

HISTORY, CHOICE, AND REFLECTION IN ROBERT PENN WARREN 'S " AMERICANA TRILOGY" ¹ [a]

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Time, history, poetry, and identity are intertwined in the thought and writings of Robert Penn Warren. These interconnections are famously encapsulated in Warren 's foreword to *Brother to Dragons*: "If poetry is the little myth we make, history is the big myth we live." ⁱ [1] This paper will deal with these themes as found in three of Warren 's long poems, *Brother to Dragons*, *Audubon: A Vision*, ⁱⁱ [2] and *Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce*. ⁱⁱⁱ [3]

These poems, for all of their differences in theme and style, share certain characteristics that this paper will highlight. 1) Each poem has, as its title character, an archetypal American. In the case of *Brother to Dragons*, that character is Thomas Jefferson, author of the *Declaration of Independence* and the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, and father of the University of Virginia . (BD I, p. 2) "Audubon" is Jean Jacques, or John James, remembered chiefly for his *Birds of America*. Chief Joseph was one of the leaders of the "non-treaty Nez Perce" who led his tribe from their traditional home in the Wallowa Valley of Oregon Territory on a thousand mile trek to freedom headed for Canada, only to be captured by the US Cavalry within 50 miles of the Canadian border, and who came to symbolize the Nez Perce struggle in the popular mind. 2) Each poem features the layering of time, with aspects of the contemporary American landscape or map overlaying that of the earlier period. 3) Each poem includes among its cast of characters

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the author of the poem, Robert Penn Warren, who either interacts with or reflects on the poem's title figure. 4) Each poem contains a meditation on history, identity, and time.

Brother to Dragonsiv [4]

This poem occupied, or preoccupied, Warren for over two decades. *Brother to Dragons*, "A Tale in Verse and Voices," was originally published in book form in 1953. As Warren makes clear in a prefatory note, it is "a dialogue spoken by characters, but it is not a play." (BD, 1953, p. xiii) In 1979, "a new version," v [5] considerably tightened, was published. In this version Warren reiterates even more strongly than in the original that the poem is not a play. (BD II, p. xv) Between the appearance of these two versions of the poem, Warren published *Brother to Dragons* as "a play in two acts" in *The Georgia Review*.vi [6]

The "tale" told in *Brother to Dragons* is both grisly and melodramatic. Lucy Jefferson, younger sister of Thomas Jefferson, married colonelvii [7] Charles Lewis. Lewis moved his family, including sons Lilburne and Isham (the younger by a dozen or so years) and his slaves, from Albemarle County, Virginia, to an estate along the Ohio River west of Louisville, Kentucky. Shortly after this relocation Lucy died, and Charles Lewis spent much of his time away from Rocky Hill, leaving Lilburne in charge. On the night of December 15, 1811, viii [8] Lilburne and Isham, in front of their assembled slaves, used a butcher axe to kill and dismember a young slave for having broken a favorite pitcher of their dead mother. This murder eventually came to the attention of local authorities, and Lilburne and Isham were indicted, arrested, and released on bail to await trial. They agreed to avoid trial by engaging in mutually assisted suicide by shooting (in one version of the story, over the grave of their mother). But this plan went awry when Lilburne was shot and killed prematurely, either through his own hand or that of Isham.

Isham was detained for the murder of his brother, but escaped from jail and disappeared. Legend has it that Isham joined Andrew Jackson's forces and fought with Jackson at the Battle of New Orleans, where he was fatally wounded, and that he was recognized as he lay dying.

While this brutal murder and the bizarre series of events that flow from it provide the backdrop for Warren 's poem, the real action of the poem is the encounter between the principals of the historic events and "R. P. W.," the "writer of this poem" who also serves as interlocutor. This encounter between R. P. W. and the shades of the past is set in "no place" at "any time." (BD I, pp. 2-3; BD II, pp. 2-3). This particular, and peculiar, placement in time and space is another way of saying, according to Warren , "that the issues that the characters . . . discuss are . . . a human constant" (BD II, p. xv). Warren is especially interested in understanding how the murder committed by Jefferson 's sister's sons--his nephews--affected Jefferson 's understanding of human nature. This matter of understanding Jefferson 's reaction is complicated by the fact that there is no evidence that Jefferson ever commented on the incident.ix [9]

Jefferson opens the revised version of *Brother to Dragons* by claiming that he "Cannot, though dead, set/My mouth to the dark stream that I may unknow/All my knowing." (BD II, p. 5) He had set his knowledge against his hope: "I tried to bring myself to say:/Knowledge is only incidental, hope is all--/Hope, a dry acorn, but some green germx [10] /May split it yet, then joy and the summer shade." (BD II, p. 5) He seeks shelter from his knowledge--his shelter seems to be "senility/And moments of indulgent fiction"--so that he "might try/To defend my old definition of man." (BD II, p. 5)

Jefferson 's "old definition of man" is the "vision" contained in the *Declaration of Independence*, a vision of man in which both liberty and equality are maximized, and reason

rules all. "In Philadelphia first it came, my heart/Shook, shamefast in glory, and I saw, I saw--
/But I'll tell you quietly, in system, what I saw." (BD II, p. 5) At this point in the poem Jefferson loses his train of thought in a nightmare vision of the Minotaur, but soon returns to his narrative.

To begin again. When I to Philadelphia came
I knew what the world was. Oh, I wasn't
That ilk of fool! Then when I saw individual evil,
I rationally said, it is only provisional paradox
To resolve itself in Time. Oh, easy,
Plump-bellied comfort!
Philadelphia, yes. I knew we were only men,
Defined in errors and interests. But I, a man too--
Yes, laugh if you will--stumbled into
The breathless awe of vision, saw sudden
On every face, face after face,
Bleared, puffed, lank, lean red-fleshed or sallow, all--
On all saw the brightness blaze,
And knew my own days,
Times, hopes, horsemanship, respect of peers,
Delight, desire, and even my love, but straw
Fit for the flame, and in that fierce combustion, I--
Why, I was nothing, nothing but joy,
And my heart cried out:
"Oh, this is Man!" (BD II, p. 7)

Jefferson's hopeful definition of man required that one "leap beyond" man's natural limits (physical, moral, and spiritual, I would suggest) as found in the historical world in order "To find justification in a goal/Hypothesized in Nature." (BD II, p. 8) Jefferson's reorienting comment, "To begin again," which was designed to get himself back on the subject at hand, has a double meaning. He has become confused and strayed from his topic and must start over. But from the perspective of many, Philadelphia --representative of the hope for mankind in the New World more generally--was an opportunity to begin the human experience again. The soon-to-be-new-nation was, after all, the last, best hope for all mankind. The vision of man embodied in the *Declaration of Independence* held open the possibility of setting aside human history and

starting over again, and it's grandeur blinded Jefferson (and perhaps other members of the Continental Congress--"delegates by accident, in essence men,/Marmosets in mantles, beasts in boots, parrots in pantaloons,/That is to say, men." [BD II, pp. 5-6]) to the bestial side of man's nature.

Jefferson continues:

But
No beast then, the towering
Definition, angelic, arrogant, abstract,
Greaved in glory, thewed with light, the bright
Brow tall as dawn.

I could not see the eyes.

So seized the pen, and in the upper room,
With the excited consciousness that I was somehow
Rectified, annealed, my past annulled
And fate confirmed. . . .
Time came, we signed the document, went home.
I had not seen the eyes of that bright apparition.
I had been blind with light.

I did not know its eyes were blind. (BD II, p. 8)

Jefferson was blinded not only by the grandeur of this vision of man, but also by the possibilities of the American West--"my West" as he calls the new frontier in this poem. Because of the importance of this new land to him, Jefferson decides to have his nephew Meriwether Lewis--who is in many ways his spiritual son--lead the expedition of discovery: "But my own blood will go/To name and chart and set the human foot." (BD II, p. 9) As the discussion of *Chief Joseph* will show, Warren deals with the fact that "the human foot" had already trod upon this territory, and not the human foot of Spanish and French explorers only, but that of many native Indian tribes.

Jefferson describes this territory in lyrical terms:

It was great Canaan 's grander counterfeit.
Bold Louisiana ,
The landfall of my soul--
Or then it seemed--

And he shares his vision of this land:

I saw
My West--the land I bought and gave and never
Saw, but like the Israelite,
From some high pass or crazy crag of mind, saw--
Saw all,
Swale and savannah and the tulip tree
Immortally blossoming to May,
Hawthorne and haw
Valleys extended, prairies idle, and the land's
Long westward languor lifting
Toward the flaming escarpment of the end of day--(BD II, p. 10)

Thus Jefferson 's vision of the West as a land flowing with milk and honey and human possibility blinded him to the human realities that the Louisiana Purchase and his policies set in motion. These realities included not only the displacement or destruction of the native peoples already inhabiting but not working the land the land (a key point always made by the spiritual heirs of John Locke!xi [11]), but also the self-destruction of his nephew Meriwether Lewis,xii [12] commander of the Lewis and Clarke expedition, the Corps of Discovery.

This double vision of man and land blinded not only Jefferson himself but also some of those who came under his influence. Late in the poem Meriwether Lewis tells Jefferson , "I was that fool fish to which/Your lie was the perfect lure. Oh, sure, I gulped/It down--your nobleness." (BD II, p. 109) Meriwether tells Jefferson that it is Jefferson 's "lie"--his vision of brotherhood--that killed him (BD II, pp. 116-17).

Thus the Jefferson of *Brother to Dragons* is twice blinded--blinded by his vision of man and by his vision of "his West." And perhaps also blinded by his vision of himself as Moses, "the Israelite," destined to bring his people to the Promised Land but not to enter it himself. But perhaps he deceived himself most of all with this image of himself as Moses, in that he never claimed to speak with God and never seemed to acknowledge that his own guilt kept him from crossing the River Jordan and entering Canaan .xiii [13]

Near the beginning of the poem Jefferson refuses to acknowledge Lilburne Lewis as anything but "the bloody brother," (BD II, p.18) and later claims "the fact that shakes my heart/With intrinsic shock" is that Lilburne is "blood-kin to old Tom Jefferson." (BD II, p. 42) He regrets not having killed the infant Lilburne and attempts to "reject, repudiate,/And squeeze from my blood the blood of Lilburne ♦" (BD II, p. 43) The trajectory of this theme of the poem--a theme we will here leave unexplored--involves the possibility of reconciliation between Jefferson and Lilburne Lewis. For our purposes it is enough to note that Lilburne's crime shakes Jefferson 's "sense of the human possibility." (BD II, p. 42)

In Warren 's telling of this tale, Jefferson 's response to Lilburne's crime is to move from his understanding of man as the "bright apparition" of the *Declaration* to the position that "There's no forgiveness for our being human./It is the inexpugnable error." (BD II, p. 19) Jefferson is at pains to tell us that even during his most optimistic and rational phase he knew what the score was, that he was not a fool (BD II, pp. 7, 26 [twice], 29). Even during the period of his greatest optimism, Jefferson tells R. P. W. and Meriwether Lewis, "if I held man innocent, I yet knew/Not all men innocent." (BD II, p. 27) But Jefferson has moved from that position and now holds

That all earth's monsters are simply innocent,
But one, that master-monster--ah, once
I thought him innocent--(BD II, p. 26)

For Jefferson this earlier view of human innocence is represented architecturally by the "Maison Quarrée" in Nîmes, France, a Roman temple built around 20 B.C. On Jefferson's recommendation, the Maison Quarrée was used as the model for Virginia's Capitol Building.
.xiv [14] As Warren has Jefferson say,

I stood in the *place*. There is no way
For words to put that authoritative reserve and glorious frugality.
I saw the law of Rome and the light
Of just proportion and heart's harmony.
And I said: "Here is a shape that shines, set
On a grundle of Nature's law, a roof-tree
So innocent of imprecision
That a man may enter in to find his freedom
Like air breathed, and all his mind
Would glow like a coal under bellows-- (BD II, p. 29)xv [15]

Warren has Jefferson contrast the beauty of Maison Quarrée with the cathedrals he saw while in France, "abominable relics/Of carved stone heaved up mountain-high by what/Bad energy in what bad time" (BD II, p. 27). For Jefferson these cathedrals represent "chaos," "confusion," and "evil." There is a certain irony in this distinction, inasmuch as Maison Quarrée was also built as a temple.

