

The James Jones Literary Society Newsletter

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Ray Elliott and Vanessa Faurie, Editors

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Contribution Will Create Endowment For Fellowship

The James Jones Literary Society has received a generous gift of \$25,000 from board member Don Sackrider to support the James Jones First Novel Fellowship once the amount has been matched by other contributions.

Sackrider is also a charter member of the Society and was a participant in the Handy Writers' Colony in Marshall, Illinois.

To make a matching contribution, please send your check to Society board member J. Michael Lennon, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Wilkes University, Wilkes-Barre, PA 18766.

The English Department of Wilkes University administers the fellowship competition, now in its fifth year. When the gift has been matched, it will be used to underwrite the costs of the fellowship contest, including the \$2,500 annual prize.

Fellowship Winner's Book Garners More Recognition

This spring has brought further recognition for Mary Kay Zuravleff's novel *The Frequency of Souls*, winner of the 1994 James Jones First Novel Fellowship. On May 21 Zuravleff accepted the prestigious Rosenthal Award from John Updike, a previous winner, at ceremonies in New York City.

The award, which carries with it a \$5,000 prize, recognizes an American work of fiction published in the previous year and chosen by the American Academy of Arts and Letters for being "a considerable literary achievement" though not a commercial success. Zuravleff's novel was published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux in 1996. It joins works by such noted American writers as Bernard Malamud, John Knowles, Thomas Pynchon, Joyce Carol Oates and Alice Walker in earning this national recognition.

The Frequency of Souls also was a finalist in March for the Oklahoma Book Award, presented annually to the best book by a writer with a connection to that state. Zuravleff grew up in Oklahoma City.

Finally, her novel also was on the long list for the Orange Prize, an award given for the first time last year and designed to recognize the best novel by a woman published in England and in the English language. Although Zuravleff's book did not make the short list, she was honored to have been nominated for consideration. She is now at work on her second novel.

Article About Jones, Colony Appears In Historical Publication

A new article about Jones, Lowney Handy and the Colony appears as the cover story in the summer issue of the *Illinois Historical Journal*.

"Not following in the groove': Lowney Handy, James Jones and the Handy Colony for Writers," was written by Thomas J. Wood, Society archivist and co-curator of the Handy Colony Collection at the University of Illinois at Springfield. The article was developed from a paper delivered at the 1995 Illinois History Symposium in Springfield and will be illustrated with photos drawn from the Handy Colony Collection.

The article reviews the early lives of Jones and Handy, Jones' remarkable development as an acclaimed novelist, the evolution of Handy's teaching methods and the founding of the Handy Writers' Colony in Marshall, Illinois, in the late 1940s.

Young writers at the Colony lived in tents and barracks in the hot Illinois summers and underwent Lowney Handy's regimens (up at 5:30 a.m., coffee but no breakfast, calisthenics, and a morning spent at the typewriter, copying one of the "approved" writers like Hemingway and Wolfe, or working on a novel).

The article also analyzes some of the themes and ideas underlying the writings of Jones and other Colony writers. The Colony writers published about a dozen novels, written under the tutelage of Lowney Handy before her death in 1964.

Wood hopes the story will introduce a wider public to Jones' writings and to Lowney Handy and the Colony, a little-known and colorful episode in Illinois' cultural history. Also, the article may whet appetites for past Society president George Hendrick's forthcoming book on the Handy Colony.

The *Illinois Historical Journal* can be found in most academic and many public libraries. Copies of the summer 1997 issue are available for \$5 through the Illinois Historical Society, 1 Old Capitol Plaza, Springfield IL 62701-1507, or phone 217-782-2635.

South Seas Cinema Society Honors Jones

May 9, 1997, marked the 20th anniversary of the death of James Jones. A day later, the South Seas Cinema Society-headed by Ed Rampell-presented a tribute to Jones with an impressive program in Honolulu, co-sponsored by The James Jones Literary Society.

Included among the events was a screening of a World War II newsreel of the Solomon Islands campaign in which Jones fought; a video of the recent inauguration of Eternity Hall at Schofield Barracks; a talk by writer and war correspondent Moana Tregaskis, whose husband, Richard, wrote *Guadalcanal Diary*; and a presentation of the 1964 film version of *The Thin Red Line*.

