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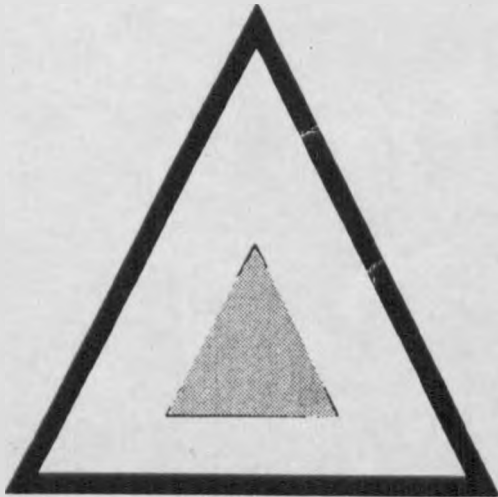
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DIONYSOS

the literature  
and addiction

TRIQUARTERLY



UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN - SUPERIOR

Winter 1994

Volume 5, Number 3



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the literature and addiction triquarterly

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## EDITORIAL

With this issue, Dionysos is suspending publication. It was a difficult decision to make, but the circumstances are such that it seemed best to make this move now. Leads are being followed to determine whether it will be possible to resume publication under other auspices, but the issue at hand will be the last edited by me and published by the University of Wisconsin-Superior. Editing Dionysos has been perhaps the most satisfying professional endeavor of my life. It has also been a rich personal experience. The people I have met, both directly and more often by mail or telephone, have made it all infinitely more than worthwhile, and I wish to take this occasion to thank profoundly the Editorial Board, the Advisory Board, the readers, my University administration, the contributors and subscribers for their enthusiastic and thoughtful support. And I particularly wish to thank, by name, copy readers Tina Johnson, Dave Lull, and Joan Bischoff; bookkeeping manager Mary Noyes; circulation director Phoebe Martens; and Grace Forseth, my wife, who typed and helped edit every word of the 15 issues of Dionysos. If and when publication resumes you will, of course, be notified. I console myself with the fact the two of the most celebrated little magazines of the century--Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren's Southern Review and Dwight Macdonald's Politics--also ran for only about five years. If the comparison strikes one as pretentious, that's probably because it is.

I wish also to thank all of you who signed the petition to the Modern Language Association in support of the Literature and Addiction Discussion Group. We were turned down--as were the proposers (mentioned in last issue's "Notes and Comments") of the Special Sessions for the 1994 MLA annual meeting. I won't waste time objecting to the MLA's decisions (which, in my experience, is akin to debating with the IRS), but it does remind one that the occasion of the founding of Dionysos was to provide our own avenue of communication rather than to rely on the uncertain knowledge and judgment of others.

When I proposed the Symposium for the occasion of our five years of publication, I did not know that it would signal my final editorial effort. In the event, what the contributors to the Symposium suggest to me is that our work is far from complete; indeed, they in effect urge that our efforts have scarcely begun, and I for one am extraordinarily pleased with this state of affairs, for it would be a real disappointment, if a mere five years of publishing were to exhaust a subject as complex and subtle as addiction and intoxication studies (employing the terms that reflect our ambivalence). The responses are alphabetically arranged save for framing them with Hale Lamont-Havers' thoughtful, cautionary letter, and Rosemarie Johnstone's detailed exploration of the epistemology of alcoholism. Here, taken together, are more than enough ideas and insights to keep us busy for years!

LITERATURE & ADDICTION: CRITICAL & IDEOLOGICAL ISSUES

A SYMPOSIUM

For the occasion of "Dionysos" fifth year of publication, a series of questions were addressed to the readership: "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 prominent 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 plays 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 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? The responses follow.

A Letter to the Editor, from Hale G. Lamont-Havers: When Dionysos was launched in 1989, it was my understanding that it was a periodical to be devoted to the study of intoxication's effect on literature--primarily alcohol related. When that focus was stretched to include other mind altering drugs--cocaine, heroin, opium, etc.--I had no argument with that. Writers have consistently used such means to enhance their creativity, and I feel this is a serious problem, which has not only been denied in many biographies, but ignored in the writer's work itself. To fully appreciate any artist's output, the reader must know under what conditions the work was created, and how drugs affected the writer's performance.

What I strenuously object to is a broadening of the study in Dionysos. The field of "addiction studies" is now overextended. Anything goes. Unhappy as those people may be who are overweight, excessive gamblers, obsessed with sex, religion, etc.--their literary creativity is not in peril. Samuel Johnson might say that those kinds of behavior--unlike drinking--don't interfere with the capacity to reason--that is, to artistically reason.

There's a kind of violent desperation in the drugged mind that

both inspires and destroys. Robin N. Crouch's fine essay on Samuel Johnson explored the problem in great detail. As a sober alcoholic of eight years' standing, I was stunned that a man, who lived almost 300 years ago, could so brilliantly describe the joys and horrors of wine. What a sane mind and sensibility Johnson had to seek his own painful abstinence, and yet never to condemn another's drinking habits. He knew how powerful was the lure of drink, how it made bearable an unbearable life.

On the other hand we have Charles Jackson, who felt he couldn't write without alcohol, even though his wife insisted that his best work was done sober. Finally, finding A.A., he never published anything significant again. As a writer, was it worth it to him to give up alcohol--his muse? That's a very complex question to answer. What about Paul Scott, who wrote his magnificent Raj Quartet on a daily bottle of gin? Could he have done that sober?

These are the kinds of issues that Dionysos has been contemplating. I should be sorry to lose this focal point to include other addictive behaviors, which lack the passion, madness, and imagination of the truly creative mind. Such behaviors have enough outlets on the talk shows.

Please don't abandon the journey into intoxication. You've just opened the bottle.

Lawrence Driscoll: In many ways we have to hold onto the belief that addicts are 'trapped' by their addiction, so that we can then suggest a program of treatment that would 'free' them. We assume that the addict can only choose an 'escape' that is also an 'inward focus,' someone who is 'inverted,' spiralling downwards into a world deprived of free will and power. Jara Krivanek (Addictions [Sydney: Allen, 1988]) describes the process of heroin addiction as a "drift" (85), where the casual user "slips gradually" into addiction (86). The 'cure' for addiction is then to reverse this process: if addicts are 'falling,' pick them up, if they are 'slipping' provide them with a firm ground to walk on, if they are 'trapped' assist in their escape. Yet all of the 'cures' are put into operation as if addicts really are slipping/falling/trapped.

As with the horror stories of withdrawal, this story leaves everyone in a position which empowers drug addiction by making us believe that if we don't 'resist' drugs and 'push' them away, then they will get 'pushed' onto us. What if our rhetoric of resistance is actually a smoke-screen, allowing us to 'pull' drugs into our society, like smugglers with contraband rum on a beach at night. Maybe we use children as 'look-outs' who, with one eye on the coast guard's hut, distract everyone's attention with hymns of resistance. Under this camouflage we can then pull in drugs all night. On the other hand, and I think this is much more likely,

what if drugs are not being 'pushed' or 'pulled'?

Insofar as our narratives of addiction mislead our children and ourselves, while at the same time we deny that they are wrong or harmful, we are behaving so much like the addict that we have constructed, one who is always prone to being a pathological liar as well as out of touch with 'reality.' There would be nothing wrong with telling these horror stories of addiction, after all they are very pleasurable, if we did not also voice our desire to eliminate the 'problem' of addiction. It would seem that we have arrived at a place whereby 'knowing' that addiction is a 'trap' results in a program of 'freedom' which paradoxically murders the addict. The irony is that as the death toll increases every time we try to 'free' someone, that statistics make it appear true that addiction really is what we say it is: addiction is a trap that ends in death.

In her novel The House of Sleep (My Madness: The Selected Writings of Anna Kavan, ed. Brian Aldiss [London: Picador, 1990]) Anna Kavan sees addiction not as a prison from which she cannot escape but as her 'home.' Rather than demanding she be cured, which from Kavan's perspective means tearing down the walls and demanding that she run away from home, we should perhaps offer to decorate her house or buy her furniture, or maybe even go and visit her. If she likes the house because of what she calls its 'haphazard aspects' and its non-causal logic, maybe we should encourage architects to come up with even more strange staircases and windows for her. If Kavan perceives addiction, as she says, not as a falling but as a 'tightrope' that holds her up, then rather than distracting her with our shouts from below, maybe we should applaud the skill with which the balancing act is performed, showing our appreciation of her aptitude, bravery and poise.

In The Diary of a Drug Fiend (Maine: Samuel Weiser, 1970) Aleister Crowley suggests that "[we] have got to learn to make use of drugs as [our] ancestors learnt to make use of lightning" (158). His position on drugs, parallel to Kavan's and Trocchi's is, he tells us, seen as sick by those around him, and in order to illustrate this situation he tells the story of two children's fear of the sea:

They found themselves in danger of being drowned and thought the best way was to avoid going near the water. But that didn't help them to use their natural faculties to the best advantage, so I made them face the sea again and again, until they decided that the best way to avoid drowning was to learn how to deal with oceans in every detail. It sounds pretty obvious when you put it like that, yet while every one agrees with me about the swimming, I am howled down on all sides when I apply the same principles to the use of drugs (364).

Maybe the strategy is not to 'resist' drugs, (which only seems to make drugs more powerful) but to learn to swim across them. We may get wet but at least we will not drown, and while our children are having fun splashing about on the shore, the rest of us can quite calmly get on with our swimming or treading water or even teach others how to do the backstroke, and maybe, once in a while, even go diving for pearls. While this may all seem very strange and sick, Kavan reminds us that "Even the crooked lanes leading to the poorer quarters promise adventure and mysterious revelation" (134).

It would appear that what makes it hard for us to hear Kavan and Crowley is that they refuse to tell us stories of addiction that conform with the stories we need to hear. As a result, we prevent ourselves from learning how 'drug addiction' could be different.

David Isaacson: I hope that the serious and scholarly examination of the connections between addictive behavior and literature is not just another trendy critical fashion. Carried to an extreme, it's easy to characterize this perspective. Just as a dogmatic Freudian finds an Oedipus complex in every bed or a Marxist finds a class conflict in every difference between social groups, so an addictionologist (pardon my neologism) may discover addictive behavior every time a writer complains of a hangover. Since just about everybody has some kind of obsessive behaviors, that doesn't mean there's any necessary connection between those behaviors and literary work. A long time ago Lionel Trilling reminded us, in his essay, "Art and Neurosis" in The Liberal Imagination, that being neurotic had no necessary causal effect on art. There are plenty of unliterary neurotics. The same is true of addictions. The fact that Hemingway was an alcoholic has numerous intriguing implications for an understanding of both the man and his work. But alcoholism alone doesn't definitively "explain" Hemingway or any other writer. And despite a romantic myth to the contrary (see Pete Hamill's recent book, A Drinking Life, for one very recent example of a writer debunking this myth), one isn't compelled to be alcoholic to be a successful American writer.

It seems clear to many physicians and psychologists that alcoholism, and other forms of drug addiction, can cause an otherwise reasonably normal person to act in abnormal, unpredictable, socially disruptive ways. Some people call such behaviors insane. Sometimes it's impossible to determine which came first: the crazy action or the addiction. R. D. Laing would argue that it's the society defining the crazy behavior that is itself crazy. Positive images of mad, which includes drunk, poets go back to Dionysos, the god whose name we invoke in the title of this journal. It is unromantic to say it, but there are a lot of unaddicted and uncrazy artists doing interesting work as well as many addicted and crazy ones who haven't done anything worthwhile ever, or in years. We simply don't know how much better work



Fitzgerald would have written had he not been a drunk. Even if it is true that drink serves as a catalyst to creativity, it's awfully hard to actually create while drinking or suffering from a hangover.

I think that addiction is a better word than intoxication in the subtitle of this journal, first, because it is broader in scope, including other drugs beside alcohol (getting some people to admit that alcohol is a drug that some people get addicted to is quite a battle), and second, because too many positive associations cluster around the word intoxication. Although it may be counterargued that too many pejorative connotations are associated with the word addiction, that term is more objective and scientific. It's not just that it's more respectable to say that I study addictive behaviors rather than the state of intoxication, but that's part of it.

A final thought: while it's certainly not a precondition to be either a practicing or a recovering alcoholic to make a contribution to these studies, I think it helps us empathize. I, for one, don't mind "outing" myself to say that I wouldn't be reading this journal or contributing to it unless I was a recovering alcoholic myself. On the other hand, that doesn't mean I'm more insightful on this subject than either a practicing alcoholic or a nonalcoholic, just that I'm grateful to see I'm not alone in realizing that it's possible to be a sober writer or critic and still get safely high on literature.

Marty Roth: In her recent book Tendencies, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick tells us an old and a new story about addiction: the first is a by now familiar story of the "addict" to be, who (like the "homosexual" but not like the "woman") will, suddenly, under the pressure of nineteenth-century medicalization, become "a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood." The second is a contemporary story of the addict who (like the woman but not like the homosexual) will proliferate into all the positions of desire: it has now "become a commonplace that, precisely, any substance, any behavior, even any affect may be pathologized as addictive." He will become the sexual addict, the workaholic, the bulimic, anorexic, and, finally, the exercise addict: she will succumb to an "epidemic of addiction attribution." Before addiction had time to settle into the body and character articulated for it by nineteenth-century authors and experts it was redispersed, so the second story goes, by postmodernism to fit the addictive appetites of consumer capitalism (even while a lingering Victorianism kept it a biographical secret). The concept of addiction becomes radically unstable almost as soon as it is declared to be an object of knowledge. Both of these stories, Foucault's and Sedgwick's, compel admiration by virtue of their bold organization of history.

The stages of Sedgwick's epidemic are drugs, food, and

exercise. What, she asks, "are we to make of the next pathologized personage to materialize out of the taxonomic frenzy of the early 1990s: the exercise addict?" To materialize at the touch of whose wand? It is far from clear whose construction of addiction is being authorized here, and what, short of abstract will or culture itself is the agency behind this determinism. A medical board, the structural implications of treatment and self-help, an insurance hookup, popular authors who want to cash in on a trend?

