



## **All That Is**

*James Salter*

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## **All That Is** James Salter

An extraordinary literary event, a major new novel by the PEN/Faulkner winner and acclaimed master: a sweeping, seductive, deeply moving story set in the years after World War II.

From his experiences as a naval officer in battles off Okinawa during World War II, Philip Bowman returns to America and finds a position as a book editor. It was a time when publishing was still a private affair - a scattered family of small houses here and in Europe - a time of gatherings in fabled apartments, parties into the night. It is a world in which to immerse himself, a world of intimate connections and surprising triumphs. But the deal that Philip cannot seem to close is love: one marriage goes bad; another fails to happen; and, finally, he meets a woman who entralls, then betrays him, setting him on a course he could never have imagined for himself.

Written with Salter's signature economy of prose, *All That Is* fiercely, fluidly explores a life unfolding in a world on the brink of change: a dazzling, sometimes devastating labyrinth of love and ambition, of the small shocks and grand pleasures of being alive.

## **All That Is Details**

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Author : James Salter

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## From Reader Review All That Is for online ebook

### Keith says

A look back to another time, from the 1945 end of World War Two into the 1970s before the twin movements of anti-establishment youth culture and first wave feminism changed everything. Salter clearly looks back fondly on this time but it is as a time that is gone forever and now seems like an alien culture.

In the hands of a lesser writer this tale of culture, class, power and wealth would be a miserable failure. Salter is often defined, in an almost obligatory fashion, as a "writer's writer." I take this to mean that no matter the story, no matter how outré it might be, a writer, a professional lover of language, will drink deeply of the novel's craft. This is, in part, because Salter is a spare writer and his sentences are crafted with exquisite care. One could adequately comment on the book with a series of quotations which if only peripherally related would still be entrancing.

The book is moored definitely in its time but the specifics of the time are rare. There a one sentence comment on the Kennedy assassination and Vietnam is summed up in another exquisite observation:

Everything, during this time, was overshadowed by the war in Vietnam. The passions of the many against the war, especially the youth, were inflamed. There were the endless lists of the dead, the visible brutality, the many promises of victory that were never kept until the war seemed like some dissolute son who cannot ever be trusted or change but must always be taken in.

The story itself is a kind of anti-bildungsroman. The main protagonist, Philip Bowman, comes home from the Pacific War changed in some subtle way. He attempts to become a journalist but ends up as an editor in a small literary publishing house. He falls deeply in love with a young Virginia aristocrat but their marriage, to the relief of both, quietly falls apart. Bowman meets many more women with whom he also falls deeply in love with and has athletic sex with in a variety of locales. It becomes a vacuous, amoral, purposeless world of sensual eroticism. Unlike our hookup culture that promises no commitment, no promises and no tomorrows the world of this book is populated by men falling completely, head over heels deeply in love. Sex is a part of it but the sex is also surrounded by comfortable domesticity and the symbols of high culture: museums, plays, dinner parties, European vacations, and always, lots of very fine liquor. There is a broad cast of characters that Salter will often introduce with a complete back story and then have them participate in some small aspect of Bowman's life before shuffling offstage. The reader follows Bowman through these adventures, as he interacts with the world of high culture as it existed until the late 1960s. For anyone familiar with TV's "Mad Men," Bowman is in many aspects a more sophisticated version of Don Draper. The book has its shocking moments, an act of unparalleled venality and an act of surreal revenge are but the two most obvious. On the other hand, this lovingly detailed look at a vanished world seems like an act of homage from the 88 year old Salter. There is much to admire or perhaps envy of this time. As the book concludes Bowman has aged and his last comments seem very much of their author:

The power of the novel in the nation's culture had weakened. It had happened gradually. It was something everyone recognized and ignored. All went on exactly as before, that was the beauty of it. The glory had faded but fresh faces kept appearing, wanting to be part of it, to be in publishing which had retained a suggestion of elegance like a pair of beautiful, bone-shined shoes owned by a bankrupt man. Those who had been in it for some years ... were like nails

driven long ago into a tree that then grew around them.

This passage of time and of the changes time inevitably brings fuel the elegiac tone here. For time, passing time is surely Salter's theme here, that and the difficulty of knowing ourselves in any serious manner. The last lines of the book emphasize this when Bowman, old but not alone, says: "There comes a time when you realize that everything is a dream, and only those things preserved in writing have any possibility of being real." One reviewer noted that Salter is as close to an Epicurean writer as we are likely to get and that it is this factor that makes his work difficult for those gentle readers still attached to the literary form.

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### **Richard Hensley says**

I found this book deeply annoying, mostly for its embedded misogyny but also for its dull protagonist and narrative torpor. The perspective drifts frequently; we enter the thoughts of more than a dozen minor characters but never any of the protagonist's women, except for a few paragraphs late in the book when one of them is moved to cheat on him. Each girlfriend's point of view is absent, presumably because, as the protagonist's mother says of his first wife, she has no soul.

The prose is good but not unerring. Sometimes in his urge to compress the author cobbles phrases into sentences that are confusing or unintentionally comic. Time and again pronoun references are unclear and have to be puzzled out through rereading. The digressive plot is rich with lifelike detail but has no compelling thread; we meander through brief anecdotes that are only mildly interesting, and the chapters jerk forward sometimes years at a time, revisiting characters whom we've long forgotten, or introducing completely new ones - the book includes roughly a hundred different named individuals. Add to this the pervasive class snobbery (it came from out of the blue but I felt a perverse gratification when the protagonist's ultimate heartthrob ran off with a blue-collar type) and you have a book that I would not have finished if not for its many strong reviews.

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### **Violet wells says**

All That Is was my introduction to James Salter. I suppose the ultimate worth test of any novel, upon finishing it, is do I want to read another one of his books? The answer to this is, yes. Yes but not in a mad hurry of love.

His prose is almost like underwriting – sketched impressions that flit with a surprising dexterity over huge expanses of time and from one character's perspective to another. Often he enters the point of view of sideshow characters for a moment, offers an anecdote or a vignette of social commentary, and then drops them. The surprise is, for the most part, he makes this eccentric head hopping work. But essentially this novel is about Philip Bowman, a young naval officer during WW2 when we first meet him who becomes an editor at a New York publishing house.

