

Please refer to the
message section.
agrarianism in
southern literature

[Literature](#)



Agrarianism is defined as a political and social philosophy that emphasizes the importance of farming and the cultivation of plant life for man to lead a happier and fuller life.

Thomas Jefferson, one of the chief proponents of Agrarian thought in American history, had mentioned its significance thus: " Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God, if He ever had a chosen people, whose breasts He has made His peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue. It is the focus in which He keeps alive that sacred fire, which otherwise might escape from the face of the earth (" Agrarianism")."

Agrarianism in Southern literature evolved at a time when the culture of the South was supposed to have been attacked by modernity. To counter the negative impact of modernity on the Southern culture and traditions, a group of twelve traditionalist poets and writers published an Agrarian collection of essays in 1930: *I'll Take My Stand*.

The thesis of this manifesto was that the past rebukes the present for the latter's dependency on machines as opposed to nature. The South was seen as traditionally agricultural, and its people were understood as non-materialistic, religious, as well as well-educated.

This viewpoint eventually took shape as an entire genre in Southern literature, as the writers and poets who had written for *I'll Take My Stand* showed how Southern agrarianism could be expressed not only in poetry and essays, but also in biographies, novels, and works of literary and social criticism (MacKethan).

Nevertheless, Southern agrarianism is considered an offshoot of Southern modernism, seeing that the subject of agrarian literature is alienation - a feeling of being out of place. Moreover, almost all of the agrarian authors and poets are modern (Grammer).

One of the famous Southern agrarians and a contributor to *I'll Take My Stand*, Allen Tate has described his writing thus: " My attempt is to see the present from the past, yet remain immersed in the present and committed to it (Fain and Young 189)." Even so, Southern modernism is considered an altogether separate genre (MacKethan).

Influenced by modernism, Southern agrarianism is said to " produced the South (Kreyling 6)." MacKethan writes that Southern agrarianism was largely a myth which the Southern agrarians - as the contributors to *I'll Take My Stand* are called - had succeeded in propagating as reality.

So, although Southern agrarianism was a myth, the writers and poets who had advocated agrarianism were successful in portraying the Southern peoples as non-materialist, lovers of nature. They had managed to make the Southern peoples keep their focus on agrarianism to boot.

Even so, as Kreyling maintains, the agrarian movement in Southern literature did not approach a unity of thought that the Southern agrarian writers and poets had claimed to be a mark of their traditional culture.

Today, it is not possible to study the literature of the South without the agrarian model in its midst. Moreover, despite its mythical nature, Southern agrarianism is said to present " an aesthetically gratifying world of pure form" in literature (Grammer 131).

This Southern genre is a widely accepted one. All the same, some of its proponents have left it altogether. According to Ransom, Southern agrarianism was a constraint on his imagination.

Robert Penn Warren, on the other hand, is known to have immersed himself completely in the philosophy of agrarianism (Grammer). Regardless, agrarianism continues to be understood as an essential part of Southern literature, balancing the past with the present.

Works Cited

"Agrarianism." Answers. 2007. 10 Nov 2007. .

Fain, John Tyree, and Thomas Daniel Young (eds.). The Literary Correspondence of Donald

Davidson and Allen Tate. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1974.

Grammer, J. M. "Reconstructing Southern Literature." American Literary History (Spring 2001),

Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 126-140.

Kreyling, Michael. Inventing Southern Literature. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi,

1998.

Mackethan, Lucinda. "Genres of Southern Literature." Southern Spaces. 1 Aug 2005. 10 Nov

2007. .

Ransom, John Crowe. "Wanted: An Ontological Critic." Selected Essays of John Crowe

Ransom. Ed. Thomas Daniel Young and John Hindle. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984, pp. 147-79.