What Sedgwick makes of that oddly turned addiction to exercise is that addiction is the dark soul of a relationship that can attach itself to any object or value. This last turn poses the paradox of being addicted to health, but we have imagined ourselves as addicted to love since antiquity (Sedgwick neglects to mention the ancient and ever-popular addiction to sex, perhaps because it is so badly out of sequence). In Jules Verne's "Idea of Doctor Ox," under the false pretense of building a gasworks, Doctor Ox intoxicates the inhabitants of a small town by adding pure oxygen to the air. Through concentration, a substance which we inhale with every breath becomes "poisonous." This exasperating turn is frequently encountered in AA as an addiction to the program itself, the discipline that restores is now recast as a substitute drug. There, however, the figure is merely ironic not annihilatory, embodying a classical notion of freedom as gratitude for being forced to do the right thing. Sedgwick also appeals to the program of culture itself, where the instability of addiction resides in the Nietzschean "will" into whose essential freedom, craving, compulsion and addiction were aboriginally written. The dispersion that Sedgwick notices, however, was also always there. Long before it found alcohol and drugs as its proper object, addiction was a metaphor that recolored the full range of dysfunctional relationships. One could always be addicted to anything (and behind this cultural trope was the similar, overlapping figure of being drunk on anything in, for example, Erasmus' Colloquies-- "Well, you don't regard as sober or sane, do you, those who for the sake of shadows and illusions of pleasure neglect the real pleasures of the mind. . . . they're not drunk with wine, to be sure, but with love, anger, avarice, craving for power, and other sinful lusts far more dangerous than drunkenness from wine"). A quick survey has netted an addiction to lechery (Montaigne), to cannibalism (a seventeenth-century French priest on the Eskimos), to war (Lewis and Clark on the Osages), to execution (Augustine on Alypius, Camus on Sade), to writing (Marie Bonaparte on Poe), and, from Sedgwick herself in the previous chapter on Jane Austen's Sense and Sensibility, an addiction to "rapidity." The distribution is not as wide as I could hope, but then I am not trying to repudiate Sedgwick so much as interrupt that deadly sense of sequence and determinism.

There is no stage at which addiction is not metaphoric; even at its historic core is a false homology of drugs and alcohol, since there is not much similarity between them other than the fact

of addiction, which, Sedgwick proposes, dissolves even as I gesture in its direction.

Anya Taylor: The biggest difficulty for me in the interdisciplinary study of alcohol and literature is to find some essential connectedness between the two that is not merely biographical and incidental, though it may have something to do with selfness or personhood or the dissolution of it. Years ago Joseph Campbell answered my question, "Why did Joyce drink?," with one word: "Rapture." I have been puzzling about his answer ever since. Perhaps it involves the self-transcendence and joy of traditional drinking songs and the enthusiasm of Dionysos and Gargantua. Perhaps alcohol unleashes some exhilarating power in the originating moment of writing which is as important as the subsequent decay of the writer's body, described in gossipy debasing anecdotes. Going over the top must be positive, joyful, self-obliterating to begin with, before the dissipation in its several senses starts. Somewhere in the conjunction of words and pleasure, of mirroring, repetition, story-telling and garrulity, of words and self-transcendence is this interconnectedness, but, though I am seeking it in my ongoing study, I have not yet found it.

Jack Williams: There's a song I'm particularly fond of named "Corpus Christi Bay" by Robert Earl Keen. It's a monologue of sorts from a man who works the oil rigs in the Gulf of Mexico. He sums up his hard-drunk, hard-lived life in the following refrain:

If I could live my life all over  
It wouldn't matter anyway  
Cause I never could stay sober  
On the Corpus Christi Bay.

I like this song for a lot of reasons, one of which is I think it tells a lot about the mindset of a drinker. There's regret and non-regret and sadness and pride and resignation in this chorus, and there's a wistful suggestion that somehow geography itself has added to his inability to remain sober. Perhaps if he just lived and worked somewhere else, his chances would be better. But the hard truth is that he doesn't nor does he really want to--as he admits early on in the song, "this life gets down in your blood."

To whatever degree he regrets his life, he doesn't regret it enough to make any sweeping changes, so that by the time the song begins and he introduces himself with the statement, "I work the rigs from three to midnight," drinking sustains him every bit as much as blood. For him, it's a bottled heart. And like it or not, drinking also helps define who he is, like the fact that he works swing shift.

I admire songs like "Corpus Christi Bay" for the same reasons I admire books by writers such as Carver, Cheever, Faulkner, and Fitzgerald (to name a few). It's art like this that teaches me about people I know and about people I've never known, about those who survive and those whose stranglehold on the bottle refuses to be kept back, about life and how to live it. Art like this offers revelation and reckoning and, ultimately, it gives me hope for the things in my own life I must contend with.

There's lots to learn from the pages of these writers. A Carver character ironically swills Teacher's scotch and tries to hold his fraying life together. A Fitzgerald character, drunk for a week, sits in a library trying to sober up. A Cheever character, liquored up and angry, trips over a red wagon. There's lessons to learn here about men and women staggering drunkenly, their lives inexorably grinding toward a bitter end, men and women with a certain kind of life down in their blood.

Given that we never learn the oil rigger's name, "Corpus Christi Bay" speaks to me of the mysteries of alcoholism and anonymity. The song suggests a sadness in the heart of a nameless man who would have you believe he has no regrets, yet each time the oil rigger repeats the refrain, we must consider the unpleasant likelihood that alcoholism ultimately embraces anonymity. No surprise then that the song ends with the oil rigger drinking, a man downing one more beer in a bar looking out upon the Corpus Christ Bay.

It occurs to me now that there's a parallel between the oil rigger of "Corpus Christi Bay" and the reporter in one of my favorite Faulkner novels, Pylon. Both involve men whose names we never learn, men who go down proudly in a swirl of booze. These men are nameless from start to finish, defined only by their occupations. That's all we have for names. And perhaps that's due to two skilled authors comfortable down in their bones with the sad truth that the anonymous will always be received.

I would like to believe that the pages of Dionysos will continue to have a few pages set aside for the oil rigger and the reporter and their brethren, all waiting a bit impatiently for last call.

Rosemarie Johnstone ["Alcoholism and the Epistemological Cure"]:  
In the late 1930s, the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous challenged the widely held belief that alcoholism was a character flaw or a moral defect. They redefined alcoholism as a three-fold illness, one that affects the mind, body, and spirit. This definition of alcoholism is familiar to many of us; in fact, a majority of Americans would now agree that alcoholism is not a moral failure but an illness, a disease which can be arrested but never cured. Clearly, A.A. has shaped our understanding of alcoholism, and it is

largely responsible for producing the cultural consensus that alcoholism is a disease; nevertheless, the term disease, itself, remains a matter of considerable confusion and disagreement. That is, many Americans agree that alcoholism is a disease, yet they remain unclear about what kind of disease-entity it is.

A.A. would describe alcoholism as an illness, yet it "treats" this illness with an epistemological cure: the transformative ideology of the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions and the recovery narratives of the Big Book, Alcoholics Anonymous. Because the antidote for alcoholism is epistemological rather than medical or pharmaceutical, it is plausible that the disease-concept is more of a disease-metaphor, a semantic neutralizing of a term which had always been associated with sin and moral weakness. Therefore, a problem drinker's admission of alcoholism may be not so much a self-diagnosis of a medical problem as it is a declaration or a pledge, a form of committed speaking which alters or shifts the alcoholic's way of living in the world.

My contribution will elaborate how our understanding of alcoholism as an illness can be more accurately described as an epistemology--a way of perceiving the world and a way of regarding the self in the world. The Big Book narratives describe the turning point in recovery in ways that suggests a shift in epistemology--a spiritual awakening. My essay will place A.A.'s recovery narratives within a tradition of alcoholic narratives stemming from the Temperance movement of the 1840s through such 20th century drinking narratives as Jack London's John Barleycorn and F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Crack-up. A.A.'s recovery narratives participate in, but also depart radically from, other narratives by redefining the parameters in which we read and perceive alcoholism.

Although we seem to agree unanimously that alcoholism is a disease, we still do not know exactly what kind of disease it is, or where the disease of alcoholism would be located in the body. If we were to search the disease concept for medical proof or empirical evidence, we would be left at best empty-handed and at worst with a stack of documented medical uncertainty and disagreement. Alcoholism may be a disease-concept, but it has not been proven to be a disease-entity. Bill Wilson, the co-founder of A.A., anticipated this confusion and was wary of using the term "disease." But Wilson was above all a pragmatist. A great admirer of William James, Wilson was prepared to live comfortably with a definition that was inabsolute, because the disease concept produced results. Wilson conceded that alcoholism did not constitute a disease entity, but he maintained, nevertheless, that it worked for alcoholics to regard alcoholism as an illness. In 1960 in an address at the Annual Convention of the National Clergy Conference on Alcoholism, Wilson states:

We have never called alcoholism a disease because, technically

speaking, it is not a disease entity. For example, there is no such thing as heart disease. Instead there are many separate heart ailments, or combinations of them. It is something like that with alcoholism. Therefore we did not wish to get in wrong with the medical profession by pronouncing alcoholism a disease entity. Therefore we always called it an illness, or a malady-- a far safer term for us to use. (Ernest Kurtz, Not God [1979] 22)

When A.A. pioneered the disease concept it stepped over a debate that had been raging among medical professionals for decades. Like most declarations, A.A.'s was a formal opinion or resolution based on scant evidence, but it worked. And it worked in spite of the fact that it was viewed with great suspicion from medical quarters. Given the culture of medical skepticism surrounding the concept at its inception, it is remarkable that the World Health Organization would eventually endorse it. In 1951, when it did so grudgingly, World Health contended that "certain forms" of alcoholism constituted a "disease process." World Health adopted the concept not because A.A. has proved that alcoholism was a disease, but because of its demonstrable success rate, which is, in part, a result of how it conceptualizes alcoholism.

This moment in the history of the disease concept illustrates how epistemology operates in the realm of alcoholism. When Wilson defines alcoholism as an illness, he constructs an epistemology, a particular way of perceiving the self in the world. He does not diagnose alcoholics as embodying a specific infection or disease entity; rather, he creates a lens through which alcoholics could regard themselves and their experiences with alcohol. Wilson's lens needed no empirical evidence up front to prove its veracity because an epistemology generates its own evidence, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy.

In "The Cybernetics of 'Self': A Theory of Alcoholism" anthropologist Gregory Bateson defines an epistemology as the way in which an individual understands or "'construes' his experience" (Steps To an Ecology of Mind [1972] 314). In Bateson's reading, an epistemology is a system of perception, a culturally determined lens or paradigm from which we not only perceive but also experience the world. Bateson writes that an individual's

(commonly unconscious) beliefs about what sort of world it is will determine how he sees it and acts within it, and his ways of perceiving and acting will determine his beliefs about its nature. The living man is thus bound within a net of epistemological and ontological premises which--regardless of ultimate truth or falsity--become partially self-validating for him (314).

In other words, what we know about the world determines our experience of the world, and that knowing can be self-reflective or unconscious, but it has nothing to do with "ultimate truth or falsity." The point is, perception is self-validating, and self-fulfilling.

Bateson's systems theory of perception is nowhere more dramatically born out than in the narratives of the so-called Big Book, Alcoholics Anonymous, which Bateson acknowledges. The Big Book documents the kind of shift in epistemology and perception which Bateson describes and which a declaration of alcoholism would require. Wilson refers to this shift in terms of a spiritual awakening, the experience of being "catapulted into what I like to call the fourth dimension of existence" (8). Wilson's own spiritual awakening occurred when he was diagnosed a hopeless alcoholic. He did not know what happened to him but after reading William James' The Varieties of Religious Experience, in the Towns Hospital, he found that he had undergone what James describes as a "religious experience," a phenomenon which Wilson would later define as a spiritual experience, avoiding the reference to religion.

In the Big Book narratives, the vocabulary used to describe this moment of spiritual awakening is almost banal, but this flatness in style and wording also attests to the profundity of the experience, the highly emotionally charged quality of the interruption or rupture within the alcoholic's experience. As documented in the Big Book, a spiritual awakening is not acquired in a linear fashion by learning facts about alcoholism. Rather the moment of insight occurs in a nonlinear way through the experience of having one's own life mirrored in another's story or by simply being in the presence of another who has inexplicably recovered from a terminal illness. In story number 2, for example, one narrator writes that after talking to an early A.A. member who visited him in the hospital, "I couldn't tell you a word of what he said. Not one experience registered with me. . . . The important thing was that he was happy. He was released, relieved from his alcoholism and was happy and contented because of it. That I shall never forget" (208). Indeed, a majority of the narrators were not influenced so much by the content of the stories they read and heard as by the intangible experience of the fellowship itself, "the quality of happiness these men displayed" (291). The experience described is that of being for a short while in the presence of "hope." Narrator number 12 writes, "I stayed up all night reading that book. For me it was a wonderful experience. . . . Here was hope. Maybe I could find my way out of this agonizing existence. Perhaps I could find freedom and peace and be able once again to call my soul my own" (309).

By 1955, when many of the contributors to the second edition were writing their testimonials, A.A.'s epistemology had so altered the culture's perception of alcoholism that one could have access

to A.A. even though one was not conscious of knowing anything about it. When Bateson describes an individual's epistemology as being unconscious, he articulates something like the experience of narrator number 3 in Part II. The 70 year old retiree describes how he was caught by his unsuspecting wife with "a cupboard full of empties." Fearing that his wife, who had a heart condition, would go into cardiac arrest, he found himself beginning "to talk frantically but clearly--and making sense." He seemed not to know where he got his ideas about alcoholism, but they were there at the ready, waiting to be uttered. He marveled, "Where were all those words coming from? They surprised me. I told her that I was an alcoholic, victim of a disease, that there was no cure, only arrestment through total abstinence. I told her that I had to go to A.A. It was the only hope I had. Spiritual experience? Whatever it was, it brushed all the heavy burdens off my back" (333-4).

The narratives suggest that the miracle of A.A. resides not so much in narrative content, but in the ability of the fellowship and its discourse to alter or transform the alcoholic's and the general public's epistemology. Narratives about alcoholism and recovery have been around for a long time, but they have not had the same ability to shift the perception of others. The Washingtonian Movement of the 1840s, for example, pioneered something like an alcoholic narrative to both inspire and to acquire new members. Members of this temperance organization also took a pledge to abstain from beer, wine and spiritous liquors. In 20th century American literature, Jack London's John Barleycorn might also be described as an alcoholic narrative in response to the prohibition era. When London explains his craving for alcohol after many years of drinking without "needing it," he describes what the Big Book would delineate years later as a compulsion of the mind to drink and an allergy of the body to go insane or die from it. London writes, "I drank when others drank and I was with them. But imperceptibly, my need for alcohol took form and began to grow. It was not a body need. . . . [T]his need for alcohol was a mental need, a nerve need, a good spirits need. How can I explain?" (New York: Grosset [1913]: 258). London's pre-A.A. narrative fairly accurately describes the baffling craving which has come to be synonymous with addiction. What is obviously missing from London's narrative is A.A.'s epistemology, an understanding that this craving itself, which produces a standard pattern of behavior--going on the water wagon, drinking only beer, etc.--is one of the signs of addiction. London obviously has no access to this concept of addiction when he exclaims, "Merciful goodness!--if John Barleycorn could get such a sway over me, a non-alcoholic, what must be the sufferings of the true alcoholic" (302).

