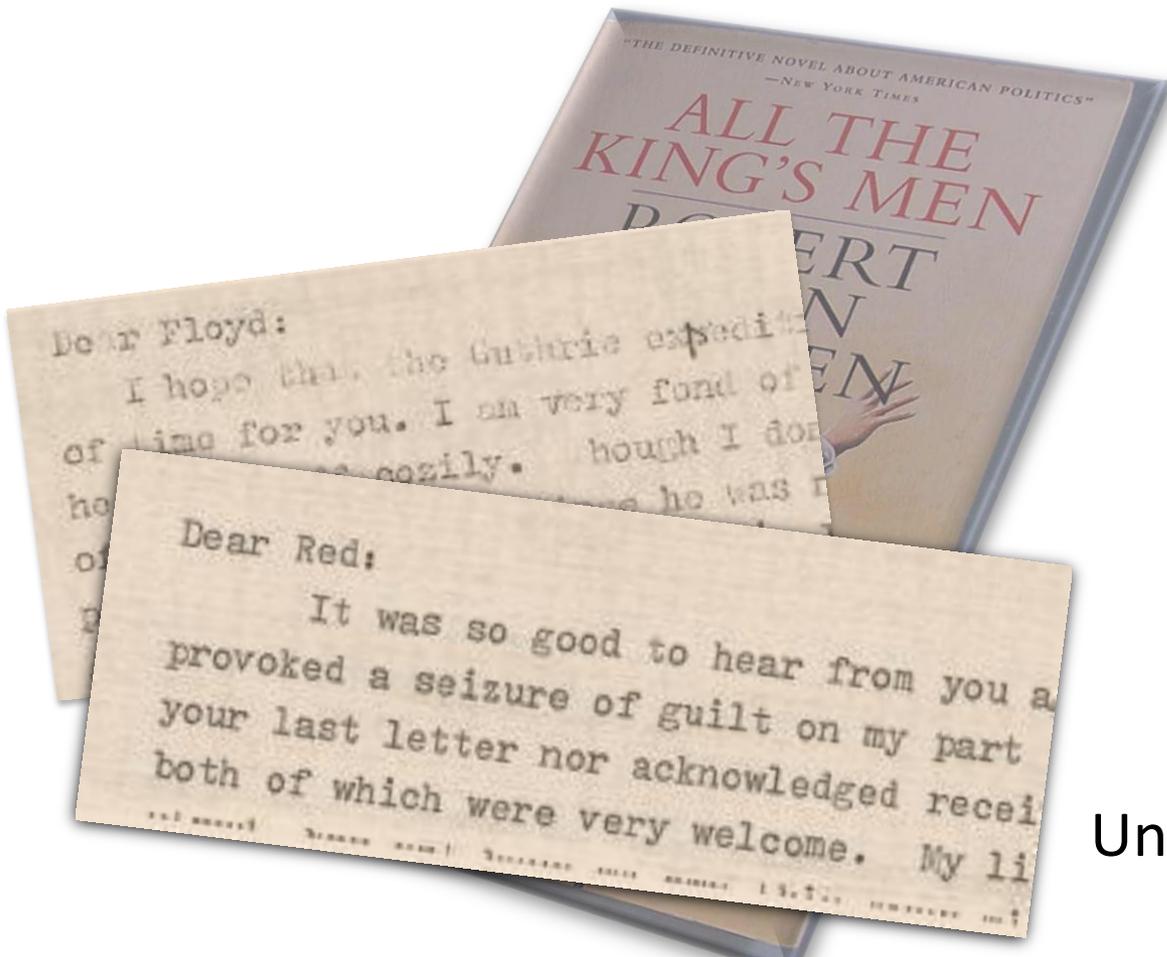


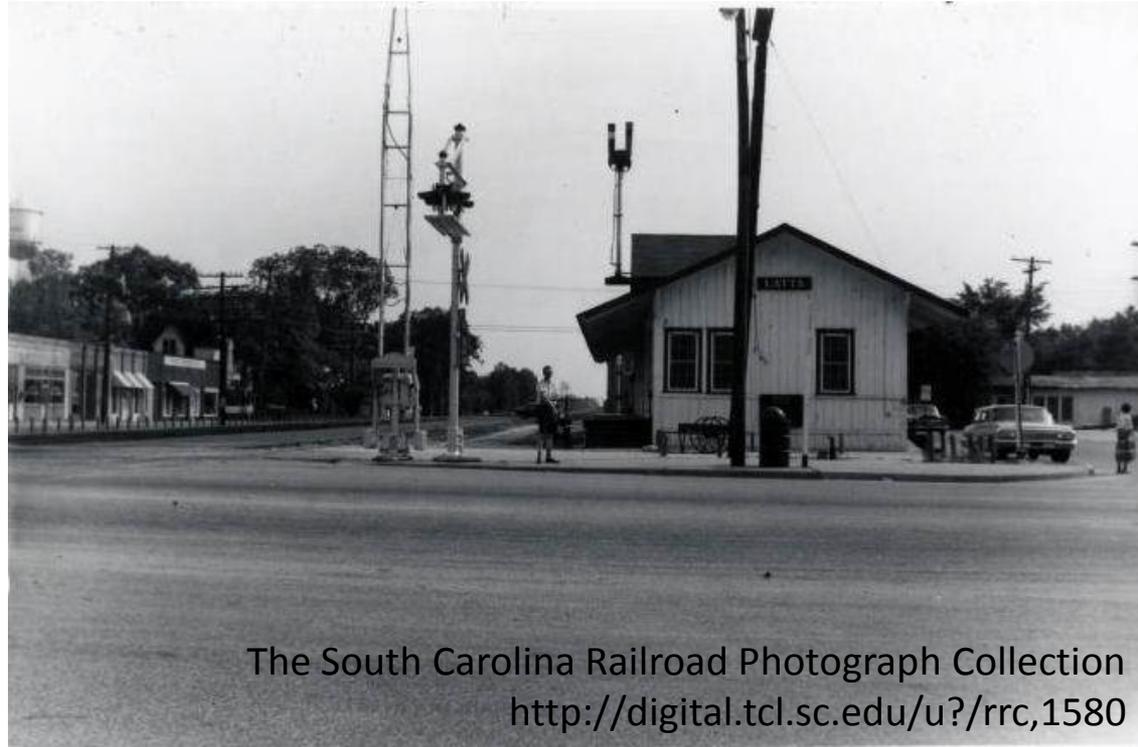
# 'It Could Have Been Different': Value and Meaning in Carlisle Floyd's *Willie Stark*



Patricia Sasser  
University Libraries  
University of South Carolina