Philip Bowman is in love with infatuation. Emotionally he doesn't appear to get beyond it as an ideal. He's like a man permanently in the grip of male menopause. Women to him are objects of beauty, conveyors of moments of heightened physical intimacy. He gets through half a dozen in the novel and the overriding sense is that he can barely tell them apart. He's a man remembering women as conquest and effect. It appears he can only dwell happily in idyllic realms. As a result of which all his attempts to build a home and forge a lasting relationship are thwarted. The novel is essentially about his sexual conquests, an attempt to highlight the regenerating nature of physical intimacy. Except it's a bit hollow as a life affirming coda, as this is a routine of recharging batteries that might be achieved through frequent visits to call girls.

I can see why Salter has never received the plaudits of a Bellow, Delillo or Roth. On the evidence of this novel he doesn't get his hands dirty as a writer. He doesn't put his head under the water. We're skimming over surfaces with Salter, beautifully depicted surfaces but there's often the feeling of missing dimensions in his prose. For example we're never quite sure if Salter perceives the egotistical superficiality of his central character's demands of women. Which is why, I suppose, he's been accused of misogyny in some quarters. In his late eighties James Salter has lived through decades in which sexual politics have been revolutionised so it's perhaps no wonder that at times he can appear mired in a more macho and entitled male mind-set but one of the fascinating subtexts of this novel is to show us, on the one hand, how much things have changed in the male/female dynamic and, on the other hand, how little they've changed.

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### **John Thorndike says**

There is an act of revenge near the end of the book that stopped me cold. Other reviews have described it, so I won't. Better to discover it as you read the book--and in fact, as you get close you'll see it coming. The revenge is stunning in its cruelty, but what I find untenable is how indifferently Philip Bowman carries out the act, and how easily Salter lets Bowman off the hook. Only pages later he's having another love affair, then another, then the book ends. But I'm stuck 30 pages back. Salter writes the last four chapters as if his readers will forgive Philip Bowman--and I can't.

I've read all of Salter's books. I love *A Sport and A Pastime*, *Burning The Days* and *Life Is Meals*, a book he wrote with his wife. But for me, Salter's masterpiece is *Light Years*. I keep a copy between my mattress and headboard and have been reading it, repeatedly, for almost 20 years. For me, in all of literature there is no greater book.

As *All That Is* unfolded, I wondered about Salter's focus. Characters drop in out of nowhere, tilt and disappear. This happens in life, of course, but at times the progress of the novel felt oddly random. That said, if the book had been 3,000 pages long instead of 300, I would have read it all with fascination. I love how Salter writes. I can hardly believe I'm giving a book of his only four stars. But the final chapters of *All That Is* seem to have come from a sleepwalker. My faith in Salter is great, and usually when he surprises me I slow down, read more carefully and learn something. But when I go back to the ending of *All That Is*, I can't stand it.

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### **Laysee says**

My response to James Salter's "All That Is" can be summed up in one question: "Is that all?"

I did not expect not to like this book since I have much respect for Salter's prose style and did enjoy "Light Years" and "Dusk and Other Stories". The prose is still commendable in this novel but it is really "all that is".

The story revolves around Philip Bowman, a young navigation officer who returns from WW2, and starts to find his way in life - getting a degree, finding a job, meeting women and getting married. Bowman becomes a successful editor with a publishing company; the entire story is about him getting into an endless train wreck of relationships with several women initiated almost always by the slightest bit of physical and/or

sexual attraction.

I wanted to abandon this book but I plodded on in hopes that I might yet find some redeeming quality. There is none. A few things about this book just did not work for me.

First, Salter frequently interrupts his storytelling on a focal character by interjecting with a new and meandering thread a myriad of other minor characters, many of whom are quickly forgotten and never appear again. The abruptness of this interferes with the main story surrounding Bowman and whichever woman is the flavor of the month. There is also no plot to give the story direction.

Second, there is not one character I care about in this book. Bowman's mother dislikes his wife (Vivian Amussen) because she thinks "Vivian had no soul". Well, Bowman has no soul too. He is a man for whom the lust of the flesh reigns supreme.

Third, the story is shallow and especially depressing and repugnant in its unrelenting portrayal of vapid lives. The many publishers Bowman meets in the course of his work are all alike in their having had at least three mistresses or wives, are hungry for sex and also starved by it. The women behave likewise. After a while, Bowman's misogyny and sexual exploits become predictable and nauseating.

One star for the star in Salter's prose - That Is All.

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## **Claudia Putnam says**

What if a woman had written this book--stylistically interesting in places, but basically a babbling chronicle of all the lovers a main (female) character had had? Wouldn't that be dismissed as chick lit?

Can't jump on the bandwagon with this one. So many people are praising the style/beautiful writing, but having just read *Light Years* a few months ago, this seems a little clunky in comparison. Also, shouldn't an author evolve over the years, stylistically? Does he really want to say the same thing with his language over and over?

I listened to a (boring, uninformed, juvenile) conversation over on Book Fight, and someone there spoke of sentences that don't call attention to themselves and let the story come out. Well, a) there IS no story in this book, and b) Salter's sentences absolutely do call attention to themselves. That's why he's known for being a stylist. He flattens semi-colons to commas, stuffs all kinds of things that don't belong together into the same paragraph, or even the same sentence. Conceptually, I mean. What can he have in mind if not to pull the reader out of the story and make her think? For example, an elderly woman, about to die (paraphrasing bec I'm too lazy to look it up): The house had flowers in it nearly every day, usually yellow jonquils, and she was dressed nicely, but she fell.

I suppose he's saying that even though she had it together enough to keep her house and personal presentation nice, she was still frail enough to fall and injure herself. Well, okay, but that "but" requires the reader to stop and translate the sentence. If he were not calling attention to his sentences, he would have written something more transparent, such as "Even though her house had such lovely flowers, and even though she was dressed well, she no longer could control her balance, AND she fell."

