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Winter, 1996 Vol. 6, No. 1

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Dionysos

Journal of Literature and Addiction

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Addiction Studies Program
Seattle University
Seattle, Washington



Editorial

Jim Harbaugh, S.J.

In Aristophanes's The Frogs, Dionysos, the god of altered states, visits the underworld in search of a literary person to sustain his City in a difficult time. After a spirited debate between two playwrights, he returns to our world with Aeschylus, in Aristophanes' view the poet of traditional values and civic virtue.

With this Winter, '96 issue, *Dionysos* the magazine also returns from limbo after a year's hiatus. We hope to continue issuing it from here at Seattle University. Certainly the contents of this issue provide materials for a very spirited debate on the nature of addiction, and on literature as it is affected by addiction. Cassie Carter sees Jim Carroll as a Rimbaudesque figure, abusing drugs as an anti-bourgeois gesture; Rosemary Johnsen notes approvingly that a new British book on literature and addiction does not depend as much on the insights of Alcoholics Anonymous as do analogous American works; Roger Forseth, distinguished editor emeritus of this journal, employs just such insights in his admiring review of John Crowley's The White Logic, in which Crowley debunks "literary" depictions of addiction (like Carroll's?). Our hope is that argument about these and other controverted topics will go on in subsequent issues.

A word about *Dionysos*' new home: the Addiction Studies Program at Seattle University is one of the oldest of its kind anywhere. Spun out from a single course first taught in 1950 by Fr. James Royce, S.J., it has helped to form addictions counselors within the context of the disciplines of Arts and Sciences for many decades. And about its new editor: I am a Jesuit priest, a certified addictions counselor, and a doctor of English from the University of Chicago.

I would like to thank the current director of Addiction Studies, Steve Morris, for all his work on the business and production aspects of this journal. And I thank Roger Forseth for his help in ushering *Dionysos* back to daylight,

here in the rainy Northwest. Thanks too to the members of the editorial board who have read the submissions for this issue.

And now *Dionysos's* fate is in the hands of you readers. This first issue of *Dionysos* redux is free: we hope to renew interest in subscriptions, but we hope even more to attract submissions. Guidelines for both are as follows:

Dionysos: The Journal of Literature and Addiction is published twice yearly (winter and spring) at the rate of \$3.00 per issue, \$5.00 annually for individuals, and \$8.00 for institutions, USA and Canada (all other: \$4.00/\$7.00/\$10.00, payment in dollars by international money order preferred) by Addiction Studies- CSY331, Seattle University, Broadway and Madison, Seattle WA 98122-4460. Please send manuscripts (two copies, plus self-addressed envelope, documentation according to The MLA Style Manual [New York: MLA, 1985] section 5.8), communications, and subscriptions to: Jim Harbaugh, S.J., Editor, *Dionysos*, Addiction Studies Program, Casey 331, Seattle University, Broadway and Madison, Seattle, WA 98122-4460. Note: Copy deadlines are: March 31st (spring issue); October 15th (winter issue).

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pollution is a result of the inability of man to transform waste. the transformation of waste is perhaps the oldest preoccupation of man. gold, being the chosen alloy, must be resurrected--via shit, at all cost. inherent within us is the dream and task of the alchemist to create from clay a man. and to recapture from the excretions of man pure and soft then solid gold.

-- Patti Smith, "The Salvation of Rock," Babel (140)

The Sickness That Takes Years to Perfect: Jim Carroll's Alchemical Vision

Cassie Carter

Jim Carroll was 12 years old when he realized that he was immersed in a world rife with corruption, where respectability was synonymous with hypocrisy, where proper appearances merely concealed depravity, where authority figures used their power to oppress others, and where it seemed someone was always trying "to steal the light from [his] eyes" ("City Drops"). It was 1962, and a war was raging in Vietnam. On the home front, racism ran rampant, and air raid sirens wailed as Khrushchev warned, "We will bury you" and "Your children will live under Communism" (Morris 19). Carroll, a street punk and star basketball player from the lower east side of Manhattan, sought some way to rise above the desolation and insanity of his circumstances to find out what was inside himself and achieve his full potential. Being a basketball star couldn't save him: he had to find a new way to transcend the emptiness and hypocrisy of his world by virtue of his own integrity, talent, and vision. So, in the midst of chaos, at the age of 12, he began to write.

Carroll's diaries, poems, and rock lyrics over the past 33 years reflect his ongoing struggle to transform the raw materials of his life into a pure reality, and his drug use/addiction, "the sickness [he] took years to perfect,"¹ has played a significant role in this process. As a teenager, Carroll needed to find a reality that didn't lie to him--that came to him directly, without mediation or circumvention--and in winter 1964, just before he entered Trinity High School, he tried heroin for the first time. He writes in The Basketball Diaries:

I was just gonna sniff a bag but Tony said I might as well skin pop it. I said OK. Then Pudgy says, "Well, if you're gonna put a needle in, you might as well mainline it." I was scared to main, but I gave in, Pudgy hit it in for me. I did half a fiver and, shit, what a rush... just one long heat wave all through my body, any ache I had flushed out. You can never top that first rush, it's

like ten orgasms...So, as simple as a walk into that cellar, I lost my virgin veins. (30)

While Carroll rationalizes this extreme act as being the result of peer pressure, the fact is that he sacrificed his innocence, his "virgin veins," for what he considered the pure, intense reality of heroin. His first shot of heroin was no symbolic gesture: he effectively broke loose from the hypocritical world which always threatened to crush him, and leapt headlong into the underground. His descent into the drug culture was somewhat haphazard, embarked upon without much foresight, but this act eclipsed every "super layup" he ever made on the basketball court. Through drugs and his participation in underground culture, Carroll felt he had discovered the honest, direct reality he had been seeking but which "respectable" society denied him.

Ironically, Carroll entered the underground at just the moment when possibilities began to open up for him in "respectable" society. Carroll's basketball coach had helped him earn an athletic/academic scholarship to Trinity, an elite Catholic high school. There, Carroll was a star basketball player (he played in the National High School All Star Basketball Game in Washington, D.C., in 1966 [BD 153-55]), but his equal passions for self-examination, new experiences, drugs, and writing were beginning to overtake his love of athletics. Carroll told Ted Berrigan that

By the time I got to Trinity the straight Jock trip had begun to wear a little thin... I still had as much charge, but I simply began getting off into new directions, like pills, sex, drugs, booze, and the New American Poetry. I had been keeping my basketball diaries since I was 12, and so when I got turned on to poetry at Trinity, writing it just came naturally. I read Howl first, I guess. Then Frank [O'Hara]. (9)

For Carroll, sex, drugs, and poetry were intimately related; hence, at the same time his dabbling in drugs exploded into full-blown heroin addiction, forcing him to hustle gay men to support his habit, Carroll's passion for poetry blossomed. As John Milward notes, "...Ginsberg and e.e. cummings taught [Carroll] that poetry was not a hermetic academic pursuit," and, "Initially he saw [heroin], as a means to a literary end" (142). Carroll explained, "Junk made me alert... for me the nods were magic--when the cigarette butt would burn your fingers, you'd jump back in total surprise that you weren't actually on that beach with sun kissing the horizon. But the nods weren't like dreaming--there was no surrealism. Just an intensified reality" (142,170).

