

# The James Jones Literary Society Newsletter

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## **Next Symposium To Feature War Historian**

With spring just making its long-awaited appearance, it may seem unseasonable to introduce a hint of autumn. However, I share such exciting news about the 1997 Symposium--scheduled for Saturday, Nov. 1, at the University of Illinois at Springfield--that I can't wait to share it.

Paul Fussell, distinguished author of 13 books, including several on modern warfare, has agreed to deliver the keynote address. His background as a veteran of World War II, a literary scholar and a cultural historian equip him admirably to explore the legacy of James Jones from the perspective of fact as well as fiction.

In 1944, as a young second lieutenant, Fussell assumed command of a combat rifle platoon in France. In 1945 he was wounded by shrapnel. Despite his wounds, he underwent training for an anticipated Allied invasion of Japan. When the United States dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, ending the war, he resumed his higher education, earning a master's and a Ph.D. from Harvard.

After publishing four works of literary criticism between 1954 and 1971, Fussell won the National Book Award for his nonfiction study of World War I, titled *The Great*

War and Modern Memory. Here he argued that traditional approaches to understanding and interpreting war as heroic had been discredited by the extraordinary carnage of World War I.

In a subsequent volume, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (1989), Fussell acknowledged the necessity of World War II while challenging its mythical status as the last "good" war. His most recent work, *Doing Battle: The Making of a Skeptic* (1996), is both a personal memoir and a probing portrait of America's quest for identity in the volatile and violent world of the 20th century.

Fussell also is noted for his essay *Thank God for the Atom Bomb*, which reassesses the continuing public debate over the necessity for using nuclear weapons to end World War II. In 1991 he edited an important anthology titled *The Norton Book of Modern War*.

Society members will not want to miss the opportunity to hear Fussell, who in *Wartime* calls Jones' *The Thin Red Line* "perhaps the best" of novels about World War II. So mark your calendar and watch this column in future issues for more details.

--*Judith Iverson, President*

### **Film Company Lining Up Cast For Thin Red Line**

Casting for *The Thin Red Line*, scheduled to begin filming in Australia and Guadalcanal in June, is progressing with *Variety* reporting commitments from actors George Clooney, Nick Nolte, Sean Penn, Viggo Mortensen and Woody Harrelson to date.

James Jones' "other" World War II novel, often considered the best combat novel from the war, is being developed for the screen by Phoenix Pictures as "the return vehicle for director Terrence Malick," who hasn't directed a film since 1978's *Days of Heaven*.

The entertainment industry newspaper reported that actors are eager for the opportunity to work with Malick on the story of the 1942 Guadalcanal battle in which Jones fought and was wounded.

### **ETERNITY HALL**

**DEDICATED IN MEMORY OF THE GALLANT AND BRAVE SOLDIERS STATIONED AT SCHOFIELD BARRACKS WHO DIED SERVING THEIR COUNTRY DURING WWII. "ETERNITY HALL" DERIVES ITS NAME**

**FROM THE NOVEL FROM HETER TO ETERNITY BY JAMES JONES, WHO LIVED IN THE HALLOWED HALLS OF D QUAD, SCHOFIELD BARRACKS, DURING PART OF HIS U.S. ARMY SERVICE, 1939-1945. HIS NOVEL, WRITTEN FOLLOWING HIS SERVICE, CENTERS AROUND LIFE AT SCHOFIELD BARRACKS PRIOR TO THE ATTACK ON PEARL HARBOR. FROM HERE TO ETERNITY MADE JAMES JONES FAMOUS; IT RECEIVED THE NATIONAL BOOK AWARD FOR FICTION IN 1951, AND LATER SERVED AS THE BASIS FOR A FILM OF THE SAME TITLE WHICH RECEIVED THREE ACADEMY AWARDS.**

*A plaque with the above inscription now adorns a room in D Quad. A special ceremony was held at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, on April 2 to dedicate Eternity Hall in the memory of the brave soldiers who served at Schofield Barracks and to recognize Jones. The author's son, Jamie, was present at the dedication.*

### **Author Tips His Hat in 'Deal'**

The influence of James Jones continues to show up in some interesting places. For Dave and Judy Iverson, the most recent example occurred when they were on a flight to Phoenix. Dave was enjoying Les Standiford's novel, *Raw Deal*, about the escapades of hero John Deal, when he (Dave) spotted an extended reference to James Jones' love of fishing in Florida, where the novel was set.

Upon their return home, the Eversons wrote to Standiford, who is a professor of English and director of creative writing at Florida International University in Miami, where Jones had taught as writer-in-residence in 1974-75. Standiford granted permission for the excerpt to be reprinted in this issue and described his connection to Jones.

Although their tenure at FIU did not overlap, as Standiford joined the faculty in 1981, he reports that Jones is still a legend on campus for his kindness, good humor and willingness to work the registration tables at the start of the semester. "I have long been a fan of Mr. Jones' work," Standiford says. His Harper-Collins series includes *Done Deal*, *Raw Deal*, *Deal to Die For* and--most recently--*Deal on Ice*.