Not saying it's a better sentence, just refuting that ridiculous notion that Salter's lines don't call attention to themselves. I don't mind writing that pulls me out of the "story" and makes me think. Also, much of the writing was just flat and boring, so these supposedly great sentences IMO were not impressive.

Story: Well. It's a string of women the MC fucks over time, maybe looking for real love, maybe unable to commit. There is nothing psychological in this novel (the main way you see the French influence, I think). No one really reacts to anything, except one character who loses his wife and child. Otherwise, there's no emotion in this book, just a series of photographs, all of which objectify the women. Every single woman in the book is evaluated in terms of her attractiveness.

Also, we are told, for every character introduced, even in passing, how many times they've been married/divorced. Everyone is on marriage number 2 or 3, and no one thinks there's anything wrong with having affairs. NO ONE. Statistically, this seems unlikely. Both seem unlikely. In 1970, say, how many people had been divorced at all, let alone multiple times? My parents got divorced around 1973 and were among the first in our area. There was stigma for it--as a kid, you were seen as damaged or viewed by teachers as dangerous, even, if your parents were divorced. So I highly doubt that every single person in the MC's circle is several times divorced.

Also, it seems to me that people who behave this way must be fundamentally unhappy. And yet there's no suggestion of this in most cases, and even when the glittery surface cracks, we don't get any insight into their unhappiness.

I'm okay with a meandering, beautifully written story, but I don't think this is that beautiful (I read *The Burgess Boys* right before this book. If you want to talk about amazing sentences, let's go talk about that book). So, overall, it doesn't come off. Not sorry I read it, but doesn't live up to the hype.

Salter reminds me of my father --they'd be the same age. My father was constantly looking at women, constantly evaluating--Oh, look at that perfect hourglass shape. Also, I think Salter's racism is inescapable. You might say he's just chronicling the attitudes of this set of people, but no one reacts, no one gets upset by someone saying nigger, and even the MC's experience of the Virgin Islands is that they're mostly black and full of lazy people. I'll be glad when this type of man has entirely died out. What a dinosaur.

This is dick lit of the first order.

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### **Adam Ross says**

It's silly to compare Salter's *All That Is* to his previous masterpieces: *Light Years*, *Burning the Days*, *A Sport and a Pastime*. His stories. Not all of them, of course, but quite a few will endure. Still, the novel's terrific and will engender, I know, a massive reconsideration of his work, which is neglected, under-read, misunderstood, too brutal and unsparing for some, too highbrow for others, too sexual, too white, too whatever. Whatever. If you miss him, you've missed something great, and here's my recommendation: Don't start with this novel. Start with any of the above I've mentioned (the story collections are *Last Night and Dusk and Other Stories*), working your way toward this late symphony. Perhaps you'll understand why he's a writer's writer. That's to say that writer's swoon over him, wish they could pull off his effects, write so piercingly and un-sentimentally. Or not. But life is like Salter writes. Period.

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### **Chrissie says**

What draws me to recommend this book is the writing. I thoroughly enjoy Salter's description of places and individuals. And sex - explicit but not too graphic and not rosily drawn in romantic words.

The places so wonderfully described are Manhattan and its suburbs. Paris, France. Spain. Thunderstorms. Beaches. Restaurants and bars. The publishing community as it was after the Second World War. The publishing houses are fictional but the atmosphere of the time feels genuine as well as the authors, poets, photographers and artists named. The central character, Philip Bowman, is an editor. He is born in Manhattan in 1925. We follow him in the years after the war through the 1980s. His life is dissolute. If you need a hero to enjoy a novel, look elsewhere. He is not a person like me, but he is a person searching for something, something not quite within his grasp. It is this that I think one can relate to. Life has an allure. Life is intoxicating. Moments of pleasure are there for the grabbing.

So why not more stars? Not because Philip is different from me, not because his choices are immoral, but because Philip remains at arm's length. I came to know many secondary characters better than Philip. Yet at the same time I complete the novel feeling that Philip being Philip **could** not let anyone closer. That is quite simply who Philip was. You can ask why. You can also ask yourself if Philip's unremarkable life is so very different, not in the specifics, but in its general quality of life compared to most people's lives. No one's life is all that dramatic as novels draw the lives of books' heroes and villains.

The audiobook narration by Joe Barrett was absolutely excellent. Women and men, those with a lisp, those from the South, from Spain, from France, each and every one could be identified from Barrett's meticulously correct intonations. Easy to follow. Perfect speed.

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## Melanie says

Oh how I wanted to love thee...

It's a little cruel to have to choose how many stars to give this book. My heart was oscillating between two or three. Both seemed cruel but I chose two.

I adore James Salter. "Light Years" was such a luminous, haunting book. "Burning The Days" was such an energetic, urgent memoir.

What happened to the energy, the urgency, the passionate, beating heart of life? Is this really "all that is"? I certainly hope not.

I was tremendously bored throughout the novel. I was devastated to be bored but I need to be honest and could not bring myself to care about this character for one second. Where was his interior life? What were his struggles? Where was the adversity?

I felt as if I was constantly floating in some ethereal world where absolutely nothing happens, where women were nothing but "goddesses", with high cheekbones and perfect limbs, nothing but empty vessels to be filled (literally) by the narrator's glorious manhood. A world where life was nothing but a succession of low-lit bars and drinks and elegant restaurants and glamorous apartments... A life unmoored, inconsequential, detached, painfully meaningless. A narrator who only seemed to come to life briefly through his sexual encounters, before dissolving again in melancholy and nostalgia.

Beautiful sentences (and there are quite a few here, lighting up the darkness) could not mask the absolute emptiness that lay at the heart of this book for me.

A beautiful disaster. My biggest literary disappointment of the year.

## Darlene says

Prior to reading 'All That Is', I had been hearing many positive things about the writing of James Salter. I picked this book up, not really knowing what to expect and now I can say that my feelings about this novel are complicated. First off, I want to say that James Salter writes beautifully... his prose flows and his descriptions of the characters and the settings are masterfully written. I was able to form a visual picture in my mind as I was reading, as if I was watching a film of what was transpiring.

