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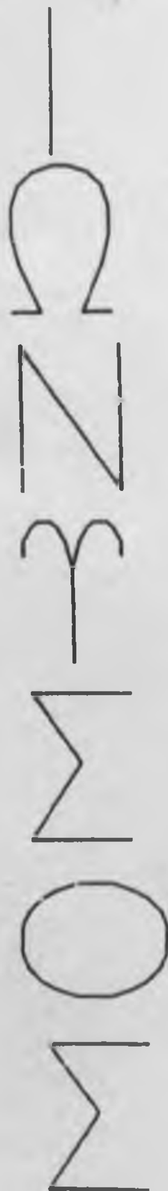

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the literature and addiction TRIQUARTERLY

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN - SUPERIOR

Fall 1993 Volume 5, Number 2

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the literature and addiction triquarterly

Fall 1993 Vol. 5 No. 2

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CALL FOR PAPERS

LITERATURE & ADDICTION: CRITICAL & IDEOLOGICAL ISSUES

A SYMPOSIUM

In our first editorial statement (Dionysos. Spring 1989) it was argued that "[o]ne of the curiosities of modern criticism is that its preoccupation . . . with the mental and emotional states of writers and their creations, with the abnormal, indeed, with the bizarre, has nonetheless excluded or trivialized one of the more pervasive of all human conditions: intoxication. Other great taboos have fallen, . . . [y]et one . . . remains: the serious analysis of drink, drunkenness, addiction, and intoxication." Five years after this argument was set forth, it is gratifying to report, much has changed. The publication of increasingly sophisticated studies in the field have been documented in the pages of Dionysos. In fact, historical and critical analysis of literature and addiction has advanced to a point where the editors of this journal judged that it was time for our readers to join us in the assessment of the current situation. We therefore invite 500-1000 word reflections, to be printed in the Spring 1994 issue. The following queries are designed to get things started:

"Addiction Studies" usually refers to the use or misuse of alcohol or drugs to be found in literary works. Increasingly, however, food, sex, gambling, and other obsessions have been analyzed for their addictive and intoxicating propensities. Is this enlargement of subject justified? positive? inevitable? . . . Critics have voiced a concern with what has been termed "pathography": the trashing of the biographical subject for commercial exploitation. Since a prominant aspect of "pathography" is often the subject's addictive behavior, how should the responsible biographer handle this problem? . . . The connection between creativity and madness has been receiving increased attention both by clinical researchers and literary theorists. Have these commentators paid sufficient attention to the part intoxication or addiction play in this linkage? . . . In what ways, if any, do ideological or cultural studies (e.g., deconstruction, new historicism, poststructuralism, marxism, gender studies) advance or refine our insight into literature and addiction? . . . Similarly, what do the the disciplines of the social and behavioral sciences, of medicine and theology, etc., have to offer? . . . With the Winter 1992 issue "addiction" replaced "intoxication" in the subtitle of Dionysos. Was this change justified?

In your responses, by all means feel free to replace, combine, or otherwise use our queries--or, indeed, to simply sound off about your own concerns. Please return your responses by 1 June 1994.

RECOVERING THE AUTHOR OF THE LOST WEEKEND: NOTES ON CHARLES JACKSON

John W. Crowley

The author of The Lost Weekend once encountered a woman he had known when both of them were children. "We loved your movie," she told him, meaning to be gracious. "I have become so used to having people say 'We loved your movie' instead of 'We read your book,'" he mordantly observed, "that now I merely say 'Thanks.'"[1]

Half a century after its publication in 1944, The Lost Weekend retains its narrative power. The book's title has entered the American vernacular, and its canny portrait of the alcoholic remains unsurpassed. Whatever its own merits, however, the fortunes of this novel have forever been linked to those of its film adaptation. That the book has stayed in print over the years is largely accountable to the enduring fame of the movie classic--winner of the 1945 Academy Awards for best picture, best director (Billy Wilder), best screenplay (Wilder and Charles Brackett), and best actor (Ray Milland).

In May 1944, a critic in The New Republic mentioned Charles Jackson along with Saul Bellow and John Hersey as three "young novelists who obviously have talent." To Jackson, who was already forty when The Lost Weekend appeared,[2] the appearance of such praise months after the first reviews gave hope that he had finally arrived as a writer. As he built upon the success of The Lost Weekend, Jackson did achieve renown during the 1940s; but neither his later work nor his literary reputation ultimately took hold. No biography and very little criticism has been published. One telling measure of Jackson's obscurity is that he has never been "Twayned" for that publisher's exhaustively inclusive United States Authors Series.

A basis for future research exists, however, in material owned by the Dartmouth College Library: an archive consisting of the original manuscript and typescript of The Lost Weekend, as well as letters from Jackson and his wife to Jackson's favorite brother. For possible use in a book I was writing, I had occasion to examine these papers, and I wish to relate some of the details of Jackson's life that are not to be found in the few published sources.[3] The following biographical sketch, which is necessarily provisional, is offered in the hope that it will spark renewed interest in this accomplished but undeservedly neglected writer.

* * *

Charles Reginald Jackson, born 6 April 1903 in Summit, New Jersey, grew up in Newark, New York, a Wayne county village east of Rochester. "Someone has said that an unhappy childhood is a writer's gold mine," he once remarked, "but I don't know, growing

up in a small town is just as good." In a small town, he added, "it's practically impossible not to know practically everything about practically everybody else . . . and this, plus the fact that one's childhood impressions are the deepest and most lasting, the purest and probably the most universal, makes for a never-failing source of fiction."[4] Newark, rechristened "Arcadia," was the source for a dozen of Jackson's stories collected in The Sunnier Side (1950) and for his last novel, A Second-Hand Life (1967). But he had more than a small-town background to draw upon for his fiction; he also had an unhappy childhood. The third of five children of Frederick George and Sarah Williams Jackson, young Charles suffered the shattering of his domestic security. In 1915, when he was twelve, his father suddenly and inexplicably left home. A year later, his only sister and youngest brother were killed in an auto wreck.

Within the surviving family, Jackson's closest bond was to his younger brother, Frederick, who inspired the character of Wick, Don Birnam's devoted sibling in The Lost Weekend. Charles always felt more or less estranged from his older brother, Herbert, and from his mother. Frederick Jackson (1906-1971), familiarly known as "Boom," was a photographer's model in his youth; he later became a weaver of braided rugs and a dealer of antiques in Malaga, New Jersey. An uncloseted homosexual, he probably influenced his brother's choice of material for his provocative second novel, The Fall of Valor (1946), in which he explored the failure of a middle-aged professor's marriage because of his attraction to a young marine officer. The possible bearing of homosexuality on alcoholism (and vice versa) was also a major theme in The Lost Weekend.[5]

After graduating from Newark High School in 1921, Charles Jackson entered Syracuse University but withdrew, for unknown reasons, during his first year. Over the next few years, he worked as a feeder in a jigsaw factory in Boston, a reporter and editor for his hometown newspaper (the Newark Courier), the stage manager of a summer theater in Brattleboro, Vermont, and a bookstore clerk in Chicago and New York. After the onset of tuberculosis in 1927, Jackson was forced into medical confinement until 1933. Along with his brother Frederick, who was also infected, he spent two of those years (1929-1931) in Davos, Switzerland, at the same sanitorium that Thomas Mann had used as the setting for The Magic Mountain (1924). Always a voracious reader, Jackson conducted his own literary education during his prolonged convalescence. He also wrote novels and stories, but none of his fiction was published until 1939, when "Palm Sunday" and "Rachel's Summer" both appeared in The Partisan Review.

While he was a patient in Switzerland, Jackson developed a drinking problem through the habitual use of alcohol as a pain killer. His condition grew unremittingly worse (to the point of delirium tremens) after he returned to New York and vainly sought

employment during the Depression. Jackson started psychoanalysis--apparently with Lawrence S. Kubie of Columbia, who took a special interest in artistic cases--but he obtained no more relief from his drinking than Don Birnam does from the "foolish psychiatrist." Convinced that his brother required treatment specifically for alcoholism, Frederick Jackson had Charles admitted, late in 1936, to the alcoholic ward of Bellevue Hospital. Here drunks did not merely dry out; they served as experimental subjects in Dr. Norman Jolliffe's long-term study of "the etiology of chronic inebriety."[6] Jolliffe likely served as Jackson's physician at Bellevue.

After Jackson was rehabilitated--he dated his sobriety from 11 November 1936--he found a job at the Columbia Broadcasting System writing radio plays as well as the popular morning serial, Sweet River. Among the seven Jackson scripts produced on the Columbia Workshop program were two originals--A Letter from Home (1939) and Dress Rehearsal (1941)--and such adaptations as The Devil and Daniel Webster and Jane Eyre. On 4 March 1938, he married Rhoda Booth, an editorial writer at Fortune, who, like Helen in The Lost Weekend, had stood by her man steadfastly during the worst of his drinking. Now a free lance, Jackson continued to write scripts for CBS while he taught radio writing at New York University.

The Long Weekend, as the novel was originally titled, was written "in a little over a year in the time left over from his two jobs."[7] Completed in April 1940, the year in which his elder daughter Sarah was born, the book was accepted by Farrar and Rinehart in 1943, the birth year of his younger daughter Kate.[8] On the strength of his novel's commercial prospects and the expectation of a job offer from Metro Goldwyn Mayer, the Jacksons bought a splendid and historic colonial house in Orford, New Hampshire--near Dartmouth College in Hanover, and a short drive from Rhoda's childhood home in Barre, Vermont. As Jackson was reading proof, his family was preparing to move out of their New York apartment and into "Six Chimney Farm," which was to be their home for a decade.

Advance paperbound copies of The Lost Weekend were circulated to reviewers in late November 1943, but the book was not offically published until 27 January 1944--in a substantial edition, especially for a first novel, of ten thousand copies. Farrar and Rinehart had primed the reading public through a clever ad campaign designed to heighten curiosity while allaying concern about a subject matter "distasteful to many people."[9] Reviewers, including such literary notables as Edmund Wilson, Diana Trilling, Mark Schorer, and Gorham Munson, were generally very positive. Philip Wylie in the New York Times credited Jackson with "the most compelling gift to the literature of addiction since De Quincey," and lauded "a writing technique that transmutes medical case history into art." Harrison Smith wrote in The Saturday Review of Literature that The Lost Weekend was a "literary tour de force" with "the impact of a sledgehammer on the reader's mind"; its

author "has taken this unlikely subject and has made something of a masterpiece of it."[10]

The Lost Weekend soon became something of a bestseller, and Jackson was thrust into prominence. The book was stacked up in the display windows of Scribner's bookstore in New York and Kroch's in Chicago; its author was mentioned in The New Yorker's "Talk of the Town" and featured in Coronet; a cartoon appeared in The Saturday Review showing some evidently tipsy clerks staggering around a book store beneath a promotional banner for The Lost Weekend. En route to Hollywood on the Santa Fe Chief, Jackson stopped at a bookshop in the Kansas City station to see how sales were going; and as he signed a few copies for the clerk, she recalled how Bette Davis had snapped one up when she was passing through the week before.

After Jackson arrived in California in April 1944, to begin a sixteen-week screenwriting contract at $1,000 a week, he gleefully reported that everyone in Hollywood was enthusiastic about The Lost Weekend and anxious to meet its author. Robert Benchley quipped that reading the novel had made him quit drinking--for twenty minutes! Carey Wilson, the producer to whom Jackson was assigned at MGM, joked that he was sick of hearing about The Lost Weekend wherever he went, and another producer told Jackson that Garbo herself had been buzzing about him.

Jackson tried to keep his sudden fame in perspective as he was swept up into the Hollywood social whirl. On any given day in the studio lunch room, he might share a table with the likes of Frank Sinatra, Gene Kelly, and Judy Garland, to whom he took a particular fancy; and he was invited to parties nearly every night, where he hobnobbed with scores of other celebrities. At one dinner he encountered a literary idol, Thomas Mann, who thrilled Jackson by asking if he were the author of a book called Weekend something or other, and then inquired about its sales. Jackson had already looked up Sheilah Graham to hear about another of his idols, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and his final days in Hollywood. Everyone dearly loved Fitzgerald, Jackson heard, but had run out of patience with his drunken misbehavior.

By contrast, the charming, dapper, and strictly sober Charlie Jackson was the toast of the town; and despite his protestations to the contrary, all the attention was going straight to his head. He reported overhearing two Hollywood insiders as they discussed his amazing social triumph. Michael Arlen flattered Jackson to his face, swearing that he had never seen anyone taken so quickly into the Hollywood fold as he had been. No wonder the oh-so-popular novelist's name was dropped in Louella Parson's column: "most interesting to talk to, says many people ask him if he is Don Birnam. . . . The answer is no."[11]

Although Don Birnam was drawn from his own drinking life, Jackson publicly minimized the autobiographical dimension of The

Lost Weekend. His apparently standard answer to reporters' queries was: "I should say about one-third of the history is based on what I have experienced myself, about one-third on the experiences of a very good friend whose drinking career I followed very closely and the other third is pure invention."[12] The "very good friend" was undoubtedly Jackson himself, and he later acknowledged that only two minor incidents in the novel were entirely fictitious. "He did not pawn his girl's leopard jacket to get money for whiskey, and he did not stand up the hostess of his favorite bar during an alcoholic lapse of memory. The rest--the desperations, delirium tremens, nightmares and bitter introspection and remorse--are from life. . . ."[13]

Whatever Jackson told the press hardly seemed to matter. In one interview, he laughed about some of the unfounded speculation: "he said he was somewhat surprised to learn in a local paper that he never had taken a drink in his life and was a teetotaler. He also was a bit shocked in Chicago when an angel-faced blond girl reporter wrote a story about him which was headed, 'Jackson Not on a Bender When He Visits Chicago.' The story intimated that he was 'on the wagon' temporarily for his sojourn in Chicago, and probably would emulate the hero of 'The Lost Week-End' when he left town." Jackson claimed that although he was now drinking only tomato juice and the like, he had once "had his periods of moderate drinking."[14]

Despite its popularity with readers, The Lost Weekend was not an obvious property for film adaptation: too psychological and too depressing. But Billy Wilder and Charles Brackett were excited by the book, and they persuaded Paramount, against the studio's better judgment, to buy the movie rights for $35,000. (In the public relations bulletin, the figure was deliberately ballooned to $100,000.) Although Cary Grant was initially considered for the role of Don Birnam, and although Jackson himself would have preferred Robert Montgomery or Franchot Tone, Wilder and Brackett insisted on Ray Milland. As the employee of a rival studio, Jackson had nothing formally to do with the script. But he was consulted by the director and producer, and he was impressed by how well they knew his novel. Jackson did, however, talk them out of their idea of making Helen into a recovered alcoholic who would first meet Don Birnam at a psychiatrist's office.

