

Mark Your Calendar for the 2005 James Jones Symposium at the Historic Peabody Hotel in Memphis, Tennessee (October 7-8)

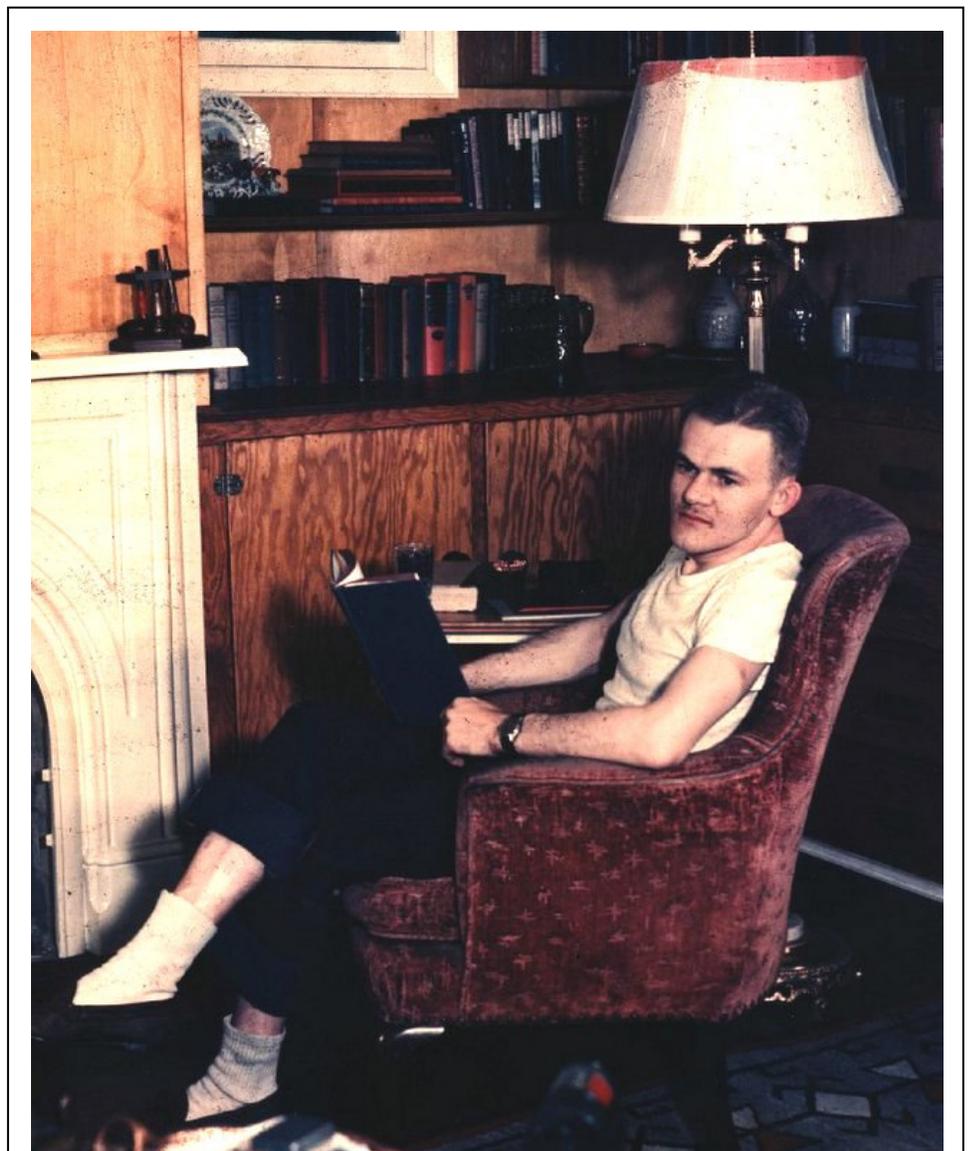
Make your plans now to attend the 2005 James Jones Literary Society symposium at the Peabody Memphis Hotel in Memphis, Tennessee on **Saturday, October 8**. Co-sponsored by the University of Memphis English Department, the focus of the symposium will be the final novel in Jones's war trilogy, *Whistle*.

Dr. Stephen Tabachnick, English department chair, C.D. Mitchell, president of the UM Creative Writing Club, and other members of the English faculty are helping earnestly with the conference logistics and area promotions.

The weekend activities will begin at noon on Friday, October 7. Distinguished author Kaylie Jones, James Jones's daughter and author of *A Soldier's Daughter Never Cries*, will be giving a reading for the public and students on the University of Memphis campus.

Friday afternoon and evening will be free to explore the world-famous Memphis music, food and nightlife.

The Saturday symposium will be held in the large hall at The



James Jones, ca. 1946

THE JAMES JONES LITERARY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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The James Jones Society Newsletter is published quarterly to keep members and interested parties apprised of activities, projects and upcoming events of the Society; to promote public interest and academic research in the works of James Jones; and to celebrate his memory and legacy.

Submissions of essays, features, anecdotes, photographs, etc., pertaining to the author James Jones may be sent to the editor for consideration. Every attempt will be made to return material, if requested upon submission. Material may be edited for length, clarity and accuracy. Send submissions to:

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Writers' guidelines available upon request and online.

The James Jones Literary Society web page:
<http://jamesjoneslitsociety.viu.edu/>

Information about the James Jones First Novel Fellowship:
<http://www.wilkes.edu/humanities/jones.html>

Memphis Peabody. The annual JJLS business meeting is scheduled from 9:30 to 9:50. The formal program will begin at 10:00 when Kaylie Jones will give an insightful overview on her father's life and career as a writer.

