LEAVES OF BLUEGRASS FICTIONS

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Abstract: *Easily translatable as "Pages of Fiction Set in Kentucky" this paper is a brief chronological account of how an 1835 Kentucky murder story has been taken over again and again in quite a number of works of fiction (mostly plays and novels, beginning with such contemporaries as Edgar Allan Poe, Thomas Holley Chivers, Charlotte Barnes, and William Gilmore Simms, to other nineteenth-century authors—John Savage…--and twentieth-century ones—Robert Penn Warren, Richard Taylor, John Hawkins…) The selected fictions here are the original one (including the murderer's Confession), Poe's (only and unfinished) play Politian, and Warren's World Enough and Time, which the author found illustrative enough for the ways in which fiction/s deviate/s and depart/s from the actual historical facts; the paper also discusses how these very real facts become fictional facts as soon as they turn into linguistic(-imaginative) representations (reports, records, testimonies, confessions, documents and accounts of all sorts…) of the former.*

Keywords: facts, fiction/s, tragedy, Kentucky, representation, melodrama

One of our preliminary points in this paper is that our purpose is not to "investigate" how such famous murders (because of their famous victims), like those of Abraham Lincoln and John Fitzgerald Kennedy gave birth to hundreds and thousands of books (over 15,000 titles about Lincoln), but to refer to one of the lesser known murders (because of their more or less ordinary victims) that resulted, however, in remarkable (and also many not so remarkable) literary works; the difference we are noticing here is that great personalities, in one case, attracted writers (generally lesser known) who meant to somehow benefit from the prestige of these personalities, seldom being able to enhance their renown; whereas, in the second case, more or less ordinary people and their dramatic/tragic destinies became the stuff of attention for often well-known writers, who thus turned them into famous "subjects"; the observed "topics" thus seem to require the genius of writers who either derive or add substance/celebrity to their characters.

Another point is that of the relationships between language, fiction and fact, as we have the feeling that once a word—or a number of words—have replaced a fact as such (whatever the word "fact" may represent to our minds), fiction has already come into the game, and the "fact" itself contains the "fiction" that language has always carried with it. In other words (see infra), when we make distinctions between journalism, for instance, or reports, or documents, or records on one hand and fiction on the other we are making distinctions between two or more types or degrees of fiction. And so, when one writer or another uses such "documentary evidence" to create fictions, he moves, in fact ("fact"?) from one fiction to another; reality or "actuality" always remains somewhere outside of the words and their complex meanings and functions. Consequently, history (the written record of man's memory) represents only one stage in a series of fictions that include historical novels, dramas, movies… In brief, as soon as man started perceiving reality and commenting on it in words, he moved away from it into the fictions he created about himself and this reality.

A third preliminary point refers to the concept of "tragedy" which, for Western civilization at least, came into being with Aristotle who, in his Poetics (335 BC) defined the confines of classical tragedy: it should depict only those with power and high status; it is characterized by seriousness; the great person has to experience peripeteia, i.e. a reversal of fortune, mostly

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from good to bad; which, in its turn, induces fear and pity (catharsis) within the spectators; finally, the character's downfall is due to the tragic hero's hamartia, i.e. a flaw, frailty, error or mistake. Modern tragedy, that Hegel himself wrote about, may, however, involve ordinary people in their domestic surroundings, and so we encounter a dramatist like Arthur Miller writing about "Tragedy and the Common Man"(1949). Simply put, one no longer has to worry as to whether "the Kentucky Tragedy" that we will be dealing with is or is not a "real tragedy."

And there are quite a number of other (American) cases illustrating our second and third points; these are the so-called "non-fiction" or "true-crime" books (both concepts being questionable in view of our first point). Chronologically, first comes Susan Glaspell's 1916 play Trifles, later turned into a short story ("A Jury of her Peers"), inspired by the Des Moines, Indiana murder of one John Hossack (which Glaspell had also covered as a journalist); then—and most famous of all—is Truman Capote's non-fiction In Cold Blood (1966), about the 1959 Kansas murder of Herbert clutter, his wife, and two of their children; in 1974 Vincent Bugliosi (who had also written about the assassination of J. F. Kennedy) published his Helter Skelter about "the Mason murders" or the Sharon Tate murder of 1969); and in 1979 (a complete list is not our purpose here) Norman Mailer described the life and death of murderer Gary Gilmore, of Utah (executed by firing squad in January 1977) in his The Executioner's Song…

