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A Note from the Editor

In this issue we welcome a British critic new to Dionysos, James Nicholls. His article, on post-World War I drinking in Paris, is a gold-mine of information on drinking, poetry, and social history, all of which was shaping Parisian drinking culture long before the epoch of the Lost Generation. We also have two articles by regular contributors: Matts Djös continues his examination of the poetry of that mythic drinker, John Berryman; and David Roskos introduces us to a poet currently being rediscovered, William Wantling. Mr. Roskos is also represented by another of his own poems. Something old and something new, as Dionysos enters a new millenium, with "Volume 10" on its cover.

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Barflies and Bohemians: Drink, Paris and Modernity

James Nicholls

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From the viewpoint of much of the criticism looking at the close association which drinking and literature appear to have maintained over the twentieth century, Paris seems to tower above the other hubs of literary production as a city in which the two activities were most intensely linked. The years between the two World Wars, immortalized in Ernest Hemingway's paraphrase of Gertrude Stein as the era of the "lost generation," are a period commonly looked back upon as the heyday of this affair between the book and the bottle. The reference to Gertrude Stein should also remind us of the enormous role Paris played at the time as one of the capital cities of modernism. The intellectual circles which writers such as Hemingway entered, orbiting around such spheres of influence as Gertrude Stein and Ezra Pound, were deeply engaged in modernist artistic and literary projects. To come to Paris in the 1920s, therefore, was not simply to enter a social world, but an artistic world profoundly involved with the aesthetic and philosophical problems of modernity.

According to Hemingway, this was a period when, in Paris, the drinks "entered you like the Holy Spirit."¹ Simultaneously, according to the same Hemingway, Paris was a city where "the scum of Greenwich Village" had been "skimmed off and deposited."² How can such a stark contradiction be explained? Was it a city of almost mystical drinking or one of shallow, boozy posturing? Despite the convergence on Paris of the so-called "lost generation" in the 1920s, it has been argued by various commentators that the city on which Hemingway and his compatriots descended after the Great War was already past its creative peak. The café culture of Paris had by this time, arguably, already begun to ossify into something of a self-regarding imitation of the vibrant creative milieu that had begun to shock the artistic and literary world in the previous decades. The impression began to emerge that cafés such as the Rotonde were now full of barflies masquerading as bohemians—voyeurs and tourists of the Left Bank attracted by something in that ambivalent conflation of louche decadence and high art depicted in the paintings of Toulouse-Lautrec and inscribed in such names as

Verlaine, Rimbaud and Wilde.³ As Hemingway would have it, by the 1920s the true work of the artist had all too often been usurped by the superficial trappings of bohemia. Of these trappings, none was more potent or symbolic than drinking, being seen drinking, and getting drunk. Across the preceding half century, drink had been raised from a pastime and occasional source of poetic inspiration to become the object of, means to, metaphor for, and signifier of the work of artists engaged in a sustained attempt to redefine our perceptions of the world itself.

Added to the allure of bohemia which drew so many expatriates to Paris at this time were other attractions which have been well documented and discussed: the relatively inexpensive lifestyle, the desire to escape Prohibition and the moral climate it represented, the fact that many Americans had arrived in Europe during the war and had simply delayed their return home. The added political significance of drinking in Paris, as against any of the other cities in Europe, has been discussed by Susanna Barrows in her study “‘Parliaments of the People’: The Political Culture of Cafés in the Early Third Republic”⁴ and applied to the expatriate American writers of Paris by Robin Room.⁵ The central concern of this essay is to consider the prehistory of the bohemian ideal that was adopted by the writers and artists of the 1920s. In other words, I want to explore how the close association between Paris, bars, drink and modernism evolved and came to gain the cultural status that it did. Three related factors can be seen at work in this prehistory: the spread of bar culture, the adoption of a socially antagonistic stance among the artistic avant-garde, and the cultic spread of absinthe drinking. The relationships between these significant social, cultural and aesthetic influences can be looked at in order to understand how, by the 1920s, Paris had assumed the image of a city in which drink and art had become almost organically intertwined.

In 1913, Guillaume Apollinaire, poet, essayist and apologist for many of the artists working in Paris at the time, published a collection of poems entitled—appropriately enough—Alcools. One of the poems in this collection, “Vendémiaire,” gives an insight into the complex nature of the perceived relationship, in the years prior to World War I, between alcohol and art.

Experimenting with Imagist poetic techniques, Apollinaire uses in “*Vendémiaire*” the dual images of drink and drinking to explore his concepts of the artist, Paris, and the aesthetic and intellectual traditions that the artists and writers of early modernism felt both heir to and in conflict with:

All I cannot say
All I shall never know
All metamorphosed into that pure wine
To appease thirsty Paris [. . .]

I reel on the universe
Along the quai where I saw waves flow and barges
rock

Hear me I am the gullet of Paris
I shall drain you again if I wish

Hear my songs of universal drunkenness⁶

Warren Ramsay, accentuating one element of the poem, suggests that here Apollinaire is “inviting his readers to be drunken—on the spiritual air of Nietzschean high places.”⁷ If, however, we accept Ezra Pound’s assertion that “an image is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time,”⁸ then Ramsay’s observation is both true and, simultaneously, reductive. The image of drink can be read in various ways here: the flow of ideas, the preservation of tradition, the slaking of intellectual thirst, transubstantiative transcendence, an extended pun on the words *raison* (reason) and *raisin* (grape)—the list could continue.

What I would wish to concentrate on, however, is the material suitability of drink to Apollinaire’s poetic project in this poem. His use of wine as the controlling image in “*Vendémiaire*,” and other poems in the collection such as some of the “*Rhénanes*,” reveals much about the status that drink and drunkenness had attained by this point in the aesthetics of modernist representation. Indeed, Apollinaire, it could be said, reveals a relatively conservative strain in his thinking by choosing wine rather than, more obviously, absinthe as his poetic drink of choice. As Peter Read argues, “[M]odernist poets, such as Apollinaire, sought a language appropriate to their experience of contemporary urban

existence."⁹ For the writers and artists of the Parisian avant-garde, from Baudelaire onwards, drink and the drinking place became increasingly central to this vision of modern urban life and the subjective experience of it. To understand why this should have become the case, and what some of the features of the relationship were, it is important to look both at examples of the art of the period and at the social and historical context from which it emerged. This analysis of the links between Parisian bar culture, social dissent and the aesthetics of early modernism will, therefore, begin with a brief look at the social and historical background.

The association of the drinking space—the tavern, cabaret and café—with urban culture has, in France as in many other western countries, an ancient history. As far back as the 13th century, tavern life was being depicted in French literature as “a meeting place of heterogeneous urban society viewed either as a *castellum diaboli* or, conversely, as the utopian center of urban life.”¹⁰ This polarized depiction, the combination of the utopian and the unacceptable (or perhaps, more properly, the depiction of utopias of unacceptability), is an example of a representational tradition that passes through French literature from Villon to Rabelais and beyond. Indeed, it is one that is further echoed in many of Hemingway’s observations on Paris. However, from the Revolution onwards, a series of social shifts and trends are set into motion which provide a unique set of relations in which the bar becomes more than simply an ambivalent social space and instead takes on a formative role in the consciousness of an artistic and conceptual movement.

It is a noticeable trait of the French approach to alcohol consumption throughout history that the prime target of attacks on alcoholic excess have not been the drinks or drinkers themselves but the establishments in which drinking took place. Prior to 1880, and reflected in restrictive laws that date back at least as far as 1256,¹¹ the tavern and cabaret were the focus of legislative and social control. In what appears almost a reverse of the American temperance movement—which only came to focus primarily on the drinking place after the Women’s Crusade of 1873-4 made it the focal point of direct action—“it was the tavern, a more complex phenomenon than mere drinking, that was seen as the

cause of idleness and unwillingness to work.”¹² The café and cabaret were viewed as places of waste and inactivity, antithetical to the work ethic of industrial capitalism; they represented both consumption without acquisition and a willful suppression of the efficiency of the individual worker. Equally, and again as in other countries, they remained associated with criminal activities, with violence and with prostitution. At the same time, drunkenness, although widely tolerated, was seen as a fault primarily to the extent that, as Diderot argued in his *Encyclopédie* of 1751, it was a form of temporary madness—a suspension of Reason made all the more perverse in its self-inflicted nature.¹³ This association of drunkenness with the suspension of Reason, and by extension the bourgeois and Enlightenment ideals with which the canonization of Reason was associated, will become important to the work of some of the artists discussed below.

Susanna Barrows has described how the repression of the drinking establishments of France in the 1850s and 1870s endowed both drink and its institutions with an added political signification on top of those they already possessed. The politically motivated closure of drinking places was a tacit acknowledgement of the role they played as the meeting rooms of the working class. Thus, essentially through the spaces in which it was consumed rather than its consumption *per se*, drink acquired an association with political radicalism.¹⁴ The simultaneous association of taverns with the (supposed) slothful recalcitrance and potentially violent subversiveness of the working classes is neither unique to this period in history nor to France. However, in the charged political atmosphere of the time, the issue took on a particularly partisan significance. Drinking places had acted as meeting places for many of the instigators of the Revolution of 1789¹⁵ and continued to form the “primary arena” for many republican activities up to the 1870s.¹⁶ One of the results of this political polarization of attitudes towards drinking places was the extensive lifting of licensing restrictions by the newly elected republican regime in the late 1870s. This was largely a response to the suppression of *débits de boisson* carried out by the conservative president Maréchal MacMahon in the previous years. In addition to the partisan association of the cafés with republicanism, republicans also had strong ideological reasons for

lifting licensing restrictions: politically, the cafés formed a concrete representation of the right of freedom to gather, while economically, the restriction of their activities was seen as a barrier to freedom of commerce.¹⁷ As a result, the numbers of drinking establishments, no longer the focus of an institutionalized fear of political radicalism, began to rise dramatically.

