



All The King's Men

Author
Robert Penn Warren

Year Published
1946

Original Language
English

OVERVIEW

Coming to Terms with the Past

During the 1930s in a southern state, Jack Burden works as a muckraker for the corrupt demagogue known as the Boss. As he digs up a scandal on his friend Judge Irwin, Jack deals with the burden of facing his personal history and accepting responsibility for his life.



Great Sleep

Jack Burden uses sleep to avoid the pain of his personal and ancestral history.

Great Twitch

To deal with Anne's affair, Jack sees people as controlled by impulses.

Spider Web

When his muckraking harms the Judge, Jack realizes actions are linked.

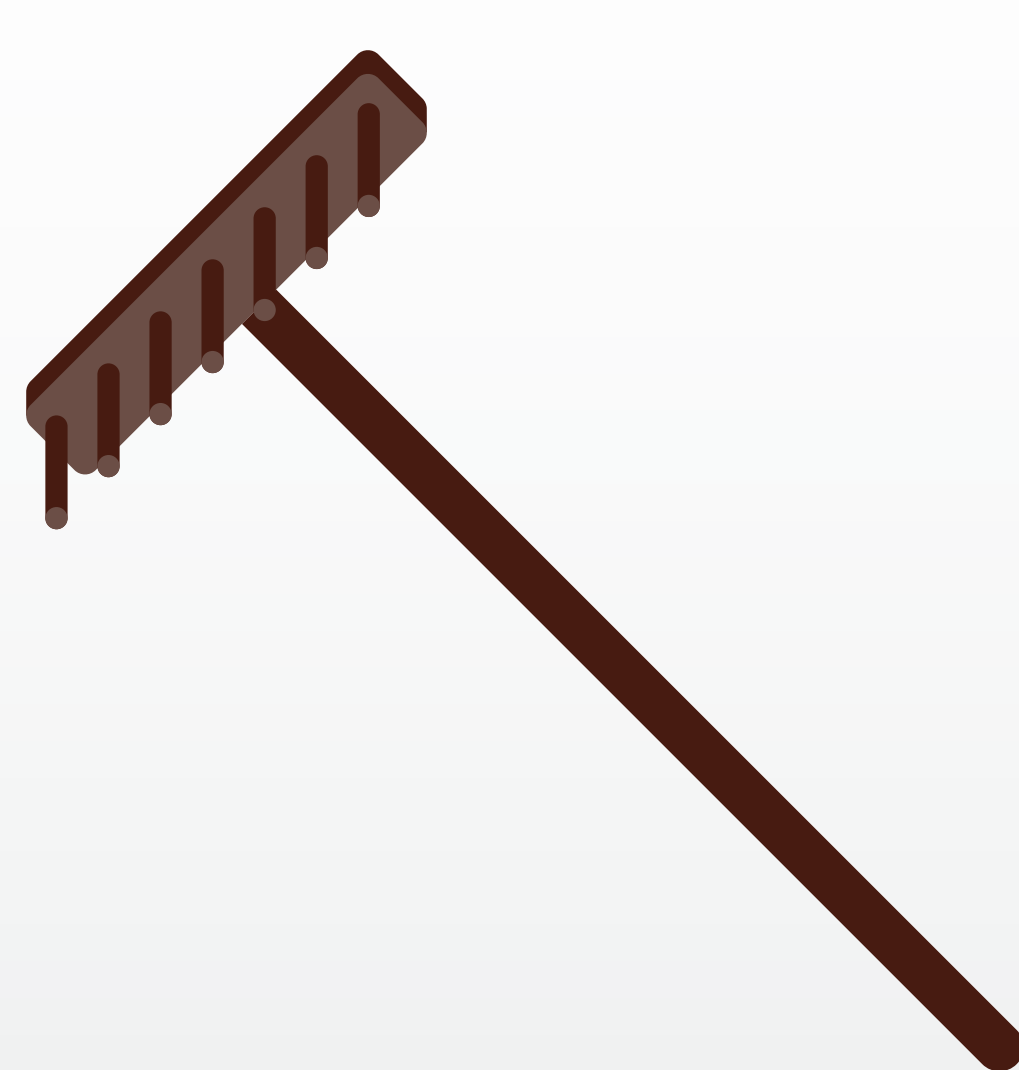
Author



ROBERT PENN WARREN
1905–89

Raised in Kentucky, Warren infused *All the King's Men* with the atmosphere of the South. He said he never would have written the novel if not for the politician Huey Long, his inspiration for the Boss. With its focus on the Boss, the novel conveys the corruption of humankind and the need to take responsibility.