In all these and other cases, readers are invited to believe the fiction that testimonies, confessions, trial records, documents of all types, newspaper articles, radio and TV shows… are all, to a lesser or greater extent, actual facts—or refer to such facts--, when the truth—another questionable concept—may be elsewhere. Thus, for instance, The Confession of Jereboam Orville Beauchamp: Who Was Hanged at Frankfort, Kentucky, on the 7th Day of July, 1826, for the Murder of Colonel Solomon P. Sharp, published in 1826 (n.b.) laid the foundation of the myth of the "Kentucky Tragedy"; a myth based on the idea that the murderer used popular understandings of the antebellum code of honor to justify his action/s against Sharp and fashioned the murder as an honor killing. Hence such commentaries on the relationships history/fiction as John Winston Coleman's 1950 "Episode of Kentucky History During the Middle 1820s" Robert D. Bamberg's 1966 The Confessions of Jereboam O. Beauchamp, Dickson D. Bruce's 2006 presentation of The Kentucky Tragedy…, or Matthew G. Schoenbachler's 2009 The Myth of the Kentucky Tragedy…

But the Kentucky Tragedy also had all the elements of melodrama—seduction, jealousy, betrayal, honor, greed, and political intrigue--, so it was bound to attract literary pens interested in a story of love, treachery, vengeance and tragic heroism, involving two troubled misfits in a world they could not understand; retold first in contemporary newspaper reports, the Kentucky Tragedy tale has grown to be heavily fictionalized with each of its creative re-inventions; beside scholarly historical books (see supra), it got to be the subject of poems, ballads, short stories, plays and novels, and each iteration of the story, over the past one hundred-and-fifty years or more represented a new divorcing from the facts of the case—what Bruce described as "the sources and legitimacy of authority" which means that a number of images and themes managed to survive in the story's various manifestations.

The first fictionalized account of the 1825 murder case comes from a Georgia Southern, mostly forgotten writer, best-known—if at all—for his friendship and rivalry with Edgar Allan Poe; Thomas Holley Chivers (1809-1858), a doctor with a medical degree from Transylvania University in Kentucky (which, naturally, attracted a Romanian's attention), wrote poems and plays with religious overtones and also corresponded with Poe (with whom he met only in June or July 1845); at one point he accused Poe of plagiarizing both "The Raven" and "Ulalume" from his own work (see Moss); anyway, the three characters in the Kentucky Tragedy become for him Conrad, Eudora, and Alonzo, in his 1834 play Conrad and

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Eudora: or, The Death of Alonzo, A Tragedy, later renamed Leoni: The Orphan of Venice; so, less than ten years after the real incidents, the story is transplanted onto distant, more Romantic lands. One finds it interesting to note that in 1848 Chivers published a pamphlet titled "Search After Truth" a series of dialogues between the Seer (i.e. Chivers) and Politian (i.e. Poe), with the Seer ultimately leading Politian to the truth. And thus we may also get an idea why, one year after Chivers, in 1835, E. A. Poe (1809-1849) wrote "Scenes from an unfinished drama" (his only—and unfinished—play) titled Politian, where he sets the same story in sixteenth-century Rome (see infra).

In the same decade, actress and playwright—with an adaptation of Edward Bulwer-Lytton's The Last Days of Pompeii and a play about Pocahontas, titled The Forest Princess—Charlotte Mary Sanford Barnes (1818-1863) published her own Kentucky Tragedy version as Octavia Bragaldi; or, The Confession (1837), where—already unsurprisingly—the drama is placed in fifteenth-century Milan. And once more back to Poe, as he interacted with another obscure writer of the time, Charles Fenno Hoffman (1806-1884), author of Greyslayer: A Romance of the Mohawk (1840), an American Revolutionary War novel set in New York's Mohawk Valley (closer home, this time), with young attorney (n.b.) Max Greyslayer's participation in the war, his brief arrest by the British, his other adventures and finally a murder plot based on the Kentucky Tragedy. Hoffman had written a bad review of Poe's Eureka (branding it as "impious"), Poe responded and called him "dishonest" but in 1846 he published in Godey's Lady's Book an essay titled "The Literati of New York City"; Hoffman is among them, and Poe mentions his Greyslayer, "a romance based on the well-known murder of Sharp, the Solicitor-General of Kentucky, by Beauchampe."

