Robert Penn Warren, David Milch, and the Literary Contexts of *Deadwood*

by Joseph Millichap

Although the enduring significance of Robert Penn Warren, Renaissance man of modern American letters, in our popular culture was revealed by the second movie adaptation of *All the King's Men* in 2005, exactly a century after his birth and six decades after the novel's first publication, the pervasive influence of his creative example also is demonstrated by the award-winning productions of David Milch, maverick genius of contemporary television. The second season of his popular and provocative HBO series *Deadwood* in 2005 occasioned a *New Yorker* profile by Mark Singer in which Milch revealed his profound respect for Warren both as writer and as man. From 1965 to his death in 1989, Warren successively acted as Milch's teacher, mentor, and colleague, and the profile also reveals that the senior figure still serves as a role model for the younger in terms of his life as well as his work. Warren's creative canon demonstrates a number of influences on and intertextualities with Milch's diverse productions, providing insight into the literary contexts that make *Deadwood* high quality television.

At first glance, critical comparison of the Hollywood eccentric with the Yale conservative, of the self-proclaimed addictive Milch with the austere Warren, may seem something of a stretch, but their parallels prove too numerous to ignore. In addition to Milch's revealing commentary on Warren, the two writers also share many subjects, modes, and styles—albeit in differing genres. The film adaptations of *All the King's Men* in 1949 and 2005 provide a link here, however, especially when we recall that Warren wrote his own theatrical versions of his novel and assisted director Robert Rossen with its first movie production. In *Deadwood*, Milch presents a dramatized and filmed serial novel in one-hour installments, while drawing on literary sources ranging from Shakespeare to Dickens to the classic movie Western, a genre Milch attributes to Jewish studio moguls (Havrilesky). While Warren is more concerned with popular culture than his academic critics will acknowledge, Milch is more involved in a high culture critique of the American experience than his reviewers have recognized.

Robert Penn Warren was born in 1905, the first child of Robert Franklin Warren and Anna Ruth Penn Warren, devoted and ambitious parents who had recently settled in Guthrie, Kentucky. Warren's hometown was the thriving agricultural and railroad center of the Black Patch, the dark-fired tobacco country in western Kentucky and Tennessee. Both Warren's parents were descended from established agrarian families, and, coincidentally, both of their fathers had served as captains in Nathan Bedford Forrest's Confederate cavalry corps. Warren grew up only a generation after the Civil War, and as a boy he lived through one of its many aftershocks in the bitter Tobacco Wars of his region during the early twentieth century. Wherever he would live and whatever he would write, Robert Penn Warren would remain a Southern writer at heart, if not always in mind.

Warren's literary genealogy was a great deal less regional, however. Both sides of his family were educated and well read; his mother was a schoolteacher before and after her

marriage, while his father had studied the classics and published verse as a young man. Encouraged by his parents and teachers, Warren excelled at local schools, and in 1921 he enrolled at Vanderbilt University in nearby Nashville. In some respects the university was still a Methodist backwater, but no place could have proved better suited for the development of a young Southern writer. Although the burgeoning Southern Renaissance had its other outposts, the Nashville Fugitives were already in residence when Warren arrived there. No other venue would prove as amenable to the shock of modernity, as the younger Fugitives often considered Southern subject matters in terms of modernist forms. In particular, the most significant inheritance for Warren was T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land,* as evidenced by his not only reading but memorizing this modernist masterpiece on its publication in 1922.

Perhaps the pure bravado of young Warren's appreciation of Eliot reveals the intellectual intensity and the artistic ambition that would drive the public aspects of his career. Warren remains the only person to have won Pulitzer prizes for both fiction and poetry, the former in 1947 for *All the King's Men* (1946) and the latter in 1958 for *Promises* (1957) and again in 1979 for *Now and Then* (1978). The Warren canon includes nine other novels, a volume of short fiction, a score of poetry collections, a verse drama, several plays and screenplays, as well as significant cultural criticism, such as *The Legacy of the Civil War* (1961). In a series of influential texts written with Cleanth Brooks, Warren also helped found the New Criticism that dominated American letters for a generation. So Warren would have remained a formidable figure on the literary scene of mid-twentieth century America even if he had published nothing after reaching the customary retirement age of sixty-five in 1970. The writer he was at that point is the one created by the traditional criticism—the Renaissance man of American letters. Recently, readers have recognized that Warren's collections published between 1970 and 1985 reveal a different writer, a major twentieth century poet; his later poetry is less derivative from the early modernists and therefore more open in form, more evocative in tone, and more personal in subject matter.

