

All the King's Men Glossary

alacrity

Quickness; willingness.

albumen

Water-soluble protein often found in urine.

Anne Hathaway

Shakespeare's wife. While Shakespeare traveled the country, Anne stayed in her cottage in Stratford.

anopheles

Mosquitos.

apoplectically

Furiously.

argumentum ad hominem

A logical fallacy in which one attacks irrelevant qualities of a person, rather than that person's argument.

ars longa est

"*Ars longa est; vita brevis est.*" A Latin expression roughly meaning "art is long; life is short."

asseveration

An affirmation.

banderilla

A dart planted in the neck of a bull during a bullfight.

Baron Munchausen

An 18th-century German nobleman who joined the Russian army and returned to tell outrageously exaggerated stories of his adventures. Baron Munchausen stories have been adapted and retold by several authors.

barracoon

A barracks where slaves are temporarily confined.

benzene ring

Benzene is a chemical compound formed by a ring of carbon molecules. Friedrich Kekule, the scientist who first proposed that its structure was that of a cyclic ring, wrote that he made this discovery after having a dream of a snake biting its own tail.

bilious

Literally, resembling bile. Acidic, ill-humored.

bluebottle

A large blue flying insect.

bowie

A single-edged hunting knife.

Caedmon's song

Caedmon was an Anglo-Saxon poet who lived in the 7th century A.D. It is claimed (though this is highly apocryphal) that he was inspired to compose poetry after a dream.

Campbellite

Member of a Protestant denomination founded by Alexander Campbell. His and other reform movements of the time sought to restore the unity of the Church by restoring the principles of early Christianity and avoiding denominationalism.

cartilaginous

Like cartilage: firm, though flexible.

catarrhal

Literally, inflamed in the mucous membranes of the nose and throat.

chintz

Bright, glazed cotton fabric.

cholera morbus

A virulent and painful stomach illness.

cocklebur

Literally, the spiny burs of a certain plant. Used derisively to refer to poor, uneducated country voters (the "cocklebur vote").

coffle

A line of slaves or prisoners chained together.

corn pone

Literally, a type of cornbread. Also used to describe a folksy, informal manner or tone of speech.

Dago red

A cheap imitation of Italian red wine.

dicker

To bargain.

Epworth League

Youth organization of the Southern Methodist Church.

floating island of Gulliver

A reference to the floating island of Laputa in Jonathan Swift's novel Gulliver's

Travels.

Florentine

"The cold-faced Florentine" is Niccolo Machiavelli, realist and author of The Prince, a seminal political treatise and handbook of brutal statecraft.

frog-sticker

A type of bayonet; specifically, the sharp metal piece at the end of this weapon used for jabbing.

garret

The room in the top floor of a house; usually, the attic.

gisant

A sculpture of a deceased person representing the person in death.

hair of the dog

Shorthand for "hair of the dog that bit him." A hangover cure by which one drinks more alcohol to soften the effects of prior drinking.

hobbledehoy

An awkward young boy.

homme sensuel

Literally "sensual man." An effeminate male, one who seeks pleasure.

ineluctable

Inescapable.

jalousies

Shutters with horizontal slats.

jonquil

The narcissus flower; the daffodil.

Kubla Khan

A famous poem by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Coleridge claimed to have written the poem in its entirety after an opium-induced dream inspired the images contained within.

laminectomy

Removal or trimming of part of the vertebra to relieve pressure on the spinal cord.

lobectomy

A lobectomy is any operation to remove one or more lobes (rounded projections) of an organ; in this case, the brain. Today, the procedure as it occurs in the novel is obsolete, and the term applies mainly to such operations performed on the lung.

lucifer

A match.

marmoreal

Marble-like; refers particularly to whiteness, smoothness, and hardness.

navvy

A unskilled physical laborer, usually in building.

oleaginous

Unctuous, oily. Also very insincere and fawning, the quality of a suck-up. When used by the Boss to refer to Tiny Duffy, it speaks of both his girth and his qualities as a person.

organdie

A stiff, transparent cotton or silk fabric.

Pecunia non olet

Latin for "money does not smell."

photostat

A photocopy made on a special machine.

privy

A toilet. Earlier, an outhouse.

purblind

Having poor sight; slow in understanding.

Queequeg

A character from the Herman Melville novel Moby Dick. His name is used in a passage alluding to the novel.

rale

An abnormal, crackling breathing sound.

report

A loud noise, an explosion. Here, the sound of gunfire.

roman à clef

A work that describes real life events in a fictional context. All the King's Men has its basis as a roman à clef, as do the political book Primary Colors and the film Citizen Kane.

Saul on the road to Damascus

In the Book of Acts in the Bible, Saul of Tarsus is a fanatical Hebrew. He sets out for Damascus to arrest followers of Jesus Christ and eradicate Christianity. Jesus appears to him in a vision, however, and he is converted, becoming Paul of Tarsus and the greatest Christian disciple of his generation. The term "road to Damascus" now refers to any sort of monumental conversion.

sebaceous

Fat.

seersucker

A thin, crinkled cotton fabric, popular in the South as summer wear.

shadow-boxing

Fighting with an imaginary opponent in order to train or show off.

shilly-shally

To procrastinate, or to hesitate in making a decision.

solon

A legislator, after the great lawgiver Solon.

susurrous

A soft sound, a murmur.

Svengali

A fictional hypnotist from the 1894 George Du Maurier novel Trilby. Svengali is a tall, swarthy, unkempt man with glaring "evil" eyes.

the nuts

Slang roughly meaning "great" or "the best."

thuggee

Robbery and murder by thugs.

thunder-mug

Slang term for a chamberpot.

tinhorn

A braggart who pretends to be wealthy and important.

whicker

The sound a horse makes, or to make the sound a horse makes.

wild ass

An onager, a term that describes both a species of wild horse and an ancient Roman siege engine.

William Blake's poem ("Blake wrote a poem to tell the Adversary ...")

This allusion is to William Blake's "To the Accuser Who Is the God of This World." The first stanza is: "Truly, my Satan, thou art but a Dunce, / And dost not know the Garment of the Man. / Every Harlot was a Virgin once, / Nor canst thou ever change Kate into Nan."