By the time the filming began in October 1944, Jackson had quit MGM, and he was invited to join the Paramount crew on location in New York. He was even given a walk-on part, as one of those who passes Don Birnam on the street during his long day's journey to pawn his typewriter. As Wilder was wrapping up production in December 1944, The Lost Weekend received some excellent publicity from a feature story in Life. But after sneak preview audiences in Santa Barbara "were unanimously of the opinion that the movie was putrid, disgusting, boring," its release was suddenly delayed indefinitely. At one point, rumor had it, the liquor interests, fearful of "a resurgence of propaganda against alcohol," were

conspiring with the Mafia to buy up all the prints of the film in order to bury it permanently![15] But after the New York critics reacted favorably at a private screening, Paramount relented; and the movie finally opened, nearly a year late, on 16 November 1945.

Before its release, The Lost Weekend was altered to accommodate the studio's demand for something slightly more upbeat. Early in 1945, Jackson declined an invitation from Wilder and Brackett to help them revise the script--the trip would have broken his stride on The Fall of Valor--but he did supply two pages of dialogue for a new ending, in which the miraculously cured Don Birnam dumps his liquor down the drain and goes right to work (with his unhocked typewriter) on the novel that his drunkenness has blocked for years. As Roger Forseth observes, this "facile, 'happy' ending" evades the tragic implications of the novel--which ends bleakly, after all, with Don Birnam poised to begin not a literary career, but yet another binge.[16] Jackson felt enormously flattered that the movie experts had turned to him for help, and he was pleased to be paid $500 for his modest efforts. It may be, however, that Wilder and Brackett had less need of Jackson's aid than desire for his authorial sanction of what was a serious violation of his novel's integrity. If The Lost Weekend had to be compromised by a Hollywood ending, better that the author himself should be induced to devise it.

The same month, April 1945, in which Jackson received payment from Paramount, he contracted with John Lane for a British edition of The Lost Weekend, for which there would also be a book club tie-in. He was scheduled to speak at Dartmouth and Columbia and, in June, to address a conference of psychiatrists at Harvard. His career was simply booming. Everyone, it seemed, wanted a piece of Charlie Jackson. In the fall of 1944, he had traveled to Hartford to have tea with Katherine Hepburn and then to address a large public meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous.[17] The local papers trumpeted his triumph on this occasion, and he received many appreciative letters afterward. About the same time, he was importuned by the Allied Liquor Association to address its annual convention. Although Jackson did not directly refuse, he set a fee that, as he expected, proved to be impossibly high. The liquor distributors were good sports, anyway; they sent along a case of champagne with their compliments!

Because of the national hangover from Prohibition, the politics surrounding The Lost Weekend were intense. The liquor lobby vied with rear-guard dry adherents to appropriate Jackson and his book to their contrary purposes. On the one hand, he wanted to keep his distance from the liquor interests. "To the latter, when they tried to 'buy him off,' Jackson could say with perfect equanimity, since he was not a 'dry': 'If you have a guilty conscience about it, you should be in another business.'"[18] On the other hand, he wanted to dissociate himself from prohibition. The result was censorship in places where anti-drink sentiment remained

strong. When Jackson's brother reported that a line about prohibition had been cut from the print of The Lost Weekend shown in Philadelphia, the author replied that there must have been some political chicanery behind it, and he complained that in England the movie had been given the dreadful subtitle, "The Diary of a Dipsomaniac."

Late in 1944, when he first returned to New York from Hollywood, Jackson had a staggering lineup of potential projects: a film adaptation for Garbo of Chekhov's Seagull, in which Judy Garland might also appear; a serial story for Collier's, with movie possibilities for Hepburn; a Broadway play for Tallulah Bankhead; stories for The New Yorker; a sequel to The Lost Weekend; a multi-volume novel to be called What Happened--all this in addition to The Fall of Valor, which he had begun in May 1944, and which he was hoping to finish by the end of the year. Jackson was feeling the weight of his own success as he worried to his brother about the new book. He simply could not publish the novel, he felt, if it turned out to be an unworthy successor to The Lost Weekend.

Although The Fall of Valor was announced for publication in 1945, its appearance was delayed (like that of the film of The Lost Weekend) for over a year while Jackson wrote draft after draft, recasting the novel completely. In March 1945, soon after he had contrived the Hollywood ending for Wilder and Brackett, Jackson collapsed from nervous exhaustion and retreated for a week to the hospital in Hanover, New Hampshire. He worked under a tremendous strain until he finished The Fall of Valor early in 1946, and then suffered a far more serious breakdown.

Jackson had quit drinking in 1936, but he remained dependent on sedatives, primarily Secanol, to overcome writer's block and to keep his inspiration flowing. At the end of March 1946, he went on a drug binge for several days; Rhoda and "Boom" had to drag him out of the New York hotel where he had holed up. While Jackson was recuperating in hospital, his wife was agonizing over their future together. She was fed up with her husband's conceit, his craven desire for celebrity, and his selfish unconcern about the suffering he had brought upon his family. Even medical attention seemed to exacerbate his self-absorption. Although the Jacksons' marriage endured this and many other trials, Rhoda had lost her trust in Charlie.

Jackson persisted in taking drugs; and after another of his Seconal jags during the summer of 1947, Rhoda wondered if he would ever conquer his addictions. She had come to understand how he had stopped drinking: a fierce desire to prove himself as a writer had provided the key motivation. But having attained some literary recognition, he had lost his bearings again; he would not recover them, she was convinced, until he had purged himself of egoism and learned some tolerance and humility.

Jackson was able to pull himself out of his 1947 binge without hospitalization, but the danger of relapse was continual because he found it so arduous to write except under the stimulating influence of drugs. After eleven years of complete abstinence, he was also playing Russian roulette with his alcoholism. Rhoda noted that he was drinking beer again, but only moderately.

The momentum of Jackson's initial success carried him through the 1940s, but his halcyon days were ending. For _The Fall of Valor_, he enjoyed respectful reviews and good sales, and his short stories were appearing regularly in the mass-market magazines. But _The Outer Edge_ (1948), the story of a psychotic murder and its ripple effect on a group of respectable and seemingly normal characters, fell short of expectations. Jackson had written this novel quickly, hoping for selection by the Book-of-the-Month Club and a lucrative movie deal. He needed money to tide him over while he completed the far more ambitious _What Happened_. But Hollywood paid only $5,000 for the screen rights to _The Outer Edge_, and no film was ever made.

Perhaps a fickle public was tiring of Jackson's novelistic formula: his focus on one or another form of social or psychological deviance. He noted sardonically that a Hollywood wag had "recently said to me, 'Say, Jackson, I hear your next book is to be about necrophilia,' and in view of the 'subject matter' of my first three novels, I am sure he thought I had it coming to me."[19] When he launched his fourth novel in 1953, the subject matter--nymphomania--was only slightly less sensational than necrophilia. But this book would not appear until 1967, and nothing whatever came of _What Happened_. After 1950, indeed, Jackson managed to write very little fiction.

Early in 1951, Jackson's life began to unravel. On and off over the years, he had attempted to treat his addictions through psychoanalysis. Now, according to what he told Rhoda, he had convinced his latest psychiatrist that he was inevitably given to periodic outbursts, that to unbind his imagination he had no choice but to take drugs. Without pills, Jackson insisted, he would become paralyzed by writer's block and sink into depression. The psychiatrist allegedly encouraged him to try using drugs in a controlled manner; he could go on two-month benders without doing himself much harm. Rhoda was buying none of it. She shrewdly observed that her husband's best work had always been done when he was completely sober; he did not see how drugs and alcohol subtly distorted his basic values and undermined his honesty as a writer.

About the same time that Jackson began popping pills again, he also resumed heavy drinking. On one of his first binges, in February 1951, he was so stupefied that Rhoda had to track him down in Vermont and bring him home. By September, while he teetered on the edge of a complete nervous breakdown, his wife was considering divorce. Things got even worse before they got any better.

Jackson was evidently taking drugs to fuel his inspiration during the spring of 1952. To Phyllis McGinley, a poet and close friend, he boasted of his immense productivity in recent months. He had completed several short stories, he claimed, including the best he had ever written.[20] During a visit to Washington that summer, Jackson saw his father, now seventy-five, for the first time in many years. The encounter brought back some forgotten childhood memories, which led in turn to an idea for a new story about "Arcadia." Poor Eddie Coyle was to be an American version of Madame Bovary, a study of bourgeois life centered on a character like Charles Bovary rather than one like Emma.

By September 1952, however, with progress apparently halted on Poor Eddie Coyle, Jackson was so deeply depressed that his psychiatrist was urging him to get drunk if that would help to relieve the mental strain. Instead he attempted suicide by swallowing pills and ended up in Bellevue. He was readmitted there after another collapse a few months later, in January 1953. Soon after his release, Jackson was bingeing on beer and paraldehyde as he rode a manic surge of creativity. Having dashed off six new stories in a week and started A Second-Hand Life, he told McGinley that the clouds had lifted and he was feeling reborn.

Jackson finally recovered from this drug-fueled "rebirth" by checking himself into an alcoholism clinic in Philadelphia during the summer of 1953--a clinic that advocated group therapy, marital counseling, and Alcoholics Anonymous. Although Jackson was familiar with A.A. when he was writing The Lost Weekend, he did not become a member then.[21] In 1953, however, he immersed himself in the program; and, often accompanied by Rhoda, he traveled all over Vermont and New Hampshire to attend meetings.

After joining A.A., Jackson confronted his psychiatrist who, he was flabbergasted to learn, had long been a sponsor of the Hanover group. Why, he demanded, had the doctor never mentioned A.A. during all those years of futile psychotherapy? Well, said the doctor, he had never believed that Jackson would respond favorably. Now he was ready because he was eager to have A.A. work for him. Rhoda was overjoyed at the remarkable transformation of her husband's attitude and personality. After Christmas in 1953, she reflected on the unaccustomed holiday joy, giving most of the credit to Alcoholics Anonymous. She could see how well Charlie was fitting into the fellowship, and she admired his dedication to other alcoholics in twelfth-step work.

Although their family life was happier and more stable than it had been for years, things were far from serene and secure for the Jacksons. Just before Christmas, Rhoda had asked Phyllis McGinley if she might know a potential buyer for a mink coat--the one Jackson had given her in 1947. Rhoda was prepared to let it go for $1000, less than a third of its original cost. She was very proud of Charlie, she told McGinley, for his courageous attempts to face

down his problems; but his recovery came at a high cost in literary productivity. He was sober, but he was not writing very much.

This was, of course, consistent with Jackson's longstanding pattern: an inverse relationship between his sobriety and his imaginative fluency. But he simply could not afford a dry spell of any duration. The Jacksons had been accumulating debts for several years; and in order to keep financially afloat, they had been selling off valuables (the mink coat, rugs, rare books, paintings, and antiques) accumulated during their salad days. By the end of 1953, more drastic measures had become inescapable. Rhoda had to find a job, and the house had to go.

In the face of this grim situation, Jackson picked up the bottle once again; there was a brief relapse while Rhoda was in New York looking for work. Their beloved "Six Chimney Farm" was sold in April 1954. Before the family relocated--first to a New York City apartment and then to a rented house in Sandy Hook, Connecticut--Jackson had one more alcoholic slip. A crucial consideration in moving was the maintenance of his still shaky sobriety. He and Rhoda had favored the Danbury area in part because it was reputed to have a good A.A. group.

In the months after leaving New Hampshire, Jackson underwent a spiritual crisis. He had long been fascinated with religion and his own lack of faith. On the train to California in 1944, he had been inspired by the majestic landscape with unwonted reverence and thoughts about God. Before Christmas in 1948, Jackson told "Boom," strictly in confidence, that he had long been looking for something beyond himself and that he had joined the Congregational church. To Phyllis McGinley in 1952, he divulged that he was drawing ever closer to becoming a Catholic; and three years later, he began weekly instruction in Church doctrine.

Urging McGinley to read The Brothers Karamozov for its spiritual profundity, he remarked that one of her statements--about how much tenacity it took to be a Catholic--had been instrumental in his own religious quest. Why, she might well ask, was he so interested in religion? Because, he explained, it brought a sense of truth at long last into his life: a reality outside himself that he had vainly sought in purely human things. But love had not filled the void within; neither had psychiatry nor literature nor even his beloved writing. But Catholicism gave him peace of mind; just sitting alone in church did more for him than any novel, even Karamozov, ever had.

Did Jackson actually convert to Catholicism in 1955? The biographical traces become indistinct at this point. Neither the papers I have seen nor any other source reveals very much about his final years. In the late 1950s, it seems, Charles and Rhoda Jackson were living apart much of the time. This arrangement likely resulted from their separate jobs: he was in New York; she

was in New Haven working for the Yale Center of Alcohol Studies. About 1958, Jackson rented a one-room pied à terre in the Dakota, a famously elegant apartment building on West 72nd Street, facing Central Park. We know that he was still in Alcoholics Anonymous because the composer and diarist Ned Rorem, who was also attending A.A. at this time, mentions that the "star pupils of our meeting are Charlie Jackson and Bill I."--that is, William Inge, the playwright and fellow resident of the Dakota, with whom Jackson had become friendly.[22] When the Yale Center moved to Rutgers University about 1960, the Jacksons were reunited in New Brunswick, New Jersey, where he became "the chairman of the AA chapter."[23]

During this period, Jackson's literary production dropped off as his celebrity faded. In a 1960 letter, Rhoda mentioned that he had written his first new fiction in over six years. Three short stories did appear in McCall's Magazine during the early 1960s, and Jackson published an occasional review. But he was suffering from what he later described as a prolonged writer's block: "I thought I was a failure, that I had been a writer merely by accident and that it was all in the past. It didn't help to have people asking me, 'Why don't you write anymore?'"[24] Having nearly ceased to write, and thus to be published, Jackson sold used cars for a while to make a living.[25] He eventually reentered the broadcasting industry, serving for five years as the story editor for Kraft Television Theater: and he was also hired as a writing instructor at Rutgers University and the Bread Loaf Conference.

