
Profile: Robert Penn Warren

Poet Laureate is Southern secessionist

by Kathleen Klenetsky

Robert Penn Warren, a fascist-medievalist possessed of an undying hatred of science and progress, has just been named the first Poet Laureate of the United States.

The newly created post, an institution imported from Britain, where Poet Laureates have been singing the glories of British imperialism since the days of John Dryden, is the offspring of Library of Congress head Daniel Boorstin. Three months ago, Boorstin hosted a seminar at the Library, where he and other select scholars discussed with the visiting Prince Charles what is "wrong" with the U.S. Constitution.

Perhaps best known as author of *All The King's Men*, a fictionalized account of Huey Long's rise and fall which effectively justifies Long's assassination by portraying him as a power-mad individual, Warren has spent a lifetime propagandizing for the explicitly Gnostic idea that material progress is evil. His elevation to the status of Poet Laureate drew kudos from Yale University's Harold Bloom, an avowed Gnostic, who called Warren "our greatest living poet."

Warren's 'Southern ethos'

A Kentuckian, Warren attended Vanderbilt University and Yale, and then went to Oxford as a Rhodes scholar. He became an avid devotee of the so-called "Southern ethos," an oligarchically oriented outlook, which is far closer to the Dostoevskian blood-and-soil fixation of "Mother Russia" and the Nazis than anything in U.S. traditions.

Both Warren's grandfathers were Confederate soliders, and he spent his childhood listening to tales extolling the unique virtues of the antebellum South. As an undergraduate of Tennessee's Vanderbilt University, Warren joined the "Fugitives," a group of poets that included John Crowe Ransom and Allen Tate. Drawing heavily on the existentialist tommyrot of T. S. Eliot and the fascist Ezra Pound,* the Fugitives were dedicated to the idea of the poet as an outcast soothsayer.

In 1930, the Fugitives translated their artistic ideas into politics. Dubbing themselves the "Southern Agrarians," they issued a famous manifesto, *I'll Take My Stand*, which aped

the outlook of European fascism. Contributors included fascists, notably Stark Young, who penned numerous articles for the *New Republic* exalting Mussolini and Franco for creating "organic" societies—the kind the Southern Agrarians envisioned for the South. *I'll Take My Stand* assailed industrialization and science, and asserted that the South must maintain a feudal, agrarian-based way of life, in order to protect her unique cultural and economic matrix.

The book's introduction, endorsed by Warren, portrayed industrialism and science as the source of all evil, in contrast to the "land" and "soil" from whence all good derives. It claimed that industrialization was necessarily antithetical to spiritual and humanistic values, as well as to religion, and that the use of technology to save back-breaking labor, robbed labor of its human qualities.

To stop the "incessant extension of industrialization," the Southern Agrarians called on all "communities" opposed to industrialization to join forces and impose an agrarian regime upon the United States. "The culture of the soil is the best and most sensitive of vocations, and therefore it should have the economic preference and enlist the maximum number of workers," a regime which "will be secured readily enough where the superfluous industries are not allowed to rise against it."

Warren's contribution to the book dealt with the "race question," and warned that unless the South rearranged itself around agricultural nuclei, blacks would keep on defecting to an "illusory" better life in northern industrial cities.

Warren has since distanced himself, at least publicly, from the racist overtones in *I'll Take My Stand*, but not from its overall medievalist stance. Recently, he has become loosely affiliated with the *Southern Partisan*, a magazine which maintains that *the South must be prepared to secede from the Union again unless its cultural and political views, as defined by the Southern Agrarians, come to prevail*. The magazine publishes articles like the "Foreign Policy of the South," by Heritage Foundation analyst Sam Francis, who argued that the South is "closer to the cultural values of the old world than the new" and is properly dominated by "pessimism about man and his works."

The views of the *Southern Partisan's* advisory board, which includes F. Reid Buckley, the monarchist brother of William F. Buckley, and John Hurley, curator of the Confederate Memorial Hall, are typified by M. E. Bradford, a University of Dallas historian and a friend of Otto von Hapsburg. One of the leading living spokesmen for the Southern Agrarians, Bradford has written articles on the thesis that the model for the American republic was the Venetian oligarchy!

With a man of Warren's outlook now Poet Laureate, why not name Simon Legree a Founding Father?

* Warren was part of a committee which awarded Ezra Pound the Bollingen Prize for Poetry in 1948 for his *Pisan Cantos*, written while Pound was in prison for treason for his pro-fascist activities during World War II.