Also among Poe's "literati" is William Gilmore Simms (1806-1870)—though not of New York City, who wrote his own novel Beauchampe, or The Kentucky Tragedy (1843) and Poe compares them: "William Gilmore Simms (who has far more power, more passion, more movement, more skill than Mr. Hoffman) has treated the subject more effectively in his novel Beauchampe, but the fact is that both gentlemen have positively failed as might have been expected"; and Poe goes on: "That both books are interesting is no merit either of Mr. H. or of Mr. S. The real events were more impressive than are the fictitious ones. The facts of this remarkable tragedy, as arranged by actual circumstance, would put to shame the skill of the most consummate artist /including Poe himself/. Nothing was left to the novelist but the amplification of character, and at this point neither the author of Greyslayer nor of Beauchampe is especially au fait. The incidents might be better woven into a tragedy."(p.2) One can simply point out that this commentary was written just one year after Poe's own failure at rendering dramatically the facts and characters of the Kentucky Tragedy in Politian. Simms, incidentally, also wrote two other volumes on the subject: Charlemont, or the Pride of the Village (1856) and a sequel to Charlemont.

Next in line is Irish (American) journalist, editor, poet and playwright John Savage (1828-1888), who publishes in 1865 a tragedy in prose and verse on the same subject titled Sybil. And a more careful research might reveal other authors seduced by the topic, only our own records a longish break (a sense of exhaustion?), until 1950, when "the pentathlon champion of American letters" (in one critic's description, as he wrote novels, short stories, poems, plays, and criticism—as one of the fathers of New Criticism, in fact) Robert Penn Warren (1905-1989) published his World Enough and Time; another intermission takes us to the 1990s: Richard Taylor's 1991 Three Kentucky Tragedies (one of 1782 on the confrontation between Kentuckians and Indians; the murder of a slave by two of Thomas Jefferson's nephews in 1807; and the 1825 "bizarre" Beauchamp-Sharp murder); and John Hawkins' 1992 outdoor drama Wounded Is the Wounding Heart, produced, appropriately, in Frankfort, Kentucky (we would like to return to the "bizarre" in the description above).

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Our following sections will give presentations of the Kentucky Tragedy as such (i.e. fiction number one) and of two literary "departures/deviations" from it, namely those of Poe (himself a "triathlon champion of American letters" the century before) and Warren, as the two best-known authors to have approached the subject.

The stage for "the Beauchamp-Sharp Tragedy" is, obviously, Kentucky, the Bluegrass State, better known for its derby, its coal fields, deer, turkey, and elk, for its bourbon and even for its KFC; it joined the Union in 1792, as the fifteenth state of the US; it stretches south of Illinois, Indiana and Ohio, north of Tennessee, East of Missouri, and west of Virginia and West Virginia, i.e. in the East-Central area of the US. Robert Penn Warren's description may be taken as its motto: "It was a land of fiddle and whisky, sweat and prayer, pride and depravity." Its characters move between, live and die in a few such real towns as Frankfort (the capital city), Bowling Green in Warren County, Bardstown and Bloomfield (about nine miles apart, see infra), and Glasgow (about thirty miles east of Bowling Green).

The triangle of players was made up of Jereboam Orville Beauchamp/e, Ann/Anna/Anne Cook/e (Beauchamp) and Solomon Porcius Sharp. Jereboam Beauchamp (b. 1802) was a young respectable law student and then lawyer, who came from a fairly prominent family (living in Glasgow, South-West of Frankfort, about a mile from Cooke's estate), and was an ardent admirer of Sharp, the most successful attorney in Bowling Green (where Beauchamp opened his own legal practice in 1822); from the various sources, Beauchamp also comes out as a strong-willed, unruly, eccentric, violent and vindictive young man, who by the age of eighteen had been formally charged with fathering at least one bastard child. Anna Cooke, a planter's daughter, was born in 1785 or 1786, in Fairfax County, Virginia; after the death of her father and sister, the family (Anna, mother and five brothers—and about two dozen slaves) moved to Kentucky for a fresh start outside of Bowling Green, where they bought an estate called Retirement; she was well-read (especially romantic novels and Byron) and rather defiant of conventional norms.