The resulting increase in the availability of alcohol, coupled with important environmental and social factors which will be discussed in more detail below, soon began to give rise to widespread fears about the influence of alcohol and alcoholism on French society. Alcohol itself, conspicuous drinking, and drunkenness became associated, in the minds of the conservative wing of the nascent temperance movement,¹⁸ with a more general set of fears surrounding a perceived decline in the vitality and potency of the French people as a whole.¹⁹ A horror of social and biological degeneration burgeoned in France after the humiliating loss of the Franco-Prussian War in 1871. While alcoholism became one of the traits through which degeneration was thought to both manifest and reproduce itself, the discourses of racial decline were not limited in focus. In this atmosphere of intense medical and social observation, mental illness, sexual deviancy, suicide, and a range of other social and biological ills were studied and discussed by practitioners ranging from phrenologists to economists to the authors of naturalist novels.

The move towards an association of alcohol with genetic degeneration moved the focus of temperance campaigning away from attacking the drinking places themselves and towards the problem of alcoholism *per se*. This paralleled the rise of distilled spirits as the beverage of choice in French drinking establishments. It is a recurring theme in the history of temperance movements that they often follow the introduction, and popularization, of distilled liquors into a society—beginning with an attack on distilled spirits and gradually moving out to incorporate a philosophy of total abstention. In France, the pattern was not dissimilar (though patriotic concerns meant that abstention from wine never became a popular policy). The virtual abolishing of controls over the public sale of drink made access to drinking places easy and, as in America, the provision of warm, sociable environments which provided everything from food to

meeting rooms to telephones only served to increase the popularity of the bars and cabarets.²⁰ However, so long as it was primarily wine that was drunk in these places, so long, therefore, as drinking was fundamentally a social act of which drunkenness was, essentially, a sometimes unavoidable side-effect, the cabarets were tolerated.

The most serious undermining of this tradition of social wine drinking can be attributed largely to one particular distilled spirit: absinthe. Although the first absinthe distillery in France had been opened by Henri-Louis Pernod in 1805, a combination of events led to the popularization of the drink in the second half of the nineteenth century. Since the 1840s, when it had been rationed to French troops fighting in Algeria as a prophylactic against fever, absinthe had begun to increase in popularity across France. At the same time, modern distilling methods had made cheap production possible, thereby opening its market up to the working class. Then, in the 1870s, the devastating vine disease phylloxera began decimating grape harvests across France and, indeed, the whole of Europe, forcing up wine prices and leading consumers to look to other types of drink. Absinthe—affordable, potent and (almost) French—gained a foothold that paved the way for a spectacular explosion in its consumption by the turn of the century. In 1854, the annual per capita consumption of spirits in France was 1.68 litres. By the mid 1870s it was around three litres and by 1900 had reached four and a half litres.²¹ Over the same period, absinthe moved from being a relatively unpopular, and unknown, liqueur to a drink with an annual consumption of 700,000 litres in 1874—a figure which rose markedly up until the 1910 high-point of 36,000,000 litres.²² The Green Fairy had spread her wings wide over a city that, throughout the *fin de siècle* period, indulged simultaneously in excesses of confidence and of paranoia, of radicalism and conservatism.²³

Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century, the cafés and bars of Paris had begun to take on a distinctly ambivalent aspect. In terms of access, the legislation of the previous years had made the opening of a drinking establishment available to anyone who had the money and inclination to do so. Furthermore, Eugène Haussmann's reinvention of central Paris under Napoleon III, with its wide pedestrian walkways and its dedication of street

corners to the building of cafés, had prioritized the café as one of the focal social spaces of the modern city. In this sense, although cafés were viewed as a low-alcohol, higher class alternative to the more disreputable cabarets,²⁴ Haussmann had nonetheless incorporated the social, public drinking space into the fabric of the city. At the same time, the consumption of alcohol, and especially absinthe, had begun to increase, sparking a conservative backlash. The scene was set for an almost inevitable encounter between poor, urban, anti-establishment artists and the cultures of drink and drinking.

The legislative and attitudinal fluctuations in relation to drink and drinking spaces which are discussed here can be seen largely as a series of responses to increased urbanization. The role of the bar in urban, working class communities led to both the association of that social space with political radicalism and the association of widespread drunkenness with a fear of the mob.²⁵ Hence drink and its institutions could come to signify a dual threat: both as facilitating radical articulation, and as releasing irrational and violent tendencies. This somewhat paradoxical construction of the drunken consciousness (as the articulate irrational), and its specific relation to the urban experience, reveals one of the more evident parallels that can be drawn between the idea of the drinker and the idea of the avant-garde artist. It is in this intersection between political threat and extra-rational expression that drink comes to function as a modal trope among the early avant-garde.

As has been mentioned before, there had been a tendency in France, and one that was reflected in the language of legislative actions, to view drunkenness as an unfortunate and somewhat misguided side-effect of social drinking.²⁶ According to Thomas Brennan, there was, for example, a tendency to use such euphemistic terms as *pris de vin* when describing a gentle inebriation. The word *ivre* implied a far more serious charge, hinting at an almost willful descent into *déraison*. In light of this, the imperative title alone of Charles Baudelaire's prose poem "*Envirez-vous*" ("Get Drunk!") was a challenge to contemporary social mores. As with the Apollinaire extract cited earlier, Baudelaire's use of drunkenness here is open to various interpretations. However, and again as with Apollinaire, there is a

specificity about the use of drunkenness as a metaphorical trope that implicates drink and drinking profoundly in the aesthetics of Baudelaire's modern sensibility.

Peter Nicholls suggests that one of the fundamental shifts in aesthetic sensibility from romanticism to modernism was the "locating of the trauma of division and separation within subjectivity rather than in the external relation of the self to the other."²⁷ Baudelaire's poetry echoes this change; for him nature does not provide an external "other" in communion with which transcendence can be achieved beyond the self. Rather, nature acts as the environment within which the poet engages with his own complex and ill-defined ego. As such, transcendence is not striven for through the positioning of the self in nature but, instead, it is achieved (if at all) through coming to terms with the very contingency, variability and unpredictability of subjective identity. As such, intoxication, literal and metaphorical, is both a mode of exploration and a representative trope:

You must always be drunk. Everything's there: it's the only question. So as not to feel the horrible burden of Time bruising your shoulders and pushing you into the earth, you must be drunk without rest.

But on what? On wine, on poetry, or on virtue, as you wish. But get drunk.²⁸

As Joshua Wilner points out, Baudelaire's imperative stands in stark opposition to more traditional calls to "know thyself" or "seize the day."²⁹ Equally, Baudelaire is not suggesting that the reader "share a glass with a friend" or "discuss it over a beer." Instead, drunkenness becomes the end of drinking and the means by which to aid and comprehend the inevitable dissolution of the coherent self in the chaos of the modern city. The metaphorical structure within which drunkenness functions in this poem is an inversion of that which would be expected in Romantic or Classical literature. Intoxication is not the metaphor by which a rarefied and intense experience within life is articulated; rather, the more profound emotional, moral and aesthetic experiences within life ("on virtue, on poetry, as you wish") become metaphors for the drunkenness, real or apparent, which lies at the heart of modern existence.

In describing Baudelaire's attitude to intoxication in *Paradis*

*Artificiel*s.

T.J. Clark points out that, for Baudelaire, “in the trance of wine . . . nature is disclosed, in hints echoes and murmurs—and that, only when artifice is brought to the pitch of perfection . . . a moment when nature is definitively absent, and rediscovered in its absence.”³⁰ This observation highlights both Baudelaire’s notion of intoxication as a particular mode of dangerous transcendence and the idea of art as artificial or unnatural. The idea of art as representing and working within a synthetic, man-made world is one that reappears in much of Baudelaire’s writing. In “The Painter of Modern Life,” Baudelaire asserts that “nature teaches us nothing or nearly nothing . . . nature can do nothing but counsel crime. . . . Virtue, on the other hand, is *artificial*, super-natural.”³¹ The artificial work of the artist is figured, in “The Salon of 1846,” as a form of intoxication, even addiction: “[A]n artist’s first job is to substitute man for nature and protest against her. This protest is not the result of a cold rational decision, like a code of rules or a figure of rhetoric; it is rash and artless, like vice, like passion, like appetite.”³² Art, like intoxication, is essentially unnatural; it is a modification of nature by human consciousness. In this particular sense, the art of intoxication is that of the agonist—a heroic assertion of human transcendence *within* the impossibility of transcendence through and in nature. Equally, like all agonistic projects, it is predicated on risk to the individual: the horrors and hangovers that are the flipside of the drunken vision.³³

I would suggest that what distinguishes this mode of heightened experience from previous depictions of intoxicated transcendence is that, rather than seeing intoxication as a portal into other modes of perception through which higher truths may be apprehended, this representation sees intoxication as a means to understand the very fluidity of experience and identity that makes the notion of access to single, higher realities absurd.³⁴ Rimbaud’s poetry represents the (il)logical extension of this; in his poem “The Drunken Boat,” all that can be expressed are the storm-tossed, fluid imaginings of the poet. Poetry no longer serves to inform or delight but to undermine Enlightenment concepts of Reason and truth through revealing their inadequacies. If identity is fluid and solvent, then alcohol, in both its phenomenological effects and its material state, lends itself to representations of this ontological and

epistemological standpoint.

