

L A U R A D U N B A R

“I can soljer with any man” The Post 9-11 Renaissance of James Jones

In a letter to Charles Scribner about James Jones, Ernest Hemingway wrote:

“He is an enormously skillful fuck-up whose work will do great harm to this country and I hope he kills himself just as soon as it does not hurt yours or his sales” (Lacy 644).

Setting aside the tongue-in-cheek calumny and sad irony contained in his wish, Hemingway’s observation about the conflicted nature of Jones’s gifts and his works’ place in American culture is worth considering because it illuminates the ways that followers of war fiction are often preoccupied with their subject’s future influence. This article examines the groundswell of interest in American graduate studies that concerns itself in whole or in part with aspects of Jones’s mid-twentieth century war fiction. I argue that Jones’s academic revitalization is the result of a nexus of themes and motifs that not only set his war fiction apart contemporarily, but which also find an uncanny confluence in post 9/11 American culture.

In the clique of white American male authors with a record of WWII military service, Jones is distinguished by his singular concern for the ordinary soldier. His thematic fidelity to ways good men fall in their passage to becoming good “soljers” seemed to strike dual chords among both civilians and veterans. Certainly, the two most famous of Jones’s soldiering and combat novels, 1951’s *From Here to Eternity* and 1962’s *The Thin Red Line*, were met with such enthusiasm by a reading and film-going public hungry for representations they could identify with on a psycho-experiential plane, if veterans, or that would help to make the war’s “itness”

intelligible, if civilians, that the novels' transition to landmarks in pop culture was almost instant.¹ However, while Jones was alive, his relations with literary critics were uneven, a state of affairs analogous with his artistic inconsistency. Jones's best work combines an extraordinary attention to the minutiae and appurtenance of soldierly activities with a critical spirit acutely sensitive to the discrepancies between liberalism's lived reality and its philosophic idealism; his worst loses its readers in a welter of indiscriminate detail and conflicting thematic impulses. Too, it is likely that mixed in with the genuine criticism was another kind, in which hid the not-uncommon relegation of popularly successful authors to the intellectual hinterlands of high culture. In the introduction to his authoritative work on Jones, James Giles notes that from 1951-1976 only ten scholarly works about Jones were published (xi). Even after his death in 1977, canonical consensus eluded Jones, and with the exception of a handful of staunch supporters his academic legacy seemed destined to remain lichen-like outside the memorializing biographies and collections of his correspondence.² Besides these, from 1981 to 1989, seven scholarly works appeared, and in the '90s, ten. More surprising, then, that around 2000 an unusual change began to take place: Since that year, and in addition to the ten scholarly publications written by established academics, almost fifty graduate dissertations that feature some aspect of, or that concentrate entirely on, Jones's war fiction have been produced; an astonishing forty-one of these appear after 2001.³

The most obvious explanation is that the events of September 11, 2001, exert a kind of ambient force field around WWII cultural representations, especially those so readily available in the lore of popular culture that they offer knee-jerk access to coherence through the recollection of familiar icons—the equivalent of a lucky rabbit's foot—in the face of a second Pearl Harbor. I argue, however, that a more accurate and complex understanding results when we consider Jones's popularity

1 See Brenda Brown Gabioud's 1987 thesis: "American Values and Reader Response in "The Naked and the Dead" and "From Here to Eternity"." Order No. 1331085 The University of Texas at Arlington, 1987. Ann Arbor: *ProQuest*.

2 See *To Reach Eternity: The Letters of James Jones*, by George Hendrick; *James Jones*, by George Garrett; *Into Eternity: The Life of James Jones, American Writer*, by Frank MacShane, and *James Jones: A Friendship*, by Willie Morris.

