

# The James Jones Literary Society Newsletter

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## **Workshop, Special Guests Highlight '96 Symposium**

In an election season like the one just concluded, frequent references to the state of the "body politic" remind us how routinely we compare the health of individuals with the vitality of institutions. In organizations, as in the members who comprise them, there are only two options: growth and development on the one hand, or stagnation and decline on the other. Because the unknown is always uncharted territory, embracing change can be risky--but avoiding it can be even costlier.

Now entering its sixth year, The James Jones Literary Society is still young. Yet it is already taking appropriate steps to consolidate past gains and pursue future opportunities.

One recent example of our willingness to accept the challenge of change was the decision to hold the 1996 symposium at a site other than Robinson, Ill., where Jones was born in 1921 and where the Society that honors his life as well as his work was established in 1991. Despite the complications involved in hosting the symposium away from Society headquarters at Lincoln Trail College, members voted in 1995 to move the event periodically in order to draw new audiences and seek fresh sources of

support. By agreeing to return to Robinson at least every three years, however, the Society reaffirmed its roots and struck a workable balance between honoring its traditions and extending its outreach.

The 1996 symposium, held Nov. 2 at the University of Illinois at Springfield (UIS), attracted an enthusiastic audience of both stalwarts and newcomers. About 40 individuals, many from the local campus and community, participated in a concurrent writers' workshop conducted by Society members and professional authors Kaylie Jones, Richard Peck and Mary Kay Zuravleff. Besides getting sound advice on how to complete and market their work, registrants received complimentary one-year memberships in the Society.

Workshop participants constituted part of the audience of about 150 who saw the moving documentary, *James Jones: Reveille to Taps* (which was introduced and screened by Michael Lennon in the morning, and who heard the memorable keynote address delivered by Willie Morris in the afternoon. Lennon had co-edited and co-produced the video while on the ENGLISH faculty of Sangamon State University, now UIS.

The reception at the Illinois State Library gave visitors to Springfield a chance to find Jones' name enshrines along with those of 34 other literary luminaries on the new building's frieze and to see his books displayed in the Illinois Authors Room, where Morris, Peck and Zuravleff autographed copies of their latest works. A further local connection to Jones was explored at the symposium through the informative exhibits mounted by Society archivist Tom Wood, who also moderated an interesting panel discussion of recent research on Jones. Both the exhibits and the panelists drew on materials from the Handy Writers' Colony collection, which came to SSU during production of the video and which are housed in the UIS library.

Attending the symposium for the first time were guest of honor Gloria Jones, wife of James Jones, and Kristina Valaitis, executive director of the Illinois Humanities Council, which has helped to fund the Society's past symposia. In addition, members of my graduate seminar on World War II in American fiction were present to learn more about the author of one of their assigned novels, Jones' powerful portrait of combat, *The Thin Red Line*.

Eager to build on the success of this year' symposium, the board of directors has already begun to plan next year's event, which is scheduled for Saturday, Nov. 1, 1997. UIS will again serve as the site, but the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign will co-sponsor the event, and George Hendrick (founding president of the Society and retiring member of the UIUC English Department) will act as my co-host. We welcome your feedback on the 1996 program and suggestions for the 1997

one. More details will follow in the future newsletters, but mark your calendars now! With your support, the best is yet to come.

--Judith Everson, President

## **Minutes Of The James Jones Literary Society Annual Meeting, November 2, 1996**

President Judith Everson welcomes all members and opened the meeting.

Secretary Helen Howe read the treasurer's report on behalf of Society treasurer Juanita Martin. The Society had a balance of \$8,007.81. After current bills were paid, there was expected to be a remainder of \$6,856.96. Additional revenue was received at the annual meeting, as well.

Howe also reported that there are 265 members of the Society--an increase of 23 more than the previous year. Fifty-eight life members, two honorary members and 53 complimentary members are included in that total.