R.P.W. does not share Jefferson's enthusiasm for Maison Quarrée--he calls it "a heap of organized rubble" and finds it "cold and too obviously mathematical." Maison Quarrée was "thrown up," according to R.P.W., by "those square-jawed looters/From the peninsula" (BD II, p. 29). Jefferson claims to recognize the limits of Rome as a historical model (he tells R.P.W., "I know what the Romans were, know/Better, perhaps, than you"). Simultaneously, he thought Maison Quarrée

spoke

Of a time to come
If we might take man's hand, strike shackle, lead him forth
From his own nightmare--then his natural innocence
Would dance like sunlight over the delighted landscape.
(BD II, p. 29)

But even when Jefferson is blinded by the majesty of his view of innocent man as portrayed architecturally by Maison Quarré or intellectually in the *Declaration*, the lower possibilities of man ("the Roman tax squeeze," or imperial policies determined by reading goat droppings or the equivalent, or the Minotaur as a vital component of the human self^{xvi} [16]) lurk in the background. Just after Jefferson tells R.P.W. of his breathtaking vision of man while at the Declaration Congress, culminating with his heart's cry, "Oh, this is Man!" he reflects more somberly,

And thus my minotaur. There at the blind
Labyrinthine turn of my personal time--
What do they call it? Yes,
Nel mezzo del cammin--yes, then met
The beast, in beauty masked. (BD II, pp. 7-8)

"*Nel mezzo del cammin*" may be translated "Midway in the journey." These are the opening words--the first half line--of Dante's *Inferno*. The entire first *terzina* reads as follows:

Midway in the journey of our life
I came to myself in a dark wood,
For the straight way was lost.^{xvii} [17]

By reference to Dante's epic Jefferson announces or acknowledges that he is lost "in a dark wood." This is an appropriate image for attempting to sort out Lilburne and Isham Lewis's barbarous treatment of a slave in early nineteenth century western Kentucky (that "dark and bloody land"). But Jefferson applies this Dantean image not to the events of December 1811, but

to the period of his life most responsible for his fame--the period of writing the *Declaration of Independence*. It is the ghostly Jefferson conversing with R.P.W. who understands this. While in Philadelphia Jefferson "met the beast" but did not recognize it; in 1776 he was midway in his journey, but did not realize that he was lost. With this admission, in any case, Jefferson by implication invites a Virgil^{xviii} [18] to lead him on his journey of self-discovery. As a well-trained poet, R.P.W. recognizes the literary reference and perhaps assumes that Jefferson is inviting him to fulfill this role. Inconveniently for Jefferson --but conveniently for Robert Penn Warren--R.P.W. is both at hand and willing to take on the assignment. Whether R.P.W. is ready for this role is another question entirely. Although by implication Jefferson invites a Virgil to lead him, he does not recognize R.P.W. as his guide, for later he asks R. P. W., "Do you think to instruct me?" (BD II, p. 71)^{xix} [19]

What kind of guidance or instruction can R.P.W. give to Thomas Jefferson? There are two buildings Jefferson seems to be concerned with in *Brother to Dragons*. The first, already discussed briefly above, was Maison Quarr[◆]e, a building that both Jefferson and R.P.W. have seen. The second is the house built in Kentucky by Charles Lewis for his family. Jefferson has never seen this house, for as already noted Jefferson never traveled to "his West." R.P.W., however, has visited the house:

Yes, I have seen it. Or saw,
Rather, all that remained when time and fire
Had long since done their kindness, and the crime
Could nestle, smug and snug, in any
Comfortable conscience, such as mine--or the next man's--
And over the black stones the rain
Has fallen, falls, with the benign indifference
Of the historical imagination, while grass,
In idiot innocence, has fingered all to peace.
Anyway, I saw the house--(BD II, p. 9)

When R.P.W. again says that the house is gone, Jefferson denies this: "For I, who never saw it/See it now." Jefferson is haunted by the house, and can hear its timbers creak and stair groan. (BD II, p. 12) Perhaps, too, he hears the screams of the butchered slave boy Johnxx [20] in his mind. So R.P.W. instructs Jefferson first by literally drawing him a map in speech and providing some historical detail. He tells Jefferson of his first automobile trip to visit Rocky Hill:

I assure you it is gone. I know the place.
Up highway 109 from Hopkinsville
To Dawson Springs, then west on 62,
Across Kentucky at the narrow neck.

.

Above Paducah , east some fifteen miles,
Upriver there, they call it Smithland.
The town, I mean. It never came to much

.

Just out of Smithland on the Louisville road
You'll find the monument, a simple shaft
The local DAR's put up in ◆24
Amid the ragweed, dog-fennel, and cocklebur,
To honor Lucy Lewis for good taste
In dying in Kentucky . The stone
Does name her sister to the President,
But quite neglects her chiefest fame, that she
Gave suck to two black-hearted murderers.
(BD II, pp. 12, 13, 17)

The monument to Lucy Lewis gives directions to the remains of the Lewis house. After obtaining permission from the current owner of the property that had been Rocky Hill, R.P.W. went on up the hill by foot.

But I went on, and hit the carriage road
Old Lewis' Negroes had chopped from the live rock.
I hoped to God it wasn't in July
Black hands had grabbed and black sweat dropped. (BD II, p. 23)

After climbing the hill, R.P.W. found "the huddled stones of ruin,/Just the foundation and the tumbled chimneys,/To say the human hand, once here, had gone,/And never would come back" (BD II, p. 23). An ensuing discussion of the murder of the slave involves R.P.W., Lilburne's wife Letitia, and Lilburne's (fictional) nanny Aunt Cat. Jefferson can be surprised neither by the details of the murder, nor by the subsequent discussion of Lilburne's mistreatment of the slave who would be his ultimate victim (BD II, pp.67-69). Jefferson is not surprised by this cruelty because he knew that slavery established an always potentially cruel dynamic. "There must doubtless be an unhappy influence on the manners of our people produced by the existence of slavery among us," Jefferson had written in "Notes on the State of Virginia " in 1782.

The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other. Our children see this, and learn to imitate it . . . The parent storms, the child looks on, catches the lineaments of wrath, puts on the same airs in the circle of smaller slaves, gives a loose to his worst of passions, and thus nursed, educated, and daily exercised in tyranny, cannot but be stamped by it with odious peculiarities. The man must be a prodigy who can retain his manners and morals undepraved by such circumstances.xxi [21]

None of Lilburne's actions in the abstract shock Jefferson , for he recognizes (as Meriwether Lewis puts it) "There had been other and equal fiends." But to this Jefferson protests and expresses the source of his shock, "Not in my blood!/ Listen--it is always/The dearest that betrays." (BD II, p. 34)

Perhaps, however, there is one dearer to Jefferson than his nephew (either Lilburne the murderer or Meriwether the suicide) who has betrayed him and his vision of man. When Jefferson tells R.P.W., "I tried/To be innocent" (BD II, p. 70), R.P.W. reminds him of another house of interest that had produced "black sweat" in its building.

And don't forget you lived
In the lean, late years by the skill of some colored mechanics,
Nailmakers, I think, that luckily you'd trained up.
Well, this is impertinent, but to build Monticello ,
That domed dream of our liberties floating
High on its mountain, like a cloud, demanded
A certain amount of black sweat. (BD II, p. 70)

Jefferson admits that his life required the sweat--and blood?--of slaves: "I lived in the world./Say that." But he tries to mitigate this admission (confession?) with another glance at his "old definition of man:" "Say that. But say, too, that I tried to envisage/The human possibility." (BD II, p. 70) But nephew Meriwether presses Jefferson even further, presses him to recognize his responsibility for events he, or his "murderous lie" (BD II, p. 116) of man's nobility, had set in motion. Finally Jefferson comes to some self-knowledge that he had not before possessed:

I, too,
Was unprepared for the nature of the world,
And, I confess, for my own nature. (BD II, p. 117)

Jefferson 's first lesson, then, is one of self-discovery, the discovery that he too shares with all mankind what Warren calls elsewhere "original sin." This does not leave him incapable of action, or totally bereft of the possibility of nobility. As his sister Lucy tells him, "we are human, and must work/In the shade of the human condition." (BD II, p. 118)

Jefferson 's second lesson is related to the first, and has to do with the relation of the past to the present. Jefferson says,

One day I wrote to Adams , in our old age--so long ago--
To Adams my old enemy and friend, that gnarled greatness.

I wrote and said
That the dream of the futurexxii [22] is better than
The dream of the past.

How could I hope to find courage to say
That without the fact of the past, no matter
How terrible, we cannot dream the future? (BD II, p. 118)

This lesson parallels Jack Burden's summation near the end of *All the King's Men*: "I tried to tell her how if you could not accept the past and its burden there was no future, for without one there cannot be the other, and how if you could accept the past you might hope for the future, for only out of the past can you make the future."xxiii [23] Acceptance of "the past and its burden" means, in part at least, understanding the mixed legacy of our history and embracing the good and the evil, the noble and the base, as components of the world we live in and of our own nature.

Jefferson has argued that he had lost "the light of reason" when the slave John's "blood ran out." He has refused contact with Lilburne, "the blood brother," throughout the poem, but both John and his sister Lucy press him to embrace Lilburne. When he finally does touch Lilburne the following dialogue takes place:

Jefferson : Oh, may we hope to find--
No, thus create--

Lucy: --the possibility of reason. Yes,
And create it only from
Our most evil despair?
(BD II, p. 119; Cf. BD I, pp. 194-95)

The possibility of recovering reason, not the abstract reason of his life, but a reason mixed with the reality of human nature, is Jefferson's third lesson. The recovery of reason allows for the recovery of knowledge--a chastened knowledge, to be sure. In Jefferson's first speech in *Brother to Dragons* he bemoans his inability to drink from the River Lethe and lose his

knowledge. In his last speech, in dialogue with Meriwether Lewis he holds out the possibility of joy with knowledge.

Meriwether: For nothing we had,
Nothing we were,
Is lost. All is redeemed,
In knowledge.