One effect of Carroll's descent into the underground and his experimentation with drugs was a new way of seeing his world, and he

applied this new vision to his diaries and early poems. His vision, he knew, was based on the solidity, the integrity, of his underground existence and of the concrete world around him, and writing gave him absolute freedom to transform that world. He describes this freedom in one of the most powerful passages of The Basketball Diaries:

I think about poetry and how I see it as a raw block of stone ready to be shaped, that way words are never a horrible limit to me, just tools to shape. I just get the images from the upstairs vault (it all comes in images) and fling 'em around like bricks, sometimes clean and smooth and then sloppy and ready to fall on top of you later. Like this house where I got to sometimes tear out a room and make it another size or shape so the rest makes sense...or no sense at all. And when I'm done I'm stoned as on whatever you got in your pockets right now, dig? (159)

Through writing he takes possession of his reality and transforms it. If his world is chaotic and ugly, he can forge coherence and beauty in his diaries and poems; if his reality is unalterable, he can create and fulfill infinite possibilities with his pen.

One interesting example of the way Carroll transforms concrete reality and expands its possibilities can be seen in some early poems which draw imagery from the preliminaries to the "Winkie and Blinkie" passage of The Basketball Diaries. In the diary, Carroll is on a bus to Long Beach, Long Island, having just swallowed two bottles of codeine cough syrup: "I was trying to cop a short nod again on the bus ride but this crazy old lady keeps giving me shit about being a commie because I got a red tee-shirt on...she goes on insisting that she has this vision that I'm gonna die within a month because a giant clock was gonna fall on my head" (58). In some of his earliest poems he offers three different perspectives on this experience, first in "2nd Train (for Frank O'Hara)," from Organic Trains:²

Today at the Long Beach Station
 everything was amazingly white
 and sand was stuck in my tennis sneakers
 that seems to be the way things
 are going lately I was forewarned
 about clocks falling on me
 so all I felt was 8 colors as my
 wrist watch flew into the sky's cheek.
 watches are very symbolic of security
 they remind me of Frank O'Hara. Frank
 O'Hara reminds me of many wonderful

things, as does the vanilla light
which is dripping from his January eyes.

Then again in another Organic Trains poem, "3rd Train (for THE SUMMERS)":

A woman comes up to me
and questions the aesthetic
value of a red tee shirt
this was the same woman
who yesterday warned
me about clocks
I'm convinced she was a communist. (9)

And finally, an uncollected poem, "Red Rabbit Running Backwards (for A.W.)," offers yet another variation on the same scenario:

...The aesthetic value of a red tee shirt
you making me see that could be what I mean
if it were not for the fact that the hurricane has bent the trees
and I can't see anything, in fact can only feel. can only feel
the 8 colors inside which somehow seem to indicate that
all the clocks are falling on and around me from the sky.
The Communists know what I mean....

In each poem, concrete "facts" from his experience metamorphose into something entirely new. In fact, Carroll's poetry is almost self-generating, with one poem or diary taking off from another to create ever more expanding worlds of almost infinite possibility. "Red Rabbit Running Backwards," for example, takes off from the first line of "11th Train" and recycles lines from nearly every poem in Organic Trains.

The ties between drugs and Carroll's expanding artistic vision especially begin to emerge in diary descriptions of his "nods," or drug-induced experiences, some of the most poetic passages in the Diaries. Describing an L.S.D. trip, he writes:

At dawn light came in shafts and led me to some fields nearby
to watch the tall reeds wave and then become fingers calling me
over. I rolled in the dew drenched things as though they were
lifting me across and through them with the fingers and my
body did no work at all, in fact, I forgot all about any body I had
and left it behind finally, thinking I was just a spirit flashing
incredibly fast all through, wiping up the dew invisibly. (129)

Another tab of L.S.D. leaves him "listening to some sparks fly out of an unknown album of jazz...*literal* sparks, all around as that music ran"(133). Later, he finds in his pants pocket a poem "I wrote on an experience with L.S.D. a while ago":

"Little kids shoot marbles
where the branches break the sun

into graceful shafts of light
I just want to be pure." (140)

Carroll's drug experiences not only inspire his poems and diaries; he also wants his poems and diaries to duplicate and produce the same effects as his nods. In one diary, after drinking codeine cough syrup, he writes: "I was so zonked that I'd let whole cigarettes burn down to the filter and burn my fingers without taking one drag. We had about six hours more of good solid nods and then sat around and rapped slowly about all our little visual dreams that passed in our heads clear as movies" (82-83). Significantly, in 1974, Carroll duplicated this imagery in his poetic statement for Rolling Stone: "I find that my poems have all turned into sheer verbal movie, image over image into kind of dream machines in every form, so that the reader depends a lot on the intensity of the final rush. The more capable one is of just plain nodding off and feeling from each line...the better" (Margolis 42).

These passages give some notion of where the title of his third book of poems, Living at the Movies (1973),³ comes from: Carroll attempts to create poems which produce the same "rush" as drugs, which to him is like the fleeting, though concrete, images of a film. For him, writing should be as intense as a heroin rush: the reader and writer alike should experience poetry much as a drug user feels a high--as a physical, mental, and spiritual rush. Perhaps most importantly within the context of the Diaries, this implies that drug use for Carroll is not an escape into oblivion, but (at least initially) an active, disciplined process. Carroll explained to Milward, "I wanted to see what oblivion was like without staying in that pit. I wanted to see everything that was in me, and junk slowed things down so I could take it all in...it was like sliding into a tunnel of my own design"(170). At the same time, Carroll's drug use and poetry allow him to create a reality different from the ugliness and brutality of his everyday life. Carroll told Danny O'Bryan and Mark Reese that "in poetry I wanted to be taken out of my quotidian life...spirituality comes from trying to get out of myself so I could go into myself from a different direction" (Poem, Interview, Photographs [10]).

The “quotidian life” Carroll transforms in his poetry is often that of The Basketball Diaries, which is itself a transformation of Carroll’s reality. Had he never written a word, Carroll might have been just another New York street punk grown up (or dead), a star basketball player gone to waste, a heroin addict, a hustler; he might have been numbered among the excrement of human society, polluted and unable to resurrect the debris of his life. But The Basketball Diaries performs an amazing feat of alchemy, transforming the waste of Carroll’s adolescence into a victory. In the tradition of Coleridge, Rimbaud, Genet, and William Burroughs, Carroll is not being decadent for the sake of decadence, nor is he attempting to self-destruct. Carroll uses his “nods,” as well as his own corruption, to broaden his vision and see new things, about which he can write afterward. As with his poetry, writing diaries enables Carroll to impose order upon the chaos of life, transform its ugliness into beauty, and explore infinite possibilities, but it is also a weapon. In the Diaries, Carroll’s drug use/abuse and marginal/decadent status are the ammunition he uses to assault the corrupt social order which made his life chaotic and ugly in the first place.

