

JAMES JONES'S FROM HERE TO ETERNITY, THE THIN RED  
LINE, AND WHISTLE: A TRILOGY

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A THESIS

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BY

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## DEDICATION

To my husband Charles and my daughter Carri without whose  
love, help, encouragement, and faith this work would,  
literally, not have been possible.

To my mother Lois Hanes Barnett for her love, encouragement,  
and faith in me.

To the memory of my father Charles Rose Barnett.

To my brother Charles Everett Barnett for the love and  
affection we share.



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## INTRODUCTION

Since the publication of his first novel in 1951, James Jones has been a popular author of American fiction. His career spanned some thirty years and ended with the posthumous publication of his last novel in 1978. His popular success is noted in Robert E. Cantwell's commentary stating that James Jones was in 1953 the "most successful novelist in American literary history." From Here to Eternity saw five printings of the seventy-five-cent edition and sold 1,700,000 copies in six weeks. The original edition sold nearly one-half million copies. Jones sold the movie rights to the novel for \$82,500, and he received advance royalties on reprints for \$101,000.<sup>1</sup> Michael S. Lasky wrote in 1976 that "His titles--ten are now in print--sell steadily. Three novels have been made into movies. . . . Jones, without the help of an agent, routinely gets five-figure advances for his work."<sup>2</sup> Peter Aichinger states that Jones has been the "most enduring author for the last thirty years."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "James Jones: Another 'Eternity'?" Newsweek, 23 November 1953, pp. 102-07.

<sup>2</sup> "James Jones Has Come Home to Whistle," Writers Digest, October 1976, pp. 22-26.

<sup>3</sup> The American Soldier in Fiction, 1880-1963: A History of Attitudes Toward Warfare and the Military Establishment (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1975), p. 107.

Although Jones's popular reputation as a writer seems evident, his literary achievement has not been firmly established. From the critiques examined concerning Jones's work, one basic fact seems clear: the critics do not agree about the quality or nature of his literary contribution. Some critics consider the first two novels of the trilogy, From Here to Eternity and The Thin Red Line, as great novels. Others see them as flawed, almost to the point of negating any contribution they might make. The third novel of the trilogy has only recently been published and has yet to be fully evaluated.

When the advance publicity about Whistle began to appear, speculation arose about what Jones's last novel would have to say and about whether or not it would again have to do with the military. In the Introduction to Whistle Jones makes the statement that his last work was to be the third book in a trilogy composed of From Here to Eternity (1951), The Thin Red Line (1962), and Whistle (1978). Apparently he had always had this intention. His friend Willie Morris, who was instrumental in seeing that Whistle was completed and published, explains this intent when he reports, "In some notes on an essay, he [Jones] had once written:

It was conceived as far back as 1947 when I was still first writing to Maxwell Perkins about my characters Warden and Prewitt, and the book I

wanted to write about World War II. When I was beginning From Here to Eternity, then still untitled, I meant for that book to carry its people from the peacetime Army on through Guadalcanal and New Georgia, to the return of the wounded to the United States. A time span corresponding to my own experience. But long before I reached the middle of it I realized such an ambitious scope of such dimension wasn't practicable.

The idea of the trilogy occurred to me then. Whistle, still untitled and--as a novel--unconceived, was a part of it. So when I began The Thin Red Line (some eleven years later) the plan for a trilogy was already there. And Whistle, as a concept, would be the third part of it.

Which of course it should be. It was always my intention with this trilogy that each novel should stand by itself as a work alone. . . .

There is not much else to add. Except to say that when Whistle is completed, it will surely be the end of something. At least for me. It will mark the end of a long job of work for me. Conceived in 1946 and begun in the summer of 1947, it will have taken me nearly thirty years to complete. It will say just about everything I have ever had to say, or will ever have to say, on the human condition of war and what it means to us, as against what we claim it means to us."<sup>4</sup>

Since the concept of a trilogy is the foundation of this study, that concept will be clarified here. A trilogy is "A literary composition more usually a NOVEL or a play, written in three parts, each of which is in itself a complete unit. . . . The trilogy usually is written against a large background which may be historical, philosophical, or social

<sup>4</sup> "A Friendship: Remembering James Jones," Atlantic Monthly, June 1978, pp. 47-50.

in its interests."<sup>5</sup> By the very fact of its publication over so wide a span of years and the subsequent success and recognition of each novel as a separate creation, Jones's trilogy fulfills the requirement that each work be a complete unit in itself. The three books also share a large background that is historical--the background of World War II. In Chapter III the trilogy's social and philosophical implications through its themes will be discussed.

Jones's statement concerning the trilogy reveals several points that this thesis will explore. This study will examine From Here to Eternity, The Thin Red Line, and Whistle as a trilogy. Also, since Whistle has been so recently published and since little has been written about it individually or about it in connection with the other two books, this thesis will attempt to deal with Whistle as an individual work as well as with its role in the trio.

The plots of the three novels represent the first link they have as a trilogy. They are briefly outlined in the above statement by Jones concerning the trilogy. However, what part each novel plays in the entire scheme will be further clarified here. From Here to Eternity deals with the lives of professional soldiers in a company in the

<sup>5</sup> C. Hugh Holman, A Handbook to Literature, 3d ed. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., Odyssey Press, 1972), p. 538.

peacetime Army stationed in Hawaii just before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Ned Calmer has called this novel "the best picture of Army life ever written by an American. . . ." <sup>6</sup> Regardless of other stands taken pro or con, most critics agree with Calmer's evaluation. At the end of the novel the Japanese have attacked, and this company along with the rest of America is at war. The Thin Red Line involves a company of the regular Army, formerly stationed in Hawaii, as it campaigns against the Japanese on Guadalcanal. Many critics believe that the novel's strength lies in its realism and detail. Donald Allan calls this book "the most accurate and powerful description of battle in American fiction." <sup>7</sup> Whistle continues the story of the company from Guadalcanal as it sends its casualties to a hospital in Tennessee for rehabilitation, either to rejoin the army for further campaigns in the war or to return to civilian life. The major emphasis of the novel is on the men's efforts to survive in a society they did not realize existed when they went to war. Paul Oppenheimer tells us that the characters in Whistle "struggle for survival" and

<sup>6</sup> "The Real Enemy Is Hard to Find," Saturday Review of Literature, 24 February 1951, pp. 11-12.

<sup>7</sup> "The Way It Was," Reporter, 25 October 1962, pp. 61-5.

that their struggle is against forces "more brutal, more insidious, than the one they have just left. . . ." <sup>8</sup> These three novels move successively from pre-war Army life through combat in the Pacific to rehabilitation back in the States.

Another connection between the books is the representation in each book of "the Company." "The Company" is a title used for a group of men who are basically the same in all three novels except for the name assigned to them as a unit in the Army. Before Pearl Harbor the Company is stationed at Schofield Barracks in Hawaii and is called "Company G." From Schofield Barracks the Company is sent to Guadalcanal but is now called "C-for Charlie Company." Back in the United States the men in the hospital simply call it "the company." <sup>9</sup> The name is different, but the Company is the same. That men composing the Company are the same contributes to its continuing identity in each book. The major characters and their continuity will be discussed more fully as another link in the trilogy in Chapter I.

<sup>8</sup> "A novelist's race against death," Us, 4 April 1978, pp. 24-5.

<sup>9</sup> In From Here to Eternity the term "Company" is capitalized throughout. In The Thin Red Line it is capitalized only when it refers to C-for-Charlie Company. It is not capitalized in Whistle. "Company" will be capitalized throughout this paper.



This study will examine Jones's treatment of war as a human condition. The evaluation of his work will be based upon Jones's own definition for evaluation which is found in his commentary in the documentary book WWII when he says that greatness in art--and we may presume art includes writing--is achieved when it tells the truth, and when it is "meaningful."<sup>10</sup> It is to be seen whether this trilogy meets his criteria. Jones's characters, style, and themes will be the focus in this study.

The analysis of the major characters in Chapter I will focus on two aspects: the characters as individuals and the characters as types. Since the minor characters are related very closely to the themes of the novels, these additional characters will be included in Chapter III, which deals with the major themes and philosophies shared by the trilogy.

Chapter II will attempt to analyze Jones's distinct style with special attention to choice of language, point of view, atmosphere, and certain other characteristics including those which have contributed to the development of later works of the war novel genre, in particular novels of the absurd.

In Chapter III some of the major themes and symbols shared by the three novels will be examined: Jones's theory

<sup>10</sup> WWII (New York: Grossett and Dunlap, 1975), p. 16.

of the Evolution of a Soldier, his social criticism, the theme of individuality, and war in man's experience.<sup>11</sup> As stated above, minor characters will be analyzed here in their relationships to these themes.

The Conclusion will attempt to summarize the basic attributes and weaknesses that have been seen through the study of the three novels in the preceding chapters and will attempt to draw some conclusions about them in order to arrive at some definitive answers to the question of Jones's literary legacy.

<sup>11</sup> "The Evolution of a Soldier" is Jones's own title and theory explored to a great extent in his documentary book WWII. This theory is illustrated throughout his trilogy and will serve as an organizational guide in Chapter III.

## CHAPTER I

### CHARACTERS

Most characters appearing in Jones's trilogy belong to a group constituting the chief subject of his books: the enlisted common man. "'The lower middle-class boy-man, not soldiers as such,' David Bazelon wrote, 'was Jones's subject. The common American man is a great traditional subject, and Jones in his generation was probably its major caretaker.'"<sup>1</sup> The dominant subject of Jones's trilogy, therefore, is the common American man in the situation very real, very common to Jones's generation--in the army and at war.

The major characters of the trilogy are Warden, Prewitt, and Stark in From Here to Eternity; Welsh, Witt, and Storm in The Thin Red Line; and Winch, Prell, and Strange in Whistle.<sup>2</sup> Jones created the characters of 1st/Sgt Milton Anthony Warden, Pvt Robert E. Lee Prewitt, and Mess/Sgt Maylon Stark in Eternity, and for reasons shortly to be explained chose to call them by other names in Line and subsequently by still

<sup>1</sup> David Bazelon, James Jones: A Friendship by Willie Morris (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1978), p. 78.

<sup>2</sup> Hereafter the novels under consideration will be referred to as Eternity, Line, and Whistle.

other names in Whistle.<sup>3</sup> These characters are important in that they function as a principal connection between the novels of the trilogy. Jones himself explains:

One of the problems I came up against, with the trilogy as a whole, appeared as soon as I began The Thin Red Line in 1959. In the original conception, first as a single novel and then as a trilogy, the major characters such as 1st/Sgt Warden, Pvt Prewitt and Mess/Sgt Stark were meant to continue throughout the entire work. Unfortunately the dramatic structure--I might even say, the spiritual content--of the first book demanded that Prewitt be killed in the end of it. The import of the book would have been emasculated if Prewitt did not die.

When the smoke cleared, and I wrote End to From Here to Eternity, the only end it seemed to me it could have had, there I stood with no Prewitt character.

It may seem like a silly problem now. It wasn't then. Prewitt was meant from the beginning to carry an important role in the second book, and in the third. I could not just resurrect him. And have him there again, in the flesh, wearing the same name.

I solved the problem by changing the names. All the names. But I changed them in such a way that a cryptic key, a marked similarity, continued to exist, as a reference point, with the old set of names. It seems like an easy solution now, but it was not at the time.

So in The Thin Red Line 1st/Sgt Warden became 1st/Sgt Welsh, Pvt Prewitt became Pvt Witt, Mess/Sgt Stark became Mess/Sgt Storm. While remaining the same people as before. In Whistle Welsh becomes Mart Winch, Witt becomes Bobby Prell, Storm becomes John Strange."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> This paper will follow Jones's style of writing the rank of his characters without periods.

<sup>4</sup> James Jones, Whistle (New York: Delacorte Press, 1978), p. xx.

As will be seen, each character undergoes changes in keeping with the author's theme and purpose of each particular novel yet is still recognizable as a carryover from the book that has gone before. All three characters--Warden-Welsh-Winch, Prewitt-Witt-Prell, Stark-Storm-Strange--are formed, trans-figured, and reformed by the force which dominates their lives and which is the dominant background for the trilogy: World War II.

#### I. Warden-Welsh-Winch

The character of 1st/Sgt Warden is Jones's contribution to a new protagonist who emerged in war novels published after the 1950's. Walton Litz tells us that "he is a sergeant commanding a squad or a lieutenant commanding a platoon. In either case he is trusted by his superiors, while he serves as a father image to the soldiers, who follow him like children."<sup>5</sup> Maxwell Geismar further defines him as a man who, "With all the impulses, tastes, and instincts of the common man, . . . must deal with the ruling class of army officers who run the world."<sup>6</sup> Yet Warden enjoys his position as a

<sup>5</sup> (ed.), Modern American Fiction: Essays in Criticism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 304.

<sup>6</sup> American Moderns: From Rebellion to Conformity (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968), p. 228.

noncommissioned officer, a leader without the hindrances of command.<sup>7</sup>

Warden is trusted by his superiors. Captain Holmes, the Company Commander, leaves almost all company business and decisions to Warden. Even when Holmes prefers to make the decisions himself, Warden manages to manipulate him into what Warden feels is best for the Company. Geismar says that "he plays upon Captain Holmes's own vanity, complacency, prejudices, in order to get done what he, Milt Warden, needs to get done to keep the company going."<sup>8</sup> That Warden is capable becomes clear when we read, "In the eight months he had been topkicker of G Company he had wrapped that outfit around his waist like a money belt and buttoned his shirt over it. . . . He had also pulled this slovenly organization out of the pitfalls of lax administration."<sup>9</sup>

The relationship between Warden and Prewitt magnifies the feeling of love and responsibility Warden has for his men and they for him. As much as Warden loves the Company

<sup>7</sup> Peter Aichinger, The American Soldier in Fiction, 1880-1963: A History of Attitudes Toward Warfare and the Military Establishment (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1975), p. 44.

<sup>8</sup> p. 228.

<sup>9</sup> James Jones, From Here to Eternity (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 23.

and his position of power in it, he risks all of it to keep Prewitt from court martial and tries to cover up his desertion. The unhappy fact is that Warden cannot help Prewitt because the 1st/Sgt cannot make the company what it should be.<sup>10</sup> Warden cannot keep Holmes from trying to pressure Prewitt into boxing again, although the 1st/Sgt understands and sympathizes with Prewitt's reasons. Warden hates seeing the System (the Army) try to wear Prewitt down because he will not conform but realizes he cannot change the character of the man, or of the Army. "If he can provide a place for Prewitt to function productively as a free individual in an organized society, he succeeds. If not, then by that much he fails. And it is by that much that he does fail."<sup>11</sup> Warden's characteristic of feeling a keen responsibility for his men eventually develops into a major characteristic of Winch in Whistle.

The relationship between Warden and Stark begins in Eternity but does not blossom into importance until Whistle. In Eternity Warden recognizes Stark's capabilities as a good mess sergeant and gradually over the course of the novel comes to see Stark as a friend. Perhaps the bond is formed

<sup>10</sup> Richard P. Adams, "A Second Look at From Here to Eternity," College English, 17, No. 4 (January 1956), 206.

<sup>11</sup> John R. Hopkins (comp.), James Jones: A Checklist (Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1974), p. 206.

because of the love both he and Stark shared for Karen Holmes and their affairs with her, or perhaps it is Warden's recognition of Stark's love of the Army and his pride in being a thirty-year man. The bond may be formed near the end of Eternity when Stark and Warden share the exultation of professional soldiers who realize that they can now practice their profession, the very thing they have waited for since their enlistment as professionals: war!

In Line Warden becomes Welsh. He is still the first sergeant of his company, but here he is even more irascible and hard-driving than he was in Eternity. The character of Welsh does not stand out in Line to as great a degree as it does in the other two novels. Neither does Prewitt/Witt nor Stark/Storm. This reduction is consistent with the author's intent to emphasize the disappearance of the individual man into the massive war machine, a theme to be discussed in Chapter III.

One of Welsh's functions in Line is to advance a theory of the reason for war: "Property. Property. All for Property. . . ."12 It is a cynical idea and one consistent with the cynicism of the novel. Welsh, along with every other man in Line, experiences war first-hand--and realizes

<sup>12</sup> James Jones, The Thin Red Line (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), p. 376.



it is horrible. The combat situation transforms Warden into Welsh. He is no coward, but he sees no reason to lose his life for "Property."