Jefferson : But knowledge is the most powerful cost.
It is the bitter bread.
I have eaten the bitter bread.
In joy, would end. (BD II, p. 120)

If Jefferson has found his bearings by the end the poem, it is through understanding that "individual evil" is more than "a provisional paradox." (BD II, p. 7) To use images from the poem itself to illustrate the mixed nature of men and mankind, there is no *Maison Quarrée* without the possibility of the Minotaur, no "just proportion and heart's harmony" (BD II, p. 29) without the potentiality of "midnight's enormity." (BD II, p. 6) It seems by the conclusion of the poem that it is not R.P.W. who has served as Jefferson's Virgil, but rather that Meriwether Lewis, erstwhile commander of Jefferson's Corps of Discovery, has become the leader of Jefferson's more personal Corps of Self-Discovery, aided by Jefferson's sister Lucy. What role R.P.W., or Meriwether Lewis, or Jefferson himself, may play for the poem's readers is beyond the scope of this particular exploration.

Audubon: A Visionxxiv [24]

Warren's *Audubon* contrasts with *Brother to Dragons* both in style and in subject. *Brother to Dragons* has a protagonist worthy of a massive poem, Thomas Jefferson, an American giant, perhaps the "spiritual father" of America. The title figure of *Audubon* has no such

immediate political claims on our attention, but is perhaps an appropriate subject for an American poem because of his "dual identity as both an individuated historical self and a kind of everyman."xxv [25] *Audubon* offers a series of "snapshots"xxvi [26] rather than a sustained narrative, but the cumulative impact of these individual fragments is to provide an overall sense of the trajectory of Audubon's career and life. *Brother to Dragons* is driven by the tension between Jefferson 's unseen and unknown inner life and the external critique offered by R.P.W., Lucy Jefferson Lewis, and Meriwether Lewis, and therefore, in effect, interrogates or cross examines Thomas Jefferson. *Audubon* is driven by Warren 's attempt to take us directly inside the title character.

In the prose remarks that precede *Audubon*, Warren informs the reader that Jean Jacques Audubon was "a fantasist of talent" who promoted a false story of his parentage. While he was actually the illegitimate son of a French sea captain and his mistress, Audubon encouraged the belief that he was the legitimate son of his father and his first wife, who died soon after Audubon's birth in Santo Domingo . Other stories about Audubon's true identity arose, including the claim (made after his death) that he was the lost Dauphin of France (AV, p. 253).

In the opening lines of the poem Warren sweeps away the nonessentials that could dominate a discussion of Audubon, questions of his parentage and of his failures as a business- and family man.xxvii [27] The poem opens, "Was not the lost dauphin . . ./and not even able to make a decent living . . ." (AV, p. 254). He then focuses on the topic of interest: "was only/Himself, Jean Jacques, and his passion--what/Is man but his passion?" This assertion of theme in the guise of a question seems, on the face of it, to challenge the Warrenesque view that we must accept the past and its burden if we are to move in the present and have a future

discussed above (pp. 10-11). If man is nothing but his passion, then a man who has no passion, or does not have a passion, is not a full man. But how does following one's passion, or one's fate (AV, p. 261), relate to a man's place and duties in the world?

Near the end of the poem Warren allows Audubon himself to state his passion:

Wrote: "Ever since a Boy I have had an astonishing desire
to see Much of the World and particularly
to acquire a true knowledge of the Birds of North
America (AV, p. 263).xxviii [28]

.....

Wrote: " . . . in my sleep I continually dream of birds" (AV, p. 264).

But before Warren allows the reader to encounter Audubon's journal entries and letters, he introduces his character through the *actions* of observation and thought.

Saw,
Eastward and over the cypress swamp, the dawn,
Redder than meat, break;
And the large bird,
Long neck outthrust, wings crooked to scull air, moved
In a slow calligraphy, crank, flat, and black against
The color of God's blood spilt, as though
Pulled by a string. (AV, p. 254)

When not quoting from Audubon directly, Warren allows his descriptions of nature to reflect but sharpen Audubon's own style and emphasis, thus converting Audubon's sense of natural splendor into a more visceral and morally pivotal encounter with the natural (and human) world. Compare the above to the following entry from Audubon's "Mississippi River Journal": "the *Indian Summer* this extraordinary Phenomenon of North America, is now in All its Splendour, the Blood Red Raising Sun--"xxix [29] "Ocular opportunities" were crucial for

Audubon's method,xxx [30] but Warren pushes us beyond Audubon's *vision* and into his *thoughts*. Thus the poem continues:

Moccasins set in hoar frost, eyes fixed on the bird,
Thought: "On that sky it is black."
Thought: "In my mind it is white."
Thinking: "*Ardea occidentalis*, heron, the great one." (AV, p. 254)

The movement of the last line leads one from scientific understanding of nature to popular or common perception, and then to a vision even more basic and primitive. Naming the bird in flight "the great one" implies that scientific detachment has been replaced by something approaching awe. "The great one" sounds as if it could be an Indian name and thus is potentially a link to a primordial understanding of nature.xxxi [31] As Warren makes clear, Audubon "felt the splendor of God" when he encountered Indians (AV, p. 263). In any case, this movement from *ardea occidentalis* through *heron* to *the great one* introduces another of this poem's great themes: the contrast between knowledge and love.xxxii [32]

The longest section of *Audubon*, and the poem's one sustained narrative, is entitled "The Dream He Never Knew the End Of" (AV, pp. 255-261). The story told here is based on "The Prairie,"xxxiii [33] one of the episodes that Audubon interspersed among the "bird biographies" in his massive *Ornithological Biography*. Some scholars have been much exercised by the fact that Warren did not follow Audubon's account to the letter.xxxiv [34] As I discuss Warren's understanding of the relationship between history and poetry below (see pp. 28-31) I simply note here that Warren made it clear that he felt free to manipulate "facts" as necessary to achieve his artistic aims in any given work. In the words of Allen Shepherd, primary critic of Warren's deviations from "The Prairie," Audubon's own story is a "milder and unselfconscious narrative"xxxv [35] compared to that told by Warren. Inasmuch as Warren's goal in this poem

is to take one inside of Audubon, to enable the reader to see and think the world in Audubon's terms, it is not surprising that he presents Audubon as a more self-conscious character than does Audubon himself. (One might paraphrase Chief Justice Marshall at this point: Let us not forget, that this is a *poem* we are interpreting.) Our attention to this section, therefore, will deal with what it might tell us of Audubon's vision, and of Warren 's.

In Warren 's poem this harrowing episode, in which the traveling Audubon seeks shelter for the night in an isolated cabin only to have his life threatened by the woman and her sons who live there, is converted into a nightmare or fairy tale.xxxvi [36] As is often the case in nightmares, the dreamer--Audubon--finds himself unable to act. As the woman approaches the figure of Audubon (who pretends to sleep but is wide awake) to slit his throat and take his gold watch, he tells himself that "now" is the time to protect himself, but he does not move.

And he, too, knows
What he must do, do soon, and therefore
Does not understand why now a lassitude
Sweetens his limbs, or why, even in this moment
Of fear--or is it fear?--the saliva
In his mouth tastes sweet.

"Now, now!" the voice in his head cries out, but
Everything seems far away, and small. (AV, p. 258)

Audubon is saved only by the timely arrival of three other travelers who subdue the would-be murderers on instructions, not from Audubon, but from the one-eyed Indian who had also sought shelter for the night in the hut.xxxvii [37] In Warren 's telling, Audubon's first reaction to his narrow escape is not relief but disappointment or regret: "He thinks/That now he will never know the dream's ending" (AV, p. 258). After the three miscreants have been hanged

to death and the others gone on their various ways, Audubon stands looking at the swinging bodies in a melancholy mood.

He thinks: "What has been denied me?"

Thinks: "There is never an answer."

Thinks: "The question is the only answer."

He yearns to be able to frame a definition of joy. (AV, p. 260)

Audubon's "definition of joy" comes through his framing it, not in thought, but in actions that aligned with his fate (AV, p. 261). The poem's shortest section, "We Are Only Ourselves," follows immediately on the long narrative of Audubon's narrow escape. It reads in its entirety:

We never know what we have lost, or what we have found.

We are only ourselves, and that promise.

Continue to walk in the world. Yes, love it!

He continued to walk in the world. (AV, p. 261)

As portrayed by Warren, in the section entitled "The Sign Whereby He Knew,"

Audubon's life was simple in that it was guided by what he was and "not what/He had known he ought to be" (AV, p. 261). It was simple in that it triangulated "the self that was, the self that is, and there,/Far off . . . your fate" (AV, p. 261).

In *All the King's Men* the narrator Jack Burden talks about the development of his boss, Willie Stark, and of Willie's "metaphysical self" which was always there but had to be uncovered and allowed to take its dominant place as Willie's true self.^{xxxviii} [38] That is, the "metaphysical self" had to displace the various pretenders to the throne. Among the pretenders that must be displaced in Audubon's case are all of those things that he knew he should be--successful businessman and attentive and close-at-hand husband and father (AV, p. 262). Aligning oneself

with one's fate is an active, not a passive, experience. In "The Dream He Never Knew the End Of" Audubon appears to be suspended, waiting for fate to seize him and direct him.

All of these pressures (of civilized life) crowding in on him faded away when Audubon actively embraced his "fate":

Hold your breath, let the trigger-squeeze be slow and steady.
The quarry lifts, in the halo of gold leaves, its noble head.
This is not a dimension of Time. (AV, 261)

Audubon's fate--his metaphysical self--was to pursue his "astonishing desire . . . to acquire a true knowledge of the Birds of North America" (AV, p. 263). This passion led him on countless treks across America and led him to slaughter countless birds so that he might paint them (AV, p. 266).xxxix [39]

It is as his true self as a biographer and painter of American birds that Audubon touches those who have come after him.

He put them where they are, and there we see them:
In our imagination.

What is love?

One name for it is knowledge. (AV, p. 266)

Audubon's love results in shared knowledge, for he is an evangelist and teacher of the arts of ornithology. In a description of his methods of drawing Audubon writes that "the study of ornithology must be a journey of pleasure. Each step must present to the traveler's view objects that are eminently interesting, varied in the appearance, and attracting to such a degree, as to excite in each individual thus happily employed the desire of knowing all respecting all he sees."xl [40] It was in the activities of finding and felling his beloved birds, and then of

transmitting his love and knowledge onto paper and thus into the imaginations of countless others, that Audubon framed his definition of joy.

In enacting his true self Audubon created a space of freedom, a space that was "not a dimension of Time" (AV, p. 261).^{xli} [41] Perhaps in the pursuit of his passion Audubon achieved a point outside of time. If he personally achieved such a purchase it was but temporary, for ultimately he was pulled back into human time, traveled Europe and America promoting subscriptions to his works, and was at last able to provide for his family: "And in the end, entered into his earned house,/And slept in a bed, and with Lucy" (AV, p. 264).