# Carlisle Floyd

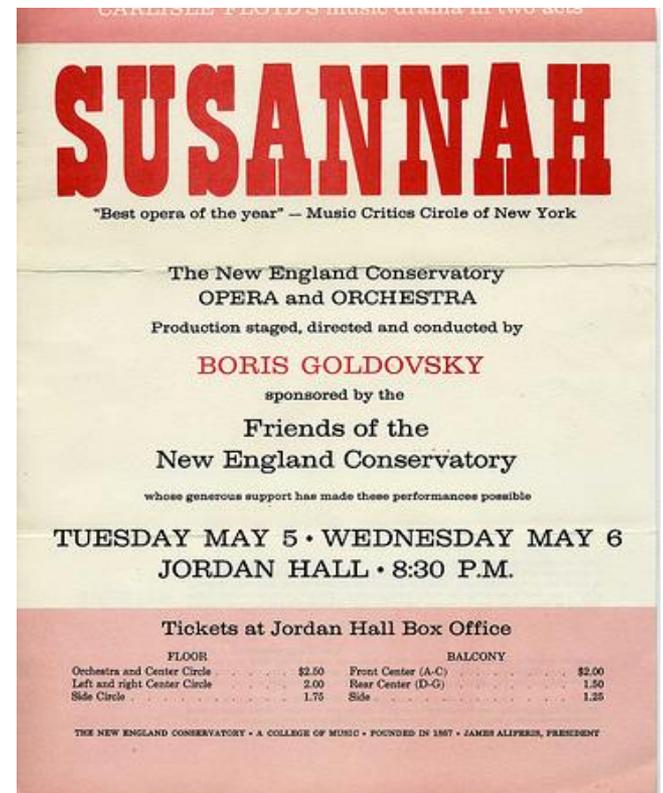
- Born in 1926 in Latta, South Carolina
- Educated first at Converse College, then at Syracuse University
- Studied with Ernst Bacon
- Taught at Florida State University



