Tattoo

Jack Cady

TATTOO

a collection

Jack Cady

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for Harriette Simpson Arnow

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INTRODUCTION

The word "tattoo" can be defined as an adornment marked on the body with indelible ink; a picture or legend, a drum or trumpet signal calling soldiers back to their quarters; a strong pulsation; a heart beat. Jack Cady's collection, TATTOO, embodies all of these definitions. While *Flying Home, James Jones* and *Transcendentalism and the American Road* roll like drumbeats calling attention to periods and places on the American landscape and the aura of guilt is indelibly etched on the characters in the stories *Tattoo* and *Term — Now We Are Fifty* and *The Priest* trace the legacy of vengeance and destruction spawned by a world where faith has become a dogma. Through it all, Cady demonstrates the skill and sharp sensitivity that marked his promise as a writer in his previous collection, THE BURNING.

As any writer knows, the ability to master several forms is often more of a dream than a reality. Jack Cady has, in this collection, exhibited that rare quality, the versatility of style that blends both essay and fiction forms into a voice that is particularly rich and poetic. In these three essays and four stories, Cady tells us that there will be another beer, another book, another chance to say I love you "as long as you can stay willing to run before the wind."

Transcendentalism was never pure. It was

> always a process that led to the discovery of truth . . . and so it teaches finally that we must tell no lies, love each other as soon as we come to love ourselves, and then be unafraid to take our chances.

Cady's characters do just that. Edna, the aunt in *Tattoo*, has seen the quest for a better life turn sour, but accepts her husband, Justin, for what he is just as she has accepted the guilt that has been with her for all of her adult life. In this short story, Cady's voice is close to the subject. The characters are developed within the conventional framework of plot and action, and the didactic statement is woven into the fabric of the fictional voice. The characters are both recognizable and real. They are from any hometown, yet they are peculiar to Cady's middlewest roots and made viable through Cady's uncompromising voice. It is an intimate story, a story that carries with it a sense of immediacy that has often been termed autobiographical. But as it is with any good writer, Cady is not *merely* confessional. The first person narrator is observant and while telling us about his personal world, he tells us something about ourselves. As awful as it is, it is the idea of our own spiritual nature magnified.

But Cady does not pretend to assume that Truth will set you free. In *Term*, his main character does not avoid truth nor is it totally revealed. It simply exists. "Speak true and you can ride any wind," the narrator tells his student, Kath, but he cannot hear or understand what is meant by his own statement until the end of the story, where he confesses, "And what I would tell them is not a lie. But it is a lie if I say it. Melville wrote of good and evil, while I speak only of sin." The narrator has begun to see that, much like his students, he is an infant, still in the throes of intellectual and spiritual slumbering. Cady never lets the reader forget that only through some word or conventional image can the secret of one moment be flashed to another moment, that even moments of tragedy and disillusion can be fruitful.

What happens when disillusion finally comes home to roost is the pivotal point for the short story, *Now We Are Fifty*. For Cady, every real tragedy is an affirmation of faith in life, a declaration that even if God is not in His Heaven, then at least Man is in his world. In *Now We Are Fifty*, the tragic hero is presented not as an expression of despair but of triumph over despair and of confidence in the value of human life. The animal in man responds to things according to their substance: edible, helpful or plastic. His only joy is to push himself through the natural world until death stops him. Man heightened and intensified is man himself in good and evil, fulfilling himself in goodness and cancelling out his own identity in evil. It is difficult for the protagonist, the narrator, to understand that for Frazier, a man who is growing in the likeness to God, faith begins even under adverse conditions to change into vision. The narrator is puzzled by Frazier's response to the tragedy presented in the story, but it is Frazier's endurance, his dauntlessness, his love that raise him up into the good. He carries within himself a proof of a deity which he can understand only by experience.

The story has a sense of mystery, an ominous quality that sets the pace and renders the setting specific and particular, but the philosophical impact, also present in the other selections in this collection, is never lost. Cady does not interfere with the pace by postulating *ad nauseum* on whether or not Frazier is poet or mystic, stump preacher or theologian. Those questions only serve to increase the tension between the two main characters. The inherent tragedy, the tragedy of men who have lost sight of values, is used to move the plot forward without succumbing to the lateral and ricochet motions of loquacious undulations regarding philosophical issues. Cady does not presume to use the grand and loftier tones of all-wise and all-knowing — those shouts which, however cultivated and erudite they may be, are often directed toward those assumed to be hard of hearing — rather he focuses on circumstances that might

promote introspection.

In the essay, *Flying Home*, Cady chooses a different setting, but again, it is circumstance that enables him to ruminate. While *Now We are Fifty* focuses on a single event, *Flying Home* encompasses the enormity of the effects of World War II. And Cady develops his essay by drawing upon incidents within that greater circumstance. When the earth was vast and the sun controlled man's waking hours, landscape artists drew the human figure as a mere speck buffeted by forces beyond his comprehension. God, man and nature somehow dwindled in the course of intervening centuries. The world grew smaller, its distant corners more easily accessible. The meanness of human life had somehow separated from Godliness. Cady begins this essay with the event of the Ford Tri-motor. "This was before the flowers came and Baez began asking where they had gone. . . We were told that the way to get an heir was to contact God. He dispatched a stork." This was the post-war society, a society in which "time rolls, the generations pulse, pant, dream, make babies." The essay *Flying Home*, is a drum roll that marked the years of the war and set the pace for the years that followed.

Cady plunges into those years with a chronicle of history linked by quotes from such notables as Lionel Hampton, John Steinbeck, FDR, James Jones, and Buckminister Fuller. Yet the voice is always Cady's. A plaintive voice that echoes the world of children reared in those turbulent years, children who were too young to go to war but still subject to the effects of that war.

> They raised a generation of kids to believe in expectations that became increasingly unreal in the world that was building. Their attitude was unreal. If I have heard it once, I have heard it ten thousand times that, "My kid is not going to have to put up with what we went through."
>
> There never has been, and likely never will be again, a nation more enamoured of education

> than was this nation in the late '40s and the '50s. At a time when one half of one percent of the British population ever saw the inside of a university, the U.S. opened every door and built new doors, sometimes for the sheer joy of opening them. What was meant by education is another matter. We look at then, look at now, shake our heads and understand. Poor no more. They went to school in order to achieve success. They were hungry enough to cultivate hunger of the belly and mind against a time when there would never be hunger again, anywhere.

In *James Jones*, Cady writes, "Somewhere beneath the brutality of social control and banal assumption, somewhere beyond the stereotypes that other writers have come to love so well, human beings dream and attempt to love." Jack Cady's respect, admiration and love for James Jones is obvious in his essay on Jones. But it is more than a eulogy, a posthumous criticism of one writer who admires another. Through Jones, Cady examines the machinery of war and society: a country hellbound for technology; the stark brutality of war; the astigmatism of social stereotypes. It is a masterful undertaking and Cady craftily "expose(s) through ten thousand doors and windows aspects of our condition." This essay is a tribute to THE THIN RED LINE; FROM HERE TO ETERNITY; and SOME CAME RUNNING. "If, in a hundred years, a reader wished to know what the American middlewest felt like, tasted like, in fact, *was* like after World War II, then Some Came Running would be the only book necessary to read." As always, Cady is concerned with the effects of the generation that spawned him, and others like him, as writers. While this essay is more of a critical review than the others, like *Flying Home* and *Transcendentalism and the American Road*, it offers yet another view of Cady's "speculation about society, its fraudulance, its hideous control," and at the same time, affords Cady the opportunity to pay homage to Jones, "a writer using the format of the novel in

experiments that would partly succeed, partly fail."

On the whole, the collection, TATTOO, carries the theme of the "great" war, World War II where men of valour, true and brave, saved the world and shoved this country into the smothering arms of technology. Albeit, these were honest actions where this country saw itself doing all the right things for all the right reasons, but as Cady so aptly emphasizes, it was more likely than not, many of the wrong things for all the right reasons. While the collection does not exclude me as a product of that generation, it is a montage of images from my father's generation and as a twenty-three year Army veteran, my father would easily identify with its themes, motifs and characters. Like my father, I accept them for what they are. Nothing more. Cady presents the archetypes and stereotypes of males force-fed on the bitter juices of war. Rafe, in the story *The Priest*, is Man, the archetype of yesterday and tomorrow, while Justin in *Tattoo*, is a stereotype beset by the limitations of chauvinistic values. But in the essay, *James Jones,* Cady slides into the quicksand of literary criticism when he attempts to go beyond these male characterizations. In this essay, he examines female characterizations, a laudable task, but in the end, the reader is still confronted with females who are motivated into action by the search for the male; beseeched by the male; guided or misled by the male. These women, caught in the scenario of the great war, are pained by the discovery of the feminine mystique: from Kath in *Term* to Edna in *Tattoo*, the mother and sister in *The Priest*, and in *James Jones*, "Geneve Lowe, ballcutter on her way up," or "Gwen French . . . college professor of English who is a thirty-five year old virgin greatly interested in the love and sex life of writers." Unlike the narrator or Frazier in *Now We Are Fifty*, these women do not investigate desires and fears about nature and the structure of the world; they are garden flower varieties: fed, clipped and nurtured by the surrounding male flora and fauna, all tilled in the soil of a post-war society.

Cady traces the corpulent aftermath of those post-war

years in *Transcendentalism and the American Road.* In this essay, the poet's voice offers the readers an even broader view of Cady's philosophical style. It is often gut level basic, abrupt and brutal. From the landscape, to the people, to the life of the trucker — the reader is bombarded with sensations.

> The allusion to horses cinches . . . Faces modes and métiers change . . . Clear night. Maybe cloudy night, rainy night or snow . . . A rabbit, possum or cat causes a liquid thump running under a tandem . . . A trembling leg when you clutch too hard . . . hands ten two on the steering wheel . . . that phallic handle you are jerking . . .

Here more than in the other selections, the sustained metaphor, the blending of poetry and philosophy is evident. Through control of language, Cady places the reader in two worlds at once: the demanding stretch of endless road that buzzes/zonks/rips the trucker past toll gates and truck stops, and the Emersonian view of Nature that reflects Kerouac, Ethan Brand and Hawthorne, among others.

> Emerson thought a lot of what he termed the Mind of The Past. He was not exactly speaking of history. Now the Mind of The Past begins to unroll, for here the weather is dry, and where the salt does not gather too thick a nail will last for years.

Transcendentalism and the American Road has a pulse that moves from the iambic voice of description and philosophy to the spondaic heartbeat throb of the road.

> Blue lights over the ready-line at the truck stop. Rig checked, lubed, whistling on a high diesel whine, surging on idle. Sharp stink of number two diesel.
>
> The cab smells. That is one of the things that makes a truck personal. The cab smells of the

> hours and days and weeks of sitting in that small area of intimate cubic feet; staring into the sun, sweating, farting, smoking, drinking coffee, writing the log. The cab is office, bedroom, kitchen. A lot of housekeeping goes on in any truck.

It is a surreal landscape and Cady paints a mural where "Utah is a hot breeze;" where storms approach like a "Stephen Crane metaphor of war as machine;" where towns are familiar even when they are small and foreign and the trucker must "kick it through Winnemucca, Wells and Elko" while "Denver folds in the mirror" and "farms slide past on the Kansas flat where homesteaders were once narrow minded but generous." And as we follow this route, Cady describes how we can discern more of God in everything from the frail flower to the everlasting stars. Even in evil, that dark cloud which hangs over creation, we can discern rays of light and hope and gradually come to see in suffering and temptation, proofs and instruments of the sublimest purposes of wisdom and love.

From the objective explorations of the post-war era in *Flying Home* to the extension of discoveries of self in *Now We Are Fifty*, Cady examines the quest for the better life turned sour. These are not poetic stories of the golden age but moments of visionary unity. *Transcendentalism and the American Road* is the link between the critical forms of *Flying Home* and the Jones essays to the fictional forms of *Tattoo* and *Now We Are Fifty*. Just as Edna in *Tattoo* has been marked with the indelible ink of guilt, that last judgment voice of the American middlewest, Kath in *Term* and Frazier in *Now We Are Fifty* have been subdued by the spirits of dark voices, of shadow, the resonance of preachers howling Armaggedon. These howls also echo in the world of *The Priest*, where Rafe, epitomizing all of Cady's characters, lives "in the time of silence with the green voice of The God in his mind," and tries to remember his father's words. Rafe's enigmatic existence is not too far from the

world Cady describes in *Flying Home*, yet in *The Priest*, Cady has reached the zenith of blending mysticism, philosophy and fiction.

Rafe is the mystic who transcends the boundaries of fixed points. The story is not one of nature versus man, but the realization that God and nature are part of man. Rafe is of this world but he is otherworldly. The question so carefully woven into this story is: What is to come after? It is a question that is both biblical and contemporary and Cady's voice reflects both points of view. He opens the story with "In the beginning was the Word and he had known that all his life." Cady is the seer, the griot, the science fiction writer, the mystic, the priest — all striving to answer a timeless question. And the answer, never clearly understood, is the motivation that draws Rafe to the story's climatic resolution just as it has always motivated Man, ". . . the tenacity of the human spirit that was always afraid but willing to lay bones along the sun-cracked trails . . . " as Cady writes elsewhere in TATTOO. Rafe struggles with language, groping for speech and understanding less and less. He is a link with the past — the Neanderthal, the Cro-Magnon. He is pre-history confronted with the future, a desultory tomorrow in which the question, What is to come after:, remains unanswerable. Yet Cady shows us that the greatest opportunity afforded the human is the development of the capacity of love. Rafe reaches out for love, and in his final years, as George Chapman wrote in the 16th century play, ALL FOOLS, finds The God within all men.

> So love, fair shining in the inward man,
> Brings forth in him the honorable fruits
> Of valour, wit, virtue, and haughty thoughts,
> Brave resolution and divine discourse.

Rafe watches the Diggers and tries to feel love. When he finally faces the Godliness in himself, finally reaches out for love, "At the end of the world, all is holy." This story sweeps past the silence of wind and brings life to the

fictional future in much the same way as Frank Herbert's DUNE or Ursula LeGuin's TOMBS OF ATUAN. It is as prophetic as a biblical passage and as poetically esoteric as Thoreau's WALDEN.

Throughout this colleciton, TATTOO, Cady explores aspects of good and evil, the antithesis of the preacher and the theologian; the deep strain of mysticism and practical mysticism that wind like "spirits of mist, thunder, wind and spirits of the dark" through American transcendentalist schools of thought. Like Thoreau, Cady describes how every man is the Lord of a realm beside which the earthy empire is but a petty state, a hummock left by the ice, not unlike the melting and the memories of the old July that plague Rafe. And like Rafe, Cady causes us to consider that society and world are whiffs of smoke. All that counts is the soul, man's natural state.

Colleen J. McElroy
Seattle, Washington
August, 1978

Tattoo

Today she is a good woman, and although yesterday is gone and so is she, an awful illumination hangs about her memory. It is the mute dread of unforgiven sin, and it exists like the rumor of weeping in our pecuniary and jiggling-breasted day. I walk through the strobing center of the blare and recall the silhouette of a coiffured woman, the bright gleam of a new coin, and imagine many rows of dead faces; paleness surrounded by ebony caskets with the nose-numbing perfume of mortuaries hanging like drapes. She was my aunt Edna and she was good. Everyone says that now.

I see one other thing that exists as vividly in my mind as the black Sunday coats of a dozen rural preachers. It is a small grave marker of coarse concrete, the figure of a kneeling lamb. The eyes are round and ill cast, the ears curved like dull and circular horns above configurations of molded fleece. The feet are tucked under. Altogether, a blob of cement sitting on a small slab among tall and dying weeds. In a way the lamb is the whole story. I think of pathos and the success of small hopes. I did not think of such things when my sister and I were small and vied for our aunt's favor as she took us to movies or Sunday School.

We were not unusual children. There was no magic in

This tale was written for Ella Rappe' and Lillie Schmidt.

the rattle and spit of electricity from trolleys that passed beneath my aunt's window. The rain that swept the panes of the dying restaurant below her second floor apartment was cold. Always cold. I wonder if we grew too quickly in defense against the cold; leaving to find our American fortunes in the clatter of roads, the quarrel of classrooms and in the busy sales of marketable goods under dangling bulbs.

We grew in an Edward Hopper world. To this day the painting of the Nighthawks reminds me of that restaurant. There is a harmed, sharp-faced woman in that painting. There is also a hawkish man who, externally at least, sometimes reminds me of me. A second man with a washed-out face tends the counter and doubtless serves chopped-up portions of the American head on the platter of the 1930's.

I grew and went about other business. My aunt continued to work. Her picture would not vary in my mind for many years. It is a childhood picture of a large woman with sedate clothing and enormous bosom who emptied treasures of gum and pennies from a black purse. Lately the picture has changed. The sin hovers. I did not even know of the sin until I was thirty and deemed old enough to forgive. Forgive whom?

She was born in 1890, was pregnant with an illegitimate child in 1906, and in early 1907 the child died at birth. The concrete lamb has been kneeling over that child's grave ever since; and this is the 70's and the lamb has knelt for more than sixty-five years. Past the death of cousins and the disappearance of high-peaked farm houses shedding snow in the midst of eighty acres of corn-stubbled fields. My aunt left the country town after the birth and moved to a small midwestern city twenty miles away. She was not a stranger there, but in 1907 it was probably as far as a young woman could flee. The lamb remained in the family plot, the stone nameless and accusatory.

Sometimes I imagine that it rose on cracking joints at night to frolic. Sixty-five years.

Her first man and the father of the child was a medical student who was the son of the town doctor. The doctor delivered the child and it died. The son quit medical school and disappeared. Death hisses through the past, and the seeds of ancient springtimes root deep and live long.

Her second man. And now here's the tale. A mindless, vicious and tongue-wagging malcontent with arms tattooed in celebration of motherhood and tall ships. A sanctimonious ex-adventurer who stood with God and coveted virginity. My uncle Justin. In 1918 he had just returned from the war. A Navy Man, and he sailed in a battleship around the world. A gunner's mate. It was enormous.He was grand and tattooed and muscled and he had *just sailed around the world.*

They were married after six months and after her confession about the lamb. Two years later, at age thirty, she bore a son who would be their only child.