On the centennial of his birth, it becomes more clear that Warren's *alterswerk,* his "age work," to translate literally that useful critical term, forms only one part of his lifelong project of bridging the gulf between high and popular culture in America. This effort began as early as the 1930s when the economic and social dislocations of the Depression decade transformed the Fugitives, essentially an aesthetic gathering focused by the traditions of high culture, to the Agrarians, a broader intellectual grouping aware of popular culture as well. Warren's contribution to the Agrarian anthology *I'll Take My Stand* in 1931 was a conflicted essay on race in the South; written from the perspective of his Rhodes scholarship at Oxford and entitled "The Briar Patch" after a Brer Rabbit tale, the piece recognized racial injustice in the region but offered only the impractical solution of agrarianism in an industrial age. Almost immediately, Warren published his first fiction, the long story "Prime Leaf" (1931), that clearly dramatizes the persistent failures of the Southern tradition in the depredations of night riders during the earlier Tobacco Wars in the Black Patch.

In the 1930s and into the 1940s, Warren's impulses toward high culture were confined for the most part to his poetry and literary analysis, while his fiction and cultural commentary were involved to a greater extent with popular culture. Exceptions exist, of course, as with his long narrative poem, "The Ballad of Billy Potts" (1944), which was

based on a Kentucky folk tale and popular history. His first published novel, *Night Rider* (1939), extends the compass of the earlier story "Prime Leaf," while *At Heaven's Gate* (1943), his second novel, dramatizes the turbulence of Tennessee politics in the two preceding decades. With his third and best known novel, *All the King's Men* in 1946, Warren truly entered the realms of popular culture. Loosely centered on the historical figure of the colorful Louisiana politician Huey Long, Warren's narrative skillfully weaves the popular story of his political persona with that of a faintly autobiographical narrator who allows the incorporation of high culture perspectives on Southern history. The novel was chosen a Book-of-the Month Club selection, then earned the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction; a movie adaptation of *All the King's Men* appeared in 1949, and it in turn won the Academy Award for Best Picture.

Born in 1945, just as Warren achieved popular success, David Milch grew up in suburban Buffalo, New York, where his father was a prominent surgeon and his mother a member of the school board. As Milch told Warren's biographer Joseph Blotner in a 1988 interview, he became "a Jewish country day school boy" (3). At Yale, Milch's major advisor in English was R. W. B. Lewis, an eminent scholar of American literature, and his teachers included Cleanth Brooks, theorist of the New Criticism, as well as Robert Penn Warren. Milch went on to earn an MFA at Iowa, later teaching there and at Yale while publishing poetry and fiction. During the early 1970s he assisted his three distinguished professors with the editing of their anthology, *American Literature: The Makers and the Making* (1973). About this experience Milch says: "I never really got an education until I began to do that work for them" (Blotner 1). Careful considerations of his television productions, especially *Deadwood*, reveal not only how much Milch learned from his mentors by way of their own creative and critical legacies, but how much he is influenced by the great traditions of American literature he discovered through them. "Warren spread out all the literary artifacts of American culture for me to study, as part of my working for him on that history of American literature" (Singer 205).

In 1982, a former Yale classmate recommended Milch as a writer for the breakthrough television series *Hill Street Blues*; his initial script, "Trial By Fury," dramatized the murder of a nun and earned him both an Emmy and the Humanitas Award. With this initial success, Milch left academe for full-time work on the series as a writer, an editor, and finally a producer. After *Hill Street Blues* concluded in 1987, Milch produced the unsuccessful spin-off *Beverly Hills Buntz* and the short-lived press drama *Capital News* (1989). In 1992 he once again teamed with *Hill Street Blues* producer Stephen Bochco to create the highly praised and recently concluded series *NYPD Blue*. Milch came to control these productions to the point that he became their *auteur* in filmic terms, complicating the collective methodology of a television ensemble and eventuating in his separation from *NYPD Blue* in 1997. Since then he was involved with a number of critically acclaimed projects, most notably *Big Apple* (2001), an hour-length drama series set in the New York City FBI office. Admitting that he struggled with personal demons, including the abuse of multiple substances as well as compulsive gambling even while at Yale, Milch confesses that these problems were exacerbated by the entertainment world. His personal life did take a more positive turn after marriage to documentary producer Rita Stern and the births of their three children in the 1980s, though only health problems in the late 1990s scared him into sobriety. He still bets, though, often on his own horses.