Plattner turned out to be a bluff man who looked like he might have exchanged a few shots in the ring in an earlier life. There were a couple of prints of hunting dogs on the walls of his office, a fisherman's vest on a coatrack, a battered copy of *From Here to Eternity* on his desk. Plattner noticed Deal looking at the book.

"He used to live here, you know that?"

Deal turned, surprised. "James Jones?" He'd seen the film. He'd grown up idolizing Burt Lancaster.

"Yeah, toward the end of his life, right after he came back from Paris." Plattner was finishing a sandwich wrapped in white paper. "I ran into him at a fish camp out in the Everglades." He made a gesture with one of his sizable hands. "I'm not much of a reader, but I read that book." Plattner nodded. "He signed it, too."

Deal reached for the book, opened the cover. Pages yellowing, crumbling around the edges. It gave off a smell like the libraries of his youth. On the title page was a florid scrawl in bleeding dark ink. To Doc P, Miami's for me. Jim.

"They had him up on an airboat, taking pictures for some tourist campaign," Plattner said. He wadded up the sandwich paper, tossed it into a waste can across the room. "One of the photographers leaned against the engine exhaust, fried a nice chunk of his shoulder, I happened to be there to fix him up."

Plattner shrugged, leaned back in his desk chair, smiled. "Anyway, Jim and I did some fishing, had a couple of drinks together. He really liked it down here."

Plattner stared off a moment, lost in thought, then turned back to Deal, apologetic. "But that's not what you wanted to talk about, was it?"

Deal put the book back on Plattner's desk. He remembered how upset he'd been with Dr. Constantine, realized how uncomfortable he was with this man, someone tuned into life as he knew it. "In a way, Dr. Plattner," Deal said. "In a way, it was."

Plattner stared at him a moment, then nodded. Finally he leaned forward in his chair, tented his fingers over a clutter of papers on his desk. "Your wife is in serious shape, I'm not going to kid you."

Deal felt his breath suck in, his stomach tighten. He couldn't find anything to say.

"She's going to make it," Plattner continued. "That's not what I'm talking about."

"What, then?" Deal stared at him, feeling helpless, desperate for any shard of hope or comfort.

"We're looking at a long process of healing," Plattner said. "Some intricate surgeries, a number of them, a fair amount of pain, a great deal of expense."

"Deal shook his head. "The money doesn't matter."

"Most difficult may be the psychological effects," Plattner said.

Deal glanced at him. "You're talking about Janice."

Platner nodded.

"Janice is tough, Doctor. She's the toughest person I know."

"And she's also a woman. A wife. A person who's received serious trauma to her features."

Deal stared at him, shaking his head slowly. ...

--from *Raw Deal* by Les Standiford

### **James Jones at the Jan. 19 Presidential Inauguration**

James Jones was included in the Illinois Society's ball at the Grand Hyatt Ballroom in Washington, D.C., for the Jan. 19 Presidential Inauguration. The ball featured a Heroes Hall, a gallery of several worthy Illinoisans that included Jones, architect Louis Sullivan and union leader John L. Lewis. I supplied the photo of Jones working in his trailer on *Some Came Running* in 1952 and the following biographical information on the author:

James Jones

Born November 6, 1921, in Robinson, Illinois; died May 9, 1977, in Southampton, Long Island, New York.

The writer James Jones is best remembered for his trilogy of realistic and gritty war novels, *From Here to Eternity* (1951), *The Thin Red Line* (1962) and *Whistle* (1978). Born and raised in Robinson, Illinois, Jones joined the U.S. Army soon after graduating from high school in 1939. He was stationed at Schofield Barracks on Oahu, where he witnessed the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. After being wounded at Guadalcanal in 1943, he was discharged and returned to Illinois, which remained his home until 1957. Illinois was the setting of his 1957 novel *Some Came Running*, as well as many of his short stories, collected in *The Ice-Cream Headache and Other Stories* (1968). His trilogy of war novels, which celebrate human dignity in the face of dehumanization of war, has been called "our most significant fictional treatment of U.S. involvement in World War II."

Suzanne Ing-New, who was in charge of the decorations for the Illinois State Ball, said it was "the hottest ticket in town," and that the Jones picture was "indispensable to use in making the theme of our Gala possible."

--*Thomas Wood, Archivist, University of Illinois at Springfield*

### **James Jones' *The Merry Month of May*: A 25th Anniversary Appraisal**

The month of May in France is a time of celebration. May 1, Labor Day, brings a three-day weekend. The anniversary of the end of World War II, May 8, is always a time of rejoicing. Then comes Ascension Thursday, at the end of May, which forms what the French call "a bridge," or a four-day vacation. May in France is truly a joyous month, a month of celebration, even ... a merry month.

James Jones uses the Paris student riots in the merry month of May 1968 as the backdrop to tackle deeper issues and moral conflicts. Perhaps his most underrated novel, *The Merry Month of May* (1971) dissects the lives of a group of American expatriates living in the psychedelic Paris of the late 1960s. The narrator of the novel is Jonathan James Hartley III, self-confessed failure in both literature and love. Through his eyes we see the tumult of the French student riots, the destruction of the expatriate Gallagher family, the excesses of the Gallagher family's friends and the romantic and sexual entanglements of all parties. Readers of this novel will discover the best use of an urban setting in any of Jones' works. On one level, the novel is about the Sorbonne student riots, but Jones' deeper purpose is to chastise the shallowness and materialism of this era.

