

DIONYSOS

the literature and intoxication triquarterly

Winter 1991

Vol. 2 No. 3

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EDITORIAL

The latest Andy Warhol Fame Award, it appears, goes by acclamation to Melody Beattie, author of Codependent No More (listed on The New York Times Book Review Paperback Best Sellers chart for 118 weeks, as of February 3). The award, appropriately, was recorded, as it were, in Time: "Taking Care of Herself" (December 10: "Self-help is a philosophy, says Melody Beattie, and her best-selling books carry the word to a tidal wave of followers"). The media attention to codependency and chemical dependence, as I have editorially observed elsewhere (Dionysos, Spring 1990), has often been characterized by a certain condescension: They are not about to be carried away by any "tidal wave" of psychobabble. It is therefore refreshing to come upon a piece, by Susan Vigilante ("The Drunks Shall Inherit the Earth," Beyond the Boom, ed. Terry Teachout [New York: Poseidon, 1990]), that thoughtfully moves beyond such fashionable pieces as Mademoiselle's "Addiction Chic." Ms. Vigilante writes perceptively about the "rehab culture" of the Sixties Generation, and does so with a novelist's depth.

Indeed, it was only a matter of time before journalism moved into fiction proper, and it is a pleasure to report that John Updike has found room in Rabbit at Rest (New York: Knopf, 1990) for his own version of the culture of addiction treatment. Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom's son Nelson, a "self-centered jerk" (to use Ms. Vigilante's term) if there ever was one, after snorting his mother's inheritance, escapes gratefully into a Philadelphia treatment clinic. The reader is then treated to the high comedy of Nelson's attempt to "share" his recovery with his father. Updike's account is pure Rabbit: "'A day at a time,' Nelson recites, 'with help of a higher power. Once you accept that help, Dad, it's amazing how nothing gets you down. All these years, I think I've been seriously depressed; everything seemed too much. Now I just put it all in God's hands, roll over, and go to sleep. You have to keep up the program, of course. . . . I love counselling.' He turns to his mother and smiles. 'I love it, and it loves me.' Harry asks him, 'These druggy kids you deal with, they all black?' . . . [Janice says] 'I think for now, Harry. Let's give Nelson the space. He's trying so hard.' 'He's full of AA bullshit'" (407-08). Harry Angstrom did not major in sensitivity, but Updike, through his creation of a redneck Childe Harold, is able to achieve in fiction a reality that the journalists can't touch.

MARLA*

Jack Williams

Smuggler

From her first memories of visiting his office, Marla's father had always kept a bottle of Scotch in his desk drawer. It was always three-quarters full, and it wasn't until she was grown that it occurred to Marla that her father regularly replaced the Scotch. For years she had assumed that it simply sat there, unused, but she never looked to see if the bottle was dusty.

As a child she had met him at the door when he returned from work, thrilled to see him again. Sometimes she was allowed to carry his briefcase, and because she had never known any different, she associated the rich scent of leather with the faint sounding of glass. Of course she never opened his briefcase, but it was rare when she didn't think she heard something rolling, tinkling, as she set his case in the corner. But she never asked, or dwelled on it for any length of time. Daddy was home!

Stash this in your hose, Marla's husband said, fetching her back from her recollection. He handed her a flask.

Do what? Marla asked. They were in a crowd, surging and twisting toward the turnstiles of a stadium. It was game day, and the university was playing its intrastate rival, the technical school. Everyone was either dressed in red and black, or yellow and black.

Come on, come on, he said, just stash it in your hose. We'll need it later.

She slipped the flask into the waistband of her hose, hidden by the red, black, and yellow clad crowd. No one noticed. Her husband took her hand and wormed through the people, angling toward the gate. As they neared it, they saw policemen and state troopers checking purses and coat pockets for containers. A man was standing to the side, looking dazed, with his pants pockets turned out. The woman beside him, also wearing red, was crying. An officer stood before them with a pair of handcuffs.

I don't like this, Marla whispered.

Don't worry, her husband said. They won't check you. You

* The Marla stories are selections from Glass Was Everywhere, a novel in progress.

watch. They won't even check you.

Marla bit her tongue when they got to the gate. The noise of the crowd roared in her ears. Her knees felt weak and loose, but the policeman just waved them past, winking at Marla when her husband had gone ahead.

I told you, her husband said when they were seated.

She didn't answer. All around them red and black shakers pulsed, keeping time with the marching band standing on the track below.

Christ, Marla finally said. How could you ask me to do that?

Do what? he asked. He stuck his soft drink in her hand and said, Juice that up for me.

The scoreboard showed the time until kick-off--five minutes, thirteen seconds. Everywhere the fans were laughing, shouting, clapping. Vendors streamed up and down the aisles, hawking their goods.

When she first brought her husband to meet her parents, she remembered, they had surprised her father in the driveway. They walked right up on him; apparently he hadn't even heard them pull in. He was taking bottles out of the trunk of his car and feeding them into a dark green garbage bag. She could still recall how pale he looked, how much his hands trembled, how guilty his voice sounded when he spoke to them.

I've decided to start recycling, he had feebly said, dropping an empty fifth into the bag.

Her husband had laughed.

The ball was kicked off and everyone around Marla rose, cheering. She mothered the flask out of her hose. The metal was warm from where it had been resting against her stomach. She held it in her hand, staring at it.

Come on! her husband demanded, nudging her on the arm. Juice that up for me. He held out her cup too. He cheered.

The kick-off team--the special team--formed a wedge, battling their way up the field. The man with the ball cut right, veered sharply, and settled in behind a wall of blockers.

Marla opened the lid. She spiked them both.

Can I Have Your Doorknobs?

It was Marla's first apartment. The walls were plaster, radiators heated the rooms, and the floors were hardwood. Elbowing off a small den was a balcony that she'd lined with ferns.

There was also a back staircase which Marla was afraid to use. It was old and rickety. The apartment had everything, except a dishwasher. Character, she decided. The place had character.

It was her first apartment.

She stirred the spaghetti sauce and then added oregano. The small card table was set for three. Her parents would be arriving soon. Everything was spotless, the food was turning out especially good, and she was in her own apartment.

Independent, she said.

She danced around the cats, Smith and Wesson, and checked the table again. Perfect, she decided. Everything was perfect.

She answered the door. Her mother and father smiled back at her.

You've gained weight, her mother said.

Marla's smile faltered.

My daughter's gone a month and already she's getting fat, her mother said to her father.

Marla took their coats and offered them wine.

Don't you have any beer? her father asked.

She didn't. Wine was it. Did he want any?

Her mother came into the kitchen and stepped through the back door, onto the landing. She opened the door that led to the back staircase.

Can I have your doorknobs? her mother asked.

Marla's smile disappeared.

They're porcelain--antique, her mother said. They'd look great at the lake house.

Take them, Marla said. Whatever. Take them.

This wine is sour, her father said. No beer?

No beer, Marla said.

Your place is . . . nice, her mother said. And you've got cats.

Marla nodded. Her mother hated cats, she knew.

Well, your place is really nice, her mother said. We love it.

Her father nodded in agreement and handed Marla his wine.

But we can't stay for dinner, her mother said. We're going to the lake house for a long weekend.

Sorry, her father said. Duty calls.

Marla sat down and lit a cigarette.

And she smokes too, her mother said to her father. She's getting fat and now she smokes.

Marla blew a smoke ring. Her head was beginning to throb. She watched while her mother pulled off the doorknobs and handed them to her father. He put one in each coat pocket.

You'll watch your weight? her mother asked.

After the door shut behind them, Marla could still hear their voices fading down the steps.

And she smokes, her mother was saying.

She sat in her chair and smoked two more cigarettes. Then she went into the bathroom and stared at herself in the mirror to see if she was fat.

She stepped through the den and onto the balcony. A couple across from her was cooking out. They waved.

Marla threw one of the ferns off the balcony and watched as its clay pot shattered below her. Then she waved to the couple cooking out.

She brought the wine and the cigarettes outside. She drank straight from the balcony, then began pitching the rest of the ferns off the edge.

Yahoo, she said.

The couple cooking out stared at her.

Can I have your doorknobs? she called to them. She laughed. She went inside for something else to throw off of her balcony.

A Narrow Corridor

Marla hadn't expected company and when she stepped on one of the cats, it didn't help matters. Someone was knocking at the door, the cat was hissing, claws bared, and she was halfway dizzy with the confusion.

Who is it? she said with her eye to the peephole.

Pizza man, a voice said.

She couldn't see anything through the hole. And she hadn't ordered a pizza. She put her hand on the dead bolt.

I didn't order a pizza, she called.

Pizza man, the voice repeated.

Marla's hand wavered at the lock. Who was it? Was it a joke? What exactly did he want?

You see, she said, I haven't ordered a pizza. I don't even like pizza. So I couldn't have ordered a pizza. You see that, don't you?

Pizza man, the voice said.

It was a man's voice, she knew that, but she didn't know whose. On the stove she had some grits, of all things, cooking. She was broke, so low on money that all she could afford was grits, and she stood there smelling them cooking, hearing the plop! sound of them boiling.

The cat she'd stepped on, Smith, and the other, Wesson, had both disappeared. They were her only firearm--she had no gun. It was a running joke among her friends that anybody breaking in would have to deal with Smith and Wesson.

She put her eye to the hole and thought she stared into a huge, distorted eyeball. It was looking back at her and she could also see part of a nose.

Marla screamed.

Please go away! she cried. Please. I've ordered no pizza. I hate pizza.

Pizza man, he said, and Marla screamed again.

The doorknob, she thought, moved slightly. She ran into the kitchen and snatched up the pot of grits. They were boiling, thick and turgid. She ran back to the door.

Don't make me shoot! she yelled. She drew back the pot of grits, ready to sling them at her assailant.

Again the voice said, Pizza man.

Marla shrieked. Her legs felt boneless, weak. She bit her lip, flipped the dead-bolt unlocked, and threw the door open. She let fly with the grits.

I didn't order any pizza! she yelled.

The grits hit the back of the legs of a pizza deliverer handing a cardboard box to her neighbor across the hall. The apartments were old, dated from the 1930's, and every building only had four apartments--two downstairs, two upstairs. For this reason, she also clipped her neighbor, Wayne, with the pot. It was a narrow corridor.

The pizza man made noises that weren't human. The grits scalded his bare legs and he fell down, beating the wooden floor with his fists.

I didn't order a pizza, Marla sobbed. I'm so sorry, but I ordered no pizza.

Are these grits? Wayne shouted, fingering a white smear from the doorjamb. Have you burned this guy with grits?

The police came, and an ambulance, for the burned pizza delivery man. Wayne and Marla both gave statements. Wayne privately confided in an officer that Marla was drunk and dangerous.

Sometimes I hear things from in there, he added.

Marla closed the door behind her when everything was finished. She locked the door, chained it, then locked the dead-bolt, so that no one could come or go.

The apartment made noises of its own: hisses, squeaks, settling sounds. The cats reappeared. She put on more grits. She sat down in her chair, the only one in the apartment, and doodled on a piece of paper.

