CHAPTER IV

JAMES JONES'S FROM HERE TO ETERNITY

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In *From Here to Eternity* and *Some Came Running* Jones describes his philosophical system which provides the basis for characterisation, plotting and symbolism in these and subsequent novels. His system emphasises a learning process in which each soul is forced to discern both its similarity to all other souls on earth and its isolation from them. The isolation is the reflection of distance which each soul has fallen away from God and become immersed in self. Self is the enemy in Jones's view of the world and it must be defeated so that each soul can be reunited with God. As long as a soul remains subject to the desires and illusions of its ego, it functions on the animal level. However, in the course of spiritual evolution, each individual is prised out of the animal level by being put through a series of distressing and humiliating experiences designed to break down his ego and to make him realise that everyone else is being treated in the same way so that nobody's pride will be left intact. At a certain point in its education, each soul should reach a state of compassionate understanding in which
it feels sorry about the pain in everyone's life without wishing to change or eliminate that pain. This recognition of the necessary role of suffering can come at different times for different souls since it occurs within the context of a process of reincarnation which spans eternity. Eventually, though, compassionate understanding will come to all souls, and they will all become one with God at the end of Time.

Jones's philosophy has led him to oppose the American popular notions of the man masculinity and ultrafemininity. According to the traditional stereotypes, men should be strong, silent, cool, aggressive and efficient and women should be passive, dependent, virtuous, emotional, and appearance conscious. As Jones sees it, however, this polarised set of stereotypes has its roots in the animal level and forms men into callous egotists and women into childish parasites. He believes that the attempt to use such stereotypes as ideals blocks the spiritual development of both men and women. In contrast he emphasises the need to recognise the mutual spiritual goals of men and women and to take a broader and more sensitive view of the multitude of possible combinations of personality traits inherent in both manhood and womanhood.
In his recent novels, such as The Merry Month of May, Jones has focused on the questions of responsibility. He argues that even though the responsible man is superior to the irresponsible man, he has not yet attained the highest level. The responsible man has learned that the danger of irresponsible behaviour lies in its association with selfishness, but he has not discerned that his own efforts to help other people are also prompted by vanity. His own vanity has its origin in the belief that one person can arrange another person's life better than he could arrange for himself. Hence, before the responsible man can move on to the level of the spiritual man, he must find out how to display compassion without seeking to alter the object of the compassion. At the same time the responsible man should keep in mind that a person who has mastered some area of experience can offer limited assistance to a disciple who has already learned enough to be able to comprehend and to act on the basis of this guidance.

Eternity is a definitive novel of the American peacetime army. Despite the blasphemy of its contents, the poetic obscenity of its speeches (which becomes contagious), and its open description of sexual values which have not been prominent in our literature, it is both a heroic and an epic novel.
It upholds those eternal "verities" that are shared by novels of this class, and which the conservatives can never find in modern literature.

Sexuality is sharp, acrid, angry, and bitter sweet in Jones. It is powerful antagonistic, and delightful, the highest pleasure in the world. But love enfeebles it and marriage destroys it, one way or another and all feminine sexuality aims at love and marriage. Net result is male impotence.

The dominant psychological concept in From Here to Eternity is that of the Freudian son-horde, in ruthless revolt against the despotic, but finally enfeebled king-father-officers. But the mother symbolism of women in love is also feared and denigrated. The central notion of masculine virility is that of the Rebellious Orphan.

The class hatred of the officer is overdone in From Here to Eternity. Jones is the writer who gave Americans the first great book of army life. Jones's novel is a synthesis of a whole area of social, and economic events of the profession of "soljerling." It is of human behaviour that both accepts and rebels against its particular chains of circumstance and destiny. The rebellious blood and bones of Jones
has made *Eternity* different from war novels of writers like Mailer and Irwin Shaw. Prewitt is the spokesman of Mailer. The question is, does a common soldier have any human rights at all?