Tattoos do not change. When my sister and I were young we watched the snarled anchor, the leaping panther, the piercd heart and the full rigged ship vibrate over muscles that were hard and capable. Later the muscles changed. In the depression there was no work. There was only the radio, the systematic soap opera fantasy that drained a perhaps stupid man's will. Much later, when he was old and lazy; a man pale and of no muscle, the tattoos were brilliant in red and blue, palpably etched against a canvas of pallid flesh. Only the tattoos were real. The man in every way failed to become his symbols.

Was there ever a chance? I was in awe of him when I was little because he ignored me and yelled at his wife and son, but I loved my aunt dearly.

"Buy yourself a present. You're so big now that I don't know what to give you."

I was seven years old in thirty-nine. I had seen a half-dollar several times, but to own one, to be given one... the gleam of the huge coin she passed to me made me gasp. I did not realize that the coin would buy nothing as great as its own lustre and so I bought an airplaine. We carried it to the mortuary for my aunt's twice weekly appointment with the dead.

This story is so short. She lived eighty-two years of days; a tiresome round that included cold lips above jaws frozen in rigor mortis, above manipulated eyelids; the work upon work that always returned her to the apartment where her unemployed ex-sailor boomed platitudes and sat by the radio among mugs emblazoned with the pictures of ships, medals for righteous conduct, souvenirs of crossing the equator. "Til death do you part." She worked with death.

The days of torn scalps. The days of mending and knitting and patching above breaks in heads that were soon to be skulls. My aunt was a hairdresser for the dead and also ran a small beauty shop for the living. Death paid twice as much, and it was work that was available in the depression. She had a son who she hoped would finish college.

"...and Justin never let her forget it. If she complained about anything he always came back with nagging about that." My mother's eyes when she told me the story of the lamb were without judgment. Indeed, my mother knew our entire family so well that the knowledge placed her beyond the requirement to judge.

By then the depression was gone, the Second War was over, and my young world was a memory that had faded before the second American reconstruction.

"You really mean that she has lived with Justin all these years and suffers from something that happened before he knew her?"

"Right is right."

"And wrong is wrong, but we both know better."

"So does Justin," my mother said, "or maybe he doesn't."

It was amazing, this evil perpetuated by zealous righteousness. The occasion was my first big experience with time structuring itself in my mind. I believe it is my aunt who has made me an amateur historian

My mother told me the story and then turned away to other business. My family has always worked hard, and on this occasion my mother's work was to help feed forty people. The year was 1962, the last family reunion we would have in that small town that is still as raw as new boards; a town enclosed by iced December fields which have been cleared for nearly two hundred years. I wonder at the rawness of small towns and think that nothing man-made and beautiful was ever constructed at the bottom of a mountain.

The family arrived. One of my cousins was the local Packard and Farmall dealer. A second cousin, a man of the hearty variety, announced that he was in the pig business and we all laughed. Children swirled between our legs. I took a position in a corner of the living room and knew that what I watched was the last gasp of an anachronism.

Reunion. Had there ever been union? I remembered my childhood, walking excursion with my aunt, the perfumed smell of waiting rooms where I looked at pictures in magazines while my aunt worked in a back room. In a little while Edna and Justin arrived.

Their son had driven them. When the purple and white station wagon was parked, his children joined the throng. The son came next, walking ahead of his wife. I had not seen my aunt and uncle in several years. She was helping him from the car. With the story of the lamb fresh in my mind I watched and took a small and criminally vicious pleasure in noting that my uncle limped. She supported him as he walked to the house. His hands

dangled.

I glanced at the son who had taken a soft chair; graduate of a business school and a Navy destroyer, loud with assertion. He was sitting, legs crossed, and over a rumpled sock the red eye of a tattoed cat stared from above the ankle. I hurried to the door to greet her and help her with her coat.

My aunt. My dear aunt, beloved of a childhood that had contained some hope of wizardry, some belief in prestidigitation if not in magic. I talked to her for a long time that day. Saw the sagging wattles of a once full and healthy face, the drooping flesh of the upper arm, the implied immortality of a single gold-capped tooth. She smiled and was happy. I grinned like a clown performing in pain and wondered. What was this resolve that lived so long, worked so tediously, forebore joy in this world with complete confidence in a supposed next, and resulted in happiness? I judge. Frequently I judge wrong. Did she judge?

"I'm so proud of you. We all are." She spoke of my university education as I might speak of my son's report card.

Later she rambled. "...after the war...you remember the shop."

"I remember. There was a sign with the silhouette of a beautiful woman." I also remembered the machines that temporarily set hair styles that came from movies where instant orchestras appeared on 1930's side streets. Black and silver machinery that twisted over heads to make all women into temporary Medusas.

"...after the war. The home permanents came out. I had to sell the shop. Still work some. Anderson and Hittle still call."

I shuddered. Listened. Felt the sweep of guilt and work and time.

"...gets his Navy pension...it's really Old Folks pension but it don't hurt if he calls it Navy. We get by. Oh, look at the children. It tickles me pink to see everybody here and look so good."

We were called to dinner. Uncle Justin, by virtue of being a deacon, said grace. He properly thanked Jesus the Lamb of God and slobbered the Amen because he was hungry. A customary thing, but I excused myself as soon as possible.

I saw my aunt and uncle once more and that was two months ago. I am forty years old now and do not understand my age, only that I have it. Passing by plane from the west coast to St. Louis I rented a car and drove to spend a weekend among the streets of the clanging city where I had spent my childhood.

"You must see Edna," my mother said, "She's failing."

Failing, and I am forty. I went to see my aunt.

The apartment was hardly changed since I was a child. The picture of a battleship with curling spray from a rainbow was yellow with time. It hung over my uncle's bed. His souvenir mugs stood on a strangely feminine whatnot that had been the high school shop project of the son. A framed good conduct medal was glassed over but was still dusty and faded. It hung beside the picture. Painted sea shells with brave mottos, bits of coral...the man lay flat on his back, pale and thin, a neon of tattoos with breath as light as the passage of a ghost. My uncle was already a spectre, but my aunt still lived.

She made instant coffee with trembling hands. She was so thin. The enormous bosom gone. The strong hands faded, but still somehow alive, like weak light through waxed paper. She had not recognized me at first and was ashamed.

"How is he?"I stopped, silently cursing myself for the stupidest of all questions. The man was dying. Fool. Fool to ask such a question.

She was not offended. The coffee cups were dimestore ironware. Plain. The coffee was bitter because trembling hands had spilled some, added more.

"Jimmy, Jimmy." She looked at me. Proud. I, who have violated scruples she held dear. Then she remembered my question.

"I pray for one thing," she said. "I never asked for much...no, sometimes I asked for a lot, but I pray that Justin dies first."

I could not answer. She knew. All along she knew. For her whole life of submission she knew.

"No one...they would not take care of him," she said. "He's not the easiest man."

She knew. Maybe she even loved him, but she was not fooled about the man. She was not fooled about the idiot chase of an ignorant's repetitious ethic over a lifetime. She had forgiven herself. She had forgiven him.

I sat holding the cup, the bitterness of the coffee as immediate and vital as sharp words. A question rose in my mind, stood like anguish in my head because I could say nothing, could of course not ask that question.

I took both her hands and spoke innocuously around the question which was, of course, "Dear aunt, *dearest lady,* what can I *do* for you before you die?"

Later that evening I changed my plane reservations and lost a business day. The next morning, just before dawn, I drove along country roads that were gravel when I was a child, that are now clean-surfaced macadam.

It was not easy to find. The entrance was different, and on the slightly rolling slopes the new section of the cemetery changed the perspective. I parked the car, opened the trunk, stood watching the early glow of dawn over the distant fields that year after year expressed vegetables and occasional wildflowers. The practical, hard-working American land.

A swarm of birds crossed the beginning day like salt superstitiously flung backward over the shoulder of the fields, and dew-heavy bushes crowded fencerows and over-grew old graves. The bottom of a ditch was mud-sodden, with occasional shallow pools of stagnant water. I walked through tall weeds, searched, found it.

The marker was smaller than I remembered, and the base was sunk in earth; the curling horn-like ears canted forward increasing the kneeling and submissive posture. I rocked the marker back and forth. It came free, the base mud-clotted.

A hundred pounds, perhaps. No more. It was possible to get it to the trunk of the car, close the trunk, and leave. There is little more to tell.

My uncle died a month ago. My aunt died yesterday, and the circle is closed. The family will erect a marker, and the family will continue its various judgments and forgiveness, its successes and errors...as I will continue mine.

My judgment is this: I dropped the marker into a deep but muddy river that runs through tamed land and beside tight-fisted and narrow minded towns. It will never, through the rest of time, interrupt the wind that blows cold over that finally unmarked grave.

Transcendentalism and the American Road

A presentation after the manner of Ralph Emerson

It is several years since I last climbed up in a tractor-trailer to pop spurs into its high behind. The allusion to horses cinches. There is an intense relationship between men and their trucks, and latterly, women and their trucks. Faces, modes and métiers change. It is still the same old road.

Some trucks have eighteen gears. At night I still sometimes lie in bed listening to the throb and cracking as somebody feels for the slot, double-clutches, and gooses it riding on in. I'm a romantic, sometimes, but I am not a romantic about the road.

There is such a thing as creative truck driving. I want to talk about that as I run San Francisco/Boston while also talking about American transcendentalism. Thoreau was its practitioner and Emerson its prophet. They lived in an age of expanding technology, but it was not a seventy mile an hour technology. That put a limit on what they could see when they looked at Nature, and Nature was one of their big subjects.

Great efforts can sometimes be seen as allegories. People make all kinds of journeys, whether they drive trucks or study mathematics. I speak of the feel of the thing while discussing Emersonian notions of Nature,

the Mind of the Past, and Experience as they fit with the thrust of high powered machinery over the road. If you have some other road, a corn field or a business office, a salesroom or a bank, who can say that they have always been the driver instead of the driven?

The start is made a little after midnight; and if the start is from San Francisco it might as well have been from Des Moines or Tallahassee or Portland, either Maine or Oregon. The road map carries the route and is similar to the palm of the hand. Lifelines on the palm are usually the deepest and best marked. So it is with the map, the major north-south and east-west routes section and square and explain the rough parallelogram that is the USA. It is a mathematical disorder that makes a lot of sense.

Clear night, maybe cloudy night, rainy night or snow. It is terrible to put tire chains on a truck, so that in the north you are always thinking about snow. Blue lights over the ready-line at the truck stop. Rig checked, lubed, whistling on a high diesel whine, surging on idle. Sharp stink of number two diesel.

The cab smells. That is one of the things that makes a truck personal. The cab smells of the hours and days and weeks of sitting in that small area of intimate cubic feet; staring into the sun, sweating, farting, smoking, drinking coffee, writing the log. The cab is office bedroom, kitchen. A lot of house-keeping goes on in any truck.

In addition, the cab smells of itself. Leather, graphite, household oil on the appliances. The smell of rubber, the bite of ammonia used on the windshield and mirrors. After a few months of living in a truck the smell is as familiar as the morning smile of that lovin'lover you've always dreamed of and probably won't have; but imagination is real.

And I'd turn over and she'd be asleep and then she'd wake up and I would be young again.

But smell is also real and it is not imagination. After living with it so long one knows immediately when there is disturbance. Time to find a truck stop with a laundry. Time to wash the sheets and blankets.

And a truck sounds. It is the subtle, unthought of noises that, missing, would first make you uncomfortable and would finally make you pull over. Slight sighs and cushionings of the five hundred dollar custom seat, the rattle of pencils in the chartbox, the bare hum of vibration in the doghouse cover; these and perhaps two dozen tiny others live as a current beneath the roar of the engine, growl of gears, hiss of compressed air from the brakes and the rush of drumbeats from the stacks. And a truck is tactile. All good truckers are nuts about cleanliness. When it did not feel clean I can remember having a hard time driving.

And visual. The way, after midnight, that the marker lights cast suggestions of gold leaf and shadow to edge the west coast mirrors, the red cast of the directionals, and the green glow that is made into a suggestion on the dash by turning down the rheostat. In the west coasts the van rises, the center and rear markers following down the road like yellow stars drawn to the sun system of the headlights.

It is your truck and in a way it is you. The imaginary lover is real enough but you've never kissed that smile; and sometimes it happens that given the chance you would not let it happen - unless maybe you were drinking - because love can cause pain, but as long as the hands are ten-two on that wheel and everything is done right that truck will break no hearts. Climb up after the last cup of coffee, settle into the feel of the rig, and pull it yelling into the road.

We all have our tools and they become part of us.

Speed. In the years after I quit trucking the word took grim overtones as the drug culture expanded and meth buzzed and zonked and ripped through systems already

high on the out front crash of rock music. Speed. On the road it means something else. Speed is constancy, taking advantage of every lull in the landscape that gives temporary advantage. Finally, it is also the ability to stay wake. The driver of a large truck thinks in terms of wind, engine rpms, grades.

Whales play off the California shores, and since Melville they have been a symbol of the forces of nature, a contrast to the freeways out of San Francisco that are always busy, blinks of red tail lights and flashers exclaiming in pips against the blue flourescence that illuminates the Bay Bridge. In the mirrors the city rises, people choked, intolerably beautiful, intolerably mean. Insurance companies parade battalions of manicured secretaries and wide-tie, narrow-eyed guys who diddle claims and joke of mistresses. Chinese slugging it out against the high cost of living in the city; Chinese making it, climbing over the backs of other Chinese. In North Beach, Italians. Red wine, cappucino, Caruso records on the juke.

Golden Gate Park, echoes and pekin ducks, Japanese tea garden, acres of grass and flowers, the Brundage collection... aquarium, animals, the once known hippie hill, and screwing in the bushes. Echoes and God and Ginsberg.

San Francisco. Stop at the toll gate, make sure of the receipt against taxes, and haul one ass and sixty thousand pounds of truck and load out of there.

Man should not be a writer, Emerson says. He should be Man writing. We should not be truckers either, but ourselves driving a truck.

It is even better than that, Ralph Emerson. You rode trains, ships and coaches. Did you ever walk the working bridge of that ship, or stand high in the cab of a long-nosed eight wheeler that screamed like faith down the narrow line of silver tracks, tracks that disappear like the point of an arrow into darkness. There's a

transcendental high, the point being that it could not be attained without the use of the machine. It transforms Nature. It transforms life.

Kick through the gears, feel the hump of the load, gather rpms and hoard them; rev, grab, line the tach just under the red jumping over point. At seventy miles an hour a lot of things are happening. Listen.

There is a great hand of wind pushing the mirrors. There is thunder in the stacks. Bounce, thrust, kick of the van which is laying two thousand square feet of aluminum sail against any quartering wind. Thump and hum of 10/22 tires, the song of nylon and weight; power wailing like the hammers of hell as overdrive comes singing in and you smash thirty tons down a narrowing road that is silver in vivid moonlight.

Lots of times; just one singing bunch of times when it was late and the cops were oiling the red, scratchy fire of the night shift from their eyes with coffee, I would turn off the lights and drive like a dark banshee under that moon. Shadows then of fence posts, trees, the dark squatting farmhouses; all the antithesis of wind because they stand and break the flow. Open road, open engine, wind lifting the trailer so that the rig weighed less and howled like a pagan hymn. Lots of times. I *was* the wind.

Emerson would understand this. kidding each other, a friend and I write letters back and forth. The Emersonian view of Nature (my friend says) is something like an x-ray, and something like $E = MC^2$, but that is too mechanical... to which I add that I'll buy the formula if we can include the expression that $Pi = 3$. Emerson knew, and tries to tell us about Nature, about us. Nature does not give a damn. Its expression is there, and it is we who must give a damn and be willing sometimes to drive without headlights. Everything costs and not much can be bought with money.

The transcendentalists paid in different ways.

"Where is the literature which gives expression to

Nature?" Thoreau knows as he asks. "....would be a poet who could impress the winds and streams into his service, to speak for him; who nailed words to their primitive senses...."

Aye. Thoreau was doing it and paying the price. I read Wild Apples and taste and dream. Something sensual there, intimated, and I indignantly wonder why men cannot admit that they are deprived of the original pain and fury of giving physical birth. Since Freud there has been much nonsense. What appears on the page must be no more narrow than a barrel, and only half as long... and here comes that long, high truck with a squall like passion thrusting down the tunnel of night, grooving between the fenceposts.

High. High. Nature translated by machine, oblivious for a time of the hunching butts of men and the spreading legs of women. The liquids are all in the crotch of the engine, the churning crankshaft, the spitting injectors.

Of course there is sex. It helps sell Bibles. Of course, Henry. Shit yes. Of course, Sigmund. But sex is as natural, or can be, as Nature. Should we fear either or both in combination?

Nature transformed, transcendent. I once saw fifty miles away and blazing over the flat run of land what at first I took to be artillery practice. No storm could be so, I thought, and I was raised beside huge rivers which are natural channels of storm. Approaching, like a Stephan Crane metaphor of War as machine; the storm sweeping and throwing flame that illuminated red through the black, high-arching clouds. The storm closing with dragons in its teeth, ozone and enamel on its breath, and I, a charging Don Quixote screaming horsepower and song, defiance and the virtue of then dedicated loins. The crash, the shock, and you meet the thunder, thundering in, become the thunder.

In Oregon there was once a sunset sky of piling clouds that were like tumbled and dying roses on a casket.

No doubt our own preoccupation with sex causes us to look askance at the transcendentalists, that suspects illumination through repression. Thank then, those origins that allow all of us to be laughable. We accuse them of being preoccupied? Puritan mentality. The kind of mind that cannot conceive Christ never sweating, never walking across dusty country, never stepping behind a tree to take a leak?

Strange thoughts as the road unreels. Who was that woman named Mary, not his mother, the other one?