A.A.'s definition of alcoholism has so altered the way readers and writers perceive it that we can no longer accept London's description of himself as "nonalcoholic." We tend to edit-in A.A.'s construction of alcoholism in texts such as London's, in



which alcoholism is being firmly denied. Raymond Carver illustrates this impulse to edit-in alcoholism in the short story "Where I'm Calling From." Standing on the porch of "his drying-out facility," Frank Martin gestures towards the hills and says "Jack London used to have a big place on the other side of this valley. Right over there behind that green hill you're looking at. But alcohol killed him. Let that be a lesson to you. He was a better man than any of us. But he couldn't handle the stuff, either . . . You guys want to read something while you're here, read that book of his, The Call of the Wild. You know the one I'm talking about? . . . It's about this animal that's half dog and half wolf. End of sermon" (Cathedral: New York, Vintage [1989]: 17).

Now that we have entered into a post A.A. era, it would be hard to read a work like F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Crack-Up" as anything but a narrative of an alcoholic who has hit bottom. Fitzgerald seems to understand something about alcoholism when he elaborates how "William Seabrook . . . tells, with some pride and a movie ending how he became a public charge. What led to his alcoholism or was bound up with it, was a collapse of his nervous system." Yet when Fitzgerald draws a distinction between his own breakdown and alcoholism, his narrative cannot help but sound slightly off-pitch to a contemporary reader's ears. He contends, "the present writer, [himself] was not so entangled--[with alcoholism] having at the time not tasted so much as a glass of beer for six months" (71).

I think that it will become increasingly difficult to read about drinking in literature without including A.A.'s cultural construction of alcoholism. We are, I think, reaching a stage where this popular notion about alcoholism has outstripped literary or academic readings of abuse. This is usually the case with popular culture since it maintains a more fluid relationship to ideas and adjusts itself more readily, than literary studies do, to changes in beliefs and practices. The same holds true for alcoholism and medicine. The disease-concept produced measurable results among alcoholics in A.A. long before it could be endorsed by the American medical profession. This is not to imply that there is something intrinsically wrong with the way the medical profession and academic institutions work, they are simply slower moving. What this does imply about popular culture, however, is that people are smart.

Alcohol, Disease, and the Limitations of  
Artistic Representation\*

Roger Forseth

Beware romans à clef.

--Jason Sams

I

The re-creation of an altered state of consciousness in a literary text may be hazardous to the creator's health. One may find high-minded or even scientific objections to this proposition, but those caveats will not be supported by general experience. The novelist William Styron, for example, in his recent book Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness, a remarkable account of Styron's descent into suicidal depression, found his "controlled" heavy drinking to be consistent with his mental health, indeed to be a catalyst for aesthetic play that later (soberly and mysteriously) would be disciplined in the actual act of literary composition. It was to the depression, he claims, when he lost his tolerance for alcohol owing that he knew he had fallen into the pit of despair.<sup>1</sup> It is an ancient story, retold years ago by Edmund Wilson, in his famous version of the wound and the bow of Philoctetes, where cause and effect are reversed, and instead of artistic creation somehow benefiting from an artificially altered state, it becomes the result of suffering caused by this condition.<sup>2</sup> These powerful parables--one modern, one ancient--give one pause. Do intoxicants, instigators of pain as well as pleasure, stimulate the muse, inspire ecstasies of creation, or do they merely lead to affliction? And if the latter, is the affliction (addiction, illness, disease, moral corruption, depravity, despair) itself in fact the origin of the creative act?

I will attempt to answer these questions by examining three novels by three self-confessed alcoholic writers: Tender Is the Night (1934) by F. Scott Fitzgerald, Recovery (1973) by John Berryman, and Sams in a Dry Season (1990) by Ivan Gold. The first, about a psychiatrist who marries a patient, was written during the most active phase of Fitzgerald's chronic alcoholism. The second, unfinished at Berryman's death, is an account of the protagonist's stay in a chemical dependency treatment center, drafted at a time when the author was sober but his alcoholism still unresolved. The third, written after Gold had resolved his alcoholism, is essentially a monologue of the hero, Jason Sams, discovering a path to spiritual health after a long "dry season" of creative sterility directly caused by his heavy drinking.

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\* An earlier version of this essay was presented at the "Symposium: The Psychology of Alcohol Use--Insights from Literature," American Psychological Association annual meeting, San Francisco, 19 August 1991.

There is reason to believe that each novel reflects at once the creative state and alcoholic condition of its author at a critical stage in his involvement with alcohol. Are these works disguised acts of therapy by successful writers attempting to recapture the purity of their early creativity? Or are they examples, in unique ways, of their having made aesthetic use of the pathological conditions that they experienced? The value of attempting an answer through literary analysis is suggested by W. K. Wimsatt in his seminal essay, "The Concrete Universal":

[A] work of literary art is in some peculiar sense a very individual thing or a very universal thing or both. . . . Whether or not one believes in universals, one may see . . . that [literature] presents the concrete and the universal, or the individual and the universal, or an object which in a mysterious and special way is both highly general and highly particular.<sup>3</sup>

With these novelists and these novels, I believe, we are not simply dealing with particular clinical case histories, useful and interesting as that might be; instead, in each we are forced to confront (whatever the author's "etiology") aesthetically constructed universals of the imagination.

## II

In 1949, with an almost obsessive burst of energy, Malcolm Lowry produced a filmscript of Tender Is the Night.<sup>4</sup> His Under the Volcano, perhaps the most powerful novel about alcoholism ever written, had been published just two years before, in 1947. It is not difficult to see that, for Lowry, Fitzgerald's study of the systematic disintegration of Dick Diver, the protagonist of Tender Is the Night, foreshadowed the Consul in Under the Volcano. Lowry detected the central part alcoholism plays in Fitzgerald's greatest novel, a fact that has been largely missed or minimized by subsequent commentators. Indeed, drink permeates Fitzgerald's story and, by his own admission, corrupted the composition of the text as well as his numerous revisions of it. The year following the publication of Tender Is the Night, in 1934, Fitzgerald wrote to Maxwell Perkins, his editor at Scribner's:

It has become increasingly plain to me that the very excellent organization of a long book or the finest perceptions and judgment in time of revision do not go well with liquor. A short story can be written on a bottle, but for a novel you need the mental speed that enables you to keep the whole pattern in your head and ruthlessly sacrifice the sideshows. . . . I would give anything if I hadn't had to write Part III of Tender Is the Night entirely on stimulant. If I had one more crack at it cold sober I believe it might have made a great difference.<sup>5</sup>

Here Fitzgerald more candidly and accurately defines his central

creative problem with his novel than he did, about the same time, in his famous essay, "The Crack-Up," a piece that consists not of real insights, but of a series of brilliant rationalizations.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, Fitzgerald perceived that the central critical problem in Tender Is the Night lies in the formation of its text. Before it was finally published in book form in 1934 (after being serialized in Scribner's Magazine), it had gone through numerous, agonized revisions.<sup>5</sup> And after its publication, Fitzgerald continued to revise it, including an entire restructuring of the narrative chronology. At his death, in 1940, he had left the "Author's Final Version" which was edited by Malcolm Cowley and published in 1951.<sup>6</sup> Since then a scholarly and critical debate has raged over which version is the "copy-text."<sup>7</sup> The arguments in the debate are important and complex, but what is abundantly clear is that Fitzgerald, who had in 1925 published the almost perfectly constructed The Great Gatsby, botched the structural formation of Tender Is the Night. What happened between 1925 and 1934, I believe, is that his alcoholism had progressed to a point where the most complex and beautiful of all his works was seriously compromised. His disease, in brief, had done him and it in.<sup>10</sup>

Tender Is the Night begins in medias res, using flashbacks after the rich central drama of the narrative--set in southern Europe in the 1920's--is established. It is essentially a story of the psychiatrist Dr. Dick Diver (Yale, Oxford, Johns Hopkins), treating, falling in love with, and marrying his wealthy patient Nicole Warren. Brilliantly employing Freud's notion of "transference," Fitzgerald traces the gradual replacement of Nicole's illness with Dick's strength.<sup>8</sup> This process is then reversed: as Nicole regains her health, Dick begins emotionally and morally to collapse. Through an intricate interplay of "transference-love," Nicole, in some respects taking on the function of the ancient Succubus, slowly un-mans the psychiatrist.

The crucial instrument of Dick's "disintegration"<sup>9</sup> is alcohol, the deus ex machina if you will, that runs through the novel like a Eumenides. He imperceptibly changes from a normal, careful drinker to a careless, often secret, abuser. Several of his patients, who are in treatment for alcoholism at his Swiss clinic, detect liquor on his breath, resulting in the following exchange with his partner:

Dick, I know well that you are a temperate, well-balanced man, even though we do not entirely agree on the subject of alcohol. But a time has come--Dick, I must say frankly that I have been aware several times that you have had a drink when it was not the moment to have one. There is some reason. Why not try another leave of abstinence?"

"Absence," Dick corrected him automatically. "It's no solution to go away."

They were both chafed, Franz at having his return ~~noticed~~ and blurred.

"Sometimes you don't use your common sense, Dick."

"I never understood what common sense meant applied to complicated problems."<sup>13</sup>

Anyone who has ever lied to his physician can appreciate this conversation, with its touching pun on "abstinence." Dick is out of control, he knows it, and, in spite of the veneer of professional courtesy in this exchange, the evidence of the accelerated progress of his addiction is unmistakable.

Nicole does not cause Dick's alcoholism: her actions and the actions of others only allow it to surface. And Fitzgerald, I believe, because his own alcoholism was at a critical stage, and in spite of his apparent insight into the mind and behavior of the alcoholic, was unable to conclude his novel on a truly tragic note. Instead, it simply peters out: Dick Diver disappears into upstate New York (we are informed), while Nicole begins her new life with a new relationship. Like his final novel, The Last Tycoon, Tender Is the Night remains a fragment; Fitzgerald only thought he had finished it; but he was not able to resolve the book's moral theme or its structure since his own alcoholism remained unresolved. We are left with a tragedy, but it is that of F. Scott Fitzgerald.

### III

The poet John Berryman published an assessment of Fitzgerald's achievement in 1946.<sup>14</sup> In it Berryman arrives at an interestingly harsh judgment of Tender Is the Night, calling it "a novel diffuse, lush, uncertain, and badly designed":

[I]t is hard to believe that anyone ever found it as a story anything but a failure. . . . [O]ne hears a personal insistence in the degeneration of Dick Diver and Abe North which seems external, morbid. It would wreck a firmer book than this. Episodes, too, almost uniformly disagreeable, are hurried in and out without reason--simply, one guesses, because they happened once. The style alters senselessly from section to section, as if the book were a series of exercises. Most of the second half can hardly be read as continuous narrative.<sup>15</sup>

It is not without irony that a quarter of a century later when Berryman's own fictional study of alcoholism was posthumously published, the reviewers reacted similarly to his unfinished fiction.<sup>16</sup>

Recovery, his only novel, is a profoundly personal story of one man's journey through an alcoholism treatment center. There are, as one might expect from the author of The Dream Songs, powerful autobiographical elements in it, so strong that Berryman's first wife was able to state flatly: "On our return from Europe . . . I had told John that I was leaving him. In Recovery he gives as my reasons his 'drinking and bad sex.'"<sup>17</sup> Alan Severance, of

course, the protagonist of the novel, made that statement, not the author. This distinction is not merely a semantic technicality. Berryman is a profoundly personal writer, and therefore the reader expects to find in a "confessional" narrative, and does find, autobiographically-based incidents and allusions. But if he had intended to write a memoir of his in-patient experiences while a patient in St. Mary's Intensive Alcohol Treatment Center in Minneapolis, Berryman surely would have done so. He was scarcely a literary naïf. The reader, then, has some obligation to respect the distance between the novelist and

Dr. Alan Severance, M.D., Litt. D., formerly Professor of Immunology and Molecular Biology, now the University Professor, Pulitzer Prize winner, etc.--twice-invited guest on the Dick Cavett Show (stoned once, and a riot). (7)

So the novel begins, and the rest of the unfinished work is a day-by-day, sometimes moment-by-moment richly-developed monologue by a brilliant, narcissistic, and often unpleasant alcoholic who grudgingly begins to find out about himself.

A principal difficulty with Recovery is that it is frequently and incorrectly seen as a roman à clef. But at least in conception it is a bildungsroman, a novel of adolescence rather than a confessional memoir. Alcoholics are, among other things, cases of arrested development, of unwillingness or inability to grow up. An essential part of the treatment for alcoholism, therefore, is the training of the prospective recovering alcoholic in the responsibilities of adulthood. The book Alcoholics Anonymous, for example, the bible of AA, with its creed of twelve steps, is not only a guide to spiritual healing; it also embodies a code of behavior; it is a species of Courtesy Book, or manual of conduct. The incessant hammering at feelings in Recovery that may strike readers as both oppressive and tedious is in reality the affective education--a drill, as it were--for the recovery of sanity and health, for the restoration and acceptance of the normal that must be achieved before the alcoholic is truly in a state of recovery. To define Recovery as a work about the education of the feelings is not, however, to classify it as a didactic temperance tract or a self-help guide. Nor is it a narcissistic exploitation of the author's lurid past. Rather, Berryman's artistic achievement is to cause the aesthetic transformation of the therapeutic, not simply to contribute to our clinical knowledge.

Among the Berryman Papers at the University of Minnesota Libraries is a four-page signed typescript (dated "27 December 1970") titled Third Alcoholic Treatment, which John Berryman characterizes as a "summary & deluded account of the beginning of [his] recovery." "Alcoholism," he wrote,

produces inevitably what are known as "sincere delusions." A sincere delusion is a lie--an affective deformation of reality--

which the liar does not know to be a lie. . . . A chilling feature of the disease is that even in an advanced stage even its most sophisticated victim does not know he has it. . . . His delusion is shared in some degree by that part of his society which is concerned with his welfare."