The novel is intended as a work about an exploited class is evident in virtually every page. Jones cares most for the lonely private living in the paradise of Hawaii but unable to experience the pleasures inherent in this environment.¹

Relatively overt statements of proletarian consciousness occur throughout the novel. Warden's refusal to become an officer arises from concerns which transcend the army. Essentially he hates and distrusts the middle class:

"Who do you think it was put Hitler up? The workers? No, it was the same middle class. Who do you think gave the communists Russia? The peasants? No, the commissars. That same goddam middle class. In every country every where that same middle class holds every rein. Call it fascism or call it individual initiative or call it Communism, and you still don't change it any." "And now I am supposed to go on and become an officer, the symbol of every goddam thing I've always stood up against, and not feel anything about it."² ....
Warden's speech makes it clear that Jones is writing from a proletarian viewpoint, but he does not embrace communism. In fact, he wishes to repudiate all totalitarian systems. One of the most chilling scenes in *From Here to Eternity* depicts Dynamite Holmes's recruitment by a power mad brigadier general named Slater. Slater argues that in the old army, Honour and Fear of Authority equally motivated men.

However, he asserts, "the advent of materialism and machine age" have made honour obsolete and men can now be controlled only by the negative concept "Fear of Authority." Slater extends his point beyond the army. "The lot of modern man has become what I call perpetual apprehension." It is his destiny for several centuries to come, until control can become stabilised." A few men who, like himself, are blessed with "logical" minds must master this method of control-through-fear, just as it has been mastered in Germany, Japan and Russia (p.342). Slater obviously embodies Jones's vision of the men who have totally risen to power throughout the twentieth century world by using technology as a means of intimidating the masses.

Jerry H. Bryant sees the Slater episode as a crucial thematic centre of the novel. Comparing Slater to General Cummings in Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* he argues that both the
novelists are warning against the fascists within our own system, bent on establishing a "non-living society."

Prewitt's individualism poses a threat to Slater's plan for a totalitarian society and, thus, the bugler must be killed.

Jones, like his idol Steinbeck in *Of Mice and Men* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, responds deeply to the lower classes and is suspicious of any systematic attempt at organizing the masses and longs nostalgically for a vanished American individualism. Jones's solution, not unlike Steinbeck's is to turn to a highly personal kind of mysticism. The focal character in *Eternity's mystical vision* is Jack Malloy.

Malloy who precedes Prewitt to the stockade has been preaching passive Resistance derived from Gandhi, the Wobblies and his own highly individualistic life. As soon as Malloy meets Prewitt, he begins to educate the new comer to convert him to "a new religion." In summarizing Malloy's past, Jones establishes the mythical significance of his character. "There was a singular quality about Jack Malloy .... He had been almost everywhere and done almost everything in his 36 years" (p.639).

In fact, Prewitt and the reader hear Malloy spoken in reverential tones even before the character is introduced. As a boy, Malloy learned to read from the Wobblies and he has never
ceased to read voraciously. He has read Theory of the Leisure Class, Little Red Songbook and Leaves of Grass. Becoming an IWW activist just as the movement was breaking up, Malloy was a veteran of the Centralia Washington, massacre, "where they castrated first, and then lynched Wesley and afterwards sentenced seven other wobblies for 2nd degree murder for having fought back" ... (p.642). Later, Malloy was a follower of the California radical movement centred round the old group of socialists. Later Upton Sinclair's movement disgusted him because of its excessive puritanism. Malloy introduces Prewitt to names in American radicalism and then outlines how the legacy of these people must be utilised and transcended, in order to create a 'new religion' of the proletariat.

Malloy has always been promiscuous but he insists that he never slept with a woman he did not love at that time. Part of his thesis is if puritanical guilt can be removed from sexuality, love will be more possible. It is time, Malloy announces, for the evolution of "a new religion" from the amalgam of individuals.

"Every religion starts at the bottom level, with the whores, publicans and sinners. Logically, it has to start
there, with the dissatisfied. You can't get the satisfied to accept new ideas.

And every religion brings martyrdom to its innovators. That part is a test of natural selection. If the new faith is strong enough, it conquers persecution and goes on to glory.  

