CHAPTER-6

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As we have seen in the preceding chapters, most of Warren’s fiction focuses on man’s conflict with the self and with the social environment. The conflict with the self involves coming to terms with the repressed desires and drives. There are elements in the unconscious mind that constantly strive for expression through action. At times these repressed drives gain the upper hand and express themselves in action. Guilt inevitably follows such expressions of the repressed desires and drives. This overpowering guilt leads the characters to self-annihilation. In Warren’s fiction, parricide is a constant theme. Rebellion against the father, actual or surrogate, and by extension rebellion against the Law of the Father of a patriarchal system leads to psychological chaos for his characters. The rebellion never leads to self realization. Child may be the father of man, but man never becomes the father. A character occupying the position of father in a work of Warren is no more than a transitory illusion. Sooner or later a character emerges out of the illusion with disastrous results. The father is always beyond reach, inaccessible, an empty signifier. “Man eats of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge and falls. But if he takes another bite, he may get at least a sort of redemption” (Warren, Knowledge, 187). All of Warren’s characters are doomed to take no more than one bite and keep repeating the myth of Adam. They fall never to achieve redemption.

The patriarchal system of the contemporary American society does not make redemption any easier. Through extensive use of the Ideological State Apparatus, the ruling class is securely entrenched in the position of the father, any rebellion against the social hierarchy is perceived by the characters as rebellion against the father with the resultant feelings of guilt. Just as in the case of the internal rebellion there is no escape from these feelings of guilt in the case of social rebellion too. The rebels must either realize their sin and be assimilated back into the system which they had rebelled against by way of penance, or they must destroy themselves as punishment for their sin against the father. It is interesting to note that most of Warren’s rebellious characters commit suicide directly or indirectly, and they are not punished by the Repressive State Apparatus. All of them fall prey to the hoax of democracy. So far as Warren is concerned, it is possible to escape the wrath of God, but it is not possible to escape the wrath of the system based on democratic principles. “...though the glory of
God does not demand that man go on all fours, the glory of democracy, by a last perversion, sometimes seems to make that demand" (Warren, Knowledge, 183).

The individual is caught between the demands of their own unconscious and the demands of the so-called democratic system that organizes society. These two masters, the ego ideal and the social institutions, ideological or repressive, do not give any respite to Warren's characters.

Thus Warren's fiction does not foretell of any possibility of any basic and fundamental change in the prevailing situation. The American ruling class has mastered the art of using the unconscious elements of the individual and collective psyche and manipulating the minds of the masses in such a way that most of the time they are not even aware of their subjection. The Great American Dream has stood the test of time and despite untiring efforts of successive generations of American fiction writers since Mark Twain to expose the myths of democracy, equality, freedom which form the bulwark of the Dream, it continues to control the minds of not only the American masses but also of the peoples around the world. The American ruling class has successfully occupied the position of the father tyrannical, oppressive, traumatizing, subjugating and yet no more than vaguely perceived. Like the unconscious father the American ruling class remains hidden, veiled so that the oppression is experienced but the source of the oppression is never realized. All rebellion is inevitably directed against lowly agents of the actual oppressor because it is only they who come into public view. It is a repetition of the rebellion against the unconscious father: for any rebellion to take complete form a coherent unified target must be formed, but the target is never the father. It may occupy the position of the father to serve the role of the whipping boy but since it is not the father all rebellion is doomed to fail and lead to chaos. No sooner than the father is eliminated the vacancy is filled by some other candidate, some other whipping boy. This is what happens in the case of the unconscious father, the empty signifier; this is what happens in the case of the American ruling class. The dissatisfaction with the prevalent condition, the ire against the oppressor is always misdirected because the father is always misperceived. As Lacan would say all recognition is misrecognition, all understanding is misunderstanding. "There is no truth that in passing through awareness does not lie." So fathers come and go but the Law of the Father remains securely entrenched in the unconscious and not so unconscious mind of the people veiling the identity of the father and protecting him from all challenge to his sovereignty.
Works Cited:


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