In Welsh can also be seen Warden's concern for his men, a concern which becomes more and more a burden for him in Line. When Corporal Fife, a one-time clerk for Welsh, requests to be taken off the line and returned to clerking, Welsh evaluates the degree of fear in Fife and endorses his request. Later when Fife decides he should sneak off from the hospital and return to the company and front line action, Welsh purposely insults him in order to con him into shipping out. Concern for his men weighs on Welsh and becomes the dominant characteristic of Winch in Whistle.

Jones makes clear Winch's connection to Welsh in Whistle: "Winch had been our 1st/sgt out there."<sup>13</sup> Winch was also shipped out after being found slumped over his desk on Guadalcanal as was Welsh. Winch was essential to his men and his officers as was Welsh. In both Eternity and Line the character's isolation is tolerated so that the officers and the men can have the benefit of his experience and skill. In Line we read: "And whatever the company was, it was crazy Mart Winch who had made it."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Jones, Whistle, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> Jones, Whistle, p. 41.

One difference from Warden/Welsh that Jones creates for Winch is a wife and two children. In Eternity and Line he is unmarried. Jones changes Winch's marital status to illustrate one of his themes on society concerning changing moral attitudes and women's roles in society, namely, a wife's infidelity. It is, however, the burden of responsibility for his men that dominates Winch: "A picture of his blank-faced, fear-eyed platoons, bleeding and breathing mud for every yard of ground, passed across the inside of Winch's eyes."<sup>15</sup> This vision will crop up more and more at unexpected times for Winch. It will invade his dreams. It will lead to his insanity and that to his end.

Winch's character is Jones's "own shadow stalking him in his decline."<sup>16</sup> Jones suffered from heart failure in his last years as does his character Winch. The fact that Winch suffers from malaria as did Jones, the fact that Winch has to stop drinking as did Jones, the fact that Winch becomes disillusioned through war as did Jones--all these similarities make the character of Winch significant. Jones died from congestive heart failure; Winch does not, but it is significant that Jones's death parallels the decline and end

<sup>15</sup> Jones, Whistle, p. 71.

<sup>16</sup> Willie Morris, James Jones: A Friendship (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1978), p. 173.

of the most vital character of his trilogy. Warden-Welsh-Winch could be said to be a part of Jones, as most of his characters are. This fact, along with the other bonds this character has with the author, makes Warden-Welsh-Winch a character of great power and poignancy.

## II. Prewitt-Witt-Prell

Pvt Robert E. Lee Prewitt was born in Eternity. He is considered by at least one critic to be "Jones's claim to worth as a novelist."<sup>17</sup> If as Richard Adams says, Prewitt's "thoughts furnish a fairly adequate measure of Jones's intellectual achievement,"<sup>18</sup> then the character of Prewitt alone might secure Jones's place in literature.

Prewitt represents for Jones the common man and the enlisted man. We learn in Eternity that Prewitt has been born a hillbilly, "brave and proud and refusing to surrender his rights as an individual." He will not compromise, and he enters the Army seeking his true identity, grasping for the only security he knows.<sup>19</sup> For many young men who grew

<sup>17</sup> Warren Leslie, "Never Had It So Bad," Southwest Review, 36 (Summer 1951), 242.

<sup>18</sup> p. 208.

<sup>19</sup> Ned Calmer, "The Real Enemy Is Hard to Find," Saturday Review of Literature, 34 (February 24, 1951), 11-12.

up in the Depression years, the army was the only answer to a jobless future, the only security--however tough and relentless--they could find.

What Prewitt seeks in the Army is a place in society, but within that society he wants to preserve his integrity and meet the requirements of army life. Prewitt realizes he must constantly make adjustments between himself and society. Yet, he feels the need to "maintain his individual integrity against the depersonalizing power of the machine. . . ."20

Prewitt's quarrel with the army centers upon his refusal to fight or to bugle.

Prewitt's war with the army is touched off by a breach of the freedom he expects in return for his loyalty and service as a soldier. The army can have no claim upon his skill at bugling and his ability in the boxing ring. These are voluntary activities, and when an inferior bugler is promoted above him, Prew chooses to transfer to an infantry outfit. A willing boxer until he inflicted a permanent injury on a sparring partner, Prew decides to keep a promise to a woman--his dying mother--not to hurt others unnecessarily, and he refuses to go out for the regimental team. At stake is Prewitt's self-defined integrity, his freedom to choose to do what he wants beyond his obligations as a soldier.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Adams, p. 209.

<sup>21</sup> Edmond L. Volpe, "James Jones--Norman Mailer," in Contemporary American Novelists, ed. Harry T. Moore (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1966), pp. 108-09.

Prewitt's relationship to Warden is crucial to understanding both characters. It is Warden who, by seeing Prewitt clearly, helps Prewitt see himself most clearly.<sup>22</sup> Prewitt comes to understand that he is "a fighter who doesn't know what he's fighting 'because the real enemy, the common enemy, was so hard to find since you did not know what it was to look for it and could not see it to get your hands on it, so you fought each other, which was easier. . . .'"<sup>23</sup>

Warden helps Prewitt understand that he cannot win because he cannot reconcile himself to a "faulty organization."<sup>24</sup> Prewitt himself says that "You can't disagree with the adopted values of a bunch of people without they get pissed off at you."<sup>25</sup> His mistake lies in believing that a man should not get kicked around.<sup>26</sup> John Moran tells us: "Sgt. Warden explains Prewitt's trouble: too much idealism. 'He loved the Army the way most men love their wives. Anybody who loves the Army that much is nuts.'"<sup>27</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Adams, p. 206.

<sup>23</sup> Calmer, p. 12.

<sup>24</sup> Adams, p. 206.

<sup>25</sup> Jones, Eternity, p. 277.

<sup>26</sup> Geismar, American Moderns, p. 226.

<sup>27</sup> Capt. John B. Moran, USMCR (Ret.), Creating a Legend: The Descriptive Catalog of Writing About the U.S. Marine Corps (Chicago: Moran, Andrews, Inc., 1973), p. 104.

Prewitt is probably the last classic hero in the American war novel. Like all of Jones's protagonists (and most World War II protagonists), he turns outward to humanity rather than retreat in silent despair as the World War I protagonists did.<sup>28</sup> He is filled with "hunger and loneliness, the confusion and despair that are Prewitt's life and longings and his search for that rarest moment when one human could find and touch another."<sup>29</sup>

Prewitt marks the end of the concept of honor in war novels.<sup>30</sup> Because he cannot accept the loss of his integrity he "gets himself arbitrarily shot--a classic release from the toils of freedom."<sup>31</sup> Wilfrid Sheed believes freedom to have been Prewitt's true problem: "The army is the ideal nest for him, a place where he can wave his finger at authority and lean on it at the same time. . . ."<sup>32</sup>

Whichever Prewitt's true problem is, too much freedom or not enough, both he and Warden "demonstrate the possibility of actual disjunction between a particular self and

<sup>28</sup> Aichinger, pp. 89-90.

<sup>29</sup> Calmer, p. 12.

<sup>30</sup> Wayne Charles Miller, An Armed America: Its Face in Fiction: A History of the American Military Novel (New York: New York University Press, 1970), p. 132.

<sup>31</sup> Wilfrid Sheed, "The Jones Boy Forever," The Atlantic, 219, No. 6 (June 1967), 69.

<sup>32</sup> p. 69.

society."<sup>33</sup> Both soldiers love the Army with deep loyalty and devotion while simultaneously realizing its corruption of them as individuals.

The term "arch-revolutionary" is one Jones ascribes to Prewitt in Eternity. Prewitt thinks of himself as "a sort of super arch-revolutionary . . . a sort of perfect criminal type, very dangerous, a mad dog that loves under dogs."<sup>34</sup> Jones tells us that this type of hero came about through the hero's involvement with and relationship to the social revolution that came about in the thirties. The hero's motivation into the army is the jobless, insecure world of the Depression.<sup>35</sup> Ihab Hassan sees Prewitt as an anarchist rather than a protestor.<sup>36</sup> But rather than no rules, it is fairness and justice that Prewitt seeks. Not only Prewitt but all of Jones's characters "do not bend to the imperatives of the

<sup>33</sup> David L. Stevenson, "James Jones and Jack Kerouac: Novelists of Disjunction," in The Creative Present: Notes on Contemporary American Fiction, ed. Nona Balakian and Charles Simmons (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1963), p. 198.

<sup>34</sup> Jones, Eternity, p. 276.

<sup>35</sup> George Plimpton, ed., Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews, Third Series (New York: Viking Press, 1967), p. 244.

<sup>36</sup> Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 85.

power structure in the Army. On the contrary, resistance becomes the essential mode of their beings."<sup>37</sup>

Prewitt represents Jones's belief and insistence upon the integrity and sanctity of the individual. Prewitt's sense of individuality will not allow him to give in to coercion by the Army to make him bugle or box. Such activity must remain his choice. Even going to the stockade is a choice for Prewitt. Although he knows that giving in to the system will spare him the ordeal, he purposely chooses the stockade. Even when he is stopped by the MP's and runs, trying to get back to his outfit after deserting, he chooses not to be caught and brought into custody. He chooses to let the MP's machine gun fire catch him. He could have jumped into the sand trap and safety, but rather than be shamed by being taken into custody, he chooses death because of his sense of honor. To the very end he cannot compromise; he cannot give up his individuality.

Jones also uses Prewitt to espouse racial equality. In a conversation between Prewitt and Stark, Stark views Negroes as either "bad" or "good." The wanderers are the bad ones, else they would have white protectors. Stark reflects the Southern attitude that Southerners believe they

<sup>37</sup> Chester E. Eisinger, Fiction of the Forties (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 42.



understand the Negro. Prewitt on the other hand has had the experience of a wandering Negro saving his life from a wandering white man. He sees all men as either good or bad, whether they are black or white.<sup>38</sup> The idea of persecution is not new to any novelist, but how he handles the problem reveals his feelings on it.<sup>39</sup> Ihab Hassan says that

The predicament of the Negro is sometimes attributed to the simple fact that he is an alien in Western culture. . . . The condition of the Negro, however, is not irrelevant to the fate of modern man whose alienation from the proud tradition he once possessed has taken a more subtle and insidious character. This is clear, painfully so, in James Jones's first and best novel, From Here to Eternity.

If the whole of history, as Emerson thought, can be incarnated in the life of one man, then history can find its explanation only in the experience of each man. When the man is like Robert E. Lee Prewitt . . . history must be what he suffers in the Schofield Barracks Stockade. Prewitt is neither a Negro nor a Jew . . . but he is nonetheless the perennial collector of injustices, the consecrated underdog. . . .

Prewitt may be eligible to the title of "White Negro" which Mailer bestowed on the "new American existentialists." He is certainly one of the dispossessed. Unlike the Negro, however, he does not lack a historical identity. . . .<sup>40</sup>

Just as Prewitt is Jones's underdog fighting for the rights of other underdogs and the rights of the individual,

<sup>38</sup> Charles I. Glicksberg, "Racial Attitudes in From Here to Eternity," Phylon, 14, No. 4 (1953), 386.

<sup>39</sup> Glicksberg, 384.

<sup>40</sup> pp. 83-6.

Warden qualifies as the underdog who fights middle-class values. Warden's love affair with Karen Holmes is seen by Chester Eisinger as a "facet of Jones's offensive against the middle class. . . . This affair is essentially an attack upon the virility of a decadent bourgeois who cannot hold his woman against the powerful sexuality of this he-man from the lower depths." The same author sees "Warden's class allegiances . . . when he refuses to accept a commission which would automatically promote him to the middle class. And his superiority to middle-class values is demonstrated in the cynical but ambiguous scene when he breaks off with Karen because he will not be trapped by her middle-class demands for status."<sup>41</sup>

David Stevenson sees the major flaw of the characters of Prewitt and Warden as being characters not seen in depth; we never know the "undersurface" of their minds.<sup>42</sup> However, the facts do not bear him out. Any two characters who can understand one another's and their own position in life cannot lack depth. Prewitt, being an uneducated, poor Kentucky hill-country vagrant, is not the type of character who can articulate his deepest feelings, yet we know those feelings are there through his actions. Prewitt considers repeatedly

<sup>41</sup> p. 43.

<sup>42</sup> p. 203.

his problems with the army, how they started and where they will take him, and he recognizes that there is something inside him that will inevitably lead him to woe. He does not assign these feelings "motivations" nor does he consciously recognize from where in his experience these feelings arose. He knows simply that the feelings are there. He longs to understand his love for the army, his love for a prostitute, his compulsion to return to his outfit though a deserter. And we know the feelings are there. Warden seems equally incapable of articulating his feelings and motivations, yet he is a man motivated by love of the Army, love of his men, and, briefly, love for a woman. It is consistent with the spirit of the characters Prewitt and Warden, being who they are, that Jones does not allow them to articulate these feelings, even to themselves. We cannot expect an intellectual self-analysis from these men, and we do not get it.

The most noticeable thing about Witt in Line is his difference from the character Prewitt in Eternity. His connections to Prewitt are there in the background given about him: "This man Witt was a small, thin, Breathitt County Kentucky boy, an old Regular, a former Regimental boxer. . . . He could perhaps, by a loose application, be classed as a troublemaker---since he had been busted several times and twice had gone to the stockade on a Summary Court

Martial."<sup>43</sup> Yet, Witt is different in quality from Prewitt; he is hard, banal, and boastful where the Prewitt of Eternity is not. This change in personality is consistent with the author's purpose for the characters in Line. They are meant to be altered by the war experience and to become less attractive in personality so as to fade into the background in the light of the masses of men involved in modern warfare. But Jones states another reason for altering his characters in Line from those in Eternity. He believed Eternity to be a romantic book in the common, ordinary meaning of the term. He did not want Line to be considered romantic:

I made all the characters better in the book [From Here to Eternity]--gave them more integrity, more intelligence, more sensitivity than they, in fact, would have had in life. And in The Thin Red Line I tried to do just the opposite, and there are many of the same characters in both books, and in the second book I've tried to write the same people more like they really were in life than they were in literature, in Eternity.<sup>44</sup>

On Guadalcanal Witt has been transferred from C-for-Charlie Company to Cannon Company--a place for malcontents and troublemakers. He longs to return to the old company but, stubbornly, will not ask. He spends the remainder of Line

<sup>43</sup> Jones, Line, pp. 100-01.

<sup>44</sup> Hopkins, p. 10.

appearing and disappearing on whim, disregarding regulations. When he decides to fight with C-for-Charlie, he tramps through jungles to do so. When someone or something there angers him, he simply leaves and returns to Cannon Company. Witt remains for Jones the man who cannot or will not adjust to his situation because it infringes upon his concept of freedom and integrity.

Evaluating the protagonists of Eternity, Wilfrid Sheed declares that Jones's "present task must be to drag his boy all the way into the post-war world and find him something useful, or usefully useless, to do."<sup>45</sup> Jones found such a place for Prell in Whistle. The location is not exactly after the war, but it is out of the war. Prell's reputation as a hill country hard-head is maintained in Whistle. His stubborn courage appears when he is shipped to the rehabilitation hospital in Luxor after having his thighs smashed by a machine gun on Guadalcanal. The Army doctors feel that amputation is necessary to save his life. Prell refuses. He wishes to survive or die a whole man.

Prell's wound serves to illustrate another theme to be explored in Chapter III: the effect of war on men. Prell's wound also returns him and Winch to a life-or-death relationship. Winch is asked by Strange to visit Prell to try to

<sup>45</sup> p. 72.

pull him out of his despondency. Characteristically, when Winch visits Prell he reads him correctly. Winch decides that sympathy is the last thing Prell needs. He decides, "He would be his enemy. Everybody needed one enemy."<sup>46</sup> Winch calls Prell a glory hunter who carelessly gets his squad shot up for medals. Winch knows that the accusation is not true, but the accusation causes Prell to regard Winch as the enemy, whom Winch has hoped to provide. Apparently Winch is correct; Prell improves. By the end of the novel he can walk again. The irony and pity of the sacrifice Winch makes for Prell is that Prell never realizes that Winch purposely becomes his enemy to provide him something to live for. Prell continues to hate Winch until death. Prell's death is also part of the theme of the war experience, but suffice it to say that, considering the emotional connection to the character of Prewitt, the decline and loss of Prell is a tragedy consistent with the theme of Whistle.