The years in his "earned house" were years of decline. "So died in his bed, and/Night leaned . . ./Off the Atlantic " (AV, p. 265). Again Warren overlays time and space: "Night leaned, and now leans,/Off the Atlantic , and is on schedule./ . . .Later,/In the shack of a sheep-herder, high above the Bitterroot,/The light goes out. No other/Light is visible./The Northwest Orient plane, New York to Seattle , has passed, winking/westward' (AV, p. 265). Consider Warren as a passenger on that flight, on his way to lecture at the University of Washington in Seattle or setting out to explore a segment of the Nez Perce or Lewis and Clark Trails. Does sitting by the window and looking down on the Bitterroot Range of Montana as a sheepherder's lamp goes out generate or support the type of "astonishing desire" that drove Audubon?

Warren as a boy, just starting to find his way in the world, is the actor in the final section of the poem, "Tell Me a Story" (AV, pp. 266-67).

Long ago, in Kentucky , I, a boy, stood
By a dirt road, in first dark, and heard
The great geese hoot northward.

I could not see them, there being no moon
And the stars sparse. I heard them.

I did not know what was happening in my heart.

On a dark night in the dark and bloody land Warren could not see the flight of the great geese,
but followed their flight by their honking. The darkness and their lonesome calls stir a longing in
his young heart. Warren knew they were headed north.

It was the season before the elderberry blooms,
Therefore they were going north.

The sound was passing northward.

Young Warren determined the direction of flight by considering the natural timetable of life: the
elderberry trees had not yet bloomed so it was early in spring, which meant that the geese were
flying north for the warm months. "For everything there is a season" (AV, p. 265) but natural
time can expand in such a way that at moments it seems timeless.

Audubon carried a gold watch, as we learned in the dream episode, but for most of the
poem his time telling is natural, based by the daily cycle of sun and moon and the annual cycle of
the seasons. Within the world of Warren's *Audubon*, when Audubon's sense of time comes under
the governance of his watch, his time has run out.

The second half of "Tell Me a Story," the concluding lines of *Audubon*, makes a request
of the reader.

Tell me a story.

In this century, and moment, of mania,
Tell me a story.

Make it a story of great distances, and starlight.

The name of the story will be Time,

But you must not pronounce its name.

Tell me a story of deep delight. (AV, p. 267)

The longing in the young Warren 's heart, and perhaps the longing in Audubon's, is for a story of deep delight. One may tell the story, but must not pronounce its name. This is so because "truth [is] the only thing that cannot/Be spoken" (AV, p. 263). Truth "can only be enacted, and that in dream" (AV, p. 263). Audubon traveled far in pursuit of his passion, and left behind writings and drawings that enacted the truth he discovered. So too the young Warren enacted stories as he grew into manhood.

There is an "existential tension" at the heart *Audubon*: does one follow one's passion or fate, or does one struggle with the burden of past? The responsibility that Warren 's poetic world leads us to is not one of passive acceptance, but of active engagement, both with one's past and with one's fate. "Fate" may have more to do with our having been chosen as opposed to our choosing. But for Warren being chosen is itself active--one must embrace, rather than merely accept, one's fate. In Warren 's world we discover our liberty only in tension with our destiny, not as a fated or predetermined outcome to our life, but as our starting point in the world--the family, community, class and nation and epoch into which we are. While we have no choice in the matter of our destiny, we are able to decide how to respond to the circumstances in which we find ourselves. The polarity of freedom and destiny allows us to mediate between blind obeisance and blind rejection of the past. It is in this field of tension that the possibility of responsible action arises, and that each person is given the opportunity to create his own self.xlii

As narrator, of course, Robert Penn Warren pervades the entirety of *Audubon*. Unlike R.P.W. in *Brother to Dragons*, who seems to challenge Jefferson at every turn, the narrator of *Audubon* has a target other than the poem's protagonist. From his opening question, "and what is your passion?" (AV, 254), to his final request for "a story of deep delight" (AV, p. 267), Warren challenges his readers to understand their passion and to become creators, thus to enact in their lives the truth that cannot be spoken.

Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce

Warren provides linkages between *Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce*, his last long narrative poem, to both *Brother to Dragons* and *Audubon: A Vision* in the front materials preceding the poem itself. *Chief Joseph's* first epigram is part of a proclamation from Thomas Jefferson to various mid-western Indian tribes. "Made by the same Great Spirit, and living in the same land with our brothers, the red men, we consider ourselves as the same family; we wish to live with them as one people, and to cherish their interests as our own" (CJ, p. 489).xlili [43] Thus the first voice one hears in reading *Chief Joseph* is that of the protagonist of *Brother to Dragons*. Given the story that unfolds, it is not too far-fetched to think of the terms "brother" and "one people" as ominous indicators of government policies designed to remake the natives into the image of European settlers or to cause them to die trying.xliv [44] Even if one is not willing to invest Jefferson's words with that much weight, the realities of American policies for dealing with recalcitrant Native Peoples is made bluntly clear in the second epigram of the poem, a statement by General William Tecumseh Sherman. "The more we can kill this year, the less will have to be killed the next year, for the more I see of these Indians, the more convinced I am that they will all have to be killed or be maintained as a species of paupers" (CJ, p. 489).

The connection between *Chief Joseph* and *Brother to Dragons* is re-emphasized with a discussion of the auspicious first encounter between the Nez Perce and representatives of the United States in the "Note" Warren inserts between the poem's epigrams and the body of the poem itself: "The Nez Perce entered history as the friendly hosts to the explorers Lewis and Clark, and took care of their superfluous possessions when the expedition made the last push to the Pacific" (CJ, p. 491). Both poems recount that Twisted Hair held council with Meriwether Lewis and provided him with a map to the "Great Water Ill-Tasted" xlv [45] (CJ, pp. 493, 494; BD II, p. 112). The action of *Chief Joseph* can come as no surprise to one who has already seen the future destruction of the west prefigured in *Brother to Dragons* (DB II, pp. 83-86.).

Warren's "note" characterizes the Nez Perce as a "handsome," "vigorous," and "not basically warlike" people. "They moved about with the offerings of the seasons, digging camas root, taking salmon at the time of their run, and making long hunts, across the Bitterroot Mountains into what is now Montana, for buffalo, which had already disappeared from their land by the time of Lewis and Clark" (CJ, p. 491). Perhaps, in one of the tribe's treks across the Bitterroot in search of buffalo, members of the tribe crossed the land later to be occupied by the sheepherder's shack of *Audubon* (AV, p. 265). Thus a bit of the action of *Audubon* is linked geographically to the setting of *Chief Joseph*, and reminds that in Audubon's vision Indians in their natural state reflected the splendor of God. Within the *Chief Joseph*, the early quotation from Jean Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville perhaps comes as close as any to Audubon's view: "Their honesty is immaculate and their purity of purpose and their observance of the rules of their religion are most uniform and remarkable. They are certainly more like a nation of saints than a horde of savages" (CJ, p. 492).

Chief Joseph opens with an image of Wallowa as the Nimipu's pastoral Eden , a memory tracing back to time immemorial, a time long before the first appearance of the first White Men, long before the arrival of Lewis and Clark. The narrator of the poem certainly makes this land sound like "Canaan 's Grander Counterfeit" (BD II, p. 10).

The salmon leaps, and is the Sky-Chief's blessing.
The Sky-Power thus blessed the Nimipu
And blessed them, too, with
The camas root, good to the tongue, in abundance. (CJ, p. 492)

But this idyllic world will not last, and the future change is portrayed, strangely, in an entry from the *Journals of Lewis and Clark* that refers to the weather^{xlvi} [46] rather than to social conditions. After a violent hail storm "it became light for a short time, then the heavens became suddenly darkened by a black cloud" (CJ, p. 493).

There are two or three major speakers in *Chief Joseph* and numerous minor ones, "minor" in terms of the number of lines they speak or write, not necessarily in terms of their importance of the action of the poem or its implications. A nameless narrator opens the poem and provides historical information, primarily the movements of the forces chasing Chief Joseph and his band, and commentary throughout the poem (CJ, pp. 3-4, 29-51, 53-56, 57). The final section of the poem is told in the first person by Warren himself: "To Snake Creek, a century later, I came" (CJ, p. 522). (If one folds the nameless narrator of most of the poem and Warren together, there are two major speakers; if one counts them separately, there are three.) Chief Joseph, or Young Joseph as he was known at the time, relates both the story of his people and his own concerns and motivations as events unfold. Other voices are presented through the insertion of quotations throughout the poem. These voices include contemporary newspaper accounts, excerpts from treaties or executive orders, comments by soldiers on both sides involved in the combat, as well

as more recent commentaries in the form of museum catalogs and historical markers. Through the use of quotations from these various sources Warren both provides a sense of the diverse perspectives at play in shaping the Nez Perce War of 1877 and frames a dialogue between competing visions of the American West.

As was the case with *Brother to Dragons*, the action of the poem may be quickly summarized, even if the implications and significance of that action resist easy resolution. The first formal treaty between the United States and the Nez Perce tribes, the Nez Perce Cession of 1855, recognized the traditional home lands of each of the various Nez Perce bands, including the Wallowa Valley of Joseph's tribe. Soon, however, gold was discovered in them thar hills, and in 1863 a new treaty was executed between the U. S. government and some of the Nez Perce leaders. The 1863 treaty shrunk the territory allotted to the Nez-Perce by some ninety per-cent and required that the various bands relocate to and settle on reservations.

In the words of an Army report prepared by Major H. Clay Wood, "Joseph [father of the protagonist of Warren 's poem], Eagle-from-the-Light, Big-Thunder and several less prominent chiefs, and headsmen,--with their followers,--were not parties to the treaty of '63: have never acknowledged its binding force, or accepted any of its privileges or benefits. To the treaty they have objected the want of authority in the Indians who spoke for the tribe. They have uniformly haughtily and utterly repudiated it. From the date of this treaty, there has been a radical division of the tribe into recognized treaty and non-treaty Nez-Perces."xlvi [47] Increasing pressure was brought to bear on the non-treaty Nez Perce to comply with the terms of the treaty they did not sign, but the non-treaty tribes continued their semi-nomadic ways. Finally, in 1877, General O. O. Howard issued an ultimatum to Joseph and other non-treaty leaders: relocate to designated

reservations within the newly restructured Nez Perce territory voluntarily or the Army will relocate you to those lands forcibly. Hostilities broke out and a small group of Nez Perce moved eastward from Oregon , through Idaho and across southern Montana , through the newly established Yellowstone Park in Wyoming and northward through Montana , in an effort to reach Canada where they would be able to settle and live peaceably. Their flight covered a thousand miles geographically and lasted from mid-June to early September, 1977, when Chief Joseph surrendered in the Little Bear Paw Mountains, less than fifty miles from the Canadian border. Along the way the Army and Nez Perce fought numerous engagements and the Nez Perce avoided other encounters by outmaneuvering their pursuers.xlviii [48]

Warren's poem is rich in historical detail--it is the most *historical* of the three poems--in large part because of the effective use of primary materials, but as was true with *Brother to Dragons* and *Audubon*, Warren's real interest is in understanding the internal struggle of the participants. Our focus now turns to the motivations of Chief Joseph, the "philosophical framework" for American national policy, and the reflections of Robert Penn Warren himself as he travels to the site of Joseph's surrender.

Chief Joseph opens with a passage that points backward into the immemorial mists to the origins of the Nez Perce and simultaneously points forward toward Joseph's guiding principle.