Let me back up a bit... 'All That Is' is a story which occurs in the decades following World War II. As the story begins, we meet a young naval officer, Philip Bowman. He is returning to the United States after his experiences in battles off Okinawa. Philip is trying to determine what to do with his life and at first toys with the idea of becoming a journalist. When he discovers that newspapers are not hiring, he ultimately takes a job reading manuscripts for a small publishing house in New York. Although the job doesn't pay particularly well, Philip discovers that he enjoys the publishing business.. he has the feeling of fitting in and belonging in this world.

Mr. Salter's descriptions of the small publishing houses and how they functioned following World War II, were highly enjoyable to read. Reading about the small groups of publishing people gathering in apartments and engaging in conversations about books and authors long into the nights sounded like pure joy to me.. and I suspect will to EVERY book lover. The difficulty I had with the story ended up being the character of Philip Bowman. Initially, Philip's life, in terms of his career, was coming together nicely.... it was his loneliness and his desire to connect with a woman romantically that created a huge amount of upheaval for him and was the source of endless frustration for me.

As the novel proceeds, we see Philip begin a series of relationships with women who, one after the other, disappoint, betray, bewilder and ultimately leave him heartbroken. Initially, I felt sympathetic towards him and his plight... perhaps most people can relate to having chosen not so wisely in love at one time or another. But as I continued to follow his experiences, I couldn't help but be reminded of a movie from not so long ago entitled, 'He's Just Not That Into You'.... substitute 'she's' for 'he's' and you have a perfect description of Philip's encounters with women. The first woman he met... and married.. was Vivian. They met in a bar on St. Patrick's Day and honestly, from the very first meeting, their relationship felt awkward and stilted to me. Even after they had been married for a time, the relationship never 'felt' better to me. The marriage eventually ended and Philip moved on to Enid, Christine, and a very young woman (young enough to be his daughter with a couple of other complications thrown in which just increased the 'ick' factor for me!).... none of these relationships flourished and in each of them, it felt to me as if Philip was feeling an attraction to women that was never truly reciprocated.

Okay.. I admit that perhaps Philip's disastrous and self-destructive relationship choices were simply a reflection of the basic differences between men and woman.... in how they choose a partner and view relationships. Perhaps Mr. Salter views relationships and how they should be quite differently from me. In fact, I'm almost sure that is the case. But I still could not keep my annoyance and frustration with Philip in check. After traversing several decades of his life and his self-destructive choices with regards to relationships, I could not help but wonder why he was not developing just A BIT more self-awareness. I could not fathom why, after several decades and more than a few failed relationships, why he just did not learn that perhaps always choosing the shiniest, prettiest bauble was not necessarily in his best interest.

I suppose my own advancing age has left me with decreasing amounts of patience when it comes to people's insistence on MAKING bad choices but never actually LEARNING from those mistakes. Or maybe part of

my frustration with Philip Bowman is that he represents a cynicism and hopelessness toward the chance of a long lasting, successful relationship actually occurring between men and women.... I would like to be able to disagree with this cynicism.

Regardless, if you enjoy reading a book simply for the beauty of the language it contains, I can highly recommend this one. If you are inclined to feel impatient with people's innate foolishness when making important decisions, you may want to skip this one. I haven't given up on James Salter, however. His writing is just too gorgeous not to give him another try. I would give this book a 3.5 stars.

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## **K.D. Absolutely says**

My first time to read a James Salter book. This one was published in 2013, two years before he died. He was 88 years old when this book was published.

One of my ten favorite books is Honore de Balzac's 1835 novel, *Old Goriot* (5 stars). This led me to many other books about old age. I am 52 years old and it is a bit early for me to empathize with characters in their twilight years. However, for me, this is akin to readers who even when they are old are still fond of sci-fi, graphic novels, or romance novels. Being old facing eventual death has a lure for me. I think that it is the final test of one's character. I think it is the most dramatic phase, albeit short and could be fleeting, in one's life. Probably, next to one's birth, one's death is the defining phase of one's life. When I think of my dead father, I would like to think of him alive and happy. However, his wasted body fighting with cancer or his dead body in the coffin a few minutes before he was interred always follow and sometimes dominate his images in my mind.

What attracted me to this book was it's memoir feels. We all know that non-fiction works are basically based on author's own experience or imagination. This not being a fan or speculative fiction or simply an escapist work and penned by a PEN/Faulkner winner means that there is wisdom in this work. So, I bought this book during 2015 Manila International Book Fair and read the following year. It is only now that I found time to review this on Goodreads because of the hectic schedule at work and at home. We have been without a housemaid for more than a year now.

Salter did not disappoint me. Based on Wiki Salter used to be a US Air Force pilot and officer, journalist and writer. His main character in this book **Philip Bowman** follows the same life path. You can feel his sincerity in every page of this book. Sincerity that stems out from his being the same as his character.

My favorite passage in the book is this one that seems to describe the final hour as imagine by the character. I could not help but imagine Salter imagining his own death and it gave me goosebumps while reading:

"He had always seen it as the dark river and the long lines of those waiting for the boatman, waiting in resignation and the patience that eternity required, stripped of all but a single, last possession, a ring, a photograph, or letter that represented everything dearest and forever left behind that they somehow hoped, it being so small, they would be able to take with them. He had such a letter, from Enid. *The days I spent with you were the greatest days in my life...*"

It made me imagine of a rich man dying in a lonely and dimly lit room with just a nurse. There could be just a rosary or a picture of a loved one on his hand. This despite the wealth that he accumulated in his life. This despite all the people he loved and those who loved him in return. We were born alone and will die alone.

Overall, this is a delightful simple yet sincere book. Recommended to all those who are fond of memoirs and stories that cover almost the whole life of the character. I always like this kind of book.

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### **Boris Feldman says**

I forced myself to finish this book. True, for the last 30% or so, I flipped the digital pages quickly. I was determined to reach the end to see why, oh why, Amazon chose it as a Best Book of the Month and the blurbers raved. (Why do the blurbers rave?)