3 Dissertations that include a Jones reference, organized alphabetically by their authors' last names: Blaskiewicz, Robert J.; Carter, Russell Kendall; Chester, Robert Keith; Creadick, Anna Greenwood; Christle, Patrick Paul; Depue, Mark R.; Di Carpio, Ralph; Dickerson, Jacob Allen; Erickson, Lucas E.; Fisher, Benjamin F.; Froula, Anna Katherine; George, Sean M.; Gregory, Jim; Grindrod, Jacqueline C.; Hendrix, Jan; Huebner, Andrew Jonathan; Ireland, Brian; Kasperski, Kenneth F.; LaFarge, Albert; Love, Rebecca I.; McDonald, Damina; Munday, Lisa M.; Nagy, Peter; Peebles, Stacy L.; Peppler, Chito C.; Perel, Zivah; Perrin, Thomas Gordon; Ross, Mathew Samuel; Sabol, Regis T.; Smihula, John Henry; Sonnenburg, Penny Marie; Stockton, Julie M.; Tateishi, Shaun K. H.; Tsika, Noah; Van Meter, Larry A.; Vernon, Alex Cay; Vincent, Jonathan Edward; Wade, Elizabeth W.; Watts, Stephen Baldwin.

among new scholars in relation to three stable and recurring themes that shape his soldier characters: First, the works' conflicting mix of deep ambivalence toward American bureaucratic institutions and unequivocal love for its people; second, their perseverant preoccupation with being "smart," where smart is understood as symptomatic of the disconnect between common-sense and moral intelligence in post-WWII society; and third, their reworking an old archetype, the yeoman, into the figure of the nuclear soldier. Through the development of these ideas, Jones's war fiction touches a register of loyalty and anxiety in post-9/11 American society, and offers, if not solutions, ways of understanding the cultural incoherence that is becoming the hallmark characteristic of the new liberal century.⁴

VS Pritchett's 1952 denigration of American army novels as "sadistic, obscene, and cynical" tools for spreading "mass cultural propaganda" anticipates much of the negative reception that Jones's war writing generated at home.⁵ The general register of the opprobrium was that Jones was resolutely anti-intellectual, and that his war fiction relied on a "cult of experience" which replaced critical analysis with affective interpretations. Pearl Bell, in *Commentary Magazine*, describes the origins of the novels' "discomfort in the presence of ideas" as the legacy of Jones's admiration for the writing of Thomas Wolfe, and its "habit of confusing incantation with ideas" (91) as evidence of the basic incompatibility of intellectualism with the author's imagination and temperament. It's likely that Philip Rahv, when he was editor

4 Clifford Geertz's exhortation, that credible cultural engagement depends on the design of the inquiry, its structure, and its goals, guides my inquiry into the trend in Jones scholarship. Therefore, instead of asking questions aimed at mapping "the continent of meaning" between Jones and his current cultural afterlives, I focus on an analysis of the scholarly interest in Jones which is centered around "guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses" (Geertz 20). To that end, I present here a series of guesses about Jones and his current scholarship that is determined less by a desire to reach a perfection of consensus between Jones's works, their analyses, and currents in present-day culture than it is concerned with—Geertz again—"refining the debate"(29).

5 On 27 July 1952 the *New York Times* published an article by VS Pritchett. In it, the Notable British Critic considers the question, brought up by the intelligentsia at *The Author* and articulated by CP Snow, about whether it is finally time to "get rough with the half prideful thought that writing of horrors is a sign of literary vitality": the sadistic books complained of are all American and, chiefly, they deal with war and army life. On one hand they record the shock felt by people who have a far shorter experience of war and a far slenderer sense of military tradition than exists in Europe. This might not disturb the European critic, but for the fact that the full weight of American power, vitality and dominance is behind what is written. The European must be excused if he sees with some dismay in these novel a kind of cultural mass propaganda, the imperialism of the bad word and the uprooted man. It is a peculiar fact that in Britain, for example, we have had very few war novels about the last war, though dramatic horrors were experienced and by the civilian as well as the military. Certainly we have had no obscene novels ... I suggest three explanations of this: the relative lack of hysteria or violence in British society, the long experience of war and finally--we finished with the whole thing in the European war books of the late Twenties, when sex, foul language, horror--the whole boiling --was done once and for all.

