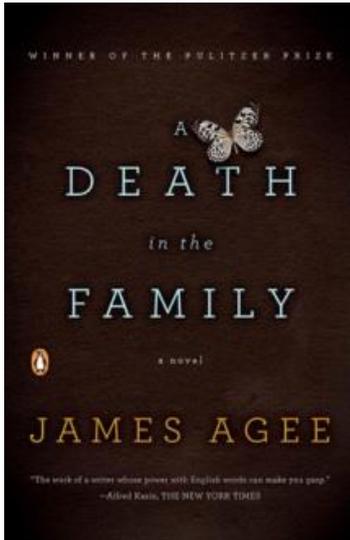


Spotlight

Friday October 13, 2017



The story behind the publishing of *A Death in the Family* by James Agee is nearly as affecting as the novel itself. Considered a great American classic the book was published after Agee's untimely death at the age of forty-five. As these stories often go, during Agee's life he received luke-warm attention for his work as a screen writer, author, and journalist. It was not until after his death when *A Death in the Family* was published that his reputation began to grow and in response to this book he is now considered one of the great American novelists.

Born in Tennessee (where there is now a street named after him) the story has the haunted air of many novels in the Southern canon. It tells the painful and raw story of a woman confronting the unexpected death of her husband at the turn of the century in small town America. Reading the book is like watching glass shatter in slow motion. Agee divided *A Death in the Family* into three parts told from multiple perspectives including the voice of the young widow, her two children, and the surrounding family. Additional writings including the stunning and unforgettable prologue were inserted by editors in italics at the end and beginning of clearly marked parts so as not to disrupt the intended flow of the novel. Held taut with restrained and beautiful language the relationships surrounding the deceased husband and his family shiver with everything that is unsaid and make the novel nearly impossible to put down while also being unbearable.

A Death in the Family is semi-autobiographical and based on the events surrounding the death of Agee's own father when he was a child. At once an intimate portrait of grief it is also a timepiece of the American south and this skillful combination of large and small stories is certainly part of what garnered the novel the Pulitzer Prize in 1958.

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