CHAPTER: FOUR
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MAN'S STATE OF ESTRANGEMENT AND RECONCILIATION

In *World Enough and Time* referring to Man's State of Estrangement and Reconciliation, Warren says,

That memory was important to him now, for it seemed to verify him, to say that all his past was one thing, and not rags and patches, and that all had moved to this moment. (WET, 259)

Warren explores the role of the past in shaping the present. The protagonist of warren who finds disappointment and disillusionment in his present life turns back to the past to see if the defect lies there. The protagonist attributes his failure, fragmentation and frustration, to his father, who fails to fulfil the expectations of the son. He feels the burden of being betrayed by his father and rejects him.

Warren's protagonists have many reasons to reject their fathers. In *A Place to Come To*, Jediah Tewksbury's father's embarrassingly indecent way of dying affects the son in many ways - one being the schoolyard confrontations and the embarrassment that the nine-year old Jed has to face. In *Band of Angels*, Amantha Sta. and Hamish Bond blame their parents for their present condition of unhappiness. Amantha's resentment of her father takes most of her life which she spends thinking of the "wrong [he] did" (epigraph to BOA).
In Warren's novels as observed by James H. Justus:

The revolt against the father and the, subsequent and often excruciating struggle to come to terms with him constitute a basic drama enacted on many levels and with varying degrees of intensity. 1

On the primary level, in order to acquire identity for himself, the son has a tendency to reject the father. On the second level the son fantasizes a father figure who will satisfy his ideas of an ideal father. The protagonist reserves the father's place for someone whom he admires, and the father surrogate comes into being. On the third level both the biological father and the surrogate father disappoint the protagonist's expectations.

Warren's protagonists emerge and establish their identities only after an initial estrangement with their fathers. Jack Burden, the narrator of All the King's Men (1946), Sue Murdock the leading character of At Heaven's Gate (1943), Jerry Calhoun Sue's lover and Isaac Sumpter, one of the major characters in The Cave (1959) are the characters discussed in the present chapter.

All the King's Men is the story of Willie Stark, a farm boy who becomes the Governor by luck. His lust for power

corrupts his high ideals. He is shot down by Adam Stanton, the Director of the free hospital proposed to be built at a cost of six million dollars. The story is narrated by Jack Burden.

Willie Stark fights against corruption when he is the Mason County Treasurer. In the next election Willie is elected Governor. Willie shields Byram White, a corrupt auditor. As a result, Hugh Miller, the uncorrupt Attorney General resigns.

Willie Stark wins a second term by foul means. The boss sends Jack to Judge Irwin for political reasons, to dig up something discreditable which can be used against the aristocratic judge, because he refuses to back Masters, who is Stark's candidate and blindly supports Callahan. Jack finds out that the Judge had accepted a bribe from the American Electric Power Company and had indirectly been the cause of one Mr. Littlepaugh's death. At this discovery, the judge shoots himself.

After the judge's death Jack Burden comes to know that the judge is his father. Jack's mother reveals the fact, cries her heart out and behaves in a hysterical manner. Seeing his mother's reaction to Judge Irwin's death, Jack understands that his mother has a capacity to love. So far he had thought that she was shallow and unfeeling.
In the meantime Willie's son Tom Stark gets Willie into trouble. Sibyl Frey, whom Tom loves becomes pregnant by him. Mac Murfee who wants to compete with Willie to become Senator, exploits this situation. Willie wants to revoke his contract with Gummy Larson. Tiny Duffy is angry with the boss as he would lose the graft expected. So he spitefully informs Adam about Willie's association with Anne. After confirming this, Adam shoots Willie in the capital and he is in turn shot by Willie's bodyguard Sugar Boy and dies. Willie is admitted in the hospital and dies in the hospital.

Jack narrates his mother's story - that the Scholarly Attorney (Ellis Burden) left her when Jack was six years old; her second husband, the Tycoon (Ross) was always ill and he died one day; the Count (Covelli), her third husband was gone" (AKM, 122) and her fourth husband, the young Executive (Theodore Murrell) lives with her - a sad portrayal about one's own mother. Jack the narrator's remark about his mother's room is that "The furniture changed, but the people in it changed too" (AKM, 121). Jack has a firm conviction that his mother did not love him. He states sadly, "I was just another man whom she wanted to have around because she was the kind of woman who had to have men around and had to make them dance to her tune" (AKM, 117). Jack finds solace in Anne Stanton.

Jack loves Anne but marries Louis and leaves her too. As a student of history Jack unfolds the mystery in the life
of his ancestor Cass Mastern. His analysis of Cass Mastern enlightens him at a philosophical level.

After Willie Stark's death Jack marries Anne Stanton. He is kind to Ellis Burden, his mother's first husband and takes care of him till his death. Warren depicts the character of the other people in the novel through Jack Burden's responses to the events and his views on them. Jack is a mere observer of happenings as David M. Wyatt rightly points out:

Robert Penn Warren's characters are placed out of themselves, the bemused or obsessive spectators of their own wayward acts. So his newest narrator* says: "Something is going on and will not stop. You are outside the going on, and you are, at the same time inside the going on. In fact, the going on is what you are."2

From the beginning, Warren reveals Jack's admiration for Stark. This stems from the rejection of his own father. When he had been thinking that Ellis Burden, the Scholarly Attorney was his father, he had rejected him. This rejection is revealed by what he says later in the novel:

... I had disaccustomed myself to thinking of the man who had been the Scholarly Attorney as my father. There was a kind of relief in knowing that that man was not by father. I had always felt some curse of his weakness upon me. ... (AWS, 375)

*Warren's newest narrator is Jediah Tewksbury, the protagonist of A Place to Come To.

his rejection is due to the fact that the Scholarly Attorney does not satisfy Jack's fantasy of an ideal father. When Jack finds in Willie Stark, an admirable man who can attract people with a mere glance, he feels a strong filial affection for Illie. Thus he finds a surrogate father in the boss. "Jack Burden within his father-search pattern of career," according to John Edward Hardy, "is in his relationship to Willie both Odysseus and Telemachus by turn." It is the surrogate father who indirectly brings about the discovery of the real father.

Jack Burden's reflections on both the fathers after the trial of Judge Irwin, prove the frustration of a son, caused the failure of the father to fulfill his son's expectations is dissatisfied with the Scholarly Attorney because.