In one sense, like Burroughs, Carroll serves up a “naked lunch,” displaying the depravity and hypocrisy inherent in a so-called “respectable” society unwilling to face itself. The “establishment” points an accusing finger at “them commies,” “longhairs,” “niggers” and “spics,” “junkies,” and “perverts,” refusing to acknowledge its own corruption. But with New York City as “the greatest hero a writer needs,” Carroll lays bare “what’s really going down out there in the pretty streets with double garages” (BD 160). What’s “really going down” is that the Communist threat is “some dream dreamed up to take the rap for you” (127); that the “‘fine’ Christian Brothers” of the Catholic Church are getting their kicks “running around with their rubber straps beating asses red for the least little goofing” (18), and “deriving some pleasure out of these dutiful tasks thrust upon [them]” (35). While narcotics forces claim to be out saving the nation, dauntlessly battling the drug epidemic, they’re “rapping right out loud to each other how much they ought to give in for evidence and what they ought to keep to sell for themselves back onto the street” (128). In disclosing this reality, he attempts to “get even for your dumb hatreds and all them war baby dreams you left in my scarred bed with dreams of bombs falling above that cliff I’m hanging steady onto” (160).

More importantly, though “there is nothing so calculated about Jim Carroll’s excursion into the inferno,” as Jamie James notes, in a way Carroll follows a program similar to Arthur Rimbaud’s, cultivating “the sickness [he] took years to perfect.” Carroll becomes all of the evil things society fears. He grows his hair long, becomes a “minority” within minority culture, steals, attends Communist Party meetings and protest marches, gets hooked on heroin, and hustles gay men to support his habit. Rimbaud believed that

becoming a visionary required one “to attain the unknown by disorganizing all the senses,” and to become as depraved as possible (100). “[T]he problem is to make the soul into a monster,” Rimbaud writes; “Think of a man grafting warts onto his face and growing them there” (102). In The Basketball Diaries, Carroll is making himself into a visionary; he is Rimbaud’s “great criminal” (102) against the so-called traditional values of society because he dares to swallow all the poisons his world has to offer, transforming what is useful to him, and spitting the rest out. Rather than passively allowing himself to become polluted, he seeks out corruption, then filters it through actions and words. His vision of his world is entirely his own, and he paints a portrait of this world in his own language -- in slang and street rap. Through his actions, clarity of vision, and street lingo, he uncovers the emptiness of his world’s values, challenges them, and forges his own, new values through a relentless exploration of himself.

Because he can see clearly, and because he is able to write about his experience, he inverts the established reality of heroes and villains, exposing the hypocrisy inherent in a “respectable” world unwilling to face itself. As he puts it:

Some lady professor...asked at one point if we weren't scared of the drug scene, then weren't we at least feeling guilty about using junk. I think now and that pisses me off. Like what is guilty or who is guilty for fuck sake? Big business dudes make billions come out of their ass and they ain't shelling out a reefer's worth of tax. Kids walk though some jungle I don't know how far away and shoot people, and white haired old men in smoking jacket armchairs make laws to keep it all going smoothly. I swim in the river and have to duck huge amounts of shit and grease and “newly discovered miracle fibers” every five feet I move because those smokestack companies don't give a flying fuck....Shit my man, it's so *all there* that no one's seeing it anymore. (199)

Carroll says, “The real junkie should be raised up for saying fuck you to all this shit city jive, for going on with all the risks and hassles and con, willing to face the rap” (189), and he descends into the abyss, into the darkest depths of heroin abuse, prostitution, and theft: into the bowels of corrupt society. But because he is in possession of his own vision, he transcends the hypocrisy of “respectable” society; he is able to purge himself of this corruption and remain pure. As he told Lynn Hirschberg in 1979,

Purity means that you always have something up your sleeve, that you have something you've earned, that you have

something to move toward, that your vision is intact. Purity, to me, exists within states of what would be thought of as impure. You can live within a state of total decay. You can live in that state and still be totally pure if your vision remains intact, if you know that you've got to keep moving ahead because you haven't reached that light yet, the light at the end of the tunnel. (27)

In The Basketball Diaries, within a "state of total decay," Carroll seeks to purify himself through the integrity of his own vision. His awareness of the corruption surrounding him on all sides heightens his urgent sense that there must be a "light at the end of the tunnel," and it is up to him alone to reach it.

Carroll said in an interview with Barbara Graustark, "Susan Sontag once told me that a junkie has a unique chance to rise up and start over" (81), and the ending of The Basketball Diaries offers that possibility. The final entry finds Carroll at the bottom of the pit, in the darkest depths of excess, stoned for four days straight. As he emerges from his drug-induced stupor, he looks around, realizing for perhaps the first time the depths he has reached. While he has physically lost all control and dignity, and while his environment is filthy and disgusting, his writing prevails. He details what he sees so poetically, and with such striking precision, that the scene becomes almost beautiful:

In ten minutes it will make four days that I've been nodding on this ratty mattress up here in Headquarters. Haven't eaten except for three carrots and two Nestle's fruit and nut bars and both my forearms sore as shit with all the little specks of caked blood covering them. My two set of gimmicks right along side me in the slightly bloody water in the plastic cup on the crusty linoleum, probably used by every case of hepatitis in upper Manhattan by now. Totally zonked, and all the dope scraped or sniffed clean from the tiny cellophane bags. Four days of temporary death gone by, no more bread, with its hundreds of casual theories, soaky nostalgia (I could have got that for free walking along Fifth Avenue at noon), at any rate, a thousand goofs, some still hazy in my noodle. (209)

As his clarity of vision returns, Carroll needs to purge himself of the poison and make a resurrection; he thinks

about my conversation with Brian: Ever notice how a junkie nodding begins to look like a foetus after a while? That's what it's all about, man, back to the womb....A wasted peek into the

mirror, I'm all thin as a wafer of concentrated rye. I wish I had some now with a little Cheez-Whiz on it. I can feel the window light hurting my eyes; it's like shooting pickle juice... Nice June day out today, lots of people probably graduating. I can see the Cloisters with its million in medieval art out the bedroom window. I got to go in and puke. I just want to be pure... (210)

It's an optimistic conclusion--but, unfortunately, Carroll remained addicted to heroin until well into his twenties, as is documented in Forced Entries: The Downtown Diaries, 1971-1973 (which actually covers a period more like 1968-74). Eventually, Carroll realized that he had become a cartoon version of the "drugged out poet," and he had made a mockery of his own poetic vision. In Forced Entries, he admits:

I'm sick of writing about dope, about drugs in every form. I'm sick of recording the ups and downs of indulgence, and sick of releasing dispatches of misery via abstinence. I thought I could deal with, perhaps even come to understand, my obsessions through some strained eloquence. I thought I could eventually pierce every veil through chance metaphor, but how many flowers can serve as metaphors for that initial mingling of blood and water encased in the barrel of a syringe? (120-21)

He knows, "It can't go on. My body is broke. I'm shitting where I eat" (114). In Forced Entries, Carroll records his discovery that his addiction was destroying his only source of purity: his writing. As he puts it, "I can't attempt to write always in the hollow flux of desperation and incipient terror" (114); and "The fact is that instead of freeing myself through language, the language itself has become a hostage, and the room where we are held becomes smaller every day...Only without boundaries can the words transform into something beyond themselves" (121). Finally, around 1974, he fled to Bolinas, California, and successfully conquered his addiction through a methadone treatment program.