I admit that the language is often well-done. The sample that I downloaded, the first pages, were fine.

But it is a novel devoid of plot. It is a pointless pastiche of vignettes about the protagonist's empty sexual conquests and the vacuity of his life.

I had never read anything by James Salter before. Indeed, I had never heard of him. If, as some of the reviewers claim, this is his greatest work, I now know why.

A pointless book about a pointless life.

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### **Amanda says**

I'm writing this review immediately after reading *All That Is*. I'm emotionally confused. James Salter did something to me in his writing that I never expected. I grew to love his concise words and phrasing. After taking a month to finish reading this book that I wasn't sure that I could finish or wanted to, I feel uneasy. I also feel a small smile on my face for finishing the novel and finally becoming attached to the main character, Philip Bowman. It only took a month to do it. I'm left feeling as though I need a hug and an urge to never fear growing old.

I had never read anything by Salter before. I only knew of this book as one of the books people will be talking about in 2013. Before reading, I scanned a few snippets of reviews of his older works. One reviewer described Salter as having an "economy of prose." No truer description has ever been made. The U.S. government may want to take some tips from him as his words and phrasing contain no fat, yet are effective enough to move the reader. For example, within one page, I went on a first date with two characters and witnessed their engagement. Their entire courtship was reduced to a few lines of text.

*All That Is* feels like a collection of short stories put together to make one story. Some stories don't feel as if they are being told chronologically as many times I did not know the date or year of events until the end of the chapter. It was confusing every so often. It also ticked me off a bit because I'd imagine the characters in other clothes or with different hair styles only to find at the end of the chapter that we had progressed to the 70s and were no longer in the mid 60s. Salter may begin a chapter by introducing a new character with the narrator speaking about him as if we were old friends. It's unnerving, diving directly into someone's life and knowing the lies they tell themselves to feel better about their situation. The stories do connect, although, I did forget exactly the significance of some names and characters (please see above where it took me a month to finish this book). That took some of the enjoyment away from me.

I spent the better half of this book looking for the central conflict. The one we are shown initially within the

description of the book or the set up within the first few lines. I was waiting on Bowman to fight for the love of one of the women he romanced. I was waiting on tragedy to befall him. I was waiting on a fantasy to occur. I was waiting on that happily ever after to arrive. But Salter doesn't present that. It's as if with his age, he speaks the truth about life and does it with a rare honesty that is refreshing. Happily ever afters don't just fall into one's lap, you have to work for them. His characters lie to themselves and to each other. They become complacent and accept unhappiness or what they deem to be happiness for survival or to avoid being lonely. It's so real that it hurts. I urge to you take your time with this novel and soak in what Salter is describing.

Most novels, even the great ones, don't pretend to be true. You believe them, they even become part of your life, but not as literal truth. This books seems to violate that.

I feel a strange attraction to Philip Bowman after finishing. My feelings towards him mirror the ebb and flow of the Pacific Ocean he sailed during WWII. The best way I can describe Bowman is to compare him to Don Draper from Mad Men in the first few seasons. I was intrigued by Bowman's actions although I didn't understand or agree with all of them. I wanted to comfort him during his return from the war, back to his sleepy hometown of Summitt, New York. His search for a job he felt meaningful and what matched his journalism major can be felt by many new and old college graduates. Bowman wants love. He wants to be loved and he wants someone to love him. I wanted him to find love even when I knew he was only hurting himself or someone else. Through all of Bowman's romances, that's what I wanted more than anything. I wanted the "this time, it's going to happen for him" feeling to come. However much I wanted it to happen, I could always sense that that time hadn't yet arrived. Salter had a way of showing me that the current woman Bowman was with, wasn't right for him or vice versa from the character's introduction. There was a time I hated Bowman. I understood his motives even if neither he nor the narrator knew about them, but that didn't mean that I wasn't disappointed with him and what he was doing. But like real life, true life, we all make mistakes and we all fall short. As I said before, I was waiting on a fantasy, but Salter served up real human action.

He felt sick with the memory of it. He was sick with all the memories. They had done things together that would make her look back one day and see that he was the one who truly mattered. That was a sentimental idea, the stuff of a woman's novel. She would never look back. He knew that. He amounted to a few pages. Not even. He hated her, but what could he do?

There are many love scenes. None are particularly vulgar, but they do have erotic qualities about them. Just as with other parts of the novel, Salter is fiscally responsible with his words yet I got just enough to fill in the blanks. Philip goes from being unsure about himself to feeling confidence and comfort in his actions. He knows what he likes and that is what makes women attracted to him, even as his age increases. To be frank, Salter enjoys the word "cock." That is all.

I'd recommend this book for someone who wants something different from the ordinary. All That Is doesn't feel ordinary at all. This isn't just a book, it's literature. Salter uses his characters to teach lessons about real love, friendship, trust, and honesty. He didn't just tell a story about a man's life, Salter revealed what it is to live with hopes, dreams, and failures. Just like any good short story, All That Is left me haunted, it left me wondering, it left me hoping, and it left me doubting. This is the first time I've ever cried writing a review. I didn't know this story would affect me as much as it did.

"Have you ever fallen in love?"

"Fallen in love? Been in love, you mean. Yes, of course."

"I mean fallen. You never forget it."

I was graced with an advanced copy of All That Is in return for an honest review. Solus ego ueritatem scripturus.

<http://www.literatilitaturelovers.com>

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## Ted says

*the slow profound rhythm began, hardly varying but as time passed somehow more and more intense ... she was trembling like a tree about to fall ...*

*"I married the wrong man", she said.*

*... and if you marry this book, I believe it's more likely to last, the older you are.*

## James Salter

James Salter has been called a “writer’s writer”, the “finest craftsman of the American sentence”. And yet before reading of him in The New Yorker earlier this year (an article probably occasioned by the publication of this book) I’d never heard of him. Salter (last name originally Horowitz) was born in 1926; entered West Point in 1942 “at the urging of his alumnus father”; graduated in 1945 and entered the Army Air Corps. He does not seem to have seen much in the way of combat in the War. In 1947, still in the service (the AAC had become the U.S. Air Force) he entered Georgetown University for post-graduate studies, receiving a Master of Arts degree in 1950. He volunteered to serve in Korea, and arrived there early in 1952. Between February and August of that year he flew over 100 combat missions.