The "usefully useless" thing Jones provides for Prell is the same usefully useless thing the Army provides for him. The Army capitalizes on Prell's Congressional Medal of Honor, his love of and dependency on the Army, and his desire to remain a thirty-year man by sending him on war-bond tours. The selling of bonds in itself is not the tragedy. The

<sup>46</sup> Jones, Whistle, p. 153.

tragedy lies in the government's use of a horribly wounded man who consents to such activity in order to remain active in the Army, the only place to offer the only security he has ever known. When one adds to this the fact that most of the upper echelon people realize the last big push is coming and the war will be over soon, the whole effort on Prell's part becomes a travesty. Apparently Prell realizes this, and much more, because his death is intentional.

Willie Morris tells us that "He [Jones] always wrote out of his feeling for the misery of these men, and from this he never deviated."<sup>47</sup> The odyssey of Prewitt-Witt-Prell is indeed a touching one, bordering often on tragedy, and often crossing over to it. His story is characteristic of a whole generation of men.

### III. Stark-Storm-Strange

The character of Mess/Sgt Maylon Stark, created in Eternity, has been virtually ignored by critics of that novel. While it is true that Stark did not stand out as much as the characters Prewitt and Warden, he did serve several purposes in the novel. What is interesting to observe is his increasing importance in Line and his sharing of equal importance with Winch in Whistle. As each part of

<sup>47</sup> A Friendship, p. 204.

the trilogy evolves, Jones turns more and more to the character of Stark as a sounding board for philosophies and thoughts and, especially in Whistle, as the character who remains most stable in comparison to Prewitt and Warden. Stark can be considered the contrast to Warden and Prewitt. He can also be considered a mediator.

Stark's relationship to Prewitt is usually only that of a bystander. He is aware of Prewitt's problems and seeks at various times to help. He makes the offer to get Prewitt assigned to his kitchen in order to help remove the pressure of the company to fight and bugle. He also sees that the other cooks do not add to Prewitt's misery by harrassing him when Prewitt draws KP duty for punishment. On the whole, however, Stark remains uninvolved with Prewitt.

Stark's relationship to Warden has already been described to some extent in the analysis of Warden. Both are noncoms, a rank which, despite their own protests to the contrary, sets them apart from ordinary enlisted men. Both are devoted thirty-year men; there is no doubt that Stark knows his trade:

Stark loved his kitchen, it was already "his," with the single-mindedness women have been taught to dream of and expect, demand, and decry when attached to anything but love. Stark drove himself as hard or harder than he drove the cooks and the KPs. The dormant Company Fund was brought into the light, and Stark bought



new silverware, he recommended the purchase of newer better equipment. There were even fresh flowers on the tables now and then, a unique experience in G Company. Sloppiness in eating was no longer allowed, and Stark enforced this new rule like a tyrant. A man who slopped catsup over his plate onto the oilcloth would suddenly find himself outside the door in the middle of a meal. The KPs lived a life of hell on earth, yet the reflective eyes in Stark's sad sneering laughing face were always soft and no KP could force himself to hate him. They saw him working just as hard as they did, and they chortled at the way he rode the cooks. Even fat Willard was forced to work.<sup>48</sup>

At the end of Eternity Warden treats Stark to a night on the town and their friendship is sealed. In Line Storm continues to be the only man who understands Welsh.

Storm also continues to be a capable mess sergeant in Line, where both he and Warden as sergeants feel a growing responsibility for their men. Warden's feelings take on the characteristics of madness, and Storm's come close to madness in the form of an obsession: "He would show these bums who it was kept them fed. Nobody'd ever say Storm didn't feed his people."<sup>49</sup> This idea of keeping the Company fed grows until it becomes Storm's one encompassing goal. He feels that it is the very least he can do when he has watched the men being killed or mutilated all around him. He loads his

<sup>48</sup> Jones, Eternity, pp. 177-78.

<sup>49</sup> Jones, Line, p. 53.

kitchen up and, dragging the protesting cooks with him, struggles as far forward as he can until forced to stop by higher command. The need to feed someone becomes so great that he feeds any and all soldiers who come by. If he cannot feed C-for-Charlie, he will feed anyone.

In Whistle Strange begins to parallel Winch in his concern for the men. Strange, however, holds on to reason while Winch becomes more restive and violent. He acts as both a contrast and a comparison to Winch's madness. Strange himself gradually succumbs to madness, but it is significant that it is Strange who fails last.

Strange plays a chief role in Whistle as the principal victim of the new society the men have returned to after the war. The new society and the effect on the men will also be discussed in Chapter III as one of the major themes of the novels.

As stated previously, one of Stark-Storm-Strange's chief purposes has been as a mediator. A mediator is one who observes, considers, and seeks answers to the problems the characters face in the novels while keeping many of his thoughts and emotions within himself, sharing them only with the reader. Stark is a moderate person--not given to strong outbursts and careful in his actions. He commiserates with Prewitt's problems, feels he is getting a raw deal, but accepts the fact that life is that way--at least in the Army.

He recognizes the futility of fighting the System. Prewitt describes him as having "cool, slow talking, levelheadedness."<sup>50</sup>

In Line Storm garners equal attention with the other characters since no one character remains in focus for long. He is still the shrewd, non-committed observer. At one point he thinks, ". . . he was aware that as long as he did his job well, Welsh would continue to leave him alone. That was enough for Storm. If Welsh wanted to be crazy, that was his own business."<sup>51</sup>

Storm is a character capable of analyzing his own feelings as well as those of other characters. After helping to storm a Japanese stronghold he thinks back on what has happened in the fight. He has killed four Japanese, and what bothers him is that he has enjoyed it. He has now experienced combat, and his shock and hatred at the risk of involving his life comes out in his decision to fight no longer. He will cook. He will do his job and leave the fighting to the infantry, and that is what he does to the end of the novel when he is shipped out for a hand wound.

In Whistle Strange becomes as strong and as important a character as Winch. He is still the observer. He

<sup>50</sup> Jones, Eternity, p. 225.

<sup>51</sup> Jones, Line, p. 31.

recognizes Bobby Prell's despair over his wound and spends a good part of the novel unobtrusively supporting and reinforcing Prell. Strange becomes the sounding board for many of the men, first because of the absence of Winch who has not arrived yet, and then because of Winch's alienation from the company due to his progressive illness. Strange becomes the mediator between Winch and the rest of the company who often fail to understand their old first sergeant. He tries hardest and longest to keep the company together, to stay in touch. He repeatedly seeks Winch's help, but more and more he is the one who helps the men. It is Strange who realizes Landers, one of the old company men, has become mad. It is Strange who finally realizes Winch is slipping both mentally and physically. Also, it is he who finally realizes it about himself. Landers, Prell, and Winch commit violence and injury as they one by one remove themselves from the world. Landers, only one hour after being discharged on the equivalent of a Section Eight, purposely steps in front of a speeding car and is killed instantly. Prell, while on a bond-selling tour in Los Angeles, hears of Landers' death and purposely picks a fight with some soldiers who do not know he is severely handicapped with his weak legs. He is killed. Winch cunningly steals two hand-grenades and one night blows up the PX. He is captured and is placed in the mental ward of the hospital. When Strange goes to see him,

he hears Winch yelling down the corridor: "Get them out! Get them out of there! Can't you see the mortars got them bracketed!"<sup>52</sup> Strange realizes that for all practical purposes, Winch has checked out of this world. But Strange, calmly and peacefully, steps off a troop ship bound for Europe. There is no struggle as he quietly drowns. His suicide, like theirs, is in character.

The fact that Jones allows Strange to develop strongly in Whistle indicates the author's change in attitude about the military experience. Jones's attitude alters over the course of the trilogy, and Strange is one of the characters who reflect that change. This point will be discussed more fully in a later chapter.

As has been shown, the three major characters of the trilogy form a strong connection between the novels of the trilogy. Understanding the characters' relationships to each other is crucial to understanding each character individually. With the three characters of Warden, Prewitt, and Stark (and their counterparts in the other novels), Jones has achieved the creation of unforgettable personalities in fiction. David Stevenson describes Jones's characters as having "appealing boldness" and "a highly romantic but

<sup>52</sup> Jones, Whistle, p. 455.

specious honesty."<sup>53</sup> Another critic believes Jones's characters are perhaps exaggerated but not "inflated or literary."<sup>54</sup> Perhaps it is these characteristics that make his characters so appealing. Perhaps, too, their appeal lies in the fact that they are characters recognized by a generation of men who shared similar experiences and recognized by other generations as men fighting for a place in this world against forces over which they have no control. What these forces do to these characters and how the characters deal with them make for their unforgettable stories, told by a man who lived them.

The minor characters in the novel are not necessarily in themselves continuous throughout the trilogy. It is rather in their relationships to various themes shared by the novels that their importance lies. The minor characters will be discussed in Chapter III in relation to the themes explored in that chapter.

<sup>53</sup> p. 212.

<sup>54</sup> "War Generation," Newsweek, 37 (26 February 1951), 82.

## CHAPTER II

### STYLE

James Jones's style<sup>1</sup> has perhaps received more attention from critics than his message because his distinctive style not only suits the stories he tells but draws attention to itself by being brutally and crudely frank, explicit, and accurate. As Paul Gray has said, Jones's prose is "offered with the stylistic niceties burned away."<sup>2</sup> As will be seen, the absence of the niceties enables Jones to tell his stories with the accuracy he insists upon and to bring the chief subject of his trilogy clearly into focus: men in the military and at war. It is not a "nice" world in which his characters exist. If Jones is to reveal the experience of war and its true meaning, his stated intention, then niceties must be sacrificed for truth. Jones willingly makes the

<sup>1</sup> My understanding of style accords with that of C. Hugh Holman, A Handbook to Literature, Third Edition (New York: Odyssey Press, The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1972), pp. 514-15. The term Style in this study incorporates two elements: "the idea to be expressed, and the individuality of the author." This study will include the general elements of diction, imagery, repetition, coherence, and the arrangement of ideas, as well as facets of style related to these elements and as well as the individuality of the author.

<sup>2</sup> "Martial Arts," Time, 106 (1 September 1975), 58.

sacrifice. Many critics believe Jones to be incapable of creating prose which contains the more conventional elements of precise grammatical phrasing, philosophic and intellectual reverie, veiled or softened aspects of human nature, and well-turned phrases. Jones is capable of these refined elements of literature, as will be seen through the study of certain elements of his style in this chapter. He fuses these elements with the other less refined aspects to create fiction stunning in its power and pleasing to a huge number of readers, as is witnessed by his career as a popular and monetarily successful writer.

Jones is also a major contributor to certain elements in contemporary fiction. He is one of the initial writers to utilize the technique of the involved narrator, the technique of black humor as forerunner to novels of the absurd, and the technique of using obscenity and graphic description in worthwhile literature.

Many aspects of Jones's style carry over from the first novel of the trilogy through the second and third. One such aspect is Jones's ability to create vivid, memorable scenes.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Certain quoted passages from Eternity and Line will appear incorrect in punctuation and spelling. These quotations have been transcribed as they appear in the original, representing an aspect of Jones's style.



In Eternity, Jones's description of Prewitt playing taps at Schofield Barracks is perhaps one of the most moving and sensitive descriptions of barracks life seen in literature. It is also a description of the loving talent of a man to create something beautiful:

He looked at his watch and as the second hand touched the top stepped up and raised the bugle to the megaphone, and the nervousness dropped from him like a discarded blouse, and he was suddenly alone, gone away from the rest of them.

The first note was clear and absolutely certain. There was no question or stumbling in this bugle. It swept across the quadrangle positively, held just a fraction longer than most buglers hold it. Held long like the length of time, stretching away from weary day to weary day. Held long like thirty years. The second note was short, almost too short, abrupt. Cut short and too soon gone, like the minutes with a whore. Short like a ten minute break is short. And then the last note of the first phrase rose triumphantly from the slightly broken rhythm, triumphantly high on an untouchable level of pride above the humiliations, the degradations.

He played it all that way, with a paused then hurried rhythm that no metronome could follow. There was no placid regimented tempo to this Taps. The notes rose high in the air and hung above the quadrangle. They vibrated there, caressingly, filled with an infinite sadness, and endless patience, a pointless pride, the requiem and epitaph of the common soldier, who smelled like a common soldier, as a woman once had told him. They hovered like halos over the heads of the sleeping men in the darkened barracks, turning all grossness to the beauty that is the beauty of sympathy and understanding. Here we are, they said, you made us, now see us, dont close your eyes and shudder at it; this beauty, and this sorrow, of things as they are. This is the true song, the song of the ruck, not of battle heroes; the song of the Stockade

prisoners itchily stinking sweating under coats of grey rock dust; the song of the mucky KPs, of the men without women. . . .

This is the song of the men who have no place, played by a man who has never had a place, and can therefore play it. Listen to it. You know this song, remember? This is the song you close your ears to every night, so you can sleep. This is the song you drink five martinis every evening not to hear. This is the song of the Great Loneliness, that creeps in like the desert wind and dehydrates the soul. This is the song you'll listen to on the day you die. . . . This song is Reality. Remember? Surely you remember?

"Day            is done . . .  
Gone           the sun . . .  
From-the-lake  
From-the-hill  
From-the-sky  
Rest in peace  
Sol    jer brave  
God            is            nigh . . ."

And as the last note quivered to prideful silence, and the bugler swung the megaphone for the traditional repeat, figures appeared in the lighted sallyport from inside of Choy's. "I told you it was Prewitt," a voice carried faintly across the quadrangle in the tone of a man who has won a bet. And then the repeat rose to join her quivering tearful sister. The clear proud notes reverberating back and forth across the silent quad. Men had come from the Dayrooms to the porches to listen in the darkness, feeling the sudden choking kinship bred of fear that supersedes all personal tastes. They stood in the darkness of the porches, listening, feeling suddenly very near the man beside them, who also was a soldier, who also must die. Then as silent as they had come, they filed back inside with lowered eyes, suddenly ashamed of their own emotion, and of seeing a man's naked soul.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> From Here to Eternity (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), pp. 218-20.

Jones's accurate description carries over to Line. Orville Prescott states that "One feels in reading it [Line] that the particular author's real motive is to tell what happened and what it was like, to describe the invasion of a tropical island. . . ." <sup>5</sup> Jones achieves a chilling description of the horrors of combat and the brutality of a cruel enemy when he focuses on a terribly wounded soldier discovered by his screams for help during a lull in the fighting. A medic is sent to give him packets of morphine to ease his pain until he dies:

Stein, still holding the glasses on him, waited. He could not escape a feeling that something more important, more earthshaking should happen. Seconds ago he was alive and Stein was talking to him; now he was dead. Just like that. But Stein's attention was pulled away before he could think more, pulled away by two things. One was Tella, who now began to scream in a high quavery babbling falsetto of hysteria totally different from his former yells. Looking at him now through the glasses--he had almost forgotten him entirely in watching the medic--Stein saw that he had flopped himself over on his side, face pressing the dirt. Obviously he had been hit again, and while one bloodstained hand tried to hold in his intestines, the other groped at the new wound in his chest. Stein wished that at least they had killed him, if they were going to shoot him up again. This screaming, which he ceased only long enough to draw sobbing breath,

<sup>5</sup> Orville Prescott, "Novelists and War: Hersey, Michener, Mailer, Jones, Baron, Wouk," In My Opinion: An Inquiry Into the Contemporary Novel (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1952), p. 149.

was infinitely more bad than the yells for everyone concerned, both in its penetration and in its longevity. But they were not firing more now. And as if to prove it deliberate a faint faraway voice called several times in an Oriental accent, "Cly, Yank, cly! Yerl, Yank, yerl!"<sup>6</sup>

In Whistle, Jones's insistence upon accurate, detailed description continues. The following is one of the cruder descriptive passages, but it serves to indicate the nature of Jones's attitude toward realism:

Man-stink. How used to it he had gotten over the years. And all its various flavors. What was that word? Effluvia. Sweaty male armpits and smelly male feet. Socks and underwear. Fetid breath. Uninhibited belches and farts. Ranked open toilet bowls and urinals in the early morning. It mingled with the smell of toothpaste and shaving soap from the row of washbasins all down the other side.<sup>7</sup>

To say, however, that Jones describes only crude scenes in Line and Whistle is not fair to the author. The following description of the jungle from Line contains elements of the ominous, yet there is a lushness in its sensory images:

As their eyes adjusted, they became able to see huge vines and creepers hanging in great festooning arcs, many of them larger than young trees at home. Giant treetrunks towered straight up, far above their heads to the roof, their thin

<sup>6</sup> The Thin Red Line (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), pp. 238-39.