During Jackson's years of creative exhaustion, his health was also in decline. A recurrence of tuberculosis landed him in the sanitarium again. He had always been a heavy smoker too, and one lung was so damaged now that it had to be removed. But after a long recuperation, his prospects were finally improving. In a generous act of faith, Macmillan staked Jackson to an advance for a new book and set him up in the Chelsea Hotel to write it; and he "proceeded to unblock himself."[26] The vehicle for Jackson's literary come-back was A Second-Hand Life (1967), the novel he had started fifteen years before, when he had also written his last book of stories, Earthly Creatures (1953). A Second-Hand Life garnered $100,000 for paperback rights from the New American Library, and the Literary Guild made it an alternate selection.

These signs of popular favor were not matched by high critical esteem, however. If Jackson had harbored any hopes of recapturing his literary glory, he must have been sorely disappointed by the tepid notices. Granville Hicks, for example, opened his review by apologizing for once having compared The Lost Weekend invidiously to Under the Volcano: "I said in effect that Lowry need not have worried, because his was the better book and in time had been generally recognized as such. Well, that is true; but I could have praised Under the Volcano without seeming to disparage The Lost Weekend, which has its own kind of excellence." Comparably faint praise was all that Hicks could muster for A Second-Hand Life:

"another novel that, without being a literary masterpiece, deserves to be taken seriously."[27]

Jackson, meanwhile, looking "much younger than his sixty-four years, much healthier than his medical history would indicate, and much happier than his writer's block should have left him," puffed on a cigarette ("They only took out one lung," he quipped), smiled cheerfully, and spoke proudly of the enduring success of The Lost Weekend, which was still selling regularly in twenty-four languages. "There are two editions in this country right now," he noted. "It's always taken care of me: $24 from Greece here, and $16 from Finland there. It adds up."[28]

About a year later, on 21 September 1968, Charles Jackson ended his life with an overdose of sleeping pills. For the record, Carl Brandt, his literary agent, insisted that there had been no suicidal intent. At the time of his death, Jackson was working on Farther and Wilder, a sequel to The Lost Weekend that he had first contemplated writing in 1943--a novel, as he had told his brother then, that would trace Don Birnam's downward spiral to the bottom and then follow him back up. This would be, he thought, a far bigger and more valuable story that The Lost Weekend. Although Farther and Wilder remained unfinished, the story of recovery from alcoholism has nevertheless become a flourishing genre.

Since the 1940s, American writers have continued to produce some powerful stories of alcoholic disintegration, such as Natalie Anderson Scott's The Story of Mrs. Murphy (1947) or Richard Yates's Disturbing the Peace (1975). More common, however, have been "recovery narratives" that bear the influence of the so-called Alcoholism Movement and of Alcoholics Anonymous. Significant examples include: Thomas Randall, The Twelfth Step (1957)[29]; John Berryman, Recovery (1972); John Cheever, Falconer (1977); Donald Newlove, Sweet Adversity (1978), and Those Drinking Days (1981); Janet Campbell Hale, The Jailing of Cecelia Capture (1985); Ivan Gold, Sams in a Dry Season (1990); David Gates, Jernigan (1991). There are, in addition, two outstanding series of detective stories in which the protagonist's recovery from alcoholism is a recurrent plot device: the Matt Scudder novels of Lawrence Block and the Dave Robicheaux novels of James Lee Burke.

Numerous Hollywood films, some of them derived from popular plays or bestselling books, have also dealt explicitly with alcoholism. In several of these, too, Alcoholics Anonymous is represented explicitly as the means to "recovery": Come Fill the Cup (1952), Come Back, Little Sheba (1952), Something to Live For (1952), I'll Cry Tomorrow (1955), The Voice in the Mirror (1958), and Days of Wine and Roses (1962).[30]

The proliferation of such works in the immediate post-war period had much to do with the cumulative success of A.A., in which "recovery narratives" have always played an important part. But

Charles Jackson must also be credited with initiating in The Lost Weekend a major shift in the representation of alcoholism in American culture.[31]

NOTES

1 Charles Jackson, The Sunnier Side: Twelve Arcadian Tales (New York: Farrar, 1950) 37.

2 Because he had been writing so long without any success, Jackson was extremely conscious of his age when fame finally came his way. In a symposium of first novelists in 1944, he explained: "At sixteen I expected to make a real contribution to American letters, but at forty I know better. All I want is to be able to write, truly and well, stories that will hold the reader's interest and possibly tell him something about other people and maybe even about himself." "'Ifs' for the First Novelist," The Saturday Review of Literature. 27 (26 February 1944) 13.

3 Although much of what follows is based on the unpublished letters of Charles and Rhoda Jackson to Frederick Jackson, I am unable to include direct quotations because my requests for permission have, in effect, been denied: I received the silent treatment from Jackson's heirs and his literary agent. I have been left no choice, therefore, but to paraphrase, rather than quote from, manuscript material. I am nevertheless grateful to Philip N. Cronenwett, Dartmouth's Curator of Manuscripts, for his help and hospitality during my research trip there in June 1993.

4 The Sunnier Side, 56.

5 The flamboyantly gay nurse whom Don encounters in the hospital scene was called "George" in the original typescript of the novel. In changing this name to "Bim," Jackson was likely punning on his brother's nickname, "Boom." Because of tight censorship in Hollywood, none of the homosexual material in the novel could be allowed into the film. On the significance of this material, see my chapter on The Lost Weekend in The White Logic: Alcoholism and Gender in American Modernist Fiction, forthcoming from The University of Massachusetts Press, 1994.

6 Bruce Holley Johnson, "The Alcoholism Movement in America: A study in Cultural Innovation," Diss. University of Illinois 1973, 233-34, 387 n.67. As outlined in 1935, the year before Jackson's admission to Bellevue, Jolliffe's ambitious research program was "to consist of a substantial number of case histories focusing on physiological, psychological, and sociological variables. The initial stage of the project was to be a thorough review of the literature including all European and American publications for the past century." This review was ultimately conducted by E. M. Jellinek, who was to become the leading authority on the modern disease concept of alcoholism.

7 "Mary Morris Goes to See the Author of 'The Lost Weekend,'" New York World-Telegram. 10 March 1944, m10; clipping in the Charles Jackson Papers at Dartmouth.

8 The first manuscript page of the novel bears three dates--March 1939, 13 April 1941, July 1942--the first two of which probably represent the fourteen-month period of its composition. The significance of July 1942 is unclear, but that date may mark the completion of Jackson's revisions.

9 Publishers Weekly. Vol. 147 (10 March 1945) 1116. The designers of the ads for The Lost Weekend were honored by Publishers Weekly for their exceptional creativity.

10 New York Times, 30 January 1944, 7; The Saturday Review of Literature. 27 (29 January 1944) 5. The worst review was probably Diana Trilling's two-sentence dismissal of The Lost Weekend because of its "essentially unfruitful novelistic subject." See The Nation. 158 (12 February 1944) 195. Jackson admitted that he had been stunned by Trilling's negatively summary judgment--"so much so that it has shaken my confidence in the next book" (i.e. The Fall of Valor). "'Ifs' for the First Novelist," 13.

11 Clipping in the Charles Jackson Papers at Dartmouth, attached to his letter of 3 June 1944 to Frederick Jackson. Jackson apparently met Louella Parsons at a party given by Judy Garland the night before the column in which he is mentioned was published.

12 "Mary Morris Goes to See the Author of 'The Lost Weekend.'" m11.

13 "Editors' Preface" to The Lost Weekend. Time Reading Program Edition (New York: Time, 1963) xi.

14 Marjorie Adams, "Charles Jackson Amazed by Legends Now Surrounding Him," The Boston Daily Globe, 20 June 1945, 14; clipping in the Charles Jackson Papers at Dartmouth. In another interview, Jackson denied that The Lost Weekend was autobiographical, but admitted "that like many young men who grew up under prohibition he leaned on alcohol at times": "'As sprawling and vague as my career was at that time, I wanted to be a writer--and one day I looked up and realized it was interfering. So I quit. No tapering off. I just stopped.'" Current Biography 1944. ed. Anna Rothe (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1945) 325.

15 Maurice Zolotow, Billy Wilder in Hollywood (New York: Putnam, 1977) 132-33, 139.

16 Roger Forseth, "'Why Did They Make Such a Fuss': Don Birnam's Emotional Barometer," Dionysos. 3 (Spring 1991) 14. Forseth argues that although the movie version of The Lost Weekend "deserved all the awards it received," it missed "the somber power of the novel."

17 For a report of this event, see "Charles Jackson Speaks at Hartford A.A.," The A.A. Grapevine. 1 (January 1945) 3.

18 "Editors' Preface" to The Lost Weekend. xii.

19 The Sunnier Side, 66. Jackson went on to say: "But I got to thinking, why not? If I knew anything about necrophilia at all, if I knew anyone who did or had any experience of it, and if there was a good story to tell with such a background--one with a real relation to life, one that would perhaps tell us something about ourselves as well as about others--then good heavens why shouldn't I write a book about necrophilia?" (66).

20 Jackson's letters to Phyllis McGinley are owned by the George Arents Research Library, Syracuse University. Jackson's best story, in his opinion, was "The Boy Who Ran Away," collected in Earthly Creatures (New York: Farrar, 1953).

21 In Jackson's address to the Hartford A.A. group in November 1944, he asserted that "he was not and never had been a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. This occasion was, in fact, his first contact with the group at all." Later in the address, however, he said that he was "indebted to A.A. for one of the novel's most telling points. He referred to the phrase he used in the book which says that, for the alcoholic, 'one drink is too many and a hundred not enough.'" Charles Jackson Speaks at Hartford A.A.," 3.

22 The New York Diary of Ned Rorem (New York: Braziller, 1967), 145.

23 "Editors' Preface" to The Lost Weekend. xiii. Jackson traveled widely as an A.A. speaker, and he now admitted in print that he was an alcoholic. See, for example, his review of Alcoholism and Society (1962): "Now, it is not the authors' fault that this reviewer is an alcoholic himself; but this fact makes it difficult for me to be objective about their work." "Public Killer No. 3," Saturday Review. 45 (8 September 1962) 53.

24 Jackson quoted in J. Beatty's "Trade Winds" column, Saturday Review. 50 (2 September 1967) 7.

25 One of Jackson's last publications was How to Buy a Used Car (New York: Chilton, 1967). In an excerpt from this book that appeared a month before Jackson's death, he offered "tips on the best way to go about it, from a man who has spent many years as a salesman and sales manager in used-car marketing." "How to Buy a Used Car," Reader's Digest. 93 (August 1968) 93.

26 "Trade Winds," 7. Jackson also wrote an article about his experience. See "Chelsea Hotel," Holiday 43 (February 1968).

27 Granville Hicks, "Always-Willing Winifred," Saturday Review. 50 (12 August 1967) 23.

28 Jackson quoted in "Trade Winds," 7.

29 "Thomas Randall" is the pseudonym of a writer who wished to remain anonymous in accordance with A.A. traditions. Although Randall died in 1958, his anonymity is still being respected by his publisher, Charles Scribner's Sons. Perhaps the first American novel to detail the inner workings of A.A., The Twelfth Step remains the best depiction of the vicissitudes of early sobriety. It is also an interesting period piece about gender tensions and pressures for "conformity" during the 1950s.

30 See Robin Room, "Alcoholism and Alcoholics Anonymous in U.S. Films, 1945-1962: The Party Ends for the 'Wet Generations,'" Journal of Studies on Alcohol. 50 (July 1989) 368-83. Come Fill the Cup and Come Back, Little Sheba were based, respectively, on a novel by Harlan Ware (New York: Random, 1952) and a play by William Inge (New York: Random, 1950). I'll Cry Tomorrow was adapted from the confessional autobiography (New York: Frederick Fell, 1954) of the popular singer, Lillian Roth. J. P. Miller's screenplay for Days of Wine and Roses was later novelized by David Westheimer (New York: Bantam, 1963).

31 Just in time for the fiftieth anniversary of its publication, The Lost Weekend has recently gone out of print! One hopes that Carroll & Graf, the last publisher of record, will reissue it or that another publisher will now pick it up.

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E. NELSON HAYES, R I P

We are saddened by the news of the death of Nelson Hayes, who died of lung cancer at the age of 69. A graduate of Cornell University, Nelson taught at Union and Skidmore Colleges. He contributed articles to The Progressive and The New Leader, and book reviews to (among other periodicals) The New York Times Book Review and The Washington Post Book World. He was the author of Trackers of the Sky (Doyle 1968), If Your Child Is Handicapped (Porter Sargent 1969), and Man and Cosmos (Norton 1975). He edited Adult Children of Alcoholics Remember (Harmony 1989), which was reviewed in Dionysos (Winter 1990). Ivan Gold writes, "after years of struggle, [Nelson] achieved some extended sobriety toward the end of his life." Nelson Hayes will be missed.

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SAMUEL JOHNSON ON DRINKING

Robin N. Crouch

Among the many details about Johnson's personal life recorded by Boswell and the other early biographers are references to his drinking habits.[1] Johnson drank frequently in his youth, sometimes getting quite drunk, and then abstained almost completely for more than twenty years (1736-57), after which he began to drink again until 1765, when, says Johnson, after not being able to drink during an illness, he resolved to quit altogether. From 1765 to 1781, Johnson apparently drank little or nothing, and then, according to Boswell, Johnson began to drink again, "but not socially."[2] There is some question whether Johnson totally freed himself from alcohol during his periods of abstinence, for he mentions several times to Boswell that he often drank alone, though it is unclear when he makes these remarks whether he is referring to the past or the present. In 1776, during a supposed period of abstinence, Johnson says, "I require wine only when alone. I have then often wished for it, and often taken it." At any rate, it is evident, both from comments made by Johnson and from these alternating periods of drinking and abstinence, that Johnson struggled to some extent with the problem. He often notes in his prayers the need to cut down on wine, and Boswell explains to us more than once that Johnson could _abstain_ but not _moderate_.[3]

Johnson worried about his own drinking during the periods when he did drink, and he also worried about the drinking habits of at least two of his friends (Boswell and Reynolds). Thomas Gilmore in his article on Boswell's alcoholism notes that in 1778, when Johnson was abstaining, he urged Boswell time after time to give up drinking.[4] Gilmore believes that Johnson's remarks at this time about drinking, though not explicitly addressed to Boswell, had one central purpose: to discourage Boswell's over-indulgence. If this is the case, it may be that Johnson's frequent remarks during this period exaggerate Johnson's negative view of alcohol, since he was concerned about Boswell. But he also speaks, in a letter to Boswell, of Reynold's heavy drinking (_L_, 2: 292). One biographer has observed that "many of his friends were drunks";[5] this was certainly the case with Boswell and may have been true of Reynolds. Apparently, the wine flowed freely among the members of the Club; in most cases, the only one who drank water was Johnson.