of the Partisan Review, had writers like Jones in mind—as Bell thought he did—when he made his unlikeable comments about red-face “open-air” Midwestern writers versus pale-skin “drawing-room” Eastern intellectuals.⁶ Nor was the criticism confined along the traditional East-West divide in American political ideology. Something about Jones’s writing—whether it was the seemingly cojones masculinity, the glorification of the army, the aestheticization of battle, or the language that seemed written with a movie script in mind—acted like an irritant to people who considered themselves serious literati. For these reviewers, Jones’s refusal to conform to the niceties of punctuation and grammar were clear evidence of his intrinsic un-literariness.⁷ In interviews, too, Jones often made statements that seemed to support his characterization as an anti-political, and therefore anti-intellectual author. In the 1958-59 Fall-Winter issue of *The Paris Review* Jones answered a question about whether his decision to emigrate to France was a sign of a national dis-affiliation by saying:

Oh no. Not at all. I’m an American, and always will be, I happen to love that big, awkward, sprawling country very much--and its big, awkward, sprawling people. Anyway, I don’t like politics; and I don’t make “political gestures,” as you call it. I don’t believe in politics. To me, politics is like one of those annoying, and potentially dangerous (but generally just painful) chronic diseases ... It’s a science ... which has grown up out of simple animal necessity more than anything else.

In a turquoise analogy, Jones defended the value of experiential narrative by claiming that one of the purposes of war fiction was to capture the real experience before time smoothed its edges. *From Here to Eternity*, the story of a company of soldiers stationed in Hawaii in the months leading up to Pearl Harbour, focuses primarily on the struggles of a private and a master sergeant to maintain their individualism from within the military command structure; the *Thin Red Line* is the story of a similar company only now engaged in active combat in Guadalcanal; *Whistle*, published posthumously in 1978, traces the path of the characters, tripled now, as

6 Rahv’s essay “Paleface and Redskin” first appeared in the 1939 issue of *The Kenyon Review*. For an analysis of its influence on American culture and ideas at the end of the twentieth century, see Sanford Pinsker’s “Philip Rahv’s “Paleface and Redskin”—Fifty years Later,” in the *Georgia Review*, V. 43 (3).

7 In the doctoral thesis that preceded his important 1989 book on Jones’s oriental liberalism, Stephen Carter said the “outrage” Jones’s grammar provoked in some critics relieved them of an intellectual problem, since “they no longer had to probe his books for meaning, but could get by with a few choice specimens of his grammatical errors. After all, the entire fate of Culture was at stake every time he said “ain’t”, wasn’t it? ... how could literature ever survive his refusal to use the apostrophe properly?” (8).

emotionally and or physically injured veterans on a fictional Southern base. Jones's own Army experience, first in Hawaii and later in combat in Guadalcanal, gave his descriptions of the soldier's daily routines, boredoms, frustrations, and fears a degree of authenticity. Unlike other contemporary writers with military experience who also wrote combat or soldiering novels, the most explicit manifestation of Jones's service was his refusal to allow the editors to censor his gamey language. His defense of words like "fuck" or "cunt" made his a realistic transcription of what William Styron called the record of the daily language of the people who used it, and even though Styron found it almost "premodern," he admired its "Dreiserian force ... the people were alive as those of Dostoevski" (Hendrick viii).⁸ Like Dreiser, Jones had a knack for capturing, in his enlisted men, characters who were emblems of what Lionel Trilling, in *The Liberal Imagination*, called the "small legitimate existence, so necessary for the majority of men to achieve, [that] is in our age so very hard, so nearly impossible for them to achieve" (33).

The cornerstone of that individual legitimacy is, in Western liberal thought, comprised of the right to property in oneself and the right to have that property recognized and acknowledged through language; with Modernism and the rise of an ever-more intrusive bureaucratic social order, the first shifted from small-scale entrepreneurship to dependence on the tiered system of corporate-controlled capital, while the expression of the latter, never easy if one was not white or male to begin with, became commensurately vexed by the same discourse. But Jones's soldiers talk, talk, talk against the tide of anonymity that was one of the consequences of the Consensus era's preoccupation with uniformity in goods, services, and standards; they mount a verbal barrage of narrative insistence on their dual right to speak and be heard; they throw into relief the variousness and complexity of the men in the uniform; they never shut up even, ironically, when their experience of external catastrophe threatens to permanently silence them physically or psychologically.