The Land of the Winding Waters, Wallowa,
The Land of the Nimipu,
Land sacred to the band of old Joseph,
Their land, the land in the far ages given
By the Chief-in-the Sky. (CJ, p. 492)

The land was sacred to the Nez Perce, in part, because it was the burying ground of the Tribe. Old Joseph, on his deathbed, instructed Joseph to "Think always of your country./◆/You

must never sell the bones of your fathers--/For selling that, you sell your Heart-Being" (CJ, p. 496) The dead do not leave the land, but go to a "dark place" where they can watch the actions of their children and of future generations. The dead, at key moments of decision or action, can perhaps transmit some of their wisdom back into the world, into the minds and hearts of their faithful people. Says Joseph, "My father/Waits thus in his dark place. Waiting, sees all./♦/Before action, sees/The deed of my hand. My hope is his Wisdom" (CJ, p. 496).

The land was sacred to the Nez Perce primarily because God put it into their care. In the poem Joseph tells of finding the right words to say at the council called by General Howard:

But then, my heart, it heard
My father's voice, like a great sky-cry
From snow-peaks in sunlight, and my voice
Was saying the Truth that no
White man can know, how the Great Spirit
Had made the earth but had drawn no lines
Of separation upon it, and all
Must remain as He made, for to each man
Earth is the Mother and Nurse, and to that spot
Where he was nursed, he must,
In love cling. (CJ, p. 498)

Warren emphasizes the importance of this view for Joseph by immediately inserting part of Joseph's statement to the Commissioners of 1876, a statement which parallels Warren 's own treatment. "The earth, my mother and nurse, is very sacred to me: too sacred to be valued, or sold for gold or for silver ♦ and my bands have suffered wrong rather than done wrong"xlix [49] (CJ, p. 498). The reaction to Joseph's plea is sadly predictable: "Howard understood not. He showed us the rifle./The rifle is not what is spoken in peace-talk" (CJ, p. 498).

The Army report already quoted above (p. 21) noted Old Joseph's reaction to the terms of the 1863 Treaty--he "haughtily and utterly repudiated it." His son Joseph shared his opinion.

Joseph's haughty rejection of the Treaty and his disdain for those Nez Perce who signed the treaty is made clear throughout the poem. Joseph recounts that his father went to Lapwai before it was designated as a reservation, and notes that neither he nor his father would sell "sacred/Bones of our fathers for white-man money,/and food scraps" (CJ, p. 493). Those who did sign the Treaty were "false Nimipu" who then went on the reservation "To eat, like a beggar, stale bread of white men" (CJ, p. 494). Joseph also expresses his disdain of those who till the soil rather than depend on God to provide as he weighs what life on the reservation would mean for his people.

We must live afar [from Wallowa] with a shrunk-little heart,
And dig in the ground like a digger of roots--at Lapwai,
The Place of the Butterflies--how pretty
That name for a reservation to puke on! (CJ, p. 498)

Even though after capture "at Keogh they ate the white man's bread" (CJ, p. 516), Joseph expresses this same disdain for those who chose such a shrunken life after his surrender and during his imprisonment.

They built me a house--me, a chief,
Who had lifted the death-tube, Winchester or Sharps,
And peered at the blue spot the sight leveled to
In nameless election. I slow squeezed trigger.
The blue spot was still.
For me, a chief--as though I were one
Of the white half-men who scratch in the ground
And at evening slop hogs. For me,
Who had lain on the prairie in starlight
And heard the coyote-wail of the far scout. (CJ, p. 518)

Rather than sleep in the house Joseph pitched his tepee.

In Warren's portrayal Joseph continually seeks to be worthy of his father, whose eyes are always on him, and to live in harmony with God. Joseph asks,

But what is a man? An autumn-tossed aspen,

Pony-fart in the wind, the melting of snow-slush?
Yes, that is all. Unless--unless--
We can learn to live the Great Spirit's meaning
As the old and wise grope for it. (CJ, p. 519)

Warren has Joseph attempt to understand why the Nez Perce and whites are so different. Perhaps it has to do with the nature of gold, which the whites so highly prize. Joseph imagines that the secret name of gold, reflecting its true nature, might be "*Death-that-in-darkness-comes-smiling*" (CJ, p. 497, italics in original). He observes the soldiers training, and speculates: "The white horse-soldiers, they mount from the left./We from the right. Can that be a difference?" (CJ, p. 497)

Joseph finally hit on *a*, if not *the*, key difference between the whites moving in and the Nez Perce in his statement at the council called by General Howard: the Nez Perce viewed the earth as something that was more basic than man and that could not be owned by him. The position of the white settlers and powers was reflected in Major Wood's report on "The Status of Young Joseph ♦ and the Indian Title to Land." Among the report's "conclusions of law" are the following:

First--Indians cannot exclusively appropriate to themselves more land than they have occasion for, or more than they are able to settle and cultivate. Their unsettled habitation throughout immense regions of the United States cannot be accounted a true and legal possession. We do not, therefore, deviate from the views of nature, in confining the Indians within narrower limits.

Second--The title of Indians to the land they occupy is a title of occupancy *only*. The sovereignty, the ultimate dominion is vested in the General Government.

Fifth--The exclusive power to extinguish the Indian title to land is vested in the General Government, and either by purchase or by conquest.

Sixth--But this title can be extinguished only with their free and full consent, unless by a just and necessary war.l [50]

As this report makes clear, the Nez Perce cannot claim ownership of land simply by living off of the largesse of the Great Spirit who provides for their basic needs. Without the admixture of their labor to the land (dismissively characterized by Warren 's Joseph as scratching in the ground or slopping hogs), the Nez Perce have no claim to their traditional lands recognizable under either American law or the philosophical principles of John Locke. In his nearly thirty years of captivity on various reservations, Joseph was allowed to visit his traditional tribal lands twice. With bittersweet irony Joseph reports, "The grave of my father lay in a land now tilled/By the white man who owned it, but had something human of heart" (CJ, p. 521).

Robert Penn Warren makes an appearance in the final section of *Chief Joseph*, where he recounts his journey to the Little Bear Paw Battlefield. He first documents the details of his flights: "LaGuardia to O'Hare, American Airlines, October 9, 1981 ,/Ticket 704 982 1454 4, Chicago . By Northwest to Great/Falls. Met by two friends, Stuart Wright and David/Quammen" (CJ, p. 522). He then outlines the drive from Great Falls northeast to the Little Bear Paw Mountains.

At the battlefield Warren surveys the "modest monuments" (CJ, p. 523), and notes that "Snake Creek is near-dry, only/A string of mossy-green puddles where Joseph,/In the same season,/Had once found water fresh for people and horse herd" (CJ, p. 524).

While his friends roamed above the site of surrender, Warren "in fanatic imagination" saw Joseph.

I see him who in how many midnights
Had stood--what seasons?--while the susurrus
Of tribal sleep dies toward what stars,
While he, eyes fixed on what strange stars, knew
That eyes were fixed on him, eyes of
Those fathers that incessantly, with

The accuracy of that old Winchester , rifled
Through all, through darkness, distance, Time,
To know if he had proved a man, and being
A man, would make all those
Who now there slept know
Their own manhood.

He knew--could see afar, beyond all night--
Those ancient eyes, in which love and judgment
Hold equal glitter, and, with no blink,
Strove always toward him. And he--
He strove to think of things outside
Of Time, in some
Great whirling sphere, like truth unnamable. Thus--
Standing there, he might well,
Already in such midnight , have foreknown
The end. (CJ, p. 525)

Thus Joseph, in Warren 's mind, has become a standard by which to measure manhood. This seems to provide an answer to the question the unnamed narrator asks near the end of the poem: "Back at Nespelem, by the campfire,/Did Joseph wonder if the gaze of Old Joseph/Yet fixed on him?/At least, no sacred land had he ever sold" (CJ, p. 521). Joseph did not wonder if Old Joseph still watched, because he knew in his faithful heart that the eyes of his father were still on him.^{li} [51]

Warren 's thoughts then turn from the "vastness of plains" where he is standing to "the squirming myriads far at/My back. Then thought of the mayor/Of Spokane --whoever the hell he may have been" (CJ, p. 525). This cavalier dismissal of the mayor of Spokane may be Warren's normal reaction to those he thinks think more highly of themselves than they should, and parallels his comment on the founder of Smithland in *Brother to Dragons*.

It never came to much,
Sure not the vainglory the man
Named Smith--whoever the hell he was--had
In mind that morning when the laid the log,

Squared sill, mixed clay for chink, and split the shakes
For the first cabin, back in the seventeen-nineties. (BD II, p. 13)

A good part of the telling of the story of Chief Joseph, from the point of view of the cavalry officers chasing him down, is the pursuit of glory (CJ, pp. 509, 510, 517). Perhaps easy glory, in Warren 's mind, is always one of the goals of the politically ambitious. These ironic or cynical thoughts are cut short for Warren,

But suddenly knew that for those sound
Of heart there is no ultimate
Irony. There is only
Process, which is one name for history. Often
Pitiful. But sometimes, under
The scrutinizing prism of Time,
Triumphant. (CJ, p. 525)

For the sound of heart there is no ultimate irony, but for the unsound of heart ultimate irony is perhaps all that there is. Warren slaughtered *heroes* as relentlessly as Audubon slaughtered birds,^{lii} [52] the better to lay them out naturally for our observation. The catalog of potential heroes from *Chief Joseph* alone is extensive, and includes Generals Sherman and Howard, President Grant, Colonel Miles, Captain Hale, and Buffalo Bill among those named. Warren provides an anonymous account of the westward movement of civilization, and expands the list of slaughtered heroes, in the narrator's sardonic voice:

Frontiersmen, land-grabbers, gold-panners were dead.
Veterans of the long chase skull-grinned in darkness.
A more soft-handed ilk now swayed the West. They founded
Dynasties, universities, libraries, shuffled
Stocks, and occasionally milked
The Treasury of the United States,
Not to mention each other. They slick-fucked a land. (CJ, p. 520)

Perhaps the ultimate irony of Chief Joseph's story is that in defeat he achieves fame he never sought (CJ, pp. 520-22). But Warren's Joseph thought "a true chief no self has" (CJ, p. 502), and he remains sound of heart.

Does Warren mean to suggest that history is simply a mechanical process independent of human actors? Such a view would seem to be incompatible with Joseph's concern for living rightly: "I prayed/That my father, whose eyes see all, and judge,/Might find some worth in an act of mine,/However slight" (CJ, p. 519). Such a view seems akin to "the Great Twitch," a version of determinism that Jack Burden for a time accepted but ultimately rejected in *All the King's Men*. Burden set aside his easy determinism for a more complex view of "the agony of [human] will."liii [53] Warren's tempered view is neither an acceptance of inevitable historical forces beyond man's control or an embrace of man's will as the ultimate controller of events. Rather, Warren understands the necessity of man's engagement with his world if he is to be a man--that is, Warren understands that ultimately there are questions far more important than the question of who won and who lost in a simple calculus of success.liv [54]

Warren's trek to Little Bear Paw Battlefield, and his reflections on Chief Joseph and Joseph's career, at last leads Warren to reflect on himself and his place in the world.