Hibbert suggests that Johnson's attitude toward drinking was "equivocal" (171). I would say that this is an accurate remark only in relation to wine's effect on physical health, about which Johnson seemed unsure. The only instance in which Johnson recommends that someone drink occurs in two letters to Dr. Taylor: "Drink a great deal, and sleep heartily . . ." (_LJ_, 1: 316), he advises him in 1773, and in 1776 he observes, "I hope you persevere in drinking. My opinion is that I have drunk too little, and therefore have the gout . . ." (_LJ_, 2: 492). The earlier remark

may refer to Johnson's habitual insomnia. His momentary thought in this letter was perhaps that drinking more wine might have helped him to sleep. The remark about gout suggests that Johnson sometimes thought that wine was physically beneficial, but in most cases he advanced the opinion that wine was injurious.

One of the points we must keep in mind when evaluating Johnson's opinions on any subject is that many of his remarks occur in casual, extemporaneous circumstances. Naturally there will occur many inconsistencies. In the peculiar case of Johnson, whose conversation was recorded so extensively, quantity counts. The repetition of the same opinion several times would seem to indicate a settled opinion. But on the subject of the physical effects of wine, Johnson does seem unsure. He tells Edwards, "Come Sir, drink water, and put in for a hundred."[6] Thomas Tyers notes: "Of Addison and Pope he used to observe, perhaps to remind himself, that they ate and drank too much, and thus shortened their days" (JM, 2: 336).

Such equivocality, however, applies only to the physical effects of drinking. In general, Johnson disapproved of alcohol, but he also had a strong appreciation of the forces that drive a man to drink. The fact that there were alternating periods when he did drink in no way, he thought, invalidated the general view he held of the destructiveness of alcohol. A man's practice might be equivocal while his principles remained firm. On one occasion he became very upset when someone suggested that people could not be sincere in their beliefs who violated them in daily life:

> The Doctor grew warm, and said, "Sir, are you so grossly ignorant of human nature, as not to know that a man may be very sincere in good principles, without having good practice? (L, 5: 359-60)

Johnson's attitude toward the mental effects of drinking never varied: his practice sometimes did. This was one of the reasons he was tolerant of Boswell's excessive drinking. Rarely did Johnson censure Boswell or anyone else for drinking too much. Once at a crowded party, Boswell came in drunk and boisterous and made a fool of himself by asking Johnson questions in a loud voice. Johnson attempted to quiet him down, and a few days later, when Boswell apologized, Johnson "behaved with the most friendly gentleness" (L, 4: 110). On another occasion, when Boswell showed up at the Club the worse for drink, a man named Colman ("one who loved mischief," says Boswell) asked Johnson what Boswell had said to him in explanation of his conduct. Johnson replied, "Sir, he said all that a man should say: he said he was sorry for it" (L, 2: 436). But the most forceful example of his sympathy toward those who drank too much is shown in his reply to Anna Williams, who was disgusted that men could make such "beasts" of themselves by getting drunk: "I wonder, Madam, that you have not the penetration to see the strong inducement to this excess: for he who makes a

beast of himself gets rid of the pain of being a man."[7]

Johnson understood from personal experience the "strong inducement" toward drink. He abstained because he knew he would run the risk of becoming a heavy drinker: "Abstinence is as easy for me as temperance would be difficult."[8] He saw heavy drinkers all around him, and he also lived through the tragedy of his wife's alcoholism and opium addiction. It may be that one reason Johnson felt himself compelled to quit drinking was that his wife drank so much. A few years after her death in 1752, Johnson took up drinking again for awhile. At any rate, the problems his friends had with drinking showed emphatically that habit counted for much more than principles. Even Boswell held the principle that one should drink moderately, a principle he violated time after time.

Johnson never denied the pleasure of wine. On the contrary, he emphasized it. Arthur Murphy, who contributed some Johnsoniana after Johnson's death, related that Garrick quoted Johnson once as stating that the greatest pleasure in the world was "fucking, and the second was drinking."[9] This remark comes to us secondhand, and the language is very unJohnsonian, but the sentiment fits in with other remarks. "There is no doubt," said Johnson to Boswell, "that not to drink wine is a great deduction from life; but it may be necessary" (L, 3: 169). The argument one sometimes hears today, that one ought to be able to "get high on life" rather than drink (or drugs), implying that life is much more pleasant when one is sober than when one is drinking, is not advanced by Johnson. It would seem to him mere cant to deny the pleasure of wine or to exaggerate the pleasure of soberness. He went so far as to state that no man is ever happy in the present moment--that is, without recourse to imagining future possibilities or past felicities--"but when he is drunk" (L, 2: 351).

Why is drinking so pleasant? Johnson's answer is suggested by his reply (quoted above) to Anna Williams that there was a natural inescapable pain involved in being a man. To be a man (in the ungendered sense) is to be saddled with both a consciousness and a conscience. It is here that Johnson's opinions about drinking are linked to larger issues. What tempts a man to drink is not dependent necessarily upon contemporary social circumstances nor on personal circumstances. Drinking is pleasant because man is the way he is; the lure of drink is a permanent and perennial temptation. Of course, there are certain individuals who never feel any temptation to drink, just as there are others who drink moderately with no ill effects. Johnson thought that the decision to drink or not rested with the individual; the problem was that the individual often made such an unwise choice. A man might convince himself that he was the sort of man who could drink moderately, when in fact he was, like Boswell, a congenital alcoholic:

> One man may drink wine, and be nothing the worse for it; on

> another wine may have effects so inflammatory as to injure him both in body and mind, and perhaps, make him commit something for which he may deserve to be hanged. (L, 3: 58)

But generally speaking, the desire for wine was fed by what Johnson called "the vacuity of life," a central tenet in his psychology of man. Man's mind is so put together that it seems at odds with reality. "The hunger of imagination,"[10] which constantly reaches out beyond reality, makes him desire more than reality can provide: more pleasure, more variety, and more interest. For this reason, people feel a vacuity, a constant lack, which creates boredom and restlessness and, if acute enough, can cause melancholy. Drinking helps to palliate this lack by making man less self-conscious and, indeed, less conscious. Johnson remarks that his tendency when he did drink was to drink alone, in order "to get rid of myself, to send myself away" (L, 3: 327). By reducing the level of consciousness, a man can also reduce the feeling of vacuity.

Johnson also says that "wine makes a man better pleased with himself" (L, 3: 327). The reduction in consciousness caused by wine also reduces the tendency man has to perceive a great gap between the ideal and the real. "It was," says Johnson, "a most mortifying reflexion for any man to consider, _what he had done_, compared with what _he might have done_" (L, 2: 129). Such a reflection, thought Johnson, was true generally of people, no matter what level of worldly success or right conduct they may be said to have achieved, for whatever they do achieve, one can be sure that it is far from the ideal. There is no approaching the ideal, because man is both naturally indolent and morally bad. "Children are always cruel. Savages are always cruel. Pity is acquired and improved by the cultivation of reason" (L, 1: 437). Asked if no man was naturally good, he replied, "No, Madam, no more than a wolf" (L, 5: 211). But despite the savage nature of man, he is endowed with a conscience, which makes him very much aware of his shortcomings, his cruelty, and his selfishness. Not only is there a vacuity in life; there is also one in man: a vacuity of virtue. It is small wonder that drinking, if it can do away with conscience, gives pleasure. In this regard, Johnson makes one of his most poignant remarks about drinking. After arguing for a time against Boswell's and Reynolds' standard defense of drinking, Johnson says: "And yet we must do justice to wine; we must allow it the power it possesses. To make a man pleased with himself, let me tell you, is doing a very great thing" (L, 3: 328).

It is instructive, I think, to compare Johnson's argument with contemporary popular slogans, such as the idea that people take to drink and drugs (and even crime) because of a lack of "self-esteem" and that in order to break or prevent these habits, we must inculcate self-esteem in such individuals. Johnson agrees that the lack of self-esteem is one of the reasons people drink; what he does not believe is that "self-esteem" is a quality that can be

dished out by parents or educators or social workers. Men lack self-esteem innately: to give a person self-esteem is in one sense to render a man less conscious.

But here we must make a distinction. Self-esteem in the modern sense has, or seems to have, two slightly different meanings. It can mean having a good opinion of oneself in comparison to other people or groups of people (we hear much about certain minorities having low self-esteem). But it is also sometimes a synonym for "self-respect," which is not quite the same thing. Self-respect is a matter of not committing indignities against oneself. If a man has self-respect, he will not allow himself to become dependent upon alcohol. It is a sign of a lack of self-respect--i.e., respect for one's own person--to become drunk.

Johnson would agree, I think, with the significance of the distinction and the importance of self-respect. He always felt ashamed of being drunk, even while he was drunk, which is why he preferred to drink alone. "I have drunk many a bottle by myself," he says, " . . . because I would have nobody witness its effects upon me" (L, 3: 42). He said that when he was young, "I used to slink home, when I had drunk too much" (L, 3: 389). But Johnson did not believe that self-esteem (as opposed to self-respect) was such a desirable quality. It was undoubtedly a pleasant quality, and wine induced it. But self-esteem in the sense of a favorable opinion of oneself, especially in comparison to others, could lead only to an ignorant conceitedness or to envy, since the positive comparison to others would often tend over time to collapse. I think Johnson would say that the deliberate attempt to inculcate self-esteem was another way of making a man drunk, not on wine, but on a foolish view of his own importance. We might note also that the most successful program against alcoholism in modern times, that of Alcoholics Anonymous, does not, in its twelve step program, mention "self-esteem." The emphasis is on self-knowledge and humility.[11]

But despite the great pleasure of drinking, Johnson disapproved of it and attempted to practice abstinence. He did so not because wine was physically unhealthy; nor did he do so because drinking was a waste of time. The vacuity of life, after all, had to be filled up, and if it were not for the bad effects of wine, one might as well fill it up in part by drinking as any other way. The fact was that "few people had intellectual resources enough to forego the pleasures of wine. They could not otherwise contrive how to fill the interval between dinner and supper" (L, 2: 130). The penalty of complete idleness was melancholy, and in order to combat melancholy, one ought to be busy doing anything at all --except drinking (L, 3: 5). "Let him take a course of chymistry, or a course of rope-dancing, or a course of anything . . . "(L, 2: 440).

For the great problem of drinking was that it interfered with one's reason. "In proportion," Johnson says, "as drinking makes a man different from what he is before he has drunk, it is bad, because it has so far affected his reason" (L, 5: 325). Johnson very much feared insanity, feared it almost as much as the possible annihilation of death. The two fears are, in fact, related. To lose one's reason is to lose a stable consciousness, and an unstable consciousness is but one step away from an annihilated consciousness. If Johnson was an empiricist, he was also a rationalist. Voitle, in his examination of Johnson's moral philosophy, identifies him as an empiricist in epistemology but as a "rationalist in morals."[12] Reason seemed to him such a central part of consciousness that it was impossible to imagine one without the other. What Johnson desired was full consciousness. That was another reason for not drinking: a drunken man could not learn. One has a choice, he said: "Abstemiousness and knowledge, or claret and ignorance" (L, 3: 335).

Hawkins suggests that Johnson stopped drinking at the age of twenty-seven after reading Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy (H 122), in which the relationship between insanity, melancholy, and drinking is discussed.[13] Having been melancholic all his life, Johnson felt apparently that drink was simply an additional step toward insanity. The addictive nature of drink was in his case, he thought, especially dangerous, because "I inherited . . . a vile melancholy from my father, which has made me mad all my life, at least not sober" (L, 5: 215). The decrease of consciousness caused by wine was thus associated in his mind with insanity and, ultimately, with annihilation. It was better not to engage in that great pleasure, for anything was better than the loss of consciousness. In response to Miss Seward's remark that the "dread of annihilation," which is a "pleasing sleep without a dream," is "certainly absurd," Johnson said:

> It is neither pleasing, nor sleep; it is nothing. Now mere existence is so much better than nothing, that one would rather exist even in pain, than not exist. (L, 3: 295-96)

Hawkins suggests that Johnson abstained from wine for "religious motives" (JM, 1: 209), although he admits that Johnson always denied this. Hill comments in a note that "religious motives had nothing to do with it" (209, n. 7). Of course, there is a sense in which all motives, for a devout person, are in the last analysis religious; but Hill, I think, is right. The direct motives for Johnson's not drinking were purely prudential, having to do not with religion but psychology. And this might be said of many of Johnson's other opinions as well. Johnson was no puritan. He loved pleasure and thought that any pleasure, other things being equal, was in itself a good.[14] The problem with drink was that other things were not equal. The loss, compared to the gain of pleasure, was too great.

Thomas Gilmore, whose work in the area of alcohol in relation to literary figures has been extensive, calls Boswell's attitude toward drink "modern" and Johnson's "postmodern."[15] What Gilmore means is that there has been a gradual shift in the twentieth century toward a more negative view of drinking (particularly in regard to writers). If modernism was "the age of literary alcoholism" (many heavy-drinking authors come to mind), then postmodernism is an age in which the effects of alcoholism on writing and on one's mental condition are severely questioned. Boswell and Johnson represent the extremes of two extensively recorded views about the effects of alcohol. Boswell often argues in favor of drinking (moderate, of course), offering standard defenses such as that wine tended to make a man tell the truth (in vino veritas), or that wine-drinking encouraged benevolent hospitality and companionship, or that wine improved one's conversation.[16] Johnson responds to each of these arguments vigorously and often humorously. In response to in vino veritas, Johnson says that "I would not keep company with a fellow . . . whom you must make drunk before you can get a word of truth out of him." In regard to benevolent companionship, Johnson says that

> all this notion about benevolence arises from a man's imagining himself to be of more importance to others, than he really is. Thy don't care a farthing whether he drinks wine or not. (L 3: 327-28)

As to the third argument, Johnson states that wine did not improve a man's conversation. It only made a man "not sensible of his defects" (L, 3: 41).

