

9-13-2002

MWP Newsletter, 2002 (September 13)

University of Mississippi. Department of English

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Recommended Citation

University of Mississippi. Department of English, "MWP Newsletter, 2002 (September 13)" (2002). *MWP News and Newsletters*. 40.

https://egrove.olemiss.edu/mwp_news/40

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Welcome to the Mississippi Writers Page Newsletter for September 13-19, 2002

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THIS WEEK in MISSISSIPPI LITERARY HISTORY

The following events all happened during this week in Mississippi history.

Year:

1825: Lawyer, Congressman, and future Supreme Court justice [L. Q. C. Lamar](#) was born in Putnam County, Georgia. (Sep. 17)

1899: Presbyterian minister **William Earl Crane** was born in Yazoo City, Mississippi. (Sep. 14)

1899: English professor **Richmond Pugh Bond** was born in Magnolia, Mississippi. (Sep. 16)

1904: Baptist minister and theologian **C. E. Autrey** was born in Columbus, Mississippi. (Sep. 17)

1907: Theologian **William F. Orr** was born in Corinth, Mississippi. (Sep. 13)

1910: Music composer and writer **Lehman Engel** was born in Jackson, Mississippi. (Sep. 14)

1910: Zoology professor **Osmond P. Breland** was born in Decatur, Mississippi. (Sep. 17)

1919: The story "They Grind Exceedingly Small" by **Ben Ames Williams** appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post*. (Sep. 13)

1928: Methodist minister **Perry Tanksley** was born near Lorman, Mississippi. (Sep. 15)

1933: English professor, fiction writer, and poet [Kenneth Holditch](#) was born in Ecu, Mississippi. (Sep. 18)

1934: Classics professor **E. Otha Wingo** was born in Booneville, Mississippi. (Sep. 17)

1939: **Larry Speakes**, former journalist and deputy press secretary for U.S. President Ronald Reagan from 1981-1987, was born in Cleveland, Mississippi. (Sep. 13)

1940: Writer and civil rights activist [Anne Moody](#), author of *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, was born in Wilkinson County, Mississippi. (Sep. 15)

1941: Social work professor **Thomas D. Watts** was born in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. (Sep. 19)

1943: Novelist [Mildred D. Taylor](#) was born in Jackson, Mississippi. (Sep. 13)

1943: Environmental engineer **Harry M. Freeman** was born in Meridian, Mississippi. (Sep. 17)

1945: Editor, journalist and photographer **James Dickerson** was born in Greenwood, Mississippi. (Sep. 14)

1946: Science fiction and fantasy writer **Howard Waldrop** was born in Houston, Mississippi. (Sep. 15)

1946: Legal historian [Walter F. Pratt, Jr.](#) was born in Jackson, Mississippi. (Sep. 17)

1947: Etiquette instructor and consultant **Joan M. Coles** was born in Houston, Mississippi. (Sep. 19)

1954: FBI officials interviewed [Richard Wright](#) in Paris about his relationship to the Communist Party when he went to renew his passport. (Sep. 16)

1957: Software developer and business professor **H. Jeff Smith** was born in Starkville, Mississippi. (Sep. 14)

1982: Music composer and writer **Lehman Engel** died of cancer in New York City. (Sep. 14)

1989: Jazz musician **Milt Hinton** performed at the White House with the Benny Carter All-Star Quartet. (Sep. 17)

2000: Playwright and poet **Beah Richards** died of emphysema in Vicksburg, Mississippi. (Sep. 14)

NEWS about MISSISSIPPI WRITERS

Do you have a news item about a Mississippi writer? Please send your information to mwp@olemiss.edu.

NEW FEATURES in the MISSISSIPPI WRITERS PAGE

The following articles were recently added to the Writer Listings:

- [Myrlie Evers-Williams](#) (1933-)
- [Michael Johnston](#)
- [Walter F. Pratt, Jr.](#) (1946-)

NEW BOOKS by Mississippi Writers

Absalom, Absalom!

