

The Texas Institute of Letters

Newsletter, January /February 2006

MARK YOUR CALENDARS:

The 70th ANNUAL TIL AWARDS BANQUET will be held April 1, 2006 at the MARRIOTT AUSTIN AT THE CAPITOL, 701 East 11th Street, Austin, TX, 78701. The phone number for Marriott room reservations is 800-228-9290 or 512-478-1111. A block of rooms are being reserved for The Texas Institute of Letters at a rate of \$135.00/ night. The deadline for reservations and the guaranteed room rate is Friday, March 10.

Jim Hoggard will be honored with the Lon Tinkle Award for Excellence.

Cash Bar will open at 6:00 p.m. and the Banquet will begin promptly at 7:00 p.m. on Saturday. New members will be introduced, followed by the book awards ceremony.

On Saturday afternoon at 4:00 p.m., new members will read selections from their work at the Marriott Hotel.

Friday Night Reception, Sponsored by *The Austin American-Statesman*
March 31, 6:30 to 8:30 Flatbed Press and Gallery 2830 East MLK Blvd. This a very short drive from the Marriott.

More Information and order forms to come.

NEWS OF MEMBERS AND OTHERS

TIL Treasurer Jim Hoggard brings the splendid news that the Houston Endowment is endowing the Jesse H. Jones Fiction Award and the Jones Dobie Paisano Fellowship with \$120,000 and \$240,000 respectively. TIL will be able to earn enough interest to pay the awards the following year. It is a great and generous gift to TIL and we appreciate their support through the years.

Tom Zigal's novel, *The White League*, won the Violet Crown Award for fiction, given annually by the Writers League of Texas. The novel has also been optioned for film.

The ABA Newsletter in February Picks from *Bookselling This Week*, touted *The Night Journal: A Novel*, by Elizabeth Crook. "By weaving the tracks of the railroad during its expansion in the West through the story, Crook exquisitely brings together the risk takers involved in settling Northeastern New Mexico, whether born into the Spanish families or having ventured from the East. Secrets and passions and family legacies fulfilled and betrayed make for a saga spanning generations. A great novel to warm up with on a cold winter night." —Sarah Bagby, Watermark Books, Wichita, KS

PW reviewed University of North Texas Press *Pride of Place: A Contemporary Anthology of Texas Nature Writing*, edited by David Taylor and including essays that express an affinity for the natural landscape of Texas by Roy Bedichek, John Graves, Naomi Nye, Pete Gunter,

Joe Nick Patoski and a "particularly powerful piece" by Stephen Harrigan, describing a trip with his daughter to the peak of Enchanted Rock, "a place that Native Americans held to be sacred and where, he says, a part of the original Texas still exists."

Larry McMurtry won a Golden globe for the screenplay of "Brokeback Mountain," using his typewriter, a "Hermes 3000, surely one of the noblest instruments of European genius." McMurtry and writing-producing partner Diana Ossana have agreed to a new Lonesome Dove miniseries, a prequel called Comanche Moon, for CBS. The story is based on his 2000 book, following Texas Rangers Call and McCrae in their pursuit of Buffalo Hump and Kicking Wolf. PW reviewed Larry McMurtry's *Oh What A Slaughter: Massacres in the American West: 1846-1890*, in which he recounts six Western frontier massacres.

L. D. and Laverne Harrell Clark appeared on the Visiting Writers' Series of Arkansas Tech University, Russellville. L. D. read from his forthcoming novel, "The Plains Beyond," scheduled for release in early 2006. Laverne read from her novel-in-progress, "Their Eyes Were On the Chickadee." The Clarks were also at the Texas Book Festival in October and "Texas Authors' Day" at the San Marcos Public Library in November, and will be at the Mary Hardin Baylor Writers' Conference in Belton in January.

The December Texas Monthly featured such writers as Larry McMurtry, Jan Reid, Mimi Swartz, Oscar Casares, Gary Cartwright, Skip Hollandsworth, Sarah Bird.

Publishers Weekly reviewed Elmer Kelton's *Brush Country: Two Texas Novels*, saying that "the keystones of his suspenseful, carefully drawn style can be found in these two early . . . full-length novels. . . . Both novels offer frontier excitement, suspense, a bit of mystery and romance, and plenty of flying fists and fast-shooting six-gun action. Kelton's first books are as good as his most recent work."