Throughout all these discussions, one gets the feeling, as one so often does in the Life, that Boswell is not quite whole-hearted in his defense of wine, even though it concerns something very significant in his life. Boswell is arguing to hear Johnson talk about wine. Being an alcoholic, Boswell would never be able to give up drinking as a result of being convinced by a logical argument. It matters not how effectively his arguments are refuted by Johnson, for he himself sees through his own arguments. He knows his defense of drinking is defeated from the beginning because it is based upon the proviso that one drink moderately, and Boswell almost always drank excessively. He knows this, but in the peculiar manner of the alcoholic, he can put this fact about himself out of his mind the moment he is tempted to drink. Gilmore states in "James Boswell's Drinking" that "Boswell may be regarded as the earliest alcoholic of historical record" (338). And Gilmore characterizes Johnson as follows:

> No important thinker before the advent of Alcoholics Anonymous subjected the attractions of drinking to such skeptical and damaging attention as did Johnson. (Spirits 175)

The eighteenth century's attitude toward drinking was not that

of the twentieth century. Heavy drinking was more usual (especially in Scotland); drunkenness was not quite as shameful as it is often considered today. Johnson's views were unusual for his time, though his attitude toward the physical effects of drinking were, like that of his age, equivocal. But Johnson turned his empirical eye on the scene of his daily life and saw, in the alcoholism of his wife and his friends, a disintegration of life rather than a pleasant heightening. He turned his eye upon himself and saw a man who, with very little encouragement, might have drunk himself into a stupor every night. What Johnson said of indolence can almost as validly be said of drinking: it is "in every man's power."[17] It takes no special qualifications to drink and very little money. It is easy to do and pleasant to do, and therefore is likely to be done with more and more frequency. As Johnson realized, man's nature is such that he was liable to be tempted to drink.

The subject of alcohol in relation to the opinions and habits of literary figures has not been studied extensively. Some might consider it a rather pedestrian topic. But to read Johnson and Boswell is to study, among other things, the psychology of common life. Unlike many other writers, Johnson and Boswell were interested in pedestrian as well as purely intellectual matters. Boswell is constantly apologizing for including what he calls "trifles," but his literary instinct told him that such trifles were valuable. The reason they are valuable is due to Johnson's conversational and Boswell's literary skills. Johnson and Boswell do not merely _mention_ everyday affairs--Pepys, after all, does that: they _analyze_ them by illustrating the basic and perennial human motives behind them. This is why Johnson's opinions are not dated. It is also why Johnson's and Boswell's works are, as Johnson said of his favorite genre (biography), books that we can "turn to use" (_L_, 5: 79).

NOTES

1 In this essay, the following short titles will be used. Volume and page numbers appear in text.

_H_ Hawkins, Sir John, _The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D._. ed. Bertram H. Davis (New York: MacMillan, 1961).

_J_ _The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson_. ed. W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss (New Haven: Yale U P, 1962).

_JM_ _Johnsonian Miscellanies_. ed. George Birkbeck Hill (New York: Barnes, 1966).

_L_ _Boswell's Life of Johnson: Together with Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides and Johnson's Diary of a Journey into North Wales_, ed. George Birkbeck Hill, rev. L. F. Powell, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1934).

_LJ_ _The Letters of Samuel Johnson_. ed. R. W. Chapman, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952).

2 L, 4: 72. For a summary of Johnson's alternating periods of drinking and abstinence, see L, 1: 103, n.3. Also see W. Jackson Bates, Samuel Johnson (New York: Harcourt, 1975) 409; and Charles E. Pierce, The Religious Life of Samuel Johnson (Hamden: Archon, 1983) 98.

3 L, 1: 468, 3: 327, 4: 72; JM 1: 25, 28.

4 Thomas B. Gilmore, "James Boswell's Drinking," Eighteenth Century Studies 24 (1991): 348.

5 Christopher Hibbert, The Personal History of Samuel Johnson (New York: Harper, 1971) 51.

6 L, 3: 306. Gilmore suggests that Johnson made this remark for the benefit of Boswell, who was present ("Boswell" 348).

7 Rev. Percival Stockwell's anecdotes, JM, 2: 333.

8 Hannah More's anecdotes, JM, 2: 197.

9 Qtd. in Hibbert 68.

10 Rasselas, J, 16 ch. 32. For an in-depth discussion of this concept, see W. Jackson Bate, The Achievement of Samuel Johnson (New York: Oxford, 1955) ch. 2.

11 Alcoholics Anonymous: The Story of How Many Thousands of Men and Women Have Recovered from Alcoholism (New York: A.A. World services, 1976): 59-60. Quoted in Thomas B. Gilmore, Equivocal Spirits: Alcoholism and Drinking in Twentieth Century Literature (Chapel Hill: U of N Carolina P, 1987) 187, n. 7.

12 Robert Voitle, Samuel Johnson the Moralist (Cambridge: Harvard U P, 1961) 12.

13 See also George Irvin, Samuel Johnson: A Personality in Conflict (New Zealand: Oxford U P, 1971) 72-73.

14 Johnson also says that pleasure and happiness are to be sharply distinguished (L, 2: 245-46). For a discussion of Johnson's concept of pleasure, see Voitle 144ff.

15 Spirits 172-75.

16 L, 2: 188, 3: 327-28, 3: 41.

17 Rambler #155, J, 4: 64.

TWO UNFINISHED BEERS: A NOTE ON DRINKING IN HEMINGWAY'S "HILLS LIKE WHITE ELEPHANTS"

Ellen Lansky

Many readers and critics have read Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants" as a story about abortion, but until now, no one has read "Hills Like White Elephants" as a story about alcoholic drinking.[1] I contend that readers do not register much response to the alcoholic drinking in this story because the characters are drinking beer. Beer, along with "alcohol, brandy, whiskey, rum, gin, ale, porter, and wine . . . containing one-half of one percentum or more of alcohol by volume,"[2] was specifically prohibited in the Volstead Act, but its presence in this story as an alcoholic beverage has gone largely unremarked by readers. Apparently for these readers beer is insignificant in this story--or less significant than the "setting" or "the bead curtain" or the multifaceted signifying function of "white elephant." Nevertheless, beer drinking has specific signifying functions as well as specific effects on the drinkers. As several beers appear on the table and disappear into the bodies of the characters, the characters become less and less articulate, more and more disembodied and ethereal--ultimately silent. This is a specifically alcoholic effect, whether it is produced by large doses of absinthe or whiskey or beer or any other alcoholic drink. It is dangerous to minimize, marginalize, or invisibilize alcoholic drinking--especially when alcoholic drinking produces the alcoholic cardiomyopathy (heartache) and the shortness of breath (inarticulation and disempowering silence) that the characters in this story (and people in "real life") experience.

One reason for the marginalization of beer drinking is that the alcohol content (or percent proof) of beer is much less than the percent proof of, say, whiskey or absinthe. In Hemingway's story, the presence of absinthe and absinthe drinking has garnered some recent critical attention in Doris Lanier's article "The Bittersweet Taste of Absinthe in Hemingway's 'Hills Like White Elephants'." Lanier's approach is to present the history of absinthe and absinthe drinking in such a way that it becomes demonized--the bane of fin de siecle and early twentieth century Europe. Lanier's focus on the alcoholic and narcotic properties of absinthe ignores the other alcoholic drink in this story: beer. Evidently, for Lanier, absinthe is a narcotic, therefore signifying "danger" or "evil," but beer is recreational, sportive.[3] It does not signify "alcoholism" or even "danger" as absinthe does, perhaps because the percent proof of beer is not as high. This is an extremely common response to beer and wine drinking--that fermented alcoholic drinks are harmless and beer or wine drinking is not dangerous, but distilled alcoholic drinks and drinking signify "danger" or "a drinking problem." Even in scientific inquiries of alcohol and alcoholism, the relative toxicity of fermented drinks

and distilled drinks is unresolved. Although Jean Charles Sournia notes that in France "by 1920 . . . it was accepted that the medical distinction made between fermented and distilled drink was spurious and had no pathological basis; of sole importance was the quantity of alcohol ingested,"[4] Agarwal and Goedde contend that "ethanol in distilled spirits is absorbed much more rapidly than the ethanol contained in wines and beers."[5] What this means is that distilled drinks will make one drunker faster, but the alcohol in fermented drinks or in distilled drinks ultimately has the same metabolic and metaphoric effects upon the drinker.

Discussing alcohol, metabolism, and metaphor is a complicated task in itself, and the metabolic and metaphoric effects of alcoholic drinking in Hemingway's story complicate it from beginning to end. In "Hills," Hemingway poses a complicated narrative task: how to write about two people drinking and arguing about an abortion without once using the words "pregnant" or "abortion." First, he sets the story in a train terminal in summertime Spain. The characters sit outside at a table, drinking and having a discussion about a "perfectly simple operation." As they sit at the table, the man remarks "It's pretty hot," and the narrator notes that "it was very hot" (211). Then Hemingway presents a scene that simultaneously reveals certain "bodily functions" (like drinking beer and absinthe) and suppresses others. No one vomits, goes to the bathroom, sweats, or even complains--beyond remarking that "it's hot." It seems unlikely and unrealistic that an articulating subject in a body--a human being--could sit in the hot Spanish sun drinking beer and absinthe, bickering, pregnant and indecisive and not register some kind of acute corporeal discomfort. But that's the rub right there. Hemingway has constructed for her a body that begins to disappear as it metabolizes alcohol. Alcohol has a solvent effect on her body. Sitting in that hot sun drinking beer and absinthe, she becomes a talking spirit, an ethereal voice--a fume. Hemingway's girl becomes non-corporeal; she's talking alcohol.

At the story's close, the girl's "perfectly simple" responses to the man's questions signify alcoholic drinking that results in an acutely heartwrenching and painful silence. After they have had several rounds of drinks and several rounds of argumentative exchanges about the "perfectly simple operation," their discussion takes on the flailing quality of a boxing match in which both fighters are too punch-drunk to connect and finish off the opponent. Finally, the girl says to the man "'Would you please please stop talking?'" (214). Saying "please" seven times in a row is a feat of articulation for someone who is irritated, hot, pregnant, and drunk. This feat finally exhausts both the girl and the man. Weakly, he tries to protest that he doesn't "want [her] to . . . [he doesn't] care anything about it" (214). She replies, "'I'll scream'" (214), but at this point it is clear to both characters and the reader that she hasn't the breath for it. The man gets up, moves their bags, and drinks another Anis in the

barroom. Then he returns to the table, which has become an "operating table," evocative of the "patient etherised on a table" image Eliot uses in the first stanza of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." Certainly the two characters (and perhaps the author as well) go to great lengths to "drape" all but the desired bits of the body of discourse they wish to expose, examine, and operate on. He asks her (in "post-op" tones), "'Do you feel better?'" (214). She smiles prettily and says to him, "I feel fine" (214). In "Hills Like White Elephants," the word "fine" functions much like the repetition of "please" earlier. Beyond "polite discourse," "fine" is a terminal signifier that shuts down further inquiry. She says she feels fine, but how can she--given the emotional and physiological circumstances? The image of this girl (s)willing herself to a fine silence is especially disturbing when one leaps ahead a few decades to find the story's author with a shotgun in his mouth, feeling fine in Idaho. Nevertheless, "fine" is her last word, Hemingway's final word; there is nothing more to say. The story is over, but the conflict is not resolved. On the table are two unfinished beers.

NOTES

1 Ernest Hemingway, "Hills Like White Elephants," The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway (New York: Scribners, 1987) 211-214. Page numbers in the text refer to this edition.

2 Robert O'Brien and Morris Chafetz, M.D., Encyclopedia of Alcoholism (New York: Facts on File, 1982) 209.

3 Doris Lanier, "The Bittersweet Taste of Absinthe in Hemingway's 'Hills Like White Elephants'," Studies in Short Fiction. 26 (1989): 281.

4 Jean Charles Sournia, A History of Alcoholism (Cambridge, MA: Basil, 1990) 71.

5 D. P. Agarwal and H. W. Goedde, Alcohol Metabolism, Alcohol Intolerance, and Alcoholism: Biochemical and Pharmacogenetic Approaches (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1990) 7.

THE PEARL OF PUGET SOUND

Peter Donahue

Ellen watched people walk past on the sidewalk beneath the bright movie marquee lights. She stood before the _Now Showing_ poster, which pictured a blurred naked couple embracing, the movie's title, _L'Amour Oblique_, below them. When it became clear Bruce wasn't going to show, she wondered why she even bothered, why she let this kind of thing happen to her--_Low self-esteem?_--and returned to the bus stop.

There, a young guy in round glasses, wearing a blue shell jacket with a knapsack over his shoulder, shuffled up to her. After pacing past her, his awkwardness painfully obvious, he asked, "You live downtown?" Ellen groaned something under her breath and continued to stare up the block, watching for the #74 bus to appear from the heavy traffic along University Avenue. "I live here in the U-District," he went on. Ellen raised her hand to her mouth and gave a thick cough, then stepped off the curb into the road to get a better view. The student--that's what Ellen guessed he was--came closer. "I'm visiting a friend downtown."

"That's good," she said and refused him any further response. After the night she was having, she had little patience for some college boy's puppy advances. She retreated to the bus stop shelter and crossed her arms. The #71 or #72 would do fine, she thought, as long as a bus came along and she didn't have to wait. When at last her bus did arrive, huge black tires screeching against the curb, she moved aside and let the student board first. Then she stepped up, flashed her transfer slip at the driver, and took a seat toward the rear. Several seats in front of her, the student rummaged through his knapsack, opened a book, and began to read.

Ellen watched the back of his head a moment and then rested the side of her forehead against the scratched plexiglass window and gazed out. The bus rattled over the iron grating of the University Bridge and made its way down Eastlake Boulevard, stopping every few blocks to let on or let off a passenger. Watching, brooding, chin wedged in her palm, she could feel all the old, familiar impulses. She knew just what she wanted--to find some rowdy bar, latch onto a guy with money to burn, score some toot, stay out all night, get messed up, do a throw beneath the sheets, and stagger home by noon. She was, after all, a creature of habit.

She rubbed her eyes with the heel of her palm and silently began to recite the Serenity Prayer, "God grant me the serenity to--" and stopped short. "Fuck em," she muttered out loud, falling back on the shortened version of the prayer a 300-pound biker at the Fremont group taught her. She repeated it--"Fuck em"--and this

time the student in the blue shell jacket twisted around, gave her a quick troubled look, and turned back to his book.

The next morning at quarter to nine, she stepped off the passenger elevator into the lobby, passed the wall of small mailboxes with their tarnished brass doors, and entered the dusty office of the Cornelius Arms. As the apartment building's office secretary, she'd been instructed by Warren--her brother, employer, and landlord--to "be on time each morning and dress professionally." She preferred instead dressing comfortably. She wore a pink button-down shirt she'd found for $2 at St. Vincent DePaul and a pair of tight, black Levi's tucked into the snakeskin boots a long-gone boyfriend once bought her in Nevada.