He had had a beautiful and eager young wife and another man [Judge Irwin] had taken her away from him and had fathered his child, and all he had done was to walk away, leaving her in possession of everything he owned ...
My new father however had not been good. He had cuckolded a friend, betrayed a wife, taken a bribe, driven a man, though unwittingly to death. (AKM, 375)

Young Executive, Theodore Murrell, his mother's fourth band does not impress Jack enough to be considered a father
ren says that his presence to Jack is nothing more than a low. Not knowing whom he has to consider his real father, remarks sadly thinking of Ellis Burden and Judge Irwin,

So I quit trying to decide. There was no use trying to probe my feelings about them ... Most people lose one father, but I was peculiarly situated ... I had lost two at the same instant. (AKM, 375)

In his research into the past of Judge Irwin, Jack Burden tarnishes Anne Stanton's image of her father too. Governor Stanton had shielded Judge Irwin from exposure at the hands of Littlepaugh and thus had been unjust. This truth about her father and the way Adam reacts to it frustrates Anne. She tells Jack how her father used to be very affectionate to her:

I put my head against his knee — Oh Jack — you remember? ... Yes — and mother was dead and father did all he could — he was so proud of Adam — and now Adam — and now ...

(AKM, 268-269)

She is hurt by Adam's words and does not want even to repeat them. What Adam has said is, "love father, ... 'love him." Then he has added "Damn his soul to hell" (AJM, 269). Anne is unable to bear the rejection and hatred expressed by her father's beloved son Adam. In her disappointment she becomes Willie's mistress, proving that a dejected child, rejecting the father tries to find fulfilment in other things like sex.

Since Jack has a craving for the love of a father, even the simple gestures of love that the boss extends, touch Jack's feelings. After becoming the Governor, the boss invites Jack
to dinner making Jack feel at home, saying, "call up Lucy and tell her what you want to eat" (AKM, 116). Soon after assuming office as Governor, the boss sends for Jack and offers him a job. Jack's attachment for the boss is so well understood by the boss that he finds a confidant in Jack when he is dying:

"It might have been all different, Jack"
I nodded again. He roused himself more. ...
"you got to believe that," he said hoarsely.
(AKM, 425)

The Governor is insistent that Jack trust him. This shows the faith that the boss has in Jack. He says that had things been different everything would have gone on well.

Jack is capable of understanding the feelings of his mother. After Judge Irwin's death he realizes her sorrow. He wants her to be left alone and so he requests the Young Executive to keep away from her. The estrangement Jack had been feeling towards the mother vanishes when he knows that she has a capacity to love and cry from the depth of her heart for the death of a loved one. Jack describes her cry as "the true cry of the buried soul which had managed, for one instant after all the years, to utter itself again" (AKM, 373).
Jack's sorrow over the loss of his fathers and his sense of shame at having two weak fathers are depicted by Warren in the scene where he thinks about becoming very rich as he would inherit the fruit of Judge Irwin's crime and would also inherit the Scholarly Attorney's money which he had left with his mother.

When Jack discovers from Judge Irwin's executor that except a few minor bequests to servants, Jack was the sole heir to the estate, Judge Irwin had saved, years before, by his single act of dishonesty — the act for which Jack had "put the pistol to his heart" (AKW, 376). It was like the ice breaking up after a long winter. Warren describes the plight of Jack Burden through multiple images.

In the relationship between Willie Stark and Tom Stark there is no rejection or estrangement on the part of the son. But the son effects a change in the father. The son Tom Stark — paralysed in the hospital bed—is symbolic of the father's — Willie Stark's — failure. As Robert B. Heilman observes "Willie Stark is born of the paralysis of others." From the beginning he is always shown as acting. Tom Stark had inherited Willie's energy and spirit. When the son lies paralysed it denotes the father's paralysis. After his son's

4Robert B. Heilman, "Melphonene as Wall flower or the Reading of Tragedy," Sewanee Review, 55 (1947), 164.
death Willie Stark plans to redirect his course of life and cleanse his administration. He decides on building a hospital without tainted money.

As Cleanth Brooks points out, Willie Stark's story is important because of the way it affects Jack's story. This novel is an account of how Jack Burden came to be a man capable of understanding his own life and his relation to his parents, his friends and the world. Willie's story is explored in terms of Jack's views and analysis of it. The experiences of Willie Stark are not directly his own but Jack's ideas of Willie's experience. It has already been observed that Jack considers Willie his father-surrogate. Hence his views on Willie, have the impact of recognizing Willie as his father-surrogate. Jack feels involved in all the matters of Willie Stark's interest. In response to Willie's wish he probes into Judge Irwin's past and because of this he discovers his own identity as Judge Irwin's son and finds out that his mother is capable of love. Thus such a small incident as probing someone's past in Willie's life, has a telling impact on Jack Burden's future. It is justified that Willie's story affects Jack. Jack Burden becomes aware of the fact that by killing his father he has created him and all his work for the Boss has been in search of a father. As viewed by Madison Jones,

Jack "is redeemed from self-ignorance and his irresponsible attempt to live in a womb-state of innocence in nature." 6 Jones elaborates that Jack's submission to nature and Willie's control of it, cause a tension out of which the meaning is generated, that is, Jack does not cling to his "Great Sleep" (AKM, 201) as before and feels as if he has had a new birth - as the Judge's son and realizing the fact that his mother is not without feelings.

Jack has faith in Willie Stark. So he believes that Willie Stark would have worked wonders if he were given a longer lease of life. By bringing about such a reconciliation in the end - that Willie was not in the wrong and that he would have done well had he lived longer - Warren clarifies that he does not take Willie for a villain. The narrator Jack also believes in the fact that Willie would have done well and proves that he too does not consider Willie a villain. Oscar Cargill rightly observes that "villains are not villainous but the erring pals of the erring Jack Burdens." 7

The story of Willie Stark is said to have its origin in the life of Huey Long of Louisiana. Warren's knowledge of Huey Long is drawn from newspaper accounts and magazine articles about Long and simply living in Louisiana during Long's era.


Long had been elected Governor in 1928 when he was thirty-four and became popular by his programme promising free texts for school children, paving roads and other public improvements. This far-reaching plan for political and economic reform was appreciated. He was elected to the Senate but held on to the governorship until he had arranged a succession that would leave him in power. As Senator he had attracted a national following with his "share our wealth" programme. On 10th September 1935 the Senate House was to meet to consider the bills Long had put before it. Shortly before it was to convene, Long went to the House Chamber in the east wing of the building, where he was photographed by a local commercial photographer, on assignment for the *New York Times*. Then he got up and moved, followed by five bodyguards and a crowd of people. "At the center of the building he turned into the reception of the Governor's office, and moments later stepped back into the long corridor and as he did so, he was shot by a man."  

The incidents narrated by Jack Burden about Willie are analogous to those in the life of Huey Long. Warren makes the Fascist Demagogue Willie, a man with social consciousness. He displays willingness to use corrupt means to bring about noble ends. Jack, like Willie is happy about the ends being good. But Warren says that he did not know anything about the secret forces that drove Huey Long along his violent path. Louis D.