<sup>7</sup> Whistle (New York: Delacorte Press, 1978), p. 12.

blade-like roots often higher than a man's head. Every-where, every-thing was wet. The ground itself was either bare dirt, slippery, slick, with wet; or else impenetrable tangles of deadfall. Here and there a few stunted straggly bushes struggled to maintain an almost lightless life. And saplings, totally branchless with only a few leaves at the top and hardly bigger around than the width of a pocketknife, strained to stretch themselves up, up, always up, to that closed roof and closed corporation a hundred feet above, where they could at least compete, before they strangled here below. Some of them that were no bigger around than the base of a whiskey shotglass had already attained a height equal to twice that of a tall man. And in all of this, nothing moved. And there was no sound save the rustle of the dripping moisture.

The men who had slipped through the protecting wall and come in here to see, stood rooted before the enormity their adjusting eyes disclosed. This was more than they had bargained for. Whatever else you could call this teeming verdure you certainly could not call it civilized. And as civilized men, it made them fearful. The toughest barroom brawler among them was fearful. Gradually, as they continued to stand without moving, vague, faint sounds began to make themselves heard again. High up in the foilage leaves rustled or a branch vibrated and there would be a twitter or a mad, raucous shout as some invisible bird moved. On the ground, a bush would shake furtively as some minute animal moved away. And yet they saw nothing.<sup>8</sup>

Jones has a knack for interesting analogy in his descriptions. In Eternity he poses the thoughts of his characters in military terms:

Warden's chance came sooner than he had expected. The next afternoon it cleared a little, the rain

<sup>8</sup> Line, pp. 59-60.

stopped a while at noon and drew back to reform its ranks before the next assault.<sup>9</sup>

Married life, his mind told him indignantly, appears to be vastly similar to the bracketing in of a battery of 155's. First a long that goes over, then a short that goes under, then a long and a short and a long and a short, a see and a saw and an up and a down, each a little bit closer to target, until finally we are in an we lay down our barrage and we're married.<sup>10</sup>

A constant roaring, marriage, in which the individual explosions are no longer even distinguishable so that it itself even finally tapers off into monotony and boredom, leaving only a charred churned-up countryside in which there is nothing alive anymore. Not even the parakeets that once rose up in white clouds screeching out of the jungle, every time a bracket shell dropped. The bracketing-in always use to be fun, remember? But laying a barrage, that begins to wear after a while. Whether you're the Artilleryman on the guncrew, or the infantryman lying out under it. Even the excitement of almost dying subsides into just gloom.<sup>11</sup>

In Line a weapons cache is described by analogy to a church congregation, which serves as an ironic contrast:

It was stifling hot in the tent and in that dim, peculiarly pleasant, lazy-making light of hot sun shining through tentage canvas, rack after wooden rack of guns filled the interior like rows of pews. Seven of these worshippers, all in their own row, were Thompson submachineguns. At the front the altar was a raised platform stacked

<sup>9</sup> Eternity, p. 107.

<sup>10</sup> Eternity, p. 704.

<sup>11</sup> Eternity, p. 704.

with drums and clips of .45 ammunition and their canvas carriers. Both clips and carriers bore the Marine Corps stamp.

The rest of the congregation were .30 cal Springfields, and a few of the new .30 cal carbines which had only gotten to C-for-Charlie recently. All mused at their devotions in the dim hot air while Dale stared at them. A closer inspection revealed that the working parts showed no signs of wear. They were all brand new. Yet they had the grease cleaned off them and stood ready for immediate use, freshly oiled. There they were. In the tent, as outside, the hot stillness of Sunday revival meeting reigned.<sup>12</sup>

In Whistle, Winch's dreams are described in terms of a snowstorm:

The sleep came slowly, in little spurts. It came like small snow flurries, sweeping an area with their stillnesses, on the light winds of a steadily thickening snowstorm.<sup>13</sup>

The analogy is apt since the dreams follow upon a sudden vision of his men Winch has had while driving home through a snowfall that evening.

Jones's language has shocked and infuriated many critics, while others believe he could not have chosen to write otherwise and remain true to the spirit of his works.

In the dialogue of his characters, Jones throughout the trilogy uses some language that is raw, obscene, and

<sup>12</sup> Jones, Line, pp. 92-93.

<sup>13</sup> Jones, Whistle, p. 410.

ungrammatical. He also chooses to ignore certain conventions of punctuation and spelling.

In Eternity we see an example of each of the above characteristics:

Warden laughed. "I sure did, dint I?" he giggled. "But that aint all: when you get him home, I want you to tell his corprl of the guard the Firs Sarnt says he is relieve from duty the rest of the night. For halping the Firs Sarnt on a private reconnaissane."

"But you cant do that, Top," Weary said wonderingly.

"I cant, 'ey?" Warden said. "I already done it. You heard what I said, dint you?"

"Yeah," Weary said, "but--"

"No buts," said Warden savagely. "Do like I said. Am I the First Sarnt or not the Firs Sarnt?"

"You're the First Sarnt."

"Maybe you dont know which side that Pfc of yours is buttered on. But me no buts. Just do like I said."

"Okay, Top. But you sure demand a hell of a lot for a lousy goddam Pfc."

"Cmere," Warden said and grabbed him by his arm. "Dont you know we got to look out for this man, Weary?" he whispered. "He's the best fuckin soljer in the Compny," He paused thoughtfully. "The ony fuckin soljer in the Company," he amended.

"What is this?" Weary said. "A mutual back-slapping society I stumbled into?"

"We got to take caref him while we can, see?" The Warden told him urgently. "This man may not be with us for long, and we got to take caref this man."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Jones, Eternity, p. 482.



Jones describes in WWII men who have gone through hell and learned to survive. It is this sort of man who uses the language Jones provides.

So there he stood--our once green, now obscene infantryman or tanker. Filthy, grimy, bearded, greasy with his own body oils (body oils aided by a thin film of dirt could make a uniform nearly completely waterproof, if it was worn long enough), dedicated to his own survival if at all possible, and willing to make it as costly as he could if it wasn't possible. . . . He was about the foulest-mouthed individual who ever existed on earth. Every other word was fucking this or fucking that. And internally, his soul was about as foul and cynical as his mouth. . . . He had pared his dreams and ambitions down to no more than relief and a few days away from the line, and a bottle of booze, a woman, and a bath.<sup>15</sup>

In Line we see the kind of man described above:

Everyone was staring at him disbelievingly, but nevertheless dumbstruck. "Goddam it, kid!" Welsh bellowed after a moment. "I told you I wanted the goddam fucking truth! And not no kid games!"

It had never occurred to Bead that he would not be believed. Now he was faced with a choice of shutting up and being taken for a liar, or telling them where and having them see what a shameful botched-up job he'd done. Even in his upset and distress it did not take him long to choose.

"Then god damn you go and look!" he cried at Welsh. "Dont take my word, go and look for your goddam fucking self!"<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> James Jones, WWII (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1975), p. 70.

<sup>16</sup> Jones, Line, p. 171.

The rough, raw language continues in Whistle, but it should be noticed that punctuation has found its way into the dialogue in some respects:

"How's the old health there, First Sarn't?" Strange said now.

"Better than yours," Winch said. He had told nobody about his ailment, and he was absolutely sure Strange had no idea what was wrong with him. "And don't call me First Sergeant. I'm not one any more. I'm a casual in transit, just like you."

"You still carry the rank and draw the pay."

"Asshole!"

"Sure," Strange said. "Why not? My sentiments exactly."

"Then we understand each other."

"I also thought I'd stop over the lounge see Bobby Prell awhile," Strange said more softly. Winch would not answer this.

"You want to come along?"

"No."

Strange moved his head. "Go by myself then."

"Stupid son of a bitch. He wouldn't be over there if he hadn't been trying to play hero."

Strange moved his head again. "Some guys got to play hero. Anyway, he must be feeling pretty down, right now. Today. The scoop the doctors putting out say he won't never walk again. Say he may still lose one of his legs."

"Whatever happens to him, it's his own damn fault," Winch said promptly.

"He's still one of the old outfit," Strange said.

"That shit's all over, too," Winch said. "And you better believe it, Johnny Stranger. You better get it through your thick Texas head."<sup>17</sup>

Chester Eisinger sees Jones's language, both his dialogue and his narration, as an attack on the middle

<sup>17</sup> Jones, Whistle, p. 18.

class.<sup>18</sup> David Stevenson sees Jones's language as representative of an anti-romantic, tough attitude, characteristic of a nonliterary person "in any normal use of the term."<sup>19</sup> Warren Leslie insists, however, that Jones is simply "reproducing soldiers' jargon" and that the use of raw, four-letter words and poor grammar is "amply justified."<sup>20</sup> In an unsigned article in Newsweek, the critic states that Jones exhibits "a clear style, an ear for common speech" and that his "four-letter words do not give the effect of obscenity."<sup>21</sup> Jones's stories move with such well-done narrative force that the raw language seems natural as it comes from the characters in specific situations. His language does not hinder the narrative but contributes positively to it.

Another characteristic of Jones's writings shared by the three novels is his choice of certain unusual words

<sup>18</sup> Fiction of the Forties (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 43.

<sup>19</sup> "James Jones and Jack Kerouac: Novelists of Disjunction," in The Creative Present: Notes on Contemporary American Fiction, ed. Nona Balakian and Charles Simmons (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1963), pp. 195-96.

<sup>20</sup> "Never Had It So Bad," Southwest Review, 36 (Summer 1951), 244.

<sup>21</sup> "War Generation," Newsweek, 37 (February 26, 1951), 82.

which, because of their sophistication, reveal a side to the author that the crudeness belies.

In Eternity are seen such words: a soldier is described as "seamed-faced;" Maggio says something "perfervidly;" Prewitt precipitates a "transmogrification." And one sentence from the novel is striking in its poetic rhythm and rhyme: "The sandtrap was deep and the slope was steep and he had fallen on a downhill lie. . . ."22

Jones continues to use unusual words in Line: metal pieces break apart "chirring" in all directions; the hospital tent is described as a "susurrus" place; a task is "insuperable;" a battle's movements are described as "strophe and antistrophe;" a soldier is "shtumping" along; rifle bullets "snickerwhack" through the brush.<sup>23</sup> And in Whistle: an odor hits Landers in the face with a "glissading" effect.

Willie Morris says, "I was to learn over the years that beneath the rough exterior was a profoundly cultured and sophisticated man, a student of literature, history, art, and music."<sup>24</sup> Jones's occasional use of sophisticated words

<sup>22</sup> Jones, Eternity, pp. 507, 583, 777, 789 respectively.

<sup>23</sup> Jones, Line, pp. 211, 355, 412, 429, 430, 454 respectively.

<sup>24</sup> James Jones: A Friendship (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1978), p. 26.

in an otherwise commonly vulgar vocabulary gives support to Morris's statement. So do the references Jones makes to techniques of painting. In Eternity he writes, "He [Prewitt] shrugged, and then he turned and paused, seeing the scene that never failed to touch him, a painting done in solid single tones, the timbre diminishing with the deepening perspective, framed by the entryway of the sallyport."<sup>25</sup> And again, "The large warm semi-tropic moon was just coming up, dimming the stars around it, making the clear air golden with a tangible pulsating life, painting new stark shadows on the ground in the perspectiveless planes and angles of a cubist."<sup>26</sup> In Line Jones refers to a "surrealistic" feeling.<sup>27</sup> All of which, again, give the impression of a man more deeply cultured than the surface vocabulary of his works implies.

A recognizable element of Jones's style is his method of redundancy. Terry Southern questions whether Jones's redundancy is really a method or a habit. Southern does, however, see this method or habit as working to Jones's advantage, especially in Line, where he sees it "suggesting

<sup>25</sup> Eternity, p. 12.

<sup>26</sup> Jones, Eternity, p. 317.

<sup>27</sup> Line, p. 74.

the insane confusion, tedium and the endlessness of war."<sup>28</sup> While it is true that Jones's redundancy does work to his advantage in Line, it works as well to his advantage in Eternity and Whistle, where the men are engaged in warfare of a different sort but nonetheless a fight for survival against tedious conformity, insane confusion, and endless strife.

In Eternity, as Stark tries to persuade Prewitt to work in his kitchen and waits for an answer, we read, "I'd sure like to," Prew said slowly. 'But I cant,' he said, finally getting it out finally."<sup>29</sup> In another scene of the novel we are told that "they had gone immediately at once across the street. . . ."<sup>30</sup> In both cases Jones is being redundant for emphatic purposes.

In Line we are told that "Some were simply watchers, standing and looking."<sup>31</sup> The effect of the redundancy is one of shock, a numbness that repetition conveys.

In Whistle, Jones refers to "About seven Navy personnel, to be exact."<sup>32</sup> Frank Trippett states that this

<sup>28</sup> "Recent Fiction, Part 1: 'When Film Gets Good. . .'" The Nation, 195 (Saturday, November 17), 1962, 331.

<sup>29</sup> Jones, Eternity, p. 209.

<sup>30</sup> Jones, Eternity, p. 223.

<sup>31</sup> Jones, Line, p. 136.

<sup>32</sup> Whistle, pp. 243-44.

expression, along with a situation being described as "pretty dire" and a party promising to be a "rousing debacle," gives the impression of a "rushed, bumpy narrative which seems less a novel than an outline."<sup>33</sup> This evaluation coincides with another review of Whistle which describes the narrative as having "the urgent, breathless quality of a man 'fighting against time,' as Willie Morris says in his introduction."<sup>34</sup>

Whatever the cause of Jones's redundancy, method or habit, it remains with him throughout the trilogy, each time serving different needs as it is used.

A major characteristic shared by the novels of the trilogy is Jones's development or employment of the involved narrator, a technique that enables Jones to develop an increasingly involved and angry point of view. Terry Southern in describing Jones's work states,

And there is behind the work a new kind of narrative; it is the "omniscient author" taken toward a logical extreme, where the narration itself, although faceless, without personality, expresses feelings, both of individuals and collectively, in their own terms. For a mild, printable, example, the narration will not say "Welsh was still angry about it" but "Welsh was still pissed-off about it." Narration which uses four-letter idiom traditionally requires that the narrator emerge as a personality. Jones has

<sup>33</sup> "G. I. Wounded," Time, 111 (March 13, 1978), 98.

<sup>34</sup> "Books," Playboy, 25 (March, 1978), 32.

ignored this requirement and has given the purely textual part of his work a tone which is in perfect harmony with each incident.<sup>35</sup>

Jones's use of the involved narrator appears throughout Eternity as well as throughout the other two novels. When Prewitt is angry we are told he wants to "beat the living piss out of such stupidity."<sup>36</sup> The narrator also, in speaking of Warden and Karen's thoughts of legalizing their affair by marriage, declares that "it would not in the end really make a whole hell of a lot of difference."<sup>37</sup> Warden forgets his gear when the Army mobilizes, and the narrator says, "He did not see how the hell he could have possibly forgotten that."<sup>38</sup> When Prewitt is drunk the narrator reveals that "It took a great deal of concentration, and a whole hell of a lot of energy, just to stay up on the tight-rope . . . any half-assed fool can do it."<sup>39</sup>

The involved narrator does not diminish with Line; if anything he becomes more involved. We are told that "Culp was damn near irrepressible, that was the truth."<sup>40</sup>

<sup>35</sup> p. 331.

<sup>36</sup> Eternity, p. 203.

<sup>37</sup> Jones, Eternity, p. 703.

<sup>38</sup> Jones, Eternity, p. 758.

<sup>39</sup> Jones, Eternity, p. 775.

<sup>40</sup> Jones, Line, p. 97.