She drew crosshatches, bars of music, locks. She drew a key, then another. She made an army of them.

Aunt Abuse

Marla stopped on the doorstep to pat her hair and adjust her dress. She smoothed the material that had gathered at her waist, then she blew into her hand to see if she had bad breath. Satisfied that she didn't, she rang the bell.

Her husband's aunt answered the door. She was a towering, mean woman who had taken on a mythical stature in the family, known by all for her terse attacks on anyone or anything that crossed her. Behind her back they called her Aunt Abuse, but they only dared to say it when she was two or three rooms away. She had sonar ears, the family said. She could hear muttered oaths through plaster and paint.

Hello, Aunt Margaret, Marla said. I'm Marla.

You're late Marla, Aunt Abuse said. Though I'm not surprised.

I'm sorry, Marla apologized, but I was--

Your husband has been here for almost an hour, the laconic woman said. He's been covering for you.

You see, Marla stammered, I got tied up with--

Young lady, I don't pay to cool the atmosphere, she said. Come inside so I can shut this door and introduce you around. I only hope no one else has given up on you.

Marla followed the tall woman, walking timidly behind her and trying to gauge the quality of her furnishings. She spied a Picasso print on one wall, and through an open door down a long hallway she saw the back legs of a claw-footed bathtub. Her husband hadn't been kidding when he told her about the beautiful house, she saw. The entire place was tasteful and understated.

In the family room her husband was stoking the fire with one hand and balancing a drink in the other. Marla thought that he looked like one of the old-fashioned scales that had cups on either side, the kind used to measure gold dust or jewels.

Aunt Abuse introduced Marla to the crowd, naming the relatives both immediate and distant with a prim nod, an occasional pointed finger. When she had finished, Marla thanked her and escaped to her husband's side.

The phone rang right when I was going out the door, she told him.

Aunt Margaret doesn't like tardiness, he whispered with a laugh.

The crowd milled around the wide room, speaking first of politics and taxes and sports, and then in lower hushed tones about the matriarch's death that had brought about the gathering. The old woman had been even more ruthless than Aunt Margaret, and as if in honor of this everyone held a drink.

Mother wanted us all together, Aunt Margaret said, so that everyone would be told at the same time. This way there will be no gossip or miscommunication.

The crowd fell silent.

I thought this was a cocktail party, Marla whispered to her husband.

He shushed her, anticipating Aunt Abuse's glare.

When Aunt Abuse had finished speaking, Marla and her husband mingled throughout the room. She tried to remember the names of all the people whom she'd met, but the drinks that kept appearing in her hand made her ears so warm that she couldn't remember anything. Making matters worse, everyone seemed angry somehow. She got so displaced that she repeated back to her husband's Uncle Ralph the joke he had told her right after the short speech.

Yes . . . why, isn't that funny? Uncle Ralph said, walking away.

Marla giggled--the punch line, something about a homosexual in a bar, still struck her as funny--and got another drink. She waved to her husband, who was chatting with a group of people whose last name she had forgotten. Ketch? Cage? Something like that.

Aunt Margaret stood by herself beside the fireplace. She glared at Marla and pulled her lips tightly together.

Marla saw the huge woman glowering at her. Marla waved, then she drained her glass and chewed on a cube of ice.

What I'm wondering, Marla called, is this. What I'm wondering is why they call you that name. I'm wondering why they call you Aunt Abuse. I'm wondering what you think of this nickname of yours.

No one said anything. The only sound was the fire on the pine logs, the smoke rising.

Marla waited with the rest of the disinherited for her answer.

Luck of the Draw

The smell of late spring in Decatur invariably made Marla laugh. The chestnut trees came to life, and their pollen had a musky scent. The school sent out graduates into the city--the seventh graders shy and smiling, the high school seniors tearing down the streets like madmen--and everywhere was the smell of bodies clapping together.

She was out walking, trying to fit in her three miles before the street lights came on. She was happy and if she could have whistled (she couldn't) she would've moved down the sidewalk whistling. More than anything else, Marla was pleased to be rid of her husband, who was visiting his mother.

She passed the high-rise for the elderly and the Christian Scientist church. The dogwoods were in bloom and she ducked under a branch of the white blossoms that overhung the sidewalk. There was a neighborhood whose streets were named for the Great Lakes, and as she stepped into the entrance, Marla called out the acronym she had learned in fifth grade. She had never forgotten it.

HOMES, she said. Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, Superior. She rattled them off as if they were the names of children.

That's right, a man said from behind Marla. He was raking leaves in the yard of the corner lot, the three story brick house that fronted the Great Lakes neighborhood.

You named them all, he said. You'd be surprised how many people can't. He was raking the wide browned leaves of a huge magnolia, whose canopy was so broad and dense that the lower leaves received almost no sunlight, even in the thick of summer. He had gathered a pile waist-high.

These leaves, he said, seeing Marla staring at the pile. Seems like I can never get them all.

That's a magnolia, right? Marla asked.

Magnolia, yes, he nodded. My mother called them magnolia bays, but they're all the same. They're evergreen, you know.

But the bottom leaves die? she asked.

He nodded. He made a motion at the mound of leaves with his rake.

Not enough sun down there, he said, surrounded by all those wide leaves. Some die. The luck of the draw, I guess.

Marla smiled, ready to resume her walk. She wanted to get home in time to see the situation comedy she watched religiously.

Seems like a waste to just put them in bags on the curb, the man said with a smile. Too bad you can't eat them.

Yes, Marla said. That would be a feal, wouldn't it? She froze: she had intended to say meal.

I mean that would be a meast, wouldn't it? she asked, this time meaning to say feast.

The man looked at her as if she had ridden in on a broomstick.

I mean feal, Marla said, failing a third time. She glanced around, wondering if she should just set off running. A streetlight twitched on.

Well, I've got to get on with my walk, Marla finally said.

Of course, the man said. Don't forget the names of those lakes, he added as he returned to his raking.

I won't, Marla promised. She hurried away, hearing the locusts and crickets start in on their nocturne.

Homes, she said. Huron, Ontario, Magnolia, Erie, Superior. She paused. Then she burst into laughter, knowing that she had missed her television show.

Meal, she said. Feast. Meal, feast. She repeated the words, letting them pace her from streetlight to streetlight until she reached home. The smell of the chestnut trees trailed after her, clinging to her clothes.

The Gratuity

The waiter brought Marla's order to the table, and as he set the grilled cheese and french fries down, he popped one of the potatoes into his mouth. Marla, who had been looking into her purse for her lighter, looked up in time to see her order. She thanked the waiter.

Oh, you're welcome, he said. Let me know if I can bring you anything else.

I'll do it, Marla said.

She took a small bite out of her sandwich and poured some ketchup on her fries. She lit a cigarette, tapped off the ashes. She swabbed a fry in the ketchup and ate it.

The bell on the front door jangled and Marla looked up and saw a friend whom she hadn't seen in months. She squealed and ran to the front to speak with her.

The waiter came to Marla's table while she was gone and filled her water glass, then ate two more of her french fries.

Marla came back to her table with a smile on her face. She ate some of her food, drank from her water, and dabbed at her mouth with the linen napkin. Then she slipped her bag on her shoulder and went to the bathroom.

While she was washing her hands and frowning over the freckles on her nose, the two rebellious grey hairs near her ear, the waiter slipped by her table and ate a handful of her french fries. He pinched off a bite of the grilled cheese then added water to her glass.

Thank you! Marla said as she returned, seeing the waiter with the water pitcher.

Surely, said the waiter as he swallowed subtly. Can I bring you anything?

Oh no, she answered. I'm fine. Everything's wonderful.

Marla sat back down and bit into her sandwich. She couldn't believe how quickly she had eaten. She wondered if people were staring at her; there were so few french fries left she was certain that she had been stuffing the food into her mouth.

How was everything? the waiter asked a few minutes later.

Wonderful, Marla said. Really good. To tell you the truth, I don't remember the last time I ate so fast. I must've been starving.

Our cook has a way with french fries, the waiter said.

Marla nodded, smiling around the two french fries she had in her mouth. It occurred to her that the waiter was quite handsome. She watched him walk toward the kitchen.

The bell on the front door sounded as a couple left the restaurant. Their booth was filled immediately--there was a line to eat lunch.

Marla sopped her last french fry in the pool of ketchup. Her eyes glowed and she felt happy and warm all over. She shifted her weight in the chair and lit a cigarette. It tasted wonderful too.

I can't remember enjoying a meal more, she told the waiter when he brought the check.

We aim to please, he said.

Really, that's the best grilled cheese and fries I think I ever had, Marla said. She didn't even feel silly saying it. She felt thankful, satisfied.

I'm glad to hear it, the waiter said. He smiled and added, I'll take that whenever you're ready.

Thank you! Marla said. She grinned: she felt wonderful. She fished in her wallet for something extra for the waiter. He'd been especially nice and he'd kept her water glass full. Not many waiters remembered to do that. She tipped him five dollars. It was extravagant, she knew, but the service had been excellent.

She stepped around the line of people who had gathered just inside the door. They were all waiting for an open table.

The food here is wonderful, Marla confided to a man as she was leaving.

She stepped out of the restaurant, still smiling, and set off down the sidewalk. Thunder crashed once, the sun disappeared, and then the rain was upon her.

Singing

It began with something small: a camera. Marla pawned it for \$30, not wanting to ask her husband for money, not wanting to explain where the money went. She had done enough of that, done enough explaining to last a lifetime, to fill the sea. And the money--they had given her new bills--felt snug in her shirt pocket. It was warm against her breast and she could faintly smell it: new money. She smiled all the way to the package store.

By the time she came into the pawn shop with her husband's

guns, the guns for which he seemed to live, she was known by name.

Marla! the proprietor called, watched her stumble in with her arms loaded with guns.

I've got guns, Marla said.

Yes, he said. He hefted one, an ancient-looking rifle with a hand-carved stock that had belonged to her husband's father. It was a family heirloom, a gun handed down from father to son and meant to continue in that vein for eternity.

Paul, she began, addressing the proprietor, this is not your ordinary gun. This is a unique gun, a one of a kind gun. This gun (she yawned) is an antique.

How much? Paul asked.

Well, what do you think? Marla answered. She spoke nonchalantly. She had picked up the skill of bartering quickly, having watched some of the people who, like her, frequented Paul's Pawn Shop (Car Titles For Cash! his window declared) and drove ruthless deals. After witnessing one man eke another \$20 from Paul over a table setting of sterling silver, Marla realized that the whole process was negotiable. She had wrongly assumed that she had to take whatever was offered. The camera, she came to realize, had been virtually stolen from her.

I could go \$200 for a gun like this, Paul finally said. He had been eyeing the stock, rubbing the grain with a look of ardor.

\$200? Marla said. Really? I had in mind a bit more than that. She tapped her nails on the glass case that enclosed an array of expensive watches, watches that were waterproof, watches that never needed batteries, watches that were worth more than her car.

\$250, Paul said without meeting her eye. He sighted the gun, squinted, then rested it on the counter with the barrel pointed toward the ceiling.