The third player was Solomon P. Sharp (born in 1787, also in Virginia, so he was younger than Anna), leader of the New Court Party in Kentucky, which already introduces the element of political intrigue in the drama. The Old Court-New Court controversy was the one between debtors (the New Court faction) who sought relief from their financial burdens after the national Panic of 1819, and the creditors (Old Court, where Beauchamp found himself almost unwittingly) to whom these obligations were owed and who were consequently anti-relief. The prominent attorney Solomon Sharp, a colonel in the state militia and the proprietor of 3,600 acres of land, was twice elected to the state legislature then served for two terms in the US House of Representatives (beginning at age 24), and in 1822 Governor John Adair named him attorney general (a position he resigned from in 1825).

The chronology of the events that the three protagonists are involved in becomes important here (and also kind of unusual—with "bizarre" elements); sometime in 1819 (three of her brothers died between 1818 and 1821) Anna Cooke is seduced and abandoned (or seduces and abandons?) Colonel P. Sharp, a married man—to Elizabeth Thompson Scott--, whom the reclusive unmarried woman had known for about twelve years, i.e. from 1807, when Beauchamp was five years old. The result of the relationship is a child born in June 1820 (either stillborn or who died very early). Beauchamp's friendship with Anna (shared interests in romantic literature, use of her personal library…) began in 1821, when he was eighteen-nineteen and she was thirty-five or thirty-six, i.e. about seventeen years older and far from the prototype of the innocent female victim. Moreover, she encourages the young lawyer's advances on condition that, after marriage, he kill Sharp to avenge her honor (and this certainly strikes one as rather unexpected—to say the least); so Jereboam Orville Beauchamp and Anna Cooke (Beauchamp) get married in June 1824.

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In the following months Beauchamp sees Sharp and requests a duel, the latter does not consent (a couple of times), takes part in the 1825 elections for the Kentucky House of Representatives and wins, and on November 6th Beauchamp rides to Frankfort, disguised and with a butcher knife dipped in poison; he waited at Sharp's house until after midnight, when the legislator was supposed to return from the General Assembly's session; around two o'clock on Nov. 7, 1825—"I put on my mask, drew my dagger and proceeded to the door; I knocked three times loud and quick, Colonel Sharp said: 'Who's there'—'Covington,' I replied, quickly Sharp's foot was heard upon the floor. I saw under the door as he approached without a light. I drew my mask over my face and immediately Colonel Sharp opened the door. I advanced into the room and with my left hand I grasped his right wrist, The violence of the grasp made him spring back and trying to disengage his wrist, he said, 'What Covington is this?' I replied 'John. A. Covington.' 'I don't know you,' said Colonel Sharp, 'I know John Covington.' Mrs. Sharp appeared at the partition door and then disappeared, seeing her disappear I said in a persuasive tone of voice, 'Come to the light, Colonel, and you will know me,' and pulling him by the arm he came readily to the door and still holding his wrist with my left hand I stripped my hat and handkerchief from over my forehead and looked into Sharp's face. He knew me the more readily I imagine, by my long, bush, curly suit of hair. He sprang back and exclaimed in a tone of horror and despair, 'Great God, it is him,' and as he said that he fell on his knees. I let go of his wrist and grasped him by the throat dashing him against the facing of the door and muttered in his face, 'Die, you villain.' As I said that I plunged the dagger to his heart."

This "real" Confession (written by Beauchamp and Anna, while together in the cell, in the hope of proving that the act was justified) seems hardly convincing, and one certainly does not intend to add more fiction to it by attempting to interpret some of its details; suffice it to say that no murderer has ever been seen as reliable in his/her own account of the crime. What is added is that Sharp's wife, Eliza, witnessed the entire scene from the top of the stairs, but Beauchamp fled before he could be identified; at the trial, hers was the only testimony, in which she could only identify the murderer's high-pitched voice. The Sharps' son, John, born in 1823, must have also been in the house.

