

# William Faulkner: the 'Great American Novelist,' with pure British aroma

by Stanley Ezrol

This fall, many media outlets commemorated the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Nobel Prize- and two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist William Faulkner. Although not many people read Faulkner's output, 25 Hollywood movies have been made, based on his novels, stories, or screenplays, and more has been written about him, and his writing, than about any English-language author other than William Shakespeare. He has been promoted globally as a representative of American culture by a CIA front organization, the Congress for Cultural Freedom<sup>1</sup>, and by the U.S. State Department. People who aren't literary professionals, who've read his work, may be shocked by this. His novels, to the non-professional, seem, on the surface, to be the rambling record of the impressions—both sensual and cognitive—of a stumbling drunk. Take this example from his 1931 novel, *The Hamlet*. This is from Book I, titled, "Flem":

"All right," Ratliff said. "So they went up the road, leaving Miz Snopes and the widow wrestling at the cookstove and them two gals standing there now holding a wire rat-trap and a chamber pot, and went up to Major de Spain's and walked up the private road where that pile of fresh horse manure was and the nigger Ab stepped in it on deliberate purpose. . . ."

Learning about the man who wrote these fantasias, strengthens the first impression. By all accounts, Faulkner was a drunken, philandering lout. In the last years of his life, he decided he was a horsey gentleman, and, on three occasions in his last three years, was seriously injured upon falling off his horse, while riding in fox hunts under the influence of bourbon. Earlier, he had sustained severe burns during a literary meeting at New York's Algonquin Hotel, because he was so drunk, he didn't realize he was leaning against a hot radiator.

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1. Allen Tate and Donald Davidson, *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1974), pp. 363-364. Michael Warner, "Origins of the Congress of Cultural Freedom, 1949-50," in *CIA: Studies in Intelligence*, Vol. 38, No. 5 (available from the CIA's World Wide Web Page, [www.odci.gov](http://www.odci.gov)).

Professionals are, of course, aware of Faulkner's degeneracy, but this doesn't seem to cool their enthusiasm. After all, didn't William James, the founder of Harvard's Psychology Department, agree with German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, that drunken irrationalism is the source of all creativity? Doesn't the fact that so many 19th- and 20th-century authors—Baudelaire, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Robert Penn Warren, Allen Tate, Jean Genet, Dylan Thomas, Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, Aldous Huxley, not to mention the beatnik and hippie crop—were drunks or drug fiends, prove the point?

In fact, great writers were not always drunks. William Shakespeare, Jonathan Swift, Friedrich Schiller, and James Fenimore Cooper, for instance, have no record of drunkenness. A case was made against Edgar Allan Poe on this issue, but has been proven false. Even if drunkenness were a requirement for great literary talent, why would the United States government officially parade such achievement around the world, as part of its Cold War against communism?

## Britain's Ku Klux Klan revival

If we put aside, for the moment, the question of Faulkner's literary talent, and investigate, instead, the development of his literary career and reputation, the mystery disappears immediately, and another one emerges. Faulkner was merely one of the more prominent lumps in the Nazi-Communist counterculture of the 1920s and '30s, which included him and the other 20th-century drunks and dope fiends mentioned. His career was closely tied to a circle of Anglophile, pro-Ku Klux Klan, environmentalist "poets" known as the Fugitives, after their 1920s poetry magazine, or the Agrarians, after the political movement they launched in 1930 with the publication of their manifesto, *I'll Take My Stand*, for a "Southern way of life against what may be called the American . . . way . . . Agrarian versus Industrial."<sup>2</sup>

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2. John Crowe Ransom, et al., *I'll Take My Stand* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), p. xxxvii. See Stanley Ezrol, "Vanderbilt University and the Night Writers of the Ku Klux Klan," *The New Federalist*, Oct. 7, 1996, p. 7, for more on the Agrarians. For details on Faulkner's life, see Joseph Leo Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography* (New York: Random House, 1974).



William Faulkner, whose career was closely tied to a circle of Anglophile, pro-Ku Klux Klan, environmentalist “poets” known as the Fugitives, and later as the Agrarians. This movement was created by the British Empire to destroy the United States as a nation-state republic.

Faulkner’s first publishing contract, with Horace Liveright, was obtained through the intervention of another native of Oxford, Mississippi, Agrarian Stark Young. Young introduced Faulkner to bookseller Elizabeth Prall, sister of Young’s paramour, David, and later wife of Nietzschean author Sherwood Anderson. Anderson, a supporter of 1932 Communist Presidential candidate William Z. Foster, and Young, a pro-slavery, pro-Confederacy reactionary, who was given the equivalent of a knighthood by Benito Mussolini in 1931<sup>3</sup>, were close literary friends and associates. In later years, Faulkner’s editor at Random House was Albert Erskine, whose career had been launched by the Agrarians, when he served as the editorial assistant for two of the most prominent figures of the group: Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks, on their *Southern Review* magazine at Louisiana State University. Faulkner’s 1952 tour for the Congress of Cultural Freedom included Agrarian Allen Tate, and would have included Robert Penn Warren, had his employer, Yale University, permitted him to go. Brooks later became one of the leading cataloguers and promoters of Faulkner’s product.<sup>4</sup>

3. Stark Young, *A Life in the Arts, Letters 1900-1962* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), pp. 352-360 on Italian Knighthood and 1931 “mission” as a paid agent of Mussolini’s government; p. 1,155 on launching Faulkner’s career; see index for Sherwood Anderson.