The central tenet of Malloy's new faith is belief in constantly changing eternally evolving God. "Might not the new religion teach that instead of being permanently fixed God is growth and evolution, a God which is never the same twice (p.646). The Old Testament concept of a 'God of Vengeance' and the New Testament concept of a "God of Forgiveness" must be replaced by an evolutionary "God of Acceptance, the God of Love - that surpasseth Forgiveness, the God who saw and heard and spoke no Evil, simply because there was done." (p.647) Old and New Testament visions of God are hopelessly compromised by the idea of guilt. Faith even in a benign "God of Forgiveness," of necessity arises out of human, feelings of sin and unworthiness. "Reincarnation," the final article of Malloy's faith, is the natural corollary of his vision of a changing God. There is a bit of Emerson in Malloy's concept of God "as the amalgam of eternally evolving individuals." In praising Joe Hill, Malloy
remarks "He must have done something, back a long time ago, before he was Joe Hill, to have earned a chance at a ticket like that one." A baffled Prewitt asked when, and Malloy replies: "In one of his previous lives" (p.648).

It is not illogical that Malloy, spokesman for the proletarian who simultaneously fears all attempts at organisation of the masses, finally settles for a mystical faith in reincarnation as the basis of his "new Religion." Artistically, however, the Malloy characterisation with its attendant philosophising does damage to Jones's novel, because Malloy's theory of incarnation is not intellectually profound. Malloy's mysticism comes to dominate far too strongly and implausibly the characterisation of Prewitt after his release from the stockade.

Jones is more powerful in depicting the sufferings of the underdogs than in developing philosophical solutions for them. Angelo Maggio the unbreakable proletarian underdog from Brooklyn representing the urban lower classes, balances Prewitt who comes from rural Kentucky background. The small Italian-American enters the stockade before Prewitt.

Maggio's arrest outside the Royal Hawaiian Hotel is one of the most memorable scenes of social protest in the
novel. Maggio, a confirmed heterosexual, has just walked out of the apartment of a homosexual named Hal whom he occasionally visits when desperate for money. The humiliation of being reduced to visiting Hal on the chance of picking up money has reduced him to desperation and he runs drunken into the night wearing only his trunks. Prewitt goes to save him from the military police and finds him outside the Royal Hawaiian. This hotel is the place where movie stars and famous people stay. Of course, it is strictly off limits to them. Maggio is not quite conscious when his friend finds him. This interlude allows Jones one of his most effective treatments of the failed communication theme. Prewitt fantasises a movie star coming out and asking him to her room. When his friend awakens, he repeats almost the same fantasy and Prewitt merely laughs at him.

Prewitt is attempting to get Maggio away when two M.P's discover them; and, then and there, the little man from Brooklyn stages his rebellion:

"Sure, I'm drunk. Sure I am. So what? Can't a man get drunk? Can't a man do anything? Can't a man ever put his goddam hands in his goddam pockets on the goddam street? Why not get picked up? You might as well be even in Leavenworth, anytime"
instead of always on the outside looking in and never getting past the glass front, like a kid outside a candy store. Why not get picked up? I aint no coward. I aint no bum. I aint no scum."

After this speech Maggio attacks the military policemen, and Prewitt is unable to rescue him.

A crucial factor in *From Here to Eternity*'s success is Jones's ability to create sympathy not only for the obvious victims of injustice like Maggio and Prewitt, but for less sympathetic characters as well. Bloom, a favourite of Dynamite Holmes, because he is a good boxer, is intensely disliked, partially for that reason. Bloom is reminiscent of Robert Cohn in Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*. Both are Jewish and have been isolated all their lives. Their isolation results in desperation which makes them more unpopular. In confusion and despair, both finally see their alienation as the result of antisemitism in others. Bloom is involved in a ridiculous fight with Prewitt which sets off the chain of events ending in the ex bugler's imprisonment. Moreover Bloom has had homosexual experiences, and is desperately insecure about his masculinity. As a result he plays a major role in a vice investigation that sweeps the island. Unable
to understand the contempt, Prewitt and others feel for him except in terms of anti-semitism and his own and other people's suspicion of his homosexual leanings, Bloom commits suicide by blowing off the tip of his head with a rifle. Ironically when Prewitt learns of Bloom's death in the stockade, he wishes that they could play Taps at his old enemy's funeral:

"Every dog face deserves to have at least one good Taps. At his funeral" (p.583).