At 11:00 Dr. Judith Everson, English professor emerita at the University of Illinois in Springfield and past president of the JJLS, will present a scholarly review of the novel, *Whistle*.

From 11:30 to 1:15 participants will be able to explore the fine eateries in downtown Memphis.

At 1:15, the 2005 JJLS First Novel Fellowship will be awarded. This year the cash unrestricted award has been increased to \$10,000. Over 600 entries have been received for the contest this year.

Following the award presentation and a short excerpt reading by the 2005 winner, Dr. Michael Lennon, retired Vice President at Wilkes University who co-authored *The James Jones Reader* and also served as president of the JJLS, will deliver a scholarly interpretation of the James Jones trilogy (*From Here to Eternity*, *The Thin Red Line* and *Whistle*).

From 2:00 to 3:30 will be a panel presentation titled "Return of Wounded Soldiers Portrayed in Literature." Tom Wood, JJLS newsletter editor and archivist at the University of Illinois at Springfield, will serve as moderator. Featured presenters will include Ray Elliott, a guest lecturer at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign who is also the publisher of Tales Press. Elliott is also a past JJLS president and is the author of *Wild Hands Toward the Sky*.

Joining the panel from Chicago is Larry Heinemann, the author of the highly acclaimed novels *Close Quarters* and *Paco's Story*,

which was the winner of the National Book Award.

Ron Kovick, author of *Born on the Fourth of July*, is tentatively planning to make the journey from California to also serve on the panel.

All the published authors attending the symposium will then be invited to a book signing in the conference hall lobby at 3:30.

A special cocktail reception will be held in a Celebrity Suite that evening for JJLS members and guests.

On Sunday morning at 11:30, a tour with an interpreter of what remains of the Kennedy Hospital is scheduled on the University of Memphis South Campus. James Jones's experiences recuperating there provided imagery for the novel *Whistle*.

Reservations can be made at The Memphis Peabody by calling 1-800-PEABODY, then press 2 for Memphis. To ensure the convention rate (\$179 plus applicable taxes for a double) mention the James Jones Literary Society.

See you in Memphis!

—Jerry Bayne, President,
James Jones Literary Society

Further Recognition for Laine Cunningham, Winner of the 2003 First Novel Fellowship

Author and storyteller Laine Cunningham of Hillsborough, North Carolina has received the Hackney Literary Award from Birmingham-Southern College. The \$5,000 cash prize was awarded for her first novel, "Message Stick," a literary mystery set in the Australian outback.

Shaun Crawford, who selects finalists every year for the judging committee, said, "This is the best

novel I've read in years." He was so impressed with the work that he took down Cunningham's contact information before passing the book to the finalist phase.

"If for some reason 'Message Stick' had not won," said Crawford, "I planned to call the author personally and tell her to get this book out to publishers!"

Cunningham appeared at the awards ceremony held during the Writing Today conference on March 11. This year marks the conference's silver anniversary. The award places Cunningham in the ranks of Pulitzer Prize winning authors like William Styron and Horton Foote, both former winners of the Hackney Literary Award and this year's Grand Masters of the conference. Other Writing Today instructors included Andrei Codrescu, a regular commentator on National Public Radio, New York Times writer Warren St. John, Emmy award winner Don Noble, and NEA fellow Carolynne Scott. Since 1969 the Hackney Literary Award has been chaired by Dr. Myra Crawford.

Founded in 1856, Birmingham-Southern College is a private, four-year liberal arts institution located in Birmingham, Alabama.

**On a Roll:
John Smelcer's Novel
"The Trap," Winner
of the 2004 First Novel
Fellowship, Accepted
for Publication**

—From the *Alaska Star*,
December 3, 2004

John Smelcer is on quite a roll these days.

The Eagle River publisher of the nation's second largest literary quarterly, *Rosebud*, which in itself has received numerous accolades,

just received some more great news.

His latest book, "The Trap," which won the 2004 James Jones First Novel Fellowship Contest, has been accepted for 2006 publication by Henry Holt of New York.

He just got the word Tuesday morning [November 30, 2004].

At 5 a.m.

"Folks in New York must have forgotten the time difference," Smelcer said.

But that was OK with him.

"Good news is always welcome," he said. "And what a great early Christmas present."

The James Jones prize is given annually from the estate of the late writer of American literary classics such as *From Here to Eternity* and *The Thin Red Line*.

Having his work associated with a novelist such as Jones is a prize in itself, said Smelcer.

"The Trap" is an Alaskan-based fiction work that follows the ordeal an old Native man faces when he steps into his own wolf trapline and realizes that no one will come searching for him for days. He has no food to eat and wolves harass him at night. His young grandson, who is safely back in the village, begins to worry about his grandfather's safety. He eventually leaves via snow machine to search for his grandfather. Smelcer said the book is more than a rescue story with language reminiscent of Jack London.

"It examines a lot of broader Alaska Native issues," Smelcer said. "The very name of the book represents two things. Of course there is the physical wolf trap that the old man steps into but for a young person, life in the village can be like a trap as well. They are watching contemporary American culture on satellite television, but there is none of that in their village. It is a very honest novel."

Smelcer himself can identify. He grew up in Tazlina and is by far the youngest remaining fluent speaker of his language, Ahtna. In the late 1990s, Smelcer wrote the Ahtna dictionary working with tribal elders in an effort to save the dying language.

He's taught a variety of English topics at the University of Alaska Anchorage and is now a professor at the Anchorage campus of Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University.