The first night after the murder Beauchamp stayed at the house of a relative in Bloomfield, the next day he moved to Bardstown, on November 9 he was with his brother-in-law in Bowling Green, and on the 10th he was back home. In the meantime, the Kentucky General Assembly authorized the governor to offer a reward of $ 3,000 for the arrest and conviction of Sharp's killer; trustees of the city of Frankfort added a reward of $ 1,000, and friends of Sharp an additional $ 2,000 reward. The suspicion rested with three men, Beauchamp and two others who were known to have made threats against Sharp's life.

On November 10th, Beauchamp and Anna were making plans to flee to Missouri (an episode developed by Robert Penn Warren one hundred and twenty-five years later), but he was arrested before nightfall on that day ant taken to Frankfort before an examining court. Beauchamp's uncle, a state senator himself, gathered a defense team, the trial began on May 8, 1826 (and lasted eleven days) and Beauchamp pleaded "not guilty"; despite the absence of any physical evidence whatsoever—all of it was circumstantial—(one more of the several strange elements in the case), on May 19 the jury returned a "guilty" verdict, Beauchamp was sentenced to be executed by hanging on June 16, 1826, until when Anna was permitted to stay in the cell with him; in fact, she had also been tried for complicity in the murder, but acquitted for lack of evidence.

While arrested, Beauchamp wrote a petition and the judge in the case granted him a stay of execution until July 7 to allow him (them) to produce a written justification of his actions; this testimony/confession was to be published in 1826, the same year as The Letters of Ann Cook (whose authorship was disputed); having written their stories, the couple attempted, on July 5,

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1826, a double suicide—first with doses of laudanum and then with a knife; the second was fatal for Anna, while the jailers were able to save Jereboam for the gallows, so he was hanged before he could die of his stab wound ("bizarre" already becomes too mild a word for this kind of irony); five thousand spectators gathered on July 7 to watch the first legal hanging in Kentucky's history. In the month before her death and her husband's execution, Anna wrote an Epitaph to be engraven on the tombstone of Mr. and Mrs. Beauchamp; written by Mrs. Beauchamp, which begins:

"Untombed below in other's arms
The husband and the wife repose,
Safe from life's never ending storms,
And safe from all their cruel foes…"

and goes on for another six stanzas, speaking of "a child of evil fate she lived…" "…her tale of matchless woe…,' of the "base seducer… and the villain low" and "this tomb of love and honor…"(see Schoenbachler). Beauchamp's father requested the bodies for burial, and they were placed (as requested—see also Warren and Marvell infra) in an embrace in a single coffin in Maple Grove Cemetery in Bloomfield, Kentucky.

In 1825/1826 the Kentucky Tragedy became a national headline story, being widely reported in dozens of newspapers; Boston-born Poe (in 1809) had been adopted from the age of two by the Allans of Richmond, Virginia, so, with a five-year stint in Britain (1815-1820), until 1827 he lived in Virginia, quite close to the stage of the drama and must have read—even heard of—stories about Beauchamp, Sharp and Cooke; as a matter of fact, in 1826 (at the age of seventeen) he spent one semester at the University of Virginia.

In 1831, while in New York and Baltimore and going through several of his well-known crises, Poe started work on a play that he never finished; as seemed to be the literary custom of the time, he placed it in Renaissance Rome and titled it Politian; Poliziano (Latin Politianus, anglicized as Politian) was the nickname of Angelo Ambrogini (1454-1494), a classical scholar and poet in Florence (n.b.), translator of Homer, Epictetus, Hippocrates, Plutarch, Plato…, and tutor of the Medici children. It is hard to speculate why he was chosen as the model for Beauchamp (he is, in fact, the English Earl of Leicester) in a play (his only and also never completed) that he was not prepared for; as a matter of fact, when "Scenes from an unpublished drama" were published, though, in the Southern Literary Messenger (two installments, in December 1835 and January 1836), Poe received some of his worst reviews: for not knowing enough about Renaissance Italy (which was more than obvious), for creating a wooden hero in a melodramatic would-be plot, or for its poorly sustained archaic style.

