

The Texas Institute of Letters

Oct., Nov., Dec. 2007 Newsletter

Changes Made to Dobie-Paisano Fellowship Program

By Michael Adams

The Dobie-Paisano Fellowship Program has been changed. Beginning with the current application process, there will be two distinct fellowships: the Jesse H. Jones Writing Fellowship—for a period of approximately six months with a stipend of \$3000 a month; and the Ralph A. Johnston Memorial Fellowship—for a period of four months with a stipend of \$5,500 a month. The fellowships are available to both creative writers and writers of non-fiction. Non-fiction should be written for the general audience.

The Jesse H. Jones Writing Fellowship will be aimed at, though certainly not limited to, writers who are early in their career and who would benefit from an extended period at the ranch. Demonstration of prior publishing and critical success is not expected, though many applicants will have such a record. Any writer at any level of success (including those with strong publishing records) is eligible for the Jesse Jones Fellowship.

The Ralph A. Johnston Memorial Fellowship is aimed at writers who have already demonstrated some publishing and critical success. This may or may not be writers a little later along in their literary careers. The definition of “publishing and critical success” will be determined by the judges each year, but, in general, we’d expect at least one critically well-received book, or an

impressive list of published essays, articles, poems, stories, etc. The decision of the judges will be based on the quality of the writer’s past work and the potential for future excellence. Of course, the writer’s suitability for ranch life is always taken into account. We will be asking this writer to give a reading or talk at The University of Texas at Austin during the residency. There will be separate judging panels for each award. If you have any questions, feel free to contact Michael Adams, Director of the Dobie-Paisano Program.

For the coming year, the Ralph A. Johnston Fellowship will run from September 15 to January 15. The Jesse Jones Fellowship will run from February 1 to July 15. Length of residency can always be changed due to maintenance or programmatic needs.

The application fee for each award is \$20. If you are applying for both the Jesse H. Jones **and** the Ralph A. Johnston Memorial Fellowship, the fee will be \$30. If applying for both awards, check the appropriate box at the top of the Ralph A. Johnston Memorial Fellowship application page, and include only one check with the Ralph A. Johnston Fellowship materials. **Each application and its accompanying materials must be mailed in separate packets. There will be different judges for each fellowship.**

How Dobie’s Paisano Ranch emerged as a TIL writing center

In 1959 J. Frank Dobie purchased a 254-acre ranch known as Shady Creek Ranch outside of Austin to use as his

country retreat. He gave it a new name: Paisano, a Spanish name denoting roadrunner. *(continued next page)*

Paisano, through which Barton Creek meandered, proved to be a most congenial setting. Dobie began summoning friends there who would sit on the stone house's long porch with its pleasant view of the cactus, wildflowers, bushes and tall live oaks trees. On a corner of the land was a log cabin, a part of which dated to the middle of the 19th century.

A few months after Dobie's death in 1964 the idea arose between Dobie's widow Bertha and two of his close friends, Frank H. Wardlaw, director of the University of Texas Press, and Lon Tinkle, a faculty member at SMU and book critic of the *Dallas Morning News*, to use Paisano as a writer's retreat.

A steering committee arose to achieve that goal, and Houstonian Ralph A. Johnston bought Paisano to allow time for fund-raising. Members of the Texas Institute of Letters were early supporters of the project. On May 11, 1966, nearly 500 people attended a gala dinner and auction of paintings by twenty prominent southwestern artists (including Jerry Bywaters, Otis Dozier, Alexandre Hogue, Peter Hurd, Olin Travis, Tom Lea, and many others) as a fund-raiser. Stanley Marcus was the principal speaker. Nearly \$40,000 was raised, and Johnston and a few others

added enough money to purchase the ranch for the University of Texas.

Paisano would be operated as a permanent memorial to Dobie with a primary purpose of encouraging creative artistic effort in all fields, particularly in writing.

Maintenance and administration of Paisano was placed under the University of Texas at Austin, and the Texas Institute of Letters assumed responsibility for the fellowship stipends.

The first Dobie-Paisano Fellow was Bill Porterfield who took residence in June 1967. He was followed by A.C. Greene, then Eldon S. Branda, and the artist Jose Cisnéros. Through the years writers such as Stephen Harrigan, Claude Stanush, Dagoberto Gilb, Gary Cartwright, C.W. Smith, Laura Furman, Sandra Cisnéros, Rosemary Catacalos, and Allen Wier, and painters, photographers, and other artists have profited from their stays at Paisano.

As A.C. Greene wrote, being at Paisano offered "a time to find time, a period and a suspension beyond and above the claws of care, beyond the reach of daily drudgery and worry which frustrates creativeness."

(Information from the Handbook of Texas Online entry on Paisano Ranch.)

April 2008 annual meeting to return to Dallas

President Fran Vick has announced that the April 18, 19, 2008, annual meeting will be held in Dallas at the same location as in April 2007, the Park Cities Hilton, which proved to be a most congenial setting.