The James Jones prize isn't the only success he's seen in 2004. About six months ago, his latest poetry book, *Without Reservation*, won the 2004 Kessler Poetry Prize sponsored by Binghamton University in New York. The prize honors Milton Kessler, a poet of international renown and former English professor who founded the creative writing program at the university.

And then there's the success of *Rosebud*, a literary magazine Smelcer has been publishing for nearly a decade with written appearances by nearly every Pulitzer and Nobel Peace Prize winner for the past 10 years.

The 2004 spring edition featured a poem, "For Owen," written by Stephen King.

Smelcer wrote to the famous horror suspense writer, asking him for poetry.

"Most folks don't think of him as a poet, but he is a good one," Smelcer said. "If we had asked him for a story, we couldn't have afforded that. But he could afford to give *Rosebud*, a poem and I could afford to pay him for that." *Rosebud* with its paid circulation of more than 25,000 is available nationally at Barnes and Nobles bookstores.

A painting by Paul McCartney is being used for a future cover. Could life get any sweeter for Smelcer?

Yes, he and wife Pam are putting the finishing touches on a home they mostly built by themselves.

"We saved nearly a-quarter-a-million dollars doing it this way," he said.

It helps him finish up his next literary project: A book based on interviews conducted with the only three survivors from a coastal village completely destroyed in the 1964 Good Friday Earthquake.

Smelcer said he's too busy to even take in the domino effect of this year's success. When asked if he ever thinks about pinching himself, he said, "I did Tuesday."

Winners of the James Jones Literary Society First Novel Fellowship and their Novels

1993

Nancy Flynn,
"Eden Undone"
(unpublished)

1994

Mary Kay Zuravleff,
The Frequency of Souls,
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996

1995 (Co-winners)

Rick Bass,
Where the Sea Used to Be,
Houghton Mifflin, 1998

Tanuja Desai Hidier,
Born Confused,
Scholastic Press, 2002

1996

Greg Hrbek,
The Hindenburg Crashes Nightly,
William Morrow & Company,
1999

1997

Leslie Schwartz,
Jumping the Green,

Simon & Schuster, 1999

1998

Judith Barnes,
Salthill
(original title "A Year in the Woods"),
St. Martin's Press, 2002

1999

Louise Wareham,
Since You Ask,
Akashic Books, 2003

2000

Stephen Phillip Policoff,
Beautiful Somewhere Else,
Carroll & Graf, 2004

2001

Ray Cristina,
"Tracking Ginger"
(unpublished)

2002

Linda Busby Parker,
Seven Laurels,
(original title "The Sum of Augusts"),
Southeast Missouri State
University Press, 2004

2003

Laine Cunningham,
"The Message Stick"
(unpublished)

2004

John Smelcer,
"The Trap"
(scheduled for publication
by Henry Holt, 2006)

Are you moving?

Planning to move?

Send your change of address to:

James Jones Literary Society
P.O. Box 68
Robinson, IL 62454

"Exquisitely American": William Styron Recalls James Jones at the 1999 Symposium

William Styron, author of Lie Down in Darkness, Sophie's Choice, The Confession of Nat Turner and other modern American classics, began a long-term friendship with Jones beginning in 1951. Styron read this recollection of Jones at the 1999 JJLS Symposium, held at Long Island University. The essay Styron read is essentially an abridged version of his Foreword to George Hendrick's To Reach Eternity: the Letters of James Jones (which also appeared in Esquire magazine in 1989). However, at the Symposium Styron included some colorful asides and concluded with revealing responses to audience questions.

I'll tell you, if you could ever think of a hard act to follow, it's Norman Mailer. Thank you, Norman. Also, I wasn't here this morning, but I hear that Joe Heller and Bud Schulberg, and who else? Yes, Betty Comden—all gave these remarkable, impromptu presentations. I wish I'd been here to experience them. I myself was thinking of trying to do the same sort of performance; but it occurred to me a number of years ago that actually I may be the only writer among the people who have appeared here, who has actually written at some length about my relationship with Jim Jones.

And so, for my sins (and perhaps for *your* sins), I'm going to expose you to a fairly long essay, but I'm not going to do the whole thing. I will expose you to a part of it because I think it wraps up, as well as I can, the whole package about me and Jim, so to speak; also

about his work. It would seem to be superfluous (or perhaps even worse) to attempt a kind of ad-libbed performance when I have this at hand. So, for better or worse, I'm going to let you have it. And then, as Norman did, throw open the room to a few questions.

I believe the last question was about input that Jim had from the actors in *From Here to Eternity*. Well I recall, back in the halcyon days that Norman was describing, he, me, Jim, and of all people, Montgomery Clift all went out into a bar. This was down near Sheridan Square, and I remember it as a rather rough-neck bar, and Montgomery Clift was there for the express purpose of being sort of "scoped" by Jim Jones, who I think really wanted to have Clift in the role, which of course, he got. I remember being there in this rough-neck bar, and this young Italian guy sitting there says:

"Hey Monty, what was it like to lay Elizabeth Taylor?"

Anyway, Monty didn't know because of his preferences—but, as it turned out, Clift did get the role. That answers the question.