Thinking collapses the road time. There was a twist and howling coming over the mountains, the rig slowed to a walk while the engine strolled high and vibrant. After Donner Pass sunlight hit a domain, a valley between mountains that extended flat for thirty miles and is visible its length. Streams in the valley, the high waters of higher and melting snow. Green-fading, rusty orange corn that is stumpy, and the yellow linoleum of wheat, polished and glossy in the sun. King Arthur ruled such a place. A kingdom. Kick it in the ass, rev on over the top. Reno ahead. Transcendental low.

The journey that some of us make... it is easy to tell who stays home; they are those who will not admit that at one time or another in their lives they were not capable of any ill, or any beauty, no matter how great.

Aggie's Truck Stop. Where the fleet seat to meet and treat; to greet the heat of hustled meat, to eat the ass of cold defeat, ere bleating nickle-less onward.

And the Hopeful roll her onto the ready line after buying fuel for Nevada. First buck's worth of nickles is free. Chow better than average, and the jackpot lights clang songs of tinkle-bell glory; the beer cold and the machines hot, except for that phallic handle you are jerking. Going to be a come down, going to be a bust.

One of the ways my truck was different was this: On the flat snout of the cab was painted, "Somewhere i have never traveled." I blessedly nigh had to break the fingers

of a sign painter to get him to make the i small, and it would not be until years later that I would realize that it takes some learning, takes some sense, to deserve the knowledge that humility does not mean humiliation. The painter had been right; but then, who of us has not been a sophomore at something, sometime.

It is easy to lose the money, and it makes you want to hump some stranger even when you know what's happening. Beer churning in the gut, a hundred bucks down the tube of the dollar slot, regret and loneliness knotting in the throat. Neon and clanging. The thick, beer tasting thought that maybe it would be good to catch a ride to town, invest a couple hundred at twenty-one, make a bundle. The beer wins. You lose.

Catch a ride back to the truck stop, the neon still winking in a ticking, precise, chronometer action; spelling the seconds of the day, the night, the day, your days. The truck is sitting there. Silent.

"You be okay?" The guy driving is hot to get rid of you. Hot to get inside and blow dough.

The answer. "Sure." Knowing it's a lie, hoping somewhere down inside it's the truth. Wire the company for an advance, get some sleep. Ethan Brand must have made this trip once in his search for the unforgivable sin. Did Hawthorne know it?

Where is the solace of Nature now. The sky is beginning to burn in the east. Clouds are as pink and blue as the caucus over a first born kid, and it makes no difference. This is not nature and the machine. This is the road. There is no consolation, only sleep. Later, waking, the beer is still heavy and there are smells in the cab but the nose is no good. Tonight, or late this afternoon, will see you back out there like some dumb Kerouac on the prod.

The log book is a sustained metaphor of lies. Catch up the log, juggle the time, fake repairs. More coffee, free in the trucker's lounge that is kept exclusive from tourists,

and a trembling leg when you clutch too hard. Rig out of balance because the head is out of balance, but the fading light is clear and unrestrained. In the use of language we are taught not to mix metaphors, and yet Nature mixes hers every day. This probably means that the expert in language is a dogmatist and not a theologian.

In Arkansas I once drove through every kind of weather in a twenty mile stretch.

Rainbow and fog, hail and snow and the high whistle of an artic wind gave over to sunshine warm as toes in thick socks. It ended prophetic; I hoped, the water-glazed macadam glistening like a benediction with white and frosty hail melting in the ditches.

Kick it on through Winnemucca, Wells and Elko. Jake Holman of The Sand Pebbles came from Wellco, Nevada, and Richard McKenna who wrote the book was too soon dead.

Sharp winds sometimes burst at night through the mountains, and the lights of on-coming traffic drunkenly scatter along the road with staggers of incipient death. The wind knocks the van, sobers a man as he rolls the window, and in fifty or a hundred miles the lungs are as clean as they'll ever be. Normal breathing, but the cold wind rimes the fine cutting edges of the teeth. Stars and shadows, animals bounding like spirits down the white line of road, to either swerve off into darkness, or die in the splat of a mechanized purgatory run by the hand of a trucker who is not then man driving a truck. A rabbit, possum or cat causes a liquid thump running under the tandem. Sometimes they get caught under the box where they are not seen for a couple of days. In summer you follow the smell and pry them out in pieces with a stick. Animals and mechanized man; must there be combat? To me the whale has always seemed like a personification of Nature - Whale, Nature - Nature, Whale... they sound the same... and who is Ishmael?

One drives like a redundancy, the long road unwinding,

and the break with Nevada is at dawn; descending then to the salt flats where other drivers with racing engines are looking for answers. Thinking of eternity at four hundred miles an hour across the eternal land.

Utah. Roadrunners without hangovers. Hawks and salt, sage and lime. The busy hive of Salt Lake City wears the sign of the Bee with the same grim judgement which bestowed on Hester Prynne her A; but Salt Lake City shows not the first sign of progress toward sainthood.

It is not only necessary not to lie, it is necessary to tell the truth without apology.

Emerson thought a lot of what he termed The Mind Of The Past. He was not exactly speaking of history. Now the Mind Of The Past begins to unroll, for here the weather is dry, and where the salt does not gather too thick a nail will last for years. The nail in the board means nothing, unless one thinks of the hand that held the hammer that drove the nail that went through the board that fit onto the house ... The Temple rises about cheap, hump-em-as-you-ketch-em motels, and cheaper hamburger joints where the grill is no hotter than the pavement - which is hot. Hot. The truck whirls beside the shrinking lake to hook left, then right, above the city where it enters onto that long, long road.

They came, the Mormons; ass back and horse back, or on foot and staggering. Fifteen miles a day, twenty miles a day, four miles a day. They panted in that sun and they dared to keep on dreaming and they built a temple to their God which is hardly more peculiar than most gods; but the real temple they built was to the tenacity of the human spirit that was afraid but willing to lay bones along the sun-cracked trails of Utah. The truck sings high when it gets clear of the hills. It eats up their best day's journey in fifteen minutes.

I've seen it everywhere, the spirits crowd in, not insisting, sometimes even disinterested. They come in the dark nights and along the smoking highways of the

Cumberlands where the roadside is overgrown and mist rises from the road like the fingers of ghosts. The land is peopled then, alive with dead, just choose your part of the country and look. Cherokee starving under the sainted auspices of Andrew Jackson, bodies dangling from limbs, black, red, white. The great American democracy where everyone dead is equal At least that is true in the mist ridden intrusion of headlights.

The sacred Cod and John Henry; and those same Indians apologized to the animal's spirit after they killed it because that was reverent and right.

Nature and the past do not live on perception alone. They have meaning because of the sweat.

Utah is a hot breeze. Coming across the engine has been as regular as a metronome, the tach wired in place. Roll it on into Colorado. The painter, Fred Remington, may have made everyone's face look the same, but he sure knew how to draw a horse. Stop for fuel, try to win a thirty-thirty rifle off a two bit punchboard knowing that the owner of the joint was the guy who got the first punch. Tired. Adjust the log. Sleep, but not much, because there is still a lot of road. Aluminum and fibre glass cabs heat quickly in the sun, and three other rigs are stealing the only shade. There are forest birds calling out there, reminding, but nobody is preaching. The first mountain bluebird I ever saw was at a crossroads in Montana. It looked like heaven's little finger.

"Doubtless we have no unanswerable questions," says Emerson. Doubtless. We sometimes have to grow enough to realize what the questions are, though, The trancendentalists were big on capacity, and we seldom have a chance to continually test our transcendental capacity. You get that chance when you drive a truck. Sometimes in peculiar ways. I can remember the face of the only man I ever almost killed, and how he saw it coming and said the right things; he was sorry, after all, that he had hogged the road.

It is more than Nature except as we are natural. The road is artificial, the truck is a construction with no characteristic of a whale, and so the combinations that go into something like sleeplessness come from individual capacity. On the northern route it is possible to run coast to coast in three days. The central route takes longer. A hundred thousand miles a year for a trucker is nothing. The record is nearly half again that much. You learn not to sleep.

Fatigue is when the spirits come. They arrive, sliding silently in behind eyes that are lighting double images in the brain while you're thinking of all the wrong things you ever did in your life. Pictures and voices rise in the mental vision, and until one adapts to the sleeplessness there is only one technique to keep from running off the road. Drive until it is at the danger point, then slap the face until welts are raised while repeating, "this is silly, this is silly." In a little while the timelessness sets in. The dreamlike quality takes over and the pictures and voices are clear and formed.

At one time I could drive for thirty hours with no more than forty minutes sleep while doing everything right. It is as illegal as the government.

The picture that bit me most was an actual photograph I had once seen. It was not a woman; neither mother, lover, wife. It was of a child. Me. A picture of me at five years of age.

Curly hair, fatuous camera grin... and innocence. The promise in that child. What happened? We all have a piece of John Calvin's puritan and iron-ass conscience in us. Even Emerson. Especially Thoreau. No one was, is, safe.

For instance, I imagined the other day that I was in that supermarket of which Alan Ginsberg wrote, and I was walking along with Jonathan Edwards, the puritan preacher, when we met the beards of Ginsberg and Walt Whitman. We peered at each other, questioning around

containerized tides and bottled ripples; and Edwards' God sent us a storm. Whitman's sent soft rain. Mine got down on its knees and prayed for us...praying to who? And Ginsberg's laughed and passed around a joint, explaining that in order to protect one's idealism it is necessary to be a cynic; but not a really, really cynic, for one must sooner or later genuinely laugh at oneself - between bouts of fury.

The pictures and voices slide in and out, grandmothers and aunts, lovers and the face of my first shy love, a girl no more than a child who died at thirteen.

The rig sings an undercurrent of power across Colorado and into Kansas. Denver folds in the mirrors, a dangerous town loaded with booze and dough and bad drivers... something special in that line about Denver. The undercurrent transmits the past like words over a phone. It is going to take hours to get across, yet the words assure, distract, teach. It is the creative imagination that so many have and so few use unless they are willing to drive before the wind. That truck does not blush if blank verse is spoken into the whistle around the west coast mirrors.

Christopher Marlowe gets mixed up with Clarence Darrow; and farms slide past on the Kansas flat where homesteaders were once narrow minded but generous... and Margaret Fuller whispers, "I am lost in this world, I sometimes meet angels, but of a different star from mine." But she spoke to the Mind of the Past and to Beethoven, so it may be that Kansas does not hear. There is always something to read in a truck. A disposable library bought and read during layovers, to be lost each housecleaning. "Books," Emerson says, "are for idle moments."

Ephriam McDowell links arms with Lister and Priestly. The three men smile. History becomes a living museum where everyone is assed in side by side. The shot from a German luger is flat across the scenery, but the dying scream is 13th century Eskimo.

The Mind of the Past comes riding on the transmitting current of the timeless feel, and, by golly damn, there you find that you have pulled that box all the way to Kansas City. Now it is time to seriously sleep, but best to take one light breath of whiskey first and read a chapter. It takes awhile to come down. The timelessness does not want to contradict itself and end.

"Son, are you all right?" .... a fading voice.

"No sir."

"If you'd just listen...."

"Your ways don't work, sir. For me." And then the gospel according to Thoreau declares that the old have nothing useful to tell the young. Count the age, remember a laughing sixty year old guy who once helped you load, figure that you understand... hope so, anyway.

Kansas City is just one of the good places to get laid. After twelve hours sleep there is an accumulation of urine and loneliness that causes a bump in the pants. Rub the sleep from road stained eyes, straighten the perspective by shaking the head, and step out into Nature.

The scream of a diesel revving in the shops at the truck stop bangs like a drummer in an echo chamber. In the restaurant tired waitresses walk on rubber heels that phlunk like a worn out pinball. Some truckers carry a motorcylce in their van so they can tour the town they are in. Some have been in a truck stop in every town in the USA, and have seen nothing of those towns - like pilots flying to an unending succession of airports.

It will be evening soon. Possible to speak carefully, be with someone, stay sober and still catch the best part of the morning road.

The search for love. Every man and every woman who ever lived probably believed that there was an address called home, but many do not know the address and so it

is necessary to constantly knock on doors, smile at faces, question, question - are you the one?

Meet her in a joint over beer, a single beer because both of you have a business to run. Twenty dollars. Thirty dollars, depends on the woman and whether she has her own room - to which you flee; she perhaps running from the memory of some man and you with memory of a woman. It is frightening to say "I love you." This is supposed to save everybody some trouble.

Pretty girl, hair curled on her shoulders, and she doesn't look tough at all. You watch her take off the shirt, the small ribs, the dark, erected nipples. tiny mama-wrinkles on the belly show she's been caught at least once. "Are you the one? It's all right what you do, if you truly are the one." And you wonder why you think of a prostitute as a girl and not a woman... and the answer echoes from Abram Terz' Chorus, "Any little tart can make you feel like a schoolboy - it's not fear, but reverence...."

The attempt is to make love but it ends up a screw. Possible sometimes to close the eyes and catch an occasional sliding glimpse of dream; but this is not natural, and this is not love. This is the road.

"Without action thought can never ripen into truth." Emerson chided the scholars of his day for the kind of thinking that rises from lack of motion. He was right, of course, One often does not know how to do a thing right or think rightly about it, until it has been done transcendentally wrong. Nor is it possible to identify all the good things that exist in bad situations: a peculiar and individual variety of goodness. If only there were not the schedule and you could learn to know this woman, if only you had not paid for it in the first place. Sometimes she even says she hopes you will come back, and maybe it isn't a lie.

Experience. Crack that big bastard over the river at midnight and wail it into Missouri, then north through

Illinois. A sleigh-ride now. Freeways open ahead like concrete flowers. The tandem hums and sings, the pace of the rig eager like homeward running horses. I know a philosopher who has chosen instead to be a blacksmith. Hooves in his hands, sweat, knowing of horses. I imagine wind in wild manes under a running, summer storm.

Birth, life, death. The circle is not sufficient and we sometimes forget creation. Yet, why are even the most reduced in imagination and resources often found to be collectors of buttons or matchbooks?

Experience explains itself in many ways. In Kentucky there is a two-level run called Dive Bomber hill, over a mile of drop with a rock face at the end. The road hooks left and up the next mountain. I've seen drivers hold back a thousand revs, hit that sweeping ninety degree turn at sixty, hang their wheel left, then right and goose out that last thin line of power. The trailer actually picks up and walks across the road. It saves time on the next grade.

Intuition is developed by experience. Everyone who loves a job knows more about that job than can ever, ever be explained. Coming over the back side of a hill you almost always know if there is trouble ahead a long time before you can possibly see it. Cattle in the road, a wreck, the cops. Experience creates.

The journey that some of us make, but that is the only similarity, for each has a road that requires individual decisions.

Fuel, coffee, coffee, more fuel. There will be one more stop for sleep before entering Pennsylvania. Ohio has good truck stops and chickenshit cops. They will stop a rig for a burned out marker light. The cab smells of beer and sweat, the feet stink and are moist in wellington boots.

Emerson did not even know how much he knew, and that is because his thought and experience were different. Sometimes he does not examine things that

could stand examination. He never recognized the difference between power and force; does not show that it is force that comes chopping from the barrel of a machine gun; that power is what supplied the gun, the ammunition, the gunner and the direction to point. It is also power, and that a greater power, that silences the gun. In classrooms, offices, field jobs, where ever I've met another Pilgrim, he or she was glad for that distinction. It helps when you have to make decisions.

The truck skims and hums and sums the road like it was a collecion of ideas.

Nature. "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation." Thoreau writes that, and from the high cab of an over-the-road truck it is possible to add.. "With frequent realizations of transcendental awareness." It is not the best solution, but it is where a lot of us start.

The Mind of the Past. It throbs, rolls and beats. In Pennsylvania at the glaring lights of the port of entry there is no trouble in remembering that in New York, proper Dutch ladies once played kickball with the severed heads of Indians as proper Dutch gentlemen, who supplied the heads, cheered.

Experience. It has been a long, long run. Pennsylvania is the come down. The game is to avoid road checks and play the extended speed-up, slow-down stunts that Pennsylvania police seem to require. The truck sounds tired, the engine cresting out a little below where it ought to be; because the engine is you and you are it, and for this run the two are inextricably mixed. The engine is nothing but force. The way to power that obviates ignorance and gunners may be to abandon that engine, be undeceived by its howling illusion; to become, perhaps, a man writing. Others on this road have made similar decisions: after all, birds must run on a beach somewhere, and somewhere there must be an address. Time soon to climb down. Time soon to knock on doors, smiling, asking.

The road collapses fast. Across the nether end of New

York, a run over mountains into Massachusetts, and soon the unloaded rig will hit the shops for a clean up. There will be a little time; time to walk along the harbor with its commerce, its fleets, its fish-smelling, rope-smelling perfume.

There is wind in the mirrors. the tires bawl and yell, and runs of sunlight lie across fields partly obscured by bumpy clouds. On this ocean whales also play offshore, and as one catches overdrive he mentally kneels..."Our Father who art in somewhere... the Whales will always win, dear Father, the Whales already have won - pity poor we who believe we are victorious; and when the Whales win again it may be that we will once more discover nature and ourselves."

Outside Boston, the long haul made, the rig surging and mumbling like a complaining old person rocking in the sun. Close it down, walk away on tired legs that are suddenly getting back a little of their spring, feet that want to move like young wisdom. There'll be another beer in town, another book. Will there also be the nerve to once more try to say, I love you.

Sure there will, as long as you can stay willing to run before the wind. Transcendentalism was never pure. It was always a process that led to the discovery of truth... and so it teaches finally that we must tell no lies, love each other as soon as we can come to love ourselves, and then be unafraid to take our chances.

Term

Books line the walls and outside it is deep summer which does not happen often in the Northwest. Sparrows pant while dogs amble tail down. The campus is dusty with sunshine, the kids lolling and compacted and satiated with sun; and I, musing, cannot touch this sheaf of papers by my hand.

It is a rough tale written by a girl who killed herself. My curses do not pass and I imagine that original creation mindless, adrift in nothing and with no concept to test the void.Unformed and not able to define space until a pinprick of intuition wriggles through sluggish tranquility to conceive one star.

The works of man more truly define. The heart is more than a target.

