



Guard of Honor against Misogyny and White Supremacy

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No critical study of James Gould Cozzens or of the American literature of his generation has ever quoted this description of the life that a smart, sensitive, educated woman of the mid-1940s was obliged to lead¹:

The wilderness around her was essentially hateful in its upset values, its incentives to self-mistrust, its comfortless patchwork of unavailing efforts and disagreeable contacts; essentially frightening—the huge, going machine had no controls you could reach—this way of life made equilibrium precarious, dependent on a fantastic rigging job. The job was usually—it had to be—serviceable, and often most ingenious; but its safety factor, unless you didn't feel it at all, was zero. It could not stand a prop knocked out from under here, or a parted guy there. (*Guard of Honor* 564)

This lack of attention to this protest against a sexist world is all the more remarkable since Cozzens ascribes this subjectivity to a female military officer, one of very few in all of American fiction. Yet Women's Army Corps Lt. Amanda Turck, the most striking character in Cozzens's *Guard of Honor*, has never found a substantial place even where one might expect to see her, in studies of women characters in novels of the World War II era. Her sardonic intellect, withering self-scrutiny, and meditations on gender are more easily noticed today than when Cozzens presented her in 1948. None of the women in *The Naked and the Dead*, *The Young Lions*, and *The Gallery* – the three most critically acclaimed of World War II novels published while that war remained an intimate memory – possess more than a smidgen of subjectivity. Norman Mailer, Irwin Shaw, and John Horne Burns created many women, but none remotely like Cozzens'

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¹Even Frederick Bracher, whose *The Novels of James Gould Cozzens* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1959) remains after six decades the best book on Cozzens, deals only briefly with Amanda Turck, and mistakenly conflates her with women characters in Cozzens's other novels, entirely missing what is distinctive about her (see esp. 139, 142, and 214). Turck figures small in Harry John Mooney, Jr. 103, 106, 112–115, and is not mentioned at all in one of the most discerning analyses of *Guard of Honor*; Alfred Kazin 95–104. Matthew Brucoli, *James Gould Cozzens* mentions Turck only once in an entire chapter on *Guard of Honor*. So it is with more recent analyses of *Guard of Honor*, e.g., J. V. N. Mallikarajuna and G. Bangla Bharathi 18–26; Robert McParland, *From Native Son to King's Men*.

articulate, knowledgeable, self-interrogating Amanda Turck.² Moreover, none of the women in Joseph Heller's, *Catch-22*, the 1961 novel set, like *Guard of Honor*, in a World War II air force base, perform any dramatic role beyond serving as objects of male desire. When two servicemen grab the breasts and buttocks of a nurse, Heller invites laughter at this bit of rollicking good fun and treats the resulting official investigation as no less comic a farce than any other action of the fools in charge of the base (288-289).

Guard of Honor's almost entirely unnoticed testimony of the damage done by sexism runs parallel to the novel's similarly unnoticed testimony to the strength of white supremacy, conveyed through the novel's central character, Col. Norman Ross. A judge in civilian life but a veteran of the previous war who reentered military service, the sixty-year-old Ross is functionally in charge of the daily operations of a base under the official command of the much younger, narrowly focused Major General Ira Beal. *Guard of Honor* is organized around Air Inspector Ross' struggle to determine just what his duty is when faced with a series of challenges created by the injudicious behavior of those around him, including Beal, and by the contradiction between the local Jim Crow regime and the Army's color-blind policies that Ross is obliged to enforce and in which he believes.

I will first take up misogyny and Turck, then racism and Ross.

"I am, as usual, a little out of place," the female lieutenant remarks amid the episode in *Guard of Honor* most often contrasted to *Catch-22*: the military parade (*Guard of Honor* 541). For Heller, such spectacles epitomize absurdity. Cozzens treats them wearily as a routine aspect of military life. Paratroopers whose jump was to provide an air-show supplement to the parade on a Florida base were mistakenly pushed out of the planes at the wrong time, resulting in their overshooting a sandy field and either drowning in a lake or breaking their legs on a concrete runway. Witnessing close-up one crash landing, the self-effacingly out-of-place Turck knows better than any of the male officers present how to deal with the injured soldier until an ambulance arrived. "I was going to be a doctor" and "got married instead," she quickly explains, but then turns this into an apology. "I have all kinds of useless information," such as knowing "how to operate a switchboard and milk a cow" (541). Her information here, anything but useless, quietly mocks