Even after his recovery, though, Carroll has continued to seek a pure reality; specifically, his ongoing project has been the retroactive transformation of his past and of the addicted self he cultivated for so much of his life. In the 1980s, this transformation took form in Carroll's entry into rock music. In light of his recovery from heroin addiction, the first Jim Carroll Band album, Catholic Boy (1980), reinterprets The Basketball Diaries as a journey through hell which led to redemption. "I was a Catholic boy, redeemed through pain, not through joy," Carroll sings in the title song, and "City Drops Into the Night" describes the process of this redemption. In Carroll's experience, it is at moments of absolute decadence, "When the body

at the bottom/That body is my own reflection,” when salvation is realizable. At that moment, endless possibilities open up: “Before the darkness there’s one moment of light,” when *everything* can change. The characters in the song find themselves at turning points, when their situations can change radically, for better or worse:

It's when ambitious little girls start to dream about a change in style
It's when the slick boys got their fingers in the telephone dial

.....
It's when the sneak thieves are checkin' the alleys for unlocked doors
And Billy's sister's gettin' frantic 'cause Billy's sister's little brother
can't score

For Carroll, one “moment of light” came and went in the final entry of The Basketball Diaries, as he wallowed in the deepest depths of heroin abuse and wrote, “I just want to be pure.” During the period of Forced Entries, another opportunity opened up when Carroll hit bottom and decided to leave New York.

The ending of “City Drops Into the Night” also reveals the specific nature of Carroll’s salvation. First, he had to realize the prison he had built for himself in the endless cycle of obsession and heroin abuse:

They're always gonna come to your door
They're gonna say it's just a routine inspection
But what do you get when you open your door?
What you get is just another injection
And there's always gonna be one more
With just a little bit less until the next one

The “dealer” (of drugs, fame, whatever) is always willing to oblige a habit and, in doing so, the dealer and the drug become rulers of the addict’s fate. But the sense Carroll conveys is that the cravings and corrupting/controlling forces will continue to impinge upon the addict so long as s/he perpetuates the addiction. Eventually, as the addict descends further into the abyss and gives him/herself over to her/his obsessions, the addiction and corrupting forces siphon away any vestige of hope the addict might have. As callous as a mugger hiding in a darkened alley and robbing a passer-by of her life savings, these corrupting forces “wait in shadows and steal the light from your eyes / To them, vision’s just some costly infection.” And once the addict has been robbed of all hope and of the artistic vision which will offer salvation, the “moment of light” passes, leaving the addict with nothing but darkness, despair, and corruption. But Carroll seized upon the moment of light in time and he was redeemed. Hence, as he concludes the song, he transforms the

drug metaphor as he becomes the “dealer” who, rather than doling out corruption, deals revelation and hope:

You should come with me
 I’m the fire, I’m the fire’s reflection
 I’m just a constant warning
 To take the other direction
 Mister, I am your connection.

Like Rimbaud’s poet, Carroll becomes “truly the thief of fire” (103), transforming himself into a modern-day Prometheus, shedding light on the underground experience, the trap of addiction, and the natures of fame and art. He shows that it is possible to make it all new—to enlarge and grasp that moment of light. He becomes “the fire’s reflection,” the reflection of both the ugliness and the beauty of addiction and underground experience.

Carroll’s point is that no matter how deeply an individual descends into the abyss, redemption is still possible through a finely-tuned artistic vision, and he has continued to stand by this belief. Recently he published “8 Fragments for Kurt Cobain” (1994), in which he identifies with the anguish which led Cobain to suicide, alluding to a number of his own autobiographical works.⁴ In the first fragment, referring to his own experience with the hazards of genius (“Which starts as a kiss / and ends like a curse” [“Nothing Is True”]), to the connections between his vision and drugs, and to the difficulties he faced in breaking free from addiction, he observes,

Genius is not a generous thing
 in return it charges more interest than any amount
 of royalties can cover / And it resents fame
 With bitter vengeance

Pills and powders only placate it awhile
 Then it puts you in a place where the planet’s
 poles reverse.
 Where the currents of electricity shift

Your body becomes a magnet and pulls to it despair
 and rotten teeth,
 Cheese whiz and guns.

But he asks Cobain in the seventh fragment:

But Kurt..
 Didn’t the thought that you would never write

another song
 Another feverish line or riff
 Make you think twice?
 That's what I don't understand
 Because it's kept me alive, above any wounds.

Perhaps drugs were Carroll's inspiration, their effects his ideal model for poetry--but it was his writing itself, his *need* to write and create a pure reality, that saved his life and has kept him going for forty-five years. He writes in Forced Entries. "I think of my past as if it were some exquisite antique knife ...you can use it to defend yourself or slit your own throat, but you can't just keep it mounted on some wall" (2). Carroll has yet to leave his past frozen, "mounted on some wall" for perpetuity. He is in a constant process of "Doing now what is/Needed for what/I am becoming" ("Coda"): not only has he written two autobiographies (Forced Entries was published in 1987), he also reworks his life in other forms, poetry and rock music, within which he continually experiments with new ways to relate his experience. Hence, with each work, he perpetually revises his autobiography so that it is always new, always alive, and never quite finished. While Carroll's sickness took years to perfect, transforming it into something beyond itself is a project to last a lifetime.

Notes

I would like to thank Richard L. Campbell for his advice on the drafts leading up to this essay. His help was invaluable.

¹ Carroll refers to his heroin addiction as "the sickness I took years to perfect" in his poem "Paregoric Babies" (Living at the Movies 99; Fear of Dreaming 101), his second diary Forced Entries (182), and in his song "Dance the Night Away" on I Write Your Name.

² Organic Trains is Carroll's first book of poetry, a limited edition published in 1967 when he was 16 (Kuennen 84). According to his 1968 Trinity High School yearbook, Carroll was "The first of the class of '68 to be published..." (qtd. in Musser 1).