From Here to Eternity was published at a time when I was in the process of completing my own first novel. I remember reading *Eternity* while I was living and writing in a country house in Rockland County, not far from New York City, and as has so often been the case with books that have made a large impression on me, I can recall the actual reading—the mood, the excitement, the surroundings. I remember the couch I lay on while reading, the room and the wallpaper, white curtains stirring and flowing in an indolent breeze, and cars that passed on the road outside. I think that perhaps I read portions of the book in other parts of the house, but it is the couch I chiefly recollect; and myself sprawled on it, holding the

heavy volume aloft in front of my eyes, as I remained more or less transfixed through most of the waking hours of several days in thrall to the story's power, its immediate narrative authority, its vigorously peopled barracks and barrooms, its gutsy humor, and its immense, harrowing sadness.

The book was about the unknown world of the peace-time army. Even if I hadn't myself suffered some of the outrages of military life, I'm sure I would have recognized the book's stunning authenticity, its burly artistry, its sheer richness as life. A sense of permanence attached itself to the pages. This remarkable quality did not arise from Jones' language, for it was quickly apparent that the author was not a stylist, certainly not the stylist of refinement and nuance that we former students of creative writing classes have been led to emulate.

The genial rhythms and carefully wrought sentences that English majors had been encouraged to admire were not on display in *Eternity*, nor was the writing even vaguely experimental; it was so conventional, as to be premodern. This was doubtless a blessing. For here was a writer whose urgent, blunt language with its off-key tonalities and hulking emphasis on adverbs wholly matched his subject matter. Jones's wretched outcasts and the narrative voice he summoned to tell their tale had achieved a near-perfect synthesis. What also made the book a triumph was the characters Jones had fashioned—Prewitt, Warden, Maggio, the officers and their wives, the Honolulu whores, the brig rats, and all the rest. There were none of the wan, tentative effigies that had begun to populate the pages of post-war fiction; but human beings of real size and arresting presence, believable, and hard to forget.

The language may have been coarse-grained, but it had Dreiserian force, and the people were as alive as those of Dostoevski. One other item, somewhat less significant, but historic nonetheless, caught my attention; and this is how it had fallen to Jones to make the final breakthrough in terms of vernacular speech which writers—and readers—had been awaiting for hundreds of years. The dreaded *f*-word, among several others, so sedulously proscribed by the guardians of decency that even Norman Mailer in his admirable *The Naked and the Dead* only three years before, had had to fudge the issue with an absurd pseudo-spelling; was now inscribed on the printed page in the speech pattern of those who normally spoke it.

Now that I've got him here on the premises, so to speak, I'd like to ask Norman Mailer, if it is true or apocryphal, that when you first met the famous actress Tallulah Bankhead, if she said,

"So you're the young man, the young writer who doesn't know how to spell fuck!"

Norman Mailer responds:

"The only thing true about that story is that it was sent to the newspapers by a public relations person working for Bankhead."
Styron resumes:

OK, now we got it, now we know the truth!

It's been said that writers are fiercely jealous of each other. Kurt Vonnegut has observed that most writers display toward one another the edgy mistrust of large bears. This may be true, but I do recall that in those years directly following World War II there seemed to be a moratorium on envy, and most of the young writers who were heirs to the Lost Generation developed a camaraderie, or a reasonable imitation of that, as if there were glory enough to go

around for all the novelists about to try to fit themselves into Apollonian niches alongside those of the earlier masters: Faulkner, Hemingway, and so on.

Many of us felt lucky to have survived the war, and the end of the war itself was a convenient point of reckoning, a moment to attempt comparison. If the Armistice of 1918 had permitted prodigies such as Hemingway, Faulkner, and Fitzgerald to create their collective myth, wouldn't our own war produce a constellation just as passionately committed, as gifted and illustrious? It was a dumb notion, since we'd overlooked the inevitable duplicity of history, which would never allow reassembly of those sovereign talents. We would have to settle for the elegant goal of becoming ourselves. But there was tremendous excitement about being a young writer in those days, and I believe Norman alluded to this beautifully: of taking part in a shared destiny.

When I finished reading *From Here to Eternity*, I felt no jealousy at all, only a desire to meet this man, just four years older than I, who had inflicted on me such emotional turmoil in the act of telling me authentic truths about an underside of American life I barely knew existed. I wanted to talk to the writer who dealt so eloquently with these lumpen warriors who had created scenes that tore at the guts. And then there was that face on the dust jacket, that same face that had glowered at me from bookstore displays and magazine covers. Was there ever such a face, with its Beethovenesque brow and lantern jaw and stepped-upon-looking nose—a forbidding face until one realized that it only *seemed* to glower, since the eyes really projected a skeptical humor that softened the initial impression of rage. Although, as I later discovered, Jim Jones contained

plenty of good clean American rage.

When I first met Jim, during the fall of that year [1951], *Lie Down in Darkness* had recently been published, and we were both subjected to a considerable amount of not unpleasant lionization. But Jim was a superlion: his book, after these many months, was still riding high on the best-seller lists. My book, on a much more modest level, had done well critically and commercially. In fact, there was a period of several months in 1951, as Mike Langdon said, that we were on the same list as *Catcher in the Rye*. But Jim's celebrity status was extraordinary, and the nimbus of stardom that attended his presence as we tripped together from party to party around Manhattan was testimony to the appeal of his unforgettable looks, but also to something deeper: the work itself, the power of a novel, to stir the imagination of countless people, as few books had in years.

Jim was serious about fiction in a way that now seems a little old-fashioned and ingenuous. He saw it as a sacred mission, as icon, as Grail.

Moving about at night with Jim was like keeping company with a Roman emperor. Indeed, I may have been a little envious, but the man had such raw magnetism, took such uncomplicated pleasure in his role as the Midwestern hick who was now the cynosure of such Big Town attention that I couldn't help being tickled by the commotion he caused, and by his glory; he'd certainly earned it. It was a period when whiskey—great quantities of it—was the substance of choice. We did a prodigious

amount of drinking, and there were always flocks of girls around, but I soon noticed that the hedonist whirl had a way of winding down, usually late at night, when Jim, who had seemingly depthless stamina, would head for a secluded corner of a bar, and talk about books.