Publishers Weekly also featured St. Andrew's Episcopal School of Austin for refusing to pull Annie Proulx's short story, "Brokeback Mountain" from its reading list or lose a \$3 million donation to its building fund. The school has raised more than \$3 million in show of support of its stance on the subject. Several YA authors have contributed autographed books to the school. The president of the American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression said that schools are often challenged on controversial books, but the St. Andrew's situation may be unique.

The TIL office received an epistle from Joe Bob Briggs, admonishing us for not purchasing his new book—*Profoundly Erotic: Sexy Movies that Changed History*. He is saving copies for all TIL members, which you can order from www.joebobbriggs.com. He says his friendship with all of us depends on this.

Judy Alter reports in the TCU Press newsletter that she will begin working half-time in January, still as director. She will have more time to write, but she will also keep her hand in the publishing at TCU Press she loves. Judy also turned in another interesting column in the Dallas Morning News on Jeff Guinn and his success with his Santa Claus books, starting with *The Autobiography of Santa Claus* in 1994. Guinn has written other books, including *Our Land Before We Die: the Proud Story of the Seminole Negro*, but his publisher wanted more Santa Claus, since the reprint of the first one made the New York Times best-seller list. He followed with *How Mrs. Claus Saved Christmas*, just released. The next one up, "The Santa Show," is due out Christmas 2006.

The Points section in the Dallas Morning News on October 30, carried the following on Texas Writing and Writers: Dagoberto Gilb talks with Macarena Hernandez about Texas culture and

his students; Carol Dawson: Texas novelists used to be stuck on their inner cowboys: But not anymore; Dick Holland identifies the seven most important figures in Lone Star Letters: Larry McMurtry, Katherine Anne Porter, John Graves, Stephen Harrigan, Terry Southern, Cormac McCarthy, Edwin (Bud) Shrake.

Paul Ruffin, director of Texas Review Press, was recently featured in an interview in the 2006 Novel and Short Story Writer's Market. His recent publications include a new novel, *Castle in the Gloom*, from University Press of Mississippi, and a book of essays, *Here's to Noah, Bless His Ark*, from Stone River Press. He has recently had fiction in *Idaho Review* and *Connecticut Review*. Ruffin has recently been a featured author at the Eudora Welty Symposium, the Tennessee Williams Festival, and the Southern Festival of Books. In addition, Jack Myers and Paul Ruffin were readers at the Writer's Garrett "Upstairs at Paperbacks Plus" in Dallas on October 21.

THINGS TO PONDER

Amazon's Newest Patent Play

Amazon continues to be aggressive in defining and protecting intellectual property. The e-tailer was recently awarded a patent for many elements of encouraging and allowing customers to post online reviews, including the very process of using a Web site to fill out a review form. Internet News reports it also covers "encouraging consumers to write reviews of items they've purchased by determining the optimal times to send them e-mails or reminders," and "in one embodiment of the patent, the system sends consumers a message inviting them to write a review in a predetermined amount of time after the purchase."

Two other patents granted cover the company's Purchase Circles, and "a method of discovering and delivering as search results related products from multiple categories, such as books written by Steve Martin, as well as DVDs of movies in which he appeared."

Interestingly, today Yale's business school released an overview of a study that concludes customer reviews "do have an impact on what consumers buy" at Amazon and BarnesandNoble.com. Observing randomly selected titles, they found "the addition of favorable reviews at one site increases book sales at that site relative to the other retailer. It also finds that negative 1-star reviews carry more weight with consumers than do positive 5-star reviews. The impact of a negative review is more powerful in decreasing book sales than a positive review is in increasing sales." Bear in mind, though, that the researchers were not using actual sales data; they were just working from posted sales rank data.

NEA's Big Plans for Reading

Recently arrived NEA Director of Literature David Kipen has hit the ground running in shaping the launch of the agency's The Big Read program, which he discussed with MobyLives.com proprietor and Melville House publisher Dennis Johnson.

As Kipen describes it, the idea is to create "a citywide reading kit in a box, and a little dough on the side, so that they don't have to invent these things from scratch." (The dough, according to the RFP, is grants of \$25,000 to \$35,000 for now.) The program is designed "to create conversation" about and engagement with literature all across the country, and to stimulate and inspire "Americans reading for pleasure."

The first Big Reads are expected to launch next February or March. Municipalities in “the high two-figures” submitted applications for the first spots. The original plan was to start with six cities, but that may expand. Kipen says, “Because we received many terrific applications, we hope to involve a few more than six, but the final number is not set.”

TO DO:

1. Pay your dues NOW!
2. Mark your calendar for April 1 banquet.