After pulling up the front window blinds to let the morning light into the paneled office, she pressed the red button on the answering machine and leaned her shoulder against the wall. The first message was someone asking about apartment rates, while the second was Warren, his voice sounding like a school principal's, telling her to make out a debit sheet on every tenant who had been a week or more late on rent within the past three years. What it mattered to him, she couldn't figure. Most likely it concerned the recent disputes Warren was having with tenants. No one knew better than her how he neglected the building, raked in thousands every month from rents and gave almost nothing back for maintenance, to say nothing of actual improvements.

She opened the center drawer of the desk in the middle of the room and pulled out a brown, hard-bound ledger. Since Warren was too cheap to invest in a computer for the office, the single ledger contained nearly all the building's accounts. She dropped it onto the desk with a thud and went into the back, separated from the front by two plywood and frosted-glass partitions, where her brother, and their father before him, kept an office more or less for show--since she was the one who really ran the building. On the back wall hung two mass-produced prints of fishing vessels in rough, dark seas. In the center of the room stood an oak desk as big as a double bed, while in one corner there was a metal file cabinet and in the opposite corner a small refrigerator. Ellen removed a plastic water jug and a cellophane packet of coffee from the refrigerator and returned up front to the coffeemaker on the side credenza. Inspecting the brown-stained carafe, she considered a moment before concluding it wasn't yet grungy enough to rinse--especially since she hadn't yet had her morning dose of caffeine. Chemical dependents, she reflected as she poured the water into the machine, were geniuses at making allowances for little things like cleanliness.

For the past week the coffee maker had been a sharp point of contention between her and Warren. Devoutly Mormon, as was her whole family, Warren at first forbid her from drinking coffee in the office. "The smell turns my stomach," he told her, though he

spent less than an hour in the office on any given day. The prohibition was his way of making her abstain. Hot drinks are not for the body or belly. says the Prophet in The Doctrine and Covenants. So to have her coffee, she would close the office and walk down the block to the Unique Cafe, and later on if Warren asked where she was, she lied and told him she was showing apartments. Then last week a tenant bolted on two-months' overdue rent and left behind, among other junk, a nearly brand new Mr. Coffee. Ellen snatched it and the next morning she and Warren wrangled over whether it could stay in the office or not. The argument lasted all morning but finally, acting all put out, Warren said she could keep the machine provided she kept it spotless, and most of all, odorless.

A real saint, she thought and poured her first cup of the day --the first of eight or so she consumed every day. Though she knew she drank way too much coffee, she also knew it was better than in the past when she drank herself into "hospital hangovers"--her ex-husband's term for the two times she went to the Emergency Room after all-night parties--or jammed cocaine into her rear-end because her nose bled too much.

She moved her lips over the hot rim of her cup and sat down at the desk. She was about to open the ledger and get to work when one of the building's managers, the latest in a long series of turnovers, entered the office after tapping on the open door. A pair of gold-rimmed sunglasses were pushed up over his forehead and a leather tool belt sagged about his skinny waist. Humming aloud, he nodded to Ellen and strolled past her straight to the coffee maker.

"Good morning," he said finally as he filled his red-and-white Circle K mug.

"Hey."

Since he'd been the one to tip her off about the Mr. Coffee in the first place, she didn't mind him helping himself. From what she could tell in the six weeks he'd worked at the Cornelius, he pretty much kept to himself, the quiet type, though a sneer was always about his mouth and his grey-green eyes seemed always on the look-out. And while he sloughed off plenty, he usually got his work done. "I'll be in 518 most of the morning fixing that sink," he informed her and sucked at the small hole in the lid of his mug. "Joe should be around if you need anything." He stepped in front of the desk and fiddled with the pens and pencils in their holder.

"If he's not drunk," Ellen said back. Last week she went by Joe's first floor apartment and found his door open. Poking her head in, she discovered the 50-year-old co-manager passed out on the floor, his pants unbuttoned and his shirt thrown open so his flabby gut hung out. She helped him off the floor and into bed,

and later wondered if some people ever hit bottom.

"What can I say?" Curtis said.

"Well, when do you think you'll be done?" She knew if he said noon he would probably finish by three or four.

Curtis considered his watchless wrist. "It's hard to say. Sometime this afternoon." He glanced at her across the desk, raised his mug, and left.

When Bruce called a little after eleven he said he was at work at the bank and couldn't talk long. Ellen heard out his excuses and apologies, and hung up on him. When he called back two minutes later, she called him an ass and asked if he stood up all his dates. But after he continued to reason with her and explained what had happened--something about a family emergency, though everything was okay now--she agreed to meet him for dinner in Pioneer Square.

At noon, after showing two apartments, she poured herself a third cup of coffee and began leafing through an article in Cosmopolitan on why women can make a commitment and men can't, when Warren strode into the office. "Is this what you do all day?" he said to her and set his briefcase on the floor.

She closed the magazine and slid it under the ledger. "If I told you no, it wouldn't do any good."

It was like talking to her father. Since the old man died five years ago, Warren routinely took on the parent role with her, and while she always resented the hell out of him for it, she knew she could play her part all to well--at least, that is, until she sobered up. Since then Warren's attitude toward her was just plain annoying.

"I don't know, Ellen, I honestly don't." He went into the back office and continued to talk to her from there. "I suppose it would help if I saw you do something once in a while. Have you compiled that list?"

"I was getting to it."

"Have you shown any apartments?"

"Two." She sat rigidly at the desk, her thin hands folded before her, as Warren planted himself in the doorway between the two partitions.

"Well?" he began.

"Well what?"

"Are they rented? Did you put anyone on a lease?"

She pushed her chair back from the desk, stepped past him to the credenza, and poured herself more coffee. "Noooo," she whined, sounding even to herself like a peevish thirteen-year-old. "I didn't. One guy said he'd call back tomorrow." She faced off with her brother. "There's a glut of apartments, Warren, in case you haven't noticed. For rent signs everywhere."

"Maybe so, little sister, but it's still your job to lease these apartments. If anyone walks in, even just to look, they should walk out with their name on a lease. It's called doing business. We rent apartments or we get out of the business. Father could have told you that."

Ellen took a good look at her brother, his grey pin-striped suit, wispy haircut, weak chin, small pointy nose. He was far more a slum-lord than their father had ever been.

"I gave you the job, Ellen, because I thought you could handle it."

"Thanks for the vote of confidence," she returned, fed up with his daily suggestion that he, the selfless brother, was making every sacrifice so she, the family black sheep, could have another chance. The truth was, he only cared about making a buck and guarding the sacred family name from any smear she might bring it--such as the time, just seventeen, she came home with a black and red yin-yang sign tattooed on the back of her right shoulder, or a year later when she stole her father's Buick for a run across the mountains to Ellensburg--to see a town with her same name--and on the way back swerved it into a ditch. Her father yelled at her for the incident and even suggested she go to school in Montana to get her life together. Yet Warren, recently returned from his mission in Switzerland, advanced from the Aaronic to Melchizedek priesthood, and about to start Brigham Young University in the fall, he blamed her for every sin under heaven, called her a slut and advised the family to disown her.

"I don't want to argue," Warren said and retreated into the office and closed the door. Through the frosted glass, Ellen could see his silhouette before the file cabinet. She sat down and opened the rent ledger. It wasn't even noon, yet she wanted a drink bad--two or three even, shots of Cuervo with beer chasers. As soon as Warren left she could close the office and drop by the Frontier Room, an old hang-out where the drinks were cheap and the bartender looked after you.

Or she could find a meeting.

She reached for her purse beneath the desk and took out the pocket-sized AA schedule with the encircled triangle on the front cover--the same emblem as on the six-month coin she was presented several weeks ago. Flipping through the schedule, she found an open meeting at the Tropicana Inn at four-thirty. When Warren stepped forward, she was startled. "What's that?" he asked and watched her slip the booklet back into her purse.

She dropped her purse on the floor and looked up. At first she didn't answer, then said, "An AA schedule."

Warren sighed and lifted his overcoat off the coatrack in the corner. "If you came to Temple once in a while, you might not need to hang out with those drunks."

She pushed the ledger away from her. "I guess I like being around my own kind."

Her brother's scorn for the program despite the Church's prohibition on drinking was nothing new to her. Her father had been a bishop with the Latter Day Saints and Warren was next in line. Church elders wanted him to bring her back into the fold, and as a favor to him, the Council agreed to hold off excommunicating her, hence casting her into eternal outer darkness, until he gave it his best effort--which was why he badgered her to go to Temple. Yet as they both knew, eventually church business would move forward and, regardless of what happened with her, Warren would be ordained. And the sooner he got to be bishop, the sooner he could campaign for Stake President, followed by High Councilor, then High Priest, and someday maybe even Prophet.

"It's absurd to be going to these meetings, and so soon after leaving the hospital. How long has it been? Five months?"

"Eight," she corrected him. "And it was a recovery center, not a hospital." She told herself to just let it go, let it go. Still, she added, "They told us to go to meetings. It's the whole point." In fact, fresh from the spin-dry, she did 90 meetings in 90 days, which was the only way she survived those first excruciating months of blessed sobriety.

"I want the eviction notices posted this afternoon," he ordered, changing the subject as if she hadn't said a word. He pointed to the brown ledger on the desk. "I also want you to start keeping a duplicate. I don't like there being just the one."

Exasperated, Ellen shook her head and tucked a stray hair behind her ear. Warren picked up his briefcase from the floor and left the office without another word. Through the front window, she watched as he double-bleeped the alarm system on his silver Saab parked at the curb, tossed his briefcase onto the passenger seat as he climbed behind the wheel, revved the engine twice, and

raced away. She kept staring out the window until, realizing a strong craving for ice cream was upon her, she locked the office and went to lunch.

Later in the afternoon Curtis leaned past the door and announced, "I have to run out to Pay 'n Pak for a loop joint. That sink's giving me trouble." Ellen glanced at the wall clock--2:50. "I'm going to need some cash too."

"Can't you charge it across the street?" she asked, since the Cornelius Arms had an account at the small hardware store across Third Avenue.

"I checked already. They don't have the right piece."

Ellen thought a moment and watched Curtis run his hand through his thick, dusty hair. "Okay," she said and reached into the bottom drawer of the desk for the metal cash box. Using a tiny key from her keychain (Turn it over--the phrase, so familiar lately from meetings, ran through her head) she opened the box and handed Curtis a twenty.

He stuffed the bill in his pants' pocket, winked, and was gone. Ellen then set about compiling the list Warren wanted, but after the fifth name, since nearly every tenant paid rent late at some point or another, she gave up. Warren wouldn't return to the Cornelius anyhow once he left his law office farther downtown. Instead he would head straight back to his fancy lake-front home in Bellevue. So the list could wait. She could finish it in the morning and post the notices then too. A day of grace, the way she figured it, never hurt anyone.

After reading a couple more articles from Cosmopolitan and rearranging the contents of the desk, she put the ledger away, drew the blinds closed, and flicked off the coffee maker and overhead florescent lights. Just as she was securing the office door, she spotted Curtis breezing through the lobby, carrying a paper bag in each hand. The smaller bag was probably the loop joint. But the large, squarish bag--no one had to tell her--was a 12-pack of beer.

Ellen arrived at Trattoria Pugali wearing a snug black skirt and a sleeveless silk blouse which floated, she thought, nicely about her breasts. Since she feared the blouse exposed her bony shoulder blades too much, she also wore a waist jacket. Taking a table by the front window, she ordered a Coke from the tall waiter, and when he returned with it a few minutes later he also set a basket of warm bread sticks before her. "Can I bring you anything else?" he asked with a certain smugness and smiled down at her. Before she could answer, he handed her a menu and leaned forward to point to selected items. "The tortellini alfredo is very good, as

is the pesto."

Ellen laid the menu down on the white tablecloth. "I'm waiting for someone actually."

"Ah," the waiter uttered and stepped back from her table. "I'll return then when your company arrives." He gave her a faint smile and moved on to another table where he began chatting up a well-dressed man and woman.

As Ellen sipped her Coke and turned away to look out the window, she saw a raggedly clad man with clumps of yellow matted hair and a dirty duffel bag yelling at a woman tagging behind him. Her face was pock-marked and swollen and she had a mid-bulge as if she were pregnant or suffering from kidney stones. She wore faded bellbottoms and a tattered windbreaker and was barefoot. At the end of a long frayed rope she held a mangy, brown dog. The man, unshaven and frantic-eyed, raised an open hand at the woman and both she and the dog flinched. Then the three of them continued on their way, past the Good Faith Shelter, toward the Alaskan Way Viaduct underpass.

"There but for the grace of God--" she began to say, then hesitated. After a long, hard childhood of seminary each weekday morning at dawn, church services and Bible classes every Sunday, and Testimony twice a month at Temple, she was averse to most professions of faith, including those in AA. She'd tried using the catch-all "Higher Power," as others at meetings did, but it sounded idiotic to her. Just the same, since she started the saying, she concluded it, "--go I," and glanced about the restaurant to see if anyone overheard.

She drained her glass down to the crushed ice and began nibbling on a breadstick. Why a bank manager in the first place? she wondered, and checked her watch. Last week it had almost begun to seem they might have something good going, but when she opened up to him (about her six-month marriage, the quick divorce, the abortion soon afterwards, the drugs and drinking, the treatment center) he turned skittish--which was okay, everyone had the right to back out--but nothing excused him from standing her up. Twice now.

She waited fifteen minutes more, picked up her purse, left two dollars under her glass, and walked out of the restaurant. She glanced up the block to see if he might be coming, then headed down the sidewalk toward the harbor. Passing beneath the viaduct, she spotted the man and woman with their dog huddled in a doorway, a green bottle with its cap off resting between them. The sight made her glad she'd gotten herself to the meeting at the Tropicana. She even read the 12-Steps aloud after the opening preamble, though she avoided sharing for the rest of the meeting.

Leaving the wino couple behind, she counted the electric beer signs in the windows of the corner convenience store. Farther up, she spotted a knot of men loitering along the harbor walk railing, passing a bottle around. Here she was, in the heart of the original Skid Row where soused loggers a century ago stumbled into Yesler's log chute and slid down the hill into the mudflats of Elliott Bay. It was one of Seattle's most celebrated historical sites, which made getting drunk almost a point of civic pride. And she was supposed to resist?