The "sincere delusion" of Alan Severance is to remain forever seduced into thinking that his wit and wisdom will guide him to recovery from his affliction. Early in Recovery,

Severance hoped everyone else was as well prepared as he was. He looked around the room eagerly. Maybe they could pop through this in fifteen minutes at the outside--it wasn't likely that anybody else would have a list of disciplines as long as his, after all--and get down to business at last. He burned to level and confront, be confronted, learn, suffer, and break through. (50-51)

This "sincere delusion" is embarrassingly and ironically lifelike--and pathetically naive. Dr. Alan Severance enters this, his third treatment center, not in his own mind as a failure, but as though he were working on an advanced phase of a research grant! He is, in his deluded mind, a treatment veteran, scarred and embattled, but unbroken, who joins the veteran's therapy group. It doesn't occur to him that he is more deserter than hero. Indeed, in his fantasia of deceit he would rather forfeit his life, so he believes, than his image of himself: scientists, like artists, must bear the wound of Philoctetes, must sacrifice their lives on the altar of creativity.

Yet the character of Alan Severance develops through the book. Berryman, with tough-minded compassion, depicts Severance haltingly but surely moving through the process of spiritual detoxification as he gropes his way toward that dim, distant goal of "serenity." The main body of Recovery is in fact, a painful, at times hesitant, but always determined dialectic of Severance's quest for sanity and spiritual peace, for what the suffering alcoholic yearns for and then discovers to be the normal condition of ordinary people.

Recovery, fragment that it is, remains finally a work of integrity, and we may legitimately speculate that, had its author been granted sufficient years (including enough experience of sobriety), he would have produced a major work of art. Alan Severance is on a progress toward a condition of spiritual serenity that Berryman himself, tragically, was never to reach, for, in the grip of a severe depression, he committed suicide in January 1972. But his uncompleted fiction is headed in the right direction, the direction of the discovery that alcohol all along was not the handmaiden of the imaginative spirit, but the destroyer of it.

## IV

Ivan Gold's Sams in a Dry Season, like Tender Is the Night and especially like Recovery, is powerfully autobiographical. Gold, however, unlike Fitzgerald or Berryman, is a recovering alcoholic. In a recent interview in The Washington Post Book World he said of his novel: "This is my testament." In writing it,

Gold says he felt like "a sculptor doing a self-portrait of how he looked 15 years ago. As such, I had enough artistic detachment, enough pleasure in embellishing the act of memory with just pure making things up, that I'm quite comfortable considering it a novel. Yet I do not repudiate the fact that I'm the drunk. I still consider myself a drunk even though I haven't had a drink in 15 years."<sup>1</sup>

Sams in a Dry Season begins with the protagonist Jason Sams, a writer in the grip of a long-term creative "dry season," instructing himself in one of his interior monologues:

. . . you put somebody in a book with all the love and wit and guile and shuddering insight you can muster and they refuse to stay put sometimes even if they're dead, for new data may surface even from the grave and sock you in the chops, my lad, or your own considered view may change, and so, and thus, Beware roman à clef, my son, the jaws that bite, the claws that snatch<sup>20</sup>

Beware, it may be added, the Biographical Fallacy, of the reductionist tendency automatically to convert stories into exempla.<sup>21</sup>

Though Gold's novel to a very large extent takes place in the mind of Jason Sams, it is far from narcissitic or purely self-regarding. "An enlightening way," Thomas B. Gilmore writes,

to approach Gold's book is to see it as a hybrid form, an interesting and unique merger of two previously separate species, the alcoholic novel and the Jewish-American novel. . . . Even though most students of alcoholism regard the isolation or loneliness of the alcoholic as one of his chief characteristics, the importance of family and, more generally, of social relations in the Jewish-American novel keeps Sams from experiencing this aspect of alcoholism as intensely as most of his predecessors in the alcoholic novel have.<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, though Tender Is the Night has been celebrated as a portrait of expatriate society, and therefore as a social novel, in important respects it is far more concerned with isolation rather than, as is Gold's novel, with community. Because of what Gilmore terms its "hybrid" characteristics, Sams in a Dry Season contains the seeds of its protagonist's alcoholic recovery.



The "dry season" of Jason Sams is ironically plural: wet with booze but creatively and procreatively dry. He sardonically conflates his writing block with the fact that his wife has difficulty conceiving, in the phrase, "my sperm no doubt [is] as sluggish as my muse" (54). Even when his drinking is at its most unmanageable, he is not without insight:

He had drunk through his thirties and into his forties, turned over cars, bought unwanted real estate, wrecked friendships and otherwise wreaked havoc with his social life, thereby weakening his one remaining rationale, that too many important American writers since Poe . . . had been roaring drunks, making it quite clear that art and alcohol went hand in hand; furthermore, as the great writer must suffer for the sake of his art you always had the exquisite hungover remorse of the morning following the insane behavior of the night before . . . so . . . what had gone wrong? How many years since he had written anything worthwhile, or completed anything at all, while his drinking continued unabated? . . . Even his last published work . . . had booze for its subtext. (11)

Booze, in fact, is now Jason's text, not his "subtext"; indeed, it is his only text.

Toward the end of the book, at the conclusion of a disastrous, mostly drunken weekend in New York, his best friend calls him a "lush, a lush," cries Jason:

which was a long way from his own calm pondering from time to time whether he might be an "alcoholic," or exhibited, now and again, "alcoholic tendencies." Paul's judgment was more hurtful for some reason than his mother's, or even his wife's, shrill and angry as that one could become (thanks to that fucking Al-Anon!), . . . His habit had always before been a source of amusement and wonder to Paul, even commanding respect, in the good old days when it had seemed to go hand in hand with spurts of progress . . . helping him convert a personal disaster into useful, vengeful art, echoing Sams' own longstanding faith . . . in the union between booze and creativity. Or so he had believed Paul believed. (142)

That last, plaintive note suggests that Jason's faith in booze is on the wane. He returns to Boston and his family, suffering a terrible alcohol-induced anxiety attack on the train, turning that trip into a harrowing ordeal, if not exactly into a replication of St. Augustine's journey to Carthage.

Jason makes it back to his family and, as it turns out, to sobriety:

"What'd you bring me from New York, Dad?"

"I forgot your present, Jake. I forgot your mother's too."

There was so much happening . . ."

He began to cry. . . . "I b-b-b-backed m-myself into a corner long ago, Jenny, and I can't get out. I'm a worthless shit! I'm alcoholic! I screw up everybody's life!"

"You just had a tough weekend," she said quietly.

"Thanks, yeah, b-but everything I touch turns rotten. I'm sorry I'm c-c-crying, but I can't stop!" Her hand was on the table, and he covered it. Her fingers moved slightly. He did not need much more by way of affirmation. . . . "Th-thank G-God! I'm f-f-free not to drink!" His face fell apart again, he couldn't speak.

Jake, at first aghast, now touched his arm. "Don't cry, Dad! You'll bring me something next time!" (204-5)

The scene is prosaic, matter-of-fact--and completely authentic: the "shicker," to use Jason's father's Yiddish term for a drunk, has begun his progress toward sanity. Emotionally--and, I believe, aesthetically--Sams in a Dry Season ends at this point. The rest of the novel is an account of Jason's at first reluctant involvement with, and subsequent full acceptance of, the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. The final section of the novel, an account of this developing fellowship, is instructive but aesthetically unnecessary; we know where Jason's headed, and it is not in the direction of Dick Diver or Alan Severance.

## V

These three tales of alcoholism, necessarily limited though they are to the concrete, fragmentary experiences of their authors, are not less universal for all that. The indeterminate tragedy of Dick Diver, the dogged hopefulness of Alan Severance, and the implicit success of Jason Sams, divergent as their outcomes are, should not mislead one into thinking that we are in the presence of unconnected experiences. These are parables of experiences, not statistical abstractions of them. Nevertheless, generalizations derived from these artifacts may have universal validity. Partial as these stories may be as commentaries on or embodiments of the disease or affliction of alcoholism, they contain a reality that cannot be expressed in any other form. The philosopher Jeremy Bentham somewhere proclaimed that metaphors are not reasons. But perhaps, in the forms of these stories of alcoholism, metaphors are reasons enough.

## NOTES

1 "The storm which swept me into a hospital . . . began as a cloud no bigger than a wine goblet the previous June. And the cloud--the manifest crisis--involved alcohol, a substance I had been abusing for forty years. Like a great many American writers, whose sometimes lethal addiction to alcohol has become so legendary as to provide in itself a stream of studies and books, I used

alcohol as the magical conduit to fantasy and euphoria, and to the enhancement of the imagination. There is no need to either rue or apologize for my use of this soothing, often sublime agent, which had contributed greatly to my writing; although I never set down a line while under its influence, I did use it--often in conjunction with music--as a means to let my mind conceive visions that the unaltered, sober brain has no access to. Alcohol was an invaluable senior partner of my intellect, besides being a friend whose ministrations I sought daily--sought also, I now see, as a means to calm the anxiety and incipient dread that I had hidden away for so long somewhere in the dungeons of my spirit." William Styron, Darkness Visible (New York: Random, 1990) 40. Like many writers, Styron finds the prospect of permanently giving up drink unthinkable. See the perceptive reviews of Styron's book, by Carol Iannone, "Depression-as-Disease," Commentary (November 1990): 54-57; and Virginia Ross, "Descent Into Despair," Dionysos: The Literature and Intoxication TriQuarterly 2.3 (Winter 1991): 40-43.

2 Edmund Wilson, "Philoctetes: The Wound and the Bow," The Wound and the Bow: Seven Studies in Literature (New York: Oxford U P, 1965) 223-42.

3 W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. "The Concrete Universal," The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry (Lexington: U of Kentucky P, 1954) 69, 71.

4 Malcolm Lowry, The Cinema of Malcolm Lowry: A Scholarly Edition of Lowry's "Tender Is the Night". ed. Miguel Mota and Paul Tiessen (Vancouver: U of British Columbia P, 1990). "In a letter to the movie producer, Frank Taylor, in 1949, Malcolm Lowry wrote that he and his wife Marjorie Bonner were 'possessed' by Tender Is the Night. They were then immersed in what was to become a 500-page filmscript of Fitzgerald's novel, complete with almost 100 pages of detailed explanatory notes and comprising about six hours of movie time" (Ruth Perlmutter, "Malcolm Lowry's Unpublished Filmscript of Tender Is the Night." American Quarterly 28 [1976]: 561).

5 F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald, ed. Andrew Turnbull (New York: Scribner's, 1963) 259-60. It is not possible, here, to cite the enormous documentation of Fitzgerald's alcoholism, but the following is representative: "[A] doctor in New York, perhaps hoping to frighten him into facing his situation, told him he would die if he did not stop drinking and put him on an allowance of one gill of gin a day. He gave Fitzgerald a gill measuring glass and Fitzgerald started home with the glass in one pocket and a quart of gin in the other. On the way home he stopped off in Wilmington to see his old friend John Biggs. . . . Sitting on the lawn Fitzgerald began to talk, and carefully, gill by gill, finished the quart of gin. As his secretary said, he did not really want to get well" (Arthur Mizener, The Far Side of Paradise: A Biography of F. Scott Fitzgerald [Boston: Houghton, 1951] 230-

31).

6 F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Crack-Up, ed. Edmund Wilson (New York: New Directions, 1945) 69-84. The title essay was first published in Esquire, February 1936.

7 See Matthew J. Bruccoli, The Composition of "Tender Is the Night": A Study of the Manuscripts (Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1963), and his "Material for a Centenary Edition of Tender Is the Night," Critical Essays on F. Scott Fitzgerald's "Tender Is the Night", ed. Milton R. Stern (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1986) 32-57. See also, Lucy M. Buntain, "A Note on the Editions of Tender Is the Night," Studies in American Fiction 1 (1973): 208-13.

8 F. Scott Fitzgerald, Tender Is the Night: (With the Author's Final Revisions), ed. Malcolm Cowley (New York: Scribner's, 1951).

9 In addition to Bruccoli and Buntain, see Brian Higgins and Hershel Parker, "Sober Second Thoughts: Fitzgerald's 'Final Version' of Tender Is the Night," Proof 4 (1975): 129-52, who argue for the 1934 text; and Robert Merrill, "Tender Is the Night as a Tragic Action," Texas Studies in Literature and Language 25 (1983): 597-615, who defends the 1951 version. I use the 1934 text in this essay. For all Fitzgerald's supposed "sober second thoughts," the 1934 text is, I feel, more genuine and less contrived than is that of 1951.

10 For a first-rate analysis of the effects of alcoholism on Fitzgerald's work, see Marty Roth, "'The Milk of Wonder': Fitzgerald, Alcoholism, and The Great Gatsby," Dionysos 2.2 (Fall 1990): 3-10. See also, Julie M. Irwin, "F. Scott Fitzgerald's Little Drinking Problem," The American Scholar 56 (1987): 415-27 (but see John W. Crowley's review of Irwin, Dionysos 1.2 [Fall 1989]: 41-42); Kenneth E. Eble, "Touches of Disaster: Alcoholism and Mental Illness in Fitzgerald's Short Stories," The Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald: New Approaches in Criticism, ed. Jackson R. Bryer (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1982) 39-52; Robert Roulston, "The Beautiful and Damned: The Alcoholic's Revenge," Literature and Psychology 27 (1977): 156-63.

11 For an excellent, detailed analysis of psychiatry in Tender Is the Night, see Jeffrey Berman, "Tender Is the Night: Fitzgerald's A Psychology for Psychiatrists," Literature and Psychology 29 (1979): 34-48.

12 Fitzgerald's term, in his planning notes to Tender Is the Night. See Mizener, 308.

13 F. Scott Fitzgerald, Tender Is the Night (New York: Scribner's, 1934) 255-56.

14 This was well before the Fitzgerald revival, which began with the publication in 1951 of Arthur Mizener's biography of Fitzgerald, The Far Side of Paradise.

15 John Berryman, "F. Scott Fitzgerald," The Freedom of the Poet (New York: Farrar, 1976) 201. The article originally appeared in The Kenyon Review 8 (1946): 103-12.

16 John Berryman, Recovery (New York: Farrar, 1973). An expanded version of my discussion of Recovery will be found in my "Spirits and Spirituality: Notes on the Art of John Berryman's Recovery," John Berryman: His Life, His Work, His Thought, ed. Richard Kelly and Alan Lathrop (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P) forthcoming.

17 Eileen Simpson, Poets in Their Youth: A Memoir (New York: Random, 1982) 245.

18 John Berryman, MSS 43, Box 1, "Loose File," "Recovery Notes, Drafts, Reviews," John Berryman Papers, U of Minnesota Libraries Manuscript Division.

