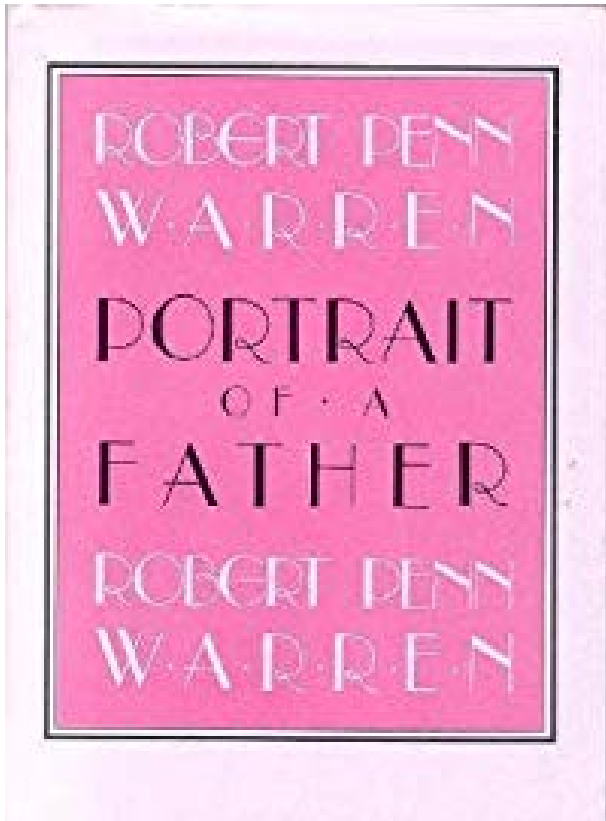


Portrait of a Father



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One of America's great poets writes of his father, lost through death and discovered again through insistent recollection. A death in the family forces a re-sorting and reshaping of all that we can recall of times and people gone from us as we measure our identities by their remembered images. While prowling in the past, Warren is drawn to likenesses between himself and his father, between himself and others of his family. The poet finds that his father too, in his long silent youth, ventured into the writing of poetry, as have so many, but in time put it away for other things.

Gradually this elegy for his father becomes Warren's reverie on the many Warrens and Penns who live now only in his memory. We encounter his mother and his mother's mother, his father's Warren line thrown back over three generations, as he draws forth sameness, giving shape and full form and then sharp recognition to family members who were and must yet remain mysteries. Then we see that Warren is delineating the tenuous threads of all our many unsettled and fragmentary American family histories, that he is tracing all our steps from the coast over mountain trails into the dark wilderness to the west. With him, when we stop to consider our loved and lost ones, we realize the delicacy of our accepted relationships. In this autobiographical essay and the accompanying poem sequence that echoes it, "Mortmain," Warren's look into the mystery of the past evokes for us the loss and recovery and wonder that death brings.