A Novel by [William Faulkner](#)

First published 1936

Random House (Hardcover, \$22.00, ISBN: 0375508724)

Publication date: September 2002



Brief Review:

One of Faulkner's greatest novels, *Absalom, Absalom!* recounts the story of Thomas Sutpen, born into a poor farm family in western Virginia in the early 1800s who runs away with plans to create a vast "design" of wealth and power. When he appears in Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi (Faulkner's apocryphal setting for most of his novels), he carves out of the wilderness a vast plantation, marries a local shopkeeper's daughter, and settles into the life of a planter when his wife bears him two children, Henry and Judith. But when Henry brings home Charles Bon, a classmate from the University of Mississippi, who becomes romantically engaged with Judith, Sutpen's design begins to unravel. On the eve of the Civil War, Henry spurns his birthright, and together he and Bon leave. It is only after the war, after Henry and Bon have served together in the same regiment throughout the war, that one of the central mysteries of the novel emerges: why did Henry shoot Charles Bon at the gate of Sutpen's mansion?

The present-day of the novel is 1909-10 and is told primarily by contemporaries, including Rosa Coldfield, the fiercely proud sister of Sutpen's wife, a spinster who after her sister's death spurns Sutpen's rude sexual advances; Jason Compson, a confirmed cynic and nihilist who did not witness the key events befalling the Sutpen family but heard most of them from his father; Quentin Compson, Jason's son, a romantic young man who is drawn into the Sutpen saga against his will by Rosa Coldfield, but once he is involved he must follow it to its logical end; and Quentin's roommate at Harvard, the Canadian Shreve McCannon, who along with Quentin feels compelled to complete the saga by any means necessary. These memorable characters not only recount historically factual information about Sutpen's story; they also freely add to it and change it in order for it to make sense. The novel, then, which is a compelling exploration of Southern history, race, and gender, is likewise a powerful statement about how we interpret the past and impart meaning to it. —[John B. Padgett](#)

In the Deep Heart's Core

By [Michael Johnston](#)

Grove Press (Hardcover, \$22.00, ISBN: 080211721X)

Publication date: September 2002



Description from *Publishers Weekly*:

Fresh from a postcollege, intensive five-week crash course, Johnston began his two-year stint with Teach for America, a program that addresses the needs of some of America's most desperate classrooms. In Johnston's case, it's a high school classroom in Greenville, Miss., with "chalkboards so scratched, rusted, and embedded with chalk dust that I couldn't read the boards even if I wrote on them with fresh white paint." There he teaches students who have been through "more funerals than honor roll assemblies" due to drugs and gang violence. The school system's countless institutional failures (among them, a counselor who sells high school credits) challenge Johnston's assurance that education was the "one valuable skill I could bring to Mississippi that she could use." The students' truancy, sexual promiscuity and aggression sorely test Johnston's conviction that "underneath, they were vulnerable ... still children." Successes are minuscule and failure is rampant.

What makes Johnston's account noteworthy is his ability to move beyond making generalizations

about impoverished schools and students. Rather, he takes readers into the constricted and often doomed lives of individuals: Corelle catches up on months of work with a six-hour marathon, but drops out of school; “confident, gracious, and charismatic” Egina becomes the accidental victim of cross fire. Although Johnston occasionally catches sight of a “few students who were trying to work effectively,” they occupy the periphery. “In making the Delta my home,” he observes, “I found inside her a despair beyond any I could have imagined.” That compassion, leavened with good sense, makes this honest and often painful account a moving, memorable call for action. —
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AUTHOR EVENTS: Book Signings, Readings, and Appearances

Aug. 1-Nov. 4: J. D. William Library, University of Mississippi, Oxford, Mississippi

“Civil Rights, Mississippi, and the Novelist’s Craft.” This exhibit highlights fictional accounts set in Mississippi during the Civil Rights Movement, including works by [Ellen Douglas](#), [Patrick D. Smith](#), [Elizabeth Spencer](#), [Eudora Welty](#), [Lewis Nordan](#), William Mahoney, Joan Williams, and many others. Supplementing the display of books will be correspondence, manuscripts, and related ephemera drawn from the archive’s literary collections. Located in the Hall of Mississippi Writers in the Special Collections Department, J. D. Williams Library. Open 8:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. weekdays. For more information, please contact: Leigh McWhite, (662) 915-7937, slmcwhit@olemiss.edu.

Sep. 18: Square Books, Oxford, Mississippi, 5:30 p.m.

Reading by Michael Johnston, author of *In the Deep Heart’s Core*, a book about his two years of teaching in the Mississippi Delta as a member of the Teach for America program. For more information, visit www.squarebooks.com.