³ Carroll's second collection of poetry is 4 Ups and 1 Down (1970), an eight-page, limited edition pamphlet containing five poems, all of which are reprinted in Living at the Movies.

⁴ Carroll's references in the poem to his own published works are extensive. See "Coda" in Fear of Dreaming (273) for financial accounting imagery similar to that in the first fragment. See also "Rock 'n' Roll" in

Forced Entries (164-65), "Them" on Dry Dreams, and "City Drops Into the Night" on Catholic Boy for Carroll's views on the relationship between genius/vision and fame, to which he alludes in the first and second fragments. For the magnet imagery in the first fragment, see "The Loft Party" in Forced Entries, where Carroll writes, "I should split, but this city is like a lodestone, and I'm a tin motherfucker" (107); and "this place is a lodestone, and its reach is as long as all our doomed desires" (108). Also, "Extractions" deals with the problem of a rotten tooth, which comes to represent the pain of his past (134-37). The final entry of The Basketball Diaries contains the Cheez-Whiz reference (210); in an earlier entry, Carroll discusses the growing importance of writing as his reason "to hang on a bit longer" (151). In addition, Carroll's references to "guitar claws" and rock audiences in the second fragment repeat imagery he uses in one of The Book of Nods's "New York City Variations" and "Poem" (see Fear of Dreaming 191, 225). The concluding lines of the eighth fragment, "Which starts out as a kiss/And follows like a curse," are from his song, "Nothing is True," on Catholic Boy. These are but a few of Carroll's intertextual allusions.

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Portrait of a Father as a Damned Poet

Mark Scott

He walks in the playroom, late,
 his glass warm from four or five bitters
 with soda and rum, trying to find a word
 to put a woman down with. It's hard
 to listen to him when he gets his icecubes
 moving that way, as if he hasn't over-drunk
 his welcome many times, and in his own house.
 He drowns his inspiration, and yet can pick
 the one good sentence from an apology,
 a curse more disguised and medieval
 than Saint Paul and Chesterton.

That woman is his wife, whose Catholic faith
 he's had to memorize in the burdensome words
 of a protestant Christian Jew who got him
 to think in terms of the Cross, and the Future,
 and History, in 1952. On Sunday afternoons
 at Sigma Nu, he'd put on a black robe
 and recite by the bowl of milk-punch
 his favorite Kipling, Auden, Housman, Yeats--
 and poems of his own he rarely saved,
 like "Kelly Never Went to War," a ballad
 he wrote in Denver under Kipling's spell.
 He lives there now and says he goes to hell
 five days a week. The last poem I heard him recite,
 almost perfect to the word, was Dylan Thomas's
 "In my Craft or Sullen Art." But over his grave
 and pine box, he wants to hear me say
 Cavafy's "The God Forsakes Antony."
 He wants to be told for the last time,
 "Do not tell yourself it was only a dream,
 that your ears deceived you." He wants
 to be told finally that his fortune failed him,
 that the plans of his life "all turned out
 to be illusions." He cannot find the word
 to compel his wife. So I will tell him,
 at his grave, as if it were true,
 and we were in the playroom, late.

Starting to Quit

Mark Scott

Spoiled and addicted already,
 I couldn't take my father's wisdom
 when he gave it, that the only way
 to quit smoking was never to start.
 I was off in his footsteps and off
 in my mother's, who was off in hers,
 the nicotine pretty well per stirpes.
 as the lawyers say in wills.

Drinking went hand in hand with smoking,
 as the profiles of Wylan make Auden.
 I remember first getting drunk one spring
 at a brunch for the Resurrection.
 The champagne rushed down the flutes
 and rose again in imitation of Christ.

We drank according to the scriptures,
 my father and I, keeping always
 in the back of our minds the sense
 that we would know our last martini,
 but never remember our first.

Who was counting? We didn't check our thirst,
 the cups it took to get us to recite
 the old poems of the inner-life,
 its melancholy, choked-up light
 that brimmed with all the sober
 art and scope we often envied
 in the poet, and sometimes hated.

Review Article

The Alcoholic Writer and the Modern Temper: Transcendence Downward

Roger Forseth

John W. Crowley. The White Logic: Alcoholism and Gender in American Modernist Fiction. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994. xi+202 pp. \$40.00 cloth, \$14.95 paper.

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

--1 Corinthians 13:11

There are no second acts in American lives.

--F. Scott Fitzgerald

I

Last Christmas Arlene Croce, the eminent dance critic of the New Yorker, delivered a gift to the culturally correct establishment. In the event, the gift was largely ill-received. Ms. Croce's philippic, "Discussing the Undiscussable," was a detailed rejection of "victim art":

I have not seen Bill T. Jones's "Still/Here" and have no plans to review it [It] is a kind of messianic traveling medicine show, designed to do some good for sufferers of fatal illnesses, both those in the cast and those thousands more who may be in the audience. If we ask what a show does that no hospital, clinic, church, or other kind of relief agency has so far been able to do, I think the answer is obvious. If we consider that the experience.... may be also intolerably voyeuristic, the remedy is also obvious: Don't go The thing that "Still/Here" makes immediately apparent, whether you see it or not, is that victimhood is a kind of mass delusion that has taken hold of previously responsible sectors of our culture. The preferred medium of victimhood ... is videotape (see TV at almost any hour of the day), but the cultivation of victimhood by institutions devoted to the care of art is a menace to all art forms.

Following an extensive discussion of the causes and rationale for the cultivation of victimhood in the arts, Ms. Croce concludes:

People for whom art is too fine, too high, too educational, too complicated may find themselves turning with relief to the new tribe of victim artists parading their wounds. They find something to respond to in the litany of pain, and they make their own connection to what the victim is saying. Of course, they are all co-religionists in the cult of Self. Only the narcissism of the nineties could put Self in place of Spirit and come up with a church service that sells out the Brooklyn Academy.¹

There is nothing really new here--as observers were quick to point out--but the authority of one of our most distinguished performance critics and the fact that the article appeared in the iconic New Yorker again raised a serious question for anyone who views a work of art through an ideological lens in order to judge its significance.² To employ a novel, for example, in a war against this or that affliction may be held justified in the interests of compassion, but it has little to do, in Arnoldian terms, with a serious criticism of life. Edmund Wilson did not, it may be recalled, in The Wound and the Bow, invoke the myth of Philoctetes's wound to justify bad art or to judge it by irrelevant criteria, but to suggest that greatness in art may, paradoxically, derive from the artist's weakness or malady. "Victimhood" had nothing to do with Wilson's analysis. It was, on the other hand, disappointing to find that so perceptive a cultural critic as Susan Sontag, following Wilson, published a sound analysis of the relation of art to disease in her Illness as Metaphor, only to lose her critical nerve and fall into the advocacy trap in her AIDS and Its Metaphors.³ where she allows her critical intelligence to go soft and be replaced by her "compassion" for the diseased. For it is the sin of advocacy, the subverting of the aesthetic autonomy of the work of art in order to push one's special, ideological cause, that has resulted in so much disarray on the current cultural scene.