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Rubin quotes Warren as saying that "Willie Stark was not Huey Long ..., 'Certainly it was the career and the atmosphere of Louisiana, that suggested the play, that was to become the novel. But suggestion does not mean identity, ...'

Though Warren has used the events in the life of Long as suggestions for the progress of the plot, his Willie is an entirely different person from Senator Long. Warren has taken the seed — the power effectively used by Long — and sown it to grow into a tree — the story of Willie as observed by Jack. The character of Willie is Warren's own creation.

In the same way as Jack believes in the last words of Willie as to what he could have done if he had lived, he believes in Willie's trying to give the poor people a fair share of the profit of the government. The arrogance and cruelty of Willie are excused by Jack because the aim for which they are done is good.

The cause for Jack's admiration of the boss is the knowledge of his own emptiness. He finds a solace in serving the boss. The reason for Anne Stanton's going to the boss is also the same. She finds him exuberant with power in the midst of worthless and idle people. Thus both Anne and Jack find in the boss, a force that is absent in themselves. Both


go to Willie as a neglected child to a parent. In this gesture we clearly see the conflict between the ideal and the real. That is, both Jack and Anne have aspiration to perfection. Finding themselves lacking in it they cling to the boss who projects an image of perfection. They imagine that he would be a complement to them. The irony is that the boss too is imperfect.

Earlier when Anne and Jack love each other, Anne expresses her wish that she wants him to be different from the other idle people in Burden's Landing. She wants him to be an independent individual of a real world. She wants him to lead an effective and meaningful life unlike the people of Burden's Landing. She will accept him only after she is convinced that he has made a fortune for himself. Jack tries to live up to this ideal and lives his life intelligently. He moves with powerful personalities and successfully retains his individuality as is made clear in the fact that such a powerful person as the boss explains all his actions to him. But the ideal of Anne which shows her disregard for the people of Burden's Landing is shattered as in real life she becomes the mistress of the boss, the leader of the land she hates. Jack's idea of perfection is that he should satisfy Anne in all possible ways and get united with her. In his life also the reverse happens and he loses Anne to the boss. It is a
case of double irony, that is, Jack and Anne find themselves in situations that oppose their idealism and yet they cannot resist the change.

Like Jack and Anne the other characters in the novel are also torn between the demands of the immediate and their consciousness of the ideal. *All the King's Men* depicts clearly what happens when people uphold the ideals and then ignore them. Ellis Burden who has high ideals, withdraws from the actual world and lives in isolation. Adam Stanton is dedicated to his duty as a doctor and believes that he is a perfect man with high ideals. As the novel proceeds, the idea we get is that such a perfect man will attempt at reparation of the wrongs and lead the entire society in the right path. But what actually happens is that this perfect man, being unable to bear the personal wrong done to him — not an irreparable wrong done to a society — ends up as a murderer, killing Willie.

Willie Stark shows a change in his attitude to things, after his son’s death. He realizes that he is corrupt. Yet he is not frustrated but optimistic. He wants to redress his earlier wrongs by constructing a hospital which will serve the ailing people. His idea of perfection now is to devote his time and means to the construction of this hospital. This ideal brings him into contact with Adam Stanton. Ironically
from this ideal stems the conspiracy of Tiny Duffy (Duffy informs Adam about Willie's affair with Anne) which leads to the murder of Willie. As Louis D. Rubin rightly puts it, "All the King's Men is about this dichotomy between moral absolutes and practical necessity, as dramatized in the lives of some human beings ..."\textsuperscript{10} It is true and proved by the story. Willie tries to rectify his ways and plans to go back to Lucy leaving his mistress. This decision provokes Saddie. Willie plans to cleanse his administration. The first step he takes is revoking the Larson contract. His conversion causes the anger of Saddie and Tiny Duffy and thus ironically his conversion to good leads to his murder.

In the murder of Willie two characters are destroyed. The destruction of Adam and Willie is both literal — since they both die — and moral. Adam loses the perfection which he has projected earlier and becomes a murderer. The validity of his perfection seen in the early part of the novel is lost. As a perfectionist Adam should have punished Anne also, since she has surrendered to the boss willingly. He is unjust in punishing the boss alone. Hence Adam the idealist dies (literally and morally) when he kills the boss because as a murderer Adam ceases to be an idealist. In Willie Stark's case he had been spared when he was bad. But now, when he

\textsuperscript{10} Louis D. Rubin, The Far_Away Country, p. 129.
really wants to do good, he is killed. He realizes that he could have done well and reveals this realization when he tells Jack before his death, "If it hadn't happened, it might - have been different - even yet" (AKM, 425). Willie's last words to Jack Burden prove that Willie Stark's death kills the good he intends to accomplish. Hence it is the death of Willie the boss and the man with humanitarian concern to do good to the others while in power (which he had misused earlier). This conflict between the ideal, they both had and the real, that happens to them, proves the view of Norman Kelvin:

... man's quest for something grand and pure, be it honor, justice, virtue or love, will necessarily suffer betrayal by evil in human nature.11

Thus the boss and Adam are instruments of each other's death and prove the dichotomy between their ideal and the real.

In the beginning of the novel we find Willie projecting his image as a simple and honest politician. It is illustrated in the words of the father of one of the children who die in the collapse of a school house due to faulty construction, "Oh God, I am punished for accepting iniquity and voting against an honest man!" (AKM, 70). Since Willie was against giving the constructing contract to Moore, people start believing him. The next development is, Willie defeats Tiny Duffy's plan to use

him to split the votes of Mac Murfee. Finally, he stands for election and is elected Governor. Thus Willie emerges as a great figure in the assessment of the people.

As Governor, he protects the image he has projected by his right choice of Hugh Miller a man with a pure heart for Attorney General. As Dennis M. Welch points out, "The images people project and live by often become substitutes for the truth." 12 Welch further points out that the people like the drugstore owner (AKM, 8) idolize Stark. On the wall of the drugstore is the picture of Willie Stark — "a careful blend of the image and the man, of the ideal and the real, such that people can recognize the man but respond to the image ..." 13 As in the picture in real life also there is always a conflict between the ideal and the real.

Warren depicts Willie, the boss as an affectionate father to his son. Willie's relationship with Tom Stark, serves to spotlight one of the special aspects of Willie's complex personality, the insecurity of a man who, throughout the novel projects his image as secure in everything. Tom is critically wounded while playing football. Adam Stanton calls a specialist from Baltimore to attend on him. When

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13 Ibid., p.163.
the plane is delayed by the fog, Willie, as illustrated by Allan R. Slotkin, "can utter only a series of loosely connected phrases." The humility of Stark's plea that something be done to save his son, reveals the human being behind the political giant. This humble plea of the boss is in contrast to Judge Irwin's reluctance to make a request to Jack.