²Norman Mailer, *The Naked and the Dead*; Irwin Shaw, *The Young Lions*; John Horne Burns, *The Gallery*. Burns' "Momma," the older Neapolitan woman who befriends the American GI's, is a well-developed character but well within gender stereotypes. All of these novels confront the war chiefly from the viewpoint of enlisted men, not officers. Of the critically acclaimed war novels of the immediate historical moment, the only one other than *Guard of Honor* with an officer as its main character is John Hersey's, *A Bell for Adano*, also, like *Guard of Honor*, a Pulitzer Prize winner. The Hersey novel is organized around Major Victor Joppolo. Its only female character is a young Italian woman in whom Joppolo takes an interest but with whom he never couples.

her self-deprecating comments and wins stunned deference from the male captains and majors standing nearby.

Captain Nathaniel Hicks is among those who discern that Turck is no ordinary WAC. Hicks is a magazine editor in civilian life whose Army job it is – in another feature of *Guard of Honor* that *Catch-22* famously turned on its head – to write articles burnishing the public image of generals. Hicks' assignments require access to documents under Turck's supervision as the base's librarian. Turck's personality gradually emerges in a series of conversations with Hicks over the three-day period in which the entirety of the novel unfolds. Hicks and Turck are better educated than any of the other officers either of them sees regularly. Each is glad for the other's ears. Hicks speaks mostly about small frustrations with Army life, but Turck more fully interprets their experiences on the base. It is she who applies Milton and Shakespeare to passing moments. Hicks recognizes the quotations and appreciates their aptness. Turck's need for a confidant is greater. The lonely divorcee in her late twenties has much to say to the slightly older married man who seems to understand her feelings and pays her the compliment of respectfully challenging some of them. Hicks admires Turck's "controlled and composed, yet ceaseless struggle which, gracefully and even gallantly, she seemed to have to renew every day" against the "obsessive self-consciousness" that was so obviously part of her (171).

Turck invites her sympathetic male friend to ponder how the entire realm of ethics has been reserved to men. Women are "incomplete" compared with men, she says with great conviction, and their lack of moral capability is basic to that condition (41). "Of course it would be Eve who ate the apple. She had no ethical sense" (598). Women are expected to have their likes and dislikes "whether from the ethical standpoint it is good, bad, or indifferent." Women are better off being "not too bright," but Turck's problem is that she does too much thinking like a man. "When any real woman is nothing but eager and serene" about something, "for me" the experience "will as often as not be spoiled ... by the horrid, unwomanly suspicion that what I'm doing is contemptible" (598).

Turck reveals to Hicks that she was a bookish child, said to be plain and too tall for a girl. Growing up in a poor family, she began at a very young age to earn money in part-time library jobs. Once established as a librarian at a medical school she persuaded the dean to let her try for a medical degree herself. But it was too much, on top of working an eight-hour shift every afternoon and evening, following a demanding morning of classes. Ashamed and in despair, she made the foolish decision to marry a closeted gay medical student eager for the cover of a marriage. The arrangement also gave cover to Turck: she appeared to have found a life for herself when, in fact, she had found only a place to hide. Fleeing the self-destructive marriage she joined a wartime Army that was glad to have her experienced services.

Cozzens develops Turck's character by contrasting her to other women. Cora Ross is an intelligent, well-centered woman who is content to be a judge's wife, and

willing to travel with her husband to less-than-ideal living conditions on a military base. She frets conventionally about the colonel's over-work and over-worry, but leaves the deep thinking to him. She is a source of support for Sally Beal, the general's confused and easily derailed wife whom both Rosses consider to be a child, emotionally. When Mrs. Beal visits the WAC quarters, Turck finds her colossally naïve about her role and incapable of understanding what it is like to a woman in the military. The many civilian secretaries put up with the sexist remarks of the Army officers and are self-effacingly and unreflectively devoted to the men for whom they work. Only the character of Lt. Mary Lippa, Turck's undisciplined WAC roommate, does Cozzens develop in any detail.