19 David Streifeld, "Ivan Gold Redux," The Washington Post Book World (18 November 1990): 15.

20 Ivan Gold, Sams in a Dry Season (Boston: Houghton, 1990) 87.

21 See René Wellek and Austin Warren, "Literature and Biography," Theory of Literature, 3rd. ed (New York: Harcourt, 1956) 75-80; and Wimsatt, "The Intentional Fallacy" (with Monroe C. Beardsley), The Verbal Icon, 3-18.

22 Thomas B. Gilmore, "A Happy Hybrid," Dionysos 3.1 (Spring 1991): 20-21.

## MAKING SENSE OUT OF SOUSED SYNONYMS

David Isaacson

Students of intoxication will not be surprised to learn that, according to the 1993 edition of The Guinness Book of Records, "the condition of being inebriated has more synonyms than any other condition or object."<sup>1</sup> Guinness cites Paul Dickson as the compiler of this list, noting that it includes 2,241 synonyms. The 1994 Guinness may correct this. Dickson has recently added 19 words, for a grand total of 2,660 words and phrases, which he proudly proclaims under the title "Soused Synonyms II" as a chapter in his book Word Treasury.<sup>2</sup>

One doesn't have to be an alcoholologist to wonder why there are so many words for this condition. In an effort to answer this question, I have classified Dickson's list into categories. Dickson may have missed some words and phrases, either because they are archaic or arcane, or too new to have come to his attention. I should also note that Dickson's list is restricted to the English language and that it focuses on adjectives or adjectival phrases, thus excluding nouns and verbs.

Dickson's list is published in a non-scholarly book addressed to a general audience. He includes a list of sources consulted, besides standard dictionaries of slang, such as Harold Wentworth and Stuart Berg Flexner's Dictionary of American Slang<sup>3</sup> and Richard A. Spear's Slang and Euphemism.<sup>4</sup> He also notes that this is "a list that not only incorporates all the previous lists but draws from a wide variety of additional sources ranging from 'research' conducted by friends and scribbled on the back of cocktail napkins to material from the editorial offices of the Dictionary of American Regional English."<sup>5</sup>

My purpose in this essay is not to criticize the unsystematic nature of Dickson's methods. If he were a lexicographer he would have provided definitions, etymologies, and other information about these words. As a matter of fact, at least four specialized dictionaries of alcohol terms have been published.<sup>6</sup> However, neither Dickson nor the compilers of these dictionaries provide a classification of these synonyms.<sup>7</sup>

Only sexual intercourse and death and dying compete with intoxication in the number and variety of synonyms used to describe these experiences. Many of these synonyms are either slang and/or euphemisms. This should come as no surprise. Purely objective, clinical or legal terms such as deceased, sexual intercourse, or intoxication do not express the complex emotions often associated with these experiences. Intoxication, like death and sexual union, is often a taboo subject. Denotative words can describe the condition from a detached observer's point of view, but only slang, euphemism, and poetic language can approximate what it feels like

to be drunk.

Most people have mixed feelings about drunkenness. Happy drunks and those who are amused by them will choose words like "in the pink" or "feeling aces," while, at the other extreme, those scandalized by drunks are likely to use words like "dead drunk" or "shit-faced." If the drunk can't convince someone else that "he was detained on business" (one of many circumlocutions for drunk), he may be able to at least temporarily assuage guilt feelings with such phrases.

Many synonyms for drunkenness are slang because standard usage can't capture adequately our ambivalent feelings about this subject. Clinical and legalistic terms like intoxicated or inebriated are useful if we want to avoid value judgments. Formal words like these are more common in written than spoken language. Standard colloquial and informal terms like drunk are easily understood by almost all users of the written or oral language. Slang terms, like blotto, or wasted, are more direct and colorful than standard usage terms. Euphemisms allow us to avoid directly confronting an unpleasant subject, and thus we have synonyms like "he has a guest in the attic" as a circumlocution for a hangover.

I am basing my distinctions between different vocabulary levels on Stuart Berg Flexner's preface to The Dictionary of American Slang, where he defines standard usage as words and expressions used under any circumstances, colloquialisms as words and idioms used in formal speech and writing and understood by nearly every native speaker, and slang as words that are peculiar to special population groups. Slang, in turn, Flexner notes, can be further subdivided to include cant, the familiar idiom of a specific occupation, trade, sect, age group, class, or sub-group; jargon, the technical and sometimes even secret vocabulary of such a group, such as "shop talk"; and argot, which is both the cant and jargon of a criminal class. General slang is the more popular portion of cant, jargon, and argot that has been absorbed into our common language from many sub-groups." A term like "three sheets to the wind" was originally nautical jargon, just as a word like "wasted" was originally argot from narcotics users and dealers for strung out on drugs, but both terms have been absorbed into popular slang as synonyms for drunkenness.

Euphemisms may be defined as "mild, agreeable, or roundabout words used in place of coarse, painful, or offensive ones." Some drunk synonyms are euphemisms providing a convenient means of denying, or at least mitigating, the drunk's unpleasant behavior. The Irish expression "he's a drop taken" is a comic understatement usually referring to many ounces of "drops." Of course, drunks may use these terms about themselves in order to minimize responsibility for drunken behavior.

Drunk synonyms can be used both to reveal and conceal quite

ambivalent feelings. Robert Chapman, in a very insightful essay in The New Dictionary of American Slang, argues that slang is frequently a defense mechanism protecting the user from real or perceived threats from family or society, and thus sometimes has a cathartic function like profanity. Sociologically, the slang of a sub-culture allows the insecure individual to find some shelter from a disapproving dominant culture. Thus slang "is simultaneously an act of featuring and obtruding the self within the subculture--by cleverness, by control, by up-to-dateness, by insolence, by virtuositities of audacious and usually satirical wit, by aggression (phallic, if you wish)."<sup>10</sup> From a Freudian point of view, Chapman also argues that slang may allow us to find release from deep-seated fears and taboos, releasing the ego from its "burdens of rationality." Some of the humor of slang is dark, cynical, and perverse, laughing in the presence of danger and death. "Slang is also the idiom of the life force. That is, it has roots somewhere near those of sexuality, and it regularly defies death. What I have in mind is partly the 'dirty' and taboo constituent of slang, but even more its tendency to kid about being hanged, electrocuted, murdered or otherwise annihilated. Gallows humor is, from this point of view, more central to slang than may have been thought."<sup>11</sup> Many drunk synonyms seem to be making light of very fearful physical and mental consequences of drinking.

The motive behind euphemisms would seem to be opposed to the blunt, and sometimes unpleasant, honesty of slang. We may laugh, in a forgiving way, at a person who has "dampened his mug," while we may be quite unforgiving if the same person is described as "pissed to the earlobes." Of course the hyperbole of "pissed to the earlobes" can be considered to be as much of a euphemism as the understated "dampened his mug." Indeed, since much slang and many euphemisms are comic, the figures of speech used can simultaneously distort and reveal. Paradoxically, the same purpose may be served by both understatement and overstatement. If we are strictly literal, a drunk person has done a lot more than dampened his mug but has also not actually been pissed to the earlobes. We must also remember that context determines how words are understood. Thus, even a normally denotative term like intoxicated can be used in an emotionally heightened way: after all, that word literally means that one has imbibed a considerable amount of a poisonous, or toxic substance.

I have concluded from studying Dickson's 2,260 words that 1) most of these words describe the unpleasant rather than the pleasant experiences of drunkenness; 2) a great many words focus very vividly on specific physical disabilities; 3) even more words describe the mental disabilities of drunkenness; 4) virtually all occupations and walks of life have contributed some synonyms to the list; 5) many of these synonyms are memorable figures of speech; and 6) drunkenness is a very important and complex subject about which many people feel very ambivalent.



I think it is significant that comparatively few of these words celebrate the benefits of intoxication. A few synonyms associate drunkenness with relaxation, such as: getting loose, mellow, having a warmer, or getting comfortable. However, while each of these terms is a synonym for drunkenness, a social drinker would probably associate relaxation with having only one drink or a few drinks. Probably only people who are alcoholics assume that drunkenness and feeling comfortable are synonyms. One of the most common denial mechanisms of alcoholics is the assertion that they drink only to feel relaxed.

Another group of synonyms, however, describes a more decidedly convivial state, one that goes beyond being simply relaxed, such as: bubbly, dippy, generous, has the whoops and jingles, and imbibed giggle water. When conviviality becomes bacchanalian the drunk is likely to be on a bender, having a binge, tying one on, and other words associated with a prolonged drinking bout. This condition is ambivalent, however, as can be seen in an image like pub-crawling.

Someone who is drunk is disoriented in both physiological and psychological ways. One of the most common clusters of metaphors for this feeling is words associated with being light-headed or flying. But while many people might say it is pleasant on occasion to feel that they are flying high, only alcoholics seek this condition repeatedly and are willing to put up with the "crashes" and other terms associated with the letdown when the high wears off.

Many more drunk words describe the harmful, or at least the confused effects of intoxication, rather than feelings of comfort, good will, and exhilaration. These pejoratives can be sorted into words describing the physical and mental/emotional effects. The physical effects, in turn, can be classified into numerous categories. Some refer to a general feeling of unease or sickness, such as: consumed a rancid oyster, crapped out, down with barrel fever, irrigated the ulcers, polluted, and pot-sick. Other terms, like suffering from the flu, under the weather, or got barley fever, are obvious euphemisms to pretend that a hangover isn't caused by drinking, but by some illness the drinker has contracted through no fault of his own.

However, some other terms in this category link drunkenness directly with disease, like blighted, decayed, has the blue johnnies, or is lopy-louse infected. Instead of minimizing the intoxicated state, these words make it sound life-threatening. Even though these terms are usually used in a comic, dismissive manner, the humor behind a term like blighted or decayed is the gallows variety Chapman associates with a lot of slang rather than the frolicsome comedy implied by words like bubbly or dippy.

Some drunk words refer more graphically, and often with

hyperbole, to specific body parts affected by drink. Headaches and other hangover symptoms are evoked by terms such as: got corns in his head or has scalt his head pad. Vision is often affected, as evident in expressions like red-eyed, soapy-eyed, blind drunk, glassy, and pop-eyed. Hearing is sometimes impaired, as is clear in terms like ears ringing, getting his ears laid back, and variations on the word buzz. Ravages of drink sometimes literally mark the face. W. C. Fields in real life and numerous literary characters, such as Shakespeare's Bardolph, display enlarged and red noses, leading to descriptions like: all schozzled up, got a rum nose, his nose is red, and painting his nose. From the fact that speech is slurred during a drinking bout, or the drunk person drools, or the mouth, teeth, or tongue feel the effects of a hangover, we get terms such as: got the back teeth well afloat, hair on his tongue, thick-lipped, thick-tongued, and double-tongued.

Another very frequent physical symptom of intoxication is a flushed face. When the flush is regarded as positive, we get expressions like: aglow, amiably incandescent, and well lit. On the other hand, the same condition viewed negatively leads to descriptions such as mug blotto and shit-faced.

When the drunk comes close to falling down or actually loses his balance, we get another group of words, some of which indicate a tolerant acceptance of clownish behavior, others obviously expressing disgust, such as: awry, bent and broken, drunk and down, a bit wobbly, curved, folded, forty-five degrees listed, gravelled, holding up the wall, leaning, slightly draped, and tippisified. A stage drunk may amuse us by being a bit wobbly, and we may laugh at a comic word like tippsified, but there is very little to laugh at when someone is described as drunk and down or bent and broken.

A large number of coarse, definitely uneuphemistic terms describe disgusting aspects of drunkenness. A few of these include expressions such as: flat-assed drunk, pissed out of one's mind (there are a great many synonyms that play changes on the word pissed), stinko, and talking to Earl on the big white phone (hugging the commode).

Violence, whether the drunk is an agent or a victim, contributes many synonyms to Dickson's list. Drunks sometimes hurt themselves or get into fights, as indicated by a great many words suggesting batterings, harsh and repeated blows, punctures and other assaults, committed with bare hands or various weapons, such as: bashed, battered, black jacked, blasted, blistered, bombed, boned, brained, bruised, busted, cracked, cut, damaged, fractured, gaffed, gutted, mashed, mauled, nailed to the floor, ripped, scratched, shaved, shot, speared, squashed, sticked, stubbed, and wasted. The harsh sounds, sometimes onomatopoeic, of most of these words, as well as the graphic visual images, speak eloquently about the pain of many drunken states.

People who are drunk may simply feel tired near the end or at the end of a drinking bout, as indicated by terms like dragging his bottom, frazzled, played out, ragged, weary, and whacked out. One of the most common consequences of intoxication is losing consciousness, and the various degrees of stupor leading up to passing out, as indicated in expressions such as: on the floor, out like a light, out for the count, past going, rolled off the sofa, stone cold drunk, stupid, T. U. B. B. (tits up but breathing), and zonkers. While one of the intentions of the alcoholic is to drown his troubles in a state of altered consciousness, he has to be in sad shape indeed to intentionally drink himself into states described by such words as stone cold drunk, bummed, or zonkers.

To complicate matters, however, our culture approves the use of drugs to anesthetize both psychological as well as physical pain. Thus we encounter words like: anesthetized, antiseptic, chloroformed, numb, mesmerized, paralytic, paralyzed, and suffering no pain. Alcoholics in denial may very well use such terms to justify continued drinking, not admitting that they may be trying to relieve the pains of alcohol with more of the same "medicine."

Another harmful effect of excessive drinking is hallucinations, sometimes associated with delirium tremens. These effects are sometimes joked about, as in the large pink rabbit named Harvey that Elwood P. Dowd conjures up as his most trusted companion in the play and movie, *Harvey*. But there is very little that's amusing in phrases such as: all pink elephants, down with the blue devils, in the horrors; or numerous phrases beginning with seeing, such as: seeing a flock of bats, double, the bears, the devil, or the snakes.

The very worst effect of drunkenness is death. Most of the following synonyms may be regarded as comic hyperbole and gallows humor, but it is revealing that one of the major categories of drunk synonyms is death and dying. While most active alcoholics would deny that they are committing suicide slowly, most recovering alcoholics acknowledge that is what they were doing. What else can we conclude from synonyms like: annihilated, croaked, dead drunk, embalmed, extinguished, fossilized, gallows drunk, maggoty, ossified, petrified, or put to bed with a shovel?