Judge Irwin as Jack's father could have revealed his identity to Jack and could have defended himself. But the boss makes a humble plea to the doctor.

Judge Irwin does not do that as he fears that his own honour is at stake, both the boss and Judge Irwin emerge as men with strong personalities. But the boss is willing to make a plea to the doctor giving up his ego because he wants to save his son. In the case of Judge Irwin as his own honour is at stake, he prefers death to any plea. Though Judge Irwin earlier goes astray, later he leads an ideal life as a just judge. He has a role both in the political world of Willie Stark and in Jack's world of understanding events. The upright judge has fitting end because his continued existence would have concealed the real loving nature of Jack's mother to him. Jack would not have known who his real father is and would have continued living in disgust as he hates the Scholarly Attorney, thinking that he is not a perfect father.

In *All the King's Men*, we have the story of Willie Stark and his men Jack Burden, Sugar Boy, Adam Stanton, Tiny Duffy, Judge Irwin and others. Through the political world of Willie Stark and Jack Burden's world of understanding events, Warren unravels the mysteries of seeming power. This power is not true power because the idolized images in which Willie Stark and Judge Irwin project themselves are pooh-poohed. Willie fears that he might lose his son and proves that his political power does not help him in any way out of this fear. Judge Irwin fears the exposure of guilt, and commits suicide proving that the strength of the image he has projected is worthless.

Towards the end of the novel Jack informs that he lives in Judge Irwin's house for a few months. He says that it is strange that the truth (which he had discovered) which had killed his father, in the end, gave the past back to him.

With him is his wife Anne Stanton and the Scholarly Attorney whom he found sick in his room in the restaurant and had brought here. The Scholarly Attorney's health keeps failing visibly day by day. He dictates something to Jack or Anne for a tract which he is writing. Jack quotes the words the Scholarly Attorney dictates:

The creation of man whom God in His foreknowledge knew doomed to sin was the awful index of God's omnipotence. For it would have been a thing of trifling and contemptible ease for perfection to create mere perfection. To do so would, to speak truth, be not creation but extension. (AKM, 462)
Then the Scholarly Attorney says that his soul has been still since the thought about man's sin as being an index to God's glory came to his mind. Here Warren clarifies that man's ideal - his craving for perfection - does not falter as he realizes that he should not resent his sinful life but should consider it to be a noble contrast to his ideal because, man's sinful state reflects God's power and glory. Thus Warren brings about a wonderful reconciliation towards the end of the novel.

By the time the Scholarly Attorney is dead, Jack plans to leave the house as it had been heavily mortgaged since Judge Irwin's affairs were tangled at the time of his death. Jack writes the story of Cass Mastern who cuckolded his friend, while living in Judge Irwin's house. For Jack this strange coincidence (because the Judge cuckolded the Scholarly Attorney by his affair with Jack's mother) is not funny because as he remarks, "Judge Irwin was my father and he was good to me, in a way, he was a man and I loved him" (A&M, 464). Thus by accepting his father Jack conciliates with the past.

The Cave (1959) is another novel in which Warren celebrates the theme of alienation and man's estrangement from his fellow human beings.

Jasper Harrick and Isaac Sumpter of John Town are financial partners in the exploration of the caves. Jasper
Harrick gets trapped inside a cave. Jasper's parents Jack Harrick dying of cancer and Celia Hornby and brother Monty are worried. Isaac's father, the Reverend Mac Carland Sumpter (Brother Sumpter) prays and consoles the family. Rescue operations begin. Jo-Lea, the daughter of Timothy Bingham says that she is pregnant with Jasper's child. But it is actually Monty's child that she is carrying.

Isaac tries to make the present situation a sensational event by manipulating the mass media. The restaurant owner Nickolas Papadoupalous feels ashamed for using the situation for making money. He wants to enter the cave and bring Jasper back. But Isaac does not allow him. Isaac enters and comes back with the news that Jasper wants them all to pray for him. Then Brother Sumpter enters the cave and comes back with the news that Jasper is dead and before dying he confessed that no girl is in trouble because of him. People think that Brother Sumpter would not have gone into the Cave and that he tells a lie. That night Brother Sumpter tells Isaac that he knows that Isaac has killed Jasper inside the Cave.

Brother Sumpter confesses to Jack Harrick. Jack remembers Brother Sumpter marrying Mary Tillyard whom Jack deserts after her pregnancy. Later she has a miscarriage. Jo-Lea comes to Jack and tells him that she is Monty's girl, revealing that she is carrying Monty's child. The novel ends with Celia
Hornby's plea to Jack not to die and Jack playing his guitar remembering Jasper, asking him in a song to await Jack's arrival.

The different groups of people near the cave mouth, reflect on the pathetic condition of Jasper and the sorrow of the family. In The Cave warren depicts the consequences of the longing for withdrawal and non-being in nightmare images of claustrophobic terror."15 The cave is literally the tomb of Jasper Harrick. The story expresses human emptiness and a yearning for fulfilment.

Isaac Sumpter feels utterly lonely amidst the crowds who cry, pray and use one another to unravel the mystery of themselves. Isaac Sumpter singles out himself by being different from the others in manipulating the situation only for material benefits and not responding to it emotionally or sentimentally. For instance, Nicholas Papadopalous, the Restaurant owner who shows concern for Celia feels guilty for selling edibles and making money while Celia is worried about her son's entrapment in the cave.

Monty is another character who suffers the pangs of alienation. He does not want to live as a son of a well-known father or as the brother of a popular spelioologist. Jasper, who explores the caves, wants to be himself, have a substantial identity for himself as Monty.