Like the best of Warren's works, Milch's finest creations, especially *Deadwood*, employ a distinctive, diverse, and mannered style to delineate a harshly naturalistic vision of the dark and divided depths within the American national character, an identity simultaneously and paradoxically both innocent and corrupted. In an introduction to a selection of Herman Melville's Civil War poems for an American literature anthology, Warren characterized the nineteenth century master's style as "metaphysical" in both poetry and prose. Warren recognized that like the English poets of the seventeenth century, Melville fused physical with psychological imagery. In describing and analyzing Melville's poetry, Warren really describes his own work as well: "[Melville] was aiming at a style rich and yet shot through with realism and prosaism, sometimes casual and open and sometimes dense and intellectually weighted, fluid and various because following the contours of the subject, or rather the contours of his own complex feelings about the subject" (*Melville* 12). Thus, Warren's formulations here might be applied to Milch's methods in *Deadwood* as well; the style Warren inherited from Melville he left in turn as his literary legacy for Milch.

The most notorious aspect of *Deadwood* has become its dialogue, a striking conflation of flowery rhetoric, often verging on Shakespearean verse or Victorian prose, with rough slang and crude profanity. *Deadwood's* negative critics have reacted to this torrent of vulgarity even more vehemently than to its callous depiction of sex and violence. One commentator counted the "f-word" used some 870 times in the 12 episodes of *Deadwood's* first season (more than once a minute), and this profusion is nearly matched by the plethora of other even more startling expletives. Both poles of his characters' speech have been challenged in terms of historical realism, but Milch resolutely defends his practice in recent interviews. While he probably is enjoying his freedom from the network censors who constantly snipped at *Hill Street Blues* and *NYPD Blue*, Milch also may be insuring the attention of cable viewers already inured to shock from earlier HBO series such as *The Sopranos, Six Feet Under,* and *Carnivale*.

Milch also is following Warren's lead in both fiction and poetry. For example, *All the King's Men* is narrated by Jack Burden, a failed scholar become cynical political operative, who combines philosophical terminology with tough-guy slang to tell the story of Governor Willie Stark. Warren also extended this practice into his poetry. Notable examples include "The Ballad of Billy Potts" (1944) and *Audubon* (1969), both narrative poems set on a Kentucky frontier of the early nineteenth century not so much different from frontier South Dakota in the later half of that century. The narrator of *Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce* (1983), a Western epic poem set like *Deadwood* in the same years of gold fever and Indian hysteria following the first strikes in the Black Hills and the Battle of the Little Big Horn, complains of how the frontier power brokers "slick-fucked a land" (*Collected Poetry*, hereafter *CP*, 520). Even in the more personal revelatory lyrics of his later career, Warren balances capitalized abstractions such as "Time" and "Truth" against vulgarities similar to those heard so often on the streets or in the saloons of Milch's fictionalized Deadwood.

Other than the characters' language, Western buffs have found little to complain about in *Deadwood's* recreation of the frontier West; indeed, several critics have proclaimed it the most realistic example of the genre ever made. Milch prides himself on the historical accuracy of his production, personally overseeing even the smallest details of sets and costumes. The total effect of this surface realism mirrors a deeper, more naturalistic vision of the human experience as seen on the frontier between wilderness and civiliza-

tion. All aspects of the life process are presented in a somber naturalistic vision: birth and death, youth and age, sex and violence, illness and decay, even nutrition and elimination. Perhaps the most repulsive instance is the constant disposal of murdered corpses as fodder for the pigs of Deadwood's Chinatown. Again, all of these elements mirror Warren's own naturalism; even the flesh-eating swine are found in "Go It Granny—Go It Hog," part of the deceptively titled collection *Promises*. *All the King's Men* is filled with other Darwinian examples, intertextual with the Realists and Naturalists Warren admired, from Stephen Crane and Theodore Dreiser to Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner.