# Floyd's operas

## Early works

- *Slow Dusk* (1949)
- *The Fugitives* (1951)
- *Susannah* (1955)



# Floyd's operas

## Original libretti by Floyd

- *The Passion of Jonathan Wade* (1962)
- *The Sojourner and Mollie Sinclair* (1963)
- *Flower and Hawk* (1972)

## Libretti adapted by Floyd

- *Wuthering Heights* (1958)
- *Markheim* (1966)
- *Of Mice and Men* (1970)
- *Bilby's Doll* (1976)
- *Willie Stark* (1981)
- *Cold Sassy Tree* (2000)

# All the King's Men

## Characters

- Jack Burden
- Burden family
- Adam Stanton and Anne Stanton
- Stanton family
- Willie Stark
- Stark family
- Cass Mastern
- Judge Irwin
- Sugar Boy
- Sadie Burke



Broderick Crawford as Willie Stark in Columbia Pictures ' 1949 film of *All the King's Men*

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“Even to an unmusical barbarian like me your fame has penetrated, and so the introduction by Paul, and by your extremely interesting enclosures, was scarcely necessary. I’d be honored to have you do All the King’s Men, as you can well imagine.”

- Robert Penn Warren to Carlisle Floyd, 7 July  
1983

# Floyd's adaptation

- Willie Stark
- Jack Burden
- Sugar Boy
- Sadie Burke
- Tiny Duffy
- Judge Irwin
- Anne Stanton



Mercedes McCambridge as Sadie Burke in Columbia Pictures' 1949 film of *All the King's Men*  
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variably want to know if we are acquainted. You might be pleased to know that I have encountered more advance interest in this  
“I have encountered more advance notice in this operatic venture than in any other in my career...This as you can imagine, is both exhilarating [sic] and frightening especially when the first note of music hasn't been written!”

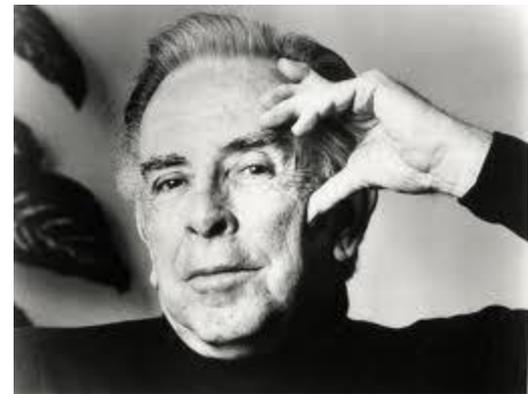
-Carlisle Floyd to Robert Penn Warren  
22 October 1977

I hope things are going well for you. I was interested

to see the story PEOPLE magazine did on you and your wife and

“I really always honestly felt...I really wanted to be a part of broadening the opera base, broadening the audience for opera...I felt that if we could redress the balance between opera, which had gotten very much out of balance with music being the dominant thing translated into the voice, and redress the balance between drama and music – I felt there was an audience for that which had not been tapped.”

-Carlisle Floyd, in an interview with the National Endowment for the Arts



**Carlisle Floyd**

National Endowment for the Arts Opera Honors

<http://www.nea.gov/honors/opera/floyd.html>

# Critical Response

“...strident, prosaic recitative that tears at the listener’s patience – and no doubt, sears the vocal cords”

– *New York Times*, 27 April 1981

“...an impressive, if flawed piece of work...*Willie Stark* cries out for a song you can sink your teeth into and fails to deliver”

– *Washington Post*, 11 May 1981

# Robert Penn Warren's Response

“I am tone deaf and don't know an oboe from a flute, and, to be honest, care less. I do go to a lot of operas, just because of Eleanor. But I usually scribble on the back of a program...Eleanor wasn't mad about the opera.”

“I objected to some oversimplification and missing of theme, but audience couldn't have cared less...It's not my baby, anyway. All I care about is cash.”

– Robert Penn Warren to Thomas G. Rosenthal

30 May 1981

“...opera in American today often stakes its artistic claims on the reproduction of an older literary work...[and]...the operas are expected to do justice to the works they adapt. No less, but no more.”

-Lawrence Kramer

-“The Great American Opera: *Klinghoffer, Streetcar*, and the Exception”

# Thanks to:

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