15 Charles H. Bohner, Robert Penn War ren, p.150.
Jack and Celia love each other, finding consolation in each other's company. They feel for their isolated son. Celia very often senses a probing enquiry in the eyes of her son Jasper. Earlier in the novel Jasper expresses his craving for a touch from his mother without uttering even a single word. She fails to respond for which she feels sad later. James H. Justus explains how touching or physical contact is a consolation for a man who feels weak as well as a manifestation of the weakness in man. James H. Justus observes,

"Touch, then goes out not only in response to human weakness, but also as the manifestation of human weakness itself. The need is to be comforted as well as to comfort another." 16

The alienated people who feel an estrangement with the world find protection in the love extended to them by the others. The struggle to save Jasper from the Cave is a drama enacted by both Isaac and Mac Carland Sumpter for different reasons. Isaac Sumpter offers to enter the cave just for his personal benefit. He enters the cave to kill Jasper, his only partner in exploring the cave. He calculates that Jasper's death will get him Jasper's share of wealth too. The people at the cave mouth send Jebb Holloway to leave food for Jasper. Isaac Sumpter and Jebb Holloway are inside the Crawlway. Isaac tells Jebb that either Jebb or he should get near Jasper and the

other should wait in the crawlway. Jebb offers to stay back. Isaac creeps in and comes back after sometime. He tells Jebb that he can tell the people outside that it is Jebb who has met Jasper. They come out and say that Jasper is dying and he wants people to pray for him. The truth that Jebb has not gone near Jasper is concealed. They tell the people that Jasper has asked his girl to forgive him. Hearing all this Oelia Horns cries. Unable to bear her sorrow and being ashamed of his own attitude in making money out of the situation, Nicholas Papadoupalous, the restaurant keeper tries to enter the cave. Isaac picks a quarrel with him. Brother Sumpter guesses that something is fishy and enters the cave under the pretext of extending help to the dying Jasper.

The drama of Brother Sumpter's struggle to save Jasper is enacted to protect his own son Isaac. He goes in to find out that Jasper is dead. As the body is warm he makes out that he would have died just a few minutes earlier. He finds Isaac's hot pack near Jasper's body. After coming out he notices Jebb Holloway's evasive talk and his attempt at keeping away from Brother Sumpter. With all these evidences he finds out that Isaac has killed Jasper for material benefit. Since he wants to save Isaac, he tells the people that Jasper is dead and he told him before dying that no girl is in trouble because of him. The people gathered there think that Brother Sumpter would not have gone near Jasper and is lying in order to save the girl Jo-Lea. Thus in his wish to save his son, Mac Garland Sumpter loses his own reputation.
Though the father has acted on his religious faith and saved him, Isaac feels irritated "Oh, no, he is strong." Isaac Sumpter thinks, "when it is to deprive me" (C, 331). He sees Jebb Holloway crouching at the edge of the crowd trying to make himself small, fearing that Jasper would have told the old man that Jebb has never gone near him. He feels ashamed. Thus the father and son enact a drama - the son in his estrangement and the father to save the son. Later Isaac Sumpter plans to leave his place, Johnstown. While packing his things, he takes the Cambridge edition of the poems of John Keats. Then the words of Keats, from the "Ode to a Nightingale" come full and plangent in his tongue, "Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird! No hungry generations tread thee down; ..." (C, 353). After saying these words aloud all seem clear to Isaac Sumpter. Then he flings the book down to the floor. The words of Keats give him the enthusiasm and assurance that he is not born for death. He is sure that his ambition to lead a prosperous life cannot be thwarted by anybody as the words "no hungry generations tread thee down" indicate.

Isaac does not tell his father that he has planned to leave. But seeing the light on, his father comes there. Only now Brother Sumpter reveals the fact to his son that he knows very well that Isaac had killed Jasper, as he found Jasper's body warm and Isaac's hot pack lying near the body forgotten.
"Well it is not my fault," the boy insisted, speaking fast, the words tumbling out, clean and sharp and fresh, ... "It is definitely not my fault. ... he would have died anyway," .. "It was not yours to decide," the old man said, "And he had to die alone. All the time you were running in and out of that cave with your lies, he was dying alone." (C, 356)

Now he feels that it is not Jasper but he, Isaac who is trapped. But he tells Mac Carland Sumpter in anger that he can call the police. Mac Carland Sumpter never realizes that in his loyalty as a father to his son, he fails in the loyalty of a son to the Divine Father. The son has committed the sin for material progress and the father for worldly prospects.

Earlier in the novel Isaac scornfully asks Brother Sumpter whether he has named him 'isaac' just "to cut his bloody little miraculous throat" (C, 96) as the Old Testament patriarch Abraham did. Isaac nurtures a hatred for his father. He thinks that his father is the cause for the death of his mother and now will deprive him of his happiness and peace.

Celia Hornby is another character in the novel who is estranged from her father. She hates her father for the way he is. But when Miss Abernathy chides her once saying,

"you have rented a room in my house and as long as you remain under this roof I expect conduct that will not reflect discredit on the house or the name of my father who built it." (C, 169)
Celia tells her,

"Well, mine is a very able lawyer, and has won cases in front of the Supreme Court of this state. He knows all about the laws of libel, and if anything should be insinuated about his daughter which would not stand up in court, he should make it cost very, very dear." (C, 169)

Celia praises her father thus to make Miss Abernathy know Celia's status. Celia does not praise her father to show her regard and love for him. She does that to make Miss Abernathy know her limits. Celia's devotion to Jack Harrick is due to the fact that he is unlike her father. She adores Jack just because he is a contrast to her father.

Dorothy Cutlick, a minor character in the novel, working in Timothy Bingham's bank, suffers in life because of her father's cruelty. She had earlier nursed her dying mother and had been a sincere daughter to both the parents. After the mother's death, her father uses her as a money-making machine. Once her father Jim Cutlick strikes Dorothy with a handy length of firewood. Fortunately her skull does not fracture but she has a bloody wound. On another occasion he comes to Dorothy's bank demanding money, threatening Timothy Bingham and Dorothy. He is arrested and released due to his kind daughter's plea. Later Dorothy Cutlick thinks of Mr. Bingham's love for his daughter Jo-Lea, and admires the father's affection, as her knowledge of her own father's hatred is a foil to this gesture of solicitude in Bingham.
In Jo-Lea's life it is her mother who is ruthless and rude. Mrs. Bingham wants Jo-Lea's child to be aborted. Mr. Bingham wants to protect his loving daughter from such a "humiliation he had agreed to visit upon her body" (C, 316). Later when Jo-Lea disappears, her mother wants to inform the police. Then too, Mr. Bingham tells his wife that he does not want police chasing his little girl. Irritated with his reply, Mrs. Bingham tells him that she washes off her hands and will go to her mother's place. Mrs. Bingham's alienation from her daughter is strongly felt when viewed against Mr. Timothy Bingham's consideration and kindness for the girl. Even simple gestures like sending magazines for his daughter to read, show his concern for her. Later, when Mr. Bingham takes Jo-Lea to the cave mouth where people are gathered, Mrs. Bingham chides him for bringing her thus to a public place and tells her daughter to get up and go home with her. Since Jo-Lea is hesitant, wishing to be there to know about Jasper, she rudely commands her daughter to go home with her. Mr. Bingham takes his daughter's side:

"I see no harm in her staying," Mr. Bingham said. "Till we know. It strikes me as a normal, human, Christian impulse." "It strikes you!" Mrs. Bingham retorted, as soon as she had recovered from surprise. (C, 218)