In *The Mind of the South* (1940), W. J. Cash speculates that Southern history was different from that of other American regions because it evolved through the frontier mode not just once, but twice—in the ante-bellum and post-bellum eras. Warren writes consistently about both Southern frontiers—other examples not mentioned above include *World Enough and Time* (1949), *Brother to Dragons* (1953), and *Band of Angels* (1955). Writing in the 1960s, no less a critic than Leslie Fiedler considered these narratives the heart of Warren's achievement: "Warren . . . has attempted the risky game of presenting to our largest audience the anti-Western in the guise of the Western, the anti-historical romance in the guise of that form itself" (392). Warren's works also consider the Western frontier directly—from the Willie Proudfit plot strand of the early *Night Rider* to the lyrics focused by the Western landscape which predominate in Warren's last poetry collection, *Altitudes and Extensions* (1985).

Warren's later lyric poetry, so much admired by its contemporary readers such as David Milch, likewise presents many examples of Western landscapes and Naturalistic visions. Warren's "Going West" (1981) provides a paradigmatic example, with its startling central image of a pheasant smashed against the windshield of a car speeding across the Great Plains, so that poet and reader can see the shining mountains only through a sudden curtain of blood.

> I have seen blood explode, blotting out the sun, blotting
> Out land, white ribbon of road, the imagined
> Vision of snowcaps. (*CP* 455)

As the poem's persona sums the experience up, "This is one way to write the history of America" (*CP* 455). In his 1974 Jefferson Humanities Lecture "Democracy and Poetry," Warren characterizes the "corrosive" vision of America's history found in our art: "and man, moving ever westward, was redeemed from the past, was washed in the blood of a new kind of lamb" (8). "Going West" also anticipates the manner in which David Milch would rewrite the accepted history of his America in *Deadwood*, moving from the decaying cities of the East to the final frontier of the great West, like Warren in this poem, but discovering the same patterns of human violence that deny the American Dream. Significantly, the opening episode of *Deadwood's* second season is titled "A Lie Agreed Upon"—Napoleon Bonaparte's skeptical yet fitting definition of history.

A powerful pattern of imagery in *Deadwood* presenting this reading of American history is the exploitation and betrayal of youthful innocence. Because few children were found in a mining camp such as Deadwood, they become natural points of narrative focus. In fact, two episodes are organized around this theme, as their titles indicate: the

eighth of Season 1, "Suffer the Little Children," and the eighth of Season 2, "Childish Things." The most significant children are the orphaned Sophia Metz, discovered after her family's massacre in the first season, and the fatherless William Bullock, adopted in the second season by his uncle Seth who dutifully weds his brother's widow in an act of patriarchal piety. Both of these pre-pubescent children seem to represent the innocent hopes forfeited by almost all the adults in Deadwood, and in so doing they become bright little pawns in their elders' shady relations. Although Sophia's life seems constantly in danger from villainous Al Swearengen through the first season, it is William who is killed in the second season, seemingly by chance though some suspect foul play. William's funeral provides a thematic focus for Season 2, somewhat the same way as Wild Bill's last rites served for Season 1.

Another young pair just the other side of puberty from William and Sophia are the putatively innocent Miles and Flora Anderson, who arrive in Deadwood searching for their "lost" father—significantly from Buffalo—in Episode 8 of Season 1, "Suffer the Little Children." Although their Victorian names are realistic enough for the time period, readers of American literature will recognize that they are recycled from those of the lost children in Henry James's chilling story of psychological horror, *The Turn of the Screw* (1898). Interestingly, James's biographers reveal that the author set *The Turn of the Screw* in the English country house he had just purchased because he was working through his own unhappy youth in several fictions at that moment. In Milch's intertextual retelling, the young pair, ostensibly brother and sister like James's earlier children, arrive already corrupted and attempt to seduce and swindle several of the adult denizens of Deadwood by playing on their childhood disappointments. When suspected and then detected by Machiavellian and murderous Cy Tolliver, Miles and Flora of Buffalo are savagely beaten, brutally slaughtered, and callously tossed to Mr. Wu's pigs as their episode ends.

Deadwood also develops this theme of innocence betrayed in many autobiographical revelations by adult characters, both female and male, of the youthful experiences that shaped their present lives. Almost all of these Deadwood residents capable of any self-awareness and self-expression have such moments. The major female figures—ranging from the barely reputable Alma Garret and Calamity Jane, to the completely disreputable Joanie Stubbs and Trixie the Whore—all imply duplicity and perhaps physical and/or sexual abuse by literal fathers or other patriarchal figures. Interestingly enough, many of these revelations between and among the women of Deadwood come as they flock together, reputable and disreputable, in protection of the orphaned Sophia Metz, as if to prevent their past fates from befalling her in the future.