If one branch of Baudelaire's thought was concerned with the nature of the self in all its incomprehensibility, then another branch was his deep concern with the objects of artistic representation. His Salon reviews and essays called for artists to paint the heroism of the world around them, not simply that of the classical world or an idealized peasantry. One of his closest friends and collaborators in promoting this shift in the artistic gaze was the artist Edouard Manet. It was Manet who fired one of the opening salvos in the battle between the new wave of artists and the establishment (in the persons of the committee of the annual Salon). In 1859, he submitted for inclusion in the Salon of that year *The Absinthe Drinker*. Standing almost life-size, plucked straight from the streets, the painting shocked the art establishment.

The Salon's displeasure was directed more to the subject matter than to Manet's style of painting. As one historian has pointed out, it was not so much that Manet had depicted a drinker—didactic paintings of beggars and drunks were not unknown at the time—it was the sheer indifference the drinker showed—"simply a bum—unrepentantly plastered on absinthe."³⁵ *The Absinthe Drinker* carried dangerous overtones: the conflation of high art and culture with the urban low-life embodied by the *chiffonier* or rag-picker; hints of drunken insubordination amongst the dangerous masses; the painterly commemoration of that antithesis of French bourgeois values: the drinker who drinks to get drunk—on absinthe! Absinthe had made its entrance into the sphere of artistic representation dramatically, as an object of representation designed to challenge the art establishment. Over the next fifty years, the popularity of absinthe would burgeon and yet it would always retain its association with the avant-garde: the mystique of decadence and non-conformity conferred onto it by such notorious artworks.

When Robert Jordan, hero of Hemingway's For Whom the Bell Tolls, pours himself an absinthe, it makes him think

of all the old evenings in cafés, of all the chestnut trees that would be in bloom now in this month, of the great slow horses of the outer boulevards, of book shops, of kiosks, and of galleries, of the Parc

Montsouris, of the Stade Buffalo, and of the Butte Chaumont, of the Guaranty Trust Company and the Île de la Cité, of Foyot's old hotel, and of being able to read and relax in the evening.³⁶

This is an interesting set of memories, given that absinthe was banned in France in 1915. It could be assumed that Jordan had access to contraband absinthe in Paris, or that he is thinking of anis—although his insistent connoisseurship with regard to “the real absinthe” would suggest otherwise. In either case, the memory harks back to an imagined Paris—the pre-war Paris of *L'Heure Verte* where absinthe and art appeared to go almost hand-in-hand in the cafés of the Left Bank.

There would appear to be something of a contradiction here. Absinthe connects back to both the rarefied artistic circle—patrons of the bookshops and galleries—and to the very fabric of the city. In pre-war Paris, absinthe could indeed be both valorised by such avant-garde writers as Paul Verlaine and Alfred Jarry whilst being seen by anti-alcohol campaigners as a deadly craze in danger of drowning the populace. In this sense of combining the elitist with the democratic, the association of non-conformist intelligentsia with the threatening masses, absinthe could provide Hemingway with a metonym of all that Paris seemed to stand for when he first arrived there.

The rise of absinthe consumption, the institution of a mass café culture and the centering of artistic life around drinking establishments were related events that took place over the same period of time, roughly from 1880 to 1910. As Roger Shattuck describes it, the relaxing of the licensing laws opened up the possibility of disparate artists and intellectuals gathering into groups beyond the regulated patronage of the salons, which had provided the nodal points of intellectual exchange in France prior to this period. “One of the principles of *la belle époque*,” suggests Shattuck, “was that the great performers moved from the *salon* into the *café*. Here anyone could enter and each man paid for his own beer.”³⁷ The move from the salon to the café was both a necessity and a challenge. Artists denied access to the rarefied world of the hand-picked salons could, and therefore did, gather in the cabarets and bars. Doing so allied them with an anti-establishment stance, an ethic designed to break the grip the high

priests of intellectual taste had on the public world of art and ideas. Cabarets such as the Chat Noir, and the cafés Guerbois and Nouvelle-Athènes (which was the setting for Edgar Degas' notorious 1876 painting *L'Absinthe*—originally entitled, less dramatically, *Sketch of a French Café*) provided the forums around which truly cosmopolitan, experimental and challenging art could be produced on its own terms.

Robin Room has pointed out that the imagined Paris of the 1920s was not only important in creating the mythology of drunken creativity but also affected twentieth century notions of the relationship between urbanity and drinking.³⁸ However, it was in the years before the outbreak of war that this Paris was born and it is in this earlier Paris that we can see at its most intense and influential the fusion of modern art, modern urban living, and modern cultures of drinking. In the art and literature of this period we can discern something of the complexity of the relationship between alcohol and modernity: whether through the café scenes of Degas and Manet, the Cubist still lives of Picasso and Braque—which, more often than not, place a bottle on their altars of modern sensibility—the culture of irrationality proclaimed by Rimbaud, Baudelaire's analogous notions of art and intoxication, or the sophisticated metaphors of Apollinaire. If anything, the post-war images of Paris represented a reduction of these protean and multiform aspects of drinking to a series of banal gestures: being seen drinking in cafés, glorifying drunkenness for its own sake—in other words, ascribing creative inspiration to one of its metaphors.

The conflation of urbanity and intoxication is, arguably, near the aesthetic heart of many modernist creations. This is certainly the case if one agrees with the notion that, to a large extent, modernism was the application of metropolitanism to the arts.³⁹ This assertion should, of course, be made with the caveat that many of the most profound influences on modern art and literature had little, or only a tangential, connection to either Paris or drink—J. G. Frazer, Freud, Marx, Schopenhauer and Einstein to name but a few. The relationship between drink and modernism is not causal. Notions of fluid identities within the crowd, the dizzying speed of movement both human and technological, the dissolving of social barriers in the new urban spaces where people

gather, the “context of heterodoxy and fluidity with which we associate the modern city,”⁴⁰ were all social conditions which shaped the work of modernist artists and writers.

However, within the modernist aesthetics of the Parisian avant-garde, drink—the fluid intoxicant—became a profoundly important metaphorical and explanatory trope. Equally, the bar represented the social space most appropriate to this urban existence—what the poet Blaise Cendrars called “that great anonymous body which is a café.”⁴¹ Drink appeared to provide a solvent through which to resolve many of the paradoxical and ambivalent combinations of self-regard and cosmopolitanism, refined aesthetic solipsism and enthusiastic, if equally horrified, indulgence in urban life that animated so much modernist art. It facilitated both a retreat into subjectivity and a Baudelairian ability to *épouser la foule*.⁴² It has provided a metaphor for the experience of the city since the earliest of modern periods.⁴³ Finally, it provided a mode of, for want of a better phrase, ironic transcendence: a transcendence both artificial and temporary and that is *known* to be so by the artist. Both arch and dangerous, it echoes the modernist irony “that recognizes the chaos and the abyss that underlie and condition artistic perfection.”⁴⁴

Notes

1. Quoted in James R. Mellow, Hemingway: A Life Without Consequences (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1992), 145.
2. Mellow, Hemingway, 164.
3. Carlos Baker, in Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story (London: Collins, 1969), 313-314, recounts the story of Hemingway carrying a drunken James Joyce home bundled over his shoulder like a coal sack. This anecdote, which rearticulates the self-perpetuating mythology of art and excess in Paris, contains a suspicious parallel to Ulysses. Hemingway, having taken the drunk Joyce home, claimed there were “no keys” and he “had to kick in the door.” This version of events neatly constructs Hemingway as Leopold Bloom to Joyce’s Stephen Dedalus.
4. Susanna Barrows, “‘Parliaments of the People’: The Political Culture of Cafés in the Early Third Republic,” in Susanna Barrows and Robin Room, eds., Drinking: Behaviour and Belief in Modern History (Berkeley: U of California P, 1991), 87-97.
5. Robin Room, “A ‘Reverence for Strong Drink’: The Lost Generation and the Elevation of Alcohol in American Culture,” Journal of Studies on Alcohol 45: 6 (1984), 540-546.
6. Guillaume Apollinaire, “Vendémiaire,” in Alcools, trans. Anne Hyde Greet

(1913; Berkeley, U of California P, 1965). It should be noted that the word *alcool* tended to refer to distilled spirits as opposed to wine and beer, which were referred to as "*boissons hygiéniques*." It was *alcool* which had been the primary target of the French temperance movement (and the title of one of its publications). Significantly, wine drinking was, by contrast, actively promoted by many temperance campaigners; it became, indeed, closely associated with patriotic duty. See Michael R. Marrus, "Social Drinking in the Belle Époque," *Journal of Social History* 7: 2 (Winter, 1974), 115-141 (119-120). For the promotion of wine by the temperance movement, see also Barnaby Conrad III, *Absinthe: History in a Bottle* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1988), 101-125.