Mike Lennon reported on the First Novel Fellowship program. A total of 560 manuscripts were submitted this year. Each was read twice, and those meriting further attention were read three times. Each applicant submitted 50 pages, and 35 semifinalists were asked for another 50 pages. Thirty-one applicants complied, and that group was then narrowed to 10 finalists. Each finalist received a letter of congratulations from the Society and a short critique of their writing, indicating strengths and weaknesses. The board voted that the submission fee be increased to \$15. This is one of the Society's most important activities because it brings the Society national recognition. Much credit must be given to the judges and readers for their work.

The Lincoln Trail College Short Story Award program received three submissions, and the winner is Matt Green, 1 1996 LTC graduate and current student at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale. The title of his story is *A Hundred Large*. The board adopted the following changes in the program rules: 1) No previous winner may submit again; 2) No LTC faculty or staff member may submit an entry; and 3) The winner will receive a critique of his/her writing.

Lennon also reported on the Nominating Committee, which consists of himself and George Hendrick. Four people were added to the board, and the board size was increased to 22. Willie Morris, one of the greatest friends of the Society, became an honorary member of the board. Mary McKinney asked that she not be renamed to the board. And George Hendrick resigned from the board. The new board members are

Richard King and Michael Mullen from Vincennes University; Warren Mason from the University of New Hampshire; and Margot Nightingale of Robinson, Ill. The following board members whose terms expire this year were re-appointed for another term: Jerry Bayne, Judith Everson, Patricia Heaman, Helen Howe and Maxine Zwermann.

The following slate of officers was approved: Judith Everson, president; Jerry Bayne, vice president and president-elect; Helen Howe, secretary; Juanita Martin, treasurer; and Tom Wood, archivist.

Everson gave the Program Committee report. The location for the 1997 conference was discussed. It was suggested that it be held in Marshall, Ill., but there were too many difficulties. It was determined that it would be better to have the 1997 symposium at the University of Illinois at Springfield, with the collaboration of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The manuscripts of *From Here To Eternity* and *The Pistol* from the university library's Rare Book Section will be brought to the meeting. Further plans will be announced later. Sept. 27, 1997, is the temporary date for the symposium, with a backup date of Nov. 1.

The 1998 meeting will be in Robinson, Ill., at Lincoln Trail College and will feature Marshall and Robinson elements. The Society hoped to have the 1997 meeting in Madison, Ind., where *Some Came Running* was filmed, but the problems were too great. Indiana does not have a funding organization like the Illinois Humanities Council to help with program costs. The Society also does not have any contact or association within Hanover College. Another location being considered is Southampton College on Long Island, N.Y. Kaylie Jones is teaching there now, and it is located near James Jones' burial site. Kurt Vonnegut and other friends of Jones' live in the area, as well.

In other matters, the Society's newsletter will now be published four times a year. Submissions of relevant material are welcome for consideration. Lennon is soliciting essays on each of James Jones' books. Tom Wood is working with the archivists at the University of Texas-Austin on the Jones collection houses there. They have proposed his working with the collection and are negotiating a possible loan time for him. Jerry Bayne announced that the Society received not-for-profit status within the state of Illinois and said the next step would be to seek the designation on the federal level.

--Helen Howe, Secretary

**Vassar Instructor Receives 1996 First Novel Award**

Vassar College English teacher Greg Herbeck is the 1996 winner of the Society's First Novel Fellowship Award for his novel-in-progress, *The Hindenburg Crashes Nightly*.

The \$2,500 award was presented to Herbeck at the sixth annual James Jones Literary Society symposium Nov. 2 in Springfield, Ill.

Herbeck, 27, is a recent graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop and the recipient of a 1995 James Michener Fellowship. Prior to entering the workshop, he taught kindergarten for three years in San Francisco and New York.

His novel explores a young man's contemporary experience of abortion and his childhood memories of his mother's fatal decision to carry a high-risk pregnancy to term.

The Society's fellowship program is intended to honor the spirit of the unblinking honesty, determination and insight into modern culture exemplified by James Jones, who also received aid from many supporters as a young writer.