Hard to explain that to these kids who loll in the sun. It is not time for them to care. Maybe this fall. For now there is other heat. The great experiment of young life continues while my hands seem stiff with my thirty-six years.

"I danced," she said. The involuntary memory cries in a fury against this place. It sobs loss and the loss is not only of the girl. Dancing was one of her ways to give form in chaos, but I do not understand that need because she was so solitary. And I? I sat before a diminshing mortality and spoke unpracticed theory.

It was not unpracticed in the past. Women and movement and force ran through my life like sporadic eruptions from young volcanos. Until I returned to college for the degree my education came from books carried in the back pocket to construction jobs. Hard hats and the sneers of a smooth world. A fight with a dirt farmer past. Sometimes Saturday night drunk. It was not joyous, but it helped punch holes in the past and promised a future. I trusted it.

When you are young you must expect to be lonely. That first occurred to me when Kath came to my office. Blue jeans, rucksack, sloppy attire. A perpetual gaiety that was a desperate cover for hysteria. It did not over-ride the sadness around brown, dark eyes. A Kansas smile, which is a loud smile when it is safe, louder when fearful. Small mouth, a body too tall for its slenderness.

By then I was already touching her in my imagination. I wanted to touch her hands, to impart personal value that would allow her to trust my barely concealed love of what I believe. Why did I not touch her? It would have cut the form, and the form over-used is nothing but formula. By then she was in love with me. That is common among students toward their favorite teachers.

"Speak true and you can ride any wind," I tell them. "If you do not hit that fine, hard line at first you will get it later. But only if you learn to speak the truth."

After being lied to most of their lives and after being taught to lie, it is a difficult thing for them to do. The facades tighten and are meshed as hard as the chain link fences around grade schools. Fingers nervously roll ball pens on the table, for there is no possibility of taking notes on such words. In a few weeks the facades fall as they almost fearfully accept that someone cares for the young wisdom they have learned to conceal. Their ignorance meshes with the wisdom, and for awhile they are content to follow this still muscular, tobacco-toothed fool with a tense face and thinning hair... but only lately a fool.

Why did I not touch her? Nothing new has been discovered about human heat since the book of Deuteronomy.

My words mix with the glare of classrooms as efficient as the bank of stainless steel buttons on the elevator. Push, whirr, click, open and shut. I grind cigarettes into unscorchable vinyl floors. A poem could not be written in such rooms, yet people in wool and tweed and cultured disdain drift along the halls. They call themselves poets and they speak in spermy voices devoid of fecundity.

From the first day Kath could overcome even that atmosphere. She was always beyond the assertive or vulgar, her narrow form a burst of frustrated but honest energy. On that first day she sat in the exact center of the room, vibrant to the point of deflection. Chairs on each side of her seemed blank. A teacher estimates a class, looks for strays and hopes for the contentious. I watched Kath and was sure she would drop out. She did not seem organized to handle the large bulk of work. Yet she had the control which gives superlative grace that only changed when she was conscious of being watched. Then, like most young girls, she became clumsy. When the class began to turn in work I was surprised to find that she had written a story. It was not the assignment. It made no difference. The control was on the page and not in her tangled life. Usually she clumped in ten minutes after the bell, rucksack of books, wool logging shirt and thin ankles that disappeared into hiking boots. Impossible that a girl could strive to be more unattractive.

Her story was about an eighteen year old girl who returned home from college pregnant and convinced her fundamentalist Kansas family that she was the reincarnation of the Virgin Mary. It was not a funny story and it worked.

I was stunned. The writing was bulky. She was not a natural story teller but the movement was there. The pages were full of the flat, branding heat of summer over

dry fields, of thick and dull-clanging church bells; of flat-head V8s roaring through the darkness on country roads, and the beer voice, sexual-frustration voice, the last judgement voice of the American middlewest. It smelled of overheated and balding whitewalls, needle-dropping Christmas trees, and the sights were of tombstones reading Smith, the resonances of preachers howling Armaggedon.

I remembered my own midwestern past and felt in my bowels the damning voices of spite-ridden and unforgiving men of God. Some of it never leaves. My first experiences with women were as much anti-religious as they were sexual. The mind-killers dictate rebellion in low places. I read Kath's story three times and fell in love. It is a matter of hope. I do not expect to be understood.

Only this:

If, in the name of some great good, we should blow ourselves from the face of this planet, and if fifty thousand years in the future the remains are visited by another race of beings, they will judge those remains not in terms of our science, our politics or our religions. They will judge in terms of our art. They will wish to know how much we dared to dream.

They should study the rest, though, for it is to our credit how much we must unlearn before we are let to dream.

Kath, Kath. Here was a great writer in the female hide of an eighteen year old. Fantastic disadvantage. Young, ignorant, guilt ridden and a genius. The writer who I could never be... I have accepted that. I called Kath in to talk about the story.

By then winter was half over. The campus was clumpy grass skidding in mud. Scandinavian faces with narrow noses and thin looks appeared like blond exclamations beneath dark hoods. Between classes the sidewalks were a stream of bobbing umbrellas. The sky, heavy misted and filled with smog, hovered over the city like a force

bound to muffle good intent. In the polished halls people shuffled, laughed, spoke of all things disparagingly and with analytic certitude.

Kath appeared with the rucksack in place. Red and black checkered shirt, patched jeans. I went through the conventions.

"Tell me about yourself." It was the first time in a long time that the question carried more than tranquil interest. This was the daughter I did not have, won't have... this was the woman genius still absent after a life of search. Ambivalence is only a word. So is incest. So is art.

Kath was making me a hero and was apologetic for conventional information Two brothers, father and mother living, rural background and a part time job on campus. Her midwest and mine matched. It sounded like my autobiography.

I edged around the material in the story. It is difficult for the conventional person to understand, but I hoped she had been pregnant. It says something about nerve, the need to know, no matter the risk. Such writers have a Pilgrim morality, but to others the morals are sometimes lewd. One does not speak of life if he worries about wasted postage. These gleaming halls murmur creativity and floor wax. When a real creator appears there is a tremble in the air and a loud shuffling of annuities. Kath did not know that her bulky story and lean observation could build more than this place can ever destroy.

She backed away from my questions, covered, did not commit personal information. Her control was good. The guilt on the page was not reflected. That was professional.

I watched her, thinking; if you could capture this girl, if you could evoke her on paper, you would attain to some of her greatness.

Wet hair puffed inconveniently as it dried, and, although pulled back, enough was worked loose so that strands of dark brown touched the corners of those brown, fearful eyes. A barely concealed tremor in the narrow hands, a movement of confusion. The hair narrowed her already narrow and almost gnome-like face. A person who seemed to have sprung alive and smiling from beneath leaves, a girl who might dwell with tranquil unconcern among dragons, but who was desperate in the closing perimeters of history or life or situation or waxed hallways. Which? Practical if narrow hands. Working hands.

"Have you ever painted," I asked. Painting is much like writing.

"No." She was puzzled. Her face was not pretty, but it was more than only young. The chin tucked in too short. Teeth off center. She had vitality and controlled movement, the most precious commodities of the actress because they spell presence. Acting is like writing.

Kath was as unintentionally sexual as nakedness.

"Many good writers have tried to paint," I told her.

Her face changed. A defensive clamp on her eagerness. Too many knife thrusts and casually imposed tasks from teachers and parents. I let it hang. You have to find out how good they are. The red checked shirt was large and bulked around narrow shoulders to almost hide the tension.

"I danced," she said. She looked down, fingered the rough wool shirt, seemed trying to explain something to her boots; and I, the fool, so captured in my vision of her genius, did not understand that she was pregnant.

"Ballet?"

"Five years."

Ballet. Five years of being too tall, too narrow, the actual wrong physical shape. The valor in the young can

make you want to howl and weep.

"There are other important ways," I told her. "You'll have to work harder at this than you ever danced."

Her eyes said that it was impossible.

Winter passed, the snow in the mountains changed to spits of rain, and then Seattle turned to spring. We broke classes in June, and I've sat on this campus during the summer thinking of life and death and everything, of poetry, of the pulse and heat of the young. She followed compulsions and old harms that were stronger than her genius, and I did not follow the inclinations of mine. To be father or lover. It made no difference, but it did make a difference that I never once put an arm around her waist. My mind seems held together with occasionally snapping tin wires that were once intricately soldered. I want to hit someone and do not have what it takes to begin a stiff argument.

A world of people. A world of ideas. It all passes beneath this window in the heat of deep summer, and on the distant lake sails flap and strive for an opening breeze. God is walking around in that heat somewhere, and I do truly hope the bastard gets vagged. The indecent exposure of God, creater of chaos, dreaming tranquilly a paunchy banker's dreams. Who, after all, creates what? The immortals have always been lean and star-ridden and hungry.

There are only two bad things that can happen to an artist. The first is comfort. The second is death. Madness, failure, despair and immeasurable joy all have their place. It is true that these can sometimes kill, but the bad thing is the result and not the process.

I know why I did not touch her. I will, goddamn, be honest for once. I was comfortable. There were women my own age. I could be surrogate father to dozens. Finally because I accepted the fatness of this place. I kept the door open during conferences in the best tradition of teachers. I subscribed to the proposition that for teachers

there are few valid forms of love. I tried to deny that formulas only produce a sod buster in durable cloth.

Her second story was about disembodied heads that floated like propelled balloons through the air as they spoke of regret. Sometimes the heads collided. When that happened a policeman came and jailed them in small square boxes. The control was perfect, yet her shame and pleading was right there on the page. I felt the control and treated her like a professional, but she was only a kid.

"Get a guy," I told her.

"I don't need it." She got prim.

"Why are you angry?"

"I'm not." The tremor never left the small hands. The tension rose in the back of the neck and not on the brow. That was right. I invited her to coffee and we sat among the clatter of trays as people spoke of Freud and Skinner and Sophocles.

We talked of her authoritarian background, the rule of familial and fundamentalist guilt. I led the conversation instead of listening, and she listened in a way that said she believed I understood everything that ever happened in her whole life. Her lips trembled, about to speak, and then in confusion she excused herself to go to a class. I did not touch her hand.

Sitting in this office, hearing the low murmur of kids lolling in the sun. Sitting here this summer, grieving, blaming, feeling the texture of my own guilt and mental blindness. I can guess from my own history why at eighteen she could not make a moral decision to get an abortion. I can remember my own shame and loneliness and how bad it is to be broke in a seamy town where morality is determined by killings in grain and pork. I understand the pain, and the final wild surge of despair that one night made her overdose on pills with no more regard to a swelling belly.

Writing is not like life. It is life. She made it as far as

Topeka... to end in Topeka... but it was as close as she could get to home. She lasted until April, wearing, one supposes, one of the bulky wool shirts. Perhaps sometimes in that rented room... but, I cannot allow the imagination to crawl. Yesterday in the hall I stood speaking to two colleagues.

"The kind of person," said one, "who sees a Miller play is the same bland intellect that goes to a show of Wyeth." He stepped back two paces to deliver himself... this is not a good place. This place is evil.

This place is like Kansas.

Outside the kids mutter and laugh. There is the hard drive of music from a portable radio. Soft drink containers tumble from a profusion of waste in a trash can. Squirrels dart from trees, examine the trash, dart chattering away at the indifferent ramble of a panting dog.

I can teach them this fall.

The radio stops and someone is chording a guitar. Laughter. Low giggles. A memo on my desk speaks of the faculty retirement program.

The books line the wall. Hemingway had to be a brute. Kazantzakis could never be Zorba. Poe had to chase love and respectability that he simultaneously destroyed.

Paton, Nexo, Faulkner... form and love and sense. The void filled with mind and heart. I can teach these kids. I can say that the writer loves truth alone, that the fine, hard line on the page is and must be exclusive of any exterior condition. It is only necessary to be true.

And what I would tell them is not a lie. But it is a lie if I say it. Melville wrote of good and evil, while I speak only of sin.

I dance, they dance, we dance, she danced.

I want to kill but I don't know who. Sophocles?

... and death is the other failure.

But I'm not good enough to teach it any more. I know that. I'm not good enough now, and I don't think I'll ever be good enough, ever again.

Flying Home

> Just as we were gettin' down to the part in the last chorus (playing on a barge in the Potomac) when everyone goes 'rum-ba-da, dum-ba-da, rum - pow!' I yelled to the bass player to 'hit the water.' And he got so excited that he jumped right in!
>
> Lionel Hampton

• • •

It was big and silver and the nose poked at air which in my memory is blue. People dashed back and forth beneath its wings with the bustle of third-rate bureaucrats over a fifth-rate rule. The thing was a Ford Tri-motor. It was the biggest plane I had then seen. At age nine the sight of that plane embarked me on a lifetime of social philosophy.

This was before the flowers came and before Baez began asking where they had gone. It was before anyone thought of throwing daisies at a cop. The USA in voluminous compassion had not yet bombed Hiroshima, lynched the Rosenbergs or lately engaged in war crimes. There were no sales taxes, televisions, shopping centers, subdivisions or freeways. We were told that the way to get an heir was to contact God. He dispatched a stork.

The Tri-motor was storklike. Squatted on the runway it stood high on widespread wheels. The tail slouched to the ground. When you boarded you walked uphill. The three

propellers, one to a wing, one on the nose, rested gawkish as sticks cast at random. It was a toy designed for a monster poodle. Fetch, Fido, fetch; but the damned thing flew. In the air it was most beautiful.

"To your dad and to me a plane could be beautiful." I say this to my friend as we discuss our differences. My friend was born after the Second World War.

"It was before the Theatre of the Absurd," she says.

It sure was, although the world was drenched in the absurd. It was polluted with the absurd. My friend's father, 12 years my senior, was about to go to war when I saw that plane. He would trail mules on the Burma Road. The battle jacket he wore in those days was given to his daughter. It hangs in our attic. Dry and cracking leather, a blaze of forgotten insignia.

The man who wore that jacket now runs a business in a large city and spends most of his time fighting encroachment by government minions or the large gulp and screw of corporations. He does not like the world's business or its music or its plans. He works too hard and his voice is quiet on times when it might be loud. Both of his daughters are living with freaks. One with a writer, the other with a potter. At fifty-seven that sort of thing can be hard to deal with. He probably tries not to think about it.

At fifty-seven, and as a representative member of a generation that has been excoriated as nazi, conservative, business jock and all around bad guy by half the population now alive, it may also be that he sometimes wishes his kids had more understanding. Is an act of justice due? Is it wanted? If justice were done would it hurt? Maybe. He expresses few opinions on amnesty for others, expresses no opinions on amnesty for himself.

I write of a silver Ford Tri-motor and of a generation of revolutionaries. Revolutionaries are those who turn the established order upside down. I write of their success

and of their failure. There has been time to ponder the history. Part of that history is my own, and, though the philosophy of history and society has produced plenty of foolishness, it is not a fool's errand. This is especially true in a time when the xeroxed soul is the convention, and when the hero has been abandoned for the martyr because the society produces few heroes. It is true at a time when big chunks of the population are emotional survivors before age thirty.

• • •

> In all my travels I saw very little real poverty, I mean the grinding terrifying poorness of the Thirties. That at least was real and tangible. No, it was a sickness, a kind of wasting disease. There were wishes but not wants. And underneath it all the building energy like gasses in a corpse.
>
> John Steinbeck, 1971

• • •

The contrast between these revolutionaries and their children can only be as angular and gawky as a stork. The generation of which I write did not know shit from shinola about 'lifestyles,' 'chairpersons' or 'creation' by committees. Few turtlenecks infested their closets. They were sometimes hep, never hip, and when their big bands swung they told each other to get hot, not cool.

They caused a revolution and raised a bunch of kids who during the '60s would engage in a reformation. Reformation has historically been purifying reform movement based not on radical ideas but on fundamentalism.

Time rolls, the generations pulse, pant, dream and make babies. My friend is twenty-eight, her father fifty-seven. In twenty-five years she will be thought an old fogey and her old man and I will both be dead. We lived hard. Thank God you don't have to take it with you.

He was born in 1920. That meant that he was too young to enjoy the fun. The cats were celebrating the invention

of walls by climbing them in those days. They were the days of Fitzgerald and Thomas (not Tom) Wolfe. A world of red hot and enlightened boy scouts. Someday a professorial set of whiskers will flash on the similarity between Richard Nixon and Gatsby.

• • •

> Eugene hemmed; hinted timidly at shagginess; confessed. They undid their buttons, smeared oily hands upon their bellies, and waited through rapturous days for the golden fleece.
>
> "Hair makes a man of you," said Harry.
>
> Look Homeward Angel

• • •

At the time Henry Ford was the revolutionary. He did it at no inconsiderable profit to himself. Like most revolutionaries of both the 19th and 20th centuries his interests were economic and only secondarily political. As in all revolutions the results were social. Only in the emerging U.S.S.R. would there be revolutionaries who would post a record of political change to equal the social flip-flop that the industrial U.S. would make in this century.

In 1920 Ford had nearly every industry in the nation screaming. His assembly plants boomed. During the First World War he had announced the five dollar day for employees. It forced industry to compete. Five dollars was an astonishing wage. It caused the kind of shock that took some time to wear off. Early labor leaders in the U.S. were as inept and fumbling before the fact as was the Communist Party in Russia after Kerensky but before Lenin.

The Model T sold more than half a million copies in 1916, two million in 1923, and the total run before the Model A appeared in '28 would be fifteen million. This in a nation of a hundred fifteen million (of which ten million were black and at the time not entitled to own anything but the blues). A nation that had yet to discover how to build a road that would work all year round.

Our hero (my friend's father and not Henry Ford) was nine years old when the world died. We must call him hero since his generation knew nothing of protagonists. The Tri-motor was still a thing of the future. The stork was taking a Freudian beating. The life of the nation was as rumpled as a bird sprawled by a shotgun blast. Social patterns, sexual customs, economic beliefs and booze chanted new themes in tin pan alley jargon over the flaming truth of this brave new world. Flight, Oh, beautiful. We can fly.

And fly they did, and, oh God, it was a fabulous wreck.

• • •

We die of what we eat and drink. But more we die
of what we think...