Turck is dismayed when a self-important braggart, Lt. James Edsell, effortlessly seduces Lippa, whose relation to Edsell seems to be "an involuntary reflex." When Lippa "takes a fancy to that lout," Turck tells Hicks, she becomes "like a bitch in heat" (519). Lippa is a flaming example of women who, like Eve, have no ethical sense, but Turck and Lippa get along well enough most of the time. Turck is amused when she learns that some of the enlisted women in their command assume that the two are lesbian lovers. But Lippa chafes under Turck's conscientious response to duty. On Edsell's arm in a crowded hotel lobby in the nearby town of Ocanara, a drunken Lippa encounters Turck and lets loose: "Oh, you make me sick, Amanda! Will you stop looking so damned refined?" Learning that Lippa is about to spend the night with Edsell, Turck reminds her that regulations require her to leave a number where she can be reached, but Lippa snaps, "Oh, shut up!" (567).

Hicks observes this exchange just as Turck learns that a communication mix-up has deprived her of the weekend hotel room to which she had been looking forward as a comfortable upgrade from the hot, dusty WAC barracks. Hicks persuades her to come up to the suite he shares with two other officers to take a bath and collect herself before going back to the base by taxi. But both of Hicks' suite-mates are unexpectedly called away, one to spend the night in a hospital with his wife, who fell ill during a visit, and the other to join comrades in a night of drinking and whoring. Hence Turck finds herself alone with Hicks. After some whiskey, she responds to Hicks' sympathetic questioning by telling him more and more about herself.

By this late point in the story the reader has learned that Hicks gets along with his womanizing friends but never joins them, even in their crude sexual banter. The other officers understand him to be faithful to his wife, who has remained home in Connecticut. Cozzens contrasts Hicks to his two suite-mates, Capt. Clarence Duchemin, a *bon vivant* always looking for available women, and Capt. Donald Andrews, a pathetically proper mathematical genius who is unprepared for the company of any woman other than his wife. Bringing Turck up to his suite was an honest, and presumably uncomplicated logistical favor, without sexual design, although Hicks has

acknowledged to himself that he finds Turck's "good figure and well-bred face" attractive and that other men do, too (512).

As the conversation proceeds Hicks becomes increasingly aware of his attraction to Turck and of his own loneliness away from his wife. He notices that Turck keeps vowing to get up and leave but does not. "Looking at her, he saw that her face showed traces of strain or anxiety; her faint smile was pained, her eyes dissatisfied or unhappy, as though she stood in the distress of facing a choice; and moreover, the choice was a choice of distresses." Sensing that she wants to stay a while longer, Hicks asks her about her marriage. It is then that Turck explains its character and her own struggles with womanhood, and much else. As she goes on, speaking about love in puzzlingly convoluted terms, Hicks suddenly realizes that Turck has never had a sexual experience. She tries to keep her carefully maintained composure, but having revealed so much, she weeps. She has wanted a real relationship, but has not been able to manage it: "You could crawl away and die of resolute intentions, manful endeavor, dogged persistence, even occasional measures of success - ." Hicks tries to apologize for pushing her too far, but she admits she has wanted to share these parts of herself with him. They fall into bed together. (601, 608)

The sex works, but not to solve much of anything. Rather than a transforming consummation, Turck's sexual initiation is only a step toward the greater self-possession for which, presumably, she will continue to strive. Her post-coital tears not only respond to a pleasure too long postponed; those tears also "deplored more and more, helpless and too late, every circumstance that brought her here to be uncovered" (620). Turck's resolution is incomplete and provisional. The phone rings; it is Ross, telling Hicks to go instantly to the airport where he will board a plane to Washington in order to work there on his articles promoting the Army Air Force. The reader does not know if Hicks will ever return to Ocanara, or if he and Turck will ever see each other again.

But the reader does know something very important. Turck's climactic intimacy with Hicks is consistent with her meditations on ethics and gender. Hicks treats her like a more complete human being than she imagines herself to be. Turck understands Hicks to be a morally sensitive male who is all the more appealing to her because he is capable of loving his wife. She complains that men are inclined to separate out their various emotions about women, sex being quite apart from other kinds of affection, while for women love is "composite," a more integrated experience. Hicks denies that "a man's feelings was ever any simpler than a woman's" (607). Turck allows that it would be "blissful" if a man allowed a woman to "see all his feelings involved in her all the time, all at once" (608). Hicks says that is not so rare, clearly thinking of himself. His difference from most of the men in *Guard of Honor* enables him to create for Turck the emotional

space in which the two do make love. As they begin to do so Turck protests that she has lost control over herself, and blurts out, “it has no conscience.” But for her, at this time and place, with this particular man, it actually does (609).