Jim was serious about fiction in a way that now seems a little old-fashioned and ingenuous. He saw it as a sacred mission, as icon, as Grail. Like so many American writers of distinction, he'd not been granted the benison of a formal education, but like these drop-outs he'd done a vast amount of reading. Thus, while there were gaps in his literary background that college boys like me had filled, he had absorbed an impressive amount of writing for a man whose school-house had been at home or in barracks. He'd been, and still was, a hungry reader, and it was fascinating in those dawn sessions, to hear this fellow built like a welter-weight boxer (which he'd occasionally been) speak in his gravelly drill sergeant's voice about a few of his more *recherché* loves—imagine Virginia Woolf, and Edith Wharton.

He had stubborn prejudices, though—a blind spot, I thought, about Hemingway. He grudgingly allowed that Hemingway had possessed lyric power in his early stories, but most of his later work he deemed phony to the core. It filled him with that rage I mentioned, and I would watch in wonder as his face darkened with a scowl as grim as Caliban's, and he'd denounce Papa as a despicable fraud and poseur. (Of course I might add parenthetically, as anyone who knows the personal diaries of Hemingway, that Hemingway wrote some of the most atrocious personal things about Jim Jones that any writer has ever written about another.)

But it sounded like over-kill. Was this some irrational, competitive obsession I wonder? I soon realized that in analyzing his judgments about Hemingway, I had to set purely literary considerations aside, and understand that a fierce, and by no means aimless or envy-inspired indignation energized his view. Basically, it had to do with men at war. For Jim had been to war, he had been wounded on Guadalcanal, had seen men die, had been sickened and traumatized by the experience. Hemingway had been to war too, and had been wounded, but despite the gloss of misery and disenchantment that overlaid his work, Jim maintained, Hemingway was at heart a war-lover, a macho contriver of romantic effects, and to all but the gullible and wishful the lie showed glaringly through the fabric of his books and in his life. He therefore had committed the artist's chief sin by betraying the truth. Jim's opinion of Hemingway was less significant than what it revealed about his own view of existence; which at its most penetrating, as in *From Here to Eternity*, and *The Thin Red Line*, was always seen through the soldier's eye, in a hallucination where the circumstances of military life caused men to behave mostly like beasts, and where human dignity, while welcome and often redemptive, is not a general rule.

Jones was among the best anatomists of warfare in our time, and in his bleak, extremely professional vision, he continued to insist that war was a congenital and chronic illness from which we would never be fully delivered. War rarely ennobled men, and usually degraded them. Cowardice and heroism were both celluloid figments, generally interchangeable, and such grandeur as could be salvaged from the mess lay at best in pathos; in the haplessness

of men's mental and physical suffering. Living or dying in war had nothing to do with valor; it had to do with luck. Jim had endured very nearly the worst; he had seen death face to face. At least partially as a result of this he was quite secure in his masculinity, and better able than anyone else I've known to detect muscle-bound pretense and empty bravado. It's fortunate that he didn't live to witness Rambo, or our high-level infatuation with military violence. It would have brought out the assassin in him.

I went to Europe soon after this and was married, and when we got together again in New York during the waning 1950s, he too was married, and he had settled in Paris. We saw each other on his frequent trips to the U.S., but my trips to Paris were even more frequent during the next fifteen years or so, and it is in Paris, nearly always Paris, where I locate Jim and where I conjure him up in memory. Year in and year out, I came to roost in the Jones's marvelous lodgings overlooking the Seine, often free-loading (*à l'anglaise*, observed Gloria, in her dim view of the British) so long that I acquired the status of the semi-permanent guest.

My clearest and still most splendid image, is of that huge, vaulted living room, and the ceiling-high doors that gave out onto the river with its hypnotic, incessant flow of barge traffic, moving eastward past the stately ecclesiastic rump of Notre Dame. The room is lined with books, and the entire wall was dominated by nearly 100 thickly hulking, drably-bound volumes of the official United States government history of the Civil War. The very thought of shipping that library across the Atlantic was numbing. What Jim sometimes called Our Great Fraternal Massacre was his enduring preoccupation, and he had an immense store

of knowledge about its politics, strategies, and battles. Somehow in the lofty room the dour Victorian tomes didn't really obtrude, yet they were a vaguely spectral presence, and always reminded me of how exquisitely *American* Jim was destined to remain during the years in Paris. War and its surreal lunacy would be his central obsession to the end, and would be that aspect of human experience he wrote best about.

Into that beautiful room with its flood of pastel Parisian light, with its sound of Dave Brubeck or Brahms, there would come during the sixties and early seventies a throng of admirable and infamous characters, ordinary and glamorous and weird people—writers and painters and movie stars, starving Algerian poets, drug addicts, Ivy League scholars, junketing U.S. Senators, thieves, jockeys, restaurateurs, big names from the American media (fidgety and morose in their sudden vacuum of anonymity), tycoons and paupers. It was said that even a couple of Japanese tourists made their confused way there, en-route to the Louvre.