There are numerous psychological states as well as physical ones commonly associated with drunkenness, some of which overlap with the physical sensations noted in the previous classifications. One of the most common positive associations of drinking is its use as a stimulant. Social drinkers like this "pick me up" effect. Alcoholics, who also like it, continue to drink well beyond it, both to prolong a buzz and because they don't know how to stop. Positive terms for this stimulating effect include: invigorated, looking lively, pepped up, perked, stimulated and (depending on one's point of view) it's beginning to kick, and raunchy.

The next stage up from stimulation, that most alcoholics enjoy but social drinkers usually find uncomfortable, may be described as tense or wound up. This is a state frequently associated with nervous energy, rapid movements, and the fact, or more often, the illusion, of creativity. Positive, or at least not always negative, terms describing this condition include: cocked, has an edge on, hepped, jazzed up, pretty well started, spirited, and sprung. On the other hand, if these words presage aggressive or unpredictable behavior, we're more likely to hear expressions like cranked, jim-jams, keyed to the roof, miffy, over the edge, quarrelsome, and rattled. A related cluster of words associates drunkenness with motors. Thus a drunk may be super-charged, primed, lubricated, vapor-locked, or winterized, suggesting that his state is hardly human.

Members of Alcoholics Anonymous admit, with the first of the twelve steps, that they are powerless over alcohol and cannot manage their own lives. Committed drinkers, conversely, frequently feel that they are very powerful, as in words suggesting that drunkenness means: bullet-proofed, fearless, feeling his cheerios, (or drink, oats, and many other phrases beginning with the word feeling), glorious, hardy, iron-plated, and simply, strong.

Another frequently ambivalent feeling associated with drinking is the sensation of being full. Normal drinkers stop when they've had enough to feel comfortable. Alcoholics don't know when to stop or have simply stopped caring about their unpredictable drinking behavior. They go on drinking despite feeling full for reasons they can't explain. Associated with this feeling of being full to the brim are other words suggesting confinement and entrapment. This is one of the most common dilemmas associated with drunkenness, as attested by the great number of drunk words in this category, such as: all he can hold, barreled up, boxed up, caged, capped off, cocked to the gills, corked, crocked, full as a boot (or full as a bull, a seaside shit house on Boxing Day, a state school hatrack, and many other terms beginning with full as), in the bag, in the pen, spilling, over the limit, loaded (and a considerable number of words that are variations on the word loaded, such as getting a load on, loaded to the earlobes, and top-loaded), packaged, slopped to the gills, snoot full, got his shoes full, has a skinfull and a half, had enough, had one too many, a cup too much, jammed, stuffed, tanked up, tight, (or other "tight as" phrases, such as a drum, a fart, as the bark on a tree), and well wrapped. One might also argue that many of the drunk synonyms beginning with the word half (Dickson lists over fifty of these) are probably euphemisms, suggesting that there may not be all that much difference between a half-crocked and a totally crocked person.

Intoxication exaggerates emotions, or acts as a catalyst to many emotional states. It's not surprising, therefore, that one group of drunk synonyms describes blazing or mean drunks, while

another group describes maudlin and motherless ones. Another common drunk condition is confusion, ranging from forgetfulness to complete bewilderment, as indicated in words such as: addled, discombobulated, flumoxed, flustered, groggy, muddled, and tangled.

Just as the worst physical consequence of drinking is death, so the worst mental consequence is insanity. While some drinkers simply act foolishly, others are actually insane. Some alcoholics are neurotic or psychotic before they drink and find that drinking helps to manage their fears and insecurities. But it is also true that drinking causes otherwise normal people to develop neuroses and psychoses. While many people joke about "crazy" drunks, this is often no joking matter. It can be argued that any repeated drunken behavior is at the very least irrational, and if prolonged significantly qualifies as a form of mental illness. Drunk synonyms associated with this subject express a great variety of feelings ranging from tolerant acceptance of foolishness to considerable sadness at the waste of otherwise promising lives. Some of the words in this category include: beyond the fringe, balmy, blithered, bonkers, daffy, dotty, freaked, gaga, has the screaming meemies, looney, nearly off his rocker, potty, schizzed, snapped, and touched as a boiled owl.

Since drinking alcohol and getting drunk are such common pastimes, they have been associated with many other activities and reflect all walks of life and all social classes. Agriculture is represented by words such as feeling his oats, has his malt above his wheat, irrigated, plowed, potted, and wilted. Carpentry and other work around the house or shop is represented in words such as: glued, hammered, plastered, shellacked the gold fish bowl, and upholstered. The military is represented by many words, including: bearing the ensign, bombed (and variations, like bombed out of his mind), in one's armor, on sentry, pot-shot, and waving a flag of defiance.

A great many terms come from the sea. One doesn't have to know anything about sailing to recognize that three sheets to the wind means drunk, but, so, interestingly, does two sheets to the wind, full sail, and three sheets in the wind and the other flapping. Other nautical terms include: under full steam, with the main brace well spliced, heeled over, his lee scuppers are under, listing to starboard, lit to the gunnels, lost his rudder, anchored in sot's bay, needing a reef taken in, on the lee lurch, over the bay, overseas, seasick, shipwrecked, afloat, decks awash, flooded, and grogged.

Drinking is often, of course, associated with eating and cooking, so it is no surprise that culinary, and pseudo-culinary terms should also be borrowed for drunkenness, such as: basted, boiled, creamed, fried to the gills (almost anything can qualify of the phrase ends "in the gills"), gingered up, juiced, Kentucky-

fried, marinated, on the sauce, parboiled, pickled, roasted, scorched, scrambled, sizzled, smoked, soused, stewed, and toasted.

Since people are fond of personifying animals, it is not surprising that there are numerous animal synonyms for drunkenness, such as: ape, bats, bit by a fox, carrying the dog on his back, dizzy as a coot, drove the brewer's horse, had a turkey on one's back, had his head full of bees, has the rats, hearing the owl hoot, hog drunk, ratty as a jaybird, roostered, shoe the goose, skunk drunk, squirrely, fish-eyed, foxy, and goat drunk. Another considerable list of similes suggests a veritable zoo, with phrases beginning with drunk as: a badger, bat, coon, coot, Davy's sow, drowned mouse, fish fly, forty billy goats, fowl, hog, loon, monkey, mouse, newt, pig, pissant, and a skunk in a trunk.

The world of drink itself has understandably contributed many drunk synonyms, including the act of drinking, the world of taverns, every kind of container for alcohol, variations on the word alcohol, slang terms like booze, and specific kinds of alcoholic beverages.

Of course, the act of drinking itself can mean simply swallowing liquid, but when the substance swallowed is alcohol every conceivable synonym for various kinds of drinking has been used, including: dipped his beak, guzzled, lapped, quaffed, quenched, swigged, swilled, and swizzled. One way to avoid directly confronting drunkenness is to pretend that the substance imbibed is not alcohol, as in terms like: hosed, liquified, moist around the edges, saturated, sloshed, soaked, soggy, sozzly, or waterlogged. One of my favorite understatements in this category is the short and simple word wet.

Containers for drinks give us words like: behind the cork, bottled, bunged, decanted, in his cups, jiggered, and jugged. The word booze has many variations and spellings, including: boosed, boosy, boozed up, boozie, boozified, boozified, boozing, boozy boozy-woozy, and getting boozed up. The word liquor, and various comic spellings of this word, give us: likkered up, in liquor, in liquor pond, likker-soaked, and likkerous. Beer drinkers may be beerified, beer-soaked, beery, in the suds, or schlitzed. Wine lovers (and the much less respectable winos) may be: out nibbling the grape, over-wined, plonk up, wine-potted, or winey. Whiskey drinkers may be: whiskeyfied, whiskey-frisky, whiskey-raddled, or whiskey-shot. Rum drinkers may be: rum-dumb, rummed up, rummied, or rummy. Gin drinkers may be gin crazed, gin soaked, ginned, or ginny.

It should be obvious by now that there are very few neutral or objective terms for the state of intoxication. In fact, to refer abstractly, to the state of intoxication is to remove oneself from the much more concrete condition of being drunk. Because drunks sometimes slur their words and also because some people lie to show

off, we encounter a group of pseudo-learned nonce terms, such as: bosco absoluto, deberit, drunkulent, drunkok, ebriose, hebriated, hixsius-doxius, incognitibus, incognito, inter pocula, intoxicated, and non compos. Some of these words seem to mingle high learning and nonsense, such as cherumbical, crukoosed, gestunketed, nimpopsical, and pifflicated. Others suggest that the drunk is an infant, such as biffy, drunky, inky poo, and has the yorks. One of my favorites, non compos poopoo, wonderfully combines medical abstraction (therefore seeming very grown-up) with the comic catharsis of a child's naughty word. Other drunk words celebrate sound more than sense, such as rockaputzered, snoozamorooed, swacko, unkdiray, wambozzled, or zissified.

Another group is of words so rare and obsolete that they might as well be nonce terms (but these are actual words), such as bibacious, bibulous, potulent, potvaliant, temulent, temulentic, or temulentious. (Perhaps these last three words have the same clinical effect as calling an erection a state of tumescence, or calling urination a state of micturation.)

There are many more examples of hyperbole among drunk synonyms than understatement, but sometimes a dry understatement can have a greater effect than a blatant overstatement. The reader or listener supplies the missing emotion, and the sometimes devastating consequences, implied in statements like: got some in him, has a drop taken, in a difficulty, influenced, there with what it takes, translated, or the vary unassuming: unsober. Or the drunk's behavior may be euphemized into something rather innocuous sounding, such as: feeling it a little, had a couple of drinks, had a wee dram, had a shot or two, had a snort, had a toothful, had one or two, has got the flavor, that way, there, or smelled the barmaid's apron.

While it is risky to make firm generalizations about all these synonyms, we can conclude that drunkenness is a very important part of many people's experience, whether or not they approve of the state. It is also certain that we feel so ambivalent about this condition that we will continue to invent new words to describe a state that, despite its many dangerous, and sometimes fatal consequences, remains quite literally intoxicating.

#### NOTES

1 Peter Matthews, ed. The Guinness Book of Records 1993 (New York: Bantam, 1993) 388.

2 Paul Dickson, Dickson's Word Treasury (New York: Wiley, 1992) 253-291.

3 Harold Wentworth and Stuart Berg Flexner, Dictionary of American Slang (New York: Crowell, 1960).

4 Richard A. Spears, Slang and Euphemism (Middle Village, New York: Johnathan David, 1981).

5 Dickson 255.

6 Ernest L. Abel, comp., Dictionary of Alcohol Use and Abuse: Slang, Terms, and Terminology (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1985); Ernest L. Abel, Alcohol Wordlore and Folklore (Buffalo, New York: Prometheus, 1987); Richard A. Spears, The Slang and Jargon of Drugs and Drink (Metuchen New Jersey: Scarecrow, 1986); and Mary Keller and Mairi McCormack, A Dictionary of Words About Alcohol (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers, 1968).

7 I have consulted a number of other dictionaries besides those mentioned in the previous endnotes for information about Dickson's synonyms, including: Eric Partridge, A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English, 8th ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1984); The Oxford English Dictionary, eds. J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, 2nd ed. (Oxford, Clarendon, 1989); A Dictionary of American English on Historical Principles, ed. Sir William A. Craigie (Chicago, U of Chicago P, 1942); and A Dictionary of Americanisms, ed. Mitford M. Mathews (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1951).

8 Robert L. Chapman, ed., New Dictionary of American Slang (New York: Harper 1986) xvii-xviii.

9 Hugh Rawson, A Dictionary of Euphemisms and Other Doubletalk: Being a Compilation of Linguistic Fig Leaves and Verbal Flourishes For Artful Users of the English Language (New York: Crown, 1981) 1.

10 Chapman xii-xiii.

11 Chapman xiv.



SPIRITS AND SALVATION IN LOUISE ERDRICH'S LOVE MEDICINE

Ellen Lansky

The "Crown of Thorns" chapter of Louise Erdrich's novel Love Medicine (New York: Holt, 1984) is full of Native American and Catholic imagery, icons, and characters. It is also full of drinking and alcoholism. The title "Crown of Thorns," with its allusion to the Passion of Christ, plus the representations of alcohol and drinking and the inscriptions of native American culture combine to suggest a reading of Gordie Kashpaw's experience as a twentieth century Native American Catholic alcoholic Passion Play. Also, June Kashpaw--Gordie's wife who gets drunk and walks to her death in an Easter snowstorm in the novel's opening chapter--is repeatedly resurrected and re-killed in this chapter. June's role in Love Medicine demonstrates both the American cultural practice of ignoring or condemning drinking women and also the traditional Catholic practice of excluding women from taking central roles in both the liturgies and the sacred texts. However, June also subverts these exclusionary practices because throughout the novel and particularly in "Crown of Thorns," her corporeal absence is offset by her powerful spiritual omnipresence.

Let's begin with Gordie. Gordie's alcoholism is a tripartite problem in this story because his disease is further complicated by the religious and cultural inscriptions he embodies. First, his alcoholism is triggered by his first drink. His intense response to his first drink suggests that something in his body makes him acutely susceptible to alcoholism. Second, Gordie's Native American heritage further problematizes this profound reaction to his first drink. Third, Gordie embodies the Catholicism which, with alcohol and alcoholism, became part of the European cultural legacy to Native Americans--particularly in the Northern Plains states.

The onset of Gordie's alcoholism offers some important information about alcoholism and drinking. The story's first sentence provides this "case history" regarding Gordie's drinking: "A month after June died, Gordie took the first drink, and then the need was on him like a hook in his jaw, tipping his wrist, sending him out with needles piercing his hairline, his aching hands" (172). From this sentence, the reader could make a problematic (but logical) cause/effect statement about alcoholism and drinking: Gordie drinks because June died. This statement is truthful because outside situations or circumstances--such as the death of a spouse--can "drive a person to drink," so to speak. However, not everyone who feels driven to drink becomes an alcoholic. Therefore, while it may be true or partially true that Gordie drinks because June died, it is also true that Gordie drinks as he does because he's an alcoholic. So what's interesting, illuminating, and important about Gordie's drinking and his alcoholism is that his first drink is one too many. Although

Roland J. Lamarine denounces the "Firewater Myth" in his article "Alcohol Abuse Among Native Americans" (Journal of Community Health 13.3 [Fall 1988]: 143-50), claiming that it is preposterous to assume that Native Americans are somehow "constitutionally prone to develop an inordinate craving for liquor and to lose control over their behavior when they drink" (144), this is precisely what Gordie experiences. Gordie's body is inscribed with the alcoholism that, since the arrival of Europeans, has become part of Native American culture.