She stood ready to skip over the railroad tracks, dodge traffic along Alaskan way, and join the drinkers on the harbor walk for a few swigs, when one of them bellowed out, "Hey, honey, over here!" She stared hard at him, bundled in his hooded parka despite the evening being clear and warm, and instead of crossing, she hurried up to the nearby concrete ramp where an old-fashioned trolley, its bells jangling loudly, was about to make its last run along the waterfront. She scurried up the ramp, stepped aboard the trolley, and after handing the conductor a dollar took the first seat directly behind him--all the while silently repeating to herself: _A minute at a time, a minute at a time, that's all, a minute at a time_.

She arrived back at the Cornelius Arms around eleven after stopping at Ralph's all-night deli for a double mocha cappuccino, extra foam, extra syrup. From the lobby, the apartment building seemed far too big and lonely. Everything was worn and faded and tainted with the nose-curling odor of age and transience and disrepair. She wasn't ready to patter back up to her third floor apartment. There was nothing there for her. Letting herself into the office, she unlocked the large metal lockbox on the back wall and located the building's master key. She relocked the office and took the freight elevator to the fifth floor where, yanking the iron gate open and halting the elevator, she got out.

In the dimly lit hallway, she felt almost drunk. She walked past several apartment doors, and when she reached #518 inserted the key. Seek, she thought, and ye shall find. She wanted to look to see what else besides the coffee maker had been left behind. To get in, though, she had to tug at the deadbolt and push hard against the door before it gave. The inside foyer was as dark as an alley, but as she stepped all the way into the vacated apartment, filled with bluish light from the streetlamps below, she saw more clearly.

Near the two side-by-side windows a vague figure stretched out in a chair. Ellen went rigid and for an instant imagined she'd come upon the body of the former tenant, who--word had it--dealt methaphetamines and bathroom lab valium. When she took a frightened half-step forward, the figure leaned back on the hindlegs of the chair and arched his body around. "Hey."

"Curtis?"

Ellen edged into the middle of the room while Curtis turned back around, propped his feet on the window sill, and reached a hand down to pick up a can of beer from the floor.

"Didn't you hear me come in?"

"I figured it was you."

Ellen thought about this for a second. "Okay," she mumbled finally, and asked, "What are you doing here?"

"Hanging out," he answered matter-of-factly. "You checking to see if that sink is fixed?"

"What sink?" Then, remembering their talk from the morning, she replied, "No, not really. It's done or it's not. Right?"

Curtis glanced over his shoulder, scanning her length--"Right"--and after making eye contact, turned back around and added, "It's done."

She could think of nothing else to say and the room became very quiet. The strange aquarium light seemed to muffle any desire on her part to speak. She leaned forward and peered out the windows Curtis stretched himself in front of. Straight ahead the Space Needle rose into the sky, like a white-legged spider she always thought, its long tripod topped with a disk of blue and yellow lights. To the left lay Puget Sound, a total blank, as if the city dropped off into a big hole beyond Western Avenue. Silently, from behind the highrise condo across the street, a ferry, a speck of green light, slid across the black open waters.

"Good view," she whispered.

Curtis took another sip of beer. "So," he asked her, "how come you're up here?"

"I could ask you the same thing."

"You already did." He raised his beer to his mouth again. "Want one?"

"All the time," she answered, and quickly added, "Thanks anyway. I'll pass."

Curtis gestured toward the kitchen area. "Pull up a chair." Ellen walked over to the chrome and formica table and took one of the mismatched chairs, dragged it over to the window, and sat down beside him. A mildly sweet breeze blew in the open windows. "Are you drying out?"

She glanced at him, studying his profile a moment, and said, "Something like that." Next she held her hand out, flat and straight, to show how steady her nerves were. "Eight months next Tuesday. I'm counting the hours."

Curtis finished off his beer. "Well, good luck. I admire that kind of thing. Really. A buddy of mine quit for two months and then went back to drinking harder than ever. After a few weeks he plowed his car into a lake up in the mountains and drowned. Another buddy got straight and stayed straight and we ain't talked or seen each other since."

Ellen sighed, and rested her foot on the window sill. "Quitting's easy, staying quit's hell. That's what they say." She wished the conversation would take a different turn, though it surprised her how easy it was to talk to Curtis; this is the longest exchange they'd had since he'd come to work there.

"So let me ask you again," he began after a short silence. "What are you doing up here so late?"

Ellen rocked back in her chair and rocked forward again. "I wanted to see if there were any more coffee makers." With one glance at him, she knew Curtis was checking her out.

"There're no pills," he came back. "I've looked."

Ellen laughed this off. "That's not what I had in mind. But I guess it proves what they said about the guy."

Curtis didn't respond. Instead he got up and took another beer from the refrigerator. Popping it open--that special pressure-release sound stinging in Ellen's ear--he said, "What, all dressed up and no place to go?" and sat back down.

"Right," was all she said. But after a moment, she sat up and confessed, "The jerk stood me up." She took a hard glance at his beer on the floor--Milwaukee's Best--and wondered how many more were in the refrigerator. Since he didn't seem too drunk, there should be quite a few left from the 12-pack he carried in earlier. "What about you?"

Curtis fought back a burp. "Ah," he got out at last, "not for me, not tonight. I'm content to have a few minutes to hang out whenever it quiets down enough around here. It keeps me from catching cabin fever." He bent forward, his elbows on his knees, and cocked his head toward her. "You're not going to get me fired, are you? I mean, being in here. After all, your brother signs my check."

Ellen shook her head. "You kidding? He'd fire me first."

"Just wondering."

They returned to looking out the window. The city lights lit up a mass of low-hanging clouds moving in off the Sound. Out on the water a tugboat blew a solitary fog horn blast, while a ferry, a different one, appeared in the distance. "I haven't ridden a ferry in ages," Ellen remarked, watching the ferry inch toward the Seattle terminal. "How about you?"

He looked at her skeptically, hesitated, and answered, "I've never been on one, period. Can you believe it? Living here in Seattle, ferries everywhere, and I've never been on one."

"Where are you from?" She'd grown up in the suburbs on the other side of Lake Washington, though it was a fact most people in the area these days came from somewhere else--California, the Midwest, the East Coast.

"West Seattle," he said. "But my family didn't take ferry rides. We didn't do much of anything for that matter. I've been on boats a couple times, just never one of these ferries they've got."

"You're family's screwed up too then?" she said. He smirked at this and took a long pull off his beer. Ellen leaned forward and confided, "I go to AA as much for my family as for my drinkin' and druggin'."

"I hear that," Curtis returned. "I drink as much because of my family as . . . well, because I like to drink." He grinned a wide, closed grin at her.

She went on. "My family expected me to be a good little Mormon girl and find some rich guy to marry and take care of so he'd pick me again as his wife in the afterlife when he came into his heavenly kingdom. It was always like that. It stinks if you're a girl. Warren goes on a mission and goes to college. Warren inherits everything when the old man dies, including this damn building, and all because he's the son and I'm the daughter. I tried being good, I wanted to be, but it never worked. Sometimes I don't know which life would've been worse. That one or this. I mean . . ." She startled herself with this flurry of words. Even in the backrooms and church basements of AA meetings, wired on coffee, no pressure from anyone, she rarely said a word. If called upon, she made a few remarks about her gratitude for the program and how glad she was to be sober, then passed. Meanwhile other people gave ten-minute versions of their entire lives from day one. She knew she should be working the program better--she didn't read the Big Book or work the Steps or even have sponsor--yet she did go to meetings, four or five a week, and she did listen.

As Curtis steadily watched her, she began to think he might

make a move toward her, reach over and lay his hand on her arm or knee, maybe try to kiss her. And if he did? She wouldn't shy away. She would make love with him if it came to that. Why not? What other consolation was there for being "clean and sober" these past months? Didn't everyone deserve a little impulsiveness now and then? So what if AAers advised against starting relationships the first year of sobriety? She didn't want a relationship.

She returned his look, but he made no move, and she began wondering if she'd made a total fool of herself. "You know," she said finally to break the lengthening silence, "I should take you up on that beer."

He turned to her. "Hey, Ellen, if you--"

"But I won't," she finished, and went back to looking out the window.

Morning light filled the empty apartment. Out the window, the sky was a baby blue. A light haze lay over the city, and across the glistening open waters the Olympic Mountains appeared clear and pink. Ellen rolled over and suddenly, in a panic, felt terribly hung-over. She tried desperately, to the point of tears, to recall the night-before's events, and after several drunken scenarios raced through her mind, each one proving false, she realized she <u>hadn't</u> drunk anything last night, and she <u>wasn't</u> hung-over now. It was just another hang-over flashback, probably from staying up so late.

She got up and made her way down to her own apartment. She took a shower, put on some warm clothes, and made sure she had some cash in her purse before heading back out. Down in the lobby she let herself into the office. Although the red light on the answering machine was flashing, she ignored it and returned the master key to the wall-mounted lockbox. She opened the center drawer of the desk, withdrew the rent ledger, and crammed it into her purse.

She took her time walking to the ferry terminal, and when she arrived, two warehouse-sized ferries, white with green trim and several stories high, were docked between the giant pylons, while commuters hurried off on foot or by car. She bought her ticket and sat down in the waiting area to listen for the next boarding call, and to try to sort through last night.

Around two a.m. when the Space Needle lights were being dimmed, Curtis finally reached over. Within minutes they were grappling about on the floor, clutching at each other's clothes. After a while Curtis got up in his underwear, closed the windows, and pulled the queen-sized Murphy bed down from the closet. They removed the rest of their clothes and on the stained and sunken bare mattress, with nothing more than an old blanket over them,

they went at it. Afterwards they talked some and Curtis drank another beer, and eventually they both fell asleep. Around 5:30, when Curtis got up and left, she put her clothes on and curled up again on the mattress to sleep some more. When she woke up the second time, and just after the scary moment when she feared herself hung-over, she felt a giant relief that Curtis was already gone.

A voice came over the loud-speaker and people in the waiting area began shuffling toward the boarding gate. Ellen walked to the gate and handed her ticket to a bearded ferry employee in his white insulated jumpsuit and green nylon jacket. Once on board, she headed straight to the snack bar for a large coffee and then, cup in hand, climbed the metal stairs to the outside deck. She walked straight up from the waterfront. The ferry let out several jarring blasts on its horn and with a shudder began to pull away from the pier. When the ferry was several yards out, Ellen removed the rent ledger from her purse and dropped it over the railing into the frothy, propeller-churned water, where it instantly disappeared.

Soon the ferry was moving fast across the blue waters of the Sound. The Cascades came into sight behind the city skyline. As the wind threw her hair about her face and neck, she clutched the collar of her suede jacket. Every mile between her and the city seemed to put it all farther behind her--dead father, brother, boyfriends, ex-husband, smug waiters, nosy students, L.D.S. elders, and alkies recovering and using alike. The sharp, cold wind also helped ease the pressure building in her for far too long now.

"Cold, isn't it?" The question seemed to catch in the wind, swirl about her shoulders, and be swept overboard like a scrap of paper. Ellen turned around and looked across the open deck.

In one of the rows of orange plastic chairs beneath the solarium sat a man in a heavy wool sweater. On his head he wore a colorful cap, the kind llama herders in the Andes wore, and at first she thought it was Curtis taking his first ferry ride. Then looking closer, she didn't know who it was. "It's all windchill," he said, and rose from his seat and approached her.

When he was within several feet, she turned away, muttered "Brrr," and strolled toward the bow of the boat.

Brief Reviews

Short Cuts. Dir. Robert Altman (1994).

Robert Altman's Short Cuts opens with a fleet of helicopters spewing poison over Los Angeles. Their combination of drift and ominous beat has a long film lineage, at least from the Viet Nam of Coutard and Coppola to urban crime and delinquency movies like John Singleton's Boyz N the Hood, and it brings this film to life. The characters, who are mostly borrowed from Raymond Carver's short stories, begin this life talking about the spraying of malathion against the Medfly, scourge of California's largest industry.

One character pilots a helicopter, one delivers TV news editorials, one is an LA cop who sarcastically reassures his wife about the safety of the poison spray by standing on his patio, head back and arms spread as though receiving manna from heaven. Another character services swimming pools; we see him stolidly assuring clients about the safety of their heavily treated water. His wife works for a telephone-sex agency, sending potent influences of another kind through a different layer of the air. One of the pool clients kills herself later in the film by inhaling carbon monoxide, after she has mimed drowning in the suspect water of her pool. The character played by Tim Robbins in The Player drank only expensive bottled water; his yuppie habit can also be read as a response to unsafe drinking water.

In The Player and in Short Cuts, Altman gives us Southern California as a world where breathing air and drinking water are unsafe, where basic life processes are in jeopardy. There are constant references to jeopardy as a TV game show, beginning with a cameo appearance by the show's actual host, Alex Trebek. Trebek is referred to as an art collector; he seems to be a gentle man, and several women want him. The game he presides over cuts up information into categories of mere fact. In the film, though we see several kinds of awful risks, the repeated word jeopardy always and only means a game.

The keynote of Short Cuts, corresponding to the beautiful or the sublime of a bygone tradition, is the irritable--its characters are chronically annoyed and irritated with themselves, their jobs or lack of jobs, their parents, their children, their lovers, their spouses and exes. These people don't seem to like one another; their talk doesn't communicate, their lovemaking doesn't bring them satisfaction, and their behaviors are self-destructive and harmful to others. The film's toxic text points to a missing center of substance abuse that is particularly powerful to its configuration.

Alcohol and drugs beat a rhythm constant as the helicopter blades, from a doctor's beautifully stocked liquor cabinet to cocaine tooted in a lounge toilet to whiskey bottles on a fishing trip to beer and joints in a disheveled living room to the

tranquilizers that--never seen or even mentioned--provide the only explanation for one character's spacey behavior. TV, the "plug-in drug," plays unheeded behind much of the action, once even carrying an advertisement for Alcoholics Anonymous and Twelve-Step self-help programs--as though for this world, "recovery" is just one more in a series of merchandised delusions.

A couple of the characters, a chauffeur played by Tom Waits and a lounge singer played by Annie Ross, are recognizably alcoholic: the singer is drinking, the driver is drunk all the time. The chauffeur's wife, a hard-working waitress played by Lily Tomlin, deplores his addiction but responds to his boozy helplessness, even after her daughter (Lili Taylor) tells her he has molested her. A late sequence shows Tomlin and Waits getting hilariously drunk together, as if the only gaiety or pleasure in their lives pours from a bottle.