Jones's idiom and colloquial phrasing as well as his involvement comes through when he says, "The second time [when Fife rejected his commander's advice] was what tore it."<sup>41</sup> When a soldier must relieve himself Jones says, "At just about five o'clock he had had to take a crap."<sup>42</sup> Welsh is angry "with a graven, black, bitter hatred of everything and everybody in the whole fucking gripeassed world."<sup>43</sup> A bombing raid "scared the living hell out of everybody."<sup>44</sup> The company is described as a "ragged, taggleassed wrath of God, locusts and adders."<sup>45</sup> And in an explanation of the commander's tactical problem for his men, the involved narrator becomes almost as harassed and angry as the commander himself: "Stein's problem now as he saw it, his first problem anyway, was the getting of his men from the comparative safety of here down that fucking outrageous bareass slope. . . ."<sup>46</sup>

In Whistle the building anger of the involved narrator in Line continues. We are told that "Landers stepped down

<sup>41</sup> Line, p. 114.

<sup>42</sup> Line, p. 163.

<sup>43</sup> Jones, Line, p. 241.

<sup>44</sup> Jones, Line, p. 340.

<sup>45</sup> Jones, Line, p. 448.

<sup>46</sup> Jones, Line, p. 216.

and went to his booth and sat down with his drink. "Let the sons of bitches ask him to make some more speeches."<sup>47</sup> After Winch speaks to Strange we read that ". . . Winch knew about his old mess/sgt that, some way or other, Johnny Stranger had seen the shit hit the fan."<sup>48</sup> Jones tells us, "All he [Winch] could think of at the moment was how quick he could get the fuck out of there."<sup>49</sup> In describing a telephone conversation: "It was Strange, all right. And he didn't fiddlefuck around."<sup>50</sup> Strange enjoys springtime on maneuvers, but the narrator tells us, "Not many of the other men seemed to notice, or to give much of a damn."<sup>51</sup>

As Terry Southern has said, the involved narrator does not emerge as a distinct character, yet the personality is there. The personality assumes a tone and point of view consistent with the characters and actions involved and somehow seems to draw the reader into a vicarious experiencing of the events being narrated. This very technique on Jones's part may share a great part of the credit in contributing to the success of his works.

<sup>47</sup> Jones, Whistle, p. 169.

<sup>48</sup> Jones, Whistle, p. 205.

<sup>49</sup> Whistle, p. 293.

<sup>50</sup> Jones, Whistle, p. 401.

<sup>51</sup> Jones, Whistle, pp. 429-30.

There are several noticeable dissimilarities in Jones's style throughout the trilogy, reflecting in some respects an effort on his part to refine or improve some aspects of his style and reflecting in other respects a change in style consistent with the tone and purpose of each novel.

In Eternity Jones's technique of running words together stands out as a chief characteristic of his phrasing. In a description of a blues song being played by a soldier on a guitar, Jones calls the effect "moreheartbreaking." Warden refers to Prewitt and Maggio as two "verynormal fuckups." Holmes states that he has a "smoothrunning outfit." Stark feels anticipation for a night on the town "whole-earth-lovingly." Streets in San Francisco are described as being "rain-water-running rough-brick-cobbled streets."<sup>52</sup>

In Line the job facing the soldiers is called "nervous-making work." An ambush spot is a "sandybottomed dryriver-bed." Faces are "blackdirty." A malaria attack is a "nightmaredream." A drunk is a "nightanddaylong bacchanal." Existence is a "mudhaunted, airraidfearridden routine of life."<sup>53</sup> In Whistle such phrasing is not in evidence.

<sup>52</sup> Jones, Eternity, pp. 462, 631, 41, 224, 464 respectively.

<sup>53</sup> Jones, Line, pp. 436, 443, 450, 451, 457, 469 respectively.

In Eternity can also be found Jones's habit of stringing adverbs together. Two or more adverbs written together are not uncommon nor ungrammatical, but Jones omits punctuation with unusual effect. Something is said "huskily sleepily," "angrily embarrassedly," or "reluctantly strangledly." Someone looks "blandly sympathetically," or "triumphantly brilliantly," or "absolutely inarticulately furiously," or "brimmingly admiringly." Something is done "indifferently stolidly."<sup>54</sup>

In Line Jones employs strings of adverbs, but in this novel he also used correct punctuation with them: "Nervously, shakily, Doll laughed."<sup>55</sup> In Whistle, the correct use of adverbs continues.

Despite the hurriedness of style in Whistle, already noted by some critics, Jones seems to have made a conscious effort to make his style grammatical. Michael S. Lasky reports in a 1976 article that Jones feels he has "tightened up" his style in the last few years.<sup>56</sup> While tightening up his style might have contributed to the hurried, breathless,

<sup>54</sup> Jones, Eternity, pp. 438, 503, 759, 439, 515, 620, 622, 577 respectively.

<sup>55</sup> Line, p. 16.

<sup>56</sup> "James Jones Has Come Home to Whistle," Writers Digest, 56 (October 1976), 26.

sketchy quality critics note in Whistle, it also witnesses his ability to write grammatical prose when he chooses.

The effect of the switch from words strung together in an unusual manner to those grammatically phrased may have hurt Jones's style more than helped it. The quality the unusual phrasing gives his works is the effect of men speaking and thinking thoughts under the mental stress from the pressures of military existence and combat. The change from this style to a grammatical one detracts from the impact of Whistle's message where men are under pressure as great as or greater than that experienced in Eternity or Line. This change in style may contribute to the belief of some critics that Whistle does not measure up in impact to the other two novels in the trilogy. Frank Trippett says, "the publisher's decision to proclaim Whistle the author's masterpiece . . . ." is a "devaluation of Jones's best work . . . ." <sup>57</sup>

The chief dissimilarity in the three novels is their difference in structure and tone. Jones states that "the structure of a book grows out of a concept and the plot grows out of the structure." <sup>58</sup>

Richard P. Adams describes the shape of the structure of Eternity as an X. One line is the downward progress of

<sup>57</sup> p. 98.

<sup>58</sup> Lasky, p. 25.

Prewitt from the Bugle Corps to death. The other is an upward one of Warden from the "tyranny" of Holmes to running the company himself under Ross. The X is intertwined with many subordinate strands such as Prewitt's affair with Lorene and Warden's with Karen. The juncture of the X is the devotion both Prewitt and Warden have for the Army.<sup>59</sup>

The structure of Line is seen by Donald A. Allan as a circle. Allan sees Line as a diary of most of the men in C-for-Charlie company. The company arrives on Guadalcanal at the beginning of the novel scared and despairing. At the end of the novel they are preparing to leave for another island in the same condition. The only thing that has changed is their acquisition of combat numbness.<sup>60</sup> All will be to do over again and again.

The structure of Whistle is one suggested by the narrator in Line. Men from the safety of the shore watch as men on the landing craft come under attack from Japanese bombers and fighter planes:

It was as though, if each man's life in the army were looked upon as a graph, beginning at the bottom with his induction and rising steadily to

<sup>59</sup> "A Second Look at From Here to Eternity," College English, 17, No. 4 (January 1956), 205-06.

<sup>60</sup> "The Way It Was," The Reporter, 27, No. 7 (October 25, 1962), 64.

this point, then this moment now--or rather the moment of the explosion itself, actually--could be considered the apex from which the line turned downward, back toward the bottom and his eventual discharge: his secret goal. Depending upon the seriousness of his condition and the amount of time required to heal him, his graph line would descend part, or all of the way, to the bottom. Some, the least injured, might never even get as far back as New Zealand or Australia, and might end their downward course at a base hospital in the New Hebrides and from there be sent back up again. Others, slightly more wounded, might get to New Zealand or Australia, but not back to the States, and so be sent forward again from there. Still others, more serious yet, might get to the States and yet not be discharged, so that they might be sent out again from there, toward this moving danger point of the front, either back this way, or to Europe. All of these graph lines would rise again, perhaps to an even higher apex. The dead, of course, would find that their graph lines stopped; at the apex itself, like those out there under the water, or else a little way below it like these men dying here.<sup>61</sup>

In Whistle, the men have stopped at the point of explosion (being wounded in whatever way) and their graph lines have descended back toward the point of enlistment until they reach the army hospital in Luxor. There the care and rehabilitation the men receive begin to take them up a slow ascent to active duty and more involvement in warfare. The line makes slow progress upward since the characters encounter so much to impede their progress in the society they have returned to. Finally though, at the realization

<sup>61</sup> Jones, Line, p. 46.

that their graph lines must face the possibility of ending suddenly when each returns to active duty, each one--Winch, Strange, Prell, even Landers--purposely ends the graph line himself, somewhere between enlistment and discharge from the world of the army and war that encompasses him in the trilogy.

The novels take their tone from two sources. The first is the purpose of the novel itself, and the second is the sexual atmosphere found within each novel. In An Armed America Wayne Charles Miller categorizes World War II novels into three categories. The first category includes Eternity. This type of novel is written in the World War I tradition in the sense that it describes the military system and espouses a sense of honor and tradition. Line falls within the second category where the novels view warfare in realistic terms in that it is brutal but necessary. Whistle falls within the third category in that these novels criticize American society.<sup>62</sup> Jones has created within his trilogy all three types of war novels, as described by Miller, and has managed in doing so to create three different attitudes, and therefore tones, within the framework of one war.

As has been stated before, Jones's attitude toward the military and war has altered over the course of the trilogy.

<sup>62</sup> An Armed America: Its Face in Fiction: A History of the American Military Novel (New York: New York University Press, 1970), pp. 133-59.



In Eternity Jones, while seeing the individual's corruption by and subjugation to the Army, loves the Army in spite of it. He revels in manly relationships and the System that fosters and encourages them. He relishes the life-style the Army before World War II offers. In Line the brutal realism of combat is reported in detailed accuracy; however, warfare is necessary. It is not fought in the World War I tradition for certain ideals. Welsh understands it is for "Property. Property. All for property. . . ." And he decides that war is necessary by telling us, "Well, this was a pretty good sized chunk of real estate, wasn't it? this island?"<sup>63</sup> In Whistle the full bitterness of the human sacrifice comes through as Jones blasts the society the men return to. It is a world of greed and unreality, of people not appreciating the sacrifice made for them nor understanding the bitterness of the men who made it. And Whistle is the stopping point, the saturation point, for most of the men who can't face returning to the hell of war nor remaining in the hell that home has become due to war. Jones has over the course of the three novels altered his tone and attitude from that of eager acceptance in Eternity, to dawning reality and anger in Line, to greater anger and ultimate rejection in Whistle.

<sup>63</sup> Jones, Line, p. 494.

The sexual atmosphere of the three novels reflects not only the tone of the times in which the narrative takes place but also the tone of the times in which the novels were actually written. Jones uses four-letter words freely in Eternity even while recognizing the reluctance of the public then to accept the language. Burroughs Mitchell recalls:

I said to Jim in a letter that he had written a great book--something that I've not said to any other writer. We did a certain amount of trimming of the manuscript and clarifying here and there, but the big job didn't come until the lawyers had read the galleys. Remember, at that time Mailer had found it necessary to use the word fug in The Naked and the Dead. The lawyers argued, reasonably enough, that the great number of fucks and shits, while perhaps not actionable, would weary and prejudice a judge and a jury. So we were given an arbitrary number to cut out, along with some other details. . . .

It was very hard work; Jim's ear was so exact that you couldn't easily remove a word from the dialogue or substitute for it. . . . Finally I reported to Mr. Scribner that we had cut all the fucks we could cut, although not the lawyers' full quota, and Mr. Scribner cheerfully accepted the situation.<sup>64</sup>

Yet, despite his insistence upon accurate language, Jones realized the public was not then ready for explicit sex. Nor, perhaps, was he ready yet to supply it. As stated before, Eternity is a romantic novel, full of honor and tradition. The atmosphere of the novel and the atmosphere of the early

<sup>64</sup> Morris, A Friendship, pp. 65-66.

1950's in which it was written would not allow for explicit sex. Therefore, we read scenes such as the one where Karen and Warden first make love:

"Okay," Warden said. He returned the kiss, feeling hungrily under his hands the long twin muscles along her spine running from the tiny waist up to the wideness of the shoulders, feeling the searching softness of her lips against him, feeling the twin pressures of her breasts against him, and thinking of the childlike radiance that had been in her face that was so different from the sophisticated hardness that she had worn on it in the kitchen, and wondering what is this anyway? what the hell have you gotten into, Milton, you and your woman's intuition?

"Come here," he said, hoarsely, gently. "Come here, little baby. Come here to me."

The great gentleness that was in him, that he was always wanting to bring forward but never could, rose up in him now like a flood, blindingly.

"Oh," Karen said. "I never knew it could be like this."

Outside the rain thrummed ceaselessly and cascaded ceaselessly from the roof, and in the street the sound of the stiff brooms of afternoon Fatigue grated soothingly, above the rain.<sup>65</sup>

We read the same type of description, perhaps even more romanticized, when Prewitt and Lorene are together sexually for the first time:

It was, he thought, like water which, when dammed, creates a pressure, a pressure of power that will pour out flooding, from any little channel it can find, from any little opening, flooding forth roaring with a long dammed slowly risen energy of

<sup>65</sup> Jones, Eternity, p. 126.

pressure that obliterates the earths and moons and stars and suns, subsiding finally into a ridiculous little trickle that will not even roll a pebble, and you wonder foolishly how this thin trickle ever could have generated power and maybe it was all in your own imagination and your eyelids did not really crumble away the firmament into the one single Sun, the one undying Principle. That, he thought, was what its like.<sup>66</sup>

No women appear in Line. Bell is the only known character who thinks about a woman, and at that she is his wife. However, the noticeable thing about his thoughts is that all of these thoughts are sexual and explicit:

He only knew, could only think one thing. That was to keep going. He had to keep going. If he ever wanted to get back home again to his wife Marty, if he ever wanted to see her again, kiss her, put himself between her breasts, between her legs, fondle, caress, and touch her, he had to keep going.<sup>67</sup>

The harsh, brutal realism of war brings forth realism elsewhere, and sex is no exception. Jones could not have veiled sexual references and remain true to the spirit of the novel which insists upon realism. Bell's thoughts also seem natural where men without women have a good many lustful thoughts about women--whether they are wives or sweethearts. Line, written in the early sixties, had an audience

<sup>66</sup> Jones, Eternity, p. 250.

<sup>67</sup> Jones, Line, p. 227.

a good deal more sophisticated to sexual realism and an era of social change which contributed to the public's acceptance of more explicit sex.

In Whistle the sexual explicitness reaches the point of "porn magazines of today."<sup>68</sup> A milder example follows here:

"I don't know," Winch said, "it didn't seem important. Because they're new, I guess," he added. They were sitting on the sheets, somewhere along the bed's edge. Arlette rolled over into it. She positioned herself firmly in the middle of it, opening wide her legs, as if ready and preparing to receive an actively violent, murderous assault. Winch accommodated her. He drove his cock, and redrove it, into her with all hate and fury and anger and rage, and outrage, that had been accumulating in him a long time. This did not disturb her a bit. It seemed only to make her happier. "Oh God, I love to fuck" she said from under him in a clear voice. Winch however did not last long. Eleven months of denial were too much for him. Then it seemed he went blind and that his eardrums blew out. Arlette, though, was not upset. She seemed to understand, and patted his shoulder. "That's all right, that's all right, we've got plenty of time," she said soothingly.<sup>69</sup>

Jones continues his explicit sexual style by including vivid descriptions of coitus, cunnilingus, and felatio.<sup>70</sup> His sexually explicit style in Whistle reflects his

<sup>68</sup> Trippett, p. 98.

<sup>69</sup> Jones, Whistle, p. 81.

<sup>70</sup> Jones, Whistle, pp. 180, 185 and 280 may be seen for documentation.

criticism of the war society, a society which included a moral as well as economic revolution for women. The women in Whistle are seen almost entirely in sexual roles. The sexual freedom of the women disturbs Strange more than it disturbs any other character. The new moral code to which Strange tries to adapt becomes almost an obsession with him which, in the face of other concerns, seems ludicrous. Finally, when his wife confesses that she loves another man for the very reason of that man's acceptance of the new sexual roles, Strange decides that he will have to accept the new sexual attitudes, also. Strange's reaction to his sexual encounters reflects Jones's reaction to the new society. Strange takes advantage of the situation, as do the other men, but he never truly seems comfortable. The new society and its effects on the characters is explored further in Chapter III. In Jones's "pornographic" style is also seen a reflection of the permissive society of the 1970's when the novel was written.