The male characters prove more reticent, though their betrayed naïveté becomes apparent in their relations to these same women: Seth Bullock to Alma, Al Swearengen to Trixie, Cy Tolliver to Joanie, and Charlie Utter to Calamity Jane. The most significant of these confessions come in Al's drunken dialogues while being pleasured by Dolly, a barely post-pubescent substitute for Trixie, who can only grunt her response to his tortured monologue. In the first of these, at the close of the Season 1, Al says that he too is an orphan, abandoned by his prostitute mother at a Dickensian workhouse in Chicago run by "Mrs. Fat Ass . . . Anderson." After little William's funeral near the end of Season 2, Al reveals that the family who purchased him from Mrs. Anderson beat him mercilessly after the death of their natural son from "falling sickness." Swearengen also calls the orphanage

overseer a "pimp," probably because she sold him not just Dolly but all his whores whenever he passes through Chicago to revenge himself on his own past (Havrilesky). Perhaps because he was sexually abused himself, Al's uncharacteristically benevolent attitudes toward both young Sophia and William therefore might be explained by the trauma of his own life journey at the same ages as these youngest inhabitants of Deadwood.

This thematic pattern may prove most important, however, in unraveling Al Swearengen's complex relations with Seth Bullock, the central conflict of character driving *Deadwood* as a series. Despite the fact that both men can be merciless killers if their circumstances demand it, both are strangely distanced from their base behaviors. Seth, in particular, often seems a naïf pulled between principle and pragmatism, though Al also is sometimes unaware of his motivations, especially his better ones as with Sophia and William or with the grotesques Jewell and the Reverend Smith. Milch has compared the complex characterization of Al Swearengen to the heroic if flawed Detective Andy Sipowicz of *NYPD Blue*—a drunk, a racist, as well as a character "very much like my dad, who was complicated and driven" (Havrilesky). Elmer Milch was not only a respected surgeon but a compulsive gambler, who early on involved young David with the manic part of his personality and through it with the seamier side of Buffalo. As Milch put it in the *New Yorker* profile: "I was the surrogate demon who was to act and sort of expurgate the demonic in my dad" (Singer 200). Milch also implies to his interviewer that he was sexually abused by a counselor when he was packed off to camp so that his parents could enjoy the racing season at Saratoga; as Singer sums it all up: "What Milch has made of such fraught relationships, betrayals, and traumas is, in essence, his life's work as a writer" (197). So, if Al Swearengen proves another imperfect father figure, Seth Bullock then becomes something of another betrayed surrogate son seeking out his place after the death of his own adopted boy, young William.

Such themes of disillusioned innocence can be found throughout Warren's voluminous canon, but particularly in his early short fiction and his late lyric poetry, as these both explore memories of his own childhood. Perhaps the finest example in fiction is his best known and most often anthologized story, "Blackberry Winter" (1946). While many of the later poems Warren once called his "shadowy autobiography" (*CP* 441) might serve us just as well, a fine instance is the one most often quoted by Milch in interviews, "I Am Dreaming of a White Christmas: The Natural History of a Vision" (1973). The logic of this tripartite lyric involves the subconscious psychology of dreams, and its settings triangulate a dreary December in western Kentucky during the 1910s of the poet's youth, a smoggy summer in the New York City of his 1970s present, and his timeless future as implied by the first snow of the season falling on the Nez Perce Pass between Idaho and Montana, named to honor Chief Joseph's gallant flight dramatized in Warren's later epic poem, a symbolic locus not that far from Deadwood in the real or the imagined geography of the West.

The poem then evolves into a naturalistic "vision" through the process of finding consequential continuities among past, present, and future. In this grim, fairy-tale world, three small chairs are placed for the three Warren children, and under the desiccated cedar Christmas tree wait "three packages. / Identical in size and shape" (*CP* 278). Unable to open his present, the persona is fearful of its implication that his parents' primal legacy is only their mortality. (In this regard, it seems interesting to wonder why Swearengen maintains a running dialogue with a parcel wrapped in brown paper, one that ostensibly

contains the severed head of a Native American killed for the bounty Al offered in the initial episode.) Then the "brown-lacquered" scene of the Kentucky past and the hazy skies, "yellow as acid," of New York City's present are altered to the West's universal whiteness (*CP* 276, 279). Although he will never know the exact nature of his childhood gift, Warren realizes the true nature of his birthright from his parents,

> This
> Is the process whereby pain of the past in its pastness
> May be converted into the future tense
>
> Of Joy. (*CP* 281)

For his profile in the *New Yorker*, David Milch told Mark Singer that he embraced "this as a creative manifesto" (199); in fact, Milch entitles one of the chapters in his course on screenwriting "Future Tense Of Joy." Summing up his influence on him, Milch has said "Mr. Warren maintained certain disciplines that were the best lessons he gave me. As a model he was crucially important" (Singer 127).