\$400, Marla said, looking at a watch as small as a dime.

Paul sighted the gun again and opened a worn book on the counter. He leafed through the ragged, flannel-like pages. He ran his finger down a column, nodded once, and made a noise in his throat.

\$350 is the best I can do, he said. He looked at her once, then his eyes flew away to the wall that was lined with guitars

and golf clubs and an ancient accordion.

Sold, Marla answered, slapping the counter.

The remainder of the guns went for big money, too, and she left the pawn shop with \$1200 in cash. The bills were new and they fit together so snugly, family-like, that her wallet hardly seemed full. She had had a fraction of that much fill her wallet to overflowing. Still, it was sweet to have a bag full of money.

She was humming when she entered the package store. She had to fight to resist singing aloud.

At home Marla rifled through the drawers and desks. Papers rained down. She overturned the sofa and broke out two windows. She upset the end tables. Then she ruined their bedroom, turning out the closet where the guns had been. She took the money from her wallet--now only eleven bills--and hid it in her underwear. Then she hit herself in the head with the huge brass candlestick on the kitchen table. She let it fall to the floor. Blood seeped across her cheek, which frightened her, though the wound itself did not hurt at all.

When her husband came in, he grimaced once and shouted, his voice shooting through the room, then he tore into the bedroom.

We've been robbed! Marla screamed from her place on the floor.

Fireworks

On the Fourth of July Marla drove across the state, into Alabama, to buy fireworks. She wanted explosives, firecrackers, bottle rockets, Roman candles--things to shoot into the night, things she could watch explode.

About one hundred yards inside the state line was a fireworks stand. The place was called, simply enough, AL'S, and it had every sort of firework that Marla had in mind. She bought all of the things she came for, as well as a boxful of gadgets that spun in circles and squealed.

Nigger chasers, Al called them.

She hadn't fully understood their purpose but she wanted plenty of explosives, plenty of air filled with acrid smoke, so she bought the box. The whole purchase took two brown grocery bags emblazoned with Al's logo. They fit in the trunk.

There were policemen everywhere on the road, and the traffic was heavy, so Marla drove carefully. She didn't speed. She had

plenty of time to get home and set up the stage for her display. She was going to light up the neighborhood, light up all of Decatur. Maybe she'd reach the Great Lakes neighborhood, she thought. Maybe the Stradfords would join her in her attack.

She got home at dusk with barely enough time to mix a drink and begin getting ready. She lugged some old tubing and some bottles out to the driveway; she figured she could launch the bottle rockets and Roman candles from there.

Everything was spilled across the driveway and she had her folding chair opened when Mr. Stradford wandered over.

Got a regular battlefield, huh? he said.

I've declared war, Marla said. Tonight I light up the town. She offered him a drink--she'd filled up a canteen with bourbon. She couldn't find her flask and all of the bottles seemed to be broken.

War is what it is, she said.

He nodded, and when he didn't speak, Marla asked about his wife.

Sleeping, Mr. Stradford said. She has a headache.

Right, Marla said. Of course. Well, this won't help that one bit. She lit a roman candle and shoved it in a bottle, then stuck it in his hands.

Here you go, she said.

Oh shit! he hollered. What do I do with--

A red mass burst from the end of the Roman candle, arcing across the street. It was followed by a green and yellow mass, then two blue ones. Mr. Stradford threw it down as soon as the launching had finished.

Give me another, he said, sweating above his mouth.

Alright! Marla said, shoving a package of bottle rockets toward him.

Mr. Stradford set off all the bottle rockets, letting them fly up and over the power lines. He laughed and danced. A few drifted toward his house but he didn't seem to notice. All the while, Marla concentrated on the firecrackers, lighting several strings of a thousand that sounded like machine-gun fire and lasted for over two minutes.

When they had finished, the driveway was littered with shreds of paper and burnt black smears. The air reeked of gunpowder. People were staring out of their windows.

Marla fished out the gadgets that squealed and spun. She set half a dozen out, spacing them across the driveway. Mr. Stradford helped her light them, and as if on cue, they burned into life.



They swarmed around Marla's legs, circling and squealing. She screamed and danced crazily. She ran back and forth down the drive and the gadgets followed her like angry hornets. She knocked over her folding chair and her canteen. She broke some bottles, kicked some of the tubing.

When they were finished with their screaming, the chair was entangled around Marla's legs. Her hair was caked with grit and paper, and her face was smeared with black powder.

Don't just stand there, Marla said to Mr. Stradford. Get this thing off of me.

* * * * *

The following notice appeared in the London Times Literary Supplement, 16-22 November 1990:

 DIONYSOS 
The Literature & Intoxication Tri Quarterly
Devoted to critical and scholarly work on both the creative and destructive dimensions of intoxication in literary texts and biography.
\$8, individuals; \$12, institutions. Information, subscriptions, sample issue:
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THEATRICAL DEFENSES: A CONVERSATION*

G. Alan Marlatt
Roger Forseth

Roger Forseth: I first got caught up in the controlled-drinking controversy when I ran across your commentary on the subject in American Psychologist, which I take to be the seminal article on the controlled-drinking debate.¹ This controversy appears to highlight the confusion between illness or disease and the principle of moral responsibility for one's health. Now, your article was published in 1983, and in it you say, "this controversy is still raging." I'm wondering, is it still?

Alan Marlatt: Still raging. The most recent chapter has to do with an article that Irving Maltzman wrote. He is the co-author of the controversial attack on the controlled-drinking research of the Sobells.² Maltzman, who has apparently experienced some frustration with the acceptance of his views about the alleged scientific misconduct of the Sobells, has continued to try to have an article published that he believes will substantiate his claims that somehow the data in the original Sobells report were faked. Maltzman's article has had an interesting history with regard to where it's been sent and what's happened to it. Basically, the article says things like, "the Sobells didn't do what they said they did." He's now saying that even the Sobells said they didn't contact the patients every month the way they

* While working on the controlled-drinking controversy--a major debate among behavioral psychologists, physicians, treatment professionals, and recovering alcoholics over whether or not chronic alcoholics can be taught to drink moderately--I was sidetracked by a smaller but very obtrusive second debate. The primary controversy raises vital philosophical, clinical, and research questions; the secondary debate has become a sideshow, mired in an often acrimonious altercation over the motives and ethics of the professionals involved, sometimes in comical, even absurd ways. In addition, the very great social, ideological, and financial stakes in the research on and treatment of chemical dependence have acted to heighten the theatrical elements of the controversy. It occurred to me that readers of Dionysos might profit from an airing of the controversy, since literary works have a way of embodying confusions, dilemmas, and defence mechanisms similar to those in the social sciences. An interview, therefore, was arranged with Dr. Alan Marlatt, one of the principal researchers in the field of the behavioral aspects of chemical dependence and a thoughtful historian of the controlled-drinking controversy. He is also on the advisory board of Dionysos. The following conversation is an edited version of a two-part interview that took place at the University of Washington, Seattle, 20 July 1989 and 30 July 1990.

said they had; in some cases they weren't contacted more than two or three times a year. Therefore they did not do what they said they did. But the Sobells had already admitted that. Maltzman also claims to have evidence that the subjects weren't randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups. Although he doesn't have a whole lot to stand on in terms of proving his case, the tone of the article was to challenge the professional credibility of the Sobells and of all the Dickens Committee and the ADAMHA committee and every other committee that's examined the evidence, and to hold to the view that he's right and everybody else is wrong.³ So he sent this article first to the Behavioral Research and Therapy, where the Sobells published their original work. The editor, Jack Rachman of the University of British Columbia, looked at it, judged it to be libelous, sent it to lawyers who said it was indeed libelous, and on those grounds rejected the article. Next Maltzman sent it to the British Journal of Addiction. The editor, Griffith Edwards, read it, also judged it to be libelous and rejected it. Finally, Maltzman sent it to Journal of Studies on Alcohol [JSA], along with a note to the editor asking that I not be involved in the review process! (The way JSA works, there are field editors in each area, and at that time I was the field editor for psychology). Jack Mendelson, who is the editor, sent the article to David Pittman, field editor for social science, who is very critical of controlled-drinking research. Pittman sent it out to a couple of reviewers and then recommended that it be accepted. I first learned about the plan to publish it when I read in JSA the list of forthcoming articles. I saw it on the list, and the Sobells and Peter Nathan (the executive editor of JSA) saw it, and we all said, "What's this?" "What's this article?" We asked Mendelson and he said, "Well I haven't really read it that carefully because we allow the field editors to make their own decisions." We pointed out that the manuscript had been judged libelous by a couple of other journals, and that he might want to have the lawyers [at the Rutgers Center for Alcohol Studies, the publishing home of JSA] take a look at it, because the Sobells might sue if this gets in. Nathan and Mendelson consulted the lawyers, and the lawyers agreed that the article was libelous, so Mendelson sent a letter back to Maltzman saying that the article on further review would not be published. That, we thought, was the end of it. Maltzman then hired a law firm in Los Angeles and said, in effect, the field editor told me this has been accepted and now you're telling me it has been rejected. Breach of contract. We are going to sue Rutgers.

It became a matter between lawyers at that point, and had nothing to do with the scientific merit of the article. It was decided by the Rutgers group not to risk litigation; as a result the article was printed in the September 1989 issue of JSA. Published along with it were some parallel articles, one of them written by a colleague of yours at the University of Wisconsin-Stout, David Cook. He's very interested in this controversy, and

had already written an article that appeared in the JSA, commenting on the underlying philosophical issues of the controlled drinking controversy.⁴ Maltzman's article was a response, in a way, to Cook's article. Cook called it a "craft versus professional" controversy, alluding to the dispute between traditional "craft" views against the idea of controlled drinking and the views of professionals who do research on this topic. In the same issue as Maltzman's article there is an editorial by Peter Nathan to the effect that the piece was accepted on the basis of lawsuit anxieties, not owing to scientific merit. The Sobells published a long response to Maltzman in the same issue, declaring their moratorium on any more responses to the dispute, given that it's now twenty years since the controversy first erupted.

As to Maltzman's allegation that the subjects weren't randomly assigned, one of the people who was there at the time the Sobells conducted their study, Tim Baker, currently professor of psychology at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, has published a statement in the same issue, saying essentially, "I was there when the coins were tossed: there was no tampering with the random assignments." So it will be his word against Maltzman's.

By the way, I resigned my field editorship over this issue. When I talked to my psychologist colleagues, they said that in the case of an article about controlled drinking submitted to JSA by a psychologist, they would assume that I had had a role in the review process, and that somehow I had recommended that Maltzman's article be accepted.

RF: Several years ago I wrote a conference paper on the controversy from a literary perspective in which I emphasized the theatrics of it: the personal recriminations, the accusations of unethical conduct and misuse of grant funds, indeed the dramatically expressed fears that controlled-drinking research could lead to alcoholic deaths.

AM: That's what it is. Theater all the way.

RF: Perhaps you contributed to the drama by coining the phrase, "The Gang of Eight."