This year's recipient was chosen by a panel composed of J. Michael Lennon, vice president for academic affairs at Wilkes University; Patricia B. Heaman, English department chair at Wilkes; Kaylie Jones, novelist and daughter of James Jones; Jon Shirota, a California writer; and Kevin Heisler, a New York City writer.

### **Tales From The Army**

I belong to many division associations and other societies, but I certainly don't want my membership in this Society to expire. I had corresponded with James in 1975 when I was writing the 25th Infantry Division (Tropic Lightning) history and sent him a copy of the manuscript. But he died before I had the history printed, and Kaylie sent the manuscript back to me.

I have read all of James' books and also Kaylie's first book. I was assigned to Schofield Barracks in 1953 and arrived just after *From Here To Eternity* had been filmed in old Quad D. (This was James' old quad just before Pearl Harbor.) I was the C.O. of Company FHITC (Hawaiian Infantry Training Center), and my trainees had to repair the damage to the quad turf that occurred during the filming. Planted charges were inserted to simulate Japanese machine gun firing from a plane. The Division returned from Korean in 1954, and I turned the quad over to the 27th Wolfhound Regiment (James' old regiment). So I feel that I had some association with James' great story about WWII.

--Melvin C. Walthall, Maj. Inf., Aus. Ret. Wichita, Kansas

## **Famous Love Scene Receives Praise**

In his article, "Islands on the Screen," appearing in a recent issue of *Hawaii Magazine* (October 1996), Jim Borg looks at movies filmed in the Hawaiian Islands about the islands and other places.

Praising its "geographical integrity," he singles out the torrid scene in *From Here To Eternity* in which Milt Warden (Burt Lancaster) and Karen Holmes (Deborah Kerr) kiss passionately in the sand at Cockroach Beach (Halona Cove) near the Halona Blowhole.

"What's satisfying to a Hawaii-lover," Borg writes, "is that the scene takes place exactly where it's supposed to--at the very East Oahu beach specified in James Jones' novel."

Interestingly, though, in the novel *Eternity*, Jones did not specifically have Warden and Holmes embraced in this famous love scene. He has them wading "nude, out into the water, hand in hand...."

--Carl Becker

## **Poetry vs. Philosophy**

It is true that social scientists interpret all the time, but it is not true that they interpret imaginatively. Consider the standard assigned text of my student days, *The American Soldier*. It taught far less about peace-time armies than *From Here To Eternity* by James Jones, or about war-time armies than *The Naked and the Dead* by Norman Mailer. It (*The American Soldier*) was full of information, but of the kind we knew already, such as there is no love lost between enlisted men and noncommissioned officers. The book did not help us to get to know soldiers from the inside. It did not teach us about fear and courage, as we learned from *The Red Badge of Courage*.

--Werner J. Dannhauser, Michigan State University, *PS: Political Science & Politics*, Vol. XXVII: No. 2 (June 1995)

## **Jones Nominated To Appear On Stamp**

An ad hoc committee composed of Society board members Warren Mason, Robert Thobaben and Carl Becker is preparing to submit a nomination to the Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee of the U.S. Postal Service for James Jones to be featured on a stamp in the Literary Arts series. The process leading to approval is long and can be tedious because the advisory committee receives approximately 40,000 nominations a

year. However, board members are optimistic and believe that, eventually, the nomination will win approval.

### **Filming To Begin Next Year On *The Thin Red Line***

The screenplay has been in the works since 1989, but a film version of *The Thin Red Line* looks to become a reality in the near future.

Writer and director Terrence Malick has completed the meticulous screenplay for theater and from producers Michael Geisler and John Roberdeau, and casting is currently underway. Malick also will direct the production, which is scheduled to begin principal photography in Queensland, Australia, in June 1997.

Malick's past two films (which he wrote and directed) earned him numerous accolades. *Badlands* (1973), with Sissy Spacek and Martin Sheen, won the San Sebastian Festival gold prize, and *Days of Heaven* (1978), with Brooke Adams, Richard Gere, Sam Shepard and Linda Manz, received best film honors from the New York Film Critics, the National Society of Film Critics and the National Board of Review. Malick received the New York Film Critics Circle Award and the 31st Cannes Film Festival Award for best director.

