



# Havanas in Camelot: Personal Essays

*William Styron*

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## Havanas in Camelot: Personal Essays William Styron

After the great success in 1990 of *Darkness Visible*, his memoir of depression and recovery, William Styron wrote more frequently in an introspective, autobiographical mode. *Havanas in Camelot* brings together fourteen of his personal essays, including a reminiscence of his brief friendship with John F. Kennedy; a recollection of the power and ceremony on display at the inauguration of François Mitterrand; memoirs of Truman Capote, James Baldwin, and Terry Southern; a meditation on Mark Twain; an account of Styron's daily walks with his dog; and an evocation of his summer home on Martha's Vineyard.

Styron's essays touch on the great themes of his fiction—racial oppression, slavery, and the Holocaust—but for the most part they address other subjects: bowdlerizations of history, literary lists, childhood moviegoing, the censoring of his own work, and the pursuit of celebrity fetish objects.

These essays, which reveal a reflective and humorous side of Styron's nature, make possible a fuller assessment of this enigmatic man of American letters.

## Havanas in Camelot: Personal Essays Details

Date : Published April 8th 2008 by Random House (first published January 1st 2008)

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Author : William Styron

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# From Reader Review *Havanas in Camelot*: Personal Essays for online ebook

## Sara says

reviewed in NY Times

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## Kat says

Truly one of the masters—although I wonder what he would've chosen to include were he still alive.

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## John says

Wonderful memoir of the writer's life with 20th century luminaries - the Kennedys, Truman Capote, James Baldwin, the 1950's Paris scene, etc.

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## Erika Dreifus says

From remarks originally posted on Practicing Writing:

I found it nearly impossible to put this book down (and fortunately, due to its slender size, I didn't need to do so very often). Its appeal wasn't, I think, simply a matter of my longtime admiration for the author of *Sophie's Choice*, *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, and *Darkness Visible*. In many ways, Styron was a witness to history, and his accounts of everything from his presence at "what turned out to be possibly the most memorable social event of the Kennedy presidency" to the culture of censorship that surrounded his first novel, *Lie Down in Darkness* (finished, writes Styron, "about two hundred years ago—it was 1951, to be exact"), will capture and hold the attention of any reader remotely interested in the social and cultural history of the United States from World War II forward.

And then, as the mention of his first novel may suggest, the elements of this book based in Styron's experience as an author among authors proved irresistible for this practicing writer. See especially the pieces grounded in Styron's friendships with Truman Capote, James Baldwin, and Terry Southern (the account of a special VIP tour of the Cook County Jail that Styron and his wife enjoyed in Southern's company, thanks to the efforts of their Chicago host, Nelson Algren, is unforgettable).

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## Kc says

Interesting and of course well-written essays by a man who was in the thick of literary society. The title

essay is a wonderful glimpse into the world of the Kennedys. Also a comical essay on his time in the Army with "the clap" and his relationship with James Baldwin.

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### **Dan Lalande says**

Flinty folder of personal essays from Virginia-born William Styron - valentines to an eclectic mix of acquaintances (JFK, James Baldwin, Francois Mitterand,) memories of the Marines, and a thank-you note to his inspirational second home, Martha's Vineyard. It's idle Styron but the voice is still there: the wry formality, the scientific take on sex, the weighty conscience of the modern Southerner.

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### **Erin says**

What a completely wonderful and random gem I picked off the shelves of the library. Someone asked me recently what Styron was doing these days and I answered that he was dead. And man, am I sorry, because we share a love and converged mind for many things : getting lost in reading novels by the dozens in the Duke library; learning that walking the dog leads to great ideas; knowing that the most important missing part in the movie Sophie's Choice was the philosophical step back into the soldier responsible for making her decide; that long cross-country drunk drives with friends are unforgettable. There's also getting diagnosed with syphilis and stuck in a VD ward on Parris island at the mercy of moralistic interrogator of a doctor, disapproval of jogging, and a man-crush on JFK and his cigars - but vive la difference.

Easy light and short reads that flow wonderfully and give a small glimpse into someone I've long admired. It will also give you one hell of a reading list, as he's not shy about listing his favorites, and one essay even includes the rivalry between two literary societies to come up with the 100 modern classics - an exercise I discovered was as random, arbitrary and capricious as I had long suspected. (Well, they didn't use a dartboard, but close.)

Please read and enjoy : especially for marines, Duke grads, and literary lovers.

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### **Nance says**

wonderful as is all his writing

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### **Rose says**

Small collection of essays that are both conversational and literary. Subjects range from John Kennedy to the author's slave-holding grandmother.

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### **Jim says**

Delightful collection of previously published short essays by this important and controversial American writer, as he considers such literary luminaries as Truman Capote, James Baldwin, Terry Southern, and Mark Twain, as well as other acquaintances. He muses about the frailty of the human body, restrictions imposed by conservatives (from oppressive librarians to fundamentalist doctors), and aura of the Kennedy White House. Many interesting and revealing insights into his life and those he knew. I have a friend who met him and wasn't impressed (surely because Styron was a socialist as much as for his arrogance), but I wish I had the opportunity to meet him. At times some of the essays seemed almost apologetic.

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### **Jan says**

Wonderful, personal writing.

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### **Laurie says**

Interesting but trivial, unessential reading

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### **Janie says**

The most hilarious account I've ever read of contracting syphilis.

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### **Mary says**

Most of these 14 essays have been published before, mostly in the late 1990's, though some recount events that occurred many decades earlier. Famous people naturally meet other famous people, and often trade on that in pieces that are mainly just name-dropping.

Styron has more in mind than bragging and it pays off particularly, for me, in regard to James Baldwin and Capote and even Mitterand. Then there's his wry, rueful, priceless explanation of his part in the gestation of the Modern Library list of 100 best books written in English in the 20th century. Lots to enjoy in the slim 162 pages.

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### **Dave says**

Pleasant, but slight--the essay on his case of "the great pox" is the best.

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