Now soon they would go back. I too,
Into the squirming throng, faceless to facelessness,
And under a lower sky. But wondered,
Even so, if when the traffic light
Rings green, some stranger may pause and thus miss
His own mob's rush to go where the light
Says go, and pausing, may look,
Not into a deepening shade of canyon,
Nor, head now up, toward ice peak in moonlight white,
But, standing paralyzed in his momentary eternity, into
His own heart look while he asks

From what undefinable distance, years, and direction,
Eyes of fathers are suddenly fixed on him. To know.
(CJ, pp. 525-26).

Warren's final reflections point back to the third epigraph Warren places at the head of the poem, Chief Sealth's vision of the world without the "Red Man."

At night when the streets of your cities are silent and you think them deserted, they will
throng with the returning hosts that once filled them and still love this beautiful land. The
White Man will never be alone. (CJ, p. 489)lv [55]

We are not alone, and it is a mistake to think that the only concerns we have are with our contemporaries. This returns us to the relationship of past to present and future (see pp. 10-11 above) that is of perennial interest for Warren. Just as the writer of the book of Hebrews^{1vi} [56] suggests, we are all surrounded by great clouds of witnesses, and it is to our great disadvantage to ignore them and a prime example of hubris and ignorance to believe that they ultimately can be ignored. A complete life involves the conversation through time, which is essential for real action in our own time.

Conclusion

While each of the poems examined stands apart from the other two in the way it approaches its themes, the three share certain key characteristics: historical documentation, the mapping of contemporary America on an earlier period, and the author appearing in some fashion as an actor in the poem. These characteristics allow for a layering and deepening of the texture of the poems, and also allows for a dialogue across generations to take place. Thus all three poems help us to understand the complexities of American life and history.

The foundation of each poem is the marshalling of documentary evidence that gives the appearance that the poem is deeply rooted in the historical American experience. A prose note or foreword, placing the protagonist(s) in historical perspective, opens each work. Further, each poem contains what seems to be historical documentation. In the case of *Brother to Dragons*, twelve footnotes (BD II, pp. 133-141) provide excerpts from Jefferson's writings, legal documents, monuments, or other historical material or information that supports the "argument" of the poem. *Audubon: A Vision* recounts one of the true (?) stories Audubon tells in his *Delineations of American Scenery and Manners* and includes quotations from his journals and correspondence. In *Chief Joseph* quotations from the principals in the Nez Perce War, from government reports, and from contemporary newspapers, are inserted into the narrative in a way that highlights the historical tensions and encapsulates the competing perspectives at play in Joseph's doomed flight for freedom. This documentation lends an air of historic authenticity to the psychological and moral judgments that are contained in the poems.

Warren discusses the relationship between poetry and history, a matter of importance for all three of the poems I have examined, explicitly in the foreword of *Brother to Dragons*.

I know that any discussion of the relation of this poem to its historical materials is, in one perspective, irrelevant to its value; and it could be totally accurate as history and still not worth a dime as a poem. I am trying to write a poem, not a history, and therefore I have no compunction about tampering with non-essential facts. But poetry is more than fantasy and is committed to the obligation of trying to say something, however obliquely, about the human condition. Therefore, a poem dealing with history is no more at liberty to violate what the writer takes to be the spirit of his history than it is at liberty

to violate what he takes to be the nature of the human heart. What he takes those things to be is, of course, his ultimate gamble.

. . .

Historical sense and poetic sense should not, in the end, be contradictory, for if poetry is the little myth we make, history is the big myth we live, and in our living, constantly remake. (BD II, p. xiii)

As Warren made clear, this understanding of the relationship between history and poetry did not commit him to a blind facticity, and he readily acknowledged that he had "no compunction about tampering with non-essential facts." (BD II, p. xiii) Historical documentation has certain strengths and certain limitations, both of which Warren exploits. The record may provide us with an outline of the facts, the sequence of events and certain consequences of those events, but what the record cannot generally provide is an understanding of the moral dimension of those actions or events. Warren suggests as much in his brief discussion of Smithland:

Though it never came to much, had citizens
Who for a century and a half were cramming their courthouse
With records of the things they lived by, if not for.
Debris of the local courts, Circuit and County,
In the fusty vaults, blind:
Land transfers, grants, indictments, inquests, complaints,
Stompings and stabbings, public blasphemy,
Lawings and mayhem, the slapdash
Confusions of life flung
In a heap like the kitchen-midden
Of a lost clan feasting while their single fire
Flared red and green with sea-salt, and night fell--
Shellfish and artifact, baked bone and shard,
Left on the sea-tongued shore,
And the sea was Time. (BD II, pp. 16-17)

All of these poems involve a layering of contemporary America on the historical materials that are the primary focus of the poem.^{lvii} [57] In both *Brother to Dragons* and *Chief Joseph* Warren charts his journey by car to the historic spot that is the location of that particular poem. This verbal mapping--"Up highway 109 . . . west on 62 . . . Above Paducah, east some fifteen miles . . . Just out of Smithland on the Louisville Road" (BD II, pp. 12, 13, 17)--serves a number of functions within the poem. In general terms, this "contemporary documentation" suggests the movement from a traditional to rational society, to use Max Weber's terms. Compare the precision of driving a Honda from along Route 87, map outspread to chart one's progress (CJ, pp. 522-23), to the more general mapping of the Nez Perce Cession of 1855 (CV, p. 494), to the less formal travel routes of the traditional Nez Perce. We have achieved precision of a sort, but has this precision displaced something more valuable?--Wisdom, perhaps?

Locating our position on a map encourages us to think that we are not lost, after all, assures us that we are still operating within the bounds of normality, and that we are still a part of the modern, rational world, even when traveling down rarely used roads and visiting out-of-the-way historic sites. But there are reminders that just beyond, or under, the civilized veneer that provides us with a sense of security, some wildness remains. While walking on Rocky Hill Warren is surprised by a large black snake that arises from the tumbled ruins and scares him, but he regains control of himself, if not of his environment, by identifying it, finally, by its scientific name--*Elaphe obsoleta obsoleta* (BD II, p. 25).

Warren himself, or a persona bearing his name or initials, appears in each poem. In *Brother to Dragons* R.P.W. talks with ghostly characters from the past, while in *Audubon* he appears but once or twice--perhaps first as a passenger on a Northwest Orient flight bound from

New York to Seattle, looking down over the darkening Bitterroot (AV, p. 265). He appears more solidly, and unmistakably, as a young boy on a dark Kentucky road, listening to geese pass unseen on their northern flight. (AV, p. 266) In *Chief Joseph* he appears as the journalistic investigator, traveling with a couple of friends to the location of the story he is working on to check out the facts.

But in each poem Warren's presence is crucial, for it is his presence that represents the possibility of dialogue with the past.^{lviii} [58] The dynamic Warren writes of explicitly in his foreword to the play version of *Brother to Dragons* holds for all three of these poems.

The play involves . . . two levels of action, one of the present and one of the past, with the suggestion that an understanding of their interpenetration is crucial. On the one level, the character here called the Writer, haunted by the shocking episode and hoping to make sense of it, visits the spot where the Lewis house once stood and where the unmarked graves of Lucy and Lilburn are lost in a tangle of brush and briar. His presence, for the second level of action, summons up the spirits of the persons involved in the old tragedy, who, yet unassuaged and unreconciled, reenact the crisis of their earthly lives, seeking a resolution in understanding and forgiveness--and in, it may be added, a new sense of the historical role of Americans. (BD, 1976, p. 67)

The dialogue across the face of American history represented by these poems suggests that Eric Voegelin's *Time of the Tale* may take on a uniquely American cast in the poetry of Robert Penn Warren. The *Time of the Tale* "expresses the experience of being (that embraces all sorts of reality, the cosmos) in flux."^{lix} [59] The *Time of the Tale* often involves the encounter between man and god and the origins of the cosmos, and therefore has a mythic dimension.

There may come a time when George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Paul Revere and John Adams are mythical figures whose stories have been told from time immemorial, but that time for us is not yet. Perhaps being remains in flux for Warren because in living our history we constantly remake it. In a lecture delivered during the bicentennial of the *Declaration of Independence*, Warren put it this way:

[I]n a way, [the past] ♦ gives' us nothing. We must *earn* what we get there. The past must be studied, worked at--in short, created. For the past, like the present, is fluid. History, the articulated past--all kinds, even our personal histories--is forever being rethought, refelt, rewritten, not merely as rigor or luck turns up new facts but as new patterns emerge, as new understandings develop, and as we experience new needs and new questions. There is no absolute, positive past available to us, no matter how rigorously we strive to determine it--as strive we must. Inevitably, the past, so far as we know it, is an inference, a creation, and this, without being paradoxical, can be said to be its chief value for us. In creating the image of the past, we create ourselves, and without that task of creating the past we might be said scarcely to exist. Without it we sink to the level of a protoplasmic swarm.lx [60]

America ' s sense of time--historical time--is distinct. The signing of the Constitution was "done in Convention . . . the Seventeenth Day of September in the Year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and Eighty seven and of the Independence of the United States of America the Twelfth," and in the consciousness of many Americans it is the second date that is of primary significance. "To begin again," Warren ' s Jefferson says in an offhand way, but for America time is measured from this new creation wrought by Jefferson and his colleagues. Jefferson is, for many, "the spiritual father" of America as Warren says in the first version of *Brother to Dragons*. (BD I, p. xi) This return to the beginning is signified in *Chief Joseph* by the epigram placed first by Warren, a part of a message from Thomas Jefferson "To the Miamis, Powtewataminies, and Weeauki"lxi [61] (CJ, p. 489) and by Warren's opening statement, "The Nez Perce entered history as the friendly hosts to the explorers Lewis and Clark" (CJ, p. 491).