In his study of American literature after 9-11, Richard Gray says "if there was one thing writers agreed about in response to 9-11, it was the failure of language--the attacks made the tools of their trade seem absurd ... disorientation is a primary feature of writing in America after the fall ... so is a sense of loss, and occasionally, longing for a dreamy, reposeful, inviting" past, or what Mark Twain called the "Delectable Land" of nostalgic history (14). The silence that Gray alludes to is, in

⁸ Jones was not the first war writer to use soldiering language as a vehicle for exploring the effects of language in representing war: Laurence Stallings and Maxwell Anderson's WWI play *What Price Glory* also created a sensation with its graphic elements; but the enduring popularity of Jones's novels made the device a part of the everyday parlance of popular postwar culture. About what he calls "army creole," Paul Fussell argues "During war-time there seems less need for high narrative, like sophisticated romance or novel, than low. Folk-narrative ... blossoms on all sides" (35).

Jones's works, a symptom of what Robert Reed Bonnadonna, in his 1999 graduate thesis, calls the "bellicose hypermasculine culture" of the Army's institutional structure, which ensures that the sensitive or unconvinced decompensate as progressively aphasic humans when forced into conformity as soldiers (11). The explicit articulation of Jones's theory about the ways "good" soldiers rise and in that passage "good" men fall, "The Evolution of the Soldier," occurs in his next-to-last 1975 novel *WWII: A Chronicle of Soldiering*. Men enter the army and are immediately subject to the beginning of successive stages of conditioning whose end result is complete self-abnegation; Jones's idea is that the only effective soldier is one who already thinks himself dead before he even enters battle (42-44). Russell Kendall Carter's dissertation observes Jones's theory rests on the idea that "rational men will not capriciously sacrifice themselves" (11), a point of some interest when compared to Jones's preoccupation with rationality, taken up later here. When the teleologies by which they understand themselves as men are threatened by their encounter with conditioning by the radical violence of the Army's programme for them, ordinary soldiers become models of Kenneth Burke's "representative anecdotes" of historic sense-making (337) and simultaneously foreshadow Jean Baudrillard's later observations about 9-11, when "not just the whole play of history and power [was] distorted by the event [of violence] but so, too, [were] the conditions of its analysis" (qtd. in Gray 47). Though inarticulateness, or the degrees of silence that war produces, recreates, perpetuates, and refutes through the dilation and contraction, voicing or voicelessness, of its subjects, is a recurring trope across combat literature, the explicitness with which it is treated by Jones is, as both Bonnadonna and J.E. Vincent note, an aspect of his work that sets him apart from his contemporaries and which makes him well-suited for attempts at understanding times of national silence through previous encounters. At the same time, Jones's predilection for length and detail feels like a strategy designed to counterpose the characters' progressive aphasia. Jones's wordiness was another irritant to some of his contemporary critics but seems to bother not at all either his popular readers or current scholarly interlocutors; perhaps because it once again reasserts language as a way of making trauma's "itness" a voiced, recorded, narrativized, and therefore comprehensible experience.

In terms of their nostalgic power, the novels by virtue of their publication dates serve as reminders of the Consensus era, a time when, superficially at least, the nation did really seem to be poised on the long soft edge of a Keatsian afternoon. The setting of *From Here to Eternity*, especially, offers means of reorientation in terms of 9/11 because its diegetic frame, a pre-Pearl Harbour Army company stationed in

Hawaii, means that it draws identifiable parallels for later generations of readers with New York before, and at the same time acts as an historical reminder that what the nation survived in the twentieth century it might again in the twenty-first. The novel ends shortly after Pearl Harbor, but the crisis is foreshadowed almost from the start—the title alludes to the “lost way” of Kipling’s 1892 poem and the ending draws uncanny parallels to New York in its last scenes, where the female characters, being evacuated to the mainland, look at the harbor one last time from a ship deck. As a testament to the story’s nostalgic power even in close chronological contexts, the 1953 film version of *From Here to Eternity* won eight Academy Awards and was the highest-grossing film of the decade—and is now considered a classic as much for its for-the-time gritty realism as for its stellar cast.⁹ That the novel’s realism was famous for the kinds of violent tragedy attached to the main characters and the movie, mostly for the beach sex scene between Burt Lancaster and Deborah Kerr, is in keeping with the curious valences of America in the fifties, that Tom Engelhardt says fomented a culture which “grasped the pleasures of the victory culture as an act of faith, and the horrors of nuclear culture as an act of faithless mockery, and held both the triumph and the mocking horror close without necessarily experiencing them as contraries” (9).