All studies of *Guard of Honor* emphasize Ross’ complicity in the pervasive racism of the milieu, but none recognize the portrait of white supremacy that is given all the more power by the unwillingness of even the most sympathetic character to challenge it. Cozzens is rightly understood to be a conservative author for inviting readers to sympathize with ostensibly wise, middle-aged men who keep the world running while surrounded by foolish and impetuous associates. He invites this in *Guard of Honor*, but in this novel, by far his best, he also does much more.

Ross is a man of conscience. He exemplifies the serious ethical engagement that Turck protests is not expected of women, contributing to their incomplete humanity. The colonel’s private brooding is the major domain of the entire novel, and is matched in intensity only by Turck’s arguments with herself. Hicks, too, reflects self-critically on his own actions, but he serves primarily as a psychological and ethical bridge between Ross and Turck, who meet briefly but do not converse. Hicks is a “good-tempered man,” never looking for trouble but fully capable of handling it if it came to him, and highly observant about the doings of people around him (25). Hicks provides the emotional space in which Turck can feel at least slightly more ethically engaged while remaining female. The other characters lack the depth required for sustained reflection. That so few of the males, even, have this quality renders Turck’s possession of it all the more distinctive a feature of *Guard of Honor*.

The evils of white supremacy emerge gradually and with increasing salience as the conscientious Ross searches for his duty. Ross knows that his duty is located in “the possibilities and limitations of the Here and Now” (396). Only in that restricted territory can anything be achieved on behalf of the good and the right. These boundaries lie not only in the immediate and shifting circumstances of time and place, but in the capabilities of the individuals whose actions he tries to influence or at least to predict and to work around. The basic idea – do the most you can with what you’ve got, given the limits you face – is saved from banality by the brute reality of how hard it is to discern just where those limits lay.

If you did not know where the limits were, how did you know that you were not working outside them? If you were working outside them you must be working in vain. It was no good acting on a supposition that men would, for your purpose, be what they did not have it in them to be; just as it was unwise to beguile yourself, up there on top of the whirlwind, with the notion that the storm was going to have to do what you said. (532-533)

While Ross sometimes thinks he has correctly figured out the boundaries of the possible, he is far from complacent. He judges his own conduct to be “odious” when he allows the informal Jim Crow system of the base to violate the rights of a group of protesting African American soldiers (285). Extensive pro-segregation sentiment within the ranks as well as in the surrounding community create “insurmountable difficulties” in doing justice to the aggrieved soldiers. Only by allowing segregation can Ross continue to keep the base running the way his superiors in Washington expect him to do without scandal and without bothering them with details about how he does it. Through a series of skillful maneuvers, Ross manages to avoid the official hearings that would have brought attention to the unjust exclusion of black officers from the Officer’s Club, and would have resulted in the disciplining of a white officer for assaulting the black unit’s commander, Lt. Stanley Willis. Ross is also able to neutralize the anti-racist provocations of a couple of “snotty” white lieutenants whom he laments were the base’s “only champions of the dignity of man” (535). That Lieutenant Prescott Phillips and his political ally, Edsell – Lippa’s lover – are essentially correct in their analysis of how racism operates on the base Ross concedes in private reflection and in conversation with his wife, Cora. But he interprets the magnitude of the opposition as a boundary of “the possible” in his particular time and place.

Even the wise and resourceful colonel cannot find a way to offer more support to the protesting blacks. Some officers who are otherwise personally humane and decent explicitly defend Jim Crow, citing at length evidence, as they see it, of the inherent inferiority of Negroes. All but a few of the white characters casually refer to black people in dehumanizing terms. What we have come to call “the N-word” crops up often in their conversations. Ross, Hicks, and Turck are among a handful of conspicuous exceptions to this practice. Countless conversations and routine actions remind the reader of the degrading quotidian experienced by African Americans. Only a few personally unattractive zealots are willing to openly contest the racism Ross laments but about which he does nothing beyond chiding his wife for her unthinking and manifestly prejudiced disparaging of the work habits of the “colored girls” who serve her as maids (440-441).