Thus, the most significant connections between David Milch and Robert Penn Warren are more deeply personal than simply professional. As Milch puts it, Warren taught him how to be a human being by giving himself up completely to his art. He told Joseph Blotner in the 1988 interview, "You had the sense in his presence of what it took, of just how whole-souled the commitment was . . . and that it was a way to stand in the world" (2). Milch, like most of Warren's more recent critics, values his mentor's poems more than his fictions, and, though he left poetry early on in his own writing career, the television *auteur* frequently rereads Warren's poetic works. Milch then emulates Warren's creative methods by preparing himself to be found by his muse, an aesthetic version of the religious spirit. So Friedrich Kekule's remark, after his discovery of the Benzene ring in a dream, that "Visions come to prepared spirits," made its way as a salient example from Warren's creative writing seminars at Yale to Milch's screenwriting classes in Hollywood (Blotner 5, Singer 195). After watching Milch's scripting sessions for *Deadwood*, Singer judges them "equal parts master class and séance—the comparison that strikes me as most apt is channeling" (195). Warren taught Milch that even careful research and preparation must inevitably give way to a psychological, moral, and artistic commitment that cannot be compromised by any consideration aside from the personal vision of the artist.

Moral commitment may seem a strange formulation to use in regard to *Deadwood*, yet Milch insists that despite its vulgarity and violence all his work, including *Hill Street Blues* and *NYPD Blue,* is "profoundly moral," judgments born out by his several Humanitas awards for his writing on these earlier shows (Nyhuis). His next project, *Big Apple* in 2001, was so named he says "not for New York City, but for the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil" (Boles). Likewise, in his own historical notes for the *Deadwood* website, Milch characterizes the thematic premise of the show as "A kind of original sin—the appropriation of what belonged to one people by another people." Similar themes are found throughout Warren's canon in works of fiction, poetry, and cultural criticism as seen above—and in "Original Sin: A Short Story" (1942), *The Circus in the Attic* (1947), or *Segregation: The Inner Conflict in the South* (1956).

In *Deadwood*, one stylistic counterpoint to the characters' incessant profanity is found in the poetic diction of the King James Bible. To underline these contrasts, a preacher arrives in Deadwood for each season. In the first, Reverend H. W. Smith, a demented Civil war chaplain, preaches Wild Bill's funeral, reading from St. Paul's epistles comparing the community of the church to the human body: "And whether one member suffer all the members suffer with it." Later, Smith is doomed by a brain tumor and mercifully suffocated by Al Swearengen who secretly shares his suffering. In Season Two, Andy Cramed, a cardsharp abandoned by Cy Tolliver to die with plague returns born again as a self-ordained preacher who conducts young William's funeral, reading extensively from the Psalms. It is as if through his art Milch is exploring the possibilities of both individual and collective redemption in nineteenth century Deadwood, the very place where it would seem least likely, as well as in contemporary America, where it often seems, if anything, even less so.

As Milch says of Warren in this regard, "his poetry is an expression of a unified state of being and really is . . . [a]s close to an exalted state as one who hasn't God can get" (Blotner 5). Thus Warren became not just a mentor for Milch, or even an "avatar" to use Mark Singer's formulation in the *New Yorker* profile (194), but a humane, artistic father figure who empowered his devoted surrogate son to find his own selfhood and to create in *Hill Street Blues*, *NYPD Blue,* and *Deadwood* some of the most real, complex, and memorable characters ever to grace American television. Milch's expanding canon continues to demonstrate a number of important influences from and intertextualities with Warren's diverse works, providing insight into the literary contexts of *Deadwood.* The carefully cross-cut conclusions of the second season—with its intricate weave of the wedding celebration in the muddle of Main Street, the territorial treaty signing in the depths of Al's Gem Saloon, and the sacrificial slaughter in the shadows of Chinese Alley—only promise more of the same for Season 3 of David Milch's *Deadwood* as it pursues a course as Robert Penn Warren's literary legacy.

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