

# Review of all the king's men



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The nature of Jack Burden's journey from the 'arid land of facts' to the 'dream sea of ideas' is what the story is all about. It goes on to spell whether the journey undertaken by the hero is indeed a spiritual one or an attempt at self-discovery.

An attempt has been made to explore the roots of this journey through Modernism (the breakdown of philosophical/moral consensus about the nature of things, the turn toward myth) and Neo-Romanticism (the search for a new unifying principle amid the fragmentations of Modernity/Scientific Materialism), the role of Willie Stark, Ellis Burden, Judge Irwin, and the hero's journey through the turmoil and pleasures of life.

The story revolves around the relationship between the themes of Death and Rebirth which occur in Jack's journey through incidences of tragedy and beyond. It ends on a note of positivism, when the hero, Jack Burden, transforms himself from being a pawn to his roots in ancestral lineage. Literature Review 'All the King's Men', is the story of the rise and fall of Willie Stark, a political titan in the Deep South, who during the 1930s rose from hardscrabblepovertyto become the governor of his state, and ultimately it's most powerful political figure.

The story goes on to say how Willie, the anti-hero blackmails and bullies his enemies into submission, and using his good office institutes a radical series of liberal reforms which are designed to tax the rich and ease the burden of the state's poor farmers. This leads to a conflict of personalities which includes the notable former governor, Sam MacMurfee, and other power mongers. Jack Burden, the scion of one of the state's aristocratic dynasties,

turns his back on his genteel upbringing, against the wishes of his well-wishers, which includes the influential Judge Irwin.

Throwing caution to wind, Jack joins Willie on his journey to stardom, earning him the name as, Willie's right hand. Willie takes advantage of Jack's talent as a historical researcher to dig up the unpleasant secrets of his enemies, using this to blackmail and provocation. Cynical and lacking in ambition as he is, Jack walks away from many of his past interests; the dissertation of American History, and marriage to Anne Stanton, the daughter of a former governor of the state.

The scene when Willie asks Jack to look for skeletons in the closet of Judge Irwin, Jack is forced to confront his ideas concerning consequence, responsibility, and motivation. He discovers that Judge Irwin had accepted a bribe, and that Governor Stanton, his would-be father-in-law, had covered it up, resulting in Judge Irwin's suicide. The story then turns to another interesting episode of Adam Stanton, Anne's brother, taking up the directorship of a new hospital being built by Willie.

The vicious turn of events leads Willie to Anne, who unsuspectingly has an affair leading to his ultimate murder. Jack, with nothing to gain returns, an empty man. In this we see, the death and rebirth of Jack through his tryst with destiny and forlorn countenance of Anne transform to one of exuberance. Willie's death at the hands of Adam, his loyal employee, jolts Jack to such an extent that he is left dumbfounded and brooding of the consequence of his future and a rethink of his belief.

Jack returns to his senses and takes a major plunge towards society by accepting his long lost love, Anne Stanton, and pursues his passion of

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research . 3. 0 Analysis Jack's journey from the ' arid land of facts' to the ' dream sea of ideas' can be best described as a journey towards truth which is emphasized when he says, ' And all times are one time, and all those dead in the past never lived before our definition gives them life, and out of the shadow their eyes implore us. That is what all of us historical researchers believe. And we love truth. '

It may be seen that the principal characters in the novel Willie Stark, Judge Irwin, Anne Stanton though their personal lives have not been free from blemishes, they were in more than a way, corrupt. Starting with his association with Willie to the displeasure of his near and dear, the moment he learns of the affair of his first love Anne Stanton with Willie, and to the moment he learns of Judge Irwin's suicide, Jack had never endured a sign of negativism in Willie's actions. It is only when Jack's mother reveals the true identity of his father, does Jack admonishes Willie for his deliberations, although not in public.

This incident leads Jack through many a twist and turn in his endeavor to get to the bottom of Willie's motives. The sequence of events that followed, leading to the untimely murder of Willie, inculcated a sense of disbelief, and revulsion in him. The trudge back to his roots exemplifies the struggle and worship of humanity in all its glory. Jack for all his wiles, was an ardent follower of his master. Willie Stark, ' the Boss' gave the impression of a man on the move. Never, did he pause to gauge the consequences of his actions. This ultimately led to his doom.

Willie Stark, though he had a humble beginning, rose to a position of wielding unbridled power in the process subjugating his opponents by brute

force and of course putting to use the investigative skills of Jack. Judge Irwin, revered as a father figure by Jack, has not been in the good books of Willie, who instigates Jack to dig into the past activities of Irwin, protested vehemently by him. However, when the facts were unearthed, a shocked Jack and a bemused Willie confronted Judge Irwin. Judge Irwin was a man of honor. He was known to be a very straight man and never took the law into his hands.

This revelation was too much for him to digest, and equally embarrassing, that he did what a man of his stature would have done, commit suicide. Strangely, for most part of the story, Jack believes that Ellis Burden, whom he refers to as his Scholarly attorney, to be his father, where in fact, it is Judge Irwin who is the real biological father. Ironically, Jack gets to know this only after the suicide of Irwin, which Jack believes was because of his action. Jack's aristocratic moorings unfortunately does not refrain him from joining hands with the immoral Willie Stark as we see in the story.

Though Willie uses Jack as a formidable tool in his ascent to power, using Jack's research skills to his greatest advantage of subjugating his opponents, was a crime most unsuspecting of such a character. Jack becomes a witness to Willie's Machiavellian manipulations and misdeeds, albeit, unwittingly. However Jack's shunning politics at the end of the story and his return to his earlier passion is a metaphor for Jack's return to his roots, his history, and his American past. In fact, Jack's research revolves around his study of the life of Cass Mastern, a man of high moral standards and a student at Transylvania College in Kentucky.

Even the subject Jack takes up for his dissertation is a reminder to the readers of Jack's search for the truth. 'Is death the last sleep? No, it is the last and final awakening,' said W. Scott, a stark reminder synonymous of the characters in this book; Judge Irwin's suicide when he is confronted by Jack with facts about his acceptance of a bribe, and the killing of Willie Stark by Adam Stanton. While for the major part of the story Jack believed that the 'Great Twitch' denoted actions in life and not words or deeds.

The awakening on that morning at home, brought Jack to retract his thoughts on life, and once again believed that men were responsible for their actions and deeds. This rethinking in a sense is responsible for Jack's decision to marry Anne Stanton (a metaphor for rebirth) despite his knowledge of the fact that he she had an affair with Willie Stark. Reflecting philosophically he says, 'all the words we speak meant nothing and there was only the pulse in the blood and the twitch of the nerve, like a dead frog's leg in the experiment when the electric current goes through, a true reflection of Modernism.

This can be, in a philosophical sense be equated to the death of Jack figuratively, since Anne was Jack's first love, whom he loved more than anything else in the world. 4. 0 Conclusion In the ultimate analysis it may be inferred that Jack's life has been a life of journey towards the truth, towards his roots and eventually his self-discovery. The main characters in the story play an important role in molding Jack's character, the incidents in the lives of those characters enlightening the path Jack has taken to achieve his goal. 5. 0 Bibliography 1. 0 [www. sparknotes. com/lit/kingsmen/summary. html](http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/kingsmen/summary.html)