

# The James Jones Literary Society Newsletter

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## **'96 Symposium In Springfield To Feature Some Firsts**

On November 1-2, the Society will hold its sixth annual symposium--one marked by several important firsts. It will be the first symposium held outside of Robinson (Jones' birthplace), the first attended by Gloria Jones (the author's wife), and the first run in conjunction with a writers' workshop. So even if you have enjoyed our earlier symposia, this one promises to be sufficiently different that we hope you won't want to miss it.

When people think of Springfield, Illinois, they usually associate the city with its best-known industry (state government) or its most famous former resident (Abraham Lincoln). This fall, however, Springfield will become the destination of James Jones enthusiasts as the University of Illinois campus on the southeast side of town hosts the Society's symposium. UIS was chosen as the 1996 site at last year's business meeting, when members voted to move the annual event periodically in order to attract new audiences for Society activities.

In his brief but productive career, Jones became a world-class writer, and through his work he entered the world of letters that is bounded only by the imagination. The symposium schedule reflects several notable Springfield-Jones connections. As the Friday evening kickoff, there will be a reception at the Illinois State Library, located across from the capitol. The library's frieze features the names of 35 prominent Illinois writers--Jones among them--and inside, the panelled Illinois Authors Room proudly displays a complete collection of his published books. At the reception, participating authors--including Board member and keynote speaker Willie Morris--will sign copies of their books, so bring your own or buy them there if you prefer.

The Society's three presidents have attachments to UIS as well. George Hendrick, founding president, has consulted the Handy Writers' Colony Collection in the campus library during his research, which will be discussed on a panel Saturday. Mike Lennon, George's successor, coproduced and coedited a superb hour-long video documentary on Jones' career while on the UIS faculty. He will introduce the video prior to its screening and describe how this project brought the Handy Collection to UIS, where it was meticulously cataloged by archivist Tom Wood. As chair of the UIS English Department, I have also used the archive in my study of Jones and in helping supervise original student scholarship based on its materials, such as the master's theses of Greg Randle and Marlene Emmons, which also will be highlighted during the symposium.

Because of the Society's commitment to encourage aspiring writers in the tradition of its namesake, a writers' workshop will run concurrently with this symposium. Interested Society members, students and others from the community can obtain expert advice on their work without having to miss key elements of the symposium. Joining Board member Kaylie Jones, a creative writing teacher and author of three published novels, as workshop instructors will be Society members Richard Peck, author of more than 30 books (many for young adults), and Mary Kay Zuravleff, whose just-published *The Frequency of Souls* won the 1994 First Novel Fellowship awarded annually by the Society.

As in the past, current Society members are registered automatically for the symposium. Anyone wishing to attend the workshop needs to complete a separate registration form and pay a modest fee. To receive more information about the writers' workshop, contact the UIS Continuing Education Office at 217/786-6073. UIS English faculty will evaluate up to 10 pages of manuscript from work-in-progress for each participant and select the three best submissions for recognition at a special lunch for workshop registrants. Take advantage of this chance to have your draft professionally critiqued!

The program committee--George Hendrick, Kaylie Jones, Mike Lennon, Tom Wood and I--hope you can join us for all the festivities. To reserve a place at the symposium luncheon (separate from the lunch for workshop participants), return the enclosed symposium luncheon form with advance payment; similarly, to reserve a spot at the symposium banquet, complete the enclosed banquet reservation form and send it along with your check.

If you plan to fly into Springfield, convenient commuter connections can be made through American, United, or TWA out of Chicago or St. Louis. If you wish to stay

overnight, several motels near campus have competitive rates: Holiday Inn (217/529-7171), Hampton Inn (529-1100), Best Western (529-6611), and Days Inn (529-0171).

I look forward to welcoming you to my campus and community. UIS and Springfield are honored to host the Society and to help it perpetuate the literary legacy of James Jones.

--Judith Everson, President

### **A Real Pager-Turner**

The following is excerpted from the Life and Letters section of the Spring 1996 edition of *The American Scholar*:

I am talking here about tomes. A tome is, technically, a volume forming part of a larger work, or a large or scholarly book. I myself think of a tome purely in terms of heft, and a book doesn't have to be scholarly to qualify. Tome-don sets in, in my opinion, somewhere around 550 pages. The first tome I can remember reading is James Jones' best-seller *From Here to Eternity* (1951), which I devoured in high school in its closely printed 860 paperback pages. I read *From Here to Eternity* straight through, at no point slowed by a critical sense, an interest in style, or a concern about what I (not yet thinking myself a writer) could steal from it for my own purposes. Pure pleasure, it was the literary equivalent of wolfing down a box of chocolates, all with nougat centers. When it was over, I was a bit sated, a bit sad, but otherwise a perfectly satisfied customer.