The *Declaration* as the beginning,lxii [62] or new beginning, of time (Time?) is of course belied both in Warren's poetry itself (consider Warren's vision of the Nez Perce before the arrival of Lewis and Clark and the impact of the Maison Quarr⁷e on Jefferson) and "the historical record."lxiii [63] But for much of American history this has been the operative and operational myth. Many Americans have been obsessed with the issue of "American exceptionalism." To the extent that America is unique, perhaps part (all?) of its uniqueness can be traced to the fact that it is simultaneously a modern society which is founded on and to a large extent still governed by its own unique creation myth. Or, perhaps more provocatively, America is at once a modern society in Weber's sense and a cosmological civilization in Voegelin's sense.

i [1] Robert Penn Warren, *Brother to Dragons: A Tale in Verse and Voices* (New York: Random House, 1953). Hereafter cited parenthetically as BD I. The title is taken from *Job* 30: 29: "I am a brother to dragons, and a companion to owls." (KJV)

ii [2] Robert Penn Warren, *Audubon: A Vision* (New York: Random House, 1969). Hereafter references will be to the version of *Audubon* printed in *The Collected Poems of Robert Penn Warren* edited by John Burt (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), pp. 251-67, and will be cited parenthetically as AV.

iii [3] Robert Penn Warren, *Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce* (New York: Random House, 1983). Hereafter references will be to the version of *Chief Joseph* printed in *The Collected Poems of Robert Penn Warren*, pp. 489-526, and will be cited parenthetically as CJ.

iv [4] The poet Frederick Turner has suggested to me that *Brother to Dragons* is reminiscent of the "ghost plays" of Japanese Noh Theater, in which conversations between the living and the dead occur. In his classic study, *The Noh Plays of Japan*, Arthur Waley includes the following notes on "apparitions"--"Here the outward form is that of a ghost; but within is the heart of a man. Such plays are generally in two parts. The beginning, in two or three sections, should be as short as possible. In the second half the *shite* (who has hitherto appeared to be a man) becomes

definitely the ghost of a dead person. Since no one has ever seen a real ghost from the Nether Regions, the actor may use his fancy, aiming only at the beautiful. To represent real life is far more difficult. If ghosts are terrifying, the cease to be beautiful. For the terrifying and the beautiful are as far apart as black and white." See pp. 25-26 of the text available on line at: {<http://www.sacred-texts.com/shi/npj/index.htm>}.

v [5] Robert Penn Warren, *Brother to Dragons: A Tale in Verse and Voices; A New Version* (New York: Random House, 1979). Hereafter cited parenthetically as BD II. This version was reprinted by LSU press in 1996; the pagination of the LSU reprint is the same as the original Random House publication.

vi [6] Robert Penn Warren, "Brother to Dragons: A Play in Two Acts," *The Georgia Review* XXX (Spring 1976): 65-138. Hereafter cited parenthetically as BD, 1976.

vii [7] Warren made a factual change on this point. BD I identifies Lewis as "a physician" (p. 2) while BD II identifies him as "Colonel Charles Lewis," "sometimes said to have been a physician" (p. xi). On the historical attribution of "a mistaken title," see Boynton Merrill, Jr., *Jefferson's Nephews: A Frontier Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), pp. 341-42. Merrill provides a complete account of the murder, the events with surrounded the murder, and the various contemporary versions of the murder.

viii [8] The date is relatively easy to pinpoint because the murder was committed on the same night of the New Madras earthquake.

ix [9] Warren addressed this concern in his foreword: "Although the tragedy in Kentucky was published in the press at the time, several eminent students of his life and work assured me, when I was working on the first version, that they could find no reference by him to the Kentucky story, and one scholar even went so far as to state in a letter his feeling that Jefferson could not bring himself to discuss--or perhaps even to face--the appalling episode. If this is true (though the chances of further research may make it untrue), it is convenient for my poem; but the role of Jefferson in the poem, or in history, does not stand or fall by the fact. If the moral shock to Jefferson administered by the discovery of what was possible in his blood should turn out to be somewhat literally short of what is here represented, subsequent events in the history of our nation, which he helped to found, might amply supply the defect." (BD II, p. xii) It should be noted that Warren muted his characterization of Jefferson in the foreword to BD II--in the foreword to BD I he identified Jefferson as "the spiritual father" of America (p. xi). There is a brief mention of all of this in Dumas Malone's massive biography of Jefferson (*Jefferson and His Time, Volume 6: The Sage of Monticello* [Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1981], pp. 153-54).

x [10] Compare this to the line from Dante (Purgatorio, III: 135) which Warren uses as the epigram for *All the King's Men*: "Mentre che la speranza ha fior del verde"--"as long as hope has any touch of green." The entire *terzina* reads as follows: "By their curse no one so loses the eternal love that it cannot be regained, as long as hope has any touch of green." *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Volume II: Purgatorio*, edited and translated by Robert M. Durling (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 55.

xi [11] Consider as evidence on this point the following dialogue from chapter 33 of A. B. Guthrie's *The Big Sky*. "Peabody nodded. ♦ ♦If the Rocky Mountain Fur Company had kept its contract with him, I dare say he would be in the mountains still, instead of cutting ice at Cambridge for the South American trade.' ♦Ice!' Boone said, ♦Kin a man sell ice?" "All the same,' Jim put in, ♦beaver would have petered out on him, same as on the rest.' ♦I'm not interested in beaver. I've told you that. It is development I'm interested in, future development. You appear to think, because the Indians haven't made use of this great western country, that nobody can.' ♦They live in this country. They live off of it, and enj'y themselves and all,' Boone answered. ♦What in hell do you want. Christ Almighty!' Peabody took a deep breath, as if to make sure he had wind enough for his argument. ♦When country which might support so many actually supports so few, then, by thunder, the inhabitants have not made good use of the natural possibilities.' His wide eyes looked at Boone, earnest and polite but not afraid. ♦That failure surely is justification for invasion, peaceful if possible, forcible if necessary, by people who can and will capitalize on opportunity'." This fictional argument parallels the historical argument over the traditional homelands of the Nez Perce (and other) tribes which will be of concern in the discussion of Warren 's *Chief Joseph*.

xii [12] There is a documentary record which shows both that Jefferson learned of Meriwether Lewis's suicide soon after the event and that he accepted Lewis's death as suicide. See Donald Johnson, editor, *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition with Related Documents 1783-1854* (Champaign-Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962), pp. 467-69, 586-93, 596-98.

xiii [13] Deuteronomy 34: 1-6. On the sin that prevented Moses from entering the promised land, see Deuteronomy 32: 48-52, and Numbers 20: 1-13 (cf. Exodus 17: 1-7). Also see God's command to Joshua after the death of Moses at Joshua 1: 2.

xiv [14] *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, edited by Merrill D. Peterson (New York: The Library of America, 1984), pp. 845-48. For comparative illustrations of these two buildings see "The Federal Style" at {<http://www.holycross.edu/departments/classics/wziobro/ClassicalAmerica/federalistintro>}. See the entry from Jefferson 's *Autobiography* contained in Warren 's notes (BD II, p. 133).

xv [15] See the letter from Jefferson to Madame de Tesse dated March 20, 1787 which begins, "Here I am, Madam, gazing whole hours at the Maison quar♦e, like a lover at his mistress." (BD II, p. 133; *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, pp. 891-893).

xvi [16] Speaking of the Minotaur Jefferson says, "He is the infamy of Crete./He is the midnight 's enormity. And is/Our brother, our darling brother." (BD II, p. 6) Thus Jefferson--and mankind as well?--is the bother to Minotaurs as well as to dragons. This knowledge, as the poem shows, comes to Jefferson much later than the *Declaration Congress*.

xvii [17] *Inferno* I.1-3. *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Volume I: Inferno*, edited and translated by Robert M. Durling (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 26, 27. Compare Jefferson : "Reason? That's the word/I sought to live by--but, oh,/We have been lost in the dark, and I/Was lost who had dreamed there was a light." (BD II, p. 119)

xviii [18] Publius Vergilius Maro, 70-19 B.C Author of the *Aeneid*, *Eclogues*, and *Bucolics*, Virgil serves as Dante's guide through hell and through purgatory. As a pagan, Virgil does not enter paradise with Dante (see *Purgatorio*, XXX. 40-75). Note that Vergil's life overlapped the building of the Maison Quarrée.

xix [19] I surmise, then, that *Brother to Dragons* is Warren's *Inferno*, and leave open the question of whether Warren also produces a Purgatory and a Paradise. Or perhaps *Brother to Dragons* is itself an abbreviated but complete *Divine Comedy*, American style. (See Lewis P. Simpson, "Warren and the Father: Robert Penn Warren and Thomas Jefferson" *The Sewanee Review* CIV (1996): 52, 65.)

xx [20] One of the confusing changes that Warren made in the poem involved the name of the murdered slave. In BD I the slave was named "George," which was the name of historical slave murdered by Lilburne Lewis, but in BD II Warren named the slave "John."

xxi [21] *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, p. 288.

xxii [22] In a letter dated August 1, 1816, Jefferson wrote to Adams, "I like the dreams of the future better than the history of the past. So good night. I will dream on . . ." (*The Adams-Jefferson Letters*, edited by Lester J. Cappon [New York: Simon and Schuster, "A Clarion Book," 1981], p. 485). For a bloody dream of the future late in Jefferson's life see his letter to Adams dated September 4, 1823: "The light which has been shed on mankind by the art of printing has eminently changed the condition of the world. As yet that light has dawned on the middling classes only of the men of Europe. The kings and the rabble of equal ignorance, have not yet received its rays; but it continues to spread. And, while printing is preserved, it can no more recede than the sun return on his course. A first attempt to recover the right of self-government may fail . . . some subsequent one of the ever renewed attempts will ultimately succeed . . . all Europe, Russia excepted, has caught the spirit, and all will attain representative government, more or less perfect. ♦ To attain all this however rivers of blood must yet flow, and years of desolation pass over. Yet the object is worth rivers of blood, and years of desolation for what inheritance so valuable can man leave his posterity? . . . You and I shall look down from another world on these glorious achievements of man, which will add to the joys even in heaven." (*Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, p. 1478; *The Adams-Jefferson Letters*, pp. 596-97)

xxiii [23] Robert Penn Warren, *All the King's Men* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, "A Harvest Book," 1982 [orig. pub. 1946]), p. 435.

xxiv [24] This poem is not the first time Warren has written on Audubon. In 1944 Warren published "Love and Separateness in Eudora Welty" in *The Kenyon Review*. This essay includes a discussion of her story, "A Still Moment," in which Audubon appears as a character. This essay is reprinted in *A Robert Penn Warren Reader* (New York: Random House, 1987), pp. 196-206 with the discussion of Audubon at pp. 200-201. Audubon is mentioned briefly in Warren's "The World of Daniel Boone," *Holiday* Vol. 34 (December 1963): 176. Warren had primary responsibility for the entry on Audubon in the history of American literature he coauthored with Cleanth Brooks and R.W.B. Lewis, and he was working on this section of the critical work in the 1960s, and it was working on this that encouraged Warren to return to Audubon as a subject for a

poem (see "An Interview with Robert Penn Warren," conducted by Peter Stitt, in *Talking with Robert Penn Warren*, edited by Floyd C. Watkins, John T. Hiers, and Mary Louise Weaks (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1990), pp. 243-44). See "John James Audubon (1785-1851)," in Cleanth Brooks, R. W. B. Lewis, and Robert Penn Warren, *American Literature: The Makers and the Making* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), Vol. I, pp.1061-1070.

xxv [25] William Bedford Clark, "Warren's *Audubon*: The Artist as Hero," *The South Atlantic Review* V. 81 (Autumn 1982): 390.

xxvi [26] Stitt, "An Interview with Robert Penn Warren," p. 244.

xxvii [27] See John Burt, *Robert Penn Warren and American Idealism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 93.

xxviii [28] "Mississippi River Journal," in *John James Audubon: Writings and Drawings*, edited by Christoph Irmscher (New York: Library of America, 1999), p. 32.

xxix [29] "Mississippi River Journal," p. 9.

xxx [30] *Audubon: Writings and Drawings*, pp. 755 and 50.

xxxi [31] See Hugh Ruppersburg, *Robert Penn Warren and the American Imagination* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1990), pp. 83-84. Audubon's respect or admiration for the native Indians he encountered is evident throughout his "Mississippi River Journal," where Indians are often favorably compared to European settlers (see, e.g., pp. 21, 23-24, 48, 51).