November 15 is deadline for nominating new members

Nominations for membership in TIL are due to vice-president Paula Marks no later than November 15, 2007.

Remember that the nominee should not be aware of his or *(continued next page)*

her nomination, as problems have arisen in the past when nominees were involved in the process.

Please send the following materials to Paula Marks at 104 Vireo Drive, Buda, TX 78610:

1. Your letter nominating the person and explaining why
2. A vita or résumé for the person, if one is available
3. Fifteen (15) pages of the person's work. These need to be quality copies,

front side only, as other photocopies will be made from what you send. Please do not send pages larger than 8 1/2 x 11 inches.

You can include the seconding letter from another TIL member, or the other TIL member can send it directly to the address above, or s/he can send it via e-mail to Paula's work e-mail: paulam@stedwards.edu.

Any questions? E-mail Paula or call (512-312-1395).

Identifying Our Past Winners' Categories

Thankfully, TIL has a list of all the winners of our literary contests since the first prize was awarded to J. Frank Dobie in 1939. As the years went by and our categories grew, more and more awards were presented, and our present list does not include what category our winners represented. .

Enter now our recording secretary, Bob Compton. Bob is attempting to recreate history, determining just what prize each individual won. It often is important to know, for instance, whether an individual won. Carry on, Bob, and more power to you! This, we know, is a rather massive effort.

Here's Bob's report on his progress:

"It's slow going; I'm checking each title for each year through Amazon and whatever else I can find. May need some help later in determining whether more than one prize was given in one year -- for instance, awards for best book of poetry and best first book of poetry, etc. First steps are fairly easy, since the early prizes were few, and the Vann history of TIL is pretty detailed through 1963. It's sort of like the problems I had putting together awards for children/young adult winners, multiplied several times."

News of members and others

Maybe you saw the article in the October 22, 2008, edition of *The New Yorker* about TIL member **Jacques Barzun** under the "Annals of Letters" heading and the title, "Age of Reason." No, many don't often think of Barzun as a Texan, but that's what he has been since he moved to San Antonio a number of years ago with his wife Marguerite (herself a Texan with a PhD in American Civilization from the University of Texas). Jacques, who

became a TIL member in 2001, turns 100 in November, and he's still sprightly.

In the same issue of *The New Yorker* we find the lead item in "The Talk of the Town" written by **Lawrence Wright**. Larry reviews our situation in Iraq and the attitudes of the Iraqis concerning our presence. As he concludes his piece, "The decision of when we leave, as inevitably we will, should be as much theirs as ours." (*continued next page*)

New TIL member **Bill Sloan** (inducted in 2006) has published the third book in his trilogy about World War II battles in the Pacific. This one, *The Ultimate Battle: Okinawa 1945—The Last Epic Struggle of World War II*, has been named the best book of 2007 by *World War II History* magazine. Simon & Schuster is the publisher. On October 25 Bill pulled a double of sorts. He appeared live on a remote broadcast of radio station KLIF at Borders in Dallas, then walked about twenty-five feet away for a brief talk and autographing session before a gathered crowd.

Steven L. Davis of Texas State University is completing a biography of J. Frank Dobie, due out in 2009 by the UT Press. Title evidently will be "Mr. Texas: The Life and Times of J. Frank Dobie." Davis' last book was *Texas Literary Outlaws: Six Writers in the Sixties and Beyond*, published in 2004.

Judy Alter occasionally writes a column for the Sunday book pages of the *Dallas Morning News* entitled "Texas Letters." In her September 2 column she reported on several lists of the top ten Texas books. **Jim Lee's** list was headed by Benjamin Capps' *A Woman of the People*, followed by Larry McMurtry's *Leaving Cheyenne*, George Sessions Perry's *Hold Autumn in Your Hand*, and William A. Owens' *This Stubborn Soil*. **Don Graham's** top ten list was headed by *Blood Meridian* and *No Country for Old Men*, both written by Cormac McCarthy, then followed by McMurtry's *In a Narrow Grave*. Then came Judy's own choices, the first four being John Graves' *Goodbye to a River*, Stephen Harrigan's *The Gates of the Alamo*, Elithe Hamilton Kirkland's *Love Is a Wild Assault*, and McMurtry's *Leaving Cheyenne*.

Ben Fountain, the former practicing attorney who gave up the law for writing and became a TIL member in 2006, has won yet another impressive award. This time it's the 2007 Whiting Writers

Award, which brings to him a \$50,000 cash prize. Ben was one of ten "emerging writers of exceptional talent and promise" to receive the award. His was based largely on his collection of short stories, *Brief Encounters With Che Guevara*. Coming up in 2009 will be his novel, *The Texas Itch*. Ben earlier won Barnes & Noble's 2006 Discover Great New Writer Awards with a \$10,000 prize.

Mylene Dressler, a TIL member since 2002, has been appointed a 2007-2008 Fellow in Writing by the Carson McCullers Center in Columbus, Georgia. This permits Mylene to live in McCullers' childhood home, where she is completing her fourth novel. Another bit of news about Mylene. Her novel, *The Deadwood Beetle* has been added to the Women's Press list of *Great Books By Women Writers*.