No domicile ever attracted such a steady stream of visitors, no host ever extended uncomplainingly so much largesse to the deserving and worthless alike. It was not a rowdy place—Jim was too soldierly to fail to maintain reasonable decorum—but like the Abbey of Thélème of Rabelais, in which visitors were politely bidden to do what they liked, guests at the house at 10, Quai d'Orleans were phenomenally relaxed, sometimes to the extent of causing the Joneses to be victimized by the very waifs they had befriended. A great deal of antique silver disappeared over the years, and someone quite close to Jim once told me that he reckoned he had lost tens of thousands of dollars in bad debts to smooth,

white-collar pan-handlers. If generosity can be a benign form of pathology, Jim and Gloria were afflicted by it, and their trustiness extended to their most disreputable servants, who were constantly ripping them off. One of them, an insolent Pakistani house-man, whom Gloria had longed to fire but had hesitated to do so out of tender-heartedness; brought her finally to her senses when she glimpsed him one evening across the floor of a tony night club, be-wigged and stunningly garbed in one of her newly-bought Dior gowns. Episodes like that were commonplace *chez* Jones in the tumultuous sixties.

There were literary journalists of the period who enjoyed pointing to a certain decadence in the Jones's life-style, and wrote reproachful monographs about the way that Jim and Gloria (now parents of two children) comported themselves. Dinners at Maxime's, after-dinner with the fat squabs at hangouts like Castel's, vacations in Deauville and Biarritz; yachting in Greece; the races at Longchamps, the oiled and pampered sloth of Americans in moneyed exile. Much the same had been written about Fitzgerald and Hemingway. The tortured Puritanism that causes Americans to mistrust their serious artists and writers, and regards it as appropriate when they are underpaid, evokes even greater mistrust when they are paid rather well, and to boot, hobnob with the Europeans. Material success is still not easily forgiven, in a country that ignored Poe and abandoned Melville. There was also the complaint that in moving to France for such a long sojourn, Jim had cut off his roots, thus depriving himself of a rich fodder of American experience necessary to produce worthwhile work. But this would seem to be a hollow objection, quite aside from the kind of judgmental

chauvinism that it expresses. Most writers have stored up by their mid-twenties emotional and intellectual baggage that will supply the needs of their future work; and the various environments into which they settle, while obviously not negligible as sources of material and stimulation, they don't really count for all that much. Jim wrote some exceedingly inferior work during his Paris years. *Go to the Widow-Maker*, which dealt mainly with under-water adventure—a chaotic novel of immeasurable length, filled with plywood characters and so on, spun me into despondency when I read it. There were, to be sure, some spectacular underwater scenes, but in general the work was a disappointment, lacking both grace and cohesion.

Jones's soldiers were at the end of an ancestral line of fiction characters who were misfits, the misbegotten who always got the short end of the stick.

But it's important to point out that although *Go to the Widow-Maker* was written in Paris, so was *The Thin Red Line*. This would strongly suggest that the iniquitous life that Jim Jones had reputedly led in Paris, the years of complacent unengaged exile, bore little relation to his work than that if he had stayed at home. The motivations that impelled him in a particular literary direction and that shaped his creative commitments probably would have remained much the same. Jim loved the good life; he would have richly enjoyed himself anywhere, and would have, as always, worked like hell. But a common failing of many writers is they often choose their

themes and address their subject matter as poorly as they often choose wives or houses. What is really significant is that while a book like *Go to the Widow-Maker* represents one of those misshapen artifacts that virtually every good writer, in the sad and lonely misguidedness of his calling, comes up with sooner or later, *The Thin Red Line* is a brilliant example of what happens when a novelist summons strength from the deepest wellsprings of his inspiration. In the book, Jim obeyed his better instincts by attending to that forlorn figure whom in all the world he cared for most and understood better than any other writer: the common foot soldier, the grungy enlisted man.

Romain Gary, who wrote beautifully about Jim, wasn't far off. There was a certain grandeur in Jones's vision of the soldier. Other writers had written of outcasts in a way that had rendered one God-forsaken group or another into archetypes of suffering—Dickens's underworld, Zola's whores, Jean Genet's thieves, Steinbeck's migrant workers, Agee's white Southern, sharecroppers, Richard Wright's black southern immigrants, and on and on—the list is honorable and long. Jones's soldiers were at the end of an ancestral line of fiction characters who were misfits, the misbegotten who always got the short end of the stick. But they never dissolved into social or political blur. The individuality that he gave to his people and the stature he endowed them with, came I believe, from a clear-eyed view of their humanness, which included their ugliness or meanness. Sympathetic as he was to his enlisted men, he never lowered himself to the temptations of an agitprop that would limn them as mere victims. Many of his soldiers were creeps, others were outright swine, and there

were enough good guys among the officers to be consonant with reality. At least part of the reason he was able to pull all this off so successfully without illusions or sentimentality, was his sense of history, along with his familiarity with the chronicles of war, they were embedded in world literature. He had read Thucydides early, and he once commented to me that no one could write well about warfare without him. He also linked his own emotions with those of Tolstoy's peasant soldiers. But the shades of the departed with whom he most closely identified, were the martyrs of the American Civil War. That pitiless and aching slaughter, which included some of his forbears, haunted him throughout his life, and provided one of the chief goads to his imagination. To be a Civil War buff was not to be an admirer of the technology of battle, although campaign strategy fascinated him; it was to try to plumb the mystery and the folly of war itself.