The contrarianism attached to the new social realities making themselves in the fifties are part and parcel of Jones’s concern, as Steven Carter notes, for the condition of the “beleaguered” individual in wider civilian society (11).¹⁰ Jones’s dismay with the progressive loss of individual liberty in modern society is given expression in his portrayal of the ways that the Army pervades every detail of the enlisted men’s daily lives, in all their associated banal routines, minor satisfactions, discontents, schemes for advancement or demotions; his contemporary timeliness lies in the fact that this concern connects the novels to the emergence of the externally-focused organization man described by Consensus intellectuals like William Whyte, C.

9 In a 1978 Paris Review interview, Joan Didion, an admirer of Jones, said this about *Eternity*’s bittersweet nostalgic power: The heat. I think that’s the way the whole thing began. There’s a lot of landscape that I never would have described if I hadn’t been homesick. If I hadn’t wanted to remember. The impulse was nostalgia. It’s not an uncommon impulse among writers. I noticed it when I was reading *From Here to Eternity* in Honolulu just after James Jones died. I could see exactly that kind of nostalgia, that yearning for a place, overriding all narrative considerations. The incredible amount of description. When Prewitt tries to get from the part of town where he’s been wounded out to Alma’s house, every street is named. Every street is described. You could take that passage and draw a map of Honolulu. None of those descriptions have any narrative meaning. They’re just remembering. Obsessive remembering. I could see the impulse.

10 For recent graduate analyses of the concept of “beleaguered individualism,” see Patrick Paul Christle’s 2001 dissertation “The Beleaguered Individual: A Study of Twentieth-Century American War Novels”, Zivah Perel’s 2005 “Individuality and the Pressure to Conform in Twentieth-Century American Military Service Narratives”, and Jeffrey Frank Severs 2007 “Reinventing Totalitarianism in the Postwar American Novel.”

Wright Mills, and David Reisman. In a parallel manner, Jones's cynicism about the rise of bureaucracy foreshadows the totemic power of the Trade Centre buildings in the American imagination. The crisis of their destruction as physical objects is not just a result of their concrete proportion as the highest buildings on the Manhattan horizon, as Gray points out, but of their symbolic value as two of the pinnacles of American social achievement—the downtown office complex that in the post WWII decades became embedded in the “household imagery” of the nation as the place of work, of security, and of institutionalized society (42).

The emphasis that the temper of Consensus bureaucratic culture placed on rationality, liberal progress, and bureaucratic structures is the second predominant theme running through Jones's work, which is picked up in the recent scholarship. Much of the working out of his ideas about the erosion of freedom is tied to a preoccupation with the gap between common-sense and moral intelligence. Jones's conflicting views about the plight of the individual on the “inside” are expressed in his extended use of “smartness” as one of the primary tropes associated with the American “heritage” character in contemporary political and social arenas. The impulse to defend a “true” or “heritage” common-sense American character was a significant issue in both Cold War and Axis-of-Evil discourses, and in this light, Jones's preoccupation with the dangers of mid-twentieth century forms of common sense, or “playing politics” takes on uncannily prophetic overtones. Characters often express a preternatural historical longing, or at least awareness of, the values and freedoms afforded them by the lost frontier, now corrupted by modernity. At the beginning of *From Here to Eternity*, one of the minor characters phrases it this way:

Maybe back in the old days, back in the time of the pioneers, a man could do what he wanted to do, in peace. But he had the woods then, he could go off in the woods and live alone. He could live well off in the woods. And if they followed him there for this or that, he could just move on. There was always more woods on up ahead. But a man cant do that now. He's got to play ball with them. He's got to divide it all by two. (11)