Hector Kane - E.A. Robinson

• • •

I pause to consider sin. Billy Sunday has given way to Billy Graham. What this means is perhaps implied by the fact that no one in America has yet written a book entitled Fundamentalism and the Art of Motorcycle Maintainance. Graham chants dogma. He tells of the faith of our hero's father, of which there is more to say.

Sin was not an abstraction in 1920, nor was it confined to theological disputation. It was not merely a scare word to evoke societal guilt. It was real. It was walking around out there with a forked tail, horns on its head, the Letter 'A' emblazoned across its brow and on its lips was the smile of the goat. Our hero's parents were products of the Victorian era. They were provincial and that is what our hero learned. Geographic mobility for the majority had been limited to a range of no more than twenty miles from home. Thus, home was different.

Home was more important and more people lived there. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, shirt-tail cousins. The home involved community. It was commmunity.

The Model T broke that community. It was possible to think in terms of a hundred miles, even a thousand. The quick rise of industry in World War One, together with

European immigration, caused the cities to boom. From an agrarian society the U.S. rapidly moved toward an urban society. The country boys learned a lot when they got to town.

The first thing they learned is that in a city you can walk around a corner and become a stranger. This is one of the few keys it takes to open the lock of the 1920's.

All bets were off except for one. You may be a stranger to others, and you may behave like others, but your conscience is not a stranger to you. The rule of a Victorian morality weakened because the community was not there to enforce the rules. It only caught up in the late hours when the music had stopped.

It rarely stopped. Business was king. Money was not plentiful for all, but it was plentiful for many. Those who had none had the knowledge of the true believer that all it was going to take was a little time. Everyone would soon be rich.

The U.S. discovered education. It became important to finish high school That assured success in business.

The educated, as well as the popular press, discovered Freud. Repressions were bad for you. A generation of ladies who had been raised with the expectation of meeting suitors in the home parlor, instead found themselves in roadhouses riding the whirl of illegal booze. Prohibition had struck. Yes, repression was bad for you...and God was back home with the old folks. Deaden that stylistically ridiculous conscience. By 1929 the situation was so tangled that it must have confused a nine year old.

• • •

> Stock prices have reached what looks like a permanently high plateau.
>
> Prof. Irving Fisher, Yale
> 16 October 1929

• • •

A lot has been written. There have been more than

enough sentimentalities bruited around about the good old days. Horror stories tinged with the schmaltz of sentimentality. In 1929 the economic crisis was more abrupt and longer lasting than would be the political crisis of 1973. Similarities are easy to see. In each case a superficial system of unwarranted power went bankrupt. In each case the enlightened boy scouts took the test for eagle and laid ostrich eggs instead.

This is hardly sarcasm. In each case we see men who were given power, but who did not understand why they deserved it or even why they had it. That they misused power was unremarkable. That they misused it with the sincerity and locker-room morality of boy scouts is most fortunate. Lenin would not have made such a mistake. Neither would Andrew Carnegie or Leland Stanford.

In 1929, at the age of nine, our hero embarked on his revolutionary career. He did not know it at the time. That is one clear difference between a revolutionary and a saint.

Two economic facts have characterized all depressions of the past. There is no work. Of this particular depression there were other characteristics as grim. Let us consider them through the experience of one who saw them between ages nine and nine-teen in the years 1929 through 1939.

The nation was in retreat. We read statistics on yellowing pages, read of cannibalism in Chicago, of starvation and millions dispossessed. All statistics. We do not read of the emotions that washed over the child, then over the young man. He will not tell you of them. He has most earnestly tried to forget them.

There was guilt, shame, hatred and fear.

In what was still a fundamentalist religious nation, guilt was exploited from the pulpit at a time when the people were confused and reaching for any explanation. Recall, also, that this was a people but newly removed from the authority of small communities. It is easy to

understand the impact on the American mind by snarling and implacable preachers. Whether or not our hero cared two sticks for religion is unimportant. He lived in a shattered world that did. As late as 1939, when I was seven, I can recall a sermon in which the depression was explained as having been a vengence of God upon the excesses and pride of the'20s.

Shame took its quiet shape, spoken in gestures, whispers, avoidance. In the American ethic, every man had always known that a good man could work and support his family. When that knowledge became a lie the men did not blame economics or government. They blamed themselves. Later, when the shame was too wearing, they sought scapegoats and masked the shame with hatred.

For the first years, fear was everywhere. Government made futile cries alternating between optimism and disgrace. Since no politician can admit error, the political persons acted then as political persons would act thirty-five years later on the withdrawal from Viet Nam...which is to say they all agreed that everyone had behaved splendidly, except, perhaps, the American people. The voters may have privately agreed, but they elected Franklin Roosevelt, as they would later elect Jimmy Carter. This is characteristic of American history. Whenever the nation has been arm-pit deep in muck it has opted for change.

• • •

> First of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself - nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.... Only a foolish optimist can deny the dark realities of the moment.
>
> F.D.R. Inaugural address, 1933

• • •

Roosevelt was, or was not, a great man. It depends on one's political hates. Our hero does not love him. Roosevelt was greatly championed or greatly despised

by those who remember his governments. Only the most bigoted, however, would deny that into the guilt, shame, hatred and fear, Roosevelt injected optimism and hope. He moved across history like he was on roller skates. Only the deliberately stupid could fail to see that he saved an industrial and economic system which would then curse him forever. It is a mixed bag. It seems most likely that the hope caused both guilt and shame to turn to hatred.

Our hero got a jolt of hate that was as scorching as a steel pour. Tin horn messiahs had been circling the action for years. By 1937 a hate campaign rose through the nation targeting the Jews, and, in lesser fashion, the Catholics and Negroes. The latter term is appropriate for the period. The agitators, or course, said nigger like always.

I recall one of those vocal tramps. In our high school auditorium in 1939 came forth a man of tales. Some were perverse even in the light of this PG rated day. There were only two Jews in that town so the rap was about Catholics.

Most of it was conventional. When a Catholic boy was born another rifle was buried beneath the church. Some were grotesque, nuns having abortions using a Satanic technique of bathing in tubs of used menstrual cloths. Priests smearing sperm around confessional to help stimulate this peculiar race.

In the remembered instance the speaker was waylaid by a group of towns people after the festivities. He received two broken arms. That rarely happened. Too often the people believed. Too often the rap was about the international cartel of Jews. Hitler's support would not be only in Germany.

What is more, the people understood a new fear. In 1938 every man, woman and child knew there was going to be a war. The dogs and the cats knew it. The birds in the trees knew it. The only ones who did not know it were the

politicians.

Our hero is eighteen. He is in a hell of a fix. The majority believed that we would soon be at war with Germany. A vocal and determined minority supported Hitler. In September, 1939, Hitler moved on Poland. In the barber shops, in beauty shops and at the soda fountain you could hear that it was a good thing. Roosevelt, the former N.R.A., and the Puritan ethic in combination would not produce wealth as quickly as would the God of the Germans leading His people to war. Stay out of the war but make it pay. Nearly everyone forgot the Japanese.

Now he is nineteen. He looks back on ten long years of hate, shame, guilt and fear. He understands without knowing exactly how, that the nation has been decimated by more than poverty. It has had a lesson in survival. As in all such lessons, many did not survive.

The point one remembers when some security-minded economist hitches up the pants of his two hundred dollar suit and speaks of Malthus is this: starvation kills, but the dead feel no pain. The pain happens when you are alive. What was killed during the romantically remembered great depression in the U.S.A. circa 1929-39 was faith. Faith in institutions. Faith in every kind and variety of religion. Faith in government. Finally, faith in a man's very self. Our hero's generation was, and is, characterized by a fear of failure so profound that for many there will never be enough visible symbols of success, tangible goods, or grocery stores stocked with food to remove that fear this side of the grave.

Then war. The entire world opted for the death penalty.

• • •

There was a time, a personal time for Lockhart,
which he knew as the time of the Burnt Man.
The Cruel Sea - Nicholas Monsarrat

• • •

To those who remember only the seedy and expensive conflicts of Korea and Viet Nam the Second World War is

almost unimaginable. The world was saturated in blood. From Murmansk to South Africa, across the continent of Europe, through the middle east and the far east, at both poles. through the snarling waters of seven seas; through Russia and Alaska and Greenland and Australia the blood flowed like a curse to saturate the world. Combatants and non-combatants alike. Jews, Gypsies, workers on rubber plantations, the natives of islands...these were the incidental flow. So were the workers in factories. Jury-rigged machinery, death traps to keep the Victory E flying...a flag, naturally. It had its counterpart in every nation. The entire personnel loss of the U.S. in Nam was equal to the total loss for both sides of one battle for one island. Guadalcanal.

A hundred million deaths is a most conservative guess for the period 1941 through 1945. Our hero does not talk about it much. He talks about mules sometimes, but not where the mules went and the hulks they passed.

It is fair to say that scarcely a family was not struck by that war. If it was not an immediate member who was killed or wounded it was a man or woman from down the street. Community had not entirely vanished. During the depression it had even been rebuilt. Anyone who had a farm to go to had gone. At least on a farm you could eat.

The curse of hope had not vanished either. Often the telegram read, "Lost, somewhere in the Pacific." People went to the globe or map, stared at the immensity of blue, knew hope not as a feathered thing but as enormous grief.

• • •

> In the first day or two after the finish we still saw an occasional blanket-covered body lying at the roadside. Frequently we saw one or two German graves, where victims of vehicle strafing were buried. As we drove along our noses told us now and then of one that the burial parties had missed. (German retreat in northern Tunisia.)
>
> Here is Your War - Ernie Pyle

Then victory. Only the politicians and fools believed that. The people shouted not because the war was won, but because it was over and the majority was still alive. There were few pangs of conscience about Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Conscience in that matter would be for later years. There was three days of shouting, then troubled murmurs in the streets. There was the spectre of Russia. There was the equal spectre of another depression that would destroy the prosperity brought by war. This was an experienced people.

Our hero returns. He has been starved and degraded for ten years, and he has feared his death for the next five. Behind him is a wrecked faith. He says to himself, and he says to others, that he has taken just all of the shit that he will ever again take in this life. The revolution has arrived. It is not economic, only. It is social. There is no hint of the boy scout. Later there will be, when dogma replaces faith.

Statistics do not pant, sweat, tumble on rumpled beds. They do not bleed. They do not dream. Statistics give measurable rates.

The birthrate rose like a scared cat going up a tall tree. So did the rates for divorce, insanity and suicide. The crime rate rose. It nearly equaled other rates. Those, more mundane, suggest an important story.

Suburbs grew from cornfields faster than those same fields have ever produced grain. Universities expanded like the castles of wizardry. A transportation system of rails had been sufficient to run a war. It was insufficient to run a peace. The trucking industry doubled, then doubled again, then doubled again. In 1939 I remember being driven twenty miles so our family could ride on a new section of three lane road. By 1945 that road was scrap, although it was still the best road around. By 1950 it was laughably obsolete. In 1944 it was still possible and practical, because of rationing, to make horse drawn deliveries on the streets of major cities. By 1947 the vestigial remains of the work horse had disapperared.

Our hero had no time to waste on inefficiency.

The initial step of revolution was to build. For a while it did not make much difference what was being built, as long as one stone was placed on another. When concrete was poured for a new foundation no one asked why. No one cared to ask. Poor no more, they would be poor no more.

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> ...it was at moments such as these that he (Frank Hirsch) felt most alive he thought because he was seeing in his mind a deal like this and elaborating it and it was these moments that he lived for but not because during them and out of them he had developed his best money-making schemes that were now paying him dependable profits and someday the profits would be bigger a lot bigger, no. The thing itself was the thrill....
>
> Some Came Running - James Jones

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Like Gatsby, Nixon was a boy scout. That is here taken to mean of an innocence which suspects thought, a fatuousness that collects baseball cards of some denomination, and a respect for the conventional wisdom. J. Edgar Hoover was a boy scout. Gerald Ford appears in such a line-up as a Cub. These men, held to be representative of two separate generations, have as much to do with our hero's generation as a balsa model of a Piper has to do with a Tri-motor. The Tri-motor was awkward and ungainly but it flew. The Piper is slick with glossy paper and enamel and it is powered by a rubber band.

There never has been, and likely never will be again, a nation more enamoured of education than was this nation in the late '40s and the '50s. At a time when one half of one percent of the British population ever saw the inside of a university, the U.S. opened every door and built new doors, sometimes for the sheer joy of opening them.

What was meant by education is another matter. We look at then, look at now, shake our heads and understand. Poor no more. They went to school in order to achieve success. They were hungry enough to cultivate hunger of belly and mind against the time when there would never be hunger again, anywhere. When one considers that this was the age of the rebuilding of Europe, the rebuilding of Japan, the Marshall Plan, and the wild and indiscriminate sharing and spreading of wealth through the world, it is clear that this was not a generation of Gatsbys and Nixons. They were revolutionaires. They were idealists as well. The new faith was a faith in universal wealth. In the '60s the faith would turn to dogma as it became clear that the revolution was lost. My friend remembers her father, our hero, as an exciting man when she was a child. He invented things, worked incredible hours and taught radical ideas. As she grew older, it seemed to her that he changed.

The faith turned to dogma because of the education they sought. That generation produced few philosophers and fewer theologians. It produced countless scientists, social scientists and designers of systems. There was no system they could not design, and today, as the systems wear thin and fall apart, it is not because of the original design but because of the overload...and they were not philosophers.

The Reformation of the '60s was a direct result of a lack of philosophy in these revolutionary idealists. They had broken the old rules and they had paid the price in madness, guilt and suicide. Now they would pay another price. Since they had no philosophy to teach their kids, they had thoughtlessly trotted out the philosophy they had learned as kids. It was a way of life tailored and tested for community in a fundamentally agrarian system. It still worked well in Kansas, though not too well in Topeka.

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I realize you have this very big love and you

want to do some very fine things with it. But I'm afraid you won't be able to do anything beneficial until you really start to think and get inside what's causing this love. You are going to have to think very clearly about basics and about the moves *you* can make to bring about changes in the things you see wrong. It doesn't do any good to get angry. It doesn't do any good for you to sit here with me unless you can find in all this something of your own to say.

Buckminster Fuller

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As the system failed, and it did most starkly fail, the revolution died. Our hero watched his friends become dogmatic and he felt the same. To this day he does not understand what happened, and neither do I, and perhaps no one does. I do know this:

They raised a generation of kids to believe in expectations that became increasingly unreal in the world that was building. Their attitude was unreal. If I have heard it once, I have heard it ten thousand times that, "My kid is not going to have to put up with what we went through."

When they turned out a predictable percentage of spoiled brats they could not understand why. When their peers, through affluence, began to turn into aging spoiled brats, they, did not understand why. When the kids began demonstrating and the boy scouts shrieked of God and Patriotism and "Love it or leave it," they felt betrayed. In protecting their revolution some turned to hatred, some to indignation, and most became silent...a silent majority that feared the failure that was now upon them. A majority facing more banality and lies and exploitation, as they had faced it since 1920. Piles of red tape lay at their feet. This is not what they had meant; it is not what they had meant at all. There was no way to say what they had meant. They had forgotten to try to put it into words and it was too late to put it into tears.

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> ...1973 Newport Jazz Festival...Gene Krupa, his health rapidly deteriorating, had dragged his weary body to make the gig... He (Benny) was deeply concerned, as were those who knew how sick Gene really was, and as I look back upon it now, I have the feeling that the reason that Benny didn't play especially well that evening was because for one of the few times in his life he was concerned with something that mattered even more than his music.
>
> George Simon

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Soon it will be time for them to pass from the scene. They will take their contrary mules, their memories of bread lines, their hallowed halls without ivy. They will pack them up and go. It is predictable that they will pass in silence. There is nothing more to say.

It was a vision, perhaps. Perhaps it was only an illusion. It was the memory of the memory of a dream. It was awkward and maybe as useless as a grounded silver plane with its nose pointed at the air; and yes, yes, dear friend, it all happened before the Theatre of the Absurd.

Now We Are Fifty

The night throb of frogs and crickets lay like a tumbled blanket across the valley and mixed with the humid vegetable odor of the wet forest. I sat with Frazier in his comfortable house. He remarked that it was still possible to find windowless cabins in these mountains. Not all feuds were dead.

"I never expected it to change." I listened to the pulse of the night. Owls called. Predators and scavengers ranged. In these hills death was direct. I wondered at the compulsion that made Frazier return to this place. In the last few years his poetry has dealt with spirits of dark, voices of shadow, and the gray mystery that intersperses with dappled sunlight on a trail. Such things are the business of poets, but I feared that he was becoming a mystic.

"The mist will rise soon." Frazier stepped to the doorway and looked into the hot night. He was framed by the dark. Frazier is tall. His nose hooks and his brows are wide and thick. His face is hollowed and creased. The gray eyes hold either an original clarity or an original madness. They burn bright and sometimes wild. We have been friends all our lives.

Frazier laughed. Erratic. He turned from the doorway to take a chair.

"Now we are all sitting," he said. "You and I sit here.

Mink is crouched in his cabin beyond that far ridge. He will be like a night-bound animal. Erickson sits and pilots a broken plane through a tangle of blackberry. A great pilot of great affairs was Erickson."

"The man was your friend." He had no right to talk that way about Erickson. I did not need his sarcasm. The situation was more than bad. It was grotesque.

A year ago our friend Erickson had checked out on a flight to Ashland in one of his company's planes. He had been engulfed by the forest. Every evidence showed that a man named Mink had killed the injured Erickson. He had waited to report the wreckage for a year. He had robbed and mutilated the body. The remains were incomplete. The lower jaw was gone. In my briefcase was film I had exposed after a long trek into the mountans.

"Not a friend," Frazier said. "I last saw Erickson in Ashland long ago. It was only for a moment. He was in a hurry."

"And you were not?"

"At the time I was," Frazier said. "Didn't I spend all those years playing the same fool as the rest. Erickson manipulated, you argued law, and I circled poetry like a hawk while wearing a mask of simplicity.These hills, from whence cometh... and yet, I believed it, believe it."

"You complain about what work costs?"