These reflections are prompted by the fact that addiction studies in general and the critique of a connection between literature and alcoholism in particular may be confused with the "victim art" that Arlene Croce deconstructs. In the Middle Ages art was accepted as the handmaiden of religion; today, it would seem, art is a function of therapy. But this need not be so. And evidence for optimism is to be found in John W. Crowley's new book on alcoholism in modernist American literature, a work that confirms this reviewer's conviction that first-rate literary criticism continues to be produced in the field of addiction studies. The author begins:

In The White Logic, I owe a great deal [to earlier works in the field], but I do not share completely their authors' confidence in the "disease concept" that has shaped thinking about "alcoholism" for over five decades. I am concerned here with the historical formation of this and earlier concepts of habitual drunkenness and their bearing on the social construction of gender roles. . . . But it is also a work of traditional criticism and literary history in its attention to what I have called the drunk narrative: a mode of fiction that expresses the conjunction of modernism and alcoholism in a pervasive ideology of despair. (x)

This argument is carried through the book with a clarity and an authority all too seldom found these days in academic criticism.

At the very end of The White Logic (the term is Jack London's for alcohol), Crowley writes:

In contrast to the truly horrific suffering endured at Guadalcanal or Dachau or Hiroshima, the agony of the alcoholic "Twentieth-Century Writer"--agony that was largely self-inflicted through drinking and that served in turn to justify drinking--was "merely literary" more often than these writers wished to recognize. When F. Scott Fitzgerald gravely opined, "There are no second acts in American lives," he neglected to mention that he and many other modernists stuck in their "graveyard period" had gotten drunk during the first act and passed out during intermission. (157)

The solid truth of this conclusion, as we shall see, is fully justified by the author's critical analyses that precede it.

II

The White Logic, subtitled Alcoholism and Gender in American Modernist Fiction,⁴ successfully combines three critical perspectives--alcoholism, gender, and The Modern Temper (Joseph Wood Krutch's term)--to achieve an extended delineation of a crucial characteristic of many modernist American authors: their use and abuse of alcohol, which then is often rationalized as a key to artistic inspiration. The main writers discussed are W. D. Howells (primarily The Landlord at Lion's Head, 1897), Jack London (John Barleycorn, 1913), Ernest Hemingway (The Sun Also Rises,

1926), F. Scott Fitzgerald (Tender Is the Night, 1934), John O'Hara (Appointment in Samarra, 1934), Djuna Barnes (Nightwood, 1936), and Charles Jackson (The Lost Weekend, 1944). There is no general introduction or conclusion. Rather, each of the seven chapters is a unified whole, containing, in addition to extended examination of the novel, detailed discussions of historical and biographical background, and brief, perceptive vignettes of other writers related to the main subject. The notes alone constitute a gold mine of information, a bibliographical commentary on the social history of alcoholism in America since the early nineteenth century.

The fiction of W. D. Howells provides Crowley with a means of tracing the "shifting representations of habitual drunkenness" that took place in both the medical and imaginative literature during Howells' long life. The primary shift was from the model of intemperance as a vice to what the Victorians called a "disease of the will." This shift is illustrated through the novels of Howells as well as through several other representative tales of the times, including Dreiser's Sister Carrie. The temperance model began to give way to the addiction model, permitting the inclusion in Howells' fiction not only of drunkenness but also of the excesses of sex, gambling, and other compulsions. Crowley concludes that a "shift from the economy of scarcity to the economy of desire at the turn of the century corresponds to what historians have perceived as the rise of cultural modernism" (17):

"Alcoholism" and "literary modernism" emerged together in a dialectical relationship that produced, in the drunk narrative, both a portrait of the modernist as an alcoholic and a portrait of the alcoholic as a modernist.(18)

In his chapter on Jack London, Crowley discusses one of the more fascinating aspects of the conventional treatments of the alcoholic writer: the denial of the writer's alcoholism. "Denial" has become a psychobabble cliché, yet that phenomenon, it seems, has pervaded academic and biographical criticism of alcoholic artists, and the treatment of London is no exception. The fact that John Barleycorn is a "generically indeterminate narrative on the border between fictional autobiography and autobiographical fiction" (19), allows the willing critic an out, an out that is finally demolished by Crowley's analysis. The text is placed in the tradition of Victorian temperance novels, and the delineation here of that tradition is comprehensive. London contributes a modernist element to the genre when he writes, "John Barleycorn is everywhere the connotation of manliness, and daring, and great-spiritedness":

The underlying logic of John Barleycorn [Crowley comments] holds that if drinking is the badge of manhood, then the manliest of men, because he stands at the farthest remove from women and their domestic regime, is the alcoholic. The alcoholic, moreover, enjoys a homosocial intimacy with other men that exists nowhere outside the world of the bottle. (28)

The author's chapter on London also includes a thorough discussion of "the chief modernist vice [of] habitual drunkenness" (35) in addition to an authoritative survey of the connection between The Modern Temper and the alcoholic writer: "this ideology of despair was propagated largely under the influence of alcohol: by writers for whom writing and drinking were conjoined" (42). This "conjoining" was to receive its classic statements in The Sun Also Rises and Tender Is the Night.

III

One could do worse than to label the decade in American literature following World War I the Age of Narcissism. Edmund Wilson in The Twenties and Robert McAlmon in Being Geniuses Together, for instance, evoke nicely that preoccupation with self that booze, sex, and Freud enabled. Hemingway once referred to The Sun Also Rises as "one book about a few drunks," but, as Crowley points out, it is in fact a veritable tincture of alcohol, and a "major example of the drunk narrative, in which alcoholism is inseparable from the modernist ethos of despair" (44). Hemingway's famous moral code is embodied here in the characters' handling of drink: "Mike was a bad drunk. Brett was a good drunk. Bill was a good drunk. Cohn was never drunk" (51). The narcissistic nature of this code--courage as self-fulfillment--is brilliantly disguised by the War background and the Pamplona externalities, but it is deeply there in the drink, as Crowley shows, partly through his revealing use of the novel's manuscript sources. In the end, though, The Sun Also Rises "remains notably resistant to The Modern Temper.... Despite its reputation as Hemingway's celebration of drinking, [it] subtly affirms sobriety as a means to the sheer drunkenness of the writer's art" (63-4).

Crowley notes, by the way, a fascinating aspect of a writer's connection to drink: the manner in which he "places" himself in relation to other drinkers. The hierarchy of holding one's booze is in some ways as rigid as the Medieval Chain of Being: "Hemingway cast Fitzgerald, as Fitzgerald in turn cast Ring Lardner, in the role of rummy's rummy--someone whose drinking problem is perversely reassuring to a fellow alcoholic for as long as it seems worse than his own" (65). There's no rationalizer like a wordsmith!