So Politian, alias Poliziano, alias the Earl of Leicester, alias Berauchamp—a prodigy, preeminent in arts, and arms, and wealth, a learned melancholy dreamer, but also "gay, volatile and giddy"—is expected in Rome for the wedding of Baldazzare Castiglione (Solomon P. Sharp)—his former schoolfellow and friend—and Alessandra, niece of duke Di Broglio; somewhere in section (Act ?) IV, Politian declares his love for Lalage (Anna Cooke), a cousin to Castiglione, who has, however, a "seared and blighted name"; as these disjointed fragments can reveal, Castiglione is to blame, and he does not accept Politian's challenge (who holds him to be a "villain" or "scoundrel"—so former friends turned enemies); orphan Lalage seems to have convinced Politian to take revenge on Castiglione, but, since he cannot, he proposes a suicide pact to Lalage so they can meet in the afterlife:

"What matters it, my fairest, and my best,
That we go down unhonored and forgotten
Into the dust—so we descend together.
Descend together…"

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Other characters include Jacinta—maid to Lalage--, Di Broglio himself, a Monk, Ugo, Benito and Rupert—servants to Di Broglio, San Ozzo—a companion to Castiglione…

The fact that in the following fourteen years Poe (he died in 1849) never returned to finish the play, that he had begun it four years before publishing these scenes, and that the little that is left is full of inconsistencies, all indicate a project the author did not seriously believe in and consequently left as such—i.e. a project, that might have been developed into a gothic mystery, full of "grotesque and arabesque" elements.

A great writer's remarkable failure at rendering dramatically our chosen historical event (as a non-specialist, one wonders if there really are histories of the United States that include and treat such topics like those literarily highlighted by the likes of Glaspell, Capote, Mailer…) may benefit from the juxtaposition of a philosophical-fictional re-embodiment more than a century later; it may already appear too familiar that Robert Penn Warren was born in Guthrie, Kentucky (a town on the Kentucky-Tennessee state line, with a South Guthrie part in Tennessee), and that his family had roots in Virginia. As such, young Robert may have come upon stories and reports of the previous century's tragedy nearby, but here is how he got his inspiration; for his psychological tragic romance (World Enough and Time: A Romantic Novel, 1950)—like for his previous All the King's Men, coming out of the history of Louisiana—Warren certainly used letters, archives, newspaper articles, diaries, other literary works and…, but here is the beginning: while in the apartment of Ralph Ellison (of the Ellisons, in fact) at the American Academy in Rome, Eugene Walter and Ralph Ellison himself interview Robert Penn Warren for the Paris Review in 1957; we learn from the interviewers that Mr. Warren "might be described as a sandy man with a twinkle in his eye" and that Mrs. Ellison also comes into the room occasionally to "replenish the glasses"; RPW: "Katherine Anne Porter and I were both at the Library of Congress /in 1944/ as Fellows. We were in the same pew, had offices next to each other. She came in one day with an old pamphlet, the trial of Beauchamp for killing Colonel Sharp. She said, 'Well, Red, you better read this.' There it was. I read it in five minutes. But I was six years in making the book…" It was, of course, Beauchamp's short "Confession" and records of the trial (already used—we assume—by Chivers, Poe, Simms…), giving Warren the murderer's side of the story (with, among others, the ambitious and evil manipulator Wilkie Barron); for a complete picture, see Lauren Kallsen's book that seems to collect all 19th-century publications that served as the sources for literary treatment of the historical incident: this confession, Anna Cooke's letters to a friend in Maryland (with Poe in Baltimore?), transcript of the couple's trial/s, and a brother's vindication of Solomon Sharp's character.

A "literary document" is also the one providing Warren with his title: "To His Coy Mistress" by metaphysical poet and politician Andrew Marvell (1621-1678)—

"Had we but world enough, and time
This coyness, Lady, were no crime
We would sit down and think which way
To walk and pass our long love's day…"—

a carpe diem poem where the speaker, addressing a woman who does not respond to his advances, then laments the shortness of human life—

"But at my back I always hear
Time's winged chariot hurrying near…"--,

though—

"The grave's a fine a private place,
But none, I think, do there embrace…"—

an unbelievable "anticipation" of the lovers' decision in the Kentucky Tragedy to be buried in one coffin and in an eternal embrace.

