



# **The Kingfish in Fiction: Huey P. Long and the Modern American Novel (Southern Literary Studies)**

*Keith Perry*

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The controversial, almost mythic Louisiana politician Huey P. Long inspired not just one but six American novels, published between 1934 and 1946. And he continues to resonate in American cultural memory, appearing in a 1995 work of historical fiction. *The Kingfish in Fiction* offers the first study of all six Hueys-who-aren't-Hueys as they strut and bluster their way across the literary page, each character telling his own particular story, each towing a different authorial agenda. Keith Perry carefully dissects the intertwining of documented history and artistic invention in Sinclair Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here*, Hamilton Basso's *Cinnamon Seed and Sun in Capricorn*, John Dos Passos's *Number One*, Adria Locke Langley's *A Lion Is in the Streets*, and Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*. menace, a sort of homegrown Hitler. Basso created two Long characters, each a rabble-rousing affront to what remained of the Old South order. To warn readers of the dangers hidden in the politician-constituent contract, Dos Passos transformed Long into a shameless manipulator of the gullible American masses. Langley's rendition suffers complete condemnation by its creator for personal as well as public transgressions. Warren's spellbinding Willie Stark, almost as much philosopher as politician, ironically bears the least resemblance to Long though for almost six decades Stark has been Long's best-known fictional embodiment. Exploring how and why these five authors turned one politician into six fictional characters leads Perry to conclude that Huey P. Long's lasting impression may well be a composite of both historical and imaginative interpretation.

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