7. Warren Ramsay, forward to Guillaume Apollinaire, *Alcools*. xi.
8. From Ezra Pound, "A Retrospect," quoted in Malcolm Bradbury and James MacFarlane, "The Name and Nature of Modernism," in Malcolm Bradbury and James MacFarlane, eds., *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1800-1930* (1976; Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1987), 19-55 (48).
9. Peter Read, "Avant-garde and *Fin de Siècle*: The Antidote to Oniropause," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 32: 2 (1996), 97-106 (97).
10. Gregory A. Austin et al., *Alcohol in Western Society from Antiquity to 1800: A Chronological History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio Information Services, 1985), 90.
11. Austin, *Alcohol in Western Society*. 84.
12. Thomas Brennan, "Social Drinking in Old Regime Paris," in Barrows, ed., *Drinking: Behaviour and Belief in Modern History*, 61-86 (71).
13. Brennan, "Social Drinking in Old Regime Paris," 67.
14. See Barrows, "'Parliaments of the People.'"
15. See Andrew Barr, *Drink: An Informal Social History* (London: Bantam, 1995), 6.
16. Barrows, "'Parliaments of the People,'" 88.
17. Michael Marrus discusses the lifting of licensing restrictions from an angle slightly different from Barrows' in "Social Drinking in the Belle Époque," 129. In Britain, the Free Trade campaigns of the 1820s led to a marked increase in drinking outlets—something which played an important role in the rise of British temperance campaigning (Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians* [London: Faber and Faber, 1971], chap. 3). The ensuing conflict between the massive distilling industry and the temperance organizations highlights the antagonistic dialectic, of which drink was an important element, between the free market and socially conservative wings of the nineteenth century bourgeoisie.
18. There was also a strong tradition in Europe of socialist temperance agitation going back to Friedrich Engels' analysis of its debilitating effect on workers in *The Condition of the Working Classes in England*. A detailed analysis of this tradition can be found in the work of James S. Roberts, especially *Drink, Temperance and the Working Class in Nineteenth Century Germany* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1984).
19. An excellent overview of this period, which looks in detail at the

- contemporary fears of national degeneration and decadence, can be found in Eugen Weber's France: Fin de Siècle (London: Harvard U P, 1986).
20. Marrus, "Social Drinking in the Belle Epoque," 131.
 21. Marrus, "Social Drinking in the Belle Époque," 122.
 22. Conrad, Absinthe. 115.
 23. Depending on the point of view, this period was the *belle époque* of Great Exhibitions and fine art, or the *fin de Siècle* of anarchist bombings, Boulanger and Dreyfus.
 24. Barr, Drink. 168.
 25. Susanna Barrows, in Distorting Mirrors: Visions of the Crowd in Late Nineteenth Century France (London: Yale U P, 1981), highlights the dangerous political overtones associated with images of the crowd in France at the time. She also looks at how alcoholism was implicated in the politics of the crowd and the threat of both the perceived degeneration of the French people and the threat of mass, uncontrolled and, worst of all, politically motivated crowd violence. One of the reasons abstention from wine never caught on amongst French temperance campaigners was that wine was not only integral to the French economy, but was seen as signifying an idealized, and almost lost, national virility.
 26. See Brennan, 74-76.
 27. Peter Nicholls, Modernisms: A Literary Guide (Berkeley: U of California P, 1995), 18.
 28. Charles Baudelaire, "Envirez-vous," from "Spleen de Paris" (1869), Oeuvres Complètes (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1961), 286. A full translation of the prose poem is available at <http://english-www.hss.cmu.edu/Poetry/envirez-vous.html>.
 29. Joshua Wilner, "Drinking Rules!: Byron and Baudelaire," Diacritics 27: 3 (Fall 1997), 34-48 (36).
 30. T. J. Clark, The Absolute Bourgeois: Artists and Politics in France 1848-1851 (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), 175.
 31. Charles Baudelaire, Selected Writings on Art and Artists, trans. P. E. Charvet (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1972), 425.
 32. Baudelaire, "The Salon of 1846," Selected Writings. 47-107, 91.
 33. See Renato Poggiali, The Theory of the Avant-Garde, trans. Gerald Fitzgerald (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard U P) for an exposition of this notion of agonism in avant-garde aesthetics. As Poggiali suggests, the agonistic stance, while self-destructive, is not mere defeatism or pessimism but "strives to transform the catastrophe into a miracle. By acting through its very failure, it tends towards a result justifying and transcending itself."
 34. The notion of fluidity, as much as of intoxication *per se*, is crucial to these concepts. James McFarlane, in "The Mind of Modernism," in Bradbury, ed., Modernism. 96-104 (80), says that in the emergence of a modernist aesthetics, "thought seemed to undergo something analogous to a change of state: a dissolving, a blending . . . a sense of flux, the notion of a continuum . . . alone seemed able to help in the understanding of certain bewildering and otherwise inexplicable phenomena of contemporary life."

35. Conrad, Absinthe. 16.
36. Ernest Hemingway, For Whom the Bell Tolls (1941; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), 51-52.
37. Shattuck, The Banquet Years. 9.
38. Room, "A 'Reverence for Strong Drink,'" 545.
39. A notion argued, for example, by Ian Small in "France and the Construction of the *Avant-Garde* in Britain," in Ceri Crossley and Ian Small, eds., Studies in Anglo-French Cultural Relations: Imagining France (London: Macmillan, 1988), 68-83.
40. Malcolm Bradbury, "The Cities of Modernism," in Bradbury, ed., Modernism, 71-93 (98).
41. Quoted in Nicholls, Modernisms. 122-123.
42. Espouse, or marry, the crowd. Marshal Berman, in All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity (London: Verso, 1982), is particularly interested in this [what Berman reads as quasi-sexual] embracing of the crowd. Walter Benjamin argued, in relation to Baudelaire, that "the crowd is not only the newest asylum of outlaws; it is also the latest narcotic for those abandoned. . . . The intoxication to which the flâneur surrenders is the intoxication of the commodity around which surges the stream of customers." Thus, Benjamin figures drink not so much as an escape from, or compensation for, alienation but as its analogous and synthetic phenomenological condition. (Walter Benjamin, Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism [London: Jonathan Cape, 1968], 55).
43. Berman, claiming that Jean-Jacques Rousseau provides the first true voice of the modern period, quotes from Rousseau's novel The New Eloise, in which the hero, having moved to the city, writes "I'm beginning to feel the drunkenness that this agitated, tumultuous life plunges you into" (18).
44. John Fletcher and Malcolm Bradbury, "The Introverted Novel," in Bradbury, ed. Modernism. 394-415 (407).

After Ginsberg

David Roskos

Easter Sunday 1999
 Dwyer & Loring just left
 spent the night
 watching movies, bullshitting,
 smoked a joint on the roof round
 midnight.

read Allen Ginsberg
 from Cosmopolitan Greetings

'After Lalon', he advises:
 "Allen Ginsberg warns you
 don't follow my path
 to extinction"

He, unhappy with fame route
 he had taken—
 honest enough to admit it,
 so that others could learn
 from his mistake.

Better to stay obscure?
 move furniture for a living?
 sweat of brow, literally,
 & ache of back?
 sore legs growing muscular
 through summer busy season
 trudging with dressers,
 boxes, sofas, chairs,
 pianos, appliances
 up & down
 stairs,
 on & off
 trucks?

maybe—
 more honest than
 teaching—
 & as seasonal.

The Alcoholic Dilemmas of Marriage, Impotence, and Objectification in the Poetry of John Berryman and Robert Lowell

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Most alcoholics tend to confuse intimacy with infatuation; and where alcohol has played a major role in determining an individual's values and conduct, even the most enduring of relationships will likely be contaminated by a set of prescriptions involving issues of control, objectification, codependence, and addiction. In those instances where writing and creativity are involved, alcohol may also determine the aesthetic impact of the literary product, most especially where that product is involved specifically with a discussion of the emotional problems which necessarily accrue from chronic drinking.

Both John Berryman and Robert Lowell were legendary for their violent psychotic episodes, their broken marriages, and their chronic alcoholism; both men present a vivid portrait of the emotional consequences of abusive drinking. Berryman's poetry is filled with images of self-reproach, objectification, and confusion; and his addiction to alcohol was very likely the root cause of most of his marital problems. In "Sonnet 56," he admits that his divorce from Eileen Mulligan in 1956 was ultimately a relief from "Sunderings and luxations" and the interminable arguments that were both startlingly brief and "hangover-long." Berryman concedes that there was not much worth salvaging in either the relationship or the household—no bright memories, no mementos, nothing except the division of wreckage:

... Love the twitching leaf
Wide to the weather, hangover-long, jag-brief,
Nulliparous intensities, or as mouse
To cats the child to broken parents, house
Sold, books divided . . . divorce as a relief. . . . (4-8)

Berryman looks back on the early years of his marriage to Mulligan and recalls how quickly the connection between the two had become strained. He writes,

We discussed, drinking, one sad afternoon
 In a Connecticut house in cloudy June.
 Thinking, whoever was mentioned, still of others.
 I thought of you,—come we too to this vile
 Loose fagend [sic]? (9-13)

Drinking, separation, regret, connections, drinking, separation: for Berryman, the act of rummaging for love ultimately deteriorated into an exhausted relationship that differed little from the dissolute “fagends”—the butt ends and burnt-out loves—that typified the marital dissolutions of so many of their friends and acquaintances.

Berryman’s poetry is remarkably confessional. In extreme cases, it is even bizarre and highly immoral. In “Drunks,” a poem written at the time that he was married to Kathleen Donahue, he describes the shenanigans and sexual escapades of a New Year’s party where,

poor H got stuck in an upstairs bedroom
 with the blonde young wife of a famous critic
 a wheel at one of the book clubs
 who turned out to have nothing on under her gown
 sprawled out half-drunk across her hostess’s bed
 moaning “Put it in! Put it in!”
 He was terrified.

I passed out & was put in that same bed. (17-24)

Here, Berryman presents a comic-grotesque spectacle of drunken self-indulgence, sexual impotence, and cupidity. The poet has passed out and been stowed in the hostess’s bed with two other inebriates, his friend “H” and a moaning, impassioned blonde who is the wife of a critic and the mistress of a local book club. However, no one—not the damsel, not “H”, not Berryman—is feeling particularly bookish or cultured or even very sexually competent at the moment; so the point of the whole confabulation and the putting “in” and being “in” and, indeed, any chance for a cultured meeting *in* this odd assortment of minds and bodies seems to have been pretty much lost somewhere *in* the bottom of the last bottle. As might be expected, this particular little conclave

ends in stupefying failure, which is just about all that can be expected when a couple of drunks end up on the same mattress with an indiscriminate and intoxicated woman.¹

Berryman's penchant for the squalid and unrestrained is also evident in "Dream Song 311." Here we are told of Henry, his alter ego, that

Hunger was constitutional with him [Henry],
women, cigarettes, liquor, need need
until he went to pieces. (7-10)

Henry's claim that his stupendous appetite cannot be appeased probably amounts to little more than senseless braggadocio, most especially with regard to his claim about an unmitigated hunger to indulge in a plethora of vices and to self-destruct. It is interesting to note that he makes no clear distinction between women and liquor—or, for that matter, between women and cigarettes. All three are treated on about the same level and in pretty much the same way. In any case, such a perspective—and such objectifications—would be hard on a relationship, hard on a marriage and, indeed, hard on life itself. It might even lead to some kind of aggressive strategy of withdrawal, indifference, and even suicide.