4. Mark Royden Winchell, *Cleanth Brooks and the Rise of Modern Criticism* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1996), p. 310.

The Agrarians who promoted Faulkner were created, directed, and controlled by the British Empire, to undermine the Promethean tradition of the United States, as the nation founded to bring the blessings of liberty and of the fruits of creative discovery to the entire world, and replace it with a hodge-podge of irrational regional and ethnic movements. In this, the Agrarians were one phase of the history of British cultural warfare against the United States, which included the pre-Civil War Transcendentalists of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Emerson’s protégés, including William James and William Dean Howells, and their “star” author, Mark Twain.<sup>5</sup>

Of the handful at the core of the Fugitive/Agrarian group, John Crowe Ransom, William Yandell Elliott, Bill Frierson, Robert Penn Warren, and Cleanth Brooks were Rhodes Scholars; Andrew Nelson Lytle studied at Oxford; Stark Young was a lifelong intimate of top British cultural warrior Julian Huxley, and a leader of British spymaster H.G. Wells’s *New Republic* group; Allen Tate became an intimate of the gang of 20th-century American authors—including T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, all patronized by the British literary establishment, and William James’s student, Gertrude Stein—who renounced America to live abroad, and, in the case of Ezra Pound, to work as an anti-American propagandist for Mussolini during the Second World War. William Yandell Elliott, Young, and Tate developed contacts for the Fugitives with the British literary establishment. Elliott, of course, went on to an illustrious career as head of Harvard University’s Government Department, became a member of Dwight Eisenhower’s National Security Council, and launched the foreign policy careers of Sir Henry Kissinger and McGeorge Bundy. Faulkner had his own Anglophile credentials. During the First World War, though an American citizen, he travelled to Canada and enlisted in the British Royal Air Force.

How did it happen that British favor was so concentrated upon this small circle of Nashville-based associates? It turns out that they were the second- and third-generation descendants of the circles who founded the Ku Klux Klan, to continue Britain’s “Civil War” against the United States through irregular means, after the military defeat of the Confederacy. Ransom was the greatnephew of James R. Crowe, a leader of Scottish Rite Freemasonry in Tennessee, and one of the inner circle of Masons, along with Sovereign Grand Commander Albert Pike and Nathan Bedford Forrest, who founded the Ku Klux Klan in 1867. Ransom’s mother, Ella, had fond memories of evenings spent by the fireside with the other Crowe women, sewing sheets together for Klan rallies. Stark Young’s father and Cleanth Brooks’

Brooks’s *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country* literally sorted out and catalogued the contents of Faulkner’s vomit, which contained a chaotic mess of the “history” of said region.

5. Stephanie and Stanley Ezrol, “Was Mark Twain a Satanic Pedophile?” *The New Federalist*, Jan. 12, 1990.

## British mold infests U.S. official culture

One indication of how successfully the British have rotted American creative capacities over the last two generations, is the extent to which the Fugitives/Agrarians have been promoted as the official exemplars of “American” culture by the U.S. government:

- During the Second World War, Allen Tate was poetry consultant to the Library of Congress. From this position, he arranged Mellon family financing of the Bollingen Prize in Poetry, to be awarded by the library. He and the Agrarians successfully agitated to rescind the treason charges that had been brought against Mussolini propagandist Ezra Pound, and, rather, maintain him in a suite of rooms—which became an active literary salon and Ku Klux Klan organizing center—in the director’s mansion

of St. Elizabeth’s insane asylum. In 1949, Tate and Warren were amongst the Library of Congress panel that awarded the first Bollingen Prize to this traitor, Ezra Pound. In the 1950s, the same circle agitated to have Pound released from St. Elizabeth’s, so he could retire to his beloved Venice.

Later, John Crowe Ransom and Robert Penn Warren served in the same Library of Congress post. When Warren was given the position, it was embellished, for the first time, with the title, “Poet Laureate of the United States.”

- Tate, Faulkner, and others of their circle were repeatedly sent on international tours, either by State Department programs, or fronts like the Congress for Cultural Freedom.

- Tate was considered for an appointment as cultural attaché to Paris—presumably he qualified through his experience with Gertrude Stein’s dope and alcohol salon there in the 1920s and ’30s.