At a meeting of more than a dozen officers Phillips calls out the blatant racism of several officers senior to him, and does so by name and to their faces. Phillips’ patrician New England accent and his relaxed air of entitled authority annoy Ross, who finds him “supercilious” and “obnoxious.” Ross requires Phillips to apologize to his superiors for questioning their character. But the reader can recognize the clarity and force of Phillips’ indictment of white supremacy and his detailed expose of the evasions of the entire chain of command. Phillips’ perspective is given more weight when, later on, he argues with Edsell, insisting on attention to the facts of who said what to whom, while Edsell fulminates about everyone in authority. Edsell slams Phillips for accepting too much of the establishment politics he

learned at St. Paul's and Harvard. Phillips privately faults himself for "having such a friend" as the arrogant ideologue, Edsell (471).

Moreover, the voices of the protesting black officers are calmly defiant and invite nothing but agreement. When Ross explains that separate officers clubs are in the interests of the "group spirit" he is trying to "inculcate" at the base, an unnamed airman challenged him: "Colonel, those Jim Crow cars they have on the railroad down here; they inculcate group spirit, too?" (238) When an elderly black man from up north visits the base to see his son, Willis, the visitor is humiliated by functionaries before he is finally able to enter the hospital to find the injured lieutenant, who has been badly beaten by General Beal's closest friend, Lt. Col. Benny Carricker. Lest the message be missed, Cozzens has the young black flier decorated with the Distinguished Flying Cross, earned by his flying achievements before his arrival in Florida and without reference to the local imbroglio.

So exemplary was Willis' service that a general flew down from Washington to pin the medal to his chest. Old Mr. Willis, thanks partly to the unauthorized intervention of the liberal busybody Edsell, arrives at his son's room just in time to witness the ceremony, during which he weeps in deep knowledge of its significance. Ross is impressed with Mr. Willis's "extraordinary eloquence" in conversation, and with his quiet dignity. "Never resigned to life in the land of Egypt, yet wasting no breath on useless protest," the father saw in his son's victimization, mused Ross, "the recurrence of a phenomenon of insult and injury for which he found no understandable explanation, a woe of his people about which he could not do anything." (415)

Ross understands that the black officers are "an unusually sensitive, intelligent, and courageous lot," badly mistreated all of their lives, justified in their anger, and now behaving altogether admirably. These men know full well, as Ross himself does, and says explicitly to himself, that "every day the white man's greed and folly proved that his claimed superiority was a lie" (167, 234). The African American soldiers will bide their time, and will make their political moves when the "conditions of the possible" for them are more favorable. They, too, know how far to go, given their circumstances. But the thoughtful, fair-minded hero of *Guard of Honor* is more concerned to protect the chain of command than to encourage his fellow white officers to change their attitudes. This renders Cozzens' enduring portrait of the range and depth of white supremacy all the more devastating.

What Cozzens most wants us to admire in Ross are not his specific decisions about race, or about anything else. What matters is the sincerity and rationality of his deliberations and, above all, and his deep awareness of his own limitations. Ross knows himself to be a better man than Beal, in many respects. Yet the more concentrated personality and combative instincts of the young flying ace enable him to evaluate some situations more accurately and effectively than Ross himself. Blind as Beal is to some important features of life, the general has been keeping his best thoughts to himself, and when finally revealed to Ross prove that Beal is a more capable human being than Ross had suspected. Moreover, Beal's instincts

suit him to lead the eventual air attack on Japan just then being assigned to him by Washington. Beal himself understands his mutual dependence with the judge. On the final page he makes explicit that he and Ross, two incomplete men, have a division of labor that goes beyond their different sets of technical skills:

“Judge, I have some little weaknesses, like having to do things my way; and Jo Jo [the general to whom Beal reports, and whom Ross greatly admires] thinks I’m just a fly-boy, and I am. No, I’m not any master mind; but spell out for me and I’ll pretty often get it You tell me what you think I don’t know, and I’ll tell you what I think you don’t know; and we’ll get there . . . I’ll do the best I can, Judge; and you do the best you can; and who’s going to do it better?” (631)