"I'm not complaning about poetry. Where in the hell are my smokes?" He rose to fetch them from the fireplace mantle at the end of the room. "You're wrong," he said. "Erickson had ceased to be a friend. Still, it was strange to see him today. That was a quiet, sober meeting. Erickson was in no hurry."

"You've earned the right to be eccentric, not the right to be cruel."

Frazier ignored me. He returned to the doorway and to the pulsing dark that was filled with death and

movement. "It was probably a night like this," he said. "It's almost exactly a year since Erickson went down." He flipped the just lighted cigarette into the darkness. "We were told right away. The sheriff sent a man thirty miles. Name and age and aircraft number. As if that had any special meaning here."

"It had no meaning to Mink."

Frazier tapped at the door frame. Stepped into the dark. Stepped back inside. He wore conventional work clothes of the hills with the shirt sleeves rolled. His forearms were tense.

"It had meaning to Mink," He said. "Erickson was Mink's problem."

"And he solved it with a rifle." I did not try to hide my disgust.

"You're the lawyer. Do you think you have a case?" Frazier turned to gesture to the room which was well furnished and held stacks of current journals, magazines and books. Recordings were shelved across one end of the room. Work by known painters hung beside sketches by a local artist. The sketches were of drift mouths, blackened faces, and abandoned cabins. Frazier's house was built of native rock and timber and resembled a small hunting lodge. The differences were subtle. In this house the ceilings were peaked and high. The windows were narrow and heavily draped.

"Identification numbers are out of place here." he gestured again at the books. "Do you think I would be allowed to live in this place if I were very different? I mind my own business." He turned back to the doorway.

"I've been a long time away," I said. "I wouldn't be allowed to live here any more, and when there is murder you don't have to mind your own business. I don't understand you. I don't understand Mink."

".... that the meek are blessed because they get to stay meek. What is there to understand?"

"You've been here too long." I was convinced of that.

"Don't change the subject. What offends you? The death, or your long wait in the city to confirm the death, or some missing bone? Mink is not that much different from the rest of us."

"Yes he is," I said. "Are you saying you didn't search?"

"We all searched. There are thirty-seven men and boys in this community and all of us searched four days." Unseen, but in the direction Frazier looked, Hanger Mountain was a ridge rising above slightly lower hills. A trail ran halfway in. It was used for weekly mail delivery by mule.

"We covered every slope beyond this hollow to the three adjacent. We searched until it was a fatality. You could lose a herd of elephants in these hills."

"Something as foreign as a plane?"

"One could crash now within a quarter mile and you would not hear. The mist is rising."

"But you did not search Hanger Mountain?"

"The folks from Haw Creek searched that mountain. We trust them."

"Always?"

"In matters such as this, and others not as stupid. And this is not a courtroom. The mist is heavy. Come to the door."

With the proof of death on film the estate could be settled. I was attorney for some of the heirs, and it might be that Frazier would be poet for the crashed plane. I did not want to think of that. I did not want his mist and his bitterness and that humid night.

"You need to be more generous."

"And you more brave. Come to the door."

It was like looking at a black shield. The darkness was

as flat as paint, the night voices dim. They were a mutter. A jumble. The stream that during the day filled the clearing with the rush of water now blended with a gurgle, a liquid hint of motion behind the black shield. As my eyes adjusted I saw the mist. It hovered and crawled at short distance. It rose slowly toward the lighted doorway and our feet.

"It will rise faster now," Frazier said. "Let's walk."

"Enjoy yourself."

Frazier turned to me. "You're angry because you're afraid."

"You are the one who is angry."

"Yes," he said. "You are afraid of Mink. Erickson. Twisted metal and twisted lives and skulls that either talk or don't or can't. This is dull. An incident between aging men."

"An incident of murder."

"Only an incident that's a little mysterious. Erickson would have understood."

"There's no mystery," I said. "The plane crashed and Mink took all he could get and then waited to see if a reward would be offered. So Erickson's affairs are delayed for a year."

"Erickson attends to his affairs," Frazier said. "He is doing it now. Doing the only business he has left."

This sullen intellectual son of a bitch. He was asking to do battle. Arrogance. My mind is as good as his.

"And you are not afraid,"I asked.

"No. Beleaguered. You people will not leave us alone. You will not leave the hills alone. You and your precious business." He stepped through the black shield and into the night.

Without him I would be lost within a hundred feet.

Between his mood and mine it would be crazy to make myself dependent on Frazier. I walked the length of the room to sit by the fireplace which was clean and gray from fires of the half dozen winters Frazier has lived here. The mist was beyond the heavy drapes. The voices of frogs and the mutter of the stream were like a murmur of the mist. The night was hot and wet but I felt almost cold.

Murder. I hate this land. It was my old acquaintance with Frazier that brought me back. Ordinarily we would have sent a younger man.

Erickson had hated this place. It is dark, wet, hot, violent. His life was spent trying to deal with boondocks Kentucky.

Murder. When Erickson checked in missing it caused the interlocked directorships of three corporations to start earning their pay. No one knew this place like Erickson. Erickson could talk to men who wear overalls and do business while standing in small town streets. When Erickson disappeared I had written to Frazier. He had written back and told me to stay away.

The heirs became impatient and offered a five thousand dollar reward. The results were on film.

"A hundred dollars would have gotten the same result." Frazier had said that on the morning before as we began the trek in to view the crash. A guide walked ahead of us. Silent. although Frazier owned a mule he said that no suitable mules were available. The silent guide carried a machete.

Along the trail were deep slits in the rock where coal seams had been entered. They were good seams.

"They still risk their lives for that," I said. People around here have always scrabbled free coal. Sunlight reached toward the black veins. The props were stout but this had nothing to do with mining. Even from the trail I could see fallen slate.

"They do not have much money," Frazier said.

The trail branched down through a stream bed bridged by logs, and then wound across the base of the first mountain. Laurel grew like trees. Shrubbery and sapling growth was brushed greener by the humidity. It would be a full day's hike.

In a mile the trail narrowed and in five miles it was overgrown footpath. Under foot was the give and slight backward pressure of deep moisture. Our guide shouldered through brush. Silent and sullen. Since I arrived I had spoken to no one but Frazier. The suspicion of these hills. It is redneck, hot, hillbilly and righteous.

"There is a mixture of spirits in these hills." Frazier was musing to himself. "The Cherokees left some, for they were an ambitious people with emissaries north and south. The Scotch Presbyterians brought some along, and the first evangelicals invented some."

I said nothing. He did not want conversation.

"Spirits of mist, thunder, wind and spirits of the dark." He laughed low, brittle. The man ahead slashed at blackberry. The trail rose and then again descended. It was hot and getting hotter.

"Spirits of the dark," Frazier said. "Well, and we are getting old, and most mystery is only a contrivance." There was a sudden flurry ahead. A kick, the sound of the machete striking the forest floor, a hush.

"Stand still," Frazier said. "There's often a nest of them."

The guide pushed at foliage with the machete. He kicked the brush. Then he motioned us forward. There was blood on the trail and pieces of a hacked snake.

"Always where it's low and wet," Frazier said. The reptilian blood was almost black on the humus. The head was split, the body chopped. Though he walked heavily our guide had been swift.

We walked. After the fourth hour my body passed from revulsion to acceptance and the trek was mechanical. It is a good body. Even under pressure I could depend on my movements. Part of it is due to early training. Erickson and Frazier and myself had all been trained to movement and the use of tools when we were young. It was not until we arrived and met Mink that it occurred to me how much Frazier resembled Erickson and how much I resembled both of them.

There are hill people and there are sorry people. Between the two there is as much difference as between a stump preacher and a theologian.

Mink was well named. I have known a thousand like him. Sly, shifty, and with long teeth. He moved with no dignity of age or experience. His clothes and cabin stank. The permanent coal dust that gets into the skin of miners circled his eyes; and his eyes were dull and clouded and suspicious. His gaze only seemed vacant. He looked more like a dying raccoon. One that could still bite.

His shack was empty but there was the mark of a woman and children. Pictures had been clipped from catalogs and religious magazines. A worn doll was tossed in a corner. The family was away visiting. They would return when we left.

"Let's unroll the sleeping bags outside," I said.

"Mosquitos," Frazier told me.

We ate from our packs and lay bundled on the floor. The trek in had been exhausting. There would still be the inspection of wreckage and the trek out. The coroner was old, Frazier told me. When the wreck was more than hearsay a deputy would bring the body out by helicopter. The inquest was a rubber stamp.

Two days of heat and fatigue. Now I sat in Frazier's long, low timbered room and stared at the shield of dark. To have to consider murder after two days of fatigue and fear and wreckage.

The wings had sheared from the plane and were tossed far enough that they did not burn. The identification numbers, white on the red wings, were like remote signals from a space of trees. The forest was dull in late summer. The pines held no gloss. The deciduous trees were chewed and ragged from August storms and insects. The fuselage lay on its side and was half gutted by fire. I had not wanted to do the necessary work because it was terrible and because I had known the man.

Where steel was exposed there was rust, and the aluminum skin was curled with fire. I watched twisted metal and tried to keep my hands from trembling. A year's accumulation of dirt lay in tiny pockets and waves of metal. The engine was twisted away from the cockpit. I looked, tried to speak, motioned to Frazier.

"No animal would do this." I turned to check the forest. Where was Mink? I felt the place between my shoulders where a bullet might enter, turned and felt the same place in my chest.

"Spirits of the dark," Frazier muttered. "No animal could."

"Where is he?"

"Keep working. Lawyers don't get hysterics."

There had been only silence, and the silence had lasted all through the long trek back. Now I sat in Frazier's living room, my thoughts scattered. Mink would get by with it. There was no love here for Erickson. There was no proof that a scavenger had not gotten to the body. Of course, Mink was stupid. He would betray himself if questioned. But who would bring him out unless there was some old grudge?

How stupid was he? I rose from the chair. Had he thought it over in his dull-minded, murderer's way and thought of his danger. Had he followed us? I know these people.

The muffled sounds of the night pulsed. The door stood

open to the darkness and the black shield seemed to move. The dark soul of the night. The dark heart of these hills and these people who will not speak to you. These people who have always bred revenge and killers. There was no mystery here. There was only fear and greed and violence.

I wanted to call to Frazier and stepped toward the doorway. Then I stopped. He had said that he was like them. The night was a glowering spirit of fear. It was the only spirit in this place.

The terror passed slowly. By the time Frazier returned I felt controlled. Resignation had replaced fear.

When he stepped from the dark it was like the appearance of a spectre. His hair and face and clothing were shining with mist. He brushed at his sleeves. The mist was thick. His shirt was damp and showed the mark of his hand.

"Why do you defend Mink?"

"I defend no one." he said. "that's in your line."

"I defend what I can understand."

"Then understand this."

"Impossible."

"No," Frazier said, "It's possible. You have been away too long. If you were in a foreign country you would be generous. Man, this is not Madrid or Paris. These are the hills."

"Murder is murder."

"Tell Erickson about it." He crossed the room to choose a recording. The room was designed for music, the measured address perfectly transmitted. One did not think of volume. The room lived in music and the music was surely Bach. Frazier walked the length of the room to sit by the cold fireplace.

I waited for one more lecture or protest. This had been

going on for most of my life. It would have been better for both of us if we had not been friends.

"Erickson may have been hurt," Frazier said. "Forget what's missing because Mink hid the evidence of his bullet. It's twenty miles from anywhere on Hanger Mountain, at least two days to a doctor."

"But to kill...."

"Sometimes around here a dog gets snake bit. We shoot it quick."

"And to rob...."

"Dammit, how do you know? He's ignorant and was afraid and had to try to burn the plane, but Mink is a decent man. At least as decent as the rest."

"And he did not report."

"Yes," Frazier said. "That's what really bothers you. On the other hand, why do you intrude with your five thousand dollars and pure intentions?" He leaned back, stretched his long legs and waited. The music surrounded us. I remained silent to force him to speak.

"Erickson was dead when he took the first course in engineering at that cow college," Frazier said. "He was dead the first time he spent ten cents on mineral rights."

"All three of us went to that college."

"And all three of us chose how we would die." There was a rush of music. "Illusions," he said. "Such a splendid choice of illusions, and so we made our choices."

"We're talking about Mink."

"It's dark out there." Frazier motioned at the now closed door. "Mink is not much different, and most of the darkness is only natural darkness. It cares nothing for our concerns. law, poetry, business, what does it matter?"

"My friend...."

"Yes," he said, "but the rest... it's the darkness of the mind. Toy monkeys on sticks. A dime a jump if you jump high." He broke off and sat watching me with neither judgement, nor affection.

"You remember when I came here," he said presently. "All of you, my friends, cautioned me against being a fool. You cautioned me. Yet, you have known me longest. You know how high I climbed my stick, did my tumbles, tipped my hat and mumbled and grimaced out there." He motioned to the closed door.

"You are famous."

"Enough to choose. I spend my time with a mule, a cow, a few chickens and a small garden. I occupy myself sorting Presbyterian ghosts, spirits, devils and haunts that are all illusory because they cloud the few real mysteries of these hills. My death is on my face, wrinkled, hawkish, and I feed my beasts and listen to The Art of the Fugue."

"Are you dying?"

"Yes. Listen, Erickson was no different. I speak of dying. All of us, all of our lives tied to these hills. We left because our fathers had jobs in the city. Erickson became rich, I became famous, and you...."

"Have done my job."

".... have also chosen."

"And Mink could not choose? Pity is a poor thing."

"And waste is a lousy thing, but you are right about pity. Mink spent his life in the mines."

"Which belonged to Erickson. You are getting childish. Are you really dying?"

"Hell, the mines belong to whoever owns mines, and I am getting angry. The poet, the lawyer, the businessman and the miner. It's all too pat. Representative props in a

two bit melodrama. By God!" His lips were drawn and white.

"Props," he said. "Whatever we do, whoever we are, but the props fail because of the human heart... it was harsh work."

"I don't want to feed your anger," I told him, "but everyone works and gets old."

"Yes. Except Mink had no pretense about work or the hills. We were trapped in illusion. Trapped in the immemorial darkness that will always be one of the true mysteries." He paused. Glanced at the closed door. "Your life was worth the price of a bullet a while ago. You were vulnerable. No pretense. No illusion. I sat beneath a poplar and watched. Had you come for the right reason...." Frazier stood, but did not walk to the record shelves. He crossed the open room to the kitchen area and began to brew tea from a local herb. With the door closed the night sounds were muted but still present. For a moment the room seemed like a lighted cave.

"This whole matter was none of our affair," he said. "Erickson intruded. He had no right to be here with those intentions and his pitiful business. He had no right to come sailing over Mink. He had no right to crash on Mink's place and leave wreckage to plague another man. Will the concerned heirs pay to have that junk removed? Erickson's last intrusion on Mink was just one of a thousand."

"What in the hell are you preaching?" I felt that he really must be dying and raving in the face of it.

"You don't see it," he said. "Forget it. But, man, you are alien. You have interfered and have no right to interfere further. Come on a true visit, or send me your letters, but stay away from these hills with your intrusions. This tea is always a little bitter."

"As bitter as the host?"

"Even now," Frazier said, "you intrude on Mink. You

are going to give him money."

"Or press charges."

"Try to understand."

I felt that I should be angry and was not. The murmur of the night lay just beyond the heavy drapes. I could hear it, restless, throbbing and certain.

"The wreck looks worse than it was. Maybe Erickson was hurt. Maybe he was only unconscious." Frazier sipped at his tea. "There is no way to know what Erickson would have thought, and there is no way to know what Mink thought because his mind is heavy and dead and he would not remember. He would tell you that Erickson was snake bit, and around here that is a cliche'."

"The man is an animal."

"The man has become an animal, now an animal with five thousand dollars."

"You object to the money?"

"The immemorial darkness," Frazier said. "Already folks call it blood money. They would not lend a mule to help in the matter. I would not myself. Mink might have lived in that hollow for the rest of his life and been buried by his children. Predict his future now? I would not dare." Frazier motioned to the delicate porcelain cup that was as strange in this place as a mule would be in a law office.

"My anger passes," he said. "When I die the people here will bury me. Then, without discussing it, they will divide the plunder. I have made provisions for the manuscripts and a few of the books."

"What does that have to do with anything?"

"Everything. It's what remains from all the things that happen and which we believe and which have no meaning. Are you so layered with illusion that you do not believe in revenge, which is another of the true mysteries. Man, I'm not just talking about the spirit of

these hills."

"....that they will destroy or steal your property."

"That Erickson had his, I have had mine and you are engaged in yours. It's sodden revenge. That's all. There is no heat to it. We are old."

"Maybe you are."

"We are old. As old as revenge."

"And you are a fool," I said. "I do my job."

"Yes, yes; and well, there is the Bach. Sometimes even now there is the poetry. Around here people can sing very sweet. They do that. Some make their own musical instruments. There are new ways to mine and new ways to build airplanes. The quality of rifles improves each year from army surplus. I listen to the Bach, walk through the natural darkness, and protest against intrusion. Sometimes when there is a gray dawn the forest and pasture are like silver when I walk down to feed the mule, and those dawns always happen in winter. The chickens are safe behind wire fences because the valley runs with hounds and foxes."

He looked at me and his face was creased, gaunt, shadowed in the low light and filled with his particular madness. "You leave in the morning," he told me. "File your report, send Mink the money, ignore the rest. It is none of your business." He walked to the door.

"Will you stay?"

"Here," he said. "Yes, right here, but for now I go to check on the beasts." He opened the door, stepped through the black shield and was engulfed. I saw him no more that night and he was uncommunicative in the morning.

I left in a dawn that promised high humidity and heat. We rode in Frazier's old car along broken road. My driver was yet another silent man from the community. We

bumped along and connected with a state road. I was carried to Ashland.

My plane flew over mountains that were like waves of green light and glaring heat. They shone in the sunshine and reflected the shadow of the plane. the shadow ran beneath the left wing and appeared and disappeared below us. The cuts between the mountains, the hollows and ravines, the dark gullies and slashes on the landscape swallowed the shadow only to throw it onto the next bright mounain top. The shadow traveled like a gray imp, a faded demon, and for those stretches where the landscape was altered it was nearly invisible. Erickson had been dead for a year, Frazier was dying in his chosen place and time and manner, and I was responsible for the affairs of others... but damn him, to be told that I had no right to be here....

