LAW OF THE FATHER: PORTRAYAL OF AMERICAN CULTURE IN THE NOVELS OF ROBERT PENN WARREN

ABSTRACT
OF THE
THESIS
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IRFAN ILAHI

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DR. MADIHUR REHMAN SUHAIB

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
ALIGARH MUSLIM UNIVERSITY
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ABSTRACT

Chapter I discusses the basic questions put up by the research. It begins with a
discussion of the theories of such exponents of psychoanalysis as Sigmund Freud and
Jacques Lacan. Lacan's 'Law of the Father' is discussed in detail. The discussion then
switches over to historical events leading to America's emergence as the sole
superpower running parallel with the cold war era, and its increased intervention in
world affairs. Finally, the chapter ends with a discussion of Robert Penn Warren's life
and career, his basic ideas and themes, as well as a discussion of the history of
American literature, especially fiction.

Chapter II discusses the representation of the theory of ideological subjection of the
masses. The theoretical background is largely based upon Althusser's essay "Ideology
and Ideological State Apparatus: Notes Towards an Investigation (IIISA, 1969). In a
capitalist economy like America the strings of power are held by a few and these few
invent subtle methods to subjugate the entire population so that the masses are not
even aware of their subjection. The novels of Robert Penn Warren present a similar
picture where apart from a few exceptions, the population is maimed through
ideological devices manufactured by the ruling class.

Chapter III presents a parallel between a corrupt system and individual corruption and
how both support each other in staying hidden from public eye. No matter how much
self-righteous and good one is, in cases of self-introspection one is likely to lie and
concoct the 'truth'. The major heroes of the four of Warren's novels discussed in the
thesis practice constant self-deception and hence must support the system to sustain
themselves and survive.

Chapter IV analyzes the conflict ridden state of mind of Warren's heroes. The
protagonists try hard to assert their identity by rejecting their past and their legacy,
while their past clings to them like a nightmare. The chapter discusses the ironical
subversion of characters from guerrilla like fighters (literal as well as symbolical) to
meek stooges. What the characters fail to understand is that they cannot exist outside of society which, in the first place, has given them their identity.

In Chapter V the characters' urge to order the hideous disorder created by the ruling class is discussed. As most people do not question the ideological subjection because they cannot perceive it, the actions of Warren's heroes against an invisible enemy appear threatening and hence a source of disorder. Ironically, in trying to order the disorder, Warren's heroes create further disorder. When an 'interpellated' public perceives their actions as unlawful, the Repressive State Apparatus maims them swiftly, and hence end the threat for once and for all.

Chapter VI conclusively portrays how the protagonists of Warren struggle with the self and the social environment. On a personal level Warren's characters are doomed to repeat the myth of Adam, they are doomed to go against the father with consequent feelings of guilt. At the social level all of them fall prey to the hoax of democracy. Hence 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.