Main Characters



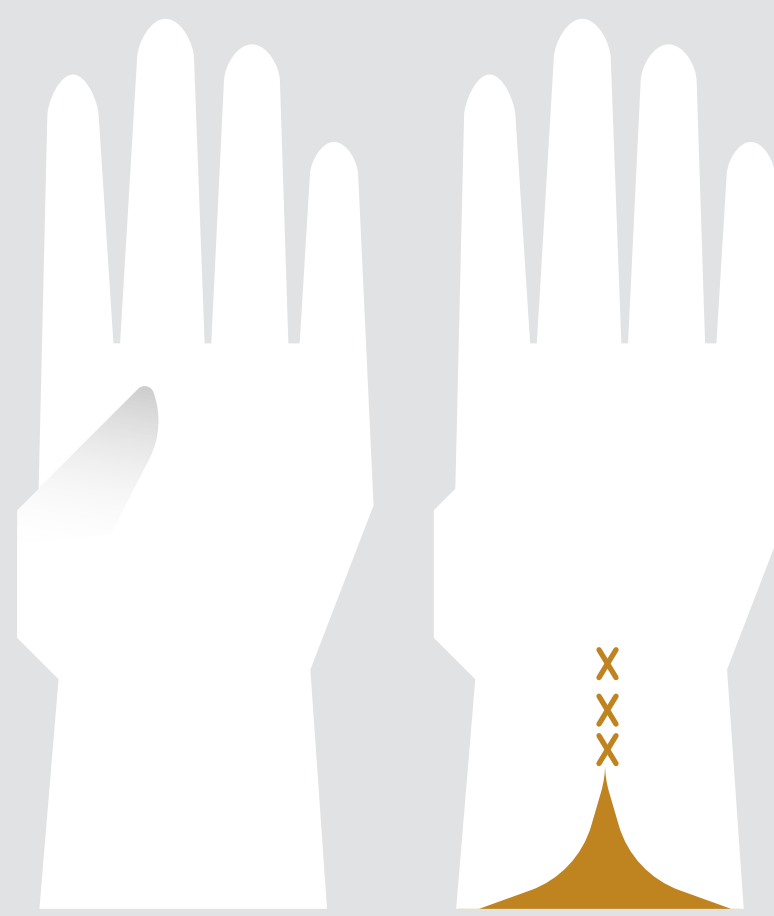
Jack Burden

Cynical, passive muckraker for the Boss; becomes responsible and chooses hope



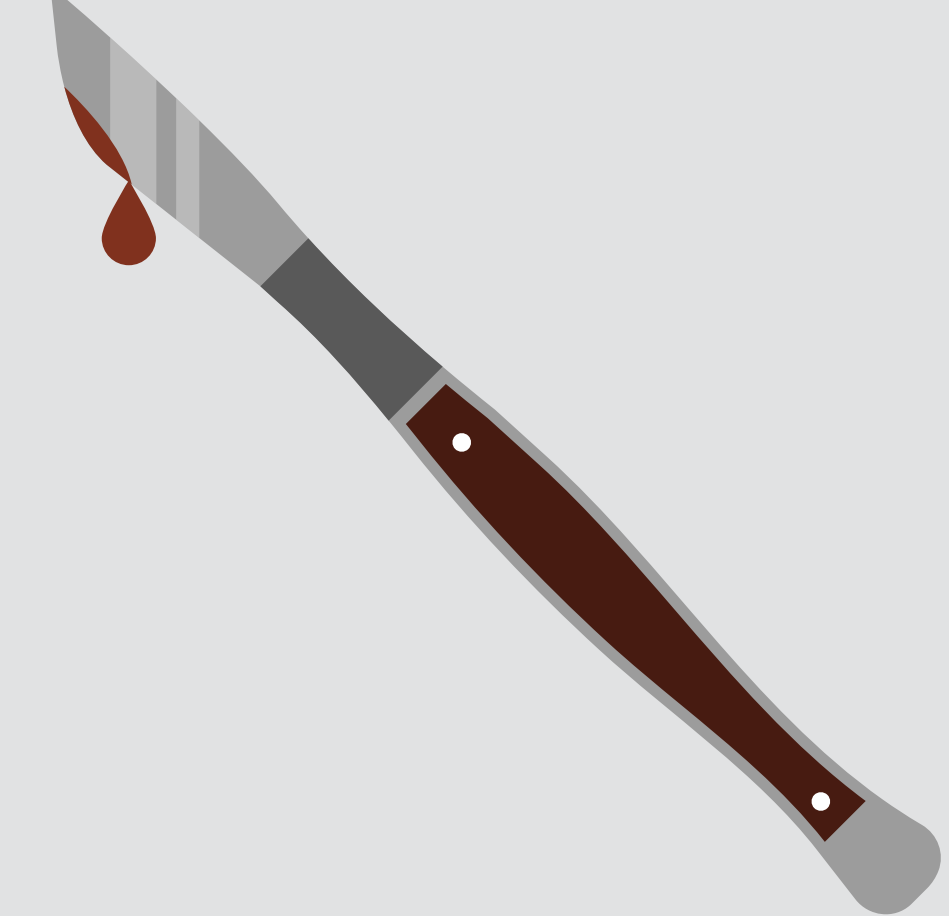
Willie Stark

Also called the Boss; powerful governor who justifies his corrupt political path



Anne Stanton

Pure, elite woman; suffers disillusionment and degrades herself but recovers



Adam Stanton

Idealistic man; becomes disillusioned and is killed while assassinating the Boss

Themes



Personal Responsibility

Avoiding pain and responsibility means living passively.



Burden of History

The past affects people's actions, which have mixed results.



Ambition & Corruption

Pride and selfishness lead the ambitious toward corruption.

If you could not accept the past and its burden there was no future.

Narrator, Chapter 9