--Aristides, *The American Scholar*, Vol. 65:2 (Spring 1996)

### **A Special Thank You**

The Board of Directors of The James Jones Literary Society would like to thank George Plimpton, editor of *The Paris Review* and an honorary member of the Society, for his generosity in printing a full-page notice about the recipients of the 1995 First Novel Fellowship Award in the Winter 1995 issue of the Review.

### **They Shall Inherit The Laughter: A Fresh Look**

By Greg Randle

**Editor's Note: Randle received an M.A. in English from Sangamon State University. He was awarded the English Program's Best Thesis Award for "James Jones' First Romance: An Examination of They Shall Inherit the**

**Laughter." A native of Hutsonville, Illinois, in Jones' Crawford County, Randle now lives in St. Cloud, Minnesota. He is director of Hope Community Support Program, which assists people with serious mental illnesses in community living.**

*They Shall Inherit the Laughter*, James Jones' apprentice novel about American soldiers returning home from World War II combat, lies obscurely in the background of his prolific writing career. As Jones' immediate reaction to the war, however, the novel itself is far from obscure. The autobiographical *Laughter* sheds fresh lights on Jones' development as a writer by providing a very personal view of his thoughts and emotions as he launched his career as a writer and made his first serious attempt to express his own vision. In a December 31, 1945, letter to Maxwell Perkins, the legendary editor of Charles Scribners Sons, Jones makes this fact exceptionally clear. Announcing that he was ready to submit the 788-page manuscript of *Laughter* for publication, the young and unpublished author wrote, "Everything I've ever seen or heard or felt has gone into the writing of this book."

Despite Jones' "unshakable" confidence in *Laughter*, it was never published (excerpts were published in *The James Jones Reader*, 1991). Among criticism leveled at the novel were that it lacked "technique" and contained "too much self-pity and bitterness." Urged by Perkins and his \$500 advance, and buoyed by Scribners' editor John Hall Wheelock's comment that *Laughter* was "a serious attempt to do a big piece of work," Jones began, somewhat begrudgingly, on *From Here to Eternity*, which propelled him to fame in 1951.

*They Shall Inherit the Laughter* describes the overwhelming spiritual and emotional crises of young soldiers returning from the trauma of overseas combat to a United States overrun by materialism and shallow self-preserving patriotism, a country whose citizens don't even try to understand their problems. It focuses primarily upon Johnny Carter, clearly based upon Jones, who returns AWOL to his hometown in southwestern Indiana.

Although Carter's intense anger and bitterness, manifested by continually drunkenness and pugnacity, threaten to envelop and destroy him throughout much of the novel, he progresses toward a spiritual awakening largely because of nurturance from an older woman named Corny Marion. Corny, clearly modeled on Lowney Handy, Jones' literary adviser, financial supporter and lover during the apprentice novel's composition, follows an Emersonian philosophy of simply living and faith in human potential to bring about social change. This philosophy is the foundation from which she ministers to Johnny as he struggles to find his own peace after the dehumanizing experience of war.

Essentially, the spiritual progression that Corny encourages and that Johnny experiences, follows Ralph Waldo Emerson's teachings. In some instances, Jones' writing is patterned directly on Emerson's, even using his imagery. As Johnny progresses slowly from disillusionment to optimism, following what Emerson calls "invisible steps of thought," the significant changes he undergoes come about through his gaining the knowledge needed to perceive himself and the world around him in a very different way than he does at the beginning of the novel. At novel's end, Johnny has tremendous faith in his own power as an individual and expresses his dream to work and fight for his ideals and against social injustice.

In another letter to Perkins written late in 1945, Jones recalled Perkins' complaint from an earlier submission of the novel that his manuscript "lacked resolution." Jones wrote, "In searching for resolution for the book, I also found a great deal of resolution for myself." When the editor again rejected the novel, writing that it needed "perspective," he knew that Jones was much too close to the circumstances of his own life. His anger was much too fresh, giving most of the novel a shrill tone, and his "resolution" was too recent to come off as highly sentimental. But this period in Jones' life was critical to his future development. If it had not been for the emotional release that virtually spills out onto the pages of *Laughter*, Jones might not have developed the stamina and the will that he generated in his struggle to write, especially his very next novel, *From Here to Eternity*.