Such is the case in the poem "Of Suicide." In this piece, Berryman drops the confessional Henry persona entirely and steps forward himself to admit,

Reflections on suicide, & on my father, possess me.
I drink too much. My wife threatens separation.
She won't "nurse" me. She feels "inadequate."
We don't mix together. (1-4)

The poet is fed up with his wife's ultimatums and the ambiguities of his circumstance. He reflects on suicide and proceeds to fumble through a series of implausible solutions and disjointed ideas: calling his mother; modeling his behavior on the Stoic Epictetus; completing plans for a trip to Mexico; the afternoon's lecture; the difficulties of teaching; his skill as a pedagogue; Gogol's apparent impotence. He concludes that he is not yet done in and won't "entirely resign." Besides,

Rembrandt was sober. There we differ. Sober.
Terrors came on him. To us they come.
Of suicide I continually think.

Apparently he didn't. I'll teach Luke. (25-28)

Suicide might be the ultimate rebellion, but the narrator lacks both focus and commitment. Self pity is his primary concern, and killing himself would hardly be redemptive. So he decides to get on with the day and "teach Luke" instead. It is quite a step down, perhaps even a meaningless gesture. Besides, the prospect of teaching would be a lot less fatal and a lot less final. That alone makes it more attractive.

In "Sonnets to Chris, #115,"² we read of another form of marital disillusionment. In this case, the perspective is underscored by a heavy note of depression, overwhelming monotony and suppressed anger. Here, Berryman writes,

As usual, I'm up before the sun
begins to warm this intolerable place
and I have stared all night upon your face
but am not wiser thereby. Everyone
rattles his weakness or his thing undone,
I shake you like a rat. Open disgrace
yawns all before me: have I left a trace,
a spoor? Clouding it over, I look for my gun.

She's hidden it. I won't sing on that.
Whiskey is bracing. Failure are my speed.
I thrive on ends, the dog is at the door
in heat, the neighborhood is male except one cat
and they thresh on my stoop. Prevent my need,
Someone, and come & find me on the floor. (1-14)

Written at a time when Berryman had been carrying on the first of numerous adulterous affairs, the poem describes his relationship with his wife and current bed partner as bleak and monotonous. He has spent another in a series of drawn out nights staring blankly at his sleeping companion in a covertly aggressive gesture of contempt. Yet she is oblivious of his agitation, and this leaves him at a moral impasse that cannot be easily resolved or dismissed. It is apparent that, because of his own painful cupidity and his resentment at her very presence, she necessarily has a moral connection as the third party to his infidelity. The narrator then considers his circumstantial degradation and, on a note of extreme cynicism, concludes that there seems to be little difference

between human copulation, most especially his own, and intercourse of the canine variety that takes place outside his door.

He then draws a parallel between himself and the neighborhood dogs who fight over the bitch in estrus at his front door. Except for his thoughts about finding some kind of escape or relief through murder (which is thwarted since the sleeping woman has had enough foresight to hide his gun), he is braced by only one other element: whiskey (which she apparently did not hide). The whiskey is notable because it is given the only positive attribute in an otherwise bleak and pessimistic (and angry) diatribe. For the narrator, it mediates the emotions and is a "brace" against guilt, anger, sleeplessness, carnality, and alienation. As usual, for Berryman, it is paramount and consequential and stands as a destructive and yet meaningless alternative to moral disintegration. The poem concludes with a bathetic petition for help, since the narrator feels that he has been rendered helpless in his irresistible craving to abandon the marriage bed in order to copulate with someone else.

Robert Lowell is much like Berryman in his concern with drinking and marital alienation. However, rather than concern himself with issues of promiscuity and seduction, Lowell focuses more exclusively on the problems emanating from alcohol abuse and marital estrangement.³ In his poem, "Man and Wife," he tells us that the relationship is finished; the fighting is over; and the abused and impetuous wife is no longer interested in her husband's salvation. She just chooses to turn her back, grieve in silence, and be left alone. Lowell apparently has a vivid recollection of the madness and homicidal drinking that tore at the very fabric of the relationship. The ensuing emotional separation led to the kind of despair that could only be predicated on deep-seated guilt, and so he writes that,

. . . I,
one hand on glass
and heart in mouth,
outdrank the Rahvs in the heat
of Greenwich Village, fainting at your feet--
too boiled and shy

and poker-faced to make a pass, . . . (14-20)

Braced by liquor, his emotions playing havoc with his heart, the

young, poker-faced Lowell had passed out at the feet of his bride-to-be. We are told that the resulting "invective" was so furious that it "scorched the traditional South" (22); but somehow, perhaps miraculously, he managed to marry the woman and gained access to the conjugal bed. But now he writes that,

... twelve years later, you turn your back.

Sleepless, you hold
your pillow to your hollows like a child;
your old-fashioned tirade—
loving, rapid, merciless—

breaks like the Atlantic Ocean on my head. (23-28)

Now, twelve years later, the "invective" of the bride-to-be has subsided into stony silence, and the relationship has become grounded in a simple equation of endurance and private pain. As a consequence, the marriage bed has become a killing field, testifying only to the despair and alienation, the unspoken resentments, and conjugal exhaustion whose very expression would be pointless.

We see here a remarkable illustration of the lack of congruence in the alcoholic perspective, whether in marriage or in a simple conjugal relationship. In either case, dishonesty and concealment are rampant, words do not match emotions, those emotions which are shared at all are expressed indirectly or covertly, and relationships remain superficial and lacking in intimacy. Surprisingly, a good many alcoholics are idealists of a very high order; indeed, this may well account for their perfectionism, their sentimentality and love of bathos, and their low threshold of frustration.⁴ While an abusive drinker is likely to obsess and fantasize about his personal life and the lives of those closest to him, he may be just as inclined to sabotage any opportunities for intimacy because of his brutal disregard for the integrity of others and his unmitigated self-involvement. Thus, he will claim to espouse the highest ideals; but he will behave despicably when he is in the presence of those he claims to love.

Self-hate involving a complex of power-driven illusions is a particularly vivid theme in "Homecoming." In this poem, Lowell again deals with issues of marriage, drunkenness, and incompatibility, although these elements are described somewhat more wistfully and with a degree of regret. Here, the poet recalls

how the rebellious infatuation of young love was transposed into the cynicism and burn-out of middle age. He writes that this was a time when "the boys in my old gang" started to "embrace retirement like bald, baby birds." Lowell then looks back on the past and remembers,

At the gingerbread casino,
how innocent the night we made it
on our *Vesuvio* martinis
with no vermouth but vodka
to sweeten the dry gin—

the lash across my face
that night we adored . . .
soon every night and all,
when your sweet, amorous
repetition changed. (11-20)

The early years of drinking were shielded in a gingerbread fantasy, and love and innocence were sweetened by a volcanic conjunction of vodka and gin. Today, however, the relationship has deteriorated into a mind-numbing routine that has little meaning any more.

The abuses of alcoholism, the meanness, and the desperate hunger to survive are even more vividly portrayed in Lowell's poem "To Speak of the Woe that is in Marriage." Here, we move forward a good number of years as Lowell assumes the persona of the wife who complains,

Oh the monotonous meanness of his lust . . .
It's the injustice . . . he is so unjust—
whiskey-blind, swaggering home at five.

My only thought is how to keep alive. (7-10)

Lowell understands very well the untenable position of the codependent spouse who struggles desperately to stay alive, both physically and emotionally. Struggling to survive, cruelty, injustice, interminable abuse: these make up the catalog of horrors she has experienced. The drunken husband can't seem to get enough. He intimidates, swaggers, and ". . . cruises for prostitutes, / free-lancing out along the razor's edge" (4-5). There is little concern for morality, integrity, or logic in his drunken meanderings; rather, they constitute an obscene preoccupation

with sexual predation. The victim of these predatory escapades—the wife—burns out in despair; and so she retreats into a private grief where he is granted no access, where there are no games of accusation and denial, and where there are no attempts to explain the unexplainable.

The poem ends on a note of desperation. The "hopped up husband," having returned from the streets, tries to intimidate his terrified wife by "stalling" above her like a huge, immovable animal. In fear and perplexity, she asks,

What makes him tick? Each night now I tie
ten dollars and his car key to my thigh. . . .
Gored by the climacteric of his want,
he stalls above me like an elephant. (11-14)

The sexual element in the relationship has subsided to impotence and constitutes little more than a game of search and recover: money and the car keys are about the only basis of connectedness now, and the husband's needs are centered only on the recovery of those instruments which will assure more drunkenness and more philandering. The wife tries to fight her intoxicated mate; but her position is untenable. Her survival is contingent on letting him go and getting on with her own life, but she is not yet prepared to give up the fight. As for his part in the game, the husband is slowed by her deceptions, but his anger is unrestrained; and, while his behavior has not yet led to absolute self-destruction, Lowell makes it clear that it will likely come soon enough.