The drinking in Tender Is the Night has, to my mind, a much more somber and disturbing function than it has in Hemingway. The manly boozing in The Sun Also Rises, however "gendered" (as Crowley demonstrates), has a tribal, sacramental quality that is almost mythic. Reality is romanced out. The primary alcoholic symbol in Fitzgerald's novel is the profoundly unromantic hangover. This perception is reinforced for me by Crowley's bringing into play The Crack-Up in his critique of Fitzgerald's novel. As the booze takes over, Dick Diver's moral strength is displaced by that of Nicole's by means of a sort of psychoanalytic transference. Alcohol becomes the medium by which the psychiatrist is drained through a succubus effect of male dominance: power shifts to Nicole. "The canonical modernist hero," Crowley says,

is a certain type of manly man; and in Fitzgerald, as in London and Hemingway, wartime male bonding is perpetuated by the culture of drinking, in which alcoholism becomes, in effect, a key sign of "manliness." (88)

It is this "manliness" of Dick's that is displaced, as he succumbs to drink, by Nicole's emerging sexual dominance, a power that destroys him.

IV

The final three chapters of The White Logic delineate the "high" and "popular" cultures of drink through an examination of Appointment in Samarra, Nightwood, and The Lost Weekend. John O'Hara was a youthful role model of mine (I then thought the title of his novel was the most profound of inspirations). Having left--so I thought--John O'Hara along with James Farrell and Robert Ruark behind, I was startled (and pleased) to discover how wrong I was--at least about O'Hara. Crowley's detailed analysis of Julian English's alcoholic self-destruction in Appointment in Samarra sets a standard by which other critical examinations of the aesthetic relation between alcoholism and the novel may well be measured:

By making his suicide the focus of interpretation, and by reading it either as an overdetermined act with a complex of causes or as an inexplicable act for which no cause ultimately matters, the critics have missed a plain and simple fact: that drinking is the main reason, if not the only one, for Julian's death. (101)

The author's exposition of this fact compels one to admit that the novel is a far more powerful realization than one remembers. The two-fisted saloon

drinker of O'Hara legend is artfully transformed: "[Julian] might be said to have died for a delusion--seduced into alcoholic depression and paranoia" (110).

Djuna Barnes is a cult figure and Nightwood a cult novel; put another way it is a cult's idea of High Culture art. For that very reason, however, it works in The White Logic by defining the outer limits by which the culture of drink is legitimately integrated into the structure of the other novels. "It remained," as Crowley writes, "for Djuna Barnes to erase the [gender] boundaries altogether by inverting the male culture of drinking" (114). Barnes came well equipped for the task, for she "was one of the first female American writers to develop a drinking problem, and Nightwood plays off the conventions of male-authored drunk narratives in order to subvert the gendering of 'alcoholism' itself" (116). Crowley invokes Kenneth Burke's characterization of the novel as "transcendence downward":

In Nightwood Barnes both parodied and appropriated the modernist culture of drinking and the genre of the drunk narrative, of which [Malcolm Lowry's] Under the Volcano is the sublime example.... While the tragic high seriousness of Nightwood has advanced Barnes's claim for inclusion in the high modernist canon, the carnivalesque nature of that tragedy works to expose the pretentiousness of The Modern Temper. (134, 135)

The novel is, it strikes me, essentially a tour de force, and I find Barnes's life, in the end, more powerful than her novel.

I know of no better way to define the differences between high and popular art than to set side by side Under the Volcano (1947) and The Lost Weekend (1944). It was Malcolm Lowry's misfortune that the latter was published first.

For Lowry, the true originality of [Under the Volcano] consisted in his use of an alcoholic as a representative man, a symbol of the tragic modern condition. He was understandably devastated by the pre-emptive publication of Charles Jackson's novel, with its unprecedented account of a binge from the drinker's point of view, and envious of its clamorous reception: critical praise, bestseller popularity, and a lucrative Hollywood contract. (135)

As Crowley points out, in the end Lowry's novel prevailed as the classic fictional drunkalogue; but for the purposes of his argument, he chose well in concluding his study with Jackson's novel, for "[w]ith tough-minded

pragmatism, The Lost Weekend renounces the abstract and rhetorical inflation of drunkenness common to the modernist texts" (140) previously discussed. The difference between the two books may be signaled by two terms, hallucinations and delirium tremens: the former is romantic, the latter, hell.

With a nice attention to historical accuracy, Alcoholics Anonymous is examined here. That organization had completed its first decade about the time The Lost Weekend was published with the attendant celebrity of the movie. Whether A.A. and the related clinical studies that encouraged the acceptance by the public of the disease model of alcoholism led to the enormous, favorable reception of Jackson's work, is problematic. In any event, Jackson "mainstreamed" the drunk novel: "The Lost Weekend began to close the book on [the previously considered] drunk narratives by exposing the literariness of their alcoholic despair," for it "inaugurated a new mode of American fiction in which habitual drunkenness was figured less as a sign of The Modern Temper than as the symptom of a disease" (155).

V

The most original as well as the most controversial element in The White Logic is the author's integration of gender into the structure of his argument. I am not particularly sympathetic to the use of Theory, gender or otherwise, as an analytical tool. In all too many cases it leads to little more than a variation of revisionist history, whether new-historicist, Marxian, deconstructionist, or a subsection of identity or sexual politics. Millenarianism is embedded in each of these perspectives: advocacy is confused with truth, and feeling with fact. Theory, except in the hands, occasionally, of the very best scholars, amounts, in Paul Dean's words, "to read[ing] literary history backwards,"⁵ to a secular theology of low explanatory power. Crowley's application of gender theory, however, is the exception, for it adds greatly to one's understanding and appreciation of the specific ways drinking is used in these texts to dramatic effect. We are, in short, shown how alcohol and sex are combined in a calculus of change to reflect the cultural process.

In her Feminization of American Culture, Ann Douglas documents the powerful gendering effect of the nineteenth-century woman's movement on the liberal protestant clergy.⁶ Crowley brilliantly analyzes how temperance, a central tenet of this movement (in addition to those of suffrage and abolition), gradually "feminized" the drinking customs of men. The cocktail lounge replaced the saloon; the martini, the boilermaker. And, through the subtle confusion of traditional sex roles in drinking attitudes and practices, social or psychological construction replaced biology. This process of displacement is

nicely explicated, to select but one example from The White Logic, in the chapter on The Sun Also Rises.

The androgynous signs of Hemingway's characters have been frequently noted, especially in his posthumous fiction. Indeed, Kenneth Lynn traces the "feminized" Hemingway back to his childhood.⁷ But it has remained for Crowley to successfully show how this phenomenon works as literary interpretation.