In 1962 during one of his visits to America, I traveled with Jim to Washington. Among other things, an influential official with whom I was friendly, and who was on President Kennedy's staff, had invited the two of us to take a special tour of the White House. Oddly, for such a well-traveled person, Jim had never been to Washington, and the trip offered him a chance to visit the near by battlefields. He had never seen any of the Civil War encampments. Jim went up to Antietam in Maryland, after which we planned to go to the Lincoln Memorial before driving up over to the White House. When he met me at our hotel just after the Antietam visit, Jim was exceptionally somber. Something at the battlefield had resonated in a special, troubling way within him. He seemed abstracted and out of sorts. It had been, he told me finally, a

part of the battleground called the Bloody Lane that had so affected him when he'd seen it. He'd read so much about the sector and the engagement, and had always wondered how the terrain would appear when he viewed it firsthand. A rather innocuous-looking place now, he said, a mere declivity in the landscape, sheltered by a few trees. But there, almost a century before, some of the most horrible carnage in the history of warfare had taken place, thousands of men on both sides dead within a few hours. The awful shambles was serene now, but the ghosts were still there, swarming; and it had really shaken him up.

Soon after this at the Lincoln Memorial, I realized that the cavernous vault, with its hushed and austere shadows, its soft footfalls and requiem whispers, might not have been the best place to take a man in such a delicate mood. Jim's face was set like a slab, his expression murky and aggrieved, as we stood on the marble reading the Gettysburg Address, engraved against one lofty wall, slowly scanning those words of supreme magnanimity and conciliation and brotherhood dreamed by a fellow Illinoisan whom Jim venerated, as almost everyone does, for transcendental reasons that needed not to be analyzed or explained in such a sacred hall. I suppose I was expecting a conventional response from Jim, the pious hum. But his reaction, soft-spoken, was loaded with savage bitterness, and for an instant was hard to absorb. "Its all just beautiful bullshit," he blurted. "They all died in vain, and they always will!" His eyes were moist with fury and grief; we left abruptly, and it required some minutes of emotional readjustment before the storm had blown away. Then he regained his composure, apologizing quickly, then returning

with good cheer and jokes to more normal concerns.

Many years went by before I happened to reflect on that day, and to consider this: that in the secret cellars of the White House, in whose corridors we were soon being shepherded around pleasantly, the ancient mischief was newly germinating. There were doubtless all sorts of precursory activities taking place which someday would confirm Jim's fierce prophecy: heavy cable traffic to Saigon, directives beefing up advisory and support groups, ominous memos on Diem and the Nhus, orders to units of the Green Berets. The shadow of Antietam and of all those other blind upheavals was falling on our own times. Jim Jones would be the last to be surprised.

Question and Answer Session with William Styron:

Q: Did Jim Jones and *From Here to Eternity* have an impact on you deciding to write *The Long March*?

A: I think it certainly had some infiltrating influence. I think that *From Here to Eternity*, as Norman implied earlier, was one of those monumental works about war that really influences everything that comes after it in some subtle way. I don't think that many war books since then have been without its influence in some possible, subtle, way; so certainly I think it had some influence.

Q: War, as mentioned by you, has had a lot of influence on a number of works. There have been a number of books about Vietnam. There was the war that spawned you, that spawned Norman [Mailer]—the Vietnam War has spawned a number of works: what do you see as spawning the next link?

A: Well, I think already there has already been one of those progressions in perpetuity in war after war, and I think there has already been a very serious body of work on the Viet Nam War. It may be that war in literature will become finally so numbing, that it will just vanish in its own sort of repetitiveness. I don't know how long people will want to read about the suffering of men and war, unless you can give it a unique twist.

Q: For those of us who are deconstructionist *Some Came Running* fans, would you say something about the strengths and weaknesses of that book?

A: I would. That's a book which I don't feel the same about. I feel it has a few good flaws, too. I have very mixed feelings about it. I'm not a big un-reconstructed fan. I remember reading it and being overwhelmed on one level by its sheer energy, and on another level by its failure to be economical—and to be in short, for want of a better word, more artistic. It's been many years since that book was published, and it certainly was too long, to my mind. I think it was one of those—hardly a writer around hasn't written an undisciplined work. I think that its main fault, was its absence of discipline. That's not a very good rundown on the book, but that's the best I can do at the moment.

Q: Did you or any of your friends, including Norman and Jim, have much contact with the so-called "Beat" generation of the 50s? Did you find similarities between yourselves?

A: I'm speaking for myself (I don't know about Norman), but I think to some extent Jim wasn't turned on by the "Beats." I don't recall either Jim or I talking with much enthusiasm about the "Beats." You're talking about Kerouac? I felt the "Beats" were on another wavelength for me, I

still feel they're on another wavelength. I always felt they had a lot of energy—a lot of brio and gusto; and they certainly had ideologically stirred up American letters. But I didn't feel very close to them as fellow-writers.

Q: As a veteran, and as far as your relationship with Mr. Jones and his experience as a veteran, and his interest in the Civil War, did you ever discuss the *Red Badge of Courage* as an author?

A: I can't think, I can't imagine that at one point or another we did not talk about *The Red Badge of Courage*. I can't recall specifically, but I know it's a book that I admired enormously. I can't believe that Jim didn't also. It's one of those little books that's almost as perfect as an egg. It's the classic small book on war, and the classic small book on the psychology of fear. It deservedly belongs in the category "classic."

Q: You've spoken about war literature; would you speak a little bit about Holocaust literature? There's been a big upsurge of Holocaust literature recently because of the 50th anniversary; and do you think that is going to burn out as well?

A: I suspect that Holocaust literature is due for a long life; I can't imagine it petering out. It may go in cycles, but what the Nazis did between 1933 and 1945 was of such an overwhelming magnitude of evil that I think its going to be a subject for fiction, poetry, literature, right into the distant future. Even now, I think, it hasn't been mined. There will be new takes on it. I do see it as a perpetual source of fascination and creativity.