AM: Could be. That refers to a group of "anti-traditionalist" behaviorists, including Peter Nathan, Stanton Peele, Linda and Mark Sobell, Nick Heather, William Miller, Martha Sanchez-Craig, and myself, attacked in a widely-read article by the "disease-model traditionalist" John Wallace, director of the Edgehill treatment center.⁵ Other people in the gang are coming out with new things. Stanton Peele has a new book out. It's an attack on not only the "disease model" but on the tendency in the United States to make all behavioral problems like alcoholism into

medical diseases caused by genetic and biological factors.⁶

RF: These "syndromes" seem to appear out of the blue, often trivialized by the media and others--as in the case of the infamous "Twinkie Defense."

AM: Definitely. We are saying that responsibility for the behavior rests with the individual, not on a disease. But some people still use as an excuse this idea that you can't control your behavior because it's a disease. But it never seems to go over with the courts. I think the Supreme Court ruling last year on the Veterans Administration case that alcoholism is willful misconduct was a reflection of that.⁷

RF: It appears, a major problem in this debate is definitional. What is "disease"? Is that term, perhaps, being used in a general, descriptive, non-technical way by people attempting to characterize a pattern or progression of addiction? What is "willful misconduct"? Is it simply irresponsible self-indulgence? John Wallace argues one way, the philosopher Herbert Fingarette, in his much-quoted book Heavy Drinking, argues another.⁸ It doesn't strike me that we have here the sort of profoundly deep logical and emotional disagreement one finds for example in the abortion debate.

AM: Interesting parallel.

RF: There you have intelligent and extremely well-informed groups disagreeing on substantive (not semantic), deeply religious grounds. Those people really know what they're talking about. But are the adversaries in the controlled-drinking dispute in reality terribly far apart?

AM: Perhaps mostly at the practical level. For example, one of my biggest gripes right now is the way we're dealing with adolescent and young adult alcohol and drug use, as though the problems of youth are the same problems we see in older males, 30-50 years or older in hospitals; and that, somehow, young people are coming down with the disease earlier. As a result, we use the same kinds of inpatient programs that work for older alcoholics. And that's a mistake, I think; Kay Fillmore at the Berkeley Alcohol Research Center and other social and developmental psychologists are saying that the majority of these young people will just go through a natural maturing out, only a few of them will continue using alcohol and drugs abusively, and we should therefore be thinking of how to accelerate that normal developmental process, rather than tagging kids with a disease label and sticking them into very expensive inpatient programs.

RF: Along that line, I was intrigued by what you mentioned last year, your group's intervention at the University of Washington after a series of serious drinking incidents. You studied a

fraternity's drinking behavior in an attempt to sort out those who were truly addicted, those on the way to a serious chemical problem, and those who were basically recreational drinkers.

AM: That's the critical issue. In fact we just got funded to do a five-year study, which follows incoming university students from the time they leave high school. As soon as we know they're accepted into the university, we assess their risk factors, such as family history of alcoholism, history of conduct disorder, and drinking level at the end of high school. We'll be able to study their transition into the university from their freshman year (it's during the first year that they drink the most) and following them through five years; whether they stay in college or leave, we'll follow them up. And we're looking at the risk factors of family history, history of conduct disorder, acting out kinds of things, especially for the males, and how much they're drinking relative to their peers now. High-risk students are asked to take part in a stepped care, secondary prevention approach. We've already done research showing that we can get people who are not physically dependent on alcohol to reduce their drinking significantly, in terms of periodic heavy drinking, number of intoxication experiences, and so forth, with a fairly minimum program, a total of five group meetings. So now we'll take all the people that are in our risk group who are coming into the university, and randomly assign them either to the experimental group that receives a brief intervention, or the control group which doesn't. And then we'll see who responds to the brief intervention and who doesn't, and if they don't respond, then we'll put them into a more intensive program, perhaps into individual therapy, and keep increasing intensity until we get something that works with them. And finally we'll follow those people through and try and do a much longer follow-up.

However, to talk about fraternity drinking for a minute or two--one of the things that we've noticed is (and this relates to Dionysos I think), on one level, these young men are looking for an initiation experience, often involving alcohol. They have various initiation experiences in the fraternity similar to tribal groups. Looked at from an anthropological perspective, we see a transition ceremony to manhood, often involving altered states of consciousness through drug or alcohol consumption, a ceremony that allows the young man to become accepted by the elder association of men, and this is an accepted rite of passage. Now in today's society, the older men are saying, "Listen young man, no alcohol until you're 21, because we don't want you to drink--it's illegal, and your need for alcohol will just have to wait. Just say no for now." Since older males no longer initiate younger men, no longer are providing them with any acceptance of what seems to me a very deep need of their own for making this kind of transition, the kids are forced to do it among themselves. So we have all these drinking games, and this

peer influence is very powerful, because there's no other mode for group acceptance.

In London last week at an addictions conference I heard Marvin Zuckerman of the University of Delaware, who does sensation-seeking personality work, say that many of these young people have a high need for sensation seeking, and his view is that this is normal. Sensation seeking is a desire for experiencing altered states of consciousness or for novel experiences that normally are not available, and that many young people will seek out these risks. We should take a hard look at what risk-taking opportunities we have available for young people in society. Actually if you look at it, we've got less and less. When I was a teenager in the late 1950s at least you could still drive 80 miles an hour legally on the freeways. Now it's 55, 65 at the most, and "wear a seat-belt." These precautions are all good things but they're also constraints on sensation seeking. Sexual behavior is really constrained by fear of HIV infection. Since young adults don't have access to initiation ceremonies anymore, what they're left with are opportunities to see violent movies, participate in gangs, and get into problems with drugs and alcohol.

What we're missing are ways of channeling this energy. Let me give you an example that contrasts sharply with American society: I was in the Netherlands before I went to London last week, at the Jellinekcentrum, the biggest addiction treatment center in Amsterdam. The Dutch philosophy is very different from ours. The legal drinking age in Holland is still sixteen. In Amsterdam any high risk activity that you care to experience is there, but from a public health perspective, it's carefully controlled. For example, prostitution is legal, but the women have to go through regular health checks for contagious diseases, and then if there's any problem they're yanked out; customers must wear condoms, but under those fairly tightly controlled conditions you can do anything you want. As to drugs, as you know they've decriminalized soft drugs in order to distinguish them from hard drugs. You can go into a coffee house and order hashish or marijuana with your coffee. You won't run into any cocaine or heroin dealers in those settings. It's an accepted part of their society. This has been going on for over a decade now so they've had a chance to document how it's been working. In the area of heroin addiction, the Dutch tried an experiment for really hard-core heroin addicts (where there's a high crime rate, repeated recidivism, and breaking into cars and things like that). The program gives them morphine, but if they engage in any criminal activity, they get totally cut off. As a result, hard-drug behavior has apparently changed dramatically. The Dutch policy says "Look, people are going to do these things, and we can't just say no, we have to say, if you're going to do that, how?" The big theme of the meetings both in Amsterdam and London was what the English call "harm minimization" or "harm

reduction," their terms for risk reduction. In the attempt to prevent AIDS, harm minimization includes needle exchange for IV drug users, a program that has been declared illegal in most of this country. In the past seven years in Holland they've given away the equivalent of 150 needles for every individual living in Amsterdam. And the rate of HIV infection has stabilized, if not dropped. So they'll be considering those kinds of goals, whereas in America, people who favor the harm reduction approach to addiction say "Our hands are tied. We can't spend a nickel on research on needle exchange, because harm minimization conflicts with the U.S. policy of zero tolerance." According to the zero tolerance position, part of our current war on drugs policy, there is no series of steps that you can go through to gradually reduce your risk, and hopefully end up drug free. With zero tolerance we have the expectation that you move immediately to the goal of total abstinence. Again, "just say no." I think, given the slowness of our initial responses to the AIDS epidemic, and now this ridiculous morality that means trying to stop addiction is more important than trying to stop AIDS, the zero tolerance policy may be responsible for thousands of unnecessary deaths. Zero tolerance is public policy, an American public policy, that is currently not open to challenge empirically.

RF: Here's where the professional, the behaviorist approach deviates from the conservative position. A conservative might say, these people are just going to die. This is going to happen; life is essentially tragic. This is in fact Eugene O'Neill's position expressed in his late plays. Such a view expresses a kind of stoicism; it's not without compassion, even at its best it expresses a deep reverence for life, but suffering and death are facts of life. It amounts to philosophical triage.

Something else seems to operate in this country in terms of implementing policy. Holland and Sweden and even Great Britain are much smaller than the US; Britain is not nearly so homogeneous as it used to be, but still basically the bureaucratic structure and political structure--the trust in the higher bureaucracy, at least, and in the professional expertise that backs it up--simply don't exist in this country. There's a great deal of populist skepticism--so we end up operating through people like Charles Rangel and William Bennett. Rangel, the Harlem congressman, is an extremely powerful national figure in drug policy. No one, not even the President is going to take Rangel head on. In fact, Rangel and Bennett might disagree about a lot of things, but basically they're both working the same side of the street, the moral side. And American intellectuals reflect that side. For instance, Susan Sontag has written two books, Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and its Metaphors. In the former she treats quite effectively--ironically but dispassionately--the problem of disease when it's not a matter of political morality. But in her book on AIDS, the moralism you found, I take it, refreshingly absent in Europe, takes over. I

felt it ruined the argument of the book.⁹ But it's very American.

AM: That seems to come from the whole origins of the country, the emphasis on individualism and so forth. I had an interesting experience visiting the Soviet Union in March of 1989. They had invited a delegation of alcoholism experts to go there and to explain how we deal with the treatment of alcohol problems, to find out what they're doing, and then over a five-year period, to develop mutual consultation. It was really interesting to see how the Soviets--at least the ones from the official alcoholism and drug-treatment area--conceptualize the problem of addiction. Their All Union Narcology Institute handles alcohol and drug dependence, which is almost entirely viewed as a biochemical defect. Any discussion whatsoever that addiction could be related to cultural values or that vodka could be used as a way of controlling large bodies of the population, was not open for discussion.

So, in the Soviet Union they were showing us these incredible treatment methods that they've come up with. Mainly mechanical devices and biologically arranged environments that increase the temperature of the alcoholic to almost fever-breaking levels, then freezing him, thereby hoping that these radical temperature changes will snap the biochemical defect. Fever-inducing drugs were used, rather like the way we used to use insulin shock therapy for treatment of depression.

RF: This is not aversion therapy?

AM: They do that also; this is similar, but more like electric convulsive shock, than aversion. They sometimes use low-level electrical brain stimulation to treat withdrawal. The patient wears an electrical stimulator, which produces electrical stimulation across the cortex that's supposed to alleviate withdrawal. Only one person's been doing that outside of the Soviet Union, Margaret Patterson in the UK. She treated such well-known rock stars as Peter Townshend and Eric Clapton.