This resolution contrasts sharply with [Robert Penn Warren’s](#) novel of the same historical moment, *All the King’s Men*. The two ethical meditations have much in common. Both advanced a chastened anti-utopianism well suited to the responsibility of running the world. Both are written for the bombers of Hiroshima. But Warren’s hero gets it all together at the end, while Cozzens’ does not. Jack Burden absorbs and critically revises the insights of “the man of pure fact,” the corrupt politician Willie Stark, and reconciles them with the insights of “the man of pure idea,” the morally rigid and too-brittle physician Adam Stanton. Burden becomes the socially responsible, complete ethical-political being who combines the core truths to which his pair of instructive but fatally incomplete friends have borne witness. Cozzens’ hero remains ethically suspended at the end, knowing that for all his wisdom he is an incomplete man, dwarfed by the magnitude of the universe for which his diminishing view of the departing plane to Washington is an emblem, closing the novel:

The position lights of the northbound plane could still be made out by their steady movement if you knew where to look. The sound of the engines faded on the higher air, merging peacefully in silence. Now in the calm night and the vast sky, the lights lost themselves, no more than stars among the innumerable stars. (631)

At the end of *Guard of Honor* the reader is more aware than ever of the hero’s limitations. Ross and Burden have opposite trajectories: Burden learns how to overcome his limitations and inhibitions, and to become an active reformer, proceeding, in the famous mission statement with which *All the King’s Men* closes, “out of history into history and the awful responsibility of time,” while Ross – who has been living in acute awareness of his responsibilities – learns how insignificant he is ([Warren](#) 453). Ross’ incompleteness matches that felt by Turck even after finally experiencing a measure of love. Burden, by contrast, achieves personal integration and coherence by marrying his childhood sweetheart, the sister of Adam Stanton and the sometime mistress of Willie Stark. Moreover, while *All the King’s Men* nods several times to a Christian cosmic assurance, the more austere, stoic Cozzens offers no life-jacket to the faithful. *Guard of Honor* invites people to find their way without God and Jesus, and without imagining that any individual could become a moral whole.

The human frailty that Turck and Ross display, in their very different fashions, propels *Guard of Honor*'s overarching affirmation of the indispensability of institutions. Nothing could be more alien to this novel than Heller's confident aloofness from of the networks of obligation and opportunity that individuals inherit and create, and within which Cozzens believes they must achieve whatever selfhood and ethical standing is available to them. Cozzens even voices appreciation for the ceremonial rituals that Heller hoots at as meaningless. Cozzens has Ross defend the specific ritual that gives the novel its title. "I don't know what good a guard of honor does him when he's dead," Beal blusters in the spirit of *Catch-22* about the forthcoming Arlington burial of deceased officer. "Some more goddamn ceremony!" Then he asks Ross's opinion. "How about you Judge?" Then Cozzens delivers what is perhaps the most openly didactic passage in all of his fiction.

Colonel Ross, not without grandiloquence, said: "It does us good. Ceremony is for us. The guard . . . is a suitable mark of our regret for mortality and our respect for service—we hope, good; but if bad or indifferent, at least long. When you are as old as I am you will realize it ought to get a man something. For our sake, not his. Not much, but something. Something people can see." (594)

Guard of Honor is generous toward the mature, empowered white men of his generation who keep existing institutions working. Distinctions are made between those who do it well and those who don't, between those who commit abuses and those who don't, and between those who see beyond themselves and those who don't. But the honors at burial apply to all of them.

One need not sympathize with Cozzens' apparent forgiveness of passivity in the face of injustice to understand that this largely fate-accepting writer in his finest moment left a vivid record of the power of white supremacy and – through the distinctive character of Lt. Amanda Turck– managed also to craft a portrait of the sexism that in 1948 was even less contested than anti-black racism. Embedded in this overwhelmingly male story is a register of the barriers an American woman of 1943 confronts if she tries to be anything other than a conventional wife, a subservient staff assistant, or a sexual partner offering gratification without demands. Here, too, is a study of the self-destruction that can accompany that effort.

Whatever Cozzens' intentions, his legendary fidelity to the minute particulars of military life, including technical details about different airplanes and subtleties in the chain of command, seems to have led him to record the racism and sexism that was indeed a fundamental feature of life on military bases of that era. Cozzens was anything but a crusader against the injustices experienced by women and African Americans. There is nothing in the record of his personal life, as examined by his