Novelist Commented On *Thin Red Line*

Quote from a letter from the late French novelist Romain Gary to James Jones:

"*The Thin Red Line*, the line between man and beast, so easily crossed, is a realistic fable, symbolic without symbols, mythological and yet completely factual, a sort of *Moby Dick* without the white whale, deeply philosophical without any philosophising whatsoever. Touched by a weird, resigned and yet lighthearted, ironic and even optimistic acceptance of our animal nature, with constant flashes of a sly, dark, peculiar humor, written with a deceptive facility that is the mark of truly great writing, this extraordinary novel achieves epic proportions, through the magic of a joyful love of life and humanity, absolutely unique in contemporary literature. This book belongs to that vein of poetical realism, which is the rarest and to me the most precious thing in the whole history of the novel: It is essentially an epic love poem

about the human predicament, and like all great books it leaves one with a feeling of wonder and hope." April 22, 1962

Quoted from Presences: Contemporaries by Pierre Brodin, Paris: Nouvelles Editions Debresse, 1964

Thin Red Line Shows Jones' Clear, Mature View Of War

Editor's Note: As *The Thin Red Line* is being filmed in Australia and Guadalcanal this summer, Society board member Ray Elliott excerpted a section about the novel from a review of the trilogy he wrote after Jones' death in 1977 and the subsequent publication of *Whistle*, the last book in the trilogy.

... *The Thin Red Line* is one of the best books ever written about men in combat. Published 17 years after the end of World War II, Jones' attitude matured slightly--he maintained that his books were actually anti-war in scope--from his early excitement and curiosity about war; if this is not totally true in the book, then it certainly is in the dedication. It's not without a touch of irony that he dedicates the book: "This book is cheerfully dedicated to those greatest of all human endeavors, WAR and WARFARE; may they never cease to give us the pleasure, excitement and adrenal stimulation that we need, or provide us with the heroes, the presidents and leaders, the monuments and museums which we erect to them in the name of PEACE."

As in (*From Here to*) *Eternity*, Jones is the universal soldier. Only this time the honor of the individual isn't what's at stake. Honor doesn't keep you alive. Survival does, survival of the individual soldier in any way possible. And survival is all that counts in combat. The glory of war quickly vanishes. You see the collective behavior of a cross-section of American men forced into a situation where they have no choice except to fight; you see man at his lowest, most base level. Patriotism means no more to Jones' combat soldiers than it did to their later counterparts in Vietnam. Only in World War II there was nowhere to go. They fought. And the evolution of a soldier (that Jones writes about throughout his work) takes the final step.

(Milt) Warden, who seemed eager to go to war at the time of Pearl Harbor when he gleefully went to the barracks roof to shoot at Japanese fighter planes, isn't quite so eager to fight as (Edward) Welch on Guadalcanal. He's still cynical and hard-nosed and takes care of his men. But "the way Welch chose to see it, he had beaten the Depression in his country, and now today, November 10, 1942, he was preparing to pay for it." Welch knows that war is for one thing: property. With which he wants nothing to do. He seems almost content with his canteens full of gin; he volunteers for nothing, does his job and usually nothing more--exactly what Jones later said he did. Not much glory in that. It does make survival easier.

Only Witt (resurrected from Robert E. Lee Prewitt in *Eternity*) seems to be unconcerned about survival. Still the rebel, he has been transferred to another company as a troublemaker. He rejoins the company to fight when he pleases and according to whether he's under the command of someone he respects. The soldiers' soldier, Witt swears he'll never return to the company after the green company commander makes a tactical error and all but two of a squad-sized patrol Witt is on are killed. Shortly before the company leaves for New Georgia, however, Witt returns. His loyalty is with the company. But he's still much like Prewitt, fighting for his individuality, demanding that his superiors be as competent a soldier as he is. Yet he's a different man from Prewitt.

Jones' understanding of the emotions of men in combat and his knowledge of military tactics are overwhelming. The reader participates, vicariously, in the strategies and battles for each hill. He feels with the men, for them. And he knows that Jones is articulating what thousands of combat veterans know but slowly forget as the years pass, and they begin to lose the feeling of what it was like--the de-evolution of a soldier that Jones writes about. Perhaps that's why Jones says at the end of the book as the survivors of C-for-Charlie leave the island to prepare for the New Georgia campaign: "One day one of their number would write a book about all this, but none would believe it, because none of them would remember it that way."

Or perhaps it's because Jones is the universal soldier, believing that "a writer should be able to be everybody," remembering it all. Even the old cigar-stomping doctor who treats Fife for an identical head wound that Jones received on Guadalcanal has evolved as a soldier. Fife wants to be evacuated, even though the wound isn't serious. "Quite suddenly his (the doctor's) smile disappeared from around the cigar butt in it. His eyes got flatter, as if some veil had fallen over them. ...

... "Old Doc Haines stared back at him obdurately now. 'I don't make the rules, son,' he said. 'I just try to live by them.'"

Fife goes back. He has no choice. This time he learns that he, too, can kill. And does. Death becomes routine, a part of the brutality of war; it's natural--as long as it's not your own. But as Prewitt thinks in *Eternity*, "When you cut with life you had to use the house deck, not your own." Combat doesn't deal a very good hand, and Jones leaves no illusion in *The Thin Red Line* that it does. Even for the survivors. ...

... The evolution and de-evolution of a soldier depicted in the trilogy does not paint a pretty picture. But these are the men who fight the wars in this country, in every country. Jones shows the men and the way they live while they're off fighting the wars in the name of freedom, high ideals and moralistic philosophies conceived by people who don't fight the wars.

Critics who find fault with more than Jones' writing have said that the only thing he found meaningful in life other than war was sex. And casual, mechanical sex at that. Perhaps. But Jones wrote about soldiers, about war and warfare. The sex, like the drinking, the fighting, the gambling, is an integral part of soldiering, as real as life itself. And James Jones wrote about soldiering the way it was, is.

- Ray Elliott

Whistle More Than Final Volume Of Trilogy

The seeds for *Whistle* and the plan for *From Here to Eternity* can be found in a letter from James Jones to his brother upon learning of their father's suicide. (James Jones) wrote: ". . . life, just like the sea, had never lost a battle yet. Perhaps it has been thwarted for a time, but it always comes back in the last quarter to score again, for the game has no final whistle. It ends only when you quit or cannot fight some more."

In *Whistle*, Jones brings back the same characters he had used in his previous war novels, *Eternity* and *The Thin Red Line*. Martin Winch is a reincarnation of Milt Warden; Johnny Strange derives from Maylon Stark; Bobby Prell is Prewitt; and the fourth character, Marion Landers is drawn from Fife in *The Thin Red Line* and directly from Jones himself. On the hospital ship that brings them back from the South Pacific, and in the hospital in Luxor, which stands in as a composite of both Memphis and Nashville, the four establish a brotherhood that derives entirely from their having been members of the same regimental company. The very military institution that turned their lives into a nightmare now gives them the only meaning they have.

The testing ground for these four men is in their relationship with women, and the juxtaposition of the young modern women to men made old and obsolete by war. None of these prove capable of lasting commitment. Sex soon becomes obsessional and replaces real feelings. Ultimately, this takes more and more from each leaving nothing but loyalty to their comrades, a loyalty formed in the place that marred them and goes nowhere but backward. As the provincialism that formed the core of their idealism breaks down and leaves them, sexually and otherwise, despite the energy of their lovemaking and kaleidoscopic partying, running on empty in a mad pursuit of pleasure that is as affected by war as it is their liberation from and removal of, puritanical inhibition. In the end, two of the four men commit suicide, one arranges to have himself killed in a barroom brawl, and the last, Martin Winch, the surviving hero, ends up in a madhouse.

Frank McShane in his biography of Jones analyzed *Whistle* in this way: "... as a story of wounded veterans, it is probably exaggerated, since no such extreme pattern of suicides emerged from returned veterans as a group. But Jones' point is that whatever

happens, there is no real solution for those who have survived the combat zone; there are no happy endings, because the damage has already been done. Death is their business."

Norman Mailer, who had opened the gates for Jones and others with *The Naked and the Dead*, noted that Jones had usurped his position as the leading romantic realist of the period. (Mailer) was, of course, writing about *From Here to Eternity* when he made that observation, but *Eternity* comes to its conclusion in *Whistle*, and one title should not be isolated from the other in either analysis or appreciation. In an unpublished preface to *Whistle*, Jones wrote:

"I can already feel the chilly arms of old age and her hooped lover closing around me. Life is a loser's game from the first. You come into the world, and you leave it with nothing."

War, James Jones reasoned, was an extension of human behavior, a view he consistently expressed from his earliest feelings relative to *The Red Badge of Courage*. The men he wrote about were very different from one another, but it was at least in part through these differences that Jones was able to paint a picture of his own war, and this of course is the main reason to believe that *Whistle* is more than the final volume of his trilogy, but his testament, and perhaps the essence of his last conscious thought.

- *Claude-Marie Lane*

It's Got A Catchy Title

While browsing in a bookstore one day, Society board member Warren Mason saw a title that caught his attention. *From Here To Maternity: A Guide For Pregnant Couples* by Connie Marshall is recommended reading for expectant parents.

A play on the famous words, *From Here To Eternity*, is not so uncommon. A headline writer at the Robinson *Daily News* in Jones' hometown wrote the following headline for Bloomington, Illinois, columnist Bill Flick's summary of June's news events, including the Mike Tyson/Evander Holyfield ear-biting incident: "From ear to eternity, June busts out."

Also, a hair styling salon in Champaign, Illinois, has called itself, *From Hair To Eternity*, for years.

Magazine For Book Enthusiasts Gives Nod To Society

Biblio magazine included some general information about The James Jones Society as part of its "Clubs and Societies" section in the March 1997 issue. The feature serves as a resource for collectors and booklovers, and made mention the Society's mission and the annual fellowship award program.

References In *Hud* Indicate *Eternity's* Pop Culture Status

There are noteworthy references to James Jones' *From Here To Eternity* in *Hud*, the sizzling 1963 western directed by Martin Ritt, and Larry McMurtry's *Horseman, Pass By*, the 1961 novel the film was based on.

Both *Hud* (which stars Paul Newman, Melvyn Douglas, Patricia Neal and Brandon De Wilde) and *Horseman* explore the lives of individuals (mainly men) in crisis to show how the traditions of the old West influence and contrast with the modern West. These references indicate that Jones' greatest novel had become a significant symbol in American pop culture within 10 years of its publication in 1951.

Quoting from the screenplay by Irving Ravetch and Harriett Frank, a slice of small-town western life is portrayed:

Hud disappears into the bar without a backward glance and Lon is left alone on the curb, looking after him. As always, the boy is pulled two different ways: fear of Hud on the one hand, and a longing to associate himself with the swagger and maleness of his uncle's life, Lon goes toward the store.

EXT. STORE

A couple of old women are rocking on the porch, in front of the RC Cola thermometers and the Garrett snuff signs, as Lon comes ambling up the steps with nothing to do. He moseys inside.

INT. STORE

Lon twirls the paperback rack a time or two and idly picks up *From Here To Eternity*. KIRBY, the proprietor, addresses him.

KIRBY

Read that one?

LON (nodding)

Twice. That's about the best book you ever got on your paperback stand.

KIRBY

Pretty steamy, ain't it?

LON

Oh, I don't know. The people in it seem a lot like the ones I see.

KIRBY

Didya read the part where the sergeant gets her for the first time?

LON

Yeah, I read that part.

The boy is embarrassed. He puts the book down and takes another.

It is interesting to see how the screenwriters altered McMurtry's original narrative, in which Lon reflects upon the impact of *Eternity* on his life:

"When I got upstairs I didn't feel very sleepy, so I got out *From Here To Eternity* and read over some of the scenes with Prew and Maggio in the New Congress Hotel. I thought it was about the best book ever to come to our drugstore newsstand, and I kept reading some of the chapters in it over and over. Those parts about the dances in the New Congress reminded me a lot of my nights in Fort Worth; the people in the book seemed a lot like the ones I saw. Then I read the part where the sergeant got her the first time, and put the book back in my suitcase in the closet. I turned off the light and stretched on top of the covers to sleep, smelling the green dewy ranchland through the screen."

McMurtry's use of *Eternity* emphasizes that the dynamics of Jones' men and situations are similar to the tense interactions experienced by the male characters in *Horseman*. Readers who were familiar with *Eternity* would understand this. The inclusion in *Hud* by screenwriters Ravetch and Frank of a rewritten, dialog-oriented version of the original passage shows that Jones' work had entered the popular culture to such an extent that moviegoers in the early 1960s would be expected to reflect upon the impact of Jones' great work on characters in crisis in modern America.

- *Richard L. King*