RF: This sounds like getting something for nothing. Although I must say, in my own experience, my unscientific experience, the hangover, however severe, never prevented the compulsive drinker from drinking. There's no behavior modification that I can see in the hangover for someone who is addicted. When I was in high school and college I recall that the casual and serious boozers began to sort themselves out. The take-it-or-leave-it-aloners would say, I've got to go home early; or, I can't take the hangovers anymore. They were starting to make the other choices. I thought, well, I must not be having very bad hangovers. In fact, I was having terrible hangovers, it just didn't make that much difference. Something more complex than either "sickness" or "willfulness," it strikes me, was operating there. If so,

then it may follow that the disease-model advocates aren't really saying that there is no moral dimension to alcoholism any more than behaviorists are saying, "just say no!"

AM: There's an interesting distinction people are trying to make between responsibility for developing the addiction problem, or how it came to be, and responsibility for changing it. And if you do that then you get around some of these definitional problems, because usually what people will think is, if you are not responsible for your alcohol problem because of genetic or biological factors beyond your control, then you're also not responsible for what you do if you've got that problem. A social psychologist, the late Philip Brickman of the University of Michigan, was the first to define what he calls the "compensatory model," which says, OK you've got the problem, now what can you do, what responsibility can you take to compensate for the fact that this problem exists.¹⁰ Voluntarily undergoing abstinence would be one way of compensating; reduced frequency of intoxication would be a second minimization alternative; but if that doesn't work, one accepts responsibility, just in the same way that a diabetic must assume responsibility for taking insulin. Even in terms of the traditional disease model, if it's a progressive disorder, and you get adequately assessed or diagnosed at point x, then it's your responsibility, knowing that you have this risk factor or "disease," to do something about it, to get yourself into treatment or a self-help group or to try and make a change in some way. Brickman describes four models: the moral model says you are responsible for the problem developing, but that you're also totally responsible for changing it on your own through your will power to just say "no." The disease model claims you are not responsible for the development of the problem and you can't change on your own, that is, you need help, such as a hospital treatment program. You're therefore not morally responsible except to present yourself in treatment, much as a driver might bring a broken car to a mechanic. Once the car is in the shop it is not the owner's responsibility because someone else is going to fix it. Brickman puts the twelve-step programs and other spiritual models in what he calls the enlightenment model: you're still considered responsible for the problem developing, but like the disease model, there's an assumption you can't change on your own--what's really helping you is a higher power. The last is the compensatory model: behavior therapies such as relapse prevention and controlled drinking. The compensatory model doesn't blame the victim; it represents a bio-psycho-social model, one that posits a range of risks, including a biological risk factor, but it also emphasizes psychological and social risk factors. The person isn't to blame. But once the problem is recognized, the addicted person can take responsibility for change, including the possibility of weighing the risks and making appropriate change with or without treatment, like smokers who quit smoking on their own.

RF: It would be fascinating to fit the process of literary creativity into Brickman's scheme. For instance, there's tragedy--and comedy!--in that wonderful writer Raymond Carver's life. He found that after he went in treatment, went to AA, that he became far more productive and his work richer--that's the comedy. The tragedy is that one of the great fears of writers is, as soon as they quit drinking they'll have nothing to inspire them.

AM: Alcohol and the muse. Everything will dry up. I know I hear that a lot.

RF: John Berryman is a perfect example. He was convinced that he couldn't write lyric poetry unless, in the Dionysian manner, he'd been drinking. He never forgot what Horace said, that you can't write a line of poetry without a glass of wine. But you never quite know what writers are talking about, whether they mean just a glass of wine, the whole aesthetic setting that includes the wine, or in the case of the alcoholic writer, a gallon of wine (or quart of Wild Turkey) for really serious inspiration!

AM: But things are changing.

RF: Indeed they are. A friend, a product of the School of Letters at the University of Iowa, recently went back there for their fiftieth-anniversary celebration. He said that the changes are incredible--all these people who used to go on epic binges with Cheever and Berryman and Carver are now jogging and drinking spritzers!

AM: Well it's happening. Per capita consumption of hard liquor is down tremendously. The same force that's making people quit smoking is getting them to change other health-risk behaviors. The latest National Institutes of Drug Abuse household survey on drug use across the country: down. Marijuana, hashish, and so on: down.

RF: David Musto, in his fine history of narcotic addiction, documents the cultural and behavioral changes in drug use during the early part of the century.¹¹ I've found his research, by the way, as important for literary analysis as for social documentation. It's indispensable for a study of Eugene O'Neill's Long Day's Journey into Night. But the history--the ups and downs--of narcotic addiction seems patterned quite differently from alcohol use and abuse. People simply turned away from drugs in a way they never have, really, from booze. Around the First World War drugs were just given up--at least by the main culture--just as they were by the vast majority of the soldiers in Vietnam after they returned to civilian life.

AM: That they gave it up raises a lot of questions about the biological and medical view of addiction that have yet to be

answered.

RF: I think that is what makes the nature/nurture debate one of the more fascinating intellectual controversies of our time. In other eras Aristotle or Leibniz, for instance, would sort the matter out in the context of moral philosophy, of virtue and the good life. I would dearly like to have their help sorting it out now.

AM: Let's get them on a panel!

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NOTES

¹ G. Alan Marlatt, "The Controlled-Drinking Controversy: A Commentary," American Psychologist 38 (1983): 1097-1110. The controversy consists of two basic issues: (1) whether or not a "gamma" alcoholic (i.e., a chronically-addicted chemically-dependent heavy drinker) can be taught through behavior modification to return to moderate drinking; and (2) whether research data presented by the psychologists Mark and Linda Sobell were falsified in an effort to support the behaviorist position. Both aspects are treated in detail in Marlatt's article, which includes a full bibliography.

² Mary L. Pendery, Irving M. Maltzman, and L. J. West, "Controlled Drinking by Alcoholics? New Findings and a Reevaluation of a Major Affirmative Study," Science 217 (1982): 169-75. The articles referred to in Journal of Studies on Alcohol will be found in 50.5 (September 1989).

³ B. M. Dickens, et al., Report of the Committee of Enquiry into Allegations Concerning Drs. Linda and Mark Sobell (Toronto: Addiction Research Centre, 1982).

⁴ D. R. Cook, "Craftsman Versus Professional: Analysis of the Controlled Drinking Controversy," Journal of Studies on Alcohol 46 (1985): 433-42.

⁵ John Wallace, "Waging the War For Wellness," Professional Counselor. January/February 1987: 21-24, 35, 39; March/April 1987: 21-27.

⁶ Stanton Peele, Diseasing of America: Addiction Treatment Out of Control (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1990).

⁷ The United States Supreme Court recently ruled that "'primary' alcoholism [is a result of] 'willful misconduct.'" Traynor v. Turnage. Supreme Court Reporter 108 (1988): 1372. The statute on which the court's decision was based has since

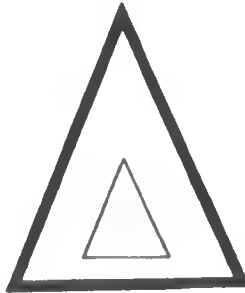
been amended so that certain federal benefits may now be granted those disabled by alcoholism (Public Law 100-689--Nov. 18, 1988--Sec. 102).

⁸ Herbert Fingarette, Heavy Drinking: The Myth of Alcoholism as a Disease (Berkeley: U of California P, 1988). See also William Madsen, Defending the Disease of Alcoholism: From Facts to Fingarette (Akron: Wilson, Brown, 1988); and Thomas B. Gilmore, "The Critic Criticized," Dionysos 1.2 (Fall 1989): 19-30.

⁹ Susan Sontag's books have been published together in an Anchor paperback (1989).

¹⁰ Philip Brickman et al, "Models of Helping and Coping," American Psychologist 37 (1982): 368-84. See also G. Alan Marlatt and Judith R. Gordon, eds., Relapse Prevention: Maintenance Strategies in the Treatment of Addictive Behaviors (New York: Guildford, 1985) Chap. 1.

¹¹ David F. Musto, The American Disease: Origins of Narcotic Control, expanded edition (New York: Oxford U P, 1987).



ALCOHOLISM AND INTOXICATION IN A TOUCH OF THE POET

Steven F. Bloom

A Touch of the Poet is one of the group of Eugene O'Neill's late plays that can be labeled his "alcoholic drama." In Poet, as in The Iceman Cometh, Long Day's Journey Into Night, and A Moon for the Misbegotten, intoxication and alcoholism are integral to O'Neill's dramaturgy. Intoxication is both romantic metaphor and naturalistic detail; the repetitious, compulsive behavioral patterns of the alcoholic and his family become, for O'Neill, a vivid theatrical image of the quest for transcendent meaning in the face of overwhelming and consistently frustrating human limitations. The stage image of the lonely, despondent alcoholic ultimately overpowers the lyrical metaphors of intoxication and the oblivion of drunken revelry, which are also aspects of this drama.

Con Melody is an alcoholic endowed with many of the realistic characteristics that mark O'Neill's alcoholic characters in his late plays--from the shakes and tremors of withdrawal on the "morning after," to the rationalization (with the important collusion of his wife) that the liquor will settle his stomach; from the initial expansiveness and increased mental sharpness as the liquor begins to take effect, to the depression and dullness of the later stages of alcoholic intoxication.

O'Neill's alcoholics are often lonely people who attempt to transcend their loneliness by transforming it into romantic solitude. Their struggle to do so reveals great inner turmoil as they are tempted to relieve loneliness at one moment while denying it the next. This struggle, in turn, is manifested in highly changeable behavior, or "emotional lability,"¹ a key symptom of alcoholic intoxication and a central feature of Con Melody's characterization.

Throughout much of the play, Melody is seen separated from the others, or alone, on stage. He moves between two worlds, seeking a third. On one side is his wife Nora, the plain, suffering peasant who reminds him of his humble roots and the limits of his attainments. On the other side are the drunkards in the barroom, all of whom seem happily oblivious to the emptiness of their lives. It is important to note that the barroom is located through the doorway, offstage, not as in The Iceman Cometh, in which it is part of the set itself, visible to the audience. While Melody cannot endure the reality presented by his family, he also cannot find satisfaction in the communal revelry of the barroom. Thus, he is often seen on stage in the dining room, in between the two worlds; and when he flees from his family into the barroom, he soon returns, disgusted with the "cursed ignorant cattle" he finds there: "Driven from pillar to post in my own home! Everywhere ignorance--or the scorn of my

own daughter!"² It is in the dining room that he does, at times, find himself alone, and during these moments, we learn much about his struggle to believe that he is more than he is.

In the first act, for instance, his first few drinks of the day begin to take effect, giving him an initial "charge." He becomes "arrogantly self-assured." boasting that in his reflection in the mirror, he sees the "unmistakable stamp of an officer and a gentleman"; and he recites from "Byron's 'Childe Harold,' as if it were an incantation by which he summons pride to justify his life to himself":

"I have not loved the World, nor the World me;
I have not flattered its rank breath, nor bowed
To its idolatries a patient knee,
Nor coined my cheek to smiles,--nor cried aloud
In worship of an echo: in the crowd
They could not deem me one of such--I stood
Among them, but not of them . . ."