Jack Harrick's affection for his son Jasper reveals a slight rejection. When Celia tells Isaac Sumpter that as on the
previous day it is he who had gone with Jasper into the cave, he should know Jasper's plans. The fact that the guitar had been left outside throughout the night makes her guess that Jasper would have gone there only with the intention of coming out soon. She reveals her anxiety to know what he told Isaac Sumpter. But Jack expresses his worry over the ruining of the guitar. She shouts in anguish, "I hope it's ruined - Oh - I hope so," she cried. "You just think of your old box, while your son, he's - " (C, 185). She knows that Jasper would not have willingly left it there. She fumbles for the chair, being unable to stand. Jack Harrick's anxiety about the guitar when his wife is so worried about their son shows how he is more obsessed with the guitar than with his son's entrapment. Towards the end when he plays on Monty's guitar he says with the same obsession about the safety of the guitar, "I don't want to bust the, ... It's Monty's box'" (C, 403). Celia feels that Jasper does not like the way Jack Harrick teases him and winks at him. These gestures according to Celia are unbecoming of a respectable father. She charges Jack Harrick of being the cause for her son Jasper, wanting to keep away from home always.

All the other characters in the novel get to know themselves only when they gather near the cave mouth and attempt to save Jasper. We find the inner recesses of all the characters explored, except that of Jasper. The story revolves round
him. As Richard Allan Davison points out,

Jasper's figurative search is implicit in his cave crawling. He alone is sacrificed. And it is through his physical entombment and eventual death that others achieve insight into themselves.17

Warren depicts the isolation of his characters in various ways. Mac Carland Sumpter, who comes to Jack's house, tells Jack to pray for him. Brother Sumpter knows Jack, the dying man's pain. But he feels that his own isolation is more painful than Jack's. So he tells Jack that he is willing to exchange places with Jack.

Jack always feels that he is hollow. When many women come to him, he thinks that his hollowness would be filled. But he is disappointed. Only when he loves Celia does he feel manly and strong. Till then he is not sure of himself. He goes after many women seeking fulfilment. He exploits the weakness of women like Mary Tillyard.

Isaac and Rachel are two other characters feeling alien. Isaac Sumpter loves Rachel Goldstein during his student days at Nashville. She confesses to him, "... 'do you know why I talk too much, ... because I'm alone so much'" (C, 108). Since both feel an isolation at home, they seek fellowship

in each other and study well. Later, a misunderstanding creeps in because of a nurse named Eustacia. From the day they part, Isaac feels frustrated. There is a gradual deterioration in his character. He drinks too much and becomes irregular in his studies. As a consequence his good fortune is shattered. He, who had earlier been offered scholarship about which he had not even known and studied well just for the sake of studying, now fails in the examinations. Due to drunkenness he is dismissed. His feeling of isolation leads him to these misfortunes.

William C. Havard points out that in the novel *The Cave*,

the ordeal of the attempted rescue culminates in the creation of a heroic myth whose effect on a variety of characters is developed in contrapuntal form. ... And through the common trauma of participation in the myth, each of the central characters, except for the doomed Isaac Sumpter, is brought to the recognition of his hitherto sublimated moral conflict, and from this recognition comes an enlarged capacity for fulfilling his obligations to himself and to the limited circle directly affected by his actions.18

*At Heaven's Gate* (1943) is another novel that delineates the alienation felt by the characters due to their rejection of their parents.

Sue Murdock, the protagonist of the novel, *At Heaven's Gate* hates her father Bogan Murdock since she feels that he has

no concern for the people around him and just uses them for his convenience. Jerry Calhoun with prospects of an attractive University position, rejects his University career and comes to work for Bogan Murdock. Sue is attracted towards Jerry and then rejects him as she finds him to be her father's proxy. She leaves home and becomes the mistress of Slim Sarrett. Later she finds out that Slim Sarrett is a homosexual and uncovers the lie he has uttered about his father and mother. Slim Sarrett has said that his mother was a New Orleans whore and his father was a barge captain. His mother is not a whore and his father is actually a washing machine salesman, still alive in Georgia. Sarrett's lie is a pattern of wish fulfillment. It is a lie uttered to justify his act of isolating himself from the family. Sue renounces Slim and turns to Jason Sweetwater. Jason does not believe in marriage which he considers a kind of prostitution where love is sold. So he refuses to marry Sue when she becomes pregnant with his child. But he claims that he loves her. She gets an abortion performed in a quarrel between Slim and his opponent, she mocks Slim and he strangles her to death.

Jerry, who rejects his father realizes his worth towards the end of the novel. Murdock does not change till the end. The novel has a sub-plot - the story of Ashby Wyndham. Ashby's influence on Private Porsum is the cause of the fall of
Murdock's financial empire. Jerry is jailed for Murdock's crime. Jerry's friend Buckfoot Blake's advice is helpful in Jerry's reconciliation with his father.

The main characters in the novel are repulsive. The minor characters like Marie, Wyndham's wife, Calhoun's uncle Lew, aunt Ursula and Private Porsum are vivid and effective. The main characters are violators of nature like the inhabitant of Dante's seventh circle - suicides, usurers and sodomites.

Jerry Calhoun has an attraction towards a pattern of living where he will feel secure without any human responsibility. His mother dies soon after his birth. His father is a clumsy farmer who cares only for those people related to him through marriage. Jerry's uncle Lew who is clubfooted, his great aunt Ursula who is blind and dirty and the negro housekeeper are the people who make Jerry's home. Jerry rejects it, feeling that it is imperfect. He finds himself baffled and lost in the "vast conspiracy" (AHG, 31) of the world. When Jerry is offered a job selling bonds in Murdock's firm Jerry rejects his graduate fellowship in the University. The estrangement he feels towards his home and father makes him consider Murdock's firm as "an index of his rise." 19 Murdock asks him to get Buckfoot Blake's advice in the selling of bonds. Jerry and

19 Leonard Casper, The Dark and Bloody Ground, p.108
Blake work together in Blake's house which fills Jerry with "discomfort and revulsion" (AHG, 79) as his own house. Yet he feels that there is something there which makes him cling to it nostalgically, that is, the memories Blake's house give him of his own earlier clumsy life as contrasted with his present sophisticated life. Though he feels highly elated, Sue rejects him thinking that he is "emotionally crippled" (AHG, 99). She would have continued to love him if he had not rejected his home and both of them would have had a happy, untainted life. All the sorrows are caused by Jerry's estrangement from home.