Depiction of Preem, the original head of the mess room, is the most striking example of Jones's ability to create sudden compassion for a previously unsympathetic character. Preem is totally incompetent and does nothing to encourage any positive feeling from the reader until he is replaced by Maylon stark. Stark's promotion is due to Warden's machinations, the latter being interested primarily in his covert "war" with Holmes. The scene in which Stark replaces Preem is brief and strangely moving. Preem says he is thirty eight but looks fifty eight and has nowhere to go for the rest of his career. As Preem, a defeated and alienated man, walks out of the mess hall alone, the reader understands that blind favouritism an inevitable result of the old army's corruption, isolates every one.
James Jones's first novel is a long complex attempt to unite several disparate themes. Literary influences on the novel are many, and Jones overtly states several of them in his description of Prewitt's obsessive reading while AWOL. Prewitt responds to Jack London for two reasons: London's own concern with the lower classes and his interest in reincarnation. London echoes are strong throughout the novel and one would expect Jones to respond to a writer like London who stressed so often the theme of physical survival in an almost exclusively male world. Neither is one surprised to find Prewitt responding to Thomas Wolfe because, after all, it was Wolfe who first inspired James Jones to write.

The power of From Here to Eternity is Jones's own highly personal achievement. The novel transcends more than a little loose organisation and awkward writing, as well as the obtrusiveness of the Jack Malloy's characterisation. Jones depicts in this novel the brutal and the doomed struggles for dignity and simple survival of a group of unforgettable characters. At one point in the novel Warden reflects on Prewitt and Maggio in the stockade and tries to dismiss them as "common ordinary very normal fuck ups" (p.631). In terms of social class, all the novel's enlisted men, including
Warden, could be so described. However, because they embody values which are so essential to the best in the human race, Prewitt, Warden, Maggio and the women are anything but "ordinary." The fact that in various ways all these characters are doomed gives Jones's novel a beauty derived from pain which will always affect a substantial number of readers.

From Here to Eternity being the first novel in a "trilogy on World War II and soldiering" has its theme of the evolution of a soldier, which is individual soldier submerging his own individuality into a necessary mass anonymity. Prewitt and Warden the best soldiers in Schofield Barracks, Honolulu, know the demands of the army that includes soldiers "surrender of self." Prewitt and Warden are rich unforgettable characters. They represent rare type of individuality that cannot be destroyed without damaging humanity. In addition to their marvellous strengths, they have weaknesses to make them into credible characters. Most of the novel takes place before Dec. 7, 1941 when the U.S.A. was not in the military combat. Prewitt's and Warden's combat, is essentially and paradoxically with the army they serve. Jones reminisces "I have both loved and hated the army." The army is an old
army which had not combated for twenty years and had lapsed into a rigid, self perpetuating system. Any institution which exists after its "raison d'être" has been virtually forgotten will inevitably become corrupt. Secondary, tertiary and outright inappropriate purposes assume dominance.

Prewitt and Warden love and hate the army. They hate corruption, forgotten purpose and incompetence that accompany directionlessness. What they love is more complex. It is the concept of what the army should be and soon it will have to be. Prewitt and Warden know the war is impending and the army will have to be the main protector of the United States, its territories, its traditional values and its ideas. Warden has already begun to move towards the requisite anonymity as the novel opens.

Much of the power of From Here to Eternity is from three perceptions which are painfully reconciled with an awareness that human individuality, personified by Prewitt and Warden, must be sacrificed in the war; a sense of the irrereplaceable value of both men's individuality and the realisation that the two soldiers are continually threatened by the institutions to which they have devoted their lives. The
existence of such primary complexity and contradiction allows Jones to introduce supporting themes that make this book more than a novel about the army. *From Here to Eternity* is also concerned with the nature of "artistic creation" as in Prewitt and also the difficulty of "Human communication" as a problem for both Prewitt and Warden with each other and also with the women they love. The picture of life of all the men in Schofield Barracks has implications as proletarian fiction.
REFERENCES