Jones's stylistic contributions are two-fold. His first contribution is in his use of four-letter words. In itself, this use is not laudable, but the effect it achieves in worthwhile literature is. Willie Morris sums up Jones's achievement in this respect:

By his hard-earned craftsmanship he had enlarged the limits of the language in America as perhaps

no other writer of his time had done. Irwin Shaw later wrote: "[His work] came from a group of men who spoke plainly, without euphemisms, using words about death and sex and cowardice and chicanery and despair that before Jones had rarely been on the printed page in this country. From the stink of the battlefield and the barracks came a bracing, clear wind of truth. To use a military term, he walked point for his company."<sup>71</sup>

Jones's second achievement is his contribution to black humor, a trend which has resulted in recent fiction in novels of the absurd. Black humor is a form of comic relief that reflects the view of the observer of a tragic situation, the view of one who has passed through and beyond fear, hurt, and despair to a place where he can see the inanity of the tragedy. Black humor takes as its subject "the most tragic experiences of human existence. . . ." It becomes, then, for the war novelist "a means of coping with the horror of war. . . ."<sup>72</sup> Black humor emphasizes the absurdity of a situation while at the same time relieving the agony. Jones believes that humor is the safety valve and saving factor of the "lower class." In the soldier, humor is reflected in

<sup>71</sup> "A Friendship: Remembering James Jones," The Atlantic Monthly, 241, No. 6 (June 1978), 49.

<sup>72</sup> Peter Aichinger, The American Soldier in Fiction, 1880-1963: A History of Attitudes Toward Warfare and the Military Establishment (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1975), p. 96.

his interest in and preoccupation with the absurdities and privilege all around him.<sup>73</sup>

In Eternity Jones employs ironic humor and at the same time pokes fun at himself when Prewitt considers the problem of prostitutes wanting to mother a man:

Two whores who finally found something to mother.  
A guy could write a book about it, he thought  
bitterly, call it From Hair to Maternity.<sup>74</sup>

And when the base is being attacked by the Japanese, we see a gleeful description of the men's efforts to retaliate:

Straight across from Warden on the roof of the Headquarters Building there were only two men up. One of them he recognized as M/Sgt Big John Deterling, the enlisted football coach. Big John had a .30 caliber water-cooled with no tripod, holding it cradled in his left arm and firing it with his right. When he fired a burst, the recoil staggered him all over the roof.

The winking noseguns of the incoming planes cut two foot-wide swathes raising dust across the quad and up the wall and over the D Co roof like a wagon road through a pasture. Warden couldnt fire at them from laughing at Big John Deterling on the Headquarters roof. This time Big John came very near to falling down and spraying the roof. The other man up over there had wisely put the chimney between him and Big John, instead of between him and the planes.

"Look at that son of a bitch," Warden said, when he could stop laughing.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>73</sup> WWII, p. 72.

<sup>74</sup> Eternity, p. 691.

<sup>75</sup> Jones, Eternity, p. 691.



In Eternity Jones's humor is not as heavily barbed as in Line, where his humor moves from mere irony to the grotesque and ridiculous, just as the men move from the relative safety of service in Hawaii to death constantly staring them in the face on Guadalcanal. Black humor helps to relieve the horror of battle and enables Jones to move toward suggestions of alternatives.<sup>76</sup>

The characters in Line border on the absurd by revealing their thoughts on war. Captain Stein sees war as part of a great conspiracy of history. Welsh is baffled by the power of any government to make him be there. Bell chants an irrational song to forget the terror and monotony of war.<sup>77</sup> Doll and Witt have an insane contest between them and volunteer for suicide missions, each trying to best the other.

The actions and reactions of the men in certain situations also reflect absurd humor. When a group of men go into the jungle upon first arriving on the island, they happen across an abandoned Japanese camp and a mass grave of Japanese dead. One man finds a sword, and another, a helmet as souvenirs. A third, not to be outdone, catches hold of the leg of a dead soldier and, by almost superhuman

<sup>76</sup> Aichinger, p. 97.

<sup>77</sup> Aichinger, pp. 85-102.

strength, exhumes the whole body. At the same instant an odor so noxious it is unbearable is also released, and the men tumble over one another as they run back to camp, laughing and gasping at so ridiculous an experience and its consequences.

Later, during a battle, the company suddenly discovers a body. It is not one of theirs but obviously one left over from a battle several days before. The corpse puts a sudden damper on their spirits, and they irrationally resent its being there. They make so much commotion that two disgusted medics come and take the body away. Even the rescue is absurd. The body is frozen in a sitting position and will not stay on the stretcher. The medics finally use one arm and leg as handles and carry it off.

At another time Corporal Bead goes to relieve himself and while his pants are down is attacked by a crazed Japanese. One thought he has is that his behind is still dirty while he has to stand and fight, and he hopes he does not die in such a ridiculous situation. The situation becomes even more ludicrous when he is knocked backward into his own feces and then grapples hand to hand with the enemy. Bead botches almost every effort to kill the man, and only after stabbing, clawing, punching, and biting him does he succeed in killing the Japanese by smashing his head to a pulp with a rifle butt. Bead is so ashamed of the incident

he tries to avoid telling anyone, but when his scrapped knuckles and scratches are noticed he tells them he killed a Japanese. The others are incredulous and have a look for themselves. The final irony is their looks of awe and respect at the mutilation of the body, which they believe resulted from rage rather than a fearful, botchy job.

All these examples of black humor create for the reader and help him to understand the sense of grotesqueness and irrationality, terror and unreality that the soldier experiences and that the ex-military man wants to read in war novels to explain the depression that follows the artificial stimulus of danger.<sup>78</sup>

In Whistle the elements of the absurd serve to highlight the mental anguish Winch is going through and in the end help to illustrate how far he has slipped mentally.

Winch views the Wurlitzers in the PX as symbols of the plastic world of the future, one which he hates. One night he craftily sneaks up to the PX and rolls two stolen hand grenades through the window and under the juke boxes. Both the Wurlitzers and the entire PX are blown to pieces. Winch is caught giggling hysterically in the bushes and is taken to the mental ward.

<sup>78</sup> Aichinger, p. 105.

Another instance of Winch's approaching insanity takes place at a restaurant on a date. The place is a quiet family-style restaurant at a respectable hotel. Winch is bothered by stomach trouble as well as insanity, and the combination proves too much. During dinner Winch "leaned forward slightly and let loose this enormous loud rippling fart which reverberated from the walls of the restaurant."<sup>79</sup> Winch may not have been able to control his physical and mental disorders, but one gets the impression that he is making as obvious a poke at society here as he does when he blows up the PX.

Novels of the absurd are missing in earlier World War II and Korean war literature. Jones's utilization of black humor adds to America's contribution to a worldwide movement in war literature which sees novels of the absurd appearing in more recent fiction. And, besides this major contribution in humor, Jones's humor serves another purpose. For readers not offended by crudity in humor, it is laughable.

Jones's style fits the intent of his trilogy. Through it we see a writer completely in accord with his subject through the elements of language, atmosphere, structure, and message. He gives to the reader an unvarnished, unglamorous side of human existence that somehow becomes real, or

<sup>79</sup> Jones, Whistle, p. 448.

seemingly real, even to persons who have not experienced it firsthand. For those who have, Jones tells us, "One day one of their number would write a book about all this, but none of them would believe it, because none of them would remember it that way."<sup>80</sup> It is yet to be seen that a common soldier refutes what Jones says on the war experience. He is their true spokesman because he was one of them and lived the experiences about which he writes. The experiences ring true; and the subjects of that truth, war and soldiering, reject glamorizing by their very natures. To imagine these stories told in any other way is difficult. Somehow they would not be what they are--probably the best expression of the World War II experience in soldiering yet produced.

<sup>80</sup> Line, p. 495.

## CHAPTER III

### THEMES

Throughout Jones's trilogy can be seen the gradual evolution from his first concept of war and its relation to mankind to the final, altered concept at which Jones arrives. The many elements that compose the themes of the novels are closely interwoven to form a chain of attitudes begun in Eternity, forged in Line, and tested in Whistle. The several links of the chain are made up of Jones's attitudes on individualism, the Army as an institution, combat, and society in general. These ideas may be traced through Jones's theory of the Evolution of a Soldier.

The first Phase in the Evolution of a Soldier occurs in Eternity. In this phase of becoming a soldier a man must learn to love war and killing. His free-thinking stops, and he becomes a number. He undergoes personal, dedicated harassments. He lives in herds and has no privacy. He is laughed at, insulted, upbraided, ridiculed, and fed like "a pig at a trough." He has no recourse or rights. This indoctrination's sole purpose is to teach each individual that he "is a nameless piece of expendable materiel of a grateful government and its ideals of freedom just as surely as any

artillery shell, mortar round, or rifle bullet." When the gross privileges accorded sadistic sergeants are added, the end result is the beginning of a soldier so bitter he would gladly take on the Jap and Nazi together.<sup>1</sup>

The theme of individualism and the attempt by society to kill the individual instinct has been explored to some extent in Chapter I through the analysis of the characters of Prewitt and Warden. Prewitt, in attempting to maintain his individuality, becomes a victim of the Treatment which is designed to make him conform. Warden attempts to maintain his individuality by defying the middle-class pressures to marry and become an officer. Warden wins his fight for individuality, at least temporarily, and is left with the two things he ultimately longs for: command of the Company and war. He has already successfully accomplished the First Step. Prewitt, through the Stockade which is part of the System, has learned to kill; he kills Fatso Judson, who has sadistically killed a soldier Prewitt loves. Prewitt, however, ultimately rejects the killer instinct and the System, thus making the ultimate statement of individuality. He learned this lesson also in the Stockage from the rebel Jack Malloy who tells Prewitt: "Every man has the right to

<sup>1</sup> James Jones, WWII (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1975), p. 31.

kill himself. . . . It's the only absolutely inviolable right a man does have . . . the old Anglo-Saxon idea of 'freedom' came from that."<sup>2</sup> Prewitt in essence does "kill himself" by allowing MP gunfire to kill him rather than being taken prisoner as a deserter.

Through the character of Malloy as well as through the characters of Prewitt and Warden, Jones makes a statement about society. Malloy speaks of a time in America before the Wobblies were defeated, when Buck Jones was the children's idol, when movies were not commercialized, and when draftees were not in Hawaii: "[O]ne has the sense that the good world, the world of innocents, has just passed away." The phrase "They are a vanishing race" recurs like a theme.<sup>3</sup> Jones sees a world, just before World War II, of disillusioned people who have gone through a depression and are observing the rise of tyranny throughout most of the world as well as witnessing class struggles in their own society. For Jones, as well as for the characters in Eternity, the Army symbolizes life as a whole. The soldier has no rights.

<sup>2</sup> James Jones, Fron Here to Eternity (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 585.

<sup>3</sup> Leslie A. Fiedler, "Dead-End Werther: The Bum as American Culture Hero," An End to Innocence (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1955), p. 186.



His society, like everyone else's society, represses the individual.<sup>4</sup>

In Eternity, the women characters represent two aspects of society's attitude toward the soldier. Karen Holmes, representing the middle-class attitude within the Army itself, feels that only the officer class is proper and acceptable, that the enlisted man is without question the undesirable lower class. She wants to marry Warden, but only if he will become an officer to prove his worthiness of her. Alma (Lorene) represents the civilian attitude toward Army men. She claims to love Prewitt, yet he, being a soldier, is not good enough to marry her. The irony is that these attitudes come from women who represent stock female characters: the unfaithful wife and the good-hearted prostitute.<sup>5</sup> It is significant that neither Karen nor Alma gets what she wants. Warden tells Karen he will not become an officer and, therefore, will not marry her; Prewitt leaves Alma's haven from desertion to return to his Company, despite her tearful pleas and declaration that she will marry him. The women's rejection at the hands of these two individualists is representative of Jones's rejection of

<sup>4</sup> Charles I. Glicksberg, "Racial Attitudes in From Here to Eternity," Phylon, 14, No. 4 (1953), 387.

<sup>5</sup> Michael S. Lasky, "James Jones Has Come Home to Whistle," Writers Digest, 56 (October 1976), 52.

the repressive aspect of society, both within and without the Army.

The military institution itself appears as an establishment which centralizes power by exploiting fear at every level.<sup>6</sup> Glicksberg points out that "James Jones utilizes the Army as the symbol of an abstract, dehumanized, soul-crushing institution which subjugates the individual by imposing fear of authority."<sup>7</sup> It is also a corrupt institution.

G Company is run by the "jocks," like O'Hayer the gambler, while Milt Warden tries to make it an efficient military unit. . . . It is a corrupt company, all right. Henderson, Dhom, and Bloom are all "fugitives from straight duty." The kitchen is a mess; the supply department, under O'Hayer, is actually run by Niccolo Leva; and there is the great comic portrait of Ike Galovitch--"platoon guide am I of dis platoon"--who also gives Prewitt the "lowdown setup" on his duties. Moving up the military hierarchy, we come to the portrait of young Lieutenant Culpepper, a true West Pointer, "son of Brigadier Culpepper, grandson of Lt. General Culpepper, "who has to stay in shape for his eighteen holes and the big party at the officer's club that night." There is the scene between Colonel Delbert himself who, "when he smiled he was really, truly almost fatherly," and the anxiety ridden Captain Holmes, who sees his majority glimmering before him--if he can come through with Bloom in the middleweight class, if he can force Prewitt to box--in the struggle for place among these

<sup>6</sup> Chester E. Eisinger, Fiction of the Forties (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 42.

<sup>7</sup> "Racial Attitudes," 384.

officers and gentlemen. Colonel Delbert asks how Miss Karen is feeling, after inviting Holmes to another stag party with "nothing but rank there"--sex and power. Holmes reflects that he doesn't want his wife to sleep with Delbert, or anything like that, but just to be nice to him.<sup>8</sup>

Just as the world is succumbing to fear-control by the spread of Naziism, Communism, Fascism, and Japanese Imperialism, so is the Army succumbing as the United States is drawn into the global conflict. War is the inevitable result of a society that operates on conformity through fear pressure, with "success" or "victory" of the majority the presumable goal. Certainly war is the ultimate goal of an army, else why does it exist at all? But for Jones, society as a whole, symbolized by the Army, expects war as part of its existence. For Jones it is not the trained soldier who alone becomes capable of violence and doing harm to his fellow man. All of mankind is capable of cruelty, and society has reached the state where individualism is a threat to its existence.<sup>9</sup> The capability for violence within all of us is one of Jones's chief concerns:

When a government has so much importance and power in the lives of men, it takes only one

<sup>8</sup> Maxwell Geismar, American Moderns: From Rebellion to Conformity (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968), pp. 227-28.

<sup>9</sup> John R. Hopkins, James Jones: A Checklist (Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1974), p. 18.

little thing to turn it backward to a previously unimagined barbarism. The terrifying thing is that it can happen any time in any country in the guise of morality . . . .<sup>10</sup>

Witness the existence of the Stockade which Leslie Fiedler has called "our home-grown 'concentration camp.'"<sup>11</sup> Jones says at another time:

[I]n all of us is this animal portion, or I would say human portion of us, which is not at all adverse to inflicting cruelty on others. This can be quite enjoyable at times. . . . A war often gives us an opportunity to do this without . . . getting a bad social name . . . or going to jail, or getting electrocuted. . . .<sup>12</sup>

War is a manifestation of mankind's desire to eliminate individuality within its members for the sake of its existence as a whole. The paradox is that by waging war each nation as an individual whole is exercising the very characteristic of individuality which it seeks to destroy among its separate members.

A further paradox in Eternity is that, despite his view of the Army, Jones

<sup>10</sup> David Butwin, ed., "The Cognoscenti Abroad-II: James Jones's Paris," Saturday Review, 52 (February 1, 1969), 36.

<sup>11</sup> p. 186.