Unlike Jerry Calhoun who hates the atmosphere of his house Sue Murdock feels comfortable at Jerry's house. She surprises Jerry, ignoring the untidy maintenance of coffee cups with drops of coffee dried on them, shaking old man Calhoun's dirty hands and kissing Jerry's aunt without minding the goblets of food on her face. She feels that these people are the source of Jerry's strength. But Jerry feels otherwise. He hates his father. While old Calhoun can heave out a wagon wheel stuck in the mud with his strong shoulders, he is not good at doing small things. His stiff fingers would not hold a buckle. But he would not break into fury as big clumsy men usually do.

"when the effort becomes too much for him he would lay down his tool, or the object with which he had been struggling ... and would stare at it." (AHG, 41)
Jerry Calhoun remembers only the weakness of his father, his struggling to hold an object in his hand. Jerry keeps only this hateful image of his father in his mind. He does not admire his father's strength in heaving out a wagon wheel stuck in the mud and his gestures of love.

One more thing he hates in his father is his care for other people. Aunt Ursula, his mother's aunt had raised Jerry's mother, uncle Lew and Jerry. She loves Jerry. As Jerry's strength increases, her own strength decreases. She is almost blind. Seeing Jerry rejecting her, his father tells him kindly, to talk to her but words would stick in Jerry's mouth. Once Jerry gets her a new shawl, over which Jerry's father is happy and tells her,

"Jerry got it for you, Aunt Ursula. He got it for you because he loves you."

The boy had gone abruptly out of the room, leaving them there, out to the backyard, ... and had said, out loud, deliberately, over and over again, the vile words he knew ..."

(AHG, 44-45)

This shows his revulsion for his father and aunt Ursula. He is irritated with his uncle for the tricks he performs. Without chiding uncle Lew, Jerry's father would give Jerry money to buy objects of his choice. Since money is scarce during
Jerry's first two years in high school his father sends the cook away and himself cooks. Unable to bear the disorder in the kitchen, Jerry cleans up everything. Thus from his childhood he is ashamed of the clumsiness prevalent in the house. These are the reasons he has, for trying to make of Murdock a substitute father and wishing to get closer to him. "His is the American dream: learn the business and marry the boss's daughter." 20 says Allen Shepherd. Though Jerry dislikes his father he wants to maintain the relationship with him by visiting him and giving him money. He feels at the same time that he owes his father something more and because of this sense of guilt he becomes more resentful of his family.

when he accepts Murdock's offer of the job he is pleased with everything in the world. His usual irritation does not show even when uncle Lew tells him not to work for the son of Lemuel Murdock, a heartless man. Warren states that Jerry is able to smile with ease for "After he had once decided to take the place, he felt at ease with himself and with the world" (AHG, 58).

Leonard Casper is of the opinion that in Jerry Calhoun's character there is a faint reflection of the Southern principle

20 Allen Shepherd, "The Poles of Fiction: warren's At Heaven's Gate," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 12, No. 3, (Fall 1970), 713. Subsequent references to this article are cited as, "Allen Shepherd, 'The Poles of Fiction,' TSL, 12, 3 (Fall 1970)."
of equality but separation, requiring mutual respect for differences. Leonard Casper remarks:

The mistake of Jerry Calhoun in *At Heaven's Gate*, for example, is to emulate the circle of sub-
servients around millionaire Murdock because he
thinks he wants recognition as an equal, that
is interchangeable identity. Calhoun like many
another Warren character fails himself the more
he tries to be someone else. 21

Jerry feels insecure and seeks withdrawal from all human
relationships that demand responsibility. Later, his work in
the banking business offers him security "and momentarily
protects him." 22 His weakness is that he is unable to
communicate to others what he feels. That is why he goes to
a lonely place and pours out vile words giving vent to his
pent up emotion after giving the shawl to Aunt Ursula. He
proves Kenneth Burke's view about the association between
words and contempt, "'what we find words for,' says Nietzsche,
'is that for which we no longer have use in our own hearts.
There is always a kind of contempt in the act of speaking.'
Contempt, indeed, so far as the original emotion was concerned,
23

Bogan Murdock's work represents for Jerry an evasion
from the clumsy world of his father, Aunt Ursula and Uncle Lew.


22 James H. Justus, "On the Politics of the Self-Created: At
Heaven's Gate," *The Achievement*, p.182.

23 Kenneth Burke, "The Poetic Process: The Psychological
Approach," *Five Approaches of Literary Criticism*, ed. Wilbur
At Murdock's suggestion, Jerry submits himself to the tutorials of an economist, Duckfoot Blake. Blake's home where Jerry and Blake work together is 'reminiscent of Jerry's own home to fill him with 'discomfort and revulsion' (AHG, 79).''

Later in the novel Jerry is left in bed realizing how much the rejection of his father has affected his own life. He is ashamed of his earlier wish that his father should be dead. The reason for such a revulsion is that he resolutely shuts his mind to the past, to be conscious only of the present and to retain thoughts about Murdock's empire alone. In the end he finds himself caught up in the vast conspiracy of the world. He is arrested for Murdock's crimes. Only then, does he realize that his admiration for Murdock is based on his own vanity and hollowness. He feels sorry for having rejected his father who is simple and sincere. Since Jerry gets reconciled to his father he achieves identity. Because of this acceptance of his father he knows his place in the past and future as Robert Berner points out,

The father is a metaphor in Warren's work for time, for the past, for an awareness of man's place in relation to the past and the future.

This change that is effected in Jerry due to the development of Murdock's empire is remarkable because Sue, Murdock's own


daughter earlier thinks that Jerry "aspires to the status of a carbon copy ... of Murdock." She feels that he is a proxy for her father and rejects him. The first happening in the development of Jerry's changed view is Bogan's reaction to Sue's death. Murdock tries to use the sympathy evoked by Sue's death for his personal progress. Jerry revolts against this. Gradually he understands what Murdock is and realizes the worth of his own father.

Sue Murdock is another character in the novel whose revolt against her father is the reason for her moving from man to man seeking identity. Both Sue and Bogan cause complexities in the lives of other people around them. Since she does not get the security she expects from her father, she deserts him. She is disappointed when Jerry also fails to assure her the protection she needs. For sometime she is happy with Slim Sarrett. Then she discovers that he is a homosexual and has lied to her about his parents. She feels that Sarrett is a part of her she wants to kill and that she would not be happy unless he is dead. Sweetwater too does not give her the strength she requires. Sue is not satisfied with any of her three lovers. Sweetwater refuses to marry her although he causes her pregnancy. "Sue is only reminded of her father's tyranny and surfeited with rejection, has an abortion performed," says Leonard Casper. Sue's hatred for her

26 Allen Shephred, "The Poles of Fiction," TSL, 12, 3 (Fall 1970), 713.

father is her primary emotion before any evil act is performed. As we find cruelty in Percy Munn's gestures of love, we see a rage in Sue's gestures of love. Sue wants Jerry to make love to her in the hall, under the staircase. Jerry thinks, "Hell, anybody would be scared, the way she acted, acting sometimes like the minute was all there was, ... or like what yesterday was or tomorrow would be didn't have any connection, not a damned bit, ... a man had to think about those things" (AHG, 117). Later she rejects Jerry as she considers him an inferior version of her father. Had she found shelter under her father's roof she would not have gone after other men for protection.