Representations of war in American culture have always been characterized by a paradoxical dualism, the division by two of ideal and reality; as a 2013 anthology edited by Jimmy L. Bryan demonstrates, the cultural expressions of America's self-understanding in times of radical upheaval are constructed in equal parts by grandeur and cynicism, sacrifice and self-interest, patriotic idealism and jingoistic

nationalism. In their ability to hold simultaneously positions of disillusionment with the local application of government and patriotism for the nation as an ideal, Jones's characters foreshadow ambivalent undertows in the currents of feeling about American foreign policy before the attacks and about foreign and domestic security policy after.

Jones's continual juxtaposition of individual and group experience drives analogies about the effect of American personal self-interest on global conditions. In *From Here to Eternity*, the character First Sergeant Milton Anthony Warden, disgusted with his men's narrow absorption in the record-keeping of their daily small advancements and grievances, tells one of them the trouble is "that you can't see any further than that douchebag nose of yours. You concern yourself with the petty details of life in order not to think ... While the whole goddamn world is rocketing to hell you got to go back and get your fucking teeth ... Its because of you theres Nazis in Germany ... Its because of you there'll be Fascism in this country someday" (309). By likening a narrowly self-interested viewpoint to the development of international and internal crises, the passage alludes to a kind of thinking associated with Cold War neo-conservatism and which helped shaped both later neo-liberal attitudes in America and the formation of anti-American feeling internationally. On the other hand, Warden is devoted to the "Profession," as the characters call the Army, and takes intense pride in both his native "smarts" and his ability to run the Company better than its managers, the officers, can.

Linking Jones's beliefs about being smart and his rise in popularity as an academic subject is the emphasis placed in post-9/11 contexts on common-sense by the Bush administration. Francis Fukuyama points out that much of the rhetoric used in the National Security Strategy of the United States set out in the West Point address of June 2002 is couched in the language of practical self-preservation against enemies who have "openly declared that they are seeking weapons of mass destruction, and evidence indicates that they are doing so with determination ... as a matter of common-sense and self-defense, America will act against such emerging threats before they are fully formed" (82). Many Americans became increasingly ambivalent about the degree and scale to which such threats existed as the war in Iraq dragged on and social-engineering projects for introducing democracy to the middle East proved vastly more complicated than was initially forecast; in Jones's novels, similar ambivalence is expressed by soldiers who persistently perceive the psychic threat posed by the military's institutional command structure as greater than the physical danger presented by the foreign enemy, because the first is less honest in its intentions.

As well as his ambivalence about the social value of common-sense, the fact that Jones's WWII novels feature characters whose disillusionment with their society becomes greater, not less, also makes his work unique when compared to one of the broad categories by which contemporary WWII combat writing may be understood both contemporarily and currently. Though it is correct to say, as Peter Aichinger notes, that single shared trait of most characters in American World War II fiction is a lack of "crusading spirit" (37), it is also true that in many of these works a transformative shift occurs once the soldiers are actually engaged in combat, which sees them suddenly become, if not inspired, at least committed to seeing the war through, as occurs in *The Caine Mutiny*, *That Winter, A Walk in the Sun*, and even in the ironically-titled *The Crusaders*. In its departure from this tendency, as Aichinger notes, *Eternity* more closely resembles WWI novels like *Three Soldiers* and *Through the Wheat*, where disillusionment and isolation are progressive. Not only does *Eternity* sidestep the battle issue by ending only just after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, it deviates in another way from its contemporaries by casting its characters in the role of professional soldiers whose "thirty-year" commitment occurs before the draft. In this way, though it still supports Aichinger's view that WWII combat novel characters are motivated by pragmatic factors like economic welfare and social security instead of patriotic morale (39), it also gestures toward the growing culture of security that orients and grounds liberal Western society never so much as it has done in the post-9/11 years, that Jones's characters call "the inside" and which has become, in James Der Derian's words, "the shifting site from which the forces of authority, order, and identity philosophically defined and physically [keep] at bay anarchy, chaos, and difference" (162).