Horowitz had begun writing in his spare time in the Air Force. His first novel, based on his experiences in Korea, was The Hunters, published in 1956 and made into a movie (starring Robert Mitchum and Robert Wagner) in 1958. Horowitz left the Air Force in 1957 to pursue writing, having served for 12 years, the last six as a fighter pilot. He cut ties with the Air Force completely in 1961 when he left the Air Force Reserve. The next year he legally changed his name to Salter. ( see Wiki )

## All That Is

When S received this book he uncharacteristically opened it up somewhere and began to read. Soon he thought *start at the beginning*; and read the book in short order (for him) neglecting all his other partly read books.

The story, and Salter’s clean, spare writing, drew him in – into the story of Phillip Bowman.

S soon found himself thinking of John Williams' Stoner. ... *starts with a short chapter on the boy growing up, finding himself in college discovering literature*. He knew the story at hand was not quite like that, though it did seem a tale of another man, like Stoner, finding himself attracted to a career not foreseen by him at a younger age.

But S was puzzled by the title. What did it mean? After comparing it with the similar *All There Is*, after

rearranging the words into *That Is All*, he concluded that the title foretold a story of a man's life and *all the things - events, happenings* - that had helped to form that life. The **set of events** that the man would retain memory of down the years, that upon reflection he would see as the events that made him what he had become, and made his life play out as it did.

What sort of events? Those things that have led up to and define and clarify the present, simply the setting of time and place and circumstance: experiences during the war in the Pacific; going to college afterward; friends and family; job interviews; finding the spot he liked as an editor; history of his mother and other characters; books, writers, dinners, parties, conversations. Co-workers, friends made; nothing remarkable about *the things told*, though the *telling* done in an economical and somehow elegant but certainly not ornate style.

The main narrative moving forward through successive events and periods of Bowman's life, with details of personal background and history, Bowman's of course (born in 1925, growing up in Summit New Jersey, his father leaving his mother and he the two year old) but other characters as well (his mother, his wife, his father-in-law, his best friend from work), done in brief flashbacks that can bubble up unexpectedly.

And the way in which the stories, almost short stories of these other characters in Bowman's life, flow in and out and along with Bowman's story, providing supporting evidence, as it were, that their experiences, some similar to Bowman's, others very different, all adding to the catalog of *all that Is*.

S could not decide whether any of this made the story different from many other such fictions, though there was one aspect of the **set of events** which seemed unusual, that being the *prominence of SEXUAL experience* - mostly for Bowman but for his sexual partners too and sometimes even for other characters.

Incidents of SEX. Salter takes care to explain why the SEX events he chronicles each had a deep significance for Bowman (and for the others at times).

Example: Bowman's first experience of intercourse with his (not foreseen at the time) wife-to-be Vivian. The friend she's staying with is gone for the weekend:

They sat for a few moments in silence and then she simply leaned forward and kissed him. The kiss was light but ardent.

“Do you want to? she asked.

She did not take everything off – shoes, stockings, and skirt, that was all. She was not prepared for more. They kissed and whispered ... He could not believe they were doing this.

“I don't ... have anything,” he whispered.

There was no answer.

He was inexperienced but it was natural and overwhelming. Also too quick, he couldn't help it. He felt embarrassed. Her face was close to his.

“I'm sorry,” he said. “I couldn't stop it.”

She said nothing, she had almost no way to judge it.

She went into the bathroom and Bowman lay back in awe at what had happened and feeling intoxicated by a world that had suddenly opened wide to the greatest pleasure, pleasure beyond

knowing. He knew of the joy that might lie ahead.

...

She nestled against him and he tried to think along her lines. Whatever might happen, they had done it. He felt only exaltation.

Later, a somewhat older Bowman is in Spain with a woman, Enid, whom he is wildly in love with. They are both married, neither with a deep attachment to their partner. They have taken opportunities as offered when he visits London for business. They witness a stunning flamenco.

They walked through walled alleyways, she in high-heels, bare-shouldered, and sat in the silent darkness as deep chords of a guitar slowly began and the air itself stilled. Chord after ominous chord, the guitarist immobile and grave until a woman in a chair beside him, till then unseen, raised her arms and with a sound like gunshots began to clap her hands ... Slowly at first she began to chant or intone – she was not singing, she was reciting what had always been known, reciting and repeating, the guitar like drums hypnotic and endless, it was the Gypsy *siguriya*

...

Her hands were up near her face, clapping ... her voice anguished, singing in blindness, her eyes closed, her bare arms, silver loops in her ears and long dark hair. The song was her song but it belonged to the Vega, the wide plain with its sun-dark workers and shimmering heat, she was pouring out life's despair, bitterness, crimes, her clapping fierce and relentless ... singing with ever greater intensity amid the relentless chords, the savage, tight beat of the heels ... the man's lean body bent like an S ...

They sat afterwards in a bar open to the narrow street, barely speaking.

"What did you think?" he said.

She replied only, "My God."

They make wild love in their room. "His old fettered life was behind him, it had been transformed as if by some revelation. They made love as if it were a violent crime, he was holding her by the waist, half woman, half vase, adding weight to the act. She was crying in agony, like a dog near death. They collapsed as if stricken." And then again in the morning, when "the slow profound rhythm began, hardly varying but as time passed somehow more and more intense ... she was trembling like a tree about to fall ..."

"I married the wrong man", she said.