The September/October issue of *Poets & Writers* featured **Bryce Milligan** and his San Antonio publishing firm, Wings Press, which in the past twelve months published seventeen books.

Terry Dalrymple of Angelo State University has a short story, "Seeing Gina," coming out in the forthcoming issue of *New Texas*. Perhaps more provocatively, Terry recently gave a presentation at the Texas Association of Creative Writing Teachers entitled "How I Became a Poet and Why I Quit." (Say it aint so, Terry!) Terry and a colleague, John Wegner published an article, "We Could Be So Good Together: Rock and Roll and American Fiction," in *Nebula*, a peer-reviewed online journal.

News from **Kent Biffle**: "I managed a Halloweeny beat in my *Dallas Morning News* column (10/07/07) with a description of **Steve Hardin's** new book on grave robbing and low life in the Republic of Texas—*Texian Macabre: The Melancholy Tale of a Hanging in Early Houston*." The Texas A&M Press book has (*continued next page*)

a publication date of November 2007. Hardin is chairman of the history department at Victoria College.

Mark Busby and **Elmer Kelton** were to combine in a session entitled "The Making of Two Texas Legends" at the Texas Book Festival in Austin, Nov. 3-4, in which they would assess John Graves' Texas State selected Graves' book, *Goodbye to a River*, as the text that all incoming freshmen and transfer students must read for the academic year. Busby has been doing a number of presentations on campus and in town about the 50th anniversary of Graves' memorable trip down the Brazos. Mark also talked about Graves, **Walt McDonald**, Dorothy Scarborough, and **William Hauptman** in a presentation on "Texas Wind" at the annual Waxahachie Chautauqua in September.

Rolando Hinojosa-Smith of the University of Texas at Austin and **Dagoberto Gilb** of Texas State University take center stage at the Texas Book Festival in the House Chambers to read passages from Gilb's *Hecho en Tejas: An Anthology of Texas Mexican Literature*.

Also at the Festival, **Rick Riordan** was to read from his yet-to-be-released novel, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, the fourth in the Percy Jackson series.

A special feature at the Festival was a tribute to the late Molly Ivins, featuring a new film, "Remembering Molly Ivins," by Paul Stekler, with comments by **Lou Dubose**, Roy Blount Jr., and Ellen Sweats. Richard Dunham moderated.

Fran Vick, our TIL president, was featured at the Festival with her co-author, Jane Clements Monday, for their new book, *Petra's Legacy: The South Texas Ranching Empire of Petra Vela and Mifflin Kennedy*. Also on the panel was Jerry Thompson, TIL's 2006 winner for the most significant scholarly book, *Civil War to the Bloody End*. After the Festival the two authors will

be doing book signings in the areas around the Kennedy and King ranches.

Report from **Joe Coomer**: "I've just finished a book about restoring our 1885 Victorian home in Stonington, Maine. Writing the book only took half as long as the restoration and wasn't nearly as hard on the hands. My last novel, *Pocketful of Names*, was nominated for the IMPAC Dublin Literary Award and is now out in paperback from Graywolf Press. An earlier novel, *The Loop*, is in movie production with TapWater Media. I'll turn 50 soon."

Clay Reynolds, UTD professor, novelist and book critic, has a new collection of stories, *Sandhill County Lines*, published by Texas Tech University Press. In it he spins yarns about small town people trapped in mean circumstances, mostly in the Lone Star State. *Publishers Weekly* says Reynolds "shines penetrating light on small lives."

The Nov. 5, 2007, issue of *Newsweek* has a fascinating essay by **Larry McMurtry** about the new movie by Joel and Ethan Coel, "No Country for Old Men." The essay, entitled "A River Runs Through It," is a wide-ranging piece about western movie-making through the years and the essential role the Rio Grande has played.

Bud Shrake's new novel, *Custer's Brother's Horse*, has been released. Publisher is John M. Hardy Publishing. **Dale Walker** reviewed it in the *Dallas Morning News*, calling it "a terrific story."

Robin Doughty, University of Texas at Austin geographer, is in the final stages of his book on establishing an environmental regime for conserving the albatross. It tracks the development of knowledge and concern for the bird group that is now the most threatened one in the world, and examines the roles of individuals who are most effectively presenting alternatives for long liners that are taking tens of thousands of birds annually.

Time to pay dues for 2008

Members may send in their dues now for 2008. Make your check payable to Texas Institute of Letters. Dues are \$50, and members may wish to make additional contributions for the Paisano fund and the Fred Whitehead Memorial Endowment fund. Send your check to James Hoggard, TIL Treasurer, Department of English, Midwestern State University, Wichita Falls, TX 76308.

Please don't forget:

Send us your address, telephone, and e-mail changes. And corrections. Also, don't forget to send news about yourself. Our members are interested in you. Send to dpayne@smu.edu.

And especially send your e-mail address if it's not already in the directory.