Q: What would James Jones have thought about [Terrence Mallick's] movie, *The Thin Red Line*?

A: That's an interesting question. I received the signal honor of speaking about *The Thin Red Line*,

of being asked to present Terrence Mallick with the Best Director Award of the New York Film Critic's Society—which I did with alacrity, because I had just seen the movie. And while it in no way resembled, to my mind, the book in any coherent way, it had the most amazing ability to catch a great deal of the spirit that Jim was dealing with when he wrote of the grungy, wretched, private soldiers in the midst of horrible combat. I thought the best part of the movie, and I said so in my citation to Mallick, was his uncanny ability to replicate in the movie the almost ineffable quality of fear. Because I think one of the most fascinating constants in Jim Jones's work about men at war, is this perpetual fear. The sense that fear is the companion of all people in battle and it's the most important function of everything you do. It's very hard to render cinematically, but I thought Mallick did an absolutely marvelous job in his script and direction itself of duplicating that very constancy; that without an adequate depiction of fear in any rendering of the war experience, you fail. And, I thought Mallick succeeded beautifully, and therefore, in answer to your question, I thought it was a good stab at duplicating Jones's *The Thin Red Line*.

On the Road with James Jones:

JJLS Vice-President Ray Elliott Named "Road Scholar" by the Illinois Humanities Council

Ray Elliott, author of *Wild Hands Toward the Sky*, was selected as a featured participant in the 2005-06 Illinois Humanities Council's Road Scholars speakers bureau, which allows non-profit organizations the

opportunity to offer high-quality, free public humanities programs to local audiences.

Like their predecessors who traversed the continents and made each town their classroom, IHC Road Scholars take their programs on the road and to the diverse communities of Illinois. Elliott, who is a past president and current vice president of the James Jones Literary Society, has two presentations that are included in the roster of programs IHC makes available to libraries, schools, civic groups, etc.

"James Jones: The Evolution of a Soldier and a Writer" focuses on the life and literary works of noted Illinois author James Jones (1921-1977), who wrote *From Here to Eternity* and *The Thin Red Line*. The premise is that Jones himself experienced a concept he coined and wrote about in major WWII literature called "the evolution of a soldier." It is a process by which those in the U.S. Armed Forces are trained to fight the country's wars and conflicts and how that process affects individuals - especially when they return to civilian life. This presentation sheds light on Jones' best-known novels, as well as the man himself. "The De-Evolution of the Soldier and its Effects on Others" is a separate presentation that can also complement the first. This talk by Elliott, a former Marine, takes a look at the immediate and lingering effects of war on those who fight them and on the loved ones left behind. It is based on extensive literary research and interviews with World War II veterans. Excerpts of those interviews and anecdotal information about men who witnessed the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, landed on Omaha beach on D-Day and fought through Europe, flew "the Hump," saw the flag raised on Iwo Jima and more are included in the presentation.

"This generation came to be known as 'the greatest generation,'" Elliott said, "but the people carry the burden of their experiences with them to their death—a very real consequence that is true of any war and is well-documented in the literature of World War II."

Elliott lives in Urbana and is also a board member of the Illinois Center for the Book and has been a featured author at the annual Illinois Authors Book Fair and other literary events.

To schedule one or both of these one-hour presentations, please visit the Illinois Humanities Council Web site at www.prairie.org and select "Educational Programs & Grants" to get to the Road Scholars Speakers Bureau, or contact the IHC office in Chicago at 312-422-5580.

Norman Mailer on Mark Twain and James Jones —from *The Spooky Art*

I suppose I am the ten millionth reader to say that *Huckleberry Finn* is an extraordinary work. Indeed, for all I know, it is a great novel. Flawed, quirky, uneven, not above taking cheap shots and cashing far too many cheques (it is rarely above milking its humour) —all the same, what a book we have here! I had the most curious sense of excitement. After a while, I understood my peculiar frame of attention. The book was so up-to-date!

I was not reading a classic author so much as looking at a new work sent to me in galleys by a publisher. It was as if it had arrived with one of those rare letters that say: "We won't make this claim often, but do think we have an extraordinary first novel to send out."

So it was like reading *From Here to Eternity* in galleys, back in

1950, or *Lie Down in Darkness*, *Catch-22*, or *The World According to Garp* (which reads like a fabulous first novel). You kept being alternately delighted, surprised, annoyed, competitive, critical, and, finally, excited. A new writer had moved on to the block. He could be a potential friend or enemy, but he most certainly was talented.

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James Jones and I used to feel in the early 1950s that we were the two best writers around. Unspoken was the feeling that there was room for only one of us. I remember that Jones inscribed my copy of *From Here to Eternity* "For Norman, my dearest enemy, my most feared friend."

—from *The Spooky Art* (Little, Brown). Copyright Norman Mailer, 2003.

James Jones and the Art of War Literature

The theme of nearly all great combat literature is the fatalism of the man on the front and his skepticism about the big ideas that put him in harm's way. Name your war and you can find the corresponding work of art—Marcus Aurelius in a sense, *War and Peace* ditto, Stephen Crane, everything from World War I, Mailer and James Jones and Bill Mauldin from World War II (plus the great *Das Boot*), the movie version of *M*A*S*H*, everything from Vietnam. Through the centuries and in many cultures, works like these are considered Art, while glorifying treatments like *Sands of Iwo Jima* are eventually seen as curiosities.

—Jim Fallows, *Slate Magazine* (www.slate.com), 2001