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World Enough and Time unfolds along three tiers, so to speak, given to us by the narrator/historian in a third-person objective narrative, in which this narrator supports, undercuts, or simply relates Beaumont's account—see Justus; first—and underlying the other two—is a personal story—the rise, career, love, and misadventures of Jeremiah Beaumont (notice the name change and the introduction of the Biblical prophet in the equation, imprisoned and threatened with death himself, whence Warren's emphasis upon the self-induced alienation of his hero, who cannot distinguish between romance and reality); thus Beaumont's is the rewritten story of Jereboam Beauchamp (pronounced as beech-am, see infra); second, the story of a complicated political plot of power and redemption in the 1820s, as, while in Frankfort, Jeremiah gets involved in the heated politics of the state, involving the above-mentioned Relief/liberal and Anti-Relief factions, between which Colonel Fort/Sharp moves like a turncoat; and third, a meditation on the process of history and revenge with philosophical speculation and symbolic moral overtones regarding community guilt and expiation.

As far as the first—and main—tier is concerned, Warren immediately and rightfully noticed that something was not quite consistent in the original Kentucky story of love, jealousy, revenge and murder (as already shown, Anna did not fit the romantic model of the young beauty when seduced by a slightly younger Sharp; next, she had not been married to any young lover/husband whom she may have betrayed with another man; third, the revenge is dubiously motivated, as Beauchamp marries her after her affair and the birth of her illegitimate child…) so he introduced a number of changes: Jeremiah's schoolteacher introduces him to Colonel Cassius Fort—successful lawyer, politician, and speculator on the Kentucky frontier--, who invites him to Frankfort to study law, together with carefree Wilkie Barron (with his widowed mother); this new character gets into a passion over a fatherless local beauty named Rachel Jordan, who has been taken advantage of and left with child by Fort, and Jeremiah insinuates himself into her life; also invented is the early death of Jeremiah's father so he could appropriately be in search of a father figure; so Jerry Oedipally rejects Fort and courts Rachel in an act of romantic rebellion; Rachel brings Jerry to the grave of her stillborn baby and promises to become his wife if he will kill the colonel; Fort refuses a duel, Jerry and Rachel get married anyway, and she soon carries his child; Fort circulates a rumor that Rachel had a child by her black coachman, and she miscarries her present pregnancy; Jerry stabs Fort in a mysterious midnight meeting (when Beaumont has a quasi-mystical experience/memory of his seemingly becoming a tree, a beech, and knowing "how it was to be rooted in the deep dark of the earth").

But the major changes are still to come: the lengthy section of the trial follows (with Warren speculating on the elusive nature of philosophical truth and of practical justice)—a trial of perjury and intimidation--, Jerry is sentenced to death and Rachel swears to share his fate by suicide; Wilkie Barron engineers the couple's escape from prison and helps them find shelter in the wilderness domain of La Grand Bosse/"Gran Boz"—the monstrous patriarch of the Ohio River pirates; Jerry learns that Barron, not Fort, had written the handbill circulated in Frankfort about Rachel and her affair; weakened Rachel sickens and dies, Barron is killed and Jerry is also murdered while trying to get the truth told—shocking violence and depressing melodrama in this section exploring the American myth of the West as a land of escape (in fact one of treachery and lawlessness).

And thus, Warren's Beaumont, an absolutist unaware of the world's complexity, which he fails to remake according to his nebulous ideals, becomes "the author of his own ruin" a "dramatist" writing his life as a quest for justice, a sinister decision to revenge a woman who did not really want to be avenged, by committing a crime against a decent man that is out of proportion with his assumed sin (prophet Jeremiah); his "was to be a tragedy, like those of the books he read as a boy…"(p.5)—in fact a more fascinating narrative than any he could

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remember; which may persuade one to go back and (re-)read all the other (see supra) literary works starting from the initial fiction of the Kentucky Tragedy and also re-write this paper.

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