He uses as a catalyst a young black woman, Samantha Everton. Setting the tragedy in motion, she hooks up with the younger Gallagher, son Hill, an unlikely leader in the volatile student movement. Harry, his father and a renowned Hollywood film writer and international sophisticate, becomes obsessed with Everton and this precipitates the destruction of both him and his family. As readers of the novel know, by the story's end Harry has deserted his family and the entire Gallagher entourage is devastated. Gallagher's wife is permanently hospitalized and daughter and son are irrevocably estranged. To the tragic end, Hartley, the amoral observer, does not take a stand against the immortality he has witnessed. Like Ishmael of *Moby Dick*, only Hartley remains to tell the tale: "And probably only I, of all the world, know what happened to them--in the merry month of May."

It is clear that Jones knew that there was a Cowboys-and-Indians posturing among the rebellious youth he observed in the streets of Paris--one similar to that of American hippies of the late '60s. While Jones himself was anti-establishment and a vocal critic of the hypocrisy of contemporary society, one can see both his contempt and pity for

the youth of that era, products of privileged upbringing. As the Gallagher son, Hill, berates his father: "You, with your money, rich, and writing those crappy films you write! Look at you, all of you: sitting there boozing it up! Boozers! Lushheads! Getting fat in the belly and fat in the mind! With your old Louis Treize and your ritzy apartment! ... After what your generation did to the world? ... Hypocrites! Absolute hypocrites, all of you! Well, we're going to pull you down. Pull the whole damn society down. Down around your ears."

While Jones is certainly not to be confused with the elder Gallagher, some of the latter's insights are not uncongenial to the novelist: "I don't like being told I'm an old-man member of a conservative Establishment who doesn't understand, and never knew what it was to revolt. ... Christ, didn't they hear about the war we fought with Hitler and Tojo? Didn't they ever hear about the Depression and the New Deal? The House Un-American Activities Committee in 1950? Who the hell do they think they are?"

Perhaps the most admirable attribute of this novel is its love of place. As Jones later noted after returning from a long tour of Europe in (says 1959, but he hadn't even moved there yet; probably '69), Paris had finally--surprisingly!--become his real home, a place where he was truly comfortable. Whether lovingly describing the cobblestone streets of the Old Quarter or Notre Dame as that "old stone barn, raised to tribal gods, ... sitting there on its haunches brooding over the bloodletting rituals of mankind for centuries. Beautiful and useless, squat[ting] over us all," his affection for Paris, its people and Gallic life permeates the novel. His Paris is one of fine restaurant meals, walks along the Seine, ancient neighborhoods, local characters and warm friendships.

It is clear that Jones uses his home at 10 Quai d'Orleans on the Isle St. Louis as the model for the Gallagher residence. Nowhere in the novel is the crazy effervescence of this era better captured than in the loving description of the Gallagher wooden bar and the fabled drinking rituals that surrounded it ("Ah, that bar."). Jones' own legendary hospitality often took place around a similar bar, which was originally a pulpit in a French church.

Did this novel deserve the critical drubbing it took at the time of publication? In a word, no. True, it is not one of his finest books. In *The Merry Month of May*, Jones was making a moral statement about the turbulent '60s. While some may consider the novel to be just a period piece, it remarkably transcends its time as an examination of generational conflict, history doomed to repeat itself, the political shallowness of post-World War II newly affluent youth and a magnificent appreciation of the world's most beautiful city.

A "merry month"? Not really, but for Jones' admirers an ever-memorable one. This novel still brings a joy of discovery to its readers a quarter of a century after publication.

-- *Warren E. Mason, Plymouth State College*

### **Farewell To A Society Friend: Charles T. Robb, 1934-1997**

Charles Robb, 63, longtime Society friend and Life Member, died in a Bangor, Maine, hospital on Feb. 1. He was a member of the Handy Writers' Colony in Marshall, Ill., from 1953-57 and continued corresponding with Lowney Handy about his writing until 1963.

Robb was grateful to the Colony for the guidance it provided aspiring writers and became a friend of James Jones, who was also in residence at the Colony during those years. When Robb learned of the Jones Society, he joined and began participating in its activities.

At the 1993 symposium in Robinson, Robb served on a panel about Jones and the Colony and shared a poem, "Kahaki Moon." That poem was in tribute to Jones and is reproduced in this issue as a tribute to Robb.

Ill health prevented Robb from making the trip to Springfield, Ill., for the 1996 symposium. But he wrote to the Board that he had drawn a will that left a generous bequest to the Society, half of which was to help underwrite the annual First Novel Fellowship and the other half of which was to support the Society's general mission.

Michael Lennon, former Society president, was named co-executor of the estate. He will arrange for Robb's papers to be deposited in the Handy Writers' Colony Collection at the University of Illinois at Springfield. The Board will confer in mid-April to determine the most appropriate and advantageous use of Robb's generous gift.