"Among them but not of them." By the Eternal, that expresses it! Thank God for you, Lord Byron--poet and nobleman who made of his disdain immortal music! (43-44)

The association with Byron, the sense that one is "among them, but not of them," the admiration for the poet's ability to "[make] of his disdain immortal music," all bespeak the romantic yearnings in the soul of Con Melody.

Melody's pretensions are not all words, however. In the scene in Act Two with Deborah Harford, he acts on his pretensions as he attempts to woo this "lady" who enters his domain. With his distinguished bearing and seductive humility, he becomes the Don Juan he imagines himself to be, and Deborah does, indeed, begin to succumb: "He bends lower, while his eyes hold hers. For a second it seems he will kiss her and she cannot help herself" (71). That Deborah's cold aloofness begins to thaw here testifies to the genuine heat generated by Melody's seductive charms. It is not just talk; the audience sees it happening.

Significantly, it is the "smell of whiskey on his breath" that ultimately cools Deborah off, preventing her from yielding to him; the odor repels her, and it "brings her to herself, shaken with disgust and coldly angry." Deborah sees no romanticism here; rather, she is repelled by the sight and the smell of the drunkard. Ironically, then, at the height of his romantic pretensions, it is the smell of the whiskey, the lowly sign of his drunkenness, that defeats him.

Melody's extreme mood changes are intensified in Act Three

as he becomes more intoxicated and desperately attempts to transcend his loneliness. As he reenacts the Battle of Talavera on his table-top, the drunken patrons of the bar look on inattentively, but Melody persists. When Riley's "rollicking song" awakens them and they join in, much to Melody's dismay, he remains the only one on stage who does not participate. Eventually, he "smiles with lordly condescension, pleased by the irreverence of the song." but his condescending pleasure is quite different from the communal pleasure the others experience. He remains among them, but not of them (96).

Melody had served as a major in one of Wellington's dragoon regiments, and he now often assumes the role of 'Major' in the play as a way of asserting his aloofness from, and superiority over, the other characters. Here, his proud account of his heroic military exploits leads him to another recitation from Byron, this time read with "bitter eloquence," a clear attempt to establish his superiority over the other drinkers, but also to justify for himself his feeling of separation from them. This verse concludes with the words, "This is to be alone--This, this is Solitude!" (101). As he then glances at the faces of his auditors, he recognizes that his isolation from them is not Byronic solitude; they simply do not understand him. With another radical mood change, he "heartily" requests Patch to play a "hunting song" called "Modideroo." As if the clash between the Byron verse and this group of drunkards has made the inevitable frustration of his romantic dreams too apparent, he almost drops the facade with a sudden shift in his lyrical frame of reference from "Childe Harold" to "Modideroo"; momentarily, as he joins them in the refrain, he becomes one of them.

At this moment of closest association with the others, however, he is still unable to accept a place beside them, and he immediately distances himself unequivocally with his romantic musings on the raptures of the hunt:

. . . A true Irish hunter under me that knows and loves me and would raise to a jump over hell if I gave the word! To hell with men, I say!--and women, too!--with their cowardly hearts rotten and stinking with lies and greed and treachery! Give me a horse to love and I'll cry quits to men! And then away, with the hounds in full cry, and after them! Off with divil a care for your neck, over ditches and streams and stone walls and fences, the fox doubling up the mountainside through the furze and the heather--! (102-03)

It is inconceivable that any of the men who listen to this speech could come close to it, in thought, wording, or delivery; this passage establishes Melody's uniqueness within his world (with the partial exception of his daughter Sara) and makes his plight

that much more poignant. His near-seduction of Deborah Harford, and a passage like this, make him more than a pathetic, deluded drunkard.

His quest for fulfillment takes him beyond the mundane, beyond the earth-bound. It is symbolized by the image of riding "up the mountainside" in pursuit of the elusive fox. This image recalls the beginning of Ibsen's romantic drama, Peer Gynt, and the image of the buck transporting Peer up the mountain ridge to Gjendin. And as is the case with Peer Gynt, Melody must inevitably plunge back to earth. In his pursuit of Deborah, it was the smell of whiskey that pulled him down; similarly, in this later scene, Melody's transcendent musings are interrupted by Sara's presence, as she hovers over him, "listening contemptuously" and with a "sneer in her eye." She ejects the men from the dining room, calling Melody's musings "blather," sarcastically referring to his companions as "gintlemen," and requesting that they all finish "gettin' drunk in the bar." The stage directions state that when Melody sees Sara's sneer, "it is as if cold water were dashed in his face." Again, the "smell of whiskey" cools Melody off, although figuratively this time; his intoxicated, romantic musings are reduced to "drunken blather."

It is important to note that except for this brief scene at the beginning of Act Three, with the singing of "Modideroo," there is none of the camaraderie and carousing on stage that recurs in The Iceman Cometh and is commonly associated with the heavy drinking engaged in by the characters in that play. In Poet, rather, we mostly observe the increasingly intoxicated Melody become irritable, maliciously aggressive and defensive, and at the bottom of it all, despondent. In Poet, the euphoric communal escape provided by drinking only exists on the other side of the barroom door. (In Long Day's Journey and Moon for the Misbegotten, the social atmosphere of the bar will move even farther offstage, outside of the realm of the central alcoholic characters as seen by the audience.)

In Act Four, Nora sits in the darkened dining room, alone, looking tired and worried, and from the barroom we hear the "sound of Patch Riley's pipes playing a reel and the stamp of dancing feet." When Maloy opens the door, we hear an "uproar of music and drunken voices" (133). The drunken revelry continues throughout the act, audible but not visible; as Melody's isolation and desperation increase, the possibility of escape provided by intoxication becomes less conceivable for him. Its allure persists, however, through the sounds of drunken celebration offstage, out of sight.

Here, with the drunken revelry audible, O'Neill introduces the figurative use of intoxication most explicitly. Sara enters, in this act, in a state that appears similar to a joyous kind of intoxication: "All the bitterness and defiance have disappeared

from her face. It looks gentle and calm and at the same time dreamily happy and exultant" (136). She does not respond to anything Nora says at first, and she does not even seem to hear; she merely sits, staring, "dreamily happy." When she does speak, there is an aura about her that is clearly different from anything in her manner in previous scenes. She eventually reveals that she has made love with Simon, and her dreamy distraction and great excitement suggest a transcendent experience. Naturally, the liaison has taken place upstairs:

SARA . . . But I was so drunk with love, I'd lost all thought or care about marriage. I'd got to the place where all you know or care is that you belong to love, and you can't call your soul your own any more, let alone your body, and you're proud you've given them to love. (149)

O'Neill uses drunkenness here as a metaphor for romantic transcendence, for belonging to something beyond the merely physical, be it to 'Life' as in Edmund's rhapsody to the sea in the fourth act of Long Day's Journey or to 'love' here in the fourth act of A Touch of the Poet. This quest for transcendence is an old theme in O'Neill's plays, but in the speeches of these characters in the late plays, it finds its most ironic expressions through the metaphorical use of drunkenness in contrast to the realistic depiction seen on stage.

This ecstasy that Sara claims to have experienced is only a temporary feeling that she describes; it has happened offstage. Like her father, Sara is immediately brought back down from her dreamy recollections to the reality of her familial circumstances. In contrast to her narrative of intoxicated transcendence, the entirely unromantic depiction of drunkenness is emphasized as Sara's scene is followed immediately by the entrance of Melody and Cregan after their "battle" at the Harfords.

The first impression we receive of the two drunks--the appearance of the battered and beaten Jamie Cregan--provokes Sara's inference that he and her father are "paralyzed drunk." This image of drunken paralysis is an extreme contrast to the image of drunken rapture that Sara has just described, and because the audience sees the paralysis, it has a much greater effect than the rapture, which we only hear about. The depths to which Melody has now descended in his intoxication are visible, as opposed to the figurative heights attained by Sara. Melody's paralysis is described in O'Neill's stage directions:

Cregan appears in the doorway at rear. He is half leading, half supporting Melody. The latter moves haltingly and

woodenly. But his movements do not seem those of drunkenness. It is more as if a sudden shock or stroke had shattered his coordination and left him in a stupor. (52)

His movements do not "seem" those of drunkenness; but this does not mean that he is not drunk. O'Neill often stipulates that movements should not "appear" to be those of drunkenness. In fact, whenever a character appears drunk, in a stereotypical fashion, it is a sure sign that he is "faking" it (e.g., Hogan in Act Two of Moon for the Misbegotten, and Jamie Tyrone in the fourth act of Long Day's Journey). Melody has consumed a great quantity of liquor during the course of the day, so when he enters here, aside from evidence of the physical injuries that he has suffered doing battle with the Harfords, he is also experiencing the dullness and despondency of the later stages of intoxication. He has descended into the same drunken depths as the characters in Iceman do after Hickey forces them to play out their pipe dreams.

In Iceman, the characters look "dead"; they complain that the alcohol has lost its kick. Here, Melody does not even attempt to get a "kick" from the liquor; he merely sits and stares. In fact, this is a remarkable moment in an O'Neill play: Nora asks Cregan to "try and make" Melody have a drink; Cregan "pours out a big drink" for him, and Melody ignores it! Eventually, when he exits in a trance-like state, Nora comments on "that crazy dead look" in his eyes, and she is perceptive in detecting death there. The humiliation that Melody has suffered this day has destroyed his illusions; in relinquishing these, he has found it necessary to eliminate all tangible reminders of them, the main one being his mare, which throughout the play is associated with his pretensions as 'Major.' When he kills the mare, he kills the Major, and with that, he kills his romantic dreams. Denied the attainment of his romantic ideal, he now seeks a "kick" from the liquor, an escape that he has long denied himself, which awaits him on the other side of the barroom door.

While Melody recognizes the death of the dream, however, Sara does not, and she presents a final obstacle to Melody's escape. For her own romantic reasons, Sara must believe in some of the family illusions and threatens to keep them alive. While killing the mare has been an important definitive act, it has occurred offstage, and theatrically remains merely rather symbolic. In his confrontation with Sara, Melody takes another decisive action, this one in full view, which makes it much more concrete. He had suggested earlier in the play that he would be able to strike Sara once he had freed himself from the false restraints of a gentleman who would not strike his daughter. When he finally "cuffs her on the side of the head" (179), it not only verifies his transformation, but it is also a visible blow to the romantic dream, since Sara had been inspired by it only

moments before. With this blow, Melody is able to turn his back on the false dreams of transcendence and move towards escape into the barroom.

Melody no longer considers drinking alone, but rather, wants to join the drunks carousing in the bar:

I want company and singin' and dancin' and great laughter.
I'll join the boys in the bar and help Cousin Jamie celebrate
our wonderful shindy wid the police. (175)

On his way out, though, Melody notices the mirror, and he enacts the final version of his "performance," which is now a "vulgar burlesque." He recites the usual lines from Byron, but now he does so mockingly. He is aware of the grotesqueness of the reflection in the mirror, as his unseen observers had been in the previous mirror scenes. In this final version, Melody intrudes on himself, in effect, and pronounces the final judgment on the former, arrogant Cornelius Melody:

Be Christ, if he wasn't the joke av the world, the Major. He
should have been a clown in a circus. (177)

With the sound of "an uproar of laughter" from the bar, Melody leaves behind the dead image in the mirror as he is drawn to the life reverberating on the other side of the barroom door.

