss, of a man's life. Having discovered that this was so, I felt unable to obliterate the traces of the experience. (xxvi)

This book on dreams thus begins with the declaration that the dreams it analyzes are to a large degree the author's own, that it is therefore an exercise in self-analysis, and that this self-analysis began with his father's death. So that the dream he had on the occasion of that death is itself the origin of the book. It is, as Jean-Louis Baudry has pointed out, the "inaugural dream" that began his self-analysis and that "caused him then to write the book on dreams" (145–46; my translation).

Thus Warren's last protagonist, the Jediah Tewksbury who eventually becomes a Joseph, may in the end turn out to be the fullest revelation of a Warrenian son. For Warren is that son, that Joseph, the same Joseph with whom Freud identified. And Freud on dreams is not just a text that can be usefully applied to Warren's but is already inscribed within it. Everything we think we can discover is already there.