And it is this last aspect of Jones's work that most shapes, I believe, his projective importance in current cultural contexts. More than any other WWII war author, Jones uses, in his characters, an historic colonial figure—the yeoman—to construct a new iteration of an old type, and one of considerable importance in the "support our troops" culture that gained so much momentum in post-911 American culture. As one of Ezra Pound's "acting ideas" that during moments of crisis "come in a curious way into focus, and ... become at least in some degree generative" (Dawes 23), Jones's regular army soldiers are touchstone figures that embody the fullest range of a war's physical and psychological experiences. In a culture which increasingly understands itself through the stories—good and bad, heroic or cowardly, humanitarian or imperialist, integrated or alienated—of its war experiences, Jones's egalitarian grunts influence all of America's later war understandings and play a foundational role in establishing the soldier as a central

cultural peacetime figure in postwar America. What Alan Robinson, in his theory of historical fiction, describes as the cognitive asymmetry between experience and inquiry is, in Jones's war fiction, subject to a social and chronological span that is simply not available from any other source. By ranging across pre-war Hawaii to post-war civilian life, Jones's narratives imagine their repeating main yeoman-soldier characters in every conceivable situation: in peace-time; in battle; as injured veterans awaiting redeployment; and as discharged veterans. In Jones's fictional WWII soldiers, all the 'classic' American virtues are reborn in a figure that combines the independence, self-reliance, physical stamina, and self-discipline of the eighteenth century, but in a twentieth-century framework of almost ceaseless institutional interpellation.

Understanding how Jones reinstalls the figure of the yeoman into the nuclear soldier matters because it sheds light on the artificial evolution of a figure that is now so indigenized into Western consciousness that it seems natural. Since the last decades of the twentieth-century, the all-American soldier is the touchstone figure for "support" culture built around sentimental heroism, whose performance of duty as an instrument in the protection of institutional interests is made acceptable by his or her common-folk ordinariness, and yet whose uniqueness simultaneously preserves the sacred tenets of Lockian liberal individualism. Particularly as the naturalized soldier has become the primary representative of institutionally sanctioned violence in American culture—the first agent of intervention in an ever-expanding peace patrol—the figure extends legitimacy to the police officer, prison guard, transportation security agent, organized crime or drug agent, federal border patrol officer, and private security guard. In this way, and though the body of scholarly work building around Jones continue to develop analyses that take multi-faceted approaches to representations of masculinity, individuality, violence, I argue that underlying all these foci is a recognition that Jones's catalytic yeoman-soldier is a crossroads Janus, historically significant and proleptically prescient.

Even when it seems to come into direct conflict with the pessimism of its creator, and his theory of the soldier, the figure finds a robustly procreative ground in Jones's work. For an explanation of how such apparently contradictory impulses can produce a figure of such cultural durability, it is helpful to draw on Paolo Valesio's theory of contemporary rhetorics. About the intellectual intrigue surrounding the plasticity of Jones's soldiers, Valesio writes:

One of the most fascinating phenomena in the history of ideas occurs when certain concepts seem to snap together as a constructive system,

emerging from a welter of sardonic critiques and negative assertions ... when in the process their connotations are completely changed, from negative to positive. (4)

Though the prevailing view in the current body of graduate work tends to tip toward soldiering as one of the negative-value occupations of a liberal state, in that it forces its agents toward the unsolvable crisis of performing their duty to the state in fulfillment of liberalism's program or by preserving themselves in fulfillment of liberalism's creed, it is also important that scholars remember that Jones's war fiction—all fiction—regularly lies athwart authorial intention, to become a “mechanism that speaks through the speaker-writer, often against his intention, and almost always with a depth and complexity of which he, the “author,” can see only a limited part (Valesio 42). Though Jones was more explicit than many authors about his desire to “discover an unsevered thread” that would bind everything he wrote, and set about doing so by consciously developing his theory about the evolution of the soldier in relation to Emersonian transcendentalism (Carter), even he would likely be surprised by the ways that his thematic concern for group and individual experience has provided a seedbed for a new cultural icon of such mixed and sometimes volatile ideologies.

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