Be God, I'm alive and in the crowd they can deem me one av
such! I'll be among thim and av thim, too--and make up for
the lonely dog's life the Major led me. (177)

The dining room has been a dark, lonely place throughout the play, and the only feeling of belonging there has been expressed in terms of intangible romantic dreams. As this world has become increasingly lonely for Melody, the noise of the crowd in the bar has grown increasingly boisterous and lively. The self-righteous Byronic statement of aloofness and aloneness finally evolves into an admission of profound loneliness.

The stage directions indicate that when Melody enters the bar, there is

a roar of welcoming drunken shouts, pounding of glasses on bar and tables, then quiet as if he had raised a hand for silence, followed by his voice greeting them and ordering drinks, and

other roars of acclaim mingled with the music of Riley's pipes. (180)

Throughout the play's final moments, this noise continues, culminating with Riley playing a reel on his pipe and the stamp of dancing feet. This lively boisterousness is similar to (though not as "cacophonous" as) that which occurs in the final moments of The Iceman Cometh, with an important difference: this celebration occurs offstage; the audience does not see it. Melody is, to some extent, similar to Larry or Hickey; like them, he has confronted the abyss. Unlike them, however, he is still able to avoid the depths he has seen there. Whereas Larry remains separate and withdrawn from the celebration, but visible to the audience, at the end of Iceman, Melody joins the celebration here, but to do so, he must leave the stage, so that the audience does not actually see him join in the revelry.

At the conclusion of The Iceman Cometh, the celebration is undoubtedly the predominant stage image, with Larry's presence on the side a significant counterpoint. In Poet, the emphasis clearly shifts: the celebration is deliberately kept offstage, while Nora and Sara remain onstage. At the sound of dancing and music from the bar, Sara realizes yet again that the old "hero of Talavera" has indeed abandoned her:

She breaks down and sobs, hiding her face on her mother's shoulder--bewilderedly. But why should I cry, Mother? Why do I mourn for him? (182)

The answer, of which Sara apparently remains unaware, is that her romantic dreams must die along with her father's mare and his illusions. Her moment of transcendent bliss has been crassly reduced to "seduction," a "swindle," and she has been labelled a "slut" (170-72). As in other O'Neill plays, the romantic ideal must die because it is unattainable, or at least, unsustainable. Sara's romanticism now seems rather futile, rather pathetic.

The drama concludes, then, with a sad picture. The alcoholic is able, finally, to escape into his drunkenness, but only after confronting the essential loneliness that is at the center of his experience. Drunken escape becomes merely a desperate means to pass the time and to avoid loneliness. The more prominent image at the end is that of the two women, alone on stage, one an enduring, suffering pragmatist, the other a naive but now disillusioned romantic. At the end of A Touch of the Poet, we are confronted with O'Neill's vision of the lonely emptiness and purposelessness of human life surrounded by drunken voices of desperation trying to escape from it.

NOTES

¹ Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (Third Edition, 1980) (DSM-III), 130. The DSM-III identifies "emotional lability" as a "characteristic psychological sign" of alcohol intoxication.

² Eugene O'Neill, A Touch of the Poet (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957) 66. All quotations are from this text.

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Conference

University of Sheffield

Literature and Addiction:

An Interdisciplinary Conference, 4-7 April 1991

Literature and Addiction will present new thought about a subject in which interest has accelerated, for example, in the foundation of the journal of literature and intoxication, Dionysos. At the centre of the conference will be literature and compulsions of the writer, as drinker, drug-taker, lover and eater. There will also be papers on the medical, psychoanalytic and sociological aspects of addiction, and on its political, religious and gender-related ramifications.

At Literature and Addiction the speakers will include Betsy Ettore (Centre for Research on Drugs and Health Behaviour, London), Roger Forseth (editor, Dionysos), Thomas Gilmore (author, Equivocal Spirits), Donald Goodwin (University of Kansas Medical Center), John Haffenden (author, The Life of John Barryman), Shelia Henderson (Institute of the Study of Drug Dependence, London), F. A. Jenner (Professor of Psychiatry, University of Sheffield), and Frances Spalding (author, Stavia Smith: A Critical Biography). The conference is organised by Tim Armstrong, Matthew Campbell, Ian MacKillop and Sue Vice.

Literature and Addiction is a full residential conference at Halifax Hall of Sheffield University, costing £175/\$285; concessionary and non-residential rates will be available. The registration fee of £50/\$80 is payable by 1 February 1991. If you wish to attend, contribute or require further information please contact The Secretary, Literature and Addiction, at the address below.

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DESCENT INTO DESPAIR: WILLIAM STYRON'S DARKNESS VISIBLE

Virginia Ross

William Styron. Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness. New York: Random House, 1990.

In Darkness Visible novelist William Styron chronicles his own harrowing descent into suicidal depression. Begun as a lecture at Johns Hopkins and then expanded for Vanity Fair,¹ this autobiographical account is a beautifully written but slender volume (84 pages) attempting to convey experience that Styron claims is virtually beyond description. Styron contends that insensitivity to depressed people on the part of most of the population, whose only personal reference point is a mild form of the blues, results not from failure of sympathy but from incomprehension.

The aims of Styron's book, then, are to give his untormented readers a glimmer of the dimensions of serious depression; and more importantly, to offer comfort to the depressed reader who has yet to recognize the magnitude of his own mood disorder, or whom the breezy encouragement offered by much of the available literature on depression fails to reach.

Darkness Visible shows where Styron himself could not find comfort. He compares his sessions with a psychiatrist, whom he calls Dr. Gold, to Emma Bovary's desperate visit to a priest for understanding as a last resort before her suicide. Like the platitudes offered by the ineffectual priest, the remedies proffered by psychiatry--both verbal and pharmacological--did not reach the depth of Styron's suffering.

This is partly, Styron asserts, because depression yields to no quick cure, and its nature remains baffling. The period one must wait for therapy or medication to take effect drags by for the sufferer with punishing slowness. Depression's onset is mysterious--the illness came upon Styron at a high point of his career, when he traveled to Paris to receive the Prix Modial Cino del Duca, a moment that should have "sparkingly restored" his ego. Its hellish depths are inadequately represented by "the wimp of a word," depression. "Never let it be doubted that depression, in its extreme form, is madness."² Styron vividly evokes the emotional landscape: "Despair, owing to some evil trick played upon the sick brain by the inhabiting psyche, comes to resemble the diabolical discomfort of being imprisoned in a fiercely overheated room. And because no breeze stirs this caldron, because there is no escape from this smothering confinement, it is entirely natural that the victim begins to think ceaselessly of oblivion" (50).

Depression's excruciating torments frequently end in

suicide. Focusing on the suicides of Romain Gary, Abbie Hoffman, Randall Jarrell, and Primo Levi,³ Styron insists that an act of suicide must be freed of association with guilt, shame, and cowardice. "Through the healing process of time--and through medical intervention or hospitalization in many cases--people survive depression, which may be its only blessing; but to the tragic legion who are compelled to destroy themselves, there should be no more reproof attached than to the victims of terminal cancer" (33). Fortuitously, a Brahms melody on tape broke through Styron's despair with a flood of happy recollections. Instead of following through on his determination to kill himself, he entered a hospital. Because the hospital provided a safe haven to wait out the havoc of his depression and to be restored to sanity, Styron argues convincingly that an enlightened view about depression must remove the stigma associated with the mental hospital.

Readers of Dionysos will be interested in Styron's attribution of his depression to sudden and traumatic deprivation of alcohol as a daily companion. For 40 years drinking was "the magical conduit to fantasy and euphoria." Because it liberated him from the realm of sober thought, he endowed alcohol as the "invaluable senior partner of my intellect." Suddenly, even the tiniest drink brought on spasms of nausea. Forced precipitously to give up alcohol on his own, Styron felt betrayed and deserted.

According to his retrospective explanation, the dark madness that descended immediately afterward must have been kept at bay for years by the anesthetic effect of daily drinking. Certainly in the invented world of his fiction, Styron was a man acquainted with depression. His fiction is steeped in disappointed dreams and discordant relationships. Rereading passages where "heroines have lurched down pathways toward doom," Styron was stunned at how accurately he had created their imbalance and destructive momentum (79).

Studies of heavy drinkers who have abruptly stopped drinking corroborate Styron's account of sudden vulnerability to long-suppressed pain. One consequence of abstinence, writes Margaret Bean-Bayog of the Harvard Medical School Department of Psychiatry, is "the consciousness of ungrieved losses, now that daily life is not dominated by the dangerous but numbing drinking."⁴ Styron remembers, "I felt loss at every hand" (56). He concludes that the death of his mother during his adolescence was a loss incompletely mourned, leaving him with a nearly unbearable load of rage, guilt, and sorrow.

What seems strangely absent from Styron's assessment of the impact of alcohol's loss is an acknowledgement that his deserting "friend" was at best a mixed blessing. Like the mood of depression, alcohol's ravages in Styron's fiction spin "a durable thread of woe" (82). Even in the fraternal glow of

alcohol Styron meticulously observes the "synthetic exaltation," and the "shambling procession of lies and excuses" required to keep up the habit. Several fictional protagonists, including Cass Kinsolving of Set This House on Fire and Milton Loftis of Lie Down in Darkness exist in "sodden distress." Cass recalls his involuted world in language evocative of the earlier novel's title: "I was blind from booze two thirds of the time. Stone-blind in this condition I created for myself, in this sweaty hot and hopeless attempt to get out of life, be shut of it, find some kind of woolly and comforting darkness I could lie in without thought for myself or my children or anyone else." ⁵ And Milton Loftis anguishes: "had he the solace of knowing that he was an alcoholic, things would have been brighter, because he had read somewhere that alcoholism was a disease; but he was not, he assured himself, alcoholic, only self-indulgent, and his disease, whatever it was, resided in shadier corners of his soul--where decisions were reached not through reason but by rationalization, and where a thin membranous growth of selfishness always seemed to prevent his decent motives from becoming happy actions."⁶

Yet in writing of alcohol's role in his own life Styron remembers its influence as almost entirely beneficent. "Like a great many American writers, whose sometimes lethal addiction to alcohol has become so legendary as to provide in itself a stream of studies and books, I used alcohol as the magical conduit to fantasy and euphoria, and to the enhancement of the imagination. There is no need to either rue or apologize for my use of this soothing, often sublime, agent, which had contributed greatly to my writing; although I never set down a line while under its influence, I did use it--often in conjunction with music--as a means to let my mind conceive visions that the unaltered, sober brain has no access to" (40). In claiming that he never wrote a word under the influence of alcohol, Styron seems to minimize the personal toll exacted by 40 years of heavy drinking.