³Bruccoli, *Cozzens*, is oblivious to these subterranean themes in *Guard of Honor*, so shows no curiosity about their possible foundation in Cozzens' private life. If Cozzens' mother or wife, the literary agent Silvia Bernice Baumgarten, to whom he was married for fifty years until her death in 1978, ever made Cozzens aware of the cost of misogyny in their own lives, Bruccoli does not record it. Bruccoli notes that Cozzens had several "unplanned," alcohol-prompted affairs during his time away from Baumgarten during the war (169), which may have helped to inspire Hick's unplanned sex with Turck. More revealingly, Bruccoli quotes Cozzens' letter to his mother of October 27, 1946, which anticipates that black people will eventually become better people (in "a generation or two"), but at the moment there are too often "stupid" and "incompetent" and there is not much that white people can do about it even when they recognize the historical contingencies (183).

biographer, Matthew Bruccoli, to explain these almost “sleeper” testimonies in his best novel.³ Cozzens’ posthumously published wartime diaries as an officer in the Army Air Force show that *Guard of Honor*’s widely hailed technical precision follows from his own experience.⁴ *Guard of Honor* records misogyny and white supremacy with no less realistic a flair than it records the conversations of fighter pilots about what their planes can and cannot do. He reported accurately on more of his world than was noticed.

Guard of Honor won the Pulitzer Prize for 1949. Critical opinion hailed it as the best of the World War II novels to appear during that decade. But this story of military officers on a 1943 Army Air Force base was almost forgotten a decade later following the bitterly negative reception of Cozzens’ *By Love Possessed* (1957). Cozzens was so pretentious a writer (trying to be Henry James but failing, etc.), and so conservative in his politics (“I am more or less Illiberal,” he liked to boast [“[The Hermit of Lambertville](#)” 73-74]), that there proved to be no willingness to go back to his earlier work.⁵ *By Love Possessed* does not lead the reader, as *Guard of Honor* does, to recognize injustices in the social order. The novel of 1957 develops the character of several women at length, but none approach Turck’s intelligence and complexity. None leave the impression that women are peculiarly disadvantaged. *By Love Possessed* depicts genteel versions of anti-Semitism and anti-Catholic prejudice, but does not imply that these are serious evils in the United States of the 1950s.

But if *Guard of Honor* is just a period piece, it is too formidable a one to remain unnoticed. Pulitzer Prizes do not always identify important works of fiction, but the previous ten winners of that prize before 1949 included Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind*, John Steinbeck’s *Grapes of Wrath*, John Hersey’s *A Bell for Adano*, Warren’s *All the King’s Men* and several other novels that left enduring historical marks. The year *Guard of Honor* got the prize, moreover, the other finalists passed over were Norman Mailer’s *The Naked and the Dead*, Irwin Shaw’s *The Young Lions*, and Thornton Wilder’s *The Ides of March*. Some of the era’s most respected literary voices, including John P. Marquand and Mark Schorer, could say only good things about it. “There are a handful like him in every age,” declared Bernard De Voto in *Harper’s*. “Later it turns out that they were the ones who wrote that age’s literature” (“[The Easy Chair](#)” 72). Whether or not De Voto’s generous assessment will be vindicated a century from now,⁶ *Guard of Honor* did register injustices that we today care more about more than did the now canonical writers of its neglected novelist’s generation. Cozzens’ later fiction,

⁴James Gould Cozzens, *A Time of War*.

⁵James Gould Cozzens, *By Love Possessed*. For the controversies surrounding *By Love Possessed* and the resulting, sharp decline in Cozzens’ critical standing, see Joan Shelley Rubin 553-579. Rubin’s title refers to the slashing take-down of Cozzens by Dwight Macdonald, “By Cozzens Possessed”.

⁶The *Library of America*, a prominent barometer of literary weather, has yet to do a volume of Cozzens’ writings, but has now published more 300 volumes, including 1940s works by David Goodis, Elmore Leonard, Dawn Powell, and Peter Taylor.

and even more his reactionary public statements in the pages of *Time* and elsewhere, made Cozzens a cultural hero of the Right and has frozen his image in the cultural mosaic of the last half-century.⁷ One can speculate about what place *Guard of Honor* might occupy today in the American literary canon had its author written nothing after 1948, and kept his political opinions to himself.

Works cited

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⁷Cozzens proud announced as early as 1942 that he was "more or less illiberal," and personally identified with the Episcopalian tastes and Republican Party politics of "the landed gentry" of his Delaware Valley home, see his statement in *Twentieth Century Authors*, 323. For an example of Cozzens as an enduring hero of the Right, see Terry Teachout, "Truth without Bullets".