The pilot banked above a river and followed it north. The shadow ran beneath us and only a little forward. It pointed toward the world that I had chosen.

All right. Maybe the son of a bitch was correct in his madness. I would respect it enough to respect his wish about Mink; and let him be correct. It was his world that was helpless, not mine. He still had no right to tell me that I had no right to be there.

James Jones

The news that James Jones had died was on the radio as I pulled into Tacoma for a speaking engagement. My aim was to tell the audience that a life spent writing holds many frustrations, but it also holds rewards not gained from many other pursuits. I had forgotten the object; had forgotten the power of a great book, and also the example for other writers that can come from the life of a great writer.

I did not want Jones to be dead. Something childish in me rebelled as it had not done for years. It is usually possible to meet the news of such deaths with a sort of uneasy fatalism. This time, with Jones, thoughts of universality, karma, history - all of the mystical knowledges we surround and defend ourselves with as we grow older - did not serve to ease the pain.

James Jones was in the first rank of his generation of writers, although I am not sure that I can say just which generation it was. He was technically a contemporary of Capote and Bellow. In interest and execution he was closer to the writers of the '20s and '30s. His style derives from a continuing and painful search through the material. It sometimes becomes ponderous but it never sacrifices a line to convenience.

As a private memorial and celebration I re-read all of Jones' work. It seemed a good thing to do for those reasons alone. It is also true that my heart and mind were

engaged with the uneasy desire to validate Jones who suffered badly from some critics.

The uneasy feeling disappeared as I read. The books do not need my opinion for validation. The best I can do is say a few things about work that has greatly affected me. What critics do and why they do it, has always been a mystery, anyway.

At the end of the reading I found that I wanted to discuss From Here To Eternity, Some Came Running and The Thin Red Line. I wanted to talk a bit about Jones' career and subjects of women, war, sex and social history. These were matters dear to Jones' investigation. No other writer has done a more honest job.

Jones' first novel was From Here To Eternity. The setting is Hawaii and the professional army just prior to World War II. The book is about a young soldier named Prewitt who is an ex-boxer. He has chosen to quit boxing because of an accident in the ring when he blinded another boxer. He is also an ex-bugler. He has chosen not to play the bugle because he loves it, and in order to keep loving it he has to quit. A situation has developed where his love would be compromised. Prewitt not only loves the bugle, he loves the army. When he is placed in any situation that requires him to think imperfectly of either then he gets in trouble. He is known as a hard head, a fuck up, and he eventually ends in the stockade where he sees other men permanently injured. One man is killed. Prewitt decides to kill the stockade sergeant who is responsible. After Prewitt's release from the stockade he has a knife fight with the sergeant and kills him. During the fight he is cut. He goes to the house of his shack job - lover - nearly surrogate mother - Alma. Alma is a professional prostitute who works one of the houses in Honolulu.

He enters a long bout of healing and heavy drinking. The Japenese bomb Pearl Harbor. Prewitt tries to make it back to his company and is shot by an army patrol.

Other important stories are going on at the same time. There is the story of Karen Holmes betrayed physically, morally and spiritually by her husband Captain Holmes. There are the stories of Maggio the wop who hates the army, of Sergeant Milt Warden who is a mad and not unhumorous genius, and the revolutionary figure of the ex-wobbly Jack Malloy.

These are the broad strokes and, as always, I have a feeling of helplessness as I turn to further deal with the book. Stories are important, but events are not particularly important. It is the meaning of event that makes each fine novel unique.

From Here To Eternity is a book of heat and light and hope and dreams. It is a book not about one idealist but several. Like all fine books the characters are in constant struggle to transcend the pressures that control them. When Prewitt is killed the event is not nearly as important as the knowledge that idealism is still alive in a world that is about to be shattered. World War II is coming. Not less than a hundred million people will die, but a billion dreams and hopes will die.

After finishing From Here To Eternity I re-read John Gardner's book, On Moral Fiction. Gardner holds that great books are moral books in the highest sense of the word... a sense that I take to be investigation and affirmation of the high principles and capacities discoverable in the human spirit. From Here To Eternity is just such a book. To read it is to discover once again that it is a hopeful thing to be human.

From Here To Eternity was Jones' first novel and it was the high point of his career from the standpoint of adulation. The career and the style are so mixed together, and so in contrast with what was generally expected of Jones, that they may be mentioned at some length. When From Here To Eternity was published it was greeted with the kind of acclaim that will frighten any writer. Jones was the new, great white hope. He would be the writer who would assume the mantle of the Steinbecks,

Hemingways and Faulkners. It must have been great to vault immediately into the realm of seriously considered writers, but such recognition requires that you write more great books.

Well, and so he did, but he would not follow a banjo act with a banjo act. His other work would always be viewed through the young heat of From Here To Eternity. As he matured and became a better writer his career began to dwindle, although the worst shock came early. He published his best book which is Some Came Running.

At this time Jones was occupied in developing the rough cutting edge in his prose that would be so useful, and which places him with the understandings and now often forgotten knowledges of earlier writers. Like Dos Passos, Arnow and Steinbeck, Jones could write smoothly and with grace when he wanted. Like those writers he did not always want to do that. Grace may sometimes be coupled with passion, but it often goes badly with the sustained search for understanding.

It was also at this time that Jones was working even more strongly under the influence of Joyce. Stream of consciousness had enjoyed a flurry of popularity. Then it dwindled as writers discovered some of its limits (and its difficulty) and opted out. Jones would discover, as all of us do who use it, that there is often room in stream of consciousness to be lyrical, but it is impossible to be constantly graceful and still do an honest job.

He had the other problem that all good writers face. That problem is pressing the limits and opening up new ways of getting the job done. Joyce was clearly operating right in line with William James' notions. He was breaking fresh ground and doing a superb job.

Jones tried to press it further. The style he was developing was an attempt to make narrative language (not just stream of consciousness) match and develop and serve as context for the building of character. He intended that narrative blend to stream of consciousness

and back to narrative without a seam. In none of his books is it done so well as in Some Came Running.

Some Came Running is about the writer Dave Hirsh who returns from the army and World War II to his hometown in Illinois. Dave develops a rapid case of the hots for Gwen French, of whom, more later. The hots become obsession, the obsession changes to love, and the love affair which has remained sexless is blown apart by Ginnie Morehead who is one of the women Dave has been bedding with while in pursuit of Gwen. Dave does not know that Gwen is a thirty-five year old virgin. He finally marries Ginnie and is killed by an ex-marine who is insane, and who was married to Ginnie for a short time.

In Some Came Running we see fulfillment of many promises that were made in From Here To Eternity. Two of the subjects I want to discuss are best talked about in the context of Some Came Running. The first is society.

When referring to literature the term 'sociology' spells sure disaster. This is largely true because the term is distorted. The distortion began in the 1940s with the adulterated Chicago school that misunderstood W. I. Thomas and substituted the convenience of method for true observation and thought in research. It would develop to a point where we would see statements like those of Talcott Parsons who once wrote that there is no quantitative difference between a man flying before a mob and a leaf flying before the wind since you can measure the velocity of each. Parsons was correct, of course, if all facts have equal weight and there is no substantial difference between emotion and wind.

Prior to these intellectual catastrophes the term sociology did not usually mean statistics and computers. Sociology often looked like literature, often like philosophy. In our own time thinkers like Peter Berger and Ernest Becker keep the old messages alive... and I like Berger's, Invitation To Sociology best, although nearly anyone can benefit from Becker's, The Structure of Evil.

Jones was interested in society. its fraudulence, its persuasive ability to control life by offering the lie that there are limited alternatives. In Some Came Running one of the concerns of the writer is to capture the makeup and the feel of that small Illinois town. Because the social context was a first cause in controlling his character's actions, he must have felt that he had to have a perfect stage. If, in a hundred years, a reader wished to know what the American middle west felt like, tasted like, in fact, *was* like after World War II, then Some Came Running would be the only book necessary to read.

The fiction writer is closer to society than is always altogether healthy. As we'll see, looking briefly at the problem, that is not always true. On rare occasions it is possible to have some luck. Tolstoy, for example, had the great luck to catch a society in a nearly fixed state just before it was knocked to flinders. He was about the last writer to have such luck and he did little fumbling. For this he has received a good deal of deserved credit.

Usually society means trouble for the fiction writer. Ignore it and your characters cannot live because they have no place to live. Stress it and you are in the same danger as a preacher who began discussing the peculiar morals of Jehovah.

Social origins make it difficult for many readers to deal with Some Came Running. With origins like the middle west who wants to be reminded? As a son of the middle border I must say that the middle west has been, and, I fear, is, bland and simpering and Oldsmobile ridden; where, as Aldo Leopold observes, the job of the state college is to make Illinois safe for soy beans.

It was difficlt for many readers to deal with Some Came Running. The book is about that generation that suffered the depression and the second war. It was a generation under the pressure of powerful change, one that was preoccupied with guilt, ambition and astronomical sexual questions. Some Came Running took many of its readers right back to the very place they were trying to

leave.

The book is a masterpiece of observation. No sociological study, not even the classic Middletown USA, has come so close to catching the small town middle west.

It is useful to read Some Came Running while thinking of other writers who have had the bad luck to have a bad society for subject. F. Scott Fitzgerald, for example, could write beautifully but had for subject the tinsel society of the '20s. In our own time Joan Didion has to face this problem. It is to her considerable credit, as it was to Fitzgerald's, that she is almost always able to write beyond her subject.

Jones never wrote a book in which there is no speculation about society, its fraudulance, its hideous control. Of all books the best job is in Some Came Running.

I believe the book poses a crucial question, one that is more important, perhaps, for writers than for readers.

Doesn't literature, and especially fiction, deal with people and not society?

The Merchant of Venice is considered literature (and you can make an argument that it predicts modern tragedy), while Dostoyevsky, Flaubert, Tolstoy, Faulkner, Dos Passos, Austen and Dickens are considered writers of acceptable fiction, all of which deals with society as well as people. Fiction addresses people in context and situation. As the context squeezes and the situation narrows to an inevitability the drama necessary for fiction becomes possible.

The second subject to discuss in connection with Some Came Running is Jones' dealings with women.

Stereotypes riddle fiction. Female stereotypes are the worst, for until lately they have gone largely unremarked. The most obvious are: The bitch who must die (or the shrew who must be tamed), the virgin

(Cinderella) who must be deflowered by any means, even the drastic means of marriage changing then to either the bitch or Wylie's construct of Mom - not a cliche' when Wylie observed her, but certainly a cliche' now. There is the whore with a heart of gold, the now nearly lost virgin mother, the wise old woman, the fallen woman and the bawd.

Most female characters in 19th and 20th century fiction fall into one of those categories, and nearly all of them depend on the stereotype to validate the character. Our literature has few Hester Prynnes, Hepzibahs, Ma Joads and Gertie Nevels. Even otherwise excellent writers like Bellow continue to fall into the trap of the female stereotypes and allow those stereotypes to account for most of the trouble that happens to their male characters.

It is different with the women in Jones' books. The difference is nowhere more apparent than in Some Came Running. That is true because there is a wider assortment of women than in the other books - although one thinks of Karen Holmes in Eternity, Lucky in Go To The Widow Maker, and a dozen or more other notable females in the various novels and short stories.

Each woman in Running superficially matches some part of a stereotype, although sometimes you have to stretch to see it. Ginnie Morehead is a slob, ignorant, cunning, but not foresighted enough to estimate the effect of her actions. Agnes Hirsh is the sister-in-law and the ostensible mom/bitch. Elivira Hirsh is the straw filled fundamentalist mother. There are several bar girls, although none with a heart of gold, who hang around Smitty's beer joint with some ex-soldiers who are their spiritual counterparts. We meet Geneve Lowe, ballcutter on her way up, and Edith Barclay, mistress with the power to revirginate. Doris Fredrick, who does not have this power, still manages to give the continuing impression of virgin while also being a spoiled brat. Dawn Hirsh is the virgin who must be deflowered. Then there is Edith's grandmother, Jane Staley, gossip,

wanton, and with traits that relate her exactly to the Wife of Bath.

In addition there is Gwen. A most special case as we will see.

After this superficial summary three points become remarkable:

First, none of these women fits their category. With the exception of Doris Fredrick who remains relatively undeveloped (to the extent that there is only third person observation and not stream of consciousness) every single major female character is developed individually and with compassion in a way that completely tramples the stereotype.

The Wife of Bath, Jane Staley, has a conscience; deep, severe, troubled. She has ethics, judgement, the capacity to recognize that both emotions are valid. She is like an Elizabethan chorus, or a witness, pacing and recording and talking about the actions of townspeople. She judges on the gossipy, superficial level, but defends against her judgement or the judgement of others on the level of morality and guilt.

No one in the book feels more actual pain than Agnes Hirsh. She knows that she is helping to cause the pain, and she recognizes the trap that makes her helpless. She is unable to stop her destruction, even when she knows that she could and should. There is no joy in Agnes Hirsh. Her bitchiness derives from the trap she is in, not from stereotype... although the trap partly comes from societal stereotypes.

Dawn Hirsh dreams, strives, and is betrayed by her lover Wally Dennis. She is trapped in the swirl of a system she hates and is unable to reject. Her alternative is to learn that she can enter the system and exercise power if she uses the control of guilt feelings taught by the society. As with nearly all of the female characters in the book, the development of Dawn is complete.

The second remarkable point is that Jones, with his observation of society, shows in this book (and in all other books except the war books) that the quality of bitchiness is built into every allowable role for the woman in society. It is as difficult for a woman to refrain from some measure of bitchiness as it is for a man to volunteer to be a sissy.

The third and really interesting point is that in a novel of 1266 pages only one woman dies and she is not murdered. Old Jane Staley dies of a rectal-vesical fistula attached to the bladder causing symptoms that she conceals because she mistakes them for the clap.

Norman Mailer, having such a variety of women, plus 1266 pages, would have doubtless murdered the lot and molested the corpses as he dismembered them. I mention this in passing because Jones and Mailer are coupled for those readers who remember only From Here to Eternity, and The Naked And The Dead.

Why are the women allowed to live, when, from Henry Miller and D. H. Lawrence onward, a tradition has grown that strews the pages with female characters dead mostly for the crime of being female?

The answer is that there is no reason for them to die. There is no reason for them to be indicted. They are well developed human beings subject to situations that warrant success, compromise, sadness, guilt, hope. At those times when everyone acts in confusion, or like fools, the characters sometimes accuse each other. The narrative listens, tells, shows that they know what fools they are while they are doing the accusing. This is especially true between Gwen and Dave.

It would have been easy to ask the stereotype to carry the blame for two deaths, Dave's and Wally's. Because of the characterization it is clear that they have no one to blame but themselves.

Now if we compare this writer's attitude not with a transparent case like Mailer, but with the bulk of work

considered interesting in the 20th century, it is obvious that Jones was working on a level of sympathy and reverence for his characters that is nearly unique. This is one requirement of greatness in a writer, and no writer may hope to achieve full potential without it.

Some Came Running is one of the most valuable of our American novels, and like many such novels it was a catastrophe as far as some critics are concerned.

Gwen French is a college professor of English who is a thirty-five year old virgin greatly interested in the love and sex life of writers. She wears the facade of a woman of the world and speaks of her various lovers. She has a theory about creativity and the propensity of writers to fall into hopeles love affairs which will furnish enough agony to assure that their work meets its potential. Gwen acknowledges that she is a critical writer because she does not want to suffer the anguish of creativity.

By the end of the book Gwen has changed a great deal. Dave Hirsh is dead, murdered by the marine because of the abominable barfly Ginnie Morehead. Gwen leaves town carrying her critical book which she cannot publish because of threatened libel suits, and which she has discovered is a novel after all. She also leaves with the resolution that she will experience sex with someone. Gwen is not guilty of Dave's death, but she feels guilty. Instead of clasping the guilt to her she makes the decision to grow up. She has accepted the anguish of life and creation rather than the plump comfort of safety.

As I noted earlier I do not understand what critics do, and while Some Came Running received intelligent and dispassionate reviews, I doubt if there can be any question about why critical scorn arrived from those uncertain quarters where it is apparently sporting to examine the struggle toward maturity of anyone except English professors.

In Some Came Running, Dave Hirsh is working on a combat novel in which death is the comic hero. That novel is The Thin Red Line. I mentioned this once to

Jones during a sporadic and inconsequential correspondence over a couple of years. He replied saying that only one editor, and no one else, ever before understood that.

Talk about discouragement: I have to believe that some readers understood that. They simply did not think it important enough to mention. Surely the state of our reading ability is not yet that low.

The Thin Red Line is the best of Jones' war books, and to me it always prompts thoughts about the subject in general, and how well it has been treated in literature. The novel is written in the conventional format of an infantry company going into combat. There is no hero except death. Quite ordinary men with dull expectations and incoherent dreams are pressed toward the indifference of statistical warfare. As the book proceeds the men die, singly, in small groups, and under the pressure of battle they behave in ways that earn them death, medals and sometimes even the million dollar wound that may lose them a limb but will take them out of battle. Above them death reigns. like the old puppet-master god, pulling here a string, dropping a string there, sometimes collapsing the entire comedy into a crumpled heap. Death gets all of the ironic lines. The men get death.

The great work of fiction makes a complete statement about its subject. In the literature that concerns war I can think of only two other complete statements. One is James Crumley's, One To Count Cadence and the other is Shohi Ooka's, Fires On The Plain.

By a complete statement I mean that each writer has grappled with every aspect of his material unrelieved by any illusion. There is no romance, no dedication to realism, no controlling scheme or preconception. In other words, there are few masterpieces, and when the subject is war there are damned few. Catch-22 made a bold attempt and got side tracked. USA did the same. Hemingway's work on war, while excellent, comprises a

fine statement that is not total because of the realistic and existential and sometimes even romantic bias. Most of the rest of the books on war are flawed with romance, except for The Painted Bird which operates in the context of war but is not really about war.

