

## A Tuscaloosa Biography

# THE STORY OF PROFESSOR HUDSON STRODE (1892-1976)



Hudson Strode was born in Illinois. After Strode's father passed away while they lived in Kentucky, his mother remarried, and the family moved to Demopolis, Alabama. As a boy, Strode loved drama, acting in school plays and attending professional performances. He graduated from high school at age sixteen and enrolled at the University of Alabama, where his interest in drama continued. Strode earned his AB in English literature in 1913 and went to New York City, where he received an MA from Columbia University.

Strode spent two years as an English instructor at Syracuse University. During this period, he sold his first short story to a women's magazine. In 1916, Strode returned to the University of Alabama to teach English literature and public speaking.

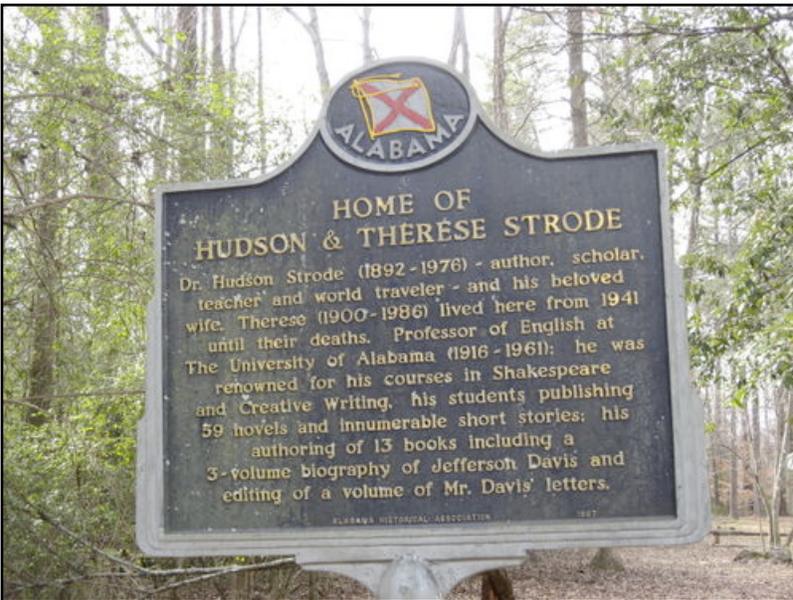
Ineligible for the draft because he was underweight, Strode spent World War I arranging troop entertainments. After the war, he returned to the University of Alabama. In 1924, he married Teresa Cory. In addition to his teaching duties, Strode was also directing plays, giving lectures and dramatic readings, and writing. His health began to suffer, and he had a nervous breakdown in the summer of 1926. After recuperating at a friend's home for several months, Strode returned to work. He spent the summers of 1927 and 1928 at the MacDowell Colony, writing poems, book reviews, and a one-act play.

Strode suffered another breakdown in 1929, and he and his wife went to live in Bermuda so that he could recover his health. When they returned to Alabama in 1932, Strode published *The Story of Bermuda*, the first of a series of travel books. In 1936, a request from one of his students, Harriet Hassell, prompted Strode to offer a fiction-writing class at the University of Alabama, which he continued to teach for twenty-five years. Strode's students published over 55 novels, 101 short stories, and countless articles. *The London Times* once referred to his creative writing class as "brilliantly effective."

So successful was the creative writing class that J. B. Lippincott, publishers, awarded between 1941 and 1945 a \$1,000 annual prize for the best novel submitted for publication from his class. Many of his former students described Dr. Strode as the motivating factor and inspiration for their works. He was also famous for his brilliant lectures and classes in Shakespeare.

In the 1950s, Strode began working on a three-volume biography of Jefferson Davis. This work was published over a nine-year period and was generally well-received, although some reviewers questioned his sympathetic tone toward his subject. In 1961, Strode was made a Knight of the Royal Order of the North Star by King Gustav Adolf of Sweden in appreciation of his writings about Scandinavia. He retired from teaching in 1963, though he continued to write and publish.

Dr. Strode's last major work, *The Eleventh House*, was an autobiography from 1882 to 1939. In the book, Dr. Strode told of encounters with such literary figures of the 1920's and 1930's as Eugene O'Neill, F. Scott Fitzgerald, H. L. Mencken, and Ernest Hemingway. Another volume of the work was planned tracing Dr. Strode's life from 1939 to the present, but because of failing health, he did not complete the task.



"We do not write to sell, and I think the best stuff has not sold at all..."

Hudson Strode, interview with *Time*

### Excerpt From An Article

"Education: Success Story", *Time* magazine, July 30, 1945.

*Professor Strode does not believe that everybody can be taught how to write. He restricts his four-session-a-week "clinic" to those who he thinks have genuine latent talent; twelve to 14 is the usual number. They read no textbooks, hear no lectures, spend their entire time writing, revising, polishing, criticizing each other's products, absorbing pungent Strode comments.*

*On occasion, students visit Strode's country retreat for discussion, with hunting & fishing trips on the side. They also go to his home, just outside Tuscaloosa, for conferences with him and his wife, who assists him in appraising manuscripts.*

*Alabaman Strode has an almost fanatical faith in the cultural present and future of the South. He takes great pride in the fact that all but four of his 14 students who have sold novels come from within 100 miles of Tuscaloosa.*

*With the war's end (seven of his students are in the Navy), and the South's gradual economic liberation from the North, Hudson Strode predicts a great regional renaissance. For, he declares, "there is more passion, more sentiment, more grace, and more variety in the South than in any other section of the nation."*

### The Strode Circle

Professor Strode mentored and taught many young authors who went on to become significant authors. Among his proteges:

Borden Deal	Elise Sanguinetti
Harriet Hassell	Thomas Hal Phillips
Catherine Rogers McLain	John Craig Stewart
Helen Norris	Harper Lee
Lonnie Coleman	Robert Ramsey
John Becher	Edward Kimbrough

### "Rust"

Rust has some roles to play --  
 Its dust besmeares the escutcheon  
 Of a vain respectability,  
 Mouldy with its varletry of mediocre  
 mouthings.  
 Rust smells hard  
 And pungent,  
 Like stale spice.  
 But in sophisticated sunlight  
 Its strangely burnt-out roughness  
 Is more subtle  
 Than gold.  
 Love,  
 Rust-stained,  
 Gives off a magic iridescence  
 And sometimes strikes immortal song  
 From a languid poet.  
 A feat of genius is a flake of brain-rust.

You can find Hudson Strode's letters, correspondences, book notes, scrapbooks, and more at the Hoole Special Collections library on campus. He left his home and his papers to the University of Alabama.