xxxii [32] While preparing sections of *Audubon* for publication in *The New Yorker* prior to the release of the book, Warren argued for keeping more of the poem than the editor wanted to include: "To begin with, I really feel committed to #I, for here the three themes of the poem are introduced ♦ the themes that are interwoven along the way afterwards. The ♦lost dauphin' ♦ Audubon couldn't really be sure who he was, though he officially accepted the official (and untrue) version that his father gave him. His story is, in a way, a variant of the fairy tales of the unrecognized princeling, with all those implications ♦ as the story of all of us is, in one way or another, one time or another. Next there is the theme of ♦what is man but his passion?' No man is ♦real' except in so far as he creates his reality, discovers the true, central passion that may given meaning to his life. These first two themes keep appearing in the poem, of course, in more or less obvious ways. Next, still in #I, we have the two views of the heron ♦ the image in nature, black against the red dawn, and the image defined in his mind: on one hand experience by immersion in nature (♦love') on contrast with meaning by abstraction, definition (♦knowledge'" (Letter from Warren to Howard Moss, dated March 24, 1969, contained in folder 2140, The Robert Penn Warren Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University Library).

xxxiii [33] "The Prairie," in *Audubon: Writings and Drawings*, pp. 524-528.

xxxiv [34] Allen Sheperd, "Warren's *Audubon*: ♦Issues in Purer Form' and ♦The Ground Rules of Fact'," *The Mississippi Quarterly* XXXIV (Winter 1970-71): 47-56.

xxxv [35] Sheperd, "Warren's *Audubon*," p. 48.

xxxvi [36] See Burt, pp. 99-101, and T. R. Hummer, "Robert Penn Warren : *Audubon* and the Moral Center ," *The Southern Review* 16 (October 1980): 799-815, esp. pp. 805-815.

xxxvii [37] The Indian had lost his eye while hunting when an arrow split on the bowstring and gouged out his eye ("The Prairie," p. 525, AV, p. 256). This is reminiscent of Tenskwatawa, "The Prophet," younger brother of the Shawnee chief Tecumseh, who lost his right eye in a similar accident as a youth (see entry on "Shawnee Prophet [Tenskwatawa]" in the on-line *Encyclopedia of North American Indians* at {http://college.hmco.com/history/readerscomp/naind/html/na_035700_shawneeproph.htm}). This would have had special significance for Warren, who has lost sight in his left eye as a teenager. Within the context of the poem--and Warren emphasizes the blood and mucus caked on the Indian's face--the presence of an apparently inept Indian provides a cautionary note to Audubon's unrestrained vision of natural splendor.

xxxviii [38] *All the King's Men*, pp. 13, 63. Whether such triangulation is simple, is of course, contestable. See my "On the Creation of the Self in the Thought of Robert Penn Warren," *Modern Age* Vol. 43 (Summer 2001): 202-210, and "The Struggle to Write as the Creation of the Self: Robert Penn Warren on ♦A Vision Earned'," *rWp: An Annual of Robert Penn Warren Studies* III (2003): 93-103.

xxxix [39] Audubon did not paint from life. He killed and then posed his subjects (see "Account of the Method of Drawing Birds," p. 754; also see the account in "The Golden Eagle," in *Audubon: Writings and Drawings*, pp. 354-56). He was interested in understanding and viewing birds as they were in nature and discounted many of the tales commonly told about animal behavior and was critical of museums for their unrealistic presentation of the animals exhibited ("Account of the Method of Drawing Birds," pp. 755-56). Compare Audubon's lifework with the well know lines from William Wordsworth's "The Tables Turned": "Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;/Our meddling intellect/Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things:--/We murder to dissect."

xl [40] "Account of the Method of Drawing Birds," p. 758. Compare this joyful approach to the study of birds with the melancholy final paragraphs of chapter nine in Mark Twain's *Life on the Mississippi*, in which Twain laments that his education as a steamboat pilot had robbed the river of its romance and beauty (Guy Cardwell, editor, *Mississippi Writings* [New York: Library of America, 1982], p. 285).

xli [41] This may represent a universal dream of sorts--"For everything there is a season [cf. Ecclesiastes 3: 1]./But there is the dream/Of a season past all seasons" (AV, p. 265).

xlii [42] Warren writes of the poles of life and fiction in "Love and Separateness in Eudora Welty," pp. 201, 205, but also see BD II, pp. 38-39. On the polarity of freedom and destiny, see Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology I* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), pp. 182-86.

xliii [43] Presidential message, January 7, 1802, in *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, edited by Adrienne Koch and William Peden (New York: The Modern Library, 1944), p. 333.

xliv [44] Jefferson's message to the Miamis, Powtewatamies, and Weeauiki foreshadows one of the issues that will be of critical importance for the settlers in their argument against the Nez Perce: "We shall, with great pleasure, see your people become disposed to cultivate the earth, to raise herds of the useful animals, and to spin and weave, for their food and clothing. These resources are certain; they will never disappoint you: while those of hunting may fail, and expose your women and children to the miseries of hunger and cold. We will with pleasure furnish you with implements for the necessary arts, and with persons who may instruct you how to make and use them" (*The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, p. 333). "Brother" is reminiscent of one of the examples of black humor that circulated within the satellite nations of the Soviet Bloc during the later stages of the Cold War, involving whether the Russians were friends or brothers of the occupied peoples. The punch line was, "Why, Comrade, we get to choose our friends." On Jefferson's Indian policy, see Bernard Sheehan, *Seeds of Extinction: Jeffersonian Philanthropy and the American Indian* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1974).

xlv [45] Alvin Josephy emphasizes the importance of this first meeting between the Nez Perce and representatives of the United States, and the way in which the later thinking of the tribe was shaped by a belief that all such representatives were as trustworthy as the first. See Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., *The Nez Perce and the Opening of the Northwest* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), pp. 228, 325.

xlvi [46] But consider Warren's later discussion of the impersonal process of history (CJ, p. 525).

xlvii [47] Major H. Clay Wood, Assistant Adjutant General for the Army's Department of the Columbia, "The Status of Young Joseph and His Band of Nez-Perce Indians Under the Treaties between the United States and the Nez-Perce Tribe of Indians and the Indian Title to Land" (Portland, Oregon: Assistant Adjutant General's Office, Department of the Columbia, 1876), pp. 42-43.

xlviiii [48] There are a number of good studies of the Nez Perce War, as well as important first-hand accounts from many of those involved. See Young Joseph, "A Indian's Views of Indian Affairs," *The North American Review* Vol. 128 (April 1879): 412-33, and O. O. Howard, "The True Story of the Wallowa Campaign," *The North American Review* Vol. 129 (July 1879): 53-64. Warren notes Joseph's article at CJ, P. 518. Among the scholarly studies that Warren would have had access to are, in addition to Josephy, Merrill D. Beal, *"I Will Fight No More Forever": Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce War* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963) and Mark H. Brown, *The Flight of the Nez Perce* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1967). A recent study is Jerome A. Greene, *Nez Perce Summer, 1877* (Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 2000).

xlix [49] Note that Joseph expressed the position Socrates articulated in Plato's *Gorgias*, that it is better to suffer evil than to commit evil.

l [50] Wood, "The Status of Young Joseph," p. 44. Wood quotes extensively from Vattel's *Law of Nations* as background for his conclusions ("The Status of Young Joseph," pp. 38-41).

li [51] Warren 's Joseph seeks to "think things/Outside of time," much as Audubon finds action and meaning that "is not a dimension of Time" (see above, pp. 15-16). Also note the parallel comments Warren made about Audubon and Joseph. Audubon "was only/Himself, Jean Jacques, and his passion" (AV, p. 254). Of Joseph, "He/was only himself, and the distances/He stared into were only himself" (CJ, p. 521). Also note that there is a soundless dimension to Warren 's visions (CJ, p. 525; AV, p. 265).

lii [52] I am indebted to my wife, Dr. Lenore Ealy , for this phraseology. On the same point, see Jonathan S. Cullick, *Making History: The Biographical Narratives of Robert Penn Warren* (Baton Rouge : Louisiana State University Press, 2000), pp. 155-57.

liii [53] *All the King's Men*, p. 436.

liv [54] In a letter to Cleanth Brooks dated December 6. 1943, Warren distinguished between personal struggle and metaphysical struggle in a discussion of characters in Shakespeare: "I think that you might underscore a little more heavily, the very excellent point made on p. 11 about the added dignity achieved by M [Macbeth] if we regard him in the light of his metaphysical attempt as contrasted with his personal attempt at a throne. He has undertaken a more than mortal struggle *but a struggle which man must as man forever undertake*. Man must try to predict and plan and control, as his destiny. But he can never be sure that he has arrived at the right premise for the effort. M is trying to follow man's destiny. Man has to try to break the bank of the future. The fact that he cannot does not mean that he must not try. The question is on what terms can he try and with what attitude. Something along that line. I feel that this can be developed. On this general point, I would suggest a comparison with the play Julius Caesar. We have a somewhat parallel philosophical issue. Brutus is a Stoic, therefore a determinist. He does not act because for him action is futile. But Cassius, an Epicurean, who by definition believes in the efficacy of will and reason in relation to the "future," lures Brutus into action. In the end Cassius says ♦you know I once held Epicurus strong' but has lost his philosophy and now begins to ♦credit things that do presage'--[in] other words has begun to doubt man's role in relation to the future. Here the set-up is different in that the Fate is not a moral order, shall we say, but a political and historical situation, which has not be[en] adequately analyzed. Etc. But the same basic issue seems to be raised here. Or am I wrong?" (*Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren: A Literary Correspondence*, edited by James A. Grimshaw, Jr., [Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998], p. 80; cf. Warren's letter on Cleopatra, p. 50)

lv [55] See "Chief Seattle," in Brooks, Lewis, and Warren, *American Literature: The Makers and the Making*, vol 1, pp. 1183-85.

lvi [56] Hebrews 12: 1.

lvii [57] This same effect is achieved in the novels *Night Rider* and *All the King's Men* with a slight reversal--an historical interlude provides some new perspective on the contemporary story.

lviii [58] It is crucial also in that it brings into the open the limits of the poet. He is not an omniscient narrator who knows all and understands all, but rather a human with the strengths and weaknesses of humans, including a poor memory at times. R.P.W. makes two trips to Rocky Hill, and on the second he discovers that the bluff "doesn't look so high / . . . And never was, perhaps, but in my head./ . . . I had plain misremembered,/Or dreamed a world appropriate for the tale." (BD II, p. 128)

lix [59] Charles R. Embry , editor, *Robert B. Heilman and Eric Voegelin: A Friendship in Letters, 1944-1984* (Columbia : University of Missouri Press , 2004), Letter 103.

lx [60] Robert Penn Warren , "The Use of the Past," in *New and Selected Essays* (New York: Random House, 1989), pp. 50-51.

lxi [61] "Made by the same Great Spirit, and living in the same land with our brothers, the red men, we consider ourselves as the same family; we wish to live with them as one people, and to cherish their interests as our own."

lxii [62] Luigi Barzini has suggested that the appropriate translation of *Novus ordo seclorum* is "The world and history begin with us" ("The Americans," *Harper's* Vol. 263 [December 1981]: 31).

lxiii [63] At least one serious work on American political thought, Willmoore Kendall and George Carey, *The Basic Symbols of American Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970) argues that the *Declaration* is actually the derailment, rather than the origin, of the American experience.