S was at first surprised by the SEX aspect, that Salter focused so much on SEXUAL experience as such an important part of a life. But then out walking he thought *yes isn't it the case that of all that we remember in life, memories both GOOD and BAD – the BAD memories, of pain, loss, fear ... the sorts of things that maybe we dream of, when we dream of our own past ... and yes those bad things can involve SEX also, rape, violent coercion (but those memories not really memories of SEX, rather memories of FEAR AND PAIN) ... the memories we retain of sex, of particular sexual experiences, are GOOD, are memories that (if one is lucky, if one isn't haunted in waking by BAD memories) fuel our reveries, those daydreams of the past that come unbidden, and though unbidden somehow appear more often than memories we invite – these memories come without invitation, over and over throughout life, on a merry-go-round pushed again and again by nothing more than a sound, a few notes from a song, a word, even a remembrance of something else which somehow chains into the other ... "all roads lead to" ... and all those roads lead here because **this place** stands out from all the rest.*

S wondered, *would the partner remember the same things? And if so, for the same reasons? He had never asked, probably never would. "Do you remember the time ... ?" What if "no"? Would he want to venture*

*into that strange landscape, where something so significant, and magnificent, to him was utterly unnoticed by the journey's partner?*

*Time to move on.*

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## **Diane Meier says**

The people who review 'All That Is' as though they expect to find "all things fair and proper," are missing the point about Salter. Think of him as a painter - Like Degas or Vermeer - and you'll find the path.

I was lucky enough to hear him interviewed on Thursday night at the Irish Art Center, and suddenly - it was clear. He means to paint portraits of the lives around him. Not his point of view. Not what he wishes might be there. Not what the world needs for fairness. Just what he sees. And if he uses language instead of color, it's just as much a portrait.

We don't ask ourselves questions about the fairness of the servant class and their employers in old Amrsterdam, when we look at Vermeer. We don't ask whether or not Degas understands or cares about the inner life of dancers - their hopes or aspirations. Or whether the horses at his race meetings have been ridden too hard. We just love the beautiful, beautiful pictures. The skill, the artistry, the color, the line, the light - we're delighted to find these things available to us. And we should be. Captured and held for us to view and consider and appreciate.

So, that's Salter's gift. These marvelous bits of life. Caught and perfectly rendered - and held in time - for us - and all who follow. I began with "All That Is" and I am making my way through all of his novels and loving it. If you're reading this review - in hopes of finding a reason to read Salter - or not - I urge you to pick him up. You'll not find it easy to stop reading. And I think you'll appreciate the gorgeous prose, the real skill and the fine line of rare and wonderful talent.

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## **Andrew Smith says**

I'm afraid I failed to finish this one. I got about a third of the way through and had enjoyed some of the writing and some sections had actually been really good, but the problem for me was twofold:

- 1) I just didn't care enough about the lead character who seemed dull and was plodding through life after the World War 2. Nothing of any interest was happening to him and he, in turn, had nothing interesting to say.
- 2) I got lost in the myriad of characters, many of whom were dropped instantly after their introduction, seemingly never to reappear.

I should have seen it coming from the start. In the opening sequence the reader is introduced to a small group of sailors preparing to participate in a significant battle towards the end of the war. The scene is set in

anticipation of the battle sequence. This could be interesting! So what happens? The battle sequence goes nowhere save for a cursory explanation of what happened, and then only at a very strategic level. And of the three characters I can recall meeting (two of whom sounded interesting, particularly one who jumped off the ship in the mistaken belief it had been 'hit') who do we follow? The dullard! We follow the one who's been already lined up as a non-character with nothing to say.

A pity, as there's some excellent writing here and there may be a good story in there somewhere. Alas I didn't find it.

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## Joe Szczepaniak says

Having read this book in short order, I took some time afterward to let it wash over--certain I had missed something. Is the grand statement embedded in the title: All That Is? Is this dull cycle of lust, boredom, and betrayal all that there is in life? If that's the message, then Salter is a bit late to the party. Nihilism has been explored ad nauseum, and we don't need another book with nothing new to say on the subject. But perhaps I missed something.

I felt that Bowman, our main character--flawed as he is--represents Salter's version of the "enlightened man" a bit too obviously for my taste. The entire narrative is a series of case studies of Bowman keeping his head above water by adhering to his own personal (read: generic) brand of nihilism. Then every person he meets along the way actually invests themselves wholly in their lives, only to be painted as noble fools who have the rug pulled out from underneath them. The message seems clear: live in the moment, and live for yourself, because this is all there is.

That's not how life is, though. If that's all you've seen of life, then it's not because you have experience--but rather a deficit of it. Flying around to various countries, reading books, and having sex with dozens of people doesn't even begin to count as "living." Living is something that happens when you connect with the living--something that involves others. Bowman never steps out of his head--not for a second. I guess it's too scary out there. I was disappointed that Salter let Bowman think he had really "given his best" to Vivian, his wife, and in so many other situations when he really had not. "But wait," you will say! "Bowman was emotionally connected with so many people! Surely that counts as living." Emotions mean nothing, at the end of the day. Actions mean everything, and Bowman is not a man of action. Being "in love" is not the same as loving someone, and laying down your own life every day for them. THAT is what love is, and Bowman never did it. It cost him nothing. Nothing cost Bowman anything. Even Christine's trick only cost him some money at first, but we're lead to believe that she took over the mortgage anyway.

If it didn't cost anyone anything, then it didn't mean anything.

If I've somehow missed the mark on this, then I'm sorry. If Salter's whole point was to say something about how sad Bowman's life was, I don't think he did it. If he says anything, it's that Bowman's way is the right way.

Nope. Sorry, James. It's not. Try again.

People have mentioned how beautiful the prose is. Salter's got a gift for putting words together. I'll give him that. However, so much of the structure of this book reads as someone's amateur idea of a unique tone. Really, it's just poor structure. Unless you're trying to help the reader get inside the mind of someone on drugs or with a mental condition, jumping willy-nilly between perspectives (10 different ones in the first chapter--I counted) is empty. It might be a "stylistic choice," but it means nothing, and is therefore empty.

If I could sum up this book, I would say it is a cheap-but-pretty, empty flower vase that was set under the sink twenty years ago, and has been polished up and presented as a gift. Hope they kept the receipt, but probably not.

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## Neal says

So... damn... good...