Styron's exoneration of alcohol seems the more remarkable in light of his strong reaction to having been overmedicated on prescription drugs. To Halcion, a benzodiazepine tranquilizer he took for insomnia, Styron attributes the intensity of his obsession with suicide, and he rails against a tendency among psychiatrists toward "promiscuous overprescribing" without carefully monitoring or even checking for predictable side effects.

Darkness Visible is ultimately a hopeful tale of depression because the teller recovers. "Depression's only grudging favor," writes Styron, "is its ultimate capitulation" (76). This moving account begins with an epigraph from the Book of Job, moves through the green hospital corridors and wired doors of purgatory, and ends with an allusion to the Paradiso. William Styron has returned from depression's dark wood to the shining world.

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NOTES

1 William Styron, "Darkness Visible," Vanity Fair (December 1989): 212-15, 278-86.

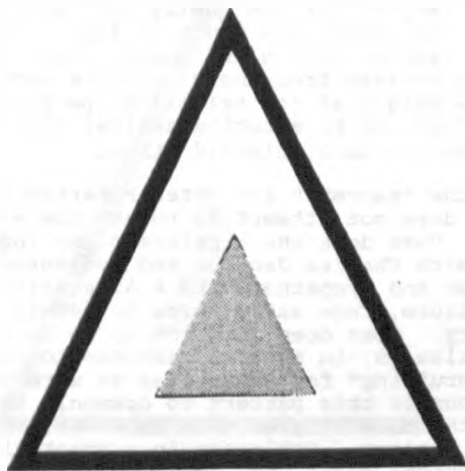
2 William Styron, Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness (New York: Random, 1990) 46-47. Hereafter page references to this edition will be cited parenthetically in the text.

3 See Styron's "Why Primo Levi Need Not Have Died," The New York Times 19 Dec. 1988: 23.

4 Roger E. Meyer, ed., Psychopathology and Addictive Disorders (New York: Guilford P, 1986) 344.

5 William Styron, Set This House on Fire (New York: Random, 1959) 54.

6 William Styron, Lie Down in Darkness (New York: Bobbs, 1951) 152-53.



Brief Review

Ralph F. Voss. A Life Of William Inge: The Strains of Triumph. Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1989.

Those privileged to hear Professor Voss at the Inge Festivals in Independence, Kansas or to read the draft of a chapter from this book in the Inge issue of Kansas Quarterly know they are in for an interesting read. Voss writes gracefully and well, and Inge has had the good fortune to attract a biographer able to narrate a life story without exploiting its potential for voyeuristic best-sellerdom. In this, Voss was aided by his subject, who has been called "the most private person in the world." Voss studied Inge's writings, eliciting from them and from extensive interviews with Inge's friends the pattern of a life. The friends considered Inge "decent, gentle and shy" and "thought he should be allowed to keep most of his embarrassments secret." Thus Voss claims not that this is the life of Inge but a life. Understood on these terms, most readers will agree it is as Voss believes, a "highly truthful" biography.

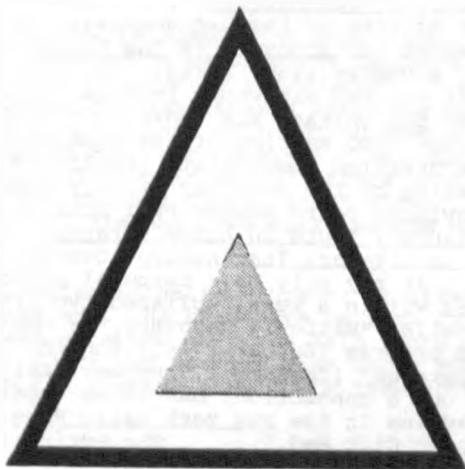
The secrets are, of course, not secrets at all in their broad outline. Inge was an alcoholic who worked for recovery in A.A. and ultimately failed. He was also very uncomfortably homosexual. In his plays, one can trace the tension between his decent, gentle respect for the family unit and his inward knowledge that the warmth and trust of family life call for personal denial and sacrifice and end in loss. The poignancy of the major works derives from their author's uncomfortable position on the margin of the relationships portrayed. Voss gives proper attention to autobiographical elements in the plays and the novel My Son is a Splendid Driver.

Although the "secrets" are often referred to in contiguous passages, Voss does not attempt to relate the alcoholism to the homosexuality. Voss does use a reference to Inge's attendance at A.A. meetings with Charles Jackson and Ned Rorem. Uncertain he could stay sober and sympathetic to A.A. sensitivity about public examples of failure, Inge asked Rorem to delete the passage from A New York Diary. Voss does not pick up on Rorem's discussion of his own alcoholism as, in part, a response to his shyness and his difficulties "cruising" for sex unless he were drunk. Alcoholism counselors encounter this pattern so commonly in gay clients that to omit it in the biography of an author whose life was doubly stigmatized is serious. Reticence is a great virtue on the current biographical scene, but some general observation of the linkage of these two behaviors did not require facts about Inge not already stated.

There is no bibliography, but the notes are full. It is consistent, perhaps, with Voss's avoidance of much discussion of drinking and sex that although he lists Robert Kent Donovan in

his acknowledgements, he makes no use of Donovan's "The Dionysiac Dance in William Inge's Picnic," which appeared in Dance Chronicle. 7:4, 1984-5, a literary study that should be of interest to readers of this journal. As his use of Rorem suggests, there is plenty of detail in the sources he does use for a fuller picture of the tensions generated by Inge's "secrets." A Life of William Inge is thorough and most welcome; whatever minor flaws we may observe, it is doubtful that anyone could do better. A really strong critical book is needed, to redress the balance for the damage done to his career by adverse reaction after Brustein's vicious attack in his lifetime. Jackson Bryer proposes to offer such a study, a collection of essays, in the near future.

--George F. Wedge



NOTES AND COMMENT

In the Spring 1990 "Notes and Comment" we noted that the Summer 1990 issue of Areté would be devoted to alcohol, drugs, and creativity. That issue is now out, and contains a collection of materials titled "Under the Influence," including articles by George Wedge and Donald Goodwin. Professor Wedge writes:

My article announced in Dionysos as forthcoming in Areté has now appeared (vol.2 no. 6, Summer 1990). It was edited without my permission in ways that altered both point of view and accuracy of citation, and no longer represents faithfully my original submission to the magazine. I wish to convey my apologies to any who have seen it.

We understand that Dr. Goodwin also has reservations about the editing of his piece. . . . The editor participated in a program on Dionysos broadcast by KUWS-Wisconsin Public Radio, January 2. . . . Dionysos has been added to the Master List of Periodicals of the MLA International Bibliography. As such, its contents will be indexed in the annual Bibliography and it will be listed in the MLA Directory of Periodicals. . . . Through our membership in the Council of Editors of Learned Journals, we were able to place an announcement for Dionysos in The London Times Literary Supplement (16-22 November 1990: 1246). You will find a reproduction of it printed elsewhere in this issue. In addition, we had displays at the Chicago MLA Convention, also arranged by CELJ; at the October 1990 meeting of the Substance Abuse Librarians and Information Specialists (SALIS) in Toronto; and at the midwinter meeting of the American Library Association in Chicago. . . . Advisory Board member Paul Schmidt edited "The Vexingly Unverifiable": Truth in Autobiography, the Fall 1990 issue of Studies in Literary Imagination (Georgia State University). . . . It may only be a temporal coincidence, but The New York Times within a week published two articles, one on an organization called "Rational Recovery," a non-spiritual, secular self-help program (December 24); and the other describing the rise of "Temperance" (January 1, appropriately). We're still trying to figure out a connection, but in our heart we know there is one. . . . Headline in the New York Daily News: "'Sober Vacations' On Tap at Club Med." . . . The spring 1991 Dionysos will be a special review issue on fiction.

Conferences

The Berryman and Alcoholism panel at the John Berryman Conference (see Dionysos, Fall 1990: 42) consisted of "Spirits and Spirituality: Notes On the Art of John Berryman's Recovery" by Roger Forseth; "The Case of the Talking Brews: Mr. Berryman and Dr. Hyde" by George Wedge; and "Berryman Revisited: A

Response to Wedge and Forseth" by Lewis Hyde. The moderator was Jim Zosel, Berryman's counselor at St. Mary's Rehabilitation Center, and the model for "Vin" in Recovery. We are obviously biased, but, judging from the question period and other conference comments, it would appear that intoxication studies has arrived as a subject for legitimate literary research. . . . A report for Dionysos on the University of Sheffield Conference on Literature and Addiction (4-7 April) is in the planning stage.

Research Notes/Work in Progress

The subject of genetics and addiction continues to receive press attention. The research itself appears to be in a problematic state. For an update, see Genetics and Biology of Addiction, ed. C. Robert Cloninger and Henri Begleiter, Banbury Report 33 (New York: Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press, 1990). . . . Catherine MacGregor writes from Ottawa that she has published an article on codependence in Under the Volcano in the Spring 1991 issue of The Malcolm Lowry Review. She is currently working on a paper on codependence in Crime and Punishment, which she plans to read at the Sheffield Conference. . . . Nicholas Warner and George Wedge are both working on books on the writer and drink.

NOTEWORTHY

"When a man is sober he is ashamed of what seems all right when he is drunk. In these words we have the essential underlying cause prompting men to resort to stupefiers. People resort to them either to escape feeling ashamed after having done something contrary to their consciences, or to bring themselves beforehand into a state in which they can commit actions contrary to conscience, but to which their animal nature prompts them" (Leo Tolstoy, "Why Do Men Stupefy Themselves?" [1890], Selected Essays, ed. Ernest J. Simmons [New York: Random House, 1964: 189]).

"Hemingway had a perfected gallows humor; he liked rough jokes, with a sting at the end. He once gave me some rules for life, among them: 'Always do sober what you said you'd do when you were drunk. That will teach you to keep your mouth shut!'" (Charles Scribner, Jr., In the Company of Writers [New York: Scribner's, 1990:64]).

CORRECTION

In Dionysos 1.3 (Winter 1990) the sentence beginning at the top of page 22 of Timothy M. Rivinus's and Brian Ford's "Children of Alcoholics in Literature" should read: "Although all these forces affect her and are clearly portrayed by Hardy, Tess is also the victim of the pathology of the alcoholic family system."

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Jack Williams, who has published poems in The Quarterly and The Chattahoochee Review, won the 1990 Agnes Scott College Writers' Festival Poetry Award. He is a graduate of Georgia State University and lives with his wife in Decatur, Georgia. "Marla" is his first published fiction.

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Virginia Ross was an assistant professor of English at Mercer University, and is currently doing free-lance (mostly medical) writing while working on a book about Nathaniel Hawthorne from a psychoanalytic perspective.

George Wedge is an associate professor of English and Linguistics at the University of Kansas, where he has taught since 1958. He is editor of Cottonwood Magazine and Press, co-editor of Stiletto, and an advisory editor to Kansas Quarterly. His poems have appeared in Kansas Quarterly, Stone Country, High Plains Literary Review, and other literary magazines, and he has published articles on dialects and poetics. He is currently on sabbatical, working on a book, Writing Under the Influence.