Sue hates being the property of her father. In the beginning she finds a certainty in Jerry. Seeing Sue's interest in him, Jerry plunges into a clumsiness that he has inherited from his father. Both Sue's interest and Jerry's clumsiness generate from filial rejection. Since he feels that he is the son of a worthless man he is unable to reciprocate to her naturally and hence behaves in a clumsy manner. She hates her father and seeks protection in Jerry Calhoun and hence she shows interest in him. Their love proves the fact that the alienated son or daughter would try to find fulfilment in something like sex. Not only she but also her lovers reject their fathers. She is unhappy because her lovers cannot replace what she has lost
with what they possess, since they possess nothing. The only person. Sue assesses rightly is Jerry's father Calhoun. Paul West observes that,

She requires a monolith and construes all tenderness as weakness, all confessed diffidence as failure. She punishes her own faults in others.28

That is why she is not able to tolerate Slim's lie and wants him dead, to feel clean. As Slim Sarrett appears to be most proficient in self-knowledge, Sue makes up her mind to learn from him. Once Sue exclaims,

Oh! Slim, Slim, you know — you know what you are — you know what you want to do. Oh Slim, you've, got to make me know, know about me. . . ."
Then he had held her head cradled against his chest, and leaning his head above her had murmured, "Hush, hush, hush" like a nurse or mother. (A.W., 251-52)

But when she realizes his appearance to be deceptive, she is unable to excuse him. Sweetwater, her third lover is a soothing support to her till she becomes pregnant with his child.

After Sue's pregnancy, Sweetwater is affectionate to her but refuses to marry her saying that he does not believe in marriage. Roma A. King Jr. observes that Sweetwater "denies all

28 Paul West, Robert Penn Warren, Univ. of Minnesota Pamphletson AME No. 44 (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1964), p. 28.
traditional values and attempts through brute force to establish the just society which his father's imperfect vision and gentle methods failed to produce."²⁹ Though he resembles his father in his desire for justice, in his brutal methods he is like Bogan Murdock. In Sweetwater's refusal to marry her Sue sees her father's cruelty reflected. She has an abortion. Thus Sue's rejection of her father is ineffectual because all the men whom she chooses as protectors are just replicas of her father. Her words to Sweetwater when he tries to dissuade her from drinking prove this:

You're just like my father, you don't like him but you ought to like him because you're just like him, you want to run everybody for their own good, and you don't give a damn for anybody, not anybody in the world, just yourself, just yourself!" (AMC, 120)

She invites death by the encouragement she gives to Slim's opponent in a quarrel. In his anger Slim strangulates her to death. She comes away from her father's place as she hates tyranny. It is ironical that she is a victim of that tyranny which chases her in the form of different men and finally puts an end to her life. Sue's estrangement from her father leads her to complicated experiences. Before her death she performs the painful process of aborting her child and undergoes physical pain. Slim is another estranged man in Warren's canon

Slim Sarrett hire the identity of his real parents and creates imaginary parents. Thus Slim also rejects his biological parents. Till the end Sue does not find out why he has told such an unnecessary lie. Slim Sarrett seeks diversion from the worldly affairs by enjoying himself in art. Bogan Murdock spends most of his time in the financial world neglecting his daughter and wife. Thus for Slim Sarrett art makes him lead his life as an introvert and for Bogan Murdock it is his finance which occupies his thoughts and words and he remains an introvert. Both of them expose their personalities as an artist and a rich businessman respectively. Slim is alienated from his own self by living in a world he creates for himself. This make-believe world is mistaken for a perfect real world. Slim says that the artist - the creator - does not 'make up' anything. Later we find out that in his world nothing is true and everything is made up. In the early part of the novel in the analysis of *At Heaven's Gate* Allen Shepherd states:

> Within the lives of most of the characters in *At Heaven's Gate* there are two spheres of influence, that of Bogan Murdock and that of Slim Sarrett. It is Sue Murdock who makes the ultimately futile attempt to escape from one sphere, that of her father, and to find fulfillment in the other, that of Slim Sarrett.  

Before her death she finds out that Sarrett's world of art is as sterile as Bogan's financial world.

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The only main character in the novel who stands at heaven's gate is Jerry Calhoun as he gets reconciled with his father. The minor characters—Ashby Wyndham, Private Porsum, Lew, Ursula and others—are good. The characters playing the main role in the novel have a flaw leading to their fall as in the case of Shakespeare's heroes and they are only near hell and not at heaven's gate.

In Night Rider and in At Heaven's Gate we find the impact of the money economy in the lives of people. In the first novel, Scanlon elaborately discusses the monopoly held by the Tobacco Companies. In the second novel, he explains how a complex financial organization has its role in the development of characters and plot of a novel.

All the main characters in the novel suffer solitude at one time or the other. Even Susan Sweetwater, who is optimistic, once feels dejected and empty. He is a person who believes only in himself. Once we find Sweetwater, the strong-willed person coming out of the Church,

... carrying his betrayal, his emptying, carefully as though not to spill his emptiness, as one is careful not to slosh a brimming bucket. (A'G, 290)

The cause for the alienation is pride. Slim Sarrett kills Susan Hurdock only because his vanity is hurt.
Irene Hendry remarks that,

Slim Sarrett is the divided man turned inward upon a private dreamworld that has no objective existence, Percy Munn is the divided man turned outward, into the objective world of action and organization where he loses his subjective existence.31

Warren introduces a character who is at ease with his parents. Buckfoot Blake treats his parents with much affection and kindness, as one would treat the pets.

All the King's Men, The Caves and At Heaven's Gate present the theme of alienation and man's state of estrangement.

In all these novels we find the protagonist's search for the ideal figure of a father. Finally his idea of the ideal father is mobilised in the real as in the case of Jerry Calhoun (At Heaven's Gate) and Jack Warren (All the King's Men). There is a reconciliation towards the end in the lives of Amanda Starr, Tobias Sears and most other children except Sue Murdock, Slim Sarrett and Isaac Jumper go west. Though they reject their fathers they are not rejected. The feel that a prosperous future awaits them.

The estrangement caused by idealism is neutralised by the reconciliation that comes about by a reluctant but rational acceptance of the real.