At Amazon, we picked this as a Best Book of the Month. In my Amazon review I wrote: "Beneath the deceptively straightforward coming-of-age and growing-old narrative--boy meets girl, loses girl; meets, loses; meets, loses--lurks the deeply personal story of what it meant to be a 20th century man. Phillip Bowman is the archetype of the flawed, ambitious, lust-filled American male. He's Don Draper. He's Rabbit Angstrom. He's your dad. He's my dad. (Also named Phil; also from New Jersey.) What's truly astounding here is the writing, from a master who happens to be an octogenarian. Salter crafts beautiful sentences. He creates characters, lives, entire worlds in just a page or two. He's also capable of some blushingly evocative sex scenes--again, impressive for a man approaching 90. Profound and lush, this is a book to savor. It's the sweeping story of a complicated, error-filled, fully wrung-out life. A guy's life. A good life."

(See more of my Amazon Best of the Month reviews.)

All That Is

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## Bill says

### 2.0 (faint and distant) STARS

Perhaps I've become addicted to ... no that's not correct ... perhaps I've come to expect gruesome violence, sexual abuse, explicit sexual encounters often to the point of depraved deviance or some degree of pedophilia or child exploitation in every book I read these days. It seems the most popular books or those produced by new, up and coming authors invariably contain some version of these themes. Perhaps these themes are necessary to satisfy the demands of the marketplace. I wonder ...

... this book was just the opposite, a refreshingly simple yet thoughtful read featuring a comforting writing style but in the end, a read that lacked any bite or sting, no electrifying twists or turns, not a whimper of surprise or revelation. This was a very simple, straight forward story about searching for and finding love, losing love and growing older, maybe wiser. I think that was the point anyway. Hard to say. The author's way with words kept me coming back for more but after a few chapters I got restless and fidgety, like a very long car ride – scenery is extraordinarily beautiful in the beginning but after a few hours that same beautiful scenery loses its luster very, very quickly.

Anyway, the story is about Philip Bowman, returning to America after serving in the U.S. Navy in the Pacific during WWII. He's a book editor and loves the buzz of the literary world. Decades later, when U.S. officials are engaged in month after month of fruitless negotiations in Paris seeking an end to the Vietnam war, Bowman has married and divorced his wife Vivian, watched his affair with Edina in London slowly fade away and suffered bitter betrayal by Christine, the woman he truly adored.

There are a gazillion characters in this book, divorce and re-marriage are common occurrences and Philip's sexual encounters frequent albeit modestly elucidated. The character development was extraordinarily thin but with so many characters, any expectations of deep character understanding are probably unrealistic. The

tale had hints of soulful sorrow and melancholy reminiscence but nothing that ripped at my heartstrings.

Ok, my diplomatic gloves are off ... this book was a bore, a mild sedative, a hypnotic daydream. To be fair the story did make me take a look at where I've been in my life so far and consider what the years ahead have in store for me but more often than not I was screaming out loud for some action!

\*\*\*big sigh of resignation\*\*\* Perhaps I am addicted to the violence and gore of newer fiction after all ...

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## Ilenia Zodiaco says

<https://38.media.tumblr.com/2d4c9c9e0...>

Un Bill Murray che spieghi perfettamente la situazione per iniziare.

Ho sentito grandi cose su questo libro. Elogi, critiche adulatorie, ululati alla luna e così via. Tra me e voi, sono rimasta del tutto indifferente all'uso sapiente della prosa unicamente perché è del tutto accondiscendente nei confronti del lettore. Tutto è molto elegante, raffinato, banale, perbene. Badate, l'indifferenza (come le donne di questo libro d'altronde, "indifferenti ma consenzienti" - anche voi state facendo una smorfia? Buono a sapersi) vi vincerà solo nei passaggi più alti e riusciti del romanzo. Per il resto, oltre ad un mare di noia e tremendo materialismo (qualcuno salvi la letteratura dalla descrizione dei vestiti e dell'arredamento delle persone abbienti, per carità, sembra di leggere un atto di onanismo), c'è ben poco altro. Il romanzo vorrebbe parlare del vuoto e infatti ci riesce in maniera inversa, diventando vuoto. A ciò subentrerà l'irritazione. Fin sopra i capelli. Quando va bene, il quadro è sempre abbozzato, mai profondo. Sì, mi piacciono i racconti, Salter possiede la tecnica pittorica per le short stories, è bravo, il problema è che gli manca proprio la sostanza. Non è che mi metta a tremare per una bella prosa, soprattutto se gira a vuoto. Ma torniamo all'irritazione. Irritazione perché? A parte l'autoreferenzialità assoluta della scrittura, il protagonista ha uno sguardo talmente ottuso da non generare neppure pena, soltanto astio. Cominciamo e concludiamo - perché davvero non vale la pena addentrarsi troppo - con il ruolo assegnato ai personaggi femminili in questo romanzo. Vi giuro che ho letto più acume nella descrizione di un maglione da cavallerizza che nella psicologia di una donna nella scrittura di quest'uomo. La sfilza di amanti che il protagonista vorrebbe educare con la luce della sua cultura (queste povere ma ricche borghesi illetterate senz'anima! Lui che invece vorrebbe solo possederle per la loro avvenenza invece è un cavaliere arturiano). A parte che in un romanzo in cui ad una festa gli uomini vengono presentati come "un giudice", "un amico di", "un editore" e le donne invece vengono COSTANTEMENTE presentate PRIMA come belle o non brutte e poi FORSE, se ci va bene, possono anche essere "figlie di qualche padre". Poi sono sempre "biondissime", "divinità pagane" e altre scempiaggini simili. Non hanno mai un punto di vista ma a questo punto ci tocca gioire perché se Salter riesce a dipingere un soldato, colto e di bell'aspetto come un rimbambito morto di figa con ben poco d'interessante da dirci sul mondo tranne la sua boria, immaginate quanti meravigliosi e sottili sentimenti attribuirebbe ad una diciottenne che fa andare a letto con un signore più maturo. Ce lo risparmiamo, grazie. Ripeto: Salter potrà anche scrivere bene e non lo nego ma questo non impedisce ad un romanzo di essere assolutamente insopportabile e compiacente. Abbandonare la nave.

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