It may well be that both Lowell and Berryman confused infatuation and power-centeredness with love. Perhaps they were self-deluded. Perhaps, as with so many alcoholics, their addictive-compulsive behavior extended far beyond issues of drinking and drunkenness. Both men appear to have suffered from alcoholic grandiosity and what Alcoholics Anonymous refers to as "big shotism"; both appeared incapable of restricting their appetites for women and alcohol; both indulged in adulterous affairs that tested the limits of decency and self-respect. Berryman was something of a Lothario and became involved in a considerable number of shabby relationships; Lowell's problems were not so generalized and usually focused on specific marital problems, sexual violence, and issues of drunkenness in his immediate family. Even so, the profile for both men is much the same: self-serving behavior and

issues of codependence were confused with intimacy, and self-indulgence paraded as self-sacrifice. Yet, because of the power of their delusions and because of the genius of their writing, the two have provided us with a memorable glimpse into one of the darker and more enigmatic facets of the alcoholic mentality. That alone justifies a careful study of their work; and that alone is reason enough to consider the tenuous relationship between creativity, mortality, intimacy, and the distorted appetites of the alcoholic mindset.

Notes

1. Berryman has devised a "host" of puns and double meanings in this poem. A good many of them deal with the word "in" and involve references to a menage-à-trois, especially with regard to who lies next to whom and with what implications. However, it lies beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the grotesque vicissitudes of the poem's humor in agonizing detail. Suffice it to say that I have given a clue to at least some of the humor and the puns in the body of this exploration.
2. This is one of the last of the *Sonnets to Chris* (published as *Berryman's Sonnets* in 1967). The sonnets were an account of his first infidelity in 1947. However, it was not the last. Berryman was to have numerous other affairs, especially during the mid-1950's; ultimately, in 1956, he divorced Eileen, although this did not put an end to his peccadilloes.
3. It should also be noted that, in addition to his alcoholism, Lowell was bipolar.
4. This low threshold of frustration is further exacerbated by the alcoholic desire to change, manipulate and reform others according to certain self-ordained prescriptions.

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Tumbling the Void: William Wantling and the Algebra of Need

David Roskos

for Lorri Jackson and Chris Ide

Walter Lowenfels has written that William Wantling was “the best poet of his age.” The San Francisco-based poet A. D. Winans, in his introduction to Wantling’s last book, 7 on Style, said that Wantling was “one of the most powerful voices to appear on the literary scene in the 1960’s.” William Wantling was a small press poet. He published in small, independently published, mostly mimeographed magazines and his books were put out by small presses, which is why you may have never heard of him. Walter Lowenfels championed his work, and included it in many of the anthologies he edited in the 1960’s and 70’s, including Where Is Vietnam (Anchor Doubleday, 1967), In a Time of Revolution (Vintage, 1969), and Open Poetry (Simon and Schuster, 1970). A selection of his poetry was also included in Penguin Modern Poets 12 in 1968. Unfortunately, all of these anthologies and all of Wantling’s books are out of print. However, at this writing, 25 years after his death, there has been a resurgence of interest in William Wantling. W. D. Ehrhart included Wantling’s Korean War poems in the Fall/Winter 1997 issue of War, Literature & the Arts (WLA), an anthology of Korean War Soldier-Poets, which he guest edited. Ehrhart also wrote a biographical essay about Wantling which was published in the November/December 1998 issue of The American Poetry Review, along with four of Wantling’s poems. A selection of Wantling’s prison poetry was included in Prison Writing in 20th-Century America, edited by H. Bruce Franklin, and published by Penguin Putnam in 1998. In 1999 editor Alan Kaufman included Wantling’s signature poem “Poetry” in The Outlaw Bible of American Poetry (Thunder’s Mouth Press).

The four major influences upon William Wantling’s life and work were his participation in the Korean War, his addiction to narcotics, the five and a half years he spent in San Quentin, and the eight years he spent at Illinois State University (as a student earning his BA and MA degrees in English for seven years and as an English instructor for one). It was in San Quentin that Wantling

began writing and discovered that he was a poet.

While war, prison and academia figured largely in Wantling's poetry, both as inspiration and subject matter, addiction remained the major preoccupation of his work throughout his career. Indeed, he considered his introduction to opiates to be the pivotal point in his life, around which everything else revolved.

Wantling's most successful, and most famous, poem is "Poetry," reprinted here as an introduction to his work in its entirety from his book San Quentin's Stranger (SQS). I feel that this poem lays out where Wantling is coming from more than any of his other poems, and summarizes both his philosophy of life and his approach toward writing.

Poetry

I've got to be honest. I can
make good word music and rhyme

at the right times and fit words
together to give people pleasure

and even sometimes take their
breath away—but it always

somehow turns out kind of phoney.
Consonance and assonance and inner

rhyme won't make up for the fact
that I can't figure out how to get

down on paper the real or the true
which we call Life. Like the other

day. The other day I was walking
on the lower exercise yard here

at San Quentin and this cat called
Turk came up to a friend of mine

and said Ernie, I hear you're

shooting on my kid. And Ernie
told him So what, punk? And Turk
pulled out his stuff and shanked
Ernie in the gut only Ernie had a
metal tray in his shirt. Turk's
shank bounced right off him and
Ernie pulled his stuff out and of
course Turk didn't have a tray and
caught it dead in the chest, a bad
one, and the blood that came to his
lips was a bright pink, lung blood,
and he just laid down in the grass
and said Shit. Fuck it. Sheit.

Fuck it. And he laughed a soft long
laugh, 5 minutes, then died. Now
what could consonance or assonance or
even rhyme do with something like that?

Wantling has taken poetry out of the classroom and brought it, and the reader, down onto San Quentin's lower exercise yard. I can't help but think of Allen Ginsberg's poem, "On Burroughs' Work" (Collected Poems 1947-1980 114):

The method must be purest meat
and no symbolic dressing,
actual visions & actual prisons
as seen then and now.

Prisons and visions presented
with rare descriptions
corresponding exactly to those
of Alcatraz and Rose.

A naked lunch is natural to us,
we eat reality sandwiches.
But allegories are so much lettuce.
Don't hide the madness.

Wantling spares us the symbolic dressing and allegorical lettuce and gets directly to the pure meat of the matter, presenting the reader with an actual vision from an actual prison, with no attempt to "hide the madness." This kind of honesty and simplicity, of "telling it like it is," in a straight-forward, "plain as talking" style, is a trademark of Wantling's best work and is one of the reasons why he was classified with a group of writers from the 1960's, which included Charles Bukowski, who were known as "Meat Poets."

W. D. Ehrhart recently wrote that "Poetry" "has to be one of the greatest prison poems ever written" (WLA 29). I agree, and would rank it with Etheridge Knight's "Hard Rock Returns to Prison from the Hospital for the Criminal Insane," and Oscar Wilde's "Ballad of Reading Gaol." Nevertheless, Charles Bukowski wasn't completely convinced. In a letter of June 2nd, 1965 to Douglas Blazek, founder of Mimeo Press and publisher of Wantling's Down, off & out, he wrote: "some of the poems went, or almost went for me. but I always got the feeling as if I were being kidded a bit—like the con with the tray in his shirt—but I didn't mind that too much; writing was clear and contained little poetic malarkey" (Screams from the Balcony 161-162). I disagree with Bukowski's criticism of this poem. We can only guess just what he meant by "poetic malarkey." And as for "the con with the tray in his shirt," maybe Ernie anticipated the confrontation with Turk and went out onto the exercise yard prepared for battle. It isn't that far-fetched. Perhaps the scene described in the poem is a composite of several situations Wantling had witnessed at San Quentin. From what I understand, a knifing in a prison exercise yard is a very commonplace occurrence.

However, by the late 1960's many of Wantling's readers had grown disenchanted with him. They felt he had lost his edge, that his academic pursuits had somehow compromised his street credibility. Here's what Wantling's friend Charles Bukowski had

to say on the matter, from a letter dated June 28th, 1969:

Hello Wantling: what the hell have you been doing to yourself, man? this stuff very thin. since you've been going through this college thing, babe, your writing has changed, softened. and it was never really great, you know that. you need a wake-up. I don't know if you can be saved. Check with your wife. I'm sure she has detected a change. I talk to you straight, man, like a father because nobody else is going to. It's not a crime to slip as a writer, but you went so fast. Get a ring & valve job, joker, or do more time. Neelie [Cherkovski] says he is going to whip your ass unless you shape up, motherfucker. If you think I am kidding, he ain't (7 on Style 15).

Bukowski fears that it may be too late for Wantling: "I don't know if you can be saved." As it turned out, Wantling the man would not be saved. He sadly was taken down, off and out by his addiction—dead at the age of 40. However Wantling the poet would be given one last chance, which he took, closing the canon of his work with some very strong poems which were as good as, if not better than, his early work.

By 1972 William Wantling was a contender again. New Zealand's Caveman Press published a small chapbook of new poems entitled Obscene & Other Poems. A. D. Winans has noted that "It was not a successful book by any standards. Neither impressive nor bad. *But it did represent new work by the author and seemed to show promise that his voice was to be reckoned with again*" (7 on Style 4, italics mine). Two of the five poems in the book have since taken their rightful place beside Wantling's best work, the title poem, "Obscene," and an early version of a poem entitled "Selected Poems," which Wantling later re-titled "In Zoology Lab." The latter focuses on his experience at Illinois State University and is a foreshadowing of what lay ahead: 7 on Style, his last and arguably best book, written in the last few months of his life and published a year after his death. Through it all, addiction remained the central theme of Wantling's poetry. It was also the central focus of his life; feeding and maintaining it had become a full time job. Ironically enough, it is the very thing

which ultimately killed him that inspired his most compelling work.