Another character (Jack Lemmon) delivers a racking monologue about how drinking cost him his marriage and family: "I wondered how many beers it would take to get you to bed," his sister-in-law says as she seduces him. A baker (Lyle Lovett) drinks himself into a resentful stew over a birthday cake that wasn't picked up and the rudeness of a distraught father (Bruce Davidson).

While drinking and drugging are made ordinary, a part of the texture of life, the shock and violence in the film--the TV newscaster's child dies of a blood clot to the brain after an apparently trivial auto accident; the fishing party finds a young woman's body at a remote river campsite; and the pool serviceman bludgeons a young woman to death--are lifted out of the loops of substance abuse. An extended sequence in which the helicopter pilot (Peter Gallagher) takes a chainsaw to his wife's furniture and wardrobe builds like a gag that is driven by justifiable revenge and high spirits.

Most of the family scenes are filled with casual drinking, smoking, and snorting, culminating in a scene where a young husband (Robert Downey) who is going to school to learn special-effects makeup practices on his wife (Lili Taylor), constructing the face of a severely battered woman and becoming aroused by it. The pool serviceman (Chris Penn) and his phone-sex-seller wife (Jennifer Jason Leigh) constantly open beers, as do the policeman (Tim Robbins) and his wife (Madeline Stowe). A neurologist (Matthew Modine) and his wife (Julianne Moore) drink whiskey and fancy cocktails.

Waits and Tomlin get drunk and dance at their reconciliation party; the doctor and his wife invite the fisherman (Fred Ward) and his wife (Anne Archer) to a barbecue that turns into drunken all-night hot-tub party. Downey and Taylor, with Penn and Leigh and their small children, have a picnic with beer in a park where alcoholic beverages are specifically forbidden. Different groups

of characters go to the lounge where Ross sings, where they drink and get into near-fights with a pugnacious African-American regular.

Besides getting high, mythical white Californians want to make out at any time with any body--anybody within a rigidly (almost nostalgically) heterosexual framework, that is. Sex is predatory in Short Cuts: men pursue women for sex, women use sex for barter. Altman sprinkles nakedness casually through the film; in what has become the most notorious sequence, Julianne Moore has an argument with Matthew Modine while naked from the waist down and Modine's gaze, like the camera's, is riveted to her reddish pubic hair. The muff scene is not merely one of many floating images: the film stops for it as for Lemmon's story, dialogue goes on behind it but the camera stays fastened to that genital signifier (or waits for it knowing it will return in a few seconds to occupy the same place in the frame). Frances McDormand, Lori Singer, Anne Archer, and Fred Ward also flash as they struggle into or out of clothes.

The muff shot is doubled by the watery morgue shot of the drowned woman, her underwear torn and drifting off the body parts it customarily covers. A similar fascination is acted out by the camera and also by the fisherman, who can neither leave it alone nor do anything about it, a perfect analogue to the scene of castration in Freud. The two dead women--the body in the river and the bludgeoned young woman--appear to be victims of sex crimes, the violent war on women that the film recognizes without naming.

The policeman's wife makes him spell "crack" in front of the children, as if that hypocritical evasion made up for the two muff scenes. She and her sister drink their beer where her kids can't see, although the couple fight extravagantly in front of the children. The pilot's ex-wife (Frances McDormand) alternately conceals and reveals her sex life to her pre-adolescent son. By contrast, the phone-sex-seller works while feeding and changing her children; when her husband says he doesn't like it she says airily, "They don't know what it means."

Short Cuts ends with a long shot of the city occluded in smog, opening out from the patio of an expensive house in the LA hills. Between the two images of poisoned air, most of the twenty or so characters have gotten drunk or high and variously harmed themselves, one another, acquaintances, and strangers. The cowardice, deceit, and delusion that are their attempts at short cuts through difficult terrain have mostly backfired, and the danger signaled by the helicopters' racket will never pass. A current joke says that "If the United States is a mental hospital, California is the violent ward." It could be the film's motto.

No film-maker has ever made a comeback or a return to his early glory days like Altman: Short Cuts feels like a merger of Nashville and The Player. The lacing together of multiple stories,

which has always been Altman's specialty, offers a brilliant solution to the problem of film form. These small slices of continuing stories combine to produce an epic grandeur in the American 1990s. Along with television's Stephen Bochco, Altman acknowledges the primacy and originality of the American soap opera where attention and identification are constantly cut into a civilization where the inability to pay attention is endemic (think of the Comedy channel's "Short Attention Span Theater"). As Altman so competently demonstrates, you don't need much of a cut to maintain coherence and narrative interest, and this rich mix of cuts energizes watching and gives it an almost toxic edge. Short Cuts confirms Robert Altman's importance to contemporary American art.

Marty and Martha Roth

Anna Kavan. My Madness: The Selected Writings of Anna Kavan. ed. Brian Aldiss. London: Pan Books, 1990. 336 pp. £6.99.

I and my cohorts, two reference librarians, cheered when My Madness: The Selected Writings of Anna Kavan. edited and with an introduction by Brian Aldiss, London: Pan Books, 1990, appeared on the OCLC screen. One librarian, Robert Hauptman, has written several of the entries on Kavan in reference works and examined her papers at the University of Tulsa, and the other librarian, Keith Ewing, considered writing his dissertation on this obscure author. No one has yet given Anna Kavan that academic accolade. Ewing first introduced Kavan to me when I asked for a computer search on women writing about alcohol/addiction. He collected all her works in cheap paperback editions or as discards from other libraries. Librarians know hosts of obscure writers, and in the case of Anna Kavan, the rest of us should come to know her. This new collection is keeping alive the name and art of British writer Anna Kavan (1901-1968). What follows is a brief introduction to the work of one who wrote about addiction with insight and eloquence, a writer akin to Jean Rhys and Djuna Barnes in terms of her characters, her tone, her obsession. A registered heroin addict with Britain's National Health Service, dead of an apparent overdose, Kavan wrote for nearly thirty years about the perspective of female victimization.

Anna Kavan is the pseudonym of Helen Woods Ferguson Edmonds (two marriages) who first began publishing English country novels in the thirties. None of these books is currently in print. She revealed a new permutation of herself with the short story collection Asylum Piece in 1940, re-naming herself after a character from her earlier novel Let Me Alone (1930) and re-

fashioning herself physically by dying her hair Madonna-blonde and by fostering an anorexic thinness via heroin. She went on to publish further novels and short story collections, those most frequently noted being Ice (1967), acclaimed by science fiction writers, and the posthumous Julia and the Bazooka & Other Stories (1970). The latter, along with other titles, is currently available only in hardcover from Dufour Publishers, the American distributor for Peter Owen Ltd. Kavan's books might be loosely characterized as pre-drug and post-drug, with Asylum Piece marking the transition.

I read Kavan for her representation of the consciousness of an addicted person. To take Asylum Piece as a sample, this collection features stories dealing obliquely with addiction and those dealing directly with addiction. Many of the pieces are reprinted in My Madness. Eight of the stories are set in an European asylum and depict various inmates who suffer from unnamed mental illnesses, including a possibly autobiographical character, a drug-addicted, blonde, upper-class woman, abandoned at the asylum by her husband. The other stories do not identify the viewpoint as evincing mental illness, but a thematic pattern quickly develops, underscoring the omnipresence of brutal authority and the victimization of individuals. Characters are victimized by military, government, or medical harassment, by psychological suffering, by betraying friends, and by spouses. Quite often, the source of the suffering is not identified while the symptoms of anguish and frustration are fully described. Most often, the narrator or main character is neither named nor physically described, other than being identified as female. And how much is autobiographical is uncertain. A beautiful example of a representative piece is "Machines in the Head," in which a female insomniac recounts the torture of being roused by a reverberation in her head, after having slept only one or two hours nightly. She envisions this mental and emotional discomfort as grinding, revolving machines. This may or may not be a depiction of heroin addiction, but her final response to it captures the viewpoint of a regretful, self-pitying, and probably addicted person:

> I remember myself as a schoolchild sitting at a hard wooden desk, and then as a little girl with thick, fair, wind-tossed hair, feeding the swans in a park. And it seems both strange and sad to me that all those childish years were spent in preparation for this--that, forgotten by everybody, with a beaten face, I should serve machinery in a place far away from the sun. (69)

Reviewers of Kavan's posthumous and re-issued work in the seventies reveal a discomfort both with her addiction (seen as self-indulgent) and with her gender (feminists didn't like her). For example, Jill Robinson in The New York Times Book Review comments on Kavan's importance:

> The facts of a difficult existence do not guarantee literature. Anna Kavan is not interesting because she was a woman, an addict, or had silver blonde hair. She is interesting because her work comes through with a powerful androgynous individuality and because the stories are luminous and rich with a fresh kind of peril.

I would disagree in that I do read Kavan because she is a woman addict, and we know too little of literature about this particular sociological and psychological experience, both in the setting of socialized medicine Kavan experienced in Britain and now. In the nineties we have come to believe that gender, or race, or class do exercise their impact in the experience of addiction, something Kavan was trying to work out in stories from _Julia and the Bazooka_, for example. Her woman character reflects at length on why she feels superior in her heroin addiction to her alcoholic husband. She can hide her addiction from the public and maintain her appearance and her dignity as a lady while he imbibes openly, risks his life driving drunk, and deteriorates in appearance. The woman rationalizes thus:

> I think smoking and drinking are vices, disgusting habits, they're so offensive to everybody. . . . when he drinks too much, he gets quarrelsome and aggressive, embarrasses people by stumbling about and making stupid remarks. What I do never affects anyone else. I don't behave in an embarrassing way. And a clean white powder is not repulsive; it looks pure, it glitters, the pure white crystals sparkle like snow.

Indeed, the tyrannical social and psychological need to maintain a chic, feminine appearance is supplied by the heroin. An identity as a victimized female is further supplied and continually reinforced. We need to learn more about the interplay of Kavan's social class, her gender, and her addiction, as well as how heroin addiction both shaped and thwarted her creativity. Anna Kavan created women characters who are victims, and the fascination of her work lies in viewing the depiction of her twin tyrants: an inhuman social order and an inhuman drug.

--Constance M. Perry

FUTURE ISSUES

The Winter 1994 issue will complete five years of publication of Dionysos. A special feature of that issue will be a symposium on literature and addiction. See page 2 above for information. . . . The Beat Generation II: The American Perspective is rescheduled for Spring 1994 publication. For details write George Wedge (Department of English, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS 66045-2115). . . . A future special, extra-cost poetry issue, edited by George Wedge and David Plumb, is forthcoming. . . . A special issue on the teaching of literature and addiction courses is in the planning stage.

NOTES AND COMMENT

The "Complimentary Sampler" of Dionysos, including contents of all issues, is now available on Internet Gopher Network (gopher.uwsuper.edu). . . . Ivan Gold writes that he has a number of copies of Sams in a Dry Season (see the review in Dionysos, Spring 1991) for sale ($11.50 post-paid, hardcover: Box 15559 Kenmore Square, Boston, MA 02215; 617/297-6725). . . . Walter Davis (English, Brown University, Providence, RI 02912) is "developing a course in alcoholism and literature, probably centering on 20th-century American fiction witers such as Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, Cheever, and Carver. I want especially to explore theoretically-informed approaches to the topic, such as theory of representation and theory of authorship. Both of these generally debated matters, it seems to me, take on radical coloring when alcohol flows into the picture: representation becomes more than usually a matter of interrogating stereotypes and ideologically-based judgments, for example, and the relation of author to text becomes more occluded than usual." He adds, "suggestions about texts to use, and especially criticism, will be appreciated, as well as reactions to the project." . . . Norman Kiell, author of Psycohoanalysis, Psychology, and Literature: A Bibliography, 3 vols. (Scarecrow 1982, 1990), is compiling an annotated bibliography on food and drink in literature. He would appreciate citations and suggestions (750 Shore Road, 5-L, Long Beach, NY 11561). . . . Three special sessions on literature and addiction have so far been proposed for the 1994 MLA Convention: "Literature, Addiction, and Academic (Ir)Responsibility: Textual Pharmacy or Social Pedagogy?" (Stephen Infantino, TCU; Jane Lilienfeld, Lincoln U, MO); "American Literature and Alcoholism" (Rose Johnstone and Ellen Lansky, U of Minnesota-Twin Cities); "Drugged Victorians" (Lawrence V. Driscoll, USC). . . . The third set of meetings since 1991 for "Friends of Bill W." was run at the December MLA Convention in Toronto. . . . Dwight Heath (Anthropology, Brown) contributed the article on anthropology to Recent Developents in Alcoholism, Vol. 11: "Ten Years of Progress" (Plenum 1993). . . . The following will be reviewed in our next issue: Pete Hamill The Drinking Life: A Memoir, by Dan Wakefield; and, "On Addiction," a special issue of differences (Spring 1993), by Marty Roth.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Robin N. Crouch is a doctoral student in literature at the University of Houston. He is currently preparing an essay on drinking as a thematic motif in the novels of D. H. Lawrence.

John W. Crowley is professor of English at Syracuse University. His most recent book, The White Logic: Alcoholism and Gender in American Modernist Fiction, is forthcoming from The University of Massachusetts Press.

Peter Donahue, a Ph.D. candidate in the writing program at Oklahoma State University, has published stories in South Carolina Review, Midland Review, Red Cedar Review, and Oxalis. His "Alcoholism as Ideology in Raymond Carver's 'Careful' and 'Where I'm Calling From'" appeared in Extrapolation.

Ellen Lansky is a doctoral candidate in English at The University of Minnesota. She is currently writing her dissertation on alcohol, conflict, and silence in twentieth-century American fiction.

Constance M. Perry, professor of English at St. Cloud State University, is working on a book about the culture of alcohol created among American expatriate writers.

Marty and Martha Roth regularly review film and theater in Minneapolis/St. Paul. They are working on a long piece on Robert Altman's Short Cuts.

AMPLIFICATION: Jack Herzig, whose poem The Samurai appeared in the Spring 1993 issue, earned a B.A. in history from the University of Michigan, an M.A. in creative writing from Hollins College, and law degrees in England and the U.S. He recently has decided to break with law and go into teaching. He lives in Jenkintown, Pennsylvania.

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ANNOUNCEMENT

NEW ADVISORY BOARD MEMBER

Ivan Gold, author of Nickel Miseries, Sick Friends (both recently reissued in paperback by Washington Square Press), and Sams in a Dry Season (Houghton Mifflin), has joined the Advisory Board of Dionysos. He is currently associated with The Writers' Room of Boston, Inc.

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