Drunk or (rarely) sober, Lady Ashley is not simply charming; she is deviously enchanting--a sexually ambiguous Circe who leads men spellbound to their doom by means of an androgynous allure.... Whereas Hemingway, like London, genders drinking as a quintessentially "masculine" behavior, he associates drunkenness with the threat of gender uncertainty. The alcoholic for Hemingway is not, as for London, the manliest of men; rather, the male rummy is as unmanly as Brett is unwomanly.... As Jake's androgynous double, Brett represents not only the woman he would in some sense like to be, but also the "unmanned" alcoholic he may very well become if he continues to relax the control of his drinking that the manly code requires. (57, 62)

These ideas are shown to permeate the novel. In fact, Crowley shows that Hemingway's celebrated Code is far richer than I, for one, had realized: alcohol and sex are used to define the moral values of each of the characters and therefore the world view embedded in the novel. Hemingway's execution in The Sun Also Rises is masterful, but Crowley's analysis makes one realize just how fine that mastery is.

VI

When St. Paul admonished the church at Corinth to "put away childish things," he was aiming specifically at an incipient gnosticism in that congregation. The Gnostics were convinced they had a short, secret path to God, so who needs to grow up? And Fitzgerald's epigram declaiming "There are no second acts in American lives" is a codification of that gnostic narcissism peculiar to the bright, mind-altered modernist literary adolescent. "Many Americans of the Lost Generation," Crowley writes, "who bellied up to the bars of Paris or frequented the speakeasies back home came to believe that ardent spirits and artistic inspiration went hand in glove" (42). Alcohol was the magic catalyst that would integrate their art and their personal lives into a form different in kind from the world at large.

Why, then, did they write tragedies? Of the seven writers Crowley covers, only Howells and Jackson depict drinking realistically, the former not an alcoholic, and the latter a recovering alcoholic in the A.A. sense. The others create romantic stories of the Self. Crowley's term for this is "The Modernist Temper," the literary sensibility of the alcoholic transformed into a literary view of reality. Only, it seems to me, in Tender Is the Night do we find a work approaching mature tragedy, and Fitzgerald's long and finally unresolved struggle with the form of the novel is convincing evidence that he knew his material. Contrary to his epigram, he was well into his second act. But, as Crowley everywhere in his book demonstrates, the gospels of the modernist literary sensibility for the most part reek with alcoholic delusions and sexual uncertainty indivisibly joined.

During my first term in graduate school, I signed up for a course on Ulysses given by the Joyce scholar William York Tindall. Among the required books was Tindall's then new book on Joyce. When, no doubt sensing an arrogant rip-off, we asked him why his book, his answer was direct: It was the latest book on Joyce and therefore, of necessity, the best. An increasing number of serious studies of literature and addiction have appeared in the last decade, each better than the last, just as each has relied on the work of the past: a healthy state of affairs. The White Logic is the best book on the subject so far.

NOTES

1. Arlene Croce, "Discussing the Undiscussable," New Yorker 26 Dec. 1994/2 Jan. 1995: 54-60. See also the (invited) responses, "Who's the Victim?" 30 Jan. 1995: 10-13. Of the numerous other responses to Ms. Croce's article, perhaps the most useful is that of Terry Teachout, "Victim Art," Commentary March 1995: 58-61.

2. I have written elsewhere on the question of "victimhood"; see "Editorial," Dionysos 3.2 (Fall 1991).

3. It is fair to mention that Sontag, in a devastating critique of Joyce Carol Oates' unfortunate response to the Croce article (New York Times 19 Feb. 1995: Sec. 2:1, 22-23), astutely rejects the victim art movement (Times 5 March 1995: Sec. 2:5).

4. Earlier versions of two chapters, those on Howells and London, appeared, respectively, in Dionysos 3.3 (Winter 1991) and 3.1 (Spring 1991). Crowley's "Recovering the Author of The Lost Weekend: Notes on Charles Jackson," Dionysos 5.2 (Fall 1993) contains the most complete biographical account of Jackson available.

5. Paul Dean, "Fighting for Herland: The Sex Wars of Gilbert and Gubar," New Criterion April 1995: 18.

6. Ann Douglas, The Feminization of American Culture (New York: Knopf, 1977).

7. Kenneth Lynn, Hemingway (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987). See also his "Hemingway's Private War," Commentary July 1981: 24-33; October 1981: 22-26.

**Poem for Banktellers, Gas Station Attendants,
& Convenience Store Clerks Alike**

David Roskos

Put the money in the bag.
Don't make me light you up
like a fag, a bundle of broken sticks.
You see, I am a desperate man,
have been eating out of garbage cans
& I've abandoned all my plans.
All I care about is my next hit
& if you've got any sense aboutcha at all
you won't stand in the way of me & it.
The road is not paved with any intentions
of any kind, nothing but loss behind.
Put the money in the bag.
I've got a life and five addictions to feed.
Can't you see that I'm in need?
Desperation is my world.
My dreams died with the first rush--
The blood drew back
& the lights went out.
When your soul dies it falls to sleep slowly
& you're always the last one to know,
Put the money in the bag
I really got to go.

10/22/94

Poem for Paulie

David Roskos

the snow is so peaceful
when it's falling,
covers up the garbage.
I looked out the window
of the church after the
meeting last night
& thought of Paul B.,
"Baretta."
He's dead 'cause of a shot
he took in his arm
on a rooftop in new york.
He said he knew the needle
was infected, realized it
a second before he sunk it,
just had a gut-feeling,
paused...
& said FUCK IT.
He died in the VA Hospital
in full-blown dementia,
lesions on his skin,
pockmarked face--
snow settles on his grave.

Book Review

Rosemary E. Johnsen
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Sue Vice, Matthew Campbell and Tim Armstrong, editors. Beyond the Pleasure Dome: Writing and Addiction from the Romantics. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994 (316 pages).

This collection of essays is of interest to readers of Dionysos for many reasons. It is noteworthy as the proceedings of the first-ever conference devoted to literature and addiction (held at Sheffield in 1991), as a partial map of the field, as an introduction to new authors of interest, and, not least, as the source of some valuable criticism on individual writers and the debates of the field. Because the essays are proceedings of an exploratory conference, the quality of the contributions is uneven; some of the essays are excellent--clear, well-argued and persuasively illustrated--while others might better have been left out. Sue Vice's introduction identifies the breadth of the contents as both virtue and liability: addiction studies can fruitfully transcend genre and period boundaries, but the field "is so wide that it is sometimes in danger of becoming a merely content-based issue (concerned simply with which writers feature addicts in their work, or were addicts themselves) rather than the subject of a more rigorous investigation" (13).

The volume is comprised of thirty-one essays divided into five sections: Medical and Legal Paradigms, Romantic Beginnings, Theories of Consumption, Addiction and Creativity, and The Novel. The divisions do not reflect consistent distinctions, and are not very helpful. Vice's brief introduction sketches out the history of the collection and names its constituent papers, and includes a couple of paragraphