

The James Jones Literary Society Newsletter

Vol. 7, No. 3 Spring 1998

The Society newsletter is published quarterly in January, April, July and October of each year.

Submissions of essays, features, anecdotes, photographs, etc., that pertain to author James Jones may be sent to the co-editors for publication consideration. Every attempt will be made to return material, if requested upon submission. Material may be edited for length, clarity and accuracy. Send submissions to R.R. 2, Box 401, Urbana, IL 61802

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'98 Conference To Celebrate Jones' Memory By Friends, Family

The fall conference of the Society will celebrate James Jones as remembered by his friends, neighbors and family. The friendships that James and Gloria Jones developed during their years together are long-lasting and powerful. Several current nonfiction books by such Jones friends and literary lions as Willie Morris, Joseph Heller, Betty Comden, Jim Salter and George Plimpton have hit the bestseller lists or received critical acclaim in recent months. A new literary biography of William Styron has broken rank with scholarly tomes and found its place in superstores, where readers can find details on one of the most celebrated friendships since Hemingway and Fitzgerald.

Perhaps no one has captured James Jones better in print than Willie Morris, eloquent author of *James Jones, A Friendship*. A featured speaker at two symposiums, Morris has recently seen the publication of his acclaimed personal essay on race, filmmaking and the South, *The Ghosts of Medgar Evers*, which follows close on the heels of the trade paperback release of his memoir, *New York Days*. One of the most moving

passages in *New York Days* shares a theme that recurs at every symposium: James Jones, the man, and his work are alive and inseparable.

Following a journey with James Jones and their sons, Jamie and David, Morris writes that they planned a trip to Robinson, Illinois, and on to the trailer camp in Memphis where Jones worked on *From Here to Eternity* and south toward Morris' home in Yazoo City, Mississippi. It was a trip they never made.

Morris writes, "I wish good old fine Jim Jones had been in the vicinity of New York City, rather than in Paris, France, in the next many months. I always wanted to know what he thought about things. He would have advised me about matters occurring for me in the magazine business, and I would have been a fool not to listen, because the man and his work were all of a piece."

Joseph Heller's delightful memoir, *Now and Then: From Coney Island to Here*, recounts his childhood in Brooklyn and his development as one of the great novelists of the 20th century. When *Catch-22* was published in 1961, many in the East Coast literary establishment expected Jones to criticize Heller's surrealistic black comedy about the war. In eloquent passages, Heller credits Jones and their mutual friend, Irwin Shaw, with boosting the success of *Catch-22* before the novel became a modern classic:

"Irwin Shaw is gone and is very sorely missed by all those who knew him and gloried in his large mind and boisterous generosity of spirit. James Jones is gone, too. Both already were famous novelists when *Catch-22* came out, and--unacquainted with its author--praised it before publication and helped lift it off to a fortunate start. And we had become friends...The novel was not the instant success many people assume it was, not at all on the scale of such immediate national acclaim as greeted the first novels of Norman Mailer, James Jones and others."

More about Heller's friendship with Jim and Gloria Jones can be found in Frank McShane's *Into Eternity*:

"When visitors came from New York, the Joneses often gave parties for them, like the one they gave Betty Comden and Adolph Green when they came to Paris for the opening of their film, *Singin' in the Rain*. Another writer who came was Joseph Heller. Although they had not known each other then, Heller had been at New York University during the same time as Jones and had published his first story in the same issue of *The Atlantic* in which Jones made his debut. When *Catch-22* appeared, Jones had praised it for its 'weird comedy' and 'its pathos for the tragic situation of the men,' and he and Gloria took Heller out to dinner when he visited Paris."

Betty Comden's memoir, *Off Stage*, displays her renowned wit and warm heart in sharing remembrances of James Jones and her ongoing friendship with Gloria. An entire chapter--"keeping up with the James Joneses"--is devoted to a friendship that has lasted more than four decades. The chapter begins at the University of Texas at Austin in a room displaying memorabilia from the Harry Ransome Collection and moves effortlessly back in time to the Oloffson Hotel in Haiti where Betty Comden casually mentions to her husband, Steve Kyle, "You know who got married here this afternoon? James Jones." The relationship comes full circle when Ms. Comden shares the inscription that Jones wrote to her in a first edition of *The Thin Red Line* and her own dedication to Jones if he were alive today.

Her feelings toward the Joneses are captured best in the author's note below a photograph of the young couple gazing into each other's eyes while on vacation:

"James Jones with his wife, Gloria, a couple fiercely loyal to each other, and to their friends. From their wedding day in Haiti on, we remained close, and now, alone without our husbands, Gloria and I cling."

Another nonfiction bestseller, George Plimpton's oral history of Truman Capote, has some vivid recollections of Jones' years in New York and Long Island. Plimpton's colorful title captures the spirit of the oral biography: *Truman Capote: In Which Various Friends, Enemies, Acquaintances, and Detractors Recall His Turbulent Career*. One of the funniest anecdotes is told by Willie Morris when Truman Capote calls Jones and Morris to his table to tell stories about his cousin from Alabama, "a professional parachutist" and "Balzacian episodes" from his childhood in Alabama.

In a more scholarly but no less colorful volume, *William Styron, A Life*, James L. W. West III recounts the Joneses' great friendship with Bill and Rose Styron. West writes that following the publication of *Lie Down In Darkness*, Styron was introduced to James Jones, "whom he immediately liked," by John P. Marquand Jr. They spend an evening "touring the cafes with Jones, Mailer and the actor Montgomery Clift, who was to play a leading role in the movie version of *From Here to Eternity*. Clift and Mailer eventually retired for the night, but Styron and Jones stayed up until morning talking about books and women and the military. Later chapters detail the friendship between the two married couples.

The biography highlights the famous July 1963 *Esquire* interview of the conversation between Jones and Styron, following the publication of *The Thin Red Line* the previous year. Eavesdropping readers found themselves in the midst of the authors discussing their future plans and literary philosophy.

Sounding an elegiac note in a late chapter of the biography, West notes, "...the death that affected Styron most profoundly was that of James Jones...his friend had been too young to die; he had come cruelly close to finishing his trilogy, only to have that satisfaction denied him." --**Kevin Heisler**

Books Jones Enjoyed In His Youth

The following is the James Jones entry from *Attacks of Taste*, edited by Evelyn B. Bryne and Otto M. Penzler (New York: Gotham Book Mart, 1971). It is a collection of responses from 70 authors on the question of their youthful reading.

My serious reading only began at the age of 18, after graduation from high school and while I was an enlisted man in the regular Army. This was occasioned by my reading of Thomas Wolfe, followed by Joyce, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner.

From these I went into a thorough study of the late 19th and early 20th century English novelists, such as Conrad, Arnold Bennet, Adlous Huxley, Galsworthy, etc. By this time I was 19, almost 20, and a part-time student at the University of Hawaii. Of these I guess my favorite for quite a while was Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel*, largely because it was such a marvelous portrait of an adolescent teenage American, boy, and I would recommend it to all people; after that, just about everything of Conrad and Galsworthy's *The Forsythe Saga*. It was only later that I came to appreciate, more, Joyce and Faulkner.

Today, though, I think my all-time favorite is still Stendhal's *The Red and the Black* because it is so marvelous at portraying what human beings are really like rather than what they pretend to be. And it is that which perhaps directs me more in my own work than any other single thing.

First Novel Fellowship Winners To Appear In Print

James Jones Literary Society members will be entitled to exhibit a modest glow of pride next month--and again next year--when the first novels of three of the winners of the organization's First Novel Fellowship Award appear in print.

Where the Sea Used to Be, first novel of Rick Bass, co-winner of the 1995 First Novel Fellowship, will be published June 15, by Houghton Mifflin.

Leslie Schwartz, who was the Jones Society's 1997 Fellowship winner, has signed a contract with Simon and Schuster for publication of her novel, *Jumping the Green*, in the spring of 1999. And Greg Herbek, winner of the Society's 1996 Fellowship award,

will have his novel, *The Hindenburg Crashes Nightly*, published by Bard, an Avon imprint, in the summer of 1999.

Although 1995 co-winner Tanuja Desai could not be reached for an interview, it is a certainty that at least four of the six Jones Society First Novel Fellowship Award winners to date have achieved publication--a record that speaks highly of the judgement of Fellowship committee members Patricia Heaman, Kevin Heisler, Kaylie Jones and Michael Lennon and the reading teams they employ in selecting first novelists with great potential.

And all members can be proud of the Society's effort to promote fledgling literary talent in the spirit of James Jones, who received similar support when he was launching his literary career and made a point of extending a helping hand to other struggling writers once his own talent had been recognized.

The Fellowship Award winners are quick to acknowledge the positive impact winning the award had in igniting their efforts to finish their novels--and in finding agents.

"The Fellowship, indeed, came at a critical time for me," Bass said. "I was beginning my sixth or seventh draft of *Where the Sea Used to Be*--I've been working on it for 14 years now--and badly needed the confidence. The dollars came at a critical time, as well."

"Winning the Jones award was very helpful to me, not only financially, but it was the means by which I found my agent," Herbek said. After the announcement of Herbek's award appeared in *Poets and Writers*, he received proposals from three agents. "It really sped up the process and made it easier for me because the agents came to me."

Schwartz put it more simply: "I owe a lot to the James Jones award. My thanks will go on forever."

"It's not just that you (the Jones Society) have chosen your Fellowship winners carefully," 1994 award winner Mary Kay Zuravleff said. "It's that the boost of being chosen helps make it happen. When you've won an award, you attract a crowd. In effect, you already have a track record, and that helps you achieve success."

Zuravleff should know; she was the first of the society's Fellowship winners to see her first novel in print. *The Frequency of Souls* was published in 1996 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, and in paperback by Penguin in 1997.

Since then, Zuravleff has won the Rosenthal Book Award and was a finalist in the Oklahoma Book Award competition, as well as the Barnes & Novel Discover New Writers Award, all in 1997.

In the fall of 1996, Zurvareff, who lives in Washington, D.C., quit her job as an editor at the Smithsonian Institution in order to be a stay-at-home mother to her young son and a full-time writer. She is now working on a new novel, probably to be titled, *Up to Your Eyebrows*, the focus of which, Zuravleff said, is an Asian art museum.

"It (the novel) will be an examination of how things have become valuable, what things are saved, what is sacrificed to save them, and what happens when they break--not only things, but relationships and families."

Bass, the author of several novellas and short stories, also is working on his second novel, to be set in Texas hill country. His collection of novellas, *The Sky, the Stars, the Wilderness*, was published last fall by Houghton Mifflin. In the fall of 1998, the University of Georgia Press will publish his short story, *Fiber*, in book form; and the Lyons Press will publish his nonfiction book *The New Wolves: The Reintroduction of the Mexican Wolf in the American Southwest*.

Bass, who received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1997, lives in Yaak, Mont., in the remote northwestern corner of the state, with his wife, two young daughters and dogs.

Since she won the Jones Fellowship last fall, Schwartz's career has taken off with the sale of *Jumping the Green* to Simon and Schuster and the rights to the book to Germany. In addition, a Hollywood agent is shopping her book to film producers, and her literary agent is offering a couple of her short stories to publishers, while Schwartz is putting together a collection of her stories with a common theme--that if UFOs--as a metaphysical way of talking about alienation.

Schwartz, who lives in Los Angeles, is still free-lancing as a health reporter for a variety of publications, but is gradually pulling away from that field, she said, in order to concentrate on her second novel, which will explore the issues of friendship and betrayal.

Herbek, of Poughkeepsie, N.Y., is an English teacher at Vassar College, but after finishing the current semester he expects to take next year off to work on a new novel. "I haven't started the actual writing yet," he said, "and the theme is very inchoate at this time, but I'm hoping to depart from realism in this new novel."

He hopes to teach again in the future, but explained that time to concentrate on writing full time is essential. "It's hard to maintain a daily writing discipline when you also have a full-time job."

Nancy Flynn, the Society's first Fellowship winner in 1993, would agree wholeheartedly with that assessment.

Caught on the fly in the midst of selling her house, planning her wedding and moving to Oregon, the resident of Ithaca, N.Y., lamented that her demanding job as manager of the Cornell University Information Technologies Technical Writing and Publications staff prevented her from finishing the novel, *Eden Undone*, for which she received the Jones Society award.

"I've felt a lot of frustration at not having the luxury to devote time to the creative side of my life, especially as I've noted other Jones Fellowship Award winners getting their books published," Flynn said. "But the necessity to make ends meet as a single mother has really robbed me of my creative opportunity."

Flynn added that the \$2,000 Fellowship had been spent to re-roof her home. However, with her 21-year-old son now in college, an impending July 4 marriage, and a new life in Corvallis, Ore., Flynn expects to focus on finishing the novel, while perhaps holding down a part-time job.

A revised excerpt from *Eden Undone* was published last year in "Now and Then," a publication of the Center of Appalachian Studies at East Tennessee State University. Flynn is determined that the finished novel will also see print.

As the success and importance of the Fellowship program has become evident, the Society has increased the amount of the Fellowship from \$2,000 in 1993 to \$2,500 in 1996 and expects to be able to award \$3,000 each year, starting in 1999.

Gradually, a new crop of American novelists is being heard, with encouragement from the James Jones Literary Society, a development Society President Jerry Bayne declared should make every member proud.

The Fellowship committee deserves high praise for the quality of its winner selections," Bayne said. "We can all feel a special interest in the careers of these fine writers, and we can be proud that their success reflects favorably on the purpose of our Society."

--Margot Nightingale, Secretary

Preface To Collection Of Poetry By JJLS Benefactor Charles Robb

Most of the members of the James Jones Literary Society met Charles Robb once: when he attended the 1993 annual conference in Robinson, Ill. Don Sackrider, like Charlie an emeritus member of The Colony run by James Jones and the Handys, knew him well, as did a few others. Charlie was quiet, very shy, but he seemed to be harboring some deep flame, a crucible of emotion. His letter to the Society, reprinted at the end of this collection, casts some light on the intensity we saw that weekend in Robinson. The first poem, dedicated to James Jones, explains it even more.

Charlie died on Feb. 1, 1997. He left half of his estate to the Society, with the proviso that half of his bequest should support the Society generally and half the James Jones First Novel Fellowship. The photograph on the last page shows Charlie with two other former Colony members, Don Sackrider and Jon Shiota, and, fittingly, the inaugural winner of the First Novel Fellowship, Nancy Flynn. Charlie's gift has helped transform the Society, enabling it to do even more to encourage interest in the life and works of James Jones and to encourage the work of unpublished novelists.

Literature, especially poetry, was Charlie's passion. He never stopped working on his poems, the best of which are published here. Nor did he ever stop savoring the writing of others. His small house in Lincoln, Maine, was crammed and stacked with dog-eared books and poetry magazines. Some of them were literally clawed apart. We honor Charlie's love of poetry with this collection, a small garland for his poetic verve and generosity of spirit.

I was assisted greatly in selecting the best of Charlie's poetry by two fine poets, Larsen Bowker, an old friend, and Joseph A. Lennon, my son, and by Jon Shiota, Colony graduate, novelists, playwright and member of the Society's Board. Tom Wood, Society archivist and Board member, gathered up Charlie's manuscripts, and Jerry Bayne, Society president, handled all aspects of printing and production. My co-executor and Charlie's lawyer, Patricia Locke, and Board member Warren Mason aided the effort in several ways. To all of these friends, and on behalf of the James Jones Literary Society, thanks for your skillful and timely help.

Finally, to Charlie: We are, to echo what you said in your letter, in default to a ghost.

--J. Michael Lennon, Preface to *Selected Poems of Charles Robb*

James Jones' War In Fact, Fiction And Film

The following was a panel contribution at the seventh annual symposium of the James Jones Literary Society, Nov. 1, at the University of Illinois at Springfield.

In his March 30, 1963, *Saturday Evening Post* article, "Phony War Films," James Jones assessed several contemporary war films and found them lacking. The defects he traced were applicable to film versions of his war fiction before and after the article. He condemned films such as *Attack!* (1956), *Kings Go Forth* (1958), *Pork Chop Hill* (1959), and *The Guns of Navarone* (1961) for approaching the war he was familiar with "via an attitude of individual heroism which, by my experience, no longer pertained."

He criticized directors who avoided the major concept of a "random quality of cipheldom, the totally arbitrary, numerical killing upon which I knew modern 'industry-oriented' warfare to be built." Although recognizing the necessity for propaganda in the stressful period of 1943, his three days viewing the above-mentioned films 20 years later resulted in the author's disillusionment with the "cinematic machine."

"I was more depressed with the essential adolescence of America (maybe I should say of the race) than I have perhaps ever been," he wrote. "If our war films are any indication of our social maturity in an age when we have the capacity of destroying ourselves, there is little hope for us."

Were James Jones with us today, there is little doubt that his verdict would remain unchanged. He realized the reasons why audiences like these films. The majority of films he viewed avoided key elements of his war fiction--"the regimentation of souls, the systematized reduction of men to animal level, the horror of pointless death, the exhaustion of living in constant fear...."

Instead, several films viewed during what Jones termed his "lost weekend" emphasized ideological construction basking in images of "The Misunderstood Leader" or "Infallible Father" who attacks the system to get justice for his men. Unlike Lewis Milestone's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), the films he watched had nothing to do with "the statistical manipulations of modern war" and the arbitrary nature of death in combat, making both individual significance and moral meaning totally futile.

Jones also found other European films equally phony. Whether anti-war or not, they avoided the unavoidable military lesson revealing modern war as destructive of human character and indissolubly connected with a 20th century dilemma shared by the very audience attending the films.

The author cogently realized the deeper reasons motivating these phony war films. "I think that modern man," he said, "victim of an impersonal, too complex society created by himself initially for reasons of safety, but now a society grown too big to

be comprehensible in human terms...has, in order to escape, reverted to the simpler 'battle ax' philosophy of the Middle Ages and before" to avoid facing "the fearsomeness of the essentially organizational, dehumanizing factor, which is the quality of modern war" ever since the American Civil War.

Despite his criticisms, Jones applauded certain segments which did appear in films such as Anthony Mann's *Men in War* (1958) and *The Longest Day* (1962) which, briefly, made them less phony. *Men in War* contained Aldo Ray's tough sergeant character counterbalancing Robert Ryan's conventional Infallible Father figure. For Jones, "Ray is indeed the Man who had grown up and become an Animal, a vicious, cruel, shrewdly functioning Animal who saves the outfit time and again."

Ryan condemns him with the moralistic message, "If we have to win our wars with people like you, God help us?" But Jones affirms the fact that "we do have to win with people like him and always have had. And every high-ranking soldier--and I suspect most politicians--knows it. And it is in fact their job to find them, or create them no matter what their speeches say."

Jones contributed dialogue to *The Longest Day*, a film comparable to a modern war in terms of its comparison to a major military campaign, a "triumph of managerial genius" in which the stars "come close to achieving the true anonymity of modern infantrymen."

Like First Infantry 15th Division combat veteran Samuel Fuller in his *American Film 2* (1976) article, "War That's Fit to Shoot," Jones knew the difference between the reality and representations. But he also suggests that sometimes aspects of the reality may appear but in a brief and fragmented form. The possibilities of making a true war film, let alone a film faithful to Jones' literary vision, are often impossible.

From Here to Eternity suffers from the Hollywood star system, censorship and contemporary ideological factors that inhibit its real message. Andrew Marton's 1964 version of *The Thin Red Line* has additional problems. Shot on a low budget in Spain by Allied Artists, the film chose to use Bernard Gordon's screenplay rather than the one Jones himself wrote.

Generally unavailable on both 16mm and video, the film version is a mixture of "phony war films" and second-hand reproductions from Jones' own text. Eliminating the novels' huge cast of characters, the film emphasizes the conflict between Keir Dullea's Private Doll and Jack Warden's Sergeant Welch in a manner akin to *The Sands of Iwo Jima* leading toward the climax of rebellious son becoming the next Infallible Father.

Unlike the novel, the severely reduced Charlie Company decides to disobey Tall's order to retire to safety and chooses instead to attack the remaining Japanese soldiers on the island in the very manner Jones condemned in his comments on *Pork Chop Hill*.

Because of its production difficulties, Marton's version eliminates many complex features of the novel. However, despite recognizing that the film fails to "substantiate the spirit of the book," Jones wrote to Burroughs Mitchell, stating that "in its own little way it's a very good war film." Jones even wrote a complimentary letter to Andrew Marton on the subject.

Although Marton makes embarrassing attempts to reproduce visually the sexual dimensions surrounding Doll's first kill and indirectly suggest his homoerotic attachment to Fife, the depiction of Doll becoming a crazed killing machine in the climax and Welch's "property" and "meat" injunctions to his men still remain as isolated faithful references to Jones' intentions in a manifestly changed text.

--Tony Williams