Although Jones abandoned work on *Laughter* early in his career, the novel was the foundation for all of his literary work, especially the war trilogy, *From Here to Eternity*, *The Thin Red Line* (1962), and *Whistle* (1978). In the trilogy, Jones returned to the unpublished novel's major theme of the individual's struggle for meaning and significance in an increasingly technological and bureaucratic world. Although Jones tempered his Emersonian optimism regarding social change, Emerson's belief in looking within the individual for Truth, and in uniting the human body and soul through spiritual awareness, continued to guide Jones in writing his fictional accounts of the changes forced upon individual soldiers in combat. These changes are seen most notably in Jones' concept of "combat numbness," and more extensively in the trilogy's unifying element, "the evolution of a soldier."

As the harbinger of Jones' literary aspirations, *They Shall Inherit the Laughter* should rise from obscurity. The fresh perspective that it brings to Jones' body of work further illuminates the author as an intelligent, talented and sensitive writer whose deepest, most enduring concern was for the individual human spirit.

**From Eternity to Django: An Interview With James Jones**

**Editor's Note: The following is excerpted from a 1960 article that appeared in the jazz magazine, *Metronome*:**

HOPPER: I understand you've picked Django as the subject for a novel. Why?

JONES: Back in Illinois, I happened to hear two sides of Django's *St. Louis Blues* and *Honeysuckle Rose*. Two of the things he had done with Coleman Hawkins and Benny Carter. Then I read a book about him by Charles Delauney, the French jazz critic, and this got me in even deeper. About that time, I began to correspond with a young French drummer. He was intrigued by my interest in the guitarist. You know, there was a part in *From Here to Eternity* that had to do with Django. Well, he had read that, and his interest stimulated my own ideas.

I arrived in France in September '58 and began talking with some of Django's friends, people who had known him throughout his lifetime. They told me all sorts of conflicting things about him. Some said he was irresponsible, others that he was simply being himself, the artist. Whether good or bad, all the opinions were violent. Although some of the French were angry because he had remained in France during the war, I never heard anyone even suggest that he was a collaborator. There is even a story that the Resistance had worked out an intricate code system using his records, but that has never been proven either.

HOPPER: How exactly do you picture Django as the subject of your novel?

JONES: I don't picture him so much as a subject as an object. By this I mean that the other main characters regard Reinhardt as a "person of desire," as a person they try to utilize to their own ends, when it is he, in the end, who dominates them all. He begins as their object, to be used and turned, but in fact, because of his own strengths, in part, he remains untouched. The others find that they are attempting to control the uncontrollable. Like many artists, my character's desires are really simple: He merely wants to get drunk, sleep with women, play his music. His needs are not so intellectually complicated as are those of others.

HOPPER: Your novel, in other words, is not going to be a strictly factual treatment of the man's life?

JONES: No. It will not be biographical in that sense. Everybody thinks of him as a very romantic character. That he certainly was, forming quintets, then disappearing for months to go off with the gypsies. But he must have been more than all that. I want to get at the base of it, at the core of the man himself, devoid of all the myths that surround him....

HOPPER: Many writers of the younger generation owe more or less an allegiance to the Beat Generation school. Much of what makes jazz "go," they have tried to incorporate into their writing. Examples are people like Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso. What is your reaction to this kind of literary treatment with such deep jazz undertones?

Well, of course, they differ very much from my own approach to writing. I think that much of the language indigenous to jazz is necessarily a part of the immediacy of jazz itself. Expressions popular among the Harlem hipsters, the real origin of so much jazz talk, only last a short time. Partly this is due to the performers and aficionados who deliberately change their language so as to keep it a private thing. Now, in writing, dialogue is only approximation, at best. This attempt by the Beatniks to record a special type of language limits and marks their works for a certain definite period. Scott Fitzgerald gave a legitimate picture of the Jazz Age, a picture that will last, because he did not depend strictly on reproducing the "hip talk" of the time, phrases that he knew would change and be forgotten, thus marking his work as something as limited and fading as a photographic reproduction. But Fitzgerald was an artist. The writing of the Beatniks is attempting to be too much of an emotional release for frustrations, for nameless problems.

HOPPER: Isn't that a legitimate field of art?

JONES: Of course it is a legitimate field of art. All art in a way is the working out of emotional frustration. But the Beatniks, in being rebellious, confuse the discipline imposed by society by the way of governmental laws, sexual mores, and the like, with the discipline imposed by the artist upon his work. The rules society crams down our throats today are more than the proper field of art: They should be rebelled against. But not at the expense of art...."

--John Hopper, *Metronome*, Vol. 77 (July 1960)