- Cleanth Brooks served a term as cultural attaché at the U.S. embassy in London in the 1960s.

grandfather fought in Forrest’s “Crittter Company,” during the Civil War. One of William Yandell Elliott’s forebears was an ostensibly anti-slavery Republican, who nonetheless belonged to the same Masonic Lodge in Murfreesboro, Tennessee as James D. Richardson, who, as a Congressman in 1898, caused Federal land in the nation’s capital to be set aside, for a monument to Klan founder Pike. Walter L. Fleming, the dean of Vanderbilt University from 1917 to 1930, to whom *I’ll Take My Stand* was dedicated, was the author of the 1905 classic, *The Ku Klux Klan: Its Origin, Growth, and Disbandment*, which, along with Thomas Dixon’s *The Klansmen* and the Hollywood movie *Birth of a Nation* based on it, promoted the re-founding and growth of the Klan in the 20th century. One of Fleming’s key sources was Ransom’s great-uncle, James R. Crowe. Young, Lytle, Frank Lawrence Owsley, and Ransom all claimed connections to the McGehee family—one of the wealthiest and largest slave-holding families in the South, which claimed descent from the British Stuart royalty. Robert Penn Warren’s father worked as a clerk for the McGehee retail chain in Kentucky.

### Cultural warfare against Platonism and the United States

To understand why this British cultural warfare unit would contract for Faulkner’s writing—a drunken man’s description of his impressions of his own vomit—it is sufficient to examine Agrarian leader John Crowe Ransom’s description of the purpose of literature and religion, both of which

he viewed as “myth making” to manipulate culture on behalf of his cause. In 1930, at the same time he was coordinating the release of *I’ll Take My Stand*, he published *God Without Thunder: An Unorthodox Defense of Orthodoxy*, which serves as a non-publicized guidebook for today’s “religious right.” The book is an attack on Platonic Christianity, which he rightly understood as the foundation of Western Civilization. In it he wrote, “Perhaps the most critical moment in our history . . . was . . . *the moment when the Roman Church sanctioned the doctrine of Filioque*. In that moment Occidentalism emerged as a definitive historical polity which was to glorify the rational principle and deny the irrational principle”<sup>6</sup> (emphasis in original). He explains that he understands the *Filioque*—the idea that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son, as well as from the Father—to be the Christian continuation of Plato’s “*Logos*,” the understanding that creativity is the dominant feature of the Universe, and is what man shares with God. Throughout, he refers to Platonic Ideas—concepts of things not perceived by the senses, such as scientific principles—as “fictions.” In *I’ll Take My Stand*, he makes it clear that the main political target of his ire is the United States, accusing it of “wag[ing] an unrelenting war on nature.”<sup>7</sup> The book is a call to turn all religions to fundamentalism in order to crush civilization. In a letter to his friend, the Agrarian Allen Tate, he was more blunt than in his published work:

6. John Crowe Ransom, *God Without Thunder* (Hamden, Conn: Archon Books, 1965, reproduction of Harcourt Brace 1930 edition), p. 305.

7. Ransom, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

The New Testament has been a failure and a backset as a religious myth . . . it's hurt us. . . . So many myth-systems . . . have contained myths . . . of Giants, or earth-born super-men (in Nietzsche's myth), who were not Gods but only demi-Gods, yet [thought] they were Gods. . . . Prometheus, for example. . . . Satan is the Hebrew Prometheus and so conceived is Milton's *Paradise Lost*. . . . He is Lucifer the Spirit of the Renaissance. . . . But then Jesus is Lucifer again. . . .<sup>8</sup>

In Ransom's "literary" criticism, he held the same view as in his religious appeal: Literature should remove "reason" from man, and return him to the state of "innocence"—pure sensuality, which he shares with animals. In *The World's Body*, he appealed to man to "recant" the belief in Platonic ideas. This is how he put it:

The aesthetic moment appears as a curious moment of suspension: between the Platonism in us, which is militant, always sciencing and devouring, and a starved

8. Thomas Daniel Young, *Gentleman in a Dustcoat: A Biography of John Crowe Ransom* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), pp. 190-191.

inhibited aspiration toward innocence which, if it could only be free, would like to respect and know the object as it might of its own accord reveal itself.

*Science gratifies a rational practical impulse and exhibits the minimum of perception. Art gratifies a perceptual impulse and exhibits the minimum of reason.*<sup>9</sup>

Isn't this what Faulkner's fiction does? You may set out to read, to exercise the higher capabilities of your intellect, but, instead, you are immersed in Faulkner's puke. You "respect and know the object as it might of its own accord reveal itself." Just as Crowe Ransom specified, the mind is used against itself, to return itself to the level of a sensuous beast. This, of course, is exactly the state of mind that Britain requires of Americans: total absorption in the muck that surrounds them, including the muck produced in their own minds. The mystery that remains is: Why would any American find anything to like in this attack against the mission of the United States—the creative powers of themselves and their posterity?

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 175, 312.

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