"She (Gloria Jones) reviewed several earlier scripts and liked it," Roberdeau said, pointing out that Malick retained nearly every major character that appears in the novel.

The filming and editing process is expected to take about 10 months to complete.

### **Merchant-Ivory To Film Kaylie Jones' First Novel**

Author and board member Kaylie Jones' first book, *A Soldier's Daughter Never Cries* (1990), is being made into a movie by filmmakers James Ivory and Ismael Merchant and will star Nick Nolte and Sean Young.

*A Soldier's Daughter* is a fictional reminiscence of Jones' childhood in Paris about a young girl and the relationship with her adopted brother. Ruth Praver Jhabvala wrote the screen adaptation, and Jones is serving as a consultant.

Jones is James Jones' daughter and teaches writing at Southampton College and Long Island University-Southampton.

### **Award-Winning Novel Celebrates 'Average, Awkward Souls'**

Winner of The James Jones Literary Society First Novel Fellowship, Mary Kay Zuravleff's *The Frequency of Souls* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux) fuses humor and seamless craftsmanship in an original, suspenseful story of an electrical engineer who learns to question the science-based philosophy that has guided his life, as well as the import of automatic butter-softeners.

As the novel opens, 39-year-old George Mahony, who has redesigned Coldpoint refrigerators for 14 of his 16 married years, finds solace in statistics and figures, in the explicable certainty of physical laws. Since building his first radio set from "glass tubes and a spool of thread," he has believed that "the universe was soldered together with logic." When the senior engineer known to all at Coldpoint as "the Veteran" is replaced by Niagara Spense, a young, gawky woman who wears thick glasses, a hearing aid and the same homemade dress in a different color every day, George is sparked by both his new officemate's metaphysical mindset and physical proximity. After Niagara reveals her unusual airwave experiments--she listens for the dead over radio frequencies--George realizes that he has grown complacent both in his quest for refrigerator breakthroughs and in his marriage. He becomes obsessed with life possibilities he has neither considered nor realized, as well as with his new co-worker who spends her disposable income on satellite dishes.

A comparison to the work of John Barth seems natural here, given that Barth not only provides comment on the back of the book's jacket, but was one of Zuravleff's teachers. This first novel has the fresh inventiveness and wit of Barth's fiction as well as its central preoccupation with scientific phenomena. Coincidentally, Barth's latest collection of stories, *On With the Story* (1996), adopts recent theories of quantum physics as its dominant metaphors, while Zuravleff artfully weaves her characters' lives with the latest advancements in refrigeration technology, paleontology and air-wave frequencies. Zuravleff adeptly and comically exposes absurdities that arise from interactions between humanity and technology. Following the memorial service of the engineering "Veteran" (a pioneer of refrigerator self-defrosting who has elected to be frozen indefinitely via cryogenics), his son raises an ice bowl overhead in a toast: "To my father. May he chill in peace."

Clever connections and word play coupled with engrossing particulars about scientific research enliven *The Frequency of Souls*; unlike Barth, however, Zuravleff does not direct the reader's attention to techniques of writing itself--to the verbal circuitry that makes her fiction hum. (Except for a self-conscious reference to George's avoiding the latest Stephen Spielberg blockbuster about dinosaurs because he "hated anyone mixing science and fiction."). While booting up myriad images of hard-drives, backed-up data disks, hydro-chloroflourocarbons and solar-powered, even see-through refrigerators, Zuravleff's fiction ultimately celebrates the average, awkward

souls in waffle-soled safety shoes who attempt to take heat-exchange technology into the future. As the title suggests, this fiction concerns itself with both physical and spiritual worlds, as well as the mysterious, baffling forces that entwine them inextricably. Grappling with the unknowns of science, as well as with their own inadequacies, philosophies and fears, Zuravleff's engaging characters create comic sparks of their own in a novel that infuses our computerized world with the breath of life.

--Barbara Burkhardt