Sep. 19: Square Books, Oxford, Mississippi, 5:30 p.m.

Reading by Whitney Terrell, author of *The Huntsman*, on Thacker Mountain Radio. Musical guest will be country music singer/songwriter (and Mississippi writer) Marty Stuart. For more information, visit www.thackermountain.com.

Sep. 25: Square Books, Oxford, Mississippi, 5 p.m.

Reading by [Thomas Hal Phillips](#). For more information, visit the Square Books web site, www.squarebooks.com.

Sep. 26: Square Books, Oxford, Mississippi, 5:30 p.m.

Reading by [Will D. Campbell](#) on Thacker Mountain Radio. Musical guest will be Mississippi Delta gospel-blues artists Duff & the Revelators. For more information, visit www.thackermountain.com.

Sep. 26-28: Mississippi State University, Starkville, Mississippi, 7:30 p.m.

“June Recital,” an adaptation of extracts from, among others, [Eudora Welty](#)’s “Losing Battles” and “Why I Live at the P.O.” Brenda Currin’s one-woman show also features the direction of David Kaplan and music of Phillip Fortenberry. For more information about ticket prices or details on the performance, contact the Mississippi State University communications department at (662) 325-9810 or theatremsu@comm.msstate.edu.

Sep. 27: Square Books, Oxford, Mississippi, 5 p.m.

[Rick Bass](#) will sign and read from his short story collection, *The Hermit's Story*. For more information, visit the Square Books web site, www.squarebooks.com.

Oct. 1: Square Books, Oxford, Mississippi, 2 p.m.

On the 40th anniversary of the integration of the University of Mississippi by [James Meredith](#), author William Doyle will sign copies of *An American Insurrection: The Battle of Oxford, Mississippi, 1962*, which chronicles the history of that epochal event. For more information, visit the Square Books web site, www.squarebooks.com.

Oct. 7: Bondurant Hall Auditorium, University of Mississippi, Oxford, Mississippi, 7:00 p.m.

Poetry Reading by Alan Michael Parker. Respected poet Alan Michael Parker will read from his work. Sponsored by the John and Renee [Grisham](#) Visiting Writers Series and the Department of English. For more information, contact the English Department at (662) 915-7687, engl@olemiss.edu.

If you know of upcoming literary events by or about Mississippi writers, please let us know by writing us at mwp@olemiss.edu.

ON THE HORIZON

The following events are planned for the coming weeks and months. You may wish to begin planning now to attend or participate.

November 11, 2002

Poetry Reading by J. D. McClatchy, Bondurant Hall Auditorium, The University of Mississippi campus, in Oxford.

November 14, 2002

[Donna Tartt](#), author of *The Secret History*, will sign and read from her long-awaited second novel, *The Little Friend*, at Square Books in Oxford, Mississippi. For more information, visit the Square Books web site, www.squarebooks.com.

November 16, 2002

Mary Carol Miller will sign copies of *Lost Landmarks of Mississippi*. For more information, visit the Square Books web site, www.squarebooks.com.

January 16, 2003

Poetry Reading by Tom Chandler, Bondurant Hall Auditorium, The University of Mississippi campus, in Oxford.

February 6, 2003

U.S. Poet Laureate (2001-2002) Billy Collins reads from his poetry and offers commentary on his work and other matters. Bondurant Hall Auditorium, The University of Mississippi campus in Oxford.

February 17, 2003

A reading by [Clifton L. Taulbert](#) on the University of Mississippi campus in Oxford.

March 25, 2003

Poetry Reading by Andrew Hudgins, Bondurant Hall Auditorium, The University of Mississippi campus, in Oxford.

March 26-30, 2003

Seventeenth Annual [Tennessee Williams](#)/New Orleans Literary Festival, New Orleans, Louisiana. For information, visit their web site at www.tennesseewilliams.net.

April 10-13, 2003

Oxford Conference for the Book, Oxford, Mississippi.

July 20-25, 2003

30th Annual Faulkner & Yoknapatawpha Conference, The University of Mississippi, Oxford, Mississippi

If you know of additional news items for this newsletter or if you have suggestions, please write us at mwp@olemiss.edu.

For more information about events in the Oxford and University of Mississippi community, see the Ole Miss Community Calendar:
www.olemiss.edu/calendar/

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