<sup>12</sup> Hopkins, p. 13.

appears to love the army, and he makes Prewitt and Warden love it. And they love it at their own level as professional army men. . . . Jones glorifies the men who live this life and who joyously welcome combat with the Japanese. The paradox of the novel is the paradox of maximum freedom for individualistic expression of fundamental maleness within the framework of iron limitation and discipline imposed by the army. Jones seems to want it both ways. . . .<sup>13</sup>

Hating and loving the Army simultaneously is Jones's solution for the dilemma with which he is faced when writing Eternity. In that novel he has only begun to face and explore his world concept. He therefore arrives at a solution where one protagonist (Prewitt) solves his inability to accept the world as it is by leaving it. The other protagonist (Warden) remains, believing that he has found the way to live within the world as it is. Warden conforms in a way, but it is his way, and for the time being it satisfies his needs.

In Eternity Jones begins to see a society that, largely because of war, begins to pull itself out of the Depression. Escaping the Depression is the aim of many of the enlisted men in Eternity, but what it has cost them as individuals is a high price. It is also a high price for civilians. The speeded-up production of technology, employed to boost the war effort, first comes to our attention in Eternity. A view of the boosted war effort is seen ironically in the

<sup>13</sup> Eisinger, pp. 43-4.

soldiers' visits to brothels. The scenes become parodies of "the American capacity for 'production'. . . . The New Congress Hotel is 'like a defense plant assembly line in full swing.'"<sup>14</sup> Soldiers are lined up down the halls and pay \$2.50 for three minutes with the woman of their choice. Prewitt at one time wants to see Alma, and she distractedly works him in between other customers. While Alma lies nude on the bed urging him to hurry because time is running out, Prewitt finds his desire gone and he is unable to perform. That the situation is emasculating is a further indication of Jones's attitude on the subject. Prewitt is not the only soldier aware of the assembly line aspects of liaisons with these women. "'Am I a good lay?' asks Maureen, the hustler. 'Good,' say Maylon Stark, 'but mechanical,'"<sup>15</sup> This commentary on American technology, as well as on other aspects of American life, continues in Line and Whistle.

A further extension of society's part in a soldier's role is the soldier's realization that there is no escape; he faces a stigma if he does not serve in war, and he realizes there is no place to run anyway.<sup>16</sup> In an interview with

<sup>14</sup> Geismar, p. 230.

<sup>15</sup> Jones, Eternity, p. 230.

<sup>16</sup> Jones, WWII, p. 31.

George Plimpton, Jones examines the social pressure of a stigma:

There's so many young guys . . . young Americans and, yes, young men everywhere--a whole generation of people younger than me who have grown up feeling inadequate as men because they haven't been able to fight in a war and find out whether they are brave or not. Because it is an effort to prove this bravery that we fight--in wars or in bars--whereas if a man were truly brave he wouldn't have to be always proving it to himself. So therefore I am forced to consider bravery suspect, and ridiculous, and dangerous. . . . As a matter of fact, I am at the moment trying to write a novel, a combat novel, which, in addition to being a work which tells the truth about warfare as I saw it, would free all these young men from the horse-shit which has been engrained in them by my generation. I don't think that combat has ever been written about truthfully; it has always been described in terms of bravery and cowardice. I won't even accept these words as terms of human reference anymore. And anyway, hell, they don't even apply to what, in actual fact, modern warfare, has become.<sup>17</sup>

Jones wishes to reveal the truth about the war experience. This revelation involves Phase Two in the Evolution of a Soldier--combat itself. The true aspects of warfare, Phase Two in a soldier's evolution, begin to be explored from the outset in Line, the second novel of the trilogy. As the troop ship arrives at Guadalcanal, the men begin to doubt their ability to survive and to question their own bravery

<sup>17</sup> George Plimpton, ed., Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews, Third Series (New York: Viking Press, 1967), pp. 247-48.

under fire. As word passes that a probable attack will come with the landings, the men become more fearful and edgy. The beginnings of the self-centered survival instinct begin to be seen here, too, as they curse their Company's position for departure. Their concern is for their own safety and the safety of their buddies. The companies before or after them in debarkation do not matter.

A second part of the combat experience is the recognition that veterans are "different," that they have passed into a realm the unexperienced have not seen, and the untested infantryman's curiosity is aroused.<sup>18</sup> Jones presents this step in Line just as C-for-Charlie Company lands on Guadalcanal. Trudging inland to bivouac, the company passes experienced troops heading for the beach and evacuation. The men they see are filthy, unshaven, steely-eyed characters who look at the green arrivals with grim speculation and little humor. C-for-Charlie realizes that these men have been fighting the enemy for weeks and that they have seen and done things that the new arrivals can only guess at. At the end of the novel, as what is left of C-for-Charlie moves out toward the beach to be evacuated, they are passed by incoming green units. As these scared, round-eyed young men tramp past them, C-for-Charlie looks back at them in the

<sup>18</sup> Jones, WWII, p. 36.



same way the earlier veterans had looked at them before their plunge into combat. The near awe and the admiration for the men who have seen that unknown are in the green soldiers' eyes. They almost look forward to the gleaning of that special knowledge of which they will then be a part--no longer unknowing, no longer outside.

The most crucial step in combat is the actual baptism of fire, the experiencing of actual fighting.<sup>19</sup> Here in Phase Two the theme of individualism is altered, as combat alters all men. Edmond Volpe writes that

Perhaps for my generation this vision of anonymity was the great trauma. . . . [W]e were not prepared to be swallowed up and lost in the massive organization of the army. It is this vision that has preoccupied two of the most talented fiction writers of the World War II generation--James Jones and Norman Mailer. . . . Jones is essentially a realist. . . . Jones's first novel describes the heroic struggle of an individualist to retain his integrity, but his later work contains no hero: The individual has been absorbed into the organization.<sup>20</sup>

World War II was incapable of becoming as personal an experience as was World War I because standard military

<sup>19</sup> Jones, WWII, p. 39.

<sup>20</sup> Edmond L. Volpe, "James Jones--Norman Mailer," in Contemporary American Novelists, ed. Harry T. Moore (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964; rpt. 1966), pp. 106-07.

procedures obscured the individual. All GI's seem alike.<sup>21</sup> The authors of World War II novels who must deal with the lack of individuality in the war machine have a fundamental dilemma to work out. A novel that lacks a hero or heroic action tends to be mediocre and incohesive, yet traditional patterns of heroic conduct usually end in meaningless destruction. It is significant that Jones, as well as other American authors, tries to work out this conflict between native pragmatism and the heroic tradition.<sup>22</sup> Jones works this problem out by creating as a protagonist a single company, made even more relevant to the reader who recognizes certain characters within the Company as those who have been known before in Eternity, namely Welsh as Warden, Witt as Prewitt, and Storm as Stark.

As protagonist "the company encompasses the individuals that make it up. It is an abstract unit with a table or organization designating a variety of positions which human beings fill."<sup>23</sup> Not any one soldier assumes the central position that the company as a unit assumes.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Aichinger, The American Soldier in Fiction, 1880-1963: A History of Attitudes Toward Warfare and the Military Establishment (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1975), p. 64.

<sup>22</sup> Aichinger, p. 65.

<sup>23</sup> Volpe, p. 110.

Jones employs several techniques to emphasize the insignificance of the individual soldier in the modern war machine:

He permits the reader to become a partisan rooter for the fighting unit. Then, he widens the angle of vision to make the reader aware of companies on each flank of C Company also encountering severe handships and fierce battles with the enemy. When C-for-Charlie reaches Boola Boola village, its final objective in the campaign, the effect of this dramatic climax is deliberately deadened: another company has already occupied the village and the fighting is about over. The over-enthusiastic C Company commander is relieved from his command because he had acted independently rather than as a unit in the organization. . . . By shifting from character to character, he gradually creates the impression that the individual is not only of little importance within the organization but he is of little importance to anyone but himself. . . . As the fighting continues, the dead bodies of their fellow soldiers no longer really bother them. . . . The starving Japanese prisoners are treated inhumanly, but only because the combat situation has revealed to their captors the insignificance of the individual human life. . . . The ultimate insignificance of individual man is conveyed at the end of the novel. The campaign for Guadalcanal had ended and C-for-Charlie Company begins training for the coming attack on New Georgia. The great battle is reduced to one of a series of battles. Most of the men who made up the company are dead or dispersed. . . . The individual men may live or die, come or go, but the abstraction C-for-Charlie Company remains.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Volpe, pp. 110-12.

Wayne Miller has stated that man in the wartime army discovers the truth about his culture.<sup>25</sup> Peter Aichinger agrees and adds that the protagonist in war examines his ideals and values for the first time and then adopts an attitude that will let him go on examining them. This leads the protagonist to a realization that life is fundamental.<sup>26</sup> This realization presents somewhat of a paradox in Jones's message within the trilogy. War is the least desirable situation society can impose upon man, yet the protagonist (in the case of Line, the Company) chooses to do his utmost to survive. In Eternity the author appears to be divided in his attitude toward what choice the protagonist should make. He solves the problem there by having one protagonist opt for existence within the Army system and, therefore, life, while the other opts for death and freedom from society's strictures. In Line the protagonist (Company) opts for its collective life through each individual's options for life. Storm refuses to fight any longer and keeps himself relatively safe in his kitchens behind the lines. Welsh, through keeping to himself and relying on no one else, gets through alive but ill. Stein is relieved to be sent back home. He

<sup>25</sup> An Armed American: Its Face in Fiction: A History of the American Military Novel (New York: New York University Press, 1970), p. 113.

<sup>26</sup> pp. 92-3.

accepts the deal offered to him to cover up Tall's mistake in strategy which costs numerous lives. The reason for their acceptance is not as important as the acceptance of life itself.<sup>27</sup> The issue has become not one of honor but of survival.<sup>28</sup>

At issue too is the developing theme of the "gradual disintegration of the knightly code of the old peacetime army under the pressure of a kind of warfare requiring for survival a radically altered mode of existence." The values of what fighting men share because of mutual experiences-- "personal integrity and manly independence, pride in service and the absolute importance of never letting a buddy down"-- have been debilitated and deranged by the kind of prolonged combat as is found in Line.<sup>29</sup>

The military institution itself has succumbed to the Age of the Masses. Fewer and fewer individual soldiers are known at all. Larger and larger groups are named for their generals or generals get fame through their men.<sup>30</sup> A sense

<sup>27</sup> Aichinger, p. 92.

<sup>28</sup> John W. Aldridge, "The Last James Jones," The New York Times Book Review, 83, No. 10 (March 5, 1978), 31.

<sup>29</sup> John W. Aldridge, "The Last James Jones," The New York Times Book Review, 83, No. 10 (March 5, 1978), 30.

<sup>30</sup> Jones, WWII, p. 61.

of displacement and increasing insignificance befuddles the soldier and general alike as the war grows in scope and depth around him. There is a huge size to everything. The number involved, tonnage required to supply them, shipping required to move it all overseas in two directions at once make up for staggering prodigal losses. Everything reaches such huge proportions that any single soldier or general becomes dwarfed. Jones summarizes the situation: "Where once there were divisions, there were now corps, and soon armies, and army groups."<sup>31</sup>

I think . . . anonymity is one of the last big obstacles the Evolution of a Soldier has to encounter and step over. To accept anonymity, along with all the rest he has to accept, is perhaps the toughest step of all for the combat soldier.<sup>32</sup>

Jones believes there are many things that enable a man to fight: professionalism, a sense of sacrifice, esprit de corps, personal vanity and pride, sheer excitement of battle. He also believes that there is something within the human nature itself which contributes to combat ability. He calls it a "penultimate national, social, racial masochism--a sort of hotly joyous, almost-sexual enjoyment and acceptance."

<sup>31</sup> Jones, WWII, pp. 84-5.

<sup>32</sup> Jones, WWII, p. 122.

It is the ultimate luxury of "just not giving a damn anymore." When men are soldiers at last, they have "written themselves off." They believe death is inevitable.<sup>33</sup> Jones sees this acceptance as creating and reinstilling hope "in a kind of reverse-process mental photo-negative function." Each small thing becomes significant--the next meal, next bottle of booze, next kiss, next sunrise, next full moon, next bath.<sup>34</sup>

In combat the soldier must also learn to deal with fear. Jones describes this acceptance of fear: "Learning to live with it, and to go ahead in spite of it, took practice and a certain overlay of bitter panache it took time to acquire."<sup>35</sup> General Omar Bradley is quoted in Jones's WWII as at least one officer who understood the situation of the combat soldier:

The rifleman trudges into battle knowing that statistics are stacked against his survival. He fights without promise of either reward or relief. Behind every river, there's another hill--and behind that hill, another river. After weeks or months in the line only a wound can offer him the comfort of safety, shelter, and a bed. Those who are left to fight, fight on, evading death but knowing that with each day of evasion they have exhausted one more chance for survival. Sooner or later, unless victory comes, the chase must end on the litter or in the grave.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> WWII, pp. 38-9.

<sup>34</sup> WWII, p. 68.

<sup>35</sup> WWII, p. 168.

<sup>36</sup> WWII, p. 196.

The soldier who survives and sees that he might go home reaches the last stage in the combat experience. Jones calls it the "miserable reawakening of hope."<sup>37</sup> It is also the beginning of Phase Three: Going Home. Jones tells us that there are several things to help a soldier live through this phase: professionalism, esprit de corps, victory, cynicism, and combat numbness.<sup>38</sup> Combat numbness is a phenomenon of which at least two characters in Line suffer. Bell and Welsh observe that this condition comes over them immediately after the excitement of battle and remains with them for increasingly longer periods of time. Jones describes combat numbness as

composed of equal parts of sheer physical fatigue, insupportable fear, and a sort of massive, strained disbelief at what was happening. . . . It seemed to wax in a man in direct ratio to the number and length of the times he had felt it before, and afterwards it waned in him in the same predictably divisible ratio. The oftener and longer he felt it, the quicker it came over him next time and the longer it took to leave him after. So that, if handled properly and if the man's outfit stayed up on the line often enough and long enough, it could even become a mercifully blissful permanent state.<sup>39</sup>

As Welsh is leaving Guadalcanal he thinks to himself, "He had known the combat numbness now--for the first time, at Boola

<sup>37</sup> WWII, p. 196.

<sup>38</sup> WWII, p. 196.

<sup>39</sup> WWII, p. 196.



Boola--and it was his calculated hope and belief that if pursued long enough and often enough, it might really become a permanent and mercifully blissful state. It was all he asked."<sup>40</sup>

The over-all end result for those who survive combat is bitterness. Jones insists that "There was a lot more bitterness in World War II than historians allow--basically the men were bitter at getting their asses shot off."<sup>41</sup>

Victory and surviving to see it lead to Going Home, Phase Three. It is with Phase Three that Whistle is concerned. Whether arriving home whole or wounded, the men associate coming home with pain. Jones refers to this process as De-Evolution. The problem is that, unlike induction into the Army, there is no center for the reverse process. This is something that each man must come through on his own--or not at all.<sup>42</sup>

For the first time since joining the Army, the soldier becomes an individual again. After living for months, perhaps years, as part of a unit, he is expected to quickly adjust to being alone again. It is not that the government

<sup>40</sup> James Jones, The Thin Red Line (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), pp. 494-95.

<sup>41</sup> Paul Gray, "Marital Arts," Time, September 1, 1975, p. 59.

<sup>42</sup> WWII, pp. 253-56.

has not prepared help for these men. For the able-bodied ones the government eventually provided help in the form of the GI Bill for aid in getting reestablished in society. For the wounded, wonderful care is provided in well-equipped Army hospitals such as the one portrayed in Whistle. The government does not, however, have a way to help the men quit remembering and reliving the most traumatic experience they have ever been through.

Various characters in Whistle have survived Guadalcanal in C-for-Charlie Company: Winch, Prell, and Strange, as well as several other members of the company. They come to an Army hospital in Luxor, Tennessee, to be rehabilitated for return to service in the Army or to be released as civilians. What plagues all the men is guilt, loss of professionalism, and loss of esprit.<sup>43</sup>

The feeling of guilt that they have survived and their buddies have not is perhaps the greatest source of pain for the survivors. Winch and Strange, being sergeants, especially feel responsibility for their men, and that concern for the men drives Winch progressively insane. The loss of professionalism is something that many soldiers cannot accept. Prell, desiring to be a thirty-year-man, faces the possibility of losing his leg. Only by sheer will power does

<sup>43</sup> Jones, WWII, p. 256.

he recover to the point that the Army will let him remain to function as a Congressional Medal of Honor winner selling war bonds. Esprit de corps is the last thing to go. Jones says that there is nothing in civilian life to replace it, "the love and understanding of men for men in dangerous times, and places, and situations." There is nothing to replace the "heavy, turgid, day-to-day excitement of danger."<sup>44</sup> It is the longing to maintain esprit that occupies Strange throughout Whistle. He spends most of his time visiting and boosting the men in their company and resists the breaking up of their group the longest. The company as a whole represents the only solid, secure thing in the men's recent existence; when faced with returning to a world they cannot understand, they cannot give the company up. At the end of Whistle, when one by one the last remaining members of the company leave it in various ways, Strange cannot accept joining a new company, loving new men, and reliving all of these experiences again. Instead he dies.