The story's second sentence makes way for another problematic (but logical or at least anatomically correct) statement about drinking and alcoholism: "From the beginning it was his hands that made him drink" (172). This is a true statement, anatomically speaking. Hands serve key functions for drinkers. Hands help pour the drinks; hands participate in the articulation process that brings the drinks to the mouth. In addition to this anatomic function, Erdrich constructs Gordie's hands as his site of memory--"They remembered things his mind could not" (172), and so Gordie's hands take on an important mnemonic and metaphoric function in this story. His hands articulate literally and metaphorically; they speak his alcoholism.

Gordie's alcoholism is a disease of his hands, and it's also disease in his family. Gordie's need for alcohol sends him down the road to beg for a drink at his Uncle Eli's. In a weird Last Supper/breakfast scene, Uncle Eli offers Gordie a bun and gives Gordie his last can of beer at six o'clock in the morning. Eli tells his nephew "You gone too far now" (172). Gordie declines the bun but drinks the beer. Then he gets up and announces that he's "got to make a raise" (174), and Uncle Eli watches him go. Uncle Eli thinks of June--Gordie's dead wife, also his cousin--who had lived with him (Eli) like a daughter when she was younger. They are all blood relatives, and so June's pain is Gordie's pain is Uncle Eli's pain. And even though Uncle Eli appears here as a coffee-drinking working man (his coffee cup is "the same color as his work clothes") (174), he is a witness to Gordie's alcoholism.

Other family members also participate in Gordie's alcoholism. They understand that he is not merely "on a bender," but nobody tries to stop him or impede his decline. When he returns to his house from Uncle Eli's, he crawls "across the carpet to the phone" (175), and he calls his cousin Royce. Royce, a wine-bootlegger, claims that he "don't make house calls or give no credit" (175). Evidently, though, wine/blood is thicker than (fire)water because Royce agrees to make the delivery. Later, Royce also delivers again, because "more wine appeared" (176). Unfortunately, this wine provides neither sacrament nor salvation: "One quart helped and the next didn't. Nothing happened. [Gordie] had gone too far" (176). Although it is unfair to blame Royce for Gordie's condition, the family dynamics--especially the enabling--involved

in Gordie's drinking are worth noting. Gordie's blood relatives participate in maintaining or elevating Gordie's blood alcohol level.

Gordie's "bender" is further complicated by his Native American cultural heritage and by the presence/absence of June. It is night, and his feeling of being "trapped there with himself" (176) in the house he bought after June's death panics him. In his panic, he invokes June by name. Speaking June's name results in a new level of horror for Gordie, as his Indian grandmother has specifically prohibited it: "Never, never, ever call the dead by their names, Grandma said. They might answer" (177). He turns on all the lights, locks all the windows and doors, turns on all the appliances and machines, but "still he heard things" (177). Gordie has auditory hallucinations which bear the inscriptions of Native American culture (the dead returning to visit when called upon) plus the inscriptions of alcoholism (alcohol withdrawal responses). Then he exhibits visual hallucinations--which also combine his Native American cultural heritage and alcohol withdrawal. In the bathroom window he sees June's face: "wild and pale with a bloody mouth" (177). He runs out of the house and gets into his car. On the road, his first thought is clearly an indication of the inscription of alcoholism in his body: "his mind lit in warped hope on another bottle. He'd get to town. Another bottle would straighten him out" (178). Though he has proven to himself that another bottle has only exacerbated his condition, and the fact that he is driving a car now makes him dangerous to himself and others, his faith in alcohol supersedes the unpleasant consequences. Also, his urgency is ascribable in part to his desire to evade June, the woman he mourns and loathes.

On the road, Gordie tries to keep his focus on getting to town and getting a bottle. However, his responses to external stimuli are so diminished that when he hits a deer in the road, he "felt the jolt somewhat after he actually must have hit it" (179). He finds that he has to walk back "perhaps twenty yards" to the site of the impact. His first thought about the dead deer is that "someone would trade it for a bottle, even if it was a tough old doe" (179). Then he drags the deer to his old Chevy, but he finds he has left the trunk key at home. Feeling persecuted and sorry for himself, he damns "their hides"--whoever "their" might be--and feels that "everything worked against him. He could not remember when this had started to happen. Probably from the first, always and ever afterward, things had worked against him" (179). Gordie's vague nouns and pronouns--"everything," "this," "the first," and "things" all signify his drinking and alcoholism. He has clearly demonstrated that from his first drink, his alcoholism has worked against him. Now, because he is drunk, Gordie is unable or unwilling to make a reasoned connection between his drinking the "things" that are working against him.

In addition to the influence of alcohol, Gordie is also under

the influence of his cultural heritage as a Native American Catholic. He shoves the deer into the back seat and keeps driving in spite of his shaking. He senses the presence of someone or something. When he looks in the rearview mirror, he sees a horrible miracle. The deer is up--looking back at him. This Lazarus-like gazing deer sees and produces an array of complicated images: "She looked through him. She saw into the troubling thrashing woods of him, a rattling thicket of bones. She saw how he'd woven his own crown of thorns. She saw how although he was not worthy he'd jammed this relief on his brow" (180). The image of Gordie's "crown of thorns" invokes the second act of the Passion of Christ. The "crowning" is a humiliation scene. According to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John, Jesus is mocked by the Roman soldiers in praetorium: robed, hailed as "King," crowned with woven thorns, then beaten and scourged. Jesus refuses to defend himself, and the Roman soldiers take this refusal as an admission of guilt. As a result, Jesus's silence gives the Roman soldiers tacit permission to punish him. Jesus endures public and private mockery, humiliation, beatings, and crucifixion--with the faith that his endurance will result in a greater salvation. In Erdrich's Passion Play, the deer's gaze turns Gordie into a postmodern Native American alcoholic Jesus. The deer's gaze reveals Gordie's subscription to this central Christian paradox: there is pleasure in pain, ease in agony. Thus, Gordie's crown of thorns is his desire to drink more and more bottles of wine or beer or whatever alcoholic beverage he can find. Alcohol is the painful relief that he jams on his own brow.

The relief Gordie seeks in his alcoholic crown of thorns is clearly related to the torment he feels around June's death, but the spirits that Gordie continues to drink do not mollify nor dispel the revisiting spirit of June. Now, in the car, he senses the spirit of June in the body of the back-from-the-dead deer. Though he "did not understand what he was going to do" (180), some instinct or lower brain function triggers a response. He reaches under the seat, grabs a tire iron--a "flat-edged crowbar thick as a child's wrist" (180), and "brought it smashing down between [the deer's] eyes" (181). Then, as the result of alcohol withdrawal and fear or horror, "the shaking started" (181). He hears loud voices, and the windshield and the dash and the radio seem to smash and crack on their own. He experiences a "sudden lull," and in that lull, "in that clear moment it came to his attention that he'd just killed June" (181). He looks in the back seat and he sees June, "sprawled, her short skirt hiked up over her hips. The sheer white panties glowed. Her hair was tossed in a dead black swirl" (181). Gordie's vision or hallucination gives him the knowledge that he is "cracking, giving way. . . . He could not see where he was falling, but he knew, at length, that he'd landed in an area of terrible vastness where nothing was familiar" (181). What is interesting here is not so much the fact that Gordie cracks (as one would expect from any person who was on such an intensely alcoholic and spiritual journey), but that Gordie's overwhelming instinct

regarding the resurrected deer/June is to kill her again: to scotch her as if she were a monster.

At this point in the story, the narrative shifts from Gordie's car and consciousness to the convent and the consciousness of the insomniac Sister Mary Martin de Poores. On this particular sleepless evening, she goes to the convent sitting room where she can play her clarinet without bothering anyone else. She hears someone outside the sitting room window, and then she sees "the blunt outline of him, hang-dog, slumped hard against the window" (184). Then she smells "the sour reek of him. Drunk. Probably half conscious" (184). It is Gordie, claiming he's come to take confession. He seems to imagine he's in a confessional, and he begins muttering the confessional preamble: "Bless me Father for I have sinned" (184). Sister Mary Martin offers to get a priest, but Gordie's smell and the sound of his weeping rivets her. Finally, she agrees to hear his story--"knowing and not wanting to know. It would be a very bad thing he had to say" (185). Sister Mary Martin performs a complicated role in this scene. The Sister (who is Gordie's Sister in spiritual terms, but not a blood relative) is not a Father. Nevertheless, Sister/Father Mary Martin agrees to witness Gordie's alcoholic story as a Father/priest would do, and as Gordie's own blood relatives (Cousin Royce, Uncle Eli) do.

Gordie babbles his story--expelling his bad smells, his evil spirits, the boozy bad air he embodies. Sister Mary Martin internalizes Gordie's story. Gordie's story about killing his deer/wife June becomes "real for her also" (185). She understands, as Gordie does, "that he had just now killed his wife" (185). She holds her clarinet, as if clutching the instrument will give her clarity. But, like Gordie, "her mind was not clear" (185), and she has to ask Gordie to stop. At the end of his narrative, Gordie experiences relief--having expelled some of the bad air from his body. Gordie stops talking, and he seems "to have relaxed, breathing easier, as if telling her had removed some of the burden from him already" (185-86).

Meanwhile, June has now been raised in Sister Mary Martin's mind, then killed again. Sister Mary Martin leaves the safety of the confessional/sitting room and goes outside to see Gordie's victim for herself. She approaches the car, breathes deeply, and gazes in the window. As Sister Mary Martin gazes at the deer, her experience is the inverse of Gordie's. Gordie sees June instead of a dead deer, while Sister Mary Martin sees a dead deer instead of a woman. Sister Mary Martin has "prepared herself so strictly for the sight of a woman's body that the animal jolted her perhaps more than if the woman had been there" (187), and so she has a similar hallucination experience--caused by the alcohol in Gordie's body. Her response to the corpse is as intense as Gordie's: "At first sight of it, so strange and awful, a loud cackle came from her mouth. Her legs sagged, suddenly old, and a fainting surge of weakness spread through her. . . . Suddenly and without warning,

like her chest were cracking, the weeping broke her. It came out of her with hard violence, loud in her ears, a wild burst of sounds that emptied her" (187). Though she has not been drinking, she has inhaled Gordie's bad spirits: she is in his airspace. Consequently, she experiences the same unpleasant effects of the alcohol in Gordie's body, and she also experiences June's death.

At last, Gordie is unable to escape from or release all the spirits in and around his body. After Sister Mary Martin has expelled Gordie's bad air from her body, she exits the car and looks for Gordie. As Sister Mary Martin approaches Gordie, "her hands made gestures in the air, but no sound came from her mouth" (187). It is as if Sister Mary Martin were now handing Gordie's story back to him--returning his confession. Sister Mary Martin's approach stops Gordie "in the middle of a bawl" (187), and he flees "to the long yard where there were orchards, planted pines, then the reservation grass and woods" (188). Sister Mary Martin finds her voice and follows him "calling now, into the apple trees" (188). But this is no Garden of Eden, no safe place for Gordie. Finally, like Jesus calling out "Eli, Eli, lema sabacthani" before he gives up his spirit, Sister Mary Martin and others (perhaps Gordie's Uncle Eli and other family members) hear Gordie "crying like a drowned person, howling in the open fields" (188). They wait for "the orderlies and the tribal police to come with cuffs and litters and a court order" (188). This image of society's soldiers arriving to strap Gordie to a gurney produces the last act in this postmodern crucifixion scene. Perhaps Gordie will find relief in restraint, a new better life at the State Hospital.

Gordie does not return to the novel after this chapter, but June remains a presence--in spirit. June, who "walked over (the snow) like water and came home," must--like Jesus--experience corporeal death in the process of her salvation. However, unlike Jesus (who gets life everlasting) or Gordie (whose trip to the State Hospital is designed to regenerate him, rehabilitate him), June is not allowed a place in this crucifixion story because there are no female roles; women are not resurrected. Furthermore, there are no female parts of the Trinity, and women aren't allowed to occupy power positions in the Catholic patriarchy. Thus, every time June reappears in this crucifixion story, she must be killed again and again. In the end, what we know is that Gordie nearly drinks himself to death, and he is resurrected at the state hospital. June gets drunk with a mud engineer, then "walks home" in an Easter Sunday blizzard. June defies Northern Plains nature and Catholic narratives because a man rises above nature on Easter Sunday, not a drunk Native American woman who's just had sex with a stranger in the cab of a pickup. We can read June's subversive walk home as "salvation" in the word's truest sense, but June's experience lacks the celebratory aspects of salvation. Hers is tinged with despair, sadness, and alcohol.

## ADDICTION WITH A DIFFERENCE

Marty Roth

differences. "On Addiction," Volume 5, Number 1 (1993).

Here is another journal special issue devoted to addiction, but, unlike earlier ventures by Mosaic or even Yale French Studies, differences is a journal of culture theory. Consequently these essays look over-broadly at the subject or glance at it obliquely. This is the intention of the editors: the "interview and essays in this volume step back a bit from this cultural fix to look in their different ways at a societal attraction, not to say, addiction to addiction."

Some of the displaced addictions, like the graphomania and arithmomania that Mark Seltzer finds in Dracula as Renfield's form of obsessive-compulsive behavior, are intriguing; others feel made up for the occasion. The major effect of staging a series of metaphoric turns from the subject is that addiction is allowed to conflate back to desire, the theory of theory. Addiction here seems to mean what it meant to Iago: "some to dance, some to make bonfires, each man to what sport and revels his addiction leads him"--almost any excessive compulsive behavior in pursuit of pleasure.

Only Jacques Derrida and Seltzer take on addiction theory directly, Derrida to foreclose the topic by telling us that there can be no theory because there is no entity called drugs to be theorized; what is called "drugs" belongs to too many incompatible disciplines, both theological and scientific. Derrida's piece is self-indulgent and lazy in its movement (I kept telling myself that it was only an interview, but the spell of his authority was too strong to allow for such informality). As always, he drifts into fascinating issues: the absence of drugs in nature, the subordination of the drug to the AIDS problem, and the puritanism of the pleasure principle that makes drug policy: ". . . drugs in general are not condemned for the pleasure they bring, but rather because this aphrodisiac is not the right one: it leads to suffering and to the disintegration of the self, in short, it desocializes. It belongs to that diabolical couple, pleasure and suffering, denounced in every indictment of drugs."