When a writer abandons all modes and simply struggles with the material then the statement that results can be realism at its highest. So it is with The Thin Red Line.

War has two great victories. The first is death. When you are dead your heart stops beating. Your flesh gets cold and begins to rot. You do not think or talk or love anymore. You need no space to move around in, and you need very little space at all; no more than would a side of pork - which, if you are dead in a war you will resemble. There is no further use to be had from you unless there are hogs rooting on the battlefield, as there are in all wars. The hogs will get hoggier and someone may eventually get a slice of them. A Zen Buddist would praise the fullness of these facts, a romantic never. Zen Buddists are not famous for starting wars. Romantics hardly ever fail to start them when given a chance.

The other statement of The Thin Red Line is that war's second great victory is dehumanization. All of the men die, although not all of them are physically destroyed.

Elsewhere (In WWII) Jones wrote about the evolution and de-evolution of a soldier. He would point out in non-fiction what The Thin Red Line makes plain. After war has joked, toyed, and sufficiently daddled its victims there is no de-evolution. There is only the final becoming that can render up one of two results depending on the man: either the beast or the warrior, both total and indifferent killers.

No other writer has dealt so effectively with war. On this subject Jones also wrote WWII, Viet Journal, The Pistol and Whistle. None of the books has the fullness of Thin Red Line, but Whistle is worth mention in talking about war.

It is about the psychological aftermath. Four men return from combat and their return kills them.

They have entered a realm of violent experience, suffered permanent change, and can never know the world again except as aliens. Values that sustained them before the war are meaningless. The new values of the society that develop around them have no relation to their experience. Worse, the only certain value they have begins to disappear.

In combat they have learned that women, love, home, sex, skill, intellect, ideals, hope, good intentions, patriotism, community, economics, philosophy and every other human endeavor are less than meaningless. They are shit. The only thing that means anything is the strength of the company, its support.

In the hospital and in civilian life the one knowledge they have does not work and their attempts to make it work fail. They are lost, damned, and a grateful nation breathes easier when they are dead.

Sex is the final subject prompted by a rereading of Jones'work. It is a main topic (although not exclusive) in Go To The Widow Maker and The Merry Month of May. It is peripheral in Whistle, although a lot of straight out fucking is going on. It is a central problem in Some Came Running, a large side issue in From Here To Eternity and A Touch of Danger. Most of Jone's writing considers direct sexual experience at some point; the exceptions being The Pistol, Thin Red Line and some of the stories in The Ice Cream Headache.

By the time a writer is thirty he or she will have discovered that there is a limit to the number of things that two consenting adults can accomplish in bed. After that, the act is an exercise in variation, subtly and poetry.

This statement, written in 1978, was not always true. In this country, even among the bohemian element, it came as big news to many that people could like to suck on each other. At some time or other it was probably big

news to Jones.

We want to remember that he came from small town Illinois, from a generation described elsewhere in this book, and then we will see the validity of his interest and contribution. Since most of the world seems insufferably young to this aging, antique writer, it is possible that the world does not realize that the so-called sexual revolution was quite a revolution indeed. To really appreciate the extent of what has happened one had to be raised in the pre-pill society (or, as I less than affectionately think of it, the days of the shiek diaphragm). Abortion was illegal, vasectomy nearly unknown and tubal ligation morally suspect. This U.S. is quite a nation. We still broadcast murder on every TV network while exorcising the spicier dialogue from Romeo and Juliet.

With his interest in society and its violence it was impossible for Jones not to deal with the subject that society tried hardest to hide beneath the whimsy of mouthwash commercials guaranteed to swell the testicles and provide innumerable and superlative romps.

The world was changing. With sex it was changing so fast that for many it became a nightmare. The last such trauma in America had been in the 1920s.

In several of the books, and most notably in Merry Month and Widow Maker, Jones departed from story-telling to social observation, investigation and philosophy. He did not forget the story, but the story sometimes gets buried under the weight of ideas. They are wonderful books to read, but not necessarily as fiction.

The 1960s were a kind of global orgasm, or at least that is true for the western world. Tumultuous times should probably be the province of journalists who are rarely called on for retrospectives. All fiction, of course, is historical. To attempt to document a process while you are in the middle of it is to stretch the threads of fiction at

every seam. (Good science fiction is historical as well. Ursula LeGuin uses the term 'future history', Frank Herbert says that you cannot write science fiction unless you have your feet firmly planted in past and present reality).

Jones' contribution was to document changing sexual patterns, together with the human and social results. The documentation came from a man who had lived through the worst of American prudery, the Victorians excepted. He was among the first to write of sex in a reportorial manner, which is refreshing after years of bad porno coupled with the tales of Henry Miller and D. H. Lawrence. Men and women engaged in sex. They did not have to bludgeon each other or resort to images of bloody holes and noble marble pedestals.

From one point of view Jones' dealings with sex are the best index of his excellence as a writer. Somewhere beneath the brutality of social control and banal assumption, somewhere beyond the stereotypes that other writers have come to love so well, human beings dream and attempt to love. That is the place where Jones goes. He touches respectfully and accurately. Sex scenes are never in the books for the sake of a sex scene. They are there as one of the searching expressions of the characters... and we may say, after rereading the work, that no matter the subject at hand Jones first of all stayed with the search.

Now the man is dead and we can look at the entire packet and speculate, generalize and admire. We are certain to be wrong in much that we say, but because of the power of the work we are certain to be correct when we turn from questions of style, subject, prejudice and technique; turning instead to this particular monument that has been erected in the cause of literature.

Some writers build great monuments and some build modest ones. And the cause of literature is variously described, but I take it at least partly to be this - Literature, like all other arts, allows us to be humane. It

cannot force us, has no police power, but can in its measureless perception and sympathy expose through ten thousand doors and windows aspects of our condition. We may choose to be humane because of that, to accept love, to reject conflict and war and totality of strife.

Viewed in these terms a great writer has lived among us. Sometimes he was also a great novelist, for he wrote three novels that attain to the kind of fullness of which I have spoken. At other times he was a writer using the format of the novel in experiments that would partly succeed, partly fail. Our need for his work will become even stronger as we move further into the crowded, insecure and fearfully wealthy world of technological society. We will understand him best, no doubt, when excess and waste impoverish us and we are once more forced to ask questions of what is moral, what is right? It is then that we will need him most.

For writers he is a special writer, and those of us who are younger have a view of a great writer who always went faithfully with his material, no matter where that material might lead. A first lesson in morals for writers; that the only courage that is worth a snap is moral courage. It is that tenacity and truthfulness that is the extra legacy left us by James Jones.

The Priest

In the beginning was the Word and he had known that all his life. Now, with his thick hair gray and the rough beard too often pointed into his breast, he was no longer sure that he knew enough. Rafe told himself that beyond the Word must be the thrall or the song; world without end.

Winter without end.

"Unto all of ye who somewhere dream. This is a prayer." He would chant across the ice. "To all music that yet dwells. To what heat still lies in the ice covered hills. To the embering sun."

Sometimes in deep winter the world held a hint of shine. when he was wrapped, bundled and insulated against the cold it was possible to be abroad for a few minutes. The Diggers never came in deep winter. In deep winter the sky was orange on days of shine. Usually it was brown. The thin air made him suck hard through the net of mesh swaddled around his head.

There was padding beneath the slit glasses. Rafe's father had taught the care of eyes. To think of his father and to see... That was enough to make a man believe in all words and songs because himself, a man, was there to say

This tale was written after a year of study over the journal of George Fox.

or sing them.

"At the end of the world all is holy." Rafe remembered his father always.

Sometimes Rafe's words were like the air. The song was thin and disappeared beneath the grinding of the ice. Some years brought more ice than others. The towers were down. The tall buildings were stumps. On the surface of all the world that he could see there was only the movement of ice. His songs were like showers of dying sparks. Even the voice of The God was lost or distant most of the time.

The God did not expect faith. The God gave knowledge. If the knowledge was old and the experience long past it was still remembered. The God drove invisible through the thin air and above the ice, through the broken and icy rooms of the crushed buildings and across the storage pits that held the food-dead who were encased in ice. The God passed silent through the cellars and sub-cellars of those same buildings where the cold touched but did not quite overcome the dying heat of the enclosing earth.

There were cries in the dark and the movement of The God through scrabbled passages. The rats and the raccoons and the cats and the new creatures fought over a dying economy. Flesh and fur, meat traded back and forth, the numbers diminished with the years and the occasional raids of The Diggers. Screams in the dark. Pack. Hunters. The clear force of The God drove through the burrows and above the crush of life and death, above the squalling.

When the fog rose in middle winter, around the old July, a sense of tranquility paced the slow movement of The Diggers through the dead city. In old July the sun was red. The visitors came from their great burrows in strength. In old days they had come to raid. Now Rafe did not know why they came. They were men who tramped like conquerors in insulated clothing. The areaways between buildings were broad canals of slow melt. Guides led their appointed packs along the surrounding

ice ledges. The movement of The Diggers was confident because of their superiority. They considered themselves the self blessed. They were the sons of the wise and their race was perpetuated. Rafe would watch them from an obscure outpost of broken masonry that was edged with decaying ice.

"These too are holy." His father's name had been Jubal.

Rafe would watch The Diggers and try to feel love. He would try to feel sadness. He felt little of either. When a man has lived long enough and thought hard enough there is not much under any sky that can make him sad. Even when they shot at him it did not make him sad, and they had only shot at him twice on the times when he had been careless of his concealment.

The clear force of The God drove soundless through the air. Rafe was preacher to rats, theologian to the beasts, overseer of a grotesque evolution of blind life that scampered and crawled. Creatures of the dark did not develop cones in the eyes. It had not always been that way.

"This is how the world ended." His father had been the greatest of his teachers. "It is also how another world began."

"In the ending there was fire." As a child Rafe had repeated the words as a duty.

"Such is the dogma." His father was tough and believed little. "The fire lasted for awhile. There was the heat of bombs and words. There was the hot shame of expeditious governors, but it was temporary fire. There were weapons to throw and the persuasion to throw them, but these would finally mean little."

"A lance had been fired at the sun."

"Such is the dogma." His father was small and stringy and as tough as the rats. "The lance is symbolic. Lances were fired at the atmosphere, at the depths. Mountains and volcanic systems were lanced. Prairies, forests,

meadows. It is symbolic."

"In the days of our fathers...." Rafe would begin the loved ritual.

"Four generations are passed since the fields."

"I bow to the life of the fields. I sing of the grain...."

In pockets here and there beneath the shattered buildings were the sacred artifacts. They were protected from teeth by vaults of steel.

"....clothe with boiler plate."

"And the people said, 'Now has The God spoken, and now do his people turn even as scavengers unto the bowels of the earth'."

"What that means," his father said, "is that the people saved what they could of the things they believed were Godly. It wasn't much because it took them years to understand that the things were being destroyed or eaten."

"There was great revulsion."

"You learn the words," his father said. "Think beyond the words. Yes, in their grief and fear they hated all things for awhile. They destroyed many of those things."

The sacred artifacts still made Rafe tremble. There were voices and eyes and ears in those boxes if one thought symbolically. There was the tactile and there was scent. In one box was an instrument made of wood, the strings gone, the casing cracked. There was another made of brass. There were pictures and books and statues. There were opticals. There were jujus, pieces of fabric and ribbon and crucifixes and something called leaves that were delicate and smelled warm. The leaves had once been green. This his teachers told him. "Green is this color, here on this canvas. This part is the painting. This part is the canvass."

Rafe's father died old. Rafe praised his father as he ate

him and gave thanks to The God for his father's success.Rats did not polish his father's bones. Against dogma Rafe interred them with the food-dead. It was then that there was revelation. The clear voice of The God was serene with love.

The voice told what his father had taught. The race was run and life was to impart to life.

Rafe searched for silence. Away from the grinding ice. Away from the hiss and howl and tearing of the beasts. Away from the thump and occasional vibration that The Diggers caused deep in the earth.

Through corridors, through abandoned rooms. The packs followed, stalked, screamed and fell on each other. Rafe had never known heat but the calm voice of The God was green.

By revelation he knew that he was the last man above ground, and he knew further that those below ground considered him inhuman. They considered him food. In the power of the voice he knew that The Diggers were mad. He wept for their madness and for his own.

"Two sects developed." Usually when his father taught they had been in the broken upper buildings. It imparted urgency to the teaching for it was impossible to remain for very long. "The two sects were the sect of The God and the sect of The Mind. They were believed antithical."

"So it is taught, sir."

"They aren't," his father said. "I speak heresy, but it is an old heresy of little importance now." Like all other people Rafe knew or remembered, his father's hair was coarse and long. It was pulled crosswise beneath the chin, wound backward and tied at the back of the neck. The hair then spread under the rough clothing and fanned across the back. His father's hair was a cloak. When he was little, Rafe had placed his hands beneath the hair and felt warm.

"We are the last of the sect of The God," his father said.

"The Diggers are of the sect of The Mind and they will outlive us. Then they will also pass. I cannot know what is important to them. Food, perhaps. There is a knowledge called populations. It is no longer useful to us."

"But for us, The Word."

"In our sect all are priests," his father said. "There is one duty, only. Remain coherent. Learn this well, for the duty is that we must end well."

"The sister is a priest?"

"The sister will not live. The mother will not live."

"You know this, sir?"

"It is the mother's choice and it is her heresey in which I join. She deals in life. I praise her."

"I will pray."

"Above is the ice, below the disease of the rats."

"Still, I will pray."

"Forget dogma."

In the time of silence with the green voice of The God in his mind, Rafe remembered all of his father's words. He remembered his father's grief. He was sustained by his father and by his father's hope that he, Rafe, would be the great priest.

The silence was a mistake. To be alone was to suffer madness. To suffer madness was to be incoherent. This his father had taught. He returned to the beasts and to the occasional thunder of The Diggers far beneath the city.

"There are so few of us." His father's voice mixed with the voice of The God. "That is good luck. We pass soon."

"The artifacts will remain."

"In the time of the last days of your grandfather fires died. It was easy to remain civilized when we had fuel. We

must not become beasts."

"Some of our people no longer see or speak."

".... so much to explain." His father crouched during the lessons. Heat was conserved in the crouch. "Some adapt. There is a knowledge called nutrition. Few adapt."

"The Diggers have heat."

"The Diggers have hydroponics. They have fuel and the tools to scrabble deep in the earth. They have light and government."

"They will survive. I am warm by their survival."

"They do not have The God," his father said.

Sometimes there was weakness. In the years after his father's death Rafe called to The God. He asked to remain coherent. Only in the Word," he prayed. "Take the eyes."

The God did not want his eyes and The God did not need his words and the weakness always passed. Rafe sang, chanted, clapped and danced through the corridors. He would not allow himself to mumble or whisper. Song was but one of the names of The God.

Life was another. As he grew old, Rafe disclosed to himself that he hated The God. The God did not care. When life departed it was vacuumed into The God. To praise rightly was to die. The diminishing generations of beasts praised rightly.

"So taught the mystics," his father said. "Our being arises from life and returns to life. Our being is only a physical manifestation of life."

"Take my eyes," Rafe prayed.

The end would be soon. He was old. It had taken so long to become old. The world changed as he had become old.

Again, as in the long past, the tumbled cellars sometimes vibrated with the actions of The Diggers. Pulses in the earth. The far-away vibration of machinery.

It was a warm thing.

Twice in the time of the last three old July's the sub-cellars had been broken open with machines. Lights flashed, beasts fled, were netted, stunned, clubbed. The rapid silhouettes of men chased back and forth in the flash of the lights as they gathered meat. Rafe watched each time with a passageway at his back. On the time he was chased they were afraid to chase him far. He came to anticipate the gathering of meat. When the machines broke through there were warm drafts in the passageways.

During his last year he was content. He no longer hated The God. Deep winter came and stayed and passed. The pulses in the earth were sporadic. When they came they came as occasional heavy shocks. The Diggers did new things. He was warmed by the shocks because they felt like heresy. He thought of the mother and the sister and knew that heresy was the best prayer.

"I own my eyes," he told The God.

The old July returned. Water began to seep through the passageways. He loved his eyes and took them above ground.

The world was crystal. He had never known it this way. It was necessary to proceed slowly and with caution. He shadowed his eyes. The slit glasses allowed too much light. Rafe moved with a squint. The sun was nearly yellow.

There was melt among the food-dead. He accepted this as a sign and loved them. He spoke to his father's head, spoke exactly and at length to prove his coherency. He described the crystal world to his father. In this old July there was much melt.

The Diggers came from the burrows and he was hidden beside a wet outpost to watch. They came with caution this year. Their stride was harsh and they moved in larger groups. There were more of them and it caused a

great fear in Rafe's mind. He crouched in the strange light. Awed, struck dumb at their harsh movement and numbers. He was driven by terror and fled. Into the passageways, the aisles, corridors, toward the sacred. The steel boxes were wet with melt. The voice of The God was gone.

He fumbled and almost dropped an artifact. He willed his movements to be slow. The God spoke. The artifiacts were Rafe and Rafe was the artifacts. From the jujus he chose a ribbon. It was long and broad and smooth and continuous. It was life. It was the voice of The God.

His fear left and he moved toward the surface. Strange sounds repelled, fascinated, finally attracted him. He moved slowly to prepare his eyes. On the surface he crouched behind a broken wall.

Fire bloomed in the distance. He had never seen fire, but he knew that it must be fire. On the thin air was a garble of shouts, cries, a babel that was distorted and confused and rabid. He slid carefully away from the broken wall to scuttle forward. Words choked in his mouth. He was incoherent.

To sing them. He could only move erratically over the clumsy footing of melt. He found no song.

To make a noise then. He slowed and held the ribbon before him and began to chant. In his ears the chant seemed like the hiss of the beasts, but the ribbon gave strength and his voice grew stronger. He walked toward the fire. chanting, chanting, the words now splendid in his mind and almost understood. He was not afraid. He was not sad. He walked with love and chanted with a green voice. He knew that in the end it was only necessary to say to them that they must stop shooting at each other, they must stop shooting.

Photo by William Singer

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