The society the veterans return to is a major focus in Whistle, and society as a whole is represented by the women characters. The men return to a booming economy that has altered almost every aspect of American life and in

<sup>44</sup> WWII, p. 256.

particular the role of women. The Home Front shocks the returning men with its trite slogans, teasing pin-ups, richness of civilians, and the propaganda movies which certainly reveal nothing of the combat they have seen.<sup>45</sup> It is, however, the almost total breakdown of moral standards of prewar U.S. living that shocks the men most.<sup>46</sup> Women have been liberated from their traditional social roles by going to work in the war factories of the cities. Along with this economic revolution has come liberation in sexual roles. Their men are away at war and those returning are available and eager for female companionship. At the same time the men reject the new sexual role of women, they gleefully take advantage of it. In Whistle the men rent a suite in the best hotel in town and never want for female companionship. The women are as eager as the men to be passed around and shared, and romantic relationships of any duration are short-lived at best. Again we encounter Jones's female characters in the form of prostitutes. Although it is true that the girls are seldom paid in money but instead with liquor, meals, and nights on the town, their sexual behavior leaves little room for a classification other than prostitute.

Jones's other female character, the unfaithful wife, appears again in both Line and Whistle. Bell's one thought

<sup>45</sup> Jones, WWII, pp. 150-51.

<sup>46</sup> Jones, WWII, p. 82.

in Line is to survive to return to his wife, and then at the end of Line he receives a "Dear John" letter from her that enrages even his commander with its betrayal. Strange returns in Whistle to find his wife unfaithful. Winch also discovers that his wife is unfaithful, but unlike Strange, Winch has suspected that she is. Strange and Bell both feel betrayed the more because until learning of their wives' betrayal, they themselves were faithful. The ultimate betrayal which the anger of Bell's commander expresses in Line is that the unfaithful wives have no conception of the sacrifice their men are making for them.

Throughout the trilogy the men have little regard for women except as sex objects, and this situation has drawn a great deal of criticism from critics who find Jones incapable of creating believable or sympathetic women characters. In defense of his treatment of women, it should be pointed out that his male characters have little opportunity to encounter any other kind of woman. While they are dog-face soldiers on post, no "respectable" woman will go out with them; they resort to women who will--prostitutes. The unfaithful wife appears in Eternity as a pawn for Warden to lash out at middle-class society. The unfaithful wife was certainly a problem the married soldier, far away from home, had to face. It is with these men and their situations that Jones is

concerned. If these are the kinds of women his characters encounter, these are the kinds of women the reader will encounter. It is a sordid picture but one Jones claims is part of the war experience. The women represent society's betrayal of the soldier. Like parasites they have profited from the soldiers' sacrifices, and the knowledge of this fact further embitters the returning veteran.

The veteran also returns to a society of assembly-line workers who fear for their jobs as many competitors come back from overseas duty.<sup>47</sup>

In America, the old world of "Free Enterprise" suffered such a resounding shock that it would never recover, either. Or, if it recovered somewhat, it would be to a form of free enterprise such as no American had ever yet envisioned. . . . Industrial technology had won the war for us, and technology was here to stay. It would stay because the new managerial administration and technology were a more efficient way of doing things. And by staying, they would make of Americans wage slaves in a stricter, tighter way than they had ever been during the nineteenth century Industrial Revolution.<sup>48</sup>

Whistle deals in part with the "cynical affluence of this country in wartime."<sup>49</sup> The men are struck immediately with

<sup>47</sup> Jones, WWII, p. 255.

<sup>48</sup> Jones, WWII, p. 226.

<sup>49</sup> Willie Morris, "A Friendship: Remembering James Jones," The Atlantic Monthly, 241, No. 6 (June 1978), 53.

the luxuries available to the people in the States: civilians wear expensive clothes, drive new cars, buy new homes, and have a great deal of money to spend. These conditions contrast greatly with the conditions the men face in the war. Civilians are even heard to say that they hope the war does not end before they accumulate the money they want. The returning soldier fully realizes what this affluence costs him and men like him.

The military institution representing society as a whole itself remains the repressive, corrupt institution seen in Eternity. Winch fears not getting a promotion and not being allowed to stay in as a thirty-year man because of his congestive heart failure. He goes to great lengths to keep himself appearing fit so that he will be allowed to stay in the Army. He also witnesses corruption when a fellow officer offers him partnership on business deals between civilian companies and the Army that provide a lucrative profit for persons involved. The reasoning goes that someone is going to do it, so why not members of the Army itself? Winch sees more and more what his dedication to the Army is costing him.

Prell lives with a constant threat that when the war is over he may or may not have a place in the Army. To stay in the Army is all he wants. Strange elects to stay and because of faulty paperwork finds himself eligible for overseas duty again. He stubbornly refuses to let Winch "fix" it for him.

Perhaps he can tolerate no more "fixing" from a corrupt organization, even for himself. Through the course of the trilogy all the characters have witnessed what the System does to men. Whistle "effectively concludes Jones's assessment of the experience about which he wrote best. It also contains much to indicate that his understanding of that experience had evolved considerably beyond his first adolescent perception of it. . . ." <sup>50</sup> Jones believed that the whole of written history is flavored by discrepancies in two ideals systems: the one which we would all like to believe humanity might be but only the privileged can afford to believe is; and the one which we all really know humanity in fact is but none of us wants to believe it is: <sup>51</sup>

There had to be something somewhere in all of them, in all of us, that loved it [war]. Some dark, aggressive, masochistic side of us, racial perhaps, that makes us want to spray our blood in the air, throw our blood away, for some damned misbegotten ideal or other. . . . Cynical as it sounds, one is about led to believe that only the defeated and the dead really hate war. And of course, as we all know, they do not count. <sup>52</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Aldrige, p. 31.

<sup>51</sup> WWII, p. 71.

<sup>52</sup> WWII, p. 42.



When Jones speaks of his characters in Eternity in an interview, he also can be speaking for the characters throughout the trilogy:

They are very concerned with their own personal dignity . . . because they have a heritage . . . grew up in our whole complex of early society, the frontier and so on. But what I find so disturbing is the fact that a man, in order to preserve his dignity, is willing to take away almost anybody else's. . . . I think if we're going to survive as a race at all, we've got to face up to the fact that we so far have not lived up to our own definition of what is human.<sup>53</sup>

Jones states that Army life

awakened me to the discrepancy between what's written about life and history and what really goes on in life. I think my whole life has been a slow stumbling progress to the realization that if anything's at fault for the way life is, it's the universe; it's not a particular planet, or race, or color of race, or society. The universe seems to be based on a principle of destruction in order to survive. Mankind in its petty little way is trying to obviate this. In order to survive, you have to eat something--be it animal or plant. I think war is as much a part of this as anything. It's taken my whole life to realize this and to grow out of a sense of anger at specific groups and into a kind of acceptance of it. That is the most pervasive theme in all of my books.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Hopkins, p. 11.

<sup>54</sup> Lasky, p. 52.

While Jones claims to accept life as it is, he also rejects it. At the same instant his characters realize the truth about their world, they reject it through suicide. This reaction should not come as a surprise since early in the trilogy, in Eternity, Warden himself realizes that

he understands suddenly why a man who had lived his whole life working for a corporation might commit suicide simply to express himself, would foolishly destroy himself because it was the only way to prove his own existence.<sup>55</sup>

Malloy, too, preaches this belief. Prewitt practices it. When Winch, Prell, Landers, and Strange all adopt leaving this world rather than remaining in it, they are bringing to fruition the concept of rebellious rejection planted in Eternity. There it is only one of two options. In Whistle it becomes the only one. The death of his major characters, however, is not the answer in itself. It is the catalyst to spur man on to seek an answer. As victims of war, the characters are sacrificial examples who make a strong case for the survivors.

The trilogy testifies to Jones's "profoundly darkened apprehension of the meaning of the war experience."<sup>56</sup> War as a manifestation of society in general leaves a profoundly

<sup>55</sup> Jones, Eternity, p. 107.

<sup>56</sup> Aldridge, p. 30.

darkened apprehension of the life experience. If we are to live up to our image of what human nature ought to be rather than what Jones perceives it is, we are warned that "our lack of values is an ever-present danger to peace."<sup>57</sup> War reveals the darker side of our natures. If we are to move on to "something better of the spirit" that Jones refers to in an interview with David Butwin, we must in some way eliminate this side of ourselves.<sup>58</sup>

Leslie Fiedler believes that Eternity's value as literature "lies in its redeeming for the imagination aspects of regular Army life never before exploited, and in making certain of those aspects . . . symbols of the human situation everywhere."<sup>59</sup> This evaluation applies to the trilogy as a whole. Through his revelation of war and thus of certain aspects of our society, Jones has made a plea for something better. His trilogy, while accurately describing the military and war experience rather than glorifying these experiences, makes a strong anti-war statement.

<sup>57</sup> Joseph J. Waldmeir, American Novels of the Second World War (The Hague: Mouton, 1969), p. 104.

<sup>58</sup> p. 38.

<sup>59</sup> p. 186.

## CONCLUSION

By his own definition of greatness, Jones tells us greatness in art is achieved when it tells the truth and is meaningful. Both the elements of truth and of meaningfulness, often indistinguishable one from the other, will be the criteria by which this trilogy is measured.

There are several weaknesses critics find in Jones's work, not many of which allude to truth so much as to meaningfulness. Chief among the criticisms has been that the body of Jones's work, and particularly this trilogy, deals only with the war experience or with things closely related to it. His women characters are found to be unsympathetic. Most of his characters are found to be seamy, undesirable types. His language has offended some readers, and his style in Whistle is seen to have deteriorated to sketchiness.

The body of Jones's work admittedly deals with the war experience and related situations. Jones wrote about the things he knew--and he knew war. Jones himself says

So slowly it faded, leaving behind it a whole generation of men who would walk into history looking backwards, with their backs to the sun, peering forever over their shoulders behind them, at their own lengthening shadows

trailing across the earth. None of them would ever really get over it.<sup>1</sup>

Jones recognized that not only he but an entire generation of people would respond to works about their war experiences--experiences often not understood even by themselves--and that other generations would seek to understand the war experience, perhaps only as a curiosity or perhaps as a manifestation of the society of which they are a part. Although Jones's work does confine him to one relatively brief period of time in history, that period, through its many facts of existence, yields an almost inexhaustible supply of material for the novelist. Witness the fact that war novels continue to be published and will undoubtedly continue to be as long as war exists. Writings on the subject will continue even should the war experience cease to exist, if for no reason but to study and understand human behavior. Jones realized, as do all war novelists, that war is a human condition about which there is much to say.

Jones's female characters of the trilogy are unsympathetic. His women represent certain undesirable aspects of society. They are, first, the only type of women with whom a soldier just before World War II could associate

<sup>1</sup> James Jones, WWII (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1975), p. 256.

since "proper" civilian women scorned them. They represent, second, those women who were not loyal to their men and who had no conception of their sacrifices. Third, the women represent that aspect of society that altered with the war, which brought about new social and moral roles for women. Jones had no intention that his women characters be sympathetic; the result is that they are not.

The soldier Jones depicts is, relatively speaking, a lower-class individual. His background stems from an uneducated, vagrant past of the Depression years. Here Jones is truthfully representing the United States Army of the World War II period. Granted, after war was declared, men from all classes of society were involved, but they were draftees, there only until the war was over and they could return to civilian life. The regular Army man was a thirty-year man. He enlisted because he had no place else to go, and he was staying on after the war ended. These men were the true Army for Jones, and this type of man occupies the pages of his trilogy.

Each of the weaknesses so far dealt with concern Jones's insistence that his subject and his characters represent truth. Within the boundaries Jones himself set, that of the war experience, the subject and characters could be nothing but what they are in order to fulfill the intentions he has for them.

Jones's sketchy style in Whistle can be explained. Jones realized he was racing against time and the threat of congestive heart failure to complete the trilogy. He continually expressed his concern about completing Whistle to Willis Morris, who completed Whistle from Jones's notes after the author died. In defense of the somewhat rushed, sketchy style, let it be said that it corresponds spiritually to the time element for the characters within the novel, for whom time also tragically runs out. Jones's emotional relationship to the elements of Whistle seems almost uncanny; for that reason alone, it should serve as a novel of importance in relation to its author. Within the trilogy, however, the novel's importance is far greater than just an example of an author's final efforts.

The criticism of Jones's language will be explored within the following examination of Jones's meaningful contributions to literature. Structurally, the trilogy is bound together strongly by the employment of continuous characters and continuous plot. In each novel the major characters remain identifiable as those from the novel before it, and the plot carries those characters from pre-war Army life, through combat in the Pacific, back to the States. This accomplishment is no mean achievement in light of the fact that each novel within the trilogy also stands alone as a distinct and complete work within itself.

Jones's style has been recognized as genuinely realistic and detailed. Part of this realism involves Jones's use of language. The crude, raw language serves the need for truth, since the characters who speak it and the situations in which it occurs are believable and real. Irwin Shaw credits Jones with enlarging the limits of the language, thereby enabling writers to present the truth unvarnished.

Jones has also made major contributions to literature by employing in the war novel genre the techniques of the involved narrator, black humor, and two new protagonists. The involved narrator is seen to contribute, again, to realism in that it serves to involve the reader vicariously within the experiences described. Black humor is a relatively new element in modern fiction, and Jones is a major contributor to this movement in the war novel genre. One type of protagonist Jones contributes is the sergeant, seen to emerge as a focus in World War II novels as opposed to the ordinary enlisted man. The character of Warden, and later of Stark, is Jones's chief contribution to this character type. Prewitt is the other: the revolutionary anti-hero who represents the Everyman of the post-Depression Army caste.

Jones's message is one of his greatest literary contributions and it goes hand in hand with meaningfulness. This contribution is truth--more specifically the truth concerning



the war experience. Through the war experience Jones's characters see themselves clearly, some for the first time. In many cases it requires the experience of the entire trilogy for the characters to recognize the truth about themselves, but in many cases it does not. Prewitt realizes that he cannot conform to society in the first novel, Eternity, but Warden appears to conform happily. In Line the characters of Doll and Stein conform, while Welsh and Storm only appear to. Witt still will not conform. All of the characters recognize that they want to survive. Survival becomes their truth. In Whistle, when the truth about society, and thus about themselves, is revealed, Jones's second message becomes clear. War reveals truths about man's society, and those truths are disillusioning. Jones sees war as a manifestation of society's attempt to repress the individual, a theme dealt with throughout the trilogy. The insistence on individualism is Jones's method of making clear his final message. Society must see the truth about itself as each individual within that society must see the truth about himself. As early in the trilogy as Eternity, Jones says

Here we are . . . you made us, now see us, dont close your eyes and shudder at it; this beauty, and this sorrow, of things as they are.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> James Jones, From Here to Eternity (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 218.

For Jones the individual is beautiful and unique; he is also a sorrowful creature. Made by a society which is flawed, he can be nothing else. In his truthful look at war, Jones is making a great plea for something better. In this respect he is not the naysayer who describes the evils of this world and then proposes no remedy. He pleads for a realization about human nature and thus for a change in human nature brought about by man's realization and understanding of war.

Jones's apprehension of the war experience serves as a revelation to readers who seek to understand that experience and the influence it has on the life experience. By contributing so skillfully to this understanding through From Here to Eternity, The Thin Red Line, and Whistle, Jones has made both a great humanitarian and literary contribution. The trilogy represents a two-fold statement. It is a rejection of part of society--the part of society which employs war as a means to its ends. On the other hand, the trilogy is a recognition of man's will to survive and a declaration of what is necessary to do so.

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