In Richard Klein's essay (as in much of Seltzer's), addiction is a pretext. Klein's "The Devil in Carmen" feels like another essay pressed into quick service for the special issue. He makes lyrically inviting conjunctions between Carmen, "the first woman in fiction to smoke a cigarette," the institutional history of Gauloises and Gitanes cigarettes, and actual gitanes, or Gypsies. The essay is only slightly about smoking, certainly not addiction, and when the cigarette smoke disperses, Klein gets down to a predictable but very interesting reading of Carmen.

In a familiar theoretical move, Klein uses Baudelaire to make the smoker an avatar of the romantic genius, specifically the Parnassian Dandy: smoking "mimes the movement of the romantic lyric self whose oscillation swings between poles of fascinated immersion in the world and the most intense self-regard." Derrida makes the rise of Literature coincide with (and thereby become) the rise of addiction and suggests that it is the law forbidding drugs that constitutes society itself. Both Klein and Derrida continue their addiction to equation by making the habits they examine--smoking and opiate use--crucial indices to modernity.

Derrida quotes Adorno and Horkheimer: "Whoever browses on the lotus succumbs, in the same way as anyone who heeds the Siren's song or is touched by Circe's want," and this weave of identity holds true for all the essays in this issue. The specifics of subject and object, browsing, heeding or being touched notwithstanding, all that is seen is the sameness of the great motor and the ultimate failure to achieve euphoria. This smooth weaving raises again the question of how addiction differs from desire or, more practically, the value of packing all compulsive behavior under any one umbrella--reducing all addiction to desire and all desire to addiction, for example, turning Freud's epistemophilia, which plays so central a part in Lynne Joyrich's article, into a knowledge addiction. Seltzer even says it himself: "Theory as repetition compulsion urgently nullifies the particular 'content' repeated and therefore immunizes itself against the mere approximations and differences that may make a difference." It is precisely difference that differences seems driven to override.

It will come as no surprise that the "addiction" nominally treated in this special issue is the old general issue of repetition and desire. There seems to be no way out of the game of fort and da. Equating addiction with desire or repetition allows a lot of previous work to continue as a new dominant strain in addiction studies without a disciplinary tremor. "This logic of the 'never enough,'" Joyrich writes, "--of a repetition that nonetheless yields no satisfaction--bears a direct correlation to the economy of addiction which similarly initiates a repetitive circuit of compulsive desire." But one of the characteristics of addiction is that it does yield a satisfaction; that's the way it most differs from desire, that there's a long period of increasing tolerance where the addict feels at one with desire, or, more precisely "without desire."

Joyrich's "Elvisophilia: Knowledge, Pleasure and the Cult of Elvis" and Seltzer's "Serial Killers (1)" mainly recycle desire-and-repetition theory. The Joyrich piece is a generic theory essay that does not tell nearly enough about Elvisophilia or even why its forced passage through addiction was helpful; the article never delivers, but typically wraps up with a return to Freud. Freudian theory has been extremely resistant as an anchor for addiction, so far yielding only the information that addiction is a cover for



homosexuality. Joyrich's piece ends by suspending its intentions: "for all of its quips about obsessive fans, Elvisophilia thus seems to evade a logic of addiction . . . the 'Elvisophile,' far from being chained to an oppressive addiction, is empowered to revel in the pleasure of speculation without subjecting herself to the frustration provoked by an actual lack." Cultists never feel a crash, a hangover, the frustration of missing the center?--I think not. Nevertheless, the shape of Elvisophilia as presented here is intriguing, assuming the form of the "high" of denial: "the fans' addiction takes the form of denying Elvis's addiction . . . desperate attempts to deny Elvis's excessive consumption of food and drugs through their own unending consumption of idolatrous fan material."

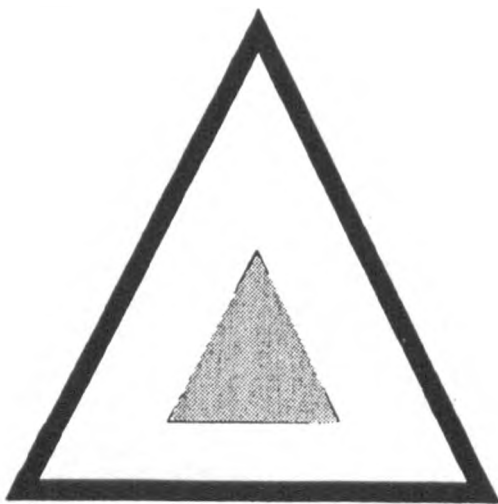
The Seltzer essay was, for me, the big disappointment of the collection, promising the most but ultimately falling back into a repetition of its nominal subject, as it ranges over what it calls "addiction to representations," "addiction to self-making," "corporeal self-transformation or surgical addiction," and many other neat addictions.

The hit of the collection was Leslie Cambi's "Stealing Femininity: Department Store Kleptomania as Sexual Disorder," which traces a web of connections and suggestions among psychoanalysis, femininity, fabric, and department stores to a kleptomania which registered on the subject as a kind of drunkenness and was itself "addictive sexual disorder, prompted by contact with the commodity form" (for another equally fascinating reading of kleptomania, see Hillel Schwartz, "The Three-Body Problem and the End of the World," in Fragments for a History of the Human Body, Part Two, (1989). It is exciting to imagine that one of her quotations from Freud can be read as a pun--"that 'needlework' left women prone to daydreaming and split states of consciousness in which hysterical traumas were more easily impressed on their minds"--on the close relationship between women and opium in the nineteenth-century, partially mediated by the revolutionary invention of the hypodermic needle.

Cambi takes us deep into medical discourse through a series of male authorities, French psychiatrists Paul Dubuisson and Gaëtan Gatian de Clérambault, and Emile Zola, to an epidemic of female kleptomania, "prompted perhaps by the anonymity of these vast commercial spaces, their liberty of access, the unprecedented array and promiscuous mingling of merchandise, or the illusion of possession arising from the commodity's new nearness to the consumer's touch, women from a broad range of classes began stealing from department stores without need or reason." Without need or reason perhaps, but it also looks like the mechanism of capitalism: "The epidemic of department store kleptomania can be seen as an extreme (but in no way antithetical) response to the social role of the department store in inciting feminine desire for new commodities and regulating the consumption of fashionable goods." The article ends with a delightful turn into a

postcolonial avenue. Modern psychiatry also remembers Clérambault for "a curious body of aesthetic research which he left to the Musée de l'homme in Paris: photographs of North African women and men," which he believed "could yield insights into the essence of racial identities."

Taking the displacements of these articles seriously, it almost seems that a focus on addiction contaminates earlier formulations and variations as well, finally, as all the states it was meant to protect in the oppositional normality. Everything vaguely addictive and everything previously non-addictive begins to look equally like an addiction. The authors claim to have stepped back and looked elsewhere to catch the shadows of addiction, and in doing so they discovered that everything is addiction. On the other hand, essays like Cambi's remind us how much of our social history, if examined slowly and in detail, traffics in pathologies.



## NOTES AND COMMENT

The University of Sheffield Academic Press has just published Beyond the Pleasure Dome: Writing and Addiction from the Romantics, edited by Sue Vice, Matthew Campbell & Tim Armstrong, a selection of papers presented at the April 1991 University of Sheffield Conference on Literature and Addiction. Among the contributors are Cathy MacGregor, Tim Rivinus, Sue Vice, Dave Plumb, Tom Dardis, Tom Roder, Roger Forseth, George Wedge, Sue Wiseman, and Nick Warner. . . . John Crowley's The White Logic: Alcoholism and Gender in American Modernist Fiction has now been published by the University of Massachusetts Press (\$40.00/14.95). See Spring 1993 "Notes and Comment" for details. His edition of Charles Jackson's Arcadian Tales is planned for the Spring 1995 list of Syracuse University Press. A version of the introduction to that volume appeared in the last issue of Dionysos. . . . Bibliographer Norman Kiell writes, "In your memo to the Program Committee of MLA, you mention J. C. Oates and the use of the word 'pathography.' Not very long ago, the NY Times credited her with the invention of the word. Not so. The word was in use as early as 1922, if not earlier, as these examples indicate: Karl Jaspers, Strindberg und van Gogh: Versuch einer pathographischer Analyse, Leipzig: Bircher, 1922; Adolf Heidenheim, Über den Menschenhass: Eine pathographische Untersuchung über Jonathan Swift, Stuttgart: 1934." . . . Anya Taylor (John Jay College, SUNY) writes, "this semester I'm teaching a jam-packed Alcohol and Literature class, my 8th or 9th year, of plays, short stories, novels, poems." . . . Robin Room will be a plenary speaker at the International Conference of AIDS, Drugs and, Alcohol at New Delhi, 22-27 Jan 1995. . . . Combined issues 26-27 (S/F 1993) of The Social History of Alcohol Review now contains book reviews as well as research notes, annotated bibliographies, and Abstracts of Papers from the Second International Congress on The Social History of Alcohol. . . . We will not be able (as planned) to reprint Dan Wakefield's fine review of Pete Hamill's A Drinking Life: we urge readers to look it up in The Nation (7 Feb: 166-69). . . . Here's another (seemingly endless) lexicographical gloss on drink, this one from Australia: Joan Hughes and Bill Ransom, "A Dinkum Dialogue with the Demon Drink," English Today 21 Jan 1990: 66-69. . . . Reading the Social Body, edited by Catherine B. Burroughs and Jeffrey David Ehrenreich (University of Iowa Press 1993), contains an essay on alcoholic women in Hollywood films. . . . James Lee Burke has just published Dixie City Jam (Hyperion), his seventh crime novel featuring (now-recovering alcoholic) Dave Robicheaux. . . . Another crime story featuring an alcoholic cop is Zaddik (Mysterious Press 1993) by David Rosenbaum ("[Dov Taylor is a sort of Jewish Matt Scudder," writes Arthur Krystal [Washington Post Book World, 22 Aug 1993: 6]). . . . Kurt Clausen is the recovering-alcoholic protagonist of John Welter's Begin to Exit Here: A Novel of the Wayward Press (Algonquin 1992). . . . Charles Bukowski, the author of Barfly, died 9 March, at the age of 73. . . . "When a Man Loves a Woman may be the prettiest movie about addiction ever made," writes Julie Salamon in The Wall Street Journal. Ron Bass,

the author of its film script, says that it "is not about alcoholism . . . [i]t's about love and co-dependency" (The New York Times, 24 Apr). . . . "Al's, the last rummy bar on the Bowery, has closed. They had a free open bar there last Saturday night, and then after the regulars yawned out the doors were shut, leaving the most famous skid row in the world without a single no-frills gin mill for the alcoholic down and out" (NY Times, 25 Dec 1993). Perhaps Al's customers (and those of The Iceman Cometh's Harry Hope) can take comfort in the following item: "Beer drinkers who switched to red wine because they were told it was good for them need not have bothered--a few pints of ale is as beneficial as Cotes du Rhone, and cheaper. Beer, even the dreaded lager, raises the spirits, stops the wrinkles and may protect against Alzheimer's disease. Even quaffed by the bucketful, it's unlikely to kill. A long-term study by Professor Thorkild Sorensen of the Copenhagen Institute of Preventive Medicine found the mortality rate for those who drink up to 69 [half-pints of beer] a week is equal to the rate for teetotallers" (The London Observer, 30 March). . . . "Most of what you read now about alcohol and addiction leaves out how marvelous it can feel to be drunk, an omission that, as addiction theorists would say, amounts to denial" (Michael Ventura, "In Defense of Alcohol," Letters at 3 a.m. [Spring Publications]). . . . Here's another example of denial: "After [Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings'] death, Norton [Basken, her second husband] expressed his opinion that she used liquor as a prescription for whatever affected her: if she was sad, she needed a drink; if she was happy, she needed a drink; if her work was going well, she had a drink to celebrate; if badly, she had a drink for comfort; likewise if she was too hot or too cold or too tired. He did not believe that she was ever an alcoholic, nor did many others who knew her. However, from the early days of her marriage to [her first husband, Charles Rawlings], she was a heavy drinker at times. As she grew older and suffered more from depression, the drinking episodes increased in frequency. She never learned the limits of her capacity for liquor, and sometimes the results were disastrous" (Elizabeth Silver Thorne, Sojourner at Cross Creek [Overlook Press 1988: 298-99]). . . . "This June in the last few days, since I have stopped drinking, has been comfortable, companionable, delightful. I really can't stand any more to pay for a burst of animation when someone comes in for drinks with a depressed and low-keyed next day, in which I have to go around on my hands and knees" (Edmund Wilson, "At Seventy: 1965-1966," The Sixties [Farrar 1993: 529]). . . . And, finally, that which goes around comes around: "[A]nother scene, equally typical of this Woodstock, took place under a big yellow tent stocked with bottomless coffee urns, where round-the-clock meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous were held. 'I haven't had urges in the year and a half I've been clean, and now I'm having them,' said a young woman Friday afternoon, seated in a circle 50-strong. "I was going to get lost in the crowd so I could get high, but then I saw the A.A. sign. I pitched my tent right next door" ("So, Where Have All The Yuppies Gone?" NY Times 15 Aug).

## ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Lawrence Driscoll is a doctoral candidate in English at the University of Southern California.

Roger Forseth reviewed the new edition of Sinclair Lewis' Free Air in the Fall 1993 issue of The Sinclair Lewis Society Newsletter.

David Isaacson is Professor and Humanities Librarian, Waldo Library, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo.

Rosemarie Johnstone is a doctoral candidate in English at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. A shorter version of her "Alcoholism and the Epistemological Cure" was delivered at the Division of Popular Culture, MLA Convention, Toronto, 1993.

Hale G. Lamont-Havers lives in Sudbury, Massachusetts.

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

Marty Roth is professor of American literature, popular culture, and film studies at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. He is writing a book tentatively entitled Theorizing Addiction on the theorization of drink and intoxication, of alcoholism, and of addiction in culture and civilization.

Anya Taylor is professor of English at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York. Her "Coleridge and Alcohol" was reviewed by Marty Roth in the Spring 1993 issue of Dionysos.

Jack Williams is a writer and poet living in Loganville, Georgia. His Marla stories and his poem, "Uncle Carl, Not Clogging," appeared previously in Dionysos.



# DIONYSOS

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Editor: Roger Forseth  
University of Wisconsin-Superior  
Superior, WI 54880

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With this issue, Dionysos is suspending publication. You will be notified immediately if and when publication resumes. Please let me know if you have any questions or if you wish back issues. All 15 issues (Volumes 1 through 5) are still available.



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University of Wisconsin - Superior  
1800 Grand Avenue  
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