“Heroin” is among Wantling’s most poignant poems about addiction. The poem begins “what / I remember of the good times . . .” and relates two occasions wherein the poet actually enjoyed himself on heroin. “That was twice,” he concludes, “the rest was nothing, even / less / the pain’s still there” (SQS 11). Pain is a recurring theme in Wantling’s work. In his poem “and children are born” he writes: “and children are born / with deep eyes / and grow up / and die / knowing nothing / feeling little / but pain [. . .] always too / the deepeyed children / forget, age into eyes / of glass, of stone / tumble the void / blind, dumb, alone / and always / nothing / always / pain” (SQS 57). Wantling was hurt and disillusioned, and no doubt felt betrayed, by the seeming futility of existence, the loss of innocence and the inevitability of death—harsh realities of life which were burned into his psyche by his experience as a Marine in the Korean War. Unable, or unwilling, to accept and transcend these harsh realities, he succumbed to despair and attempted to dull the pain with narcotics. In “Her White Body,” Wantling comes right out and tells us why he gets high: “If you had any sense / she sd / You’d know we’re going / to die soon, glaring / as I tied up / Yes, I sd & hit my ante- / cobital, that’s why I’m / fixing” (Wormwood Review 9: 4, 17). It is from this core of pain that Wantling operates and proceeds into his addiction.

“Initiation” (SQS 34) describes a scene from Wantling’s early days as a junkie in Los Angeles. He still has a conscience at this point; it hasn’t been dulled down and numbed out completely. He is driving through the streets of LA. with his first wife, Lee, “seeking magic,” looking for heroin. They are dope sick and broke, the panic of withdrawal bearing down on them. Lee suggests that Wantling “hit some chump over his head” and steal his money. He doesn’t “dig that” so she offers “To find some good tricks.” Wantling doesn’t go for this either; in fact, he’s hurt by it: “I got hot, indignant like / a square with tears.” Lee feels pity for her husband and offers these words of consolation: “—Don’t cry Daddy, it’s just / another way to burn a sucker.”

Wantling’s most shocking poem about heroin addiction is “Once You’ve Been A Dopefiend,” written in July of 1965, and

published by Marvin Malone in issue #20 of The Wormwood Review. (Wantling drastically revised this poem later on and included it in San Quentin's Stranger. A comparison of the two texts offers insight into Wantling's technique as a writer, and illustrates his skill and precision as a poet.) Wantling confesses to a murder in this poem. Again, as in "Initiation," this poem simply describes a day in the life of an addict. It begins: "Once you've been a / dopefiend for a year / you learn *anybody* can / become a snitch. . . ." He goes on to relate the story of the sad end of Chester the Bear, who, "as far as good people / go in the *Life* [.] . .] was / one of the best." They "all felt bad" when they "got the word" that Chester had informed on another addict, because they all knew what had to be done, and none of them wanted to do it. In the third stanza Wantling tells us: "it was his old lady, finally / who offered to give him / the hot shot / but she was evil, we / didn't go for it somehow." Out of an odd sense of respect, loyalty and maybe even love, Wantling and another dopefiend named Al save Chester from the indignity and betrayal of being given a hot shot by his own wife. They give it to him: "& it was that / simple—*anybody* could've saved / him the first half hour so / we drug him back in / the alley & covered / him with an old / L.A. Countyfair banner."

What is really disturbing about this poem, ultimately, isn't the story it tells, but the laconic, detached tone with which the story is told. They were simply doing what had to be done. There are rules and codes that even dopefiends are expected to live by, and "Thou Shalt Not Snitch," is at the top of the list. In the last stanza of the poem Wantling reveals that his conscience, though obviously dulled by drugs and receding fast, is not completely gone: "if I hadn't of been / so high I think / I'd've cried."

In "Don't Shoot" (The Awakening 18), it is years later, Wantling is off heroin, has served his time (for possession and forgery) at San Quentin, is remarried, to his second wife, Ruthie, and living in his native state of Illinois. The couple are enjoying a quiet evening at home, taking pleasure and solace in each other's company and in the simple things in life: Miles Davis on the stereo, popcorn and soda, sex on the living room rug. After Ruthie has fallen to sleep, Wantling reads a letter from his first wife, Lee, and reflects upon his old life as a hard-core junkie in

Los Angeles: "I read an old letter / from my first wife, wrote / a poem about her & the years / in LA. & the narcotics, & / wondered about that old man / whose skull we'd had to / fracture to take his lousy / \$83 that one bad sick / time, wondered if he'd / lived, if he'd ever just / loved & lived simply & with / total thanks as I had this / night. . . ." The tone of this redemption poem is reverent and almost sounds like a prayer. Wantling's remorse and sincerity are undeniable. But there is no way to make amends to the old man, not directly anyway. So he confesses his sin and seeks redemption through his art, in the poem.

"Initiation" and "Don't Shoot," which describe events from the beginning and end of Wantling's heroin addiction, illustrate its progression. He wound up doing something he thought he'd never do: "hit some chump over his head," steal his money and leave him for dead. This is what William S. Burroughs called The Algebra of Need, in his essay "Deposition: Testimony Concerning a Sickness":

Junk yields a basic formula of evil virus: *The Algebra of Need*. The face of "evil" is always the face of total need. A dope fiend is a man in total need of dope. Beyond a certain frequency need knows absolutely no limit or control. In the words of total need: "Wouldn't you?" Yes you would. You would lie, cheat, inform on your friends, steal, do *anything* to satisfy total need. Because you would be in a state of total sickness, total possession, and not in a position to act in any other way. Dope fiends are sick people who cannot act other than they do (*Naked Lunch* xxxix).

Wantling had contracted the "evil virus." By the time "that one bad sick time" described in "Don't Shoot" had arrived, his need for dope had gone beyond that "certain frequency" of "total need" that Burroughs was talking about.

There are several allusions to the work of William Burroughs in Wantling's work. In "an open letter to the underground," he wrote, simply enough: "I love Burroughs" (10.000 r.p.m. & digging it, yeah! 24). The editor Marvin Malone published the two writers together in a pull-out section, under the title 'Two Williams,' in the 36th issue of The Wormwood Review in 1969,

which leads me to assume that Burroughs in turn was aware of Wantling and his work. Though I doubt that Burroughs held Wantling in the high regard that Wantling held him; Burroughs considered poets to be nothing more than lazy prose writers. In "Style 4 (Interior Monologue)" Wantling alludes to the most famous phrase from Burroughs' "Deposition," "Paregoric Babies of the World Unite. We have nothing to lose but Our Pushers" (Naked Lunch xviii), in a humorous mixture of homage and parody: "DON'T EAT YELLOW SNOW excreta-eaters unite, you have nothing to lose but your bad taste" (Style 16). In another later, post-heroin, poem entitled "There Goes Another Sidetrip" (SQS 43), Wantling describes the sense of impending doom he feels due to the onset of yet another, seemingly inevitable, alcohol, pharmaceutical and psychedelic binge. Replete with an overwhelming tone of paranoia and science fiction imagery, "There Goes Another Sidetrip" sounds to me like it was swept up and assembled from Burroughs' cut-up room floor:

& then
 just when I think I'm
 getting my shit together
 the humming starts, the static
 & sideways
 upside down & just at the
 edge of my eye
 in come the metallic grey chesspieces of
 the Insect Trust
 rank & file spears & chorus line
 moving on the Martian track. stop. go
 back out again

silence

just to remind me

Just to remind him of what? That he is not free, that he is a slave of his own impulses, condemned to an endless cycle of self-destruction, a man possessed by a demon he will never completely exorcise? In short, an addict. Burroughs clarifies the nature of the situation early on in his "Deposition": "Junk is the ideal product . . . the ultimate merchandise. No sales talk necessary. The client will

crawl through a sewer and beg to buy. . . . The junk merchant does not sell his product to the consumer, he sells the consumer to his product. He does not improve and simplify his merchandise. He degrades and simplifies the client. He pays his staff in junk" (Naked Lunch xxxix). Burroughs fails to mention that this degradation and simplification of the client, or addict, is a common characteristic of addiction, and is not exclusive to heroin abuse.

Like many addicts before and after him, Wantling made the fatal mistake of differentiating between heroin addiction and addiction in general. In a letter of March 27th, 1965 to Steve Richmond, the editor of STANCE Magazine and a fellow "Meat Poet," Wantling wrote that he was "one of the shadowy 2% that have finally & forever kicked the heroin habit" (STANCE 14). Technically speaking, Wantling did kick his heroin habit. He simply switched to other drugs, all of them in fact, including other opiates, like codeine. As late as December 1973, just three months before his death from an overdose of alcohol and codeine, he wrote: "I cant even handle the day without a 6-pak & as many joints / a hit or 2 of codeine" (Style 17).

The memory of heroin use can haunt ex-junkies. It is very powerful and seductive in its lure, which is one reason why there is such a high recidivism rate among heroin addicts. Wantling was no exception. In "I wake up under a fig tree," a rambling and prosaic three and a half page narrative poem from his 1973 chapbook, 10.000 r.p.m. & diggin it, yeah!, he describes a street scene in Berkeley and is almost overcome by his urge to do heroin. Instead, he literally runs to the liquor store in an attempt to drown out the impulse to shoot dope:

Sam & I wander down Telegraph
drinking a beer & rapping to the Hare
Krishna people, checking out the
albums smack & speed freaks are
selling for fix money
Telegraph like another country
sucked-down hollow-cheeked heads
drifting by, darting in & out of
tight knots, scoring, burning each
other, lusting after heavens white powder

their arms & eyes concealed & suddenly
 I know where the *Vampire* came from, these
 people covered with tracks & pimples
 skulking on their own Brothers
 seeking new victims, doomed
 to that eternal itch, the ante-cobital fix
 just like back in the 50's only it was 8
 bills for a cap of smack then
 its half that now & better quality &
 o shit I can taste that speedball in
 the back of my throat, feel that
 taut wire strumming between
 my ears
 all I have to do is
 score some meth & smack &
 cook them up together &
punch it right in the old main vein christ
 I remember how good it feels, so
 good it scares me &
 I run to the death store, pick
 up a qt of white port but
 I might as well have

done the speedball cause
 I blow it anyway

This poem illustrates that Wantling never quite recovered from his heroin experience and certainly never overcame his addiction. As ever, though, he is bearing witness to what he has seen and experienced as an addict. Like William Burroughs, Wantling has left us with a body of work which sheds a lot of much needed light on the internal and external life of a drug addict. His life story serves well as a cautionary tale: young poets who think that a self destructive lifestyle is a requirement of being a writer would do well to reconsider this mythological notion. Finally, his poems about his experiences in the Korean War and in San Quentin contribute as much to the canons of War and Prison Writing as his poems about narcotics contribute to the Literature of Addiction.

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NOTES AND COMMENT

Roger Forseth

The Fall 1999 issue of Cottonwood (Box J, 400 Kansas Union, U of Kansas, Lawrence 66045; 785/843-2787) is dedicated to the memory of George Wedge, its long-time editor. It includes a selection of his poems as well as the opening chapters of his novel, The Spooking of Sonny Bliss. . . . St. Martin's Press has published The Languages of Addiction, ed. Jane Lilienfeld and Jeffrey Oxford. It includes essays by Dionysos contributors Matts Djos, Lawrence Driscoll, Roger Forseth, and Ellen Lansky [Djos has an article in this issue; a review of The Languages of Addiction will appear in our next issue]. . . . Bill W. and Mr. Wilson, a biography of the founder of A.A. by "Matthew J. Raphael," leads the Spring List of The U of Massachusetts P. . . . Advisory Board member Richard H. Uhlig writes, "Do you happen to know of anyone who might be interested in inheriting my [alcohol studies] library?" Anyone interested may reach Dick at 112 Essex Dr., Chapel Hill, NC 27514 (919/929-2233). . . . Dan Wakefield's How Do We Know When It's God? (Little, Brown 1999) "continues the religious transformations Wakefield recounted in 1988's Returning: A Spiritual Journey. The trouble he encounters is that transformations have an annoying impermanence. What happens when those mountaintop spiritual moments dissipate into the realities of daily life—when we once again succumb to our insecurities and doubts after experiencing the Divine Presence? In his funny, self-abnegating way, Wakefield tells how this happened to him" (Kirkus Reviews 1 July 1999: 1046). . . . "Female Trouble: Dorothy Parker, Katherine Anne Porter, and Alcoholism," by Ellen Lansky, appeared in Literature and Medicine 17.2 (Fall 1998): 212-230. Ellen read her paper "Women Alcoholics on the Screen" at the 1999 Midwest Modern Language Association meeting. . . . "[A]bsinthe . . . is . . . the craze of London bars—and potent enough to make you forget where you drank it. 'All I remember is that I made a complete prat of myself and ended up like a wino, searching for doorways to lie in,' Krissy Schmidt, a twenty-eight-year-old chef, recalled of her first and only experiment with absinthe. 'I came to about two days later with a truly hideous hangover'" (Tony Horwitz, "Will Absinthe Replace Marmite as the Worst-Tasting British Treat?" The New Yorker 27 Sept 1999: 34 [for more on absinthe, see James Nicholls's article in this issue]). . . . Johns Hopkins U P has published Lowell Edmunds's Martini, Straight Up: The Classic American Cocktail (1998), something of a variorum on the subject. . . . "More than 6,000 people from around the nation are expected to attend Hazelden's Rendezvous of Hope [during which] 'Project Mosaic' will be in the spotlight. It is a continuous emotionally charged story, written in pieces by 50 people,

one from each state. Read as a whole, it traces addicts' struggles from the absolute bottom to the hope of a chemically free rebirth" (Paul Levy, "Sobering Thoughts: Hazelden Celebrates Its 50th Anniversary," Minneapolis Star Tribune 14 Oct 1999: E1). . . . "What if addiction, whether to cocaine, heroin or alcohol, could be broken by taking a single pill? That's the audacious claim behind ibogaine, an extract of an African shrub" (Malcolm Ritter, "Pill May Be 'Cure' for Addiction," Duluth [MN] News-Tribune 2 Jan 2000: 9A). . . . "When they write a how-to book for alcoholic parents, there will almost certainly be an entry for the kind portrayed in this first novel by Gay Walley [Strings Attached (U P of Mississippi, 1999)]: the sardonic, blunt-spoken, appealingly appalling father who makes his daughter his comrade in arms" (Margaret Diehl, "Strings Attached," New York Times Book Review 14 Nov 1999: 37). . . . Jeffrey Schaler's Addiction Is a Choice (Open Court), a libertarian attack on the disease theory of addiction, is reviewed by Andy Dehnart in Salon (salon.com 10 Jan). . . . "Once when I was at the Hôtel Royal an American customer sent for me before dinner and ordered twenty-four brandy cocktails. I brought them all together on a tray, in twenty-four glasses. 'Now, garçon,' said the customer (he was drunk), 'I'll drink twelve and you'll drink twelve, and if you can walk to the door afterwards you get a hundred francs. And every night for six days he did the same thing. . . . A few months later I heard he had been extradited by the American Government—

embezzlement. There is something fine, do you not think, about these Americans?" (George Orwell, Down and Out in Paris and London [Harvest 1933] 25-26). . . . The latest issue of Social History of Alcohol Review 36/37 (1998) notes that Thomas R. Pegramp's Battling Demon Rum: The Struggle for a Dry America, 1800-1933 (Ivan Dee 1998) is out in paperback. . . .

"You would be hard-pressed to explain the taxonomy of chemicals underpinning the drug war to an extraterrestrial. Is it, for example, addictiveness that causes this society to condemn a drug?" (Michael Pollan, "A Very Fine Line," The New York Times Magazine 12 Oct 1999: 28). . . . "Paul Bowles died in Tangier, Morocco. He was 88, and throughout his extraordinary career evoked a world of dark Moroccan streets and scorching deserts, a haze of hashish and drug-induced visions" (Mel Gussow, [Obituary], The New York Times 19 Nov 1999: C20). The U of Delaware Library has acquired the Bowles papers. . . . "[Elmore] Leonard believes he is much better equipped to handle fame today than he would have been in his younger, drinking days. 'I drank because I was self-conscious in social situations,' . . . He concedes it probably isn't coincidental that his career took off shortly after he quit drinking in 1977. 'I never wrote when I was drinking—I knew better than that,' he says. 'But I wrote hung over'" (Ellen Graham, "Elmore Leonard," The Wall Street Journal 8 Nov 1999: 5). . . . "Though Mr. Gates's

characters are less romantic than the people in Richard Yates's fiction, they share a similar sense of disappointment and a similar inclination to use alcohol as an escape" (Michiko Kakutani's review of David Gates's The Wonders of the Invisible World: Stories [Knopf], The New York Times Book Review 6 July 1999: B6). . . . "For Marlowe heroin is just another drug. Addictive, yes, lethal in large enough doses and, as her title suggests, an insidious waste of time" (David Gates, reviewing Anne Marlowe's How to Stop Time: Heroin from A to Z. The New York Times Book Review 21 Nov 1999: 10. . . . Norton has published Paul Mariani's The Broken Tower: A Life of Hart Crane (1999); the second edition of Mariani's Dream Song: The Life of John Berryman, with a new introduction, appeared in 1996 (U Mass P). . . . "Being a 'recovering' alcoholic is almost getting to be a requirement for being a fictional detective, as much a part of the standard issue as Marlowe's .38 and office bottle" (Stephen Budiansky, "Soft Boiled: Detectives Aren't What They Used to Be," The Atlantic Monthly Nov 1999: 124). . . . Robert Zemeckis's television documentary on addiction (the solution to which, he concludes, is that there is no solution) appeared on Showtime 13 Sept 1999. . . . "If you want to be sober, Charlie, it's only because you're a maverick and you'll try anything" (Saul Bellow, Humboldt's Gift [Avon 1976]: 27). . . . "Why do college students drink so stupidly?" asks Jack Hitt: "[T]he typical partygoer's schedule: drive off campus or hide in the woods (often alone), guzzle a pint of bourbon, eat a box of breath mints and then stumble into the dry sorority party serenely blotto" ("The Battle of the Binge," The New York Times Magazine 24 Oct 1999: 31, 32). . . . "A 38-year-old Superior [Wisconsin] homemaker was arrested this week after she went into a tirade when her Internet access was cut off. The woman slammed her keyboard into a desk, threw an end table across her living room, broke a lamp, smashed a vase, then threw a heavy glass figurine at her husband who ducked out of the way just in time, according to Superior police reports. 'My wife is neglecting her duties as a mother because she sits in front of the computer all day and night long, every day of the week. She also drinks alcohol while doing this.' With drink in hand, she spends hours each day talking to people in a 'chat room,' he told police. Tuesday he canceled his AOL subscription. When his wife couldn't log onto the Internet she threw a fit. She broke some objects and ran out the door into the zero-degree cold without any shoes or jacket on. Her husband wanted charges filed against his wife and told police he wants her to get court-ordered counseling for computer/Internet addiction" ("Cut off from AOL, Raging Wife Arrested," Duluth [MN] News-Tribune 13 Jan 2000: 3B).

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Matts Djos (Ph.D., Texas A & M, 1975) is a Professor of English at Mesa State College in Grand Junction, Colorado, specializing in American literature. His personal familiarity with many of the problems of alcoholism has led to a scholarly concern about the connection between alcohol abuse and modern American writing.

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David Roskos lives in his home state of New Jersey, where he edits and publishes Big Hammer magazine and other publications under the imprint of Iniquity Press/Vendetta Books. He works as a furniture mover and has been published approximately one hundred times over the past 20 years, most recently in the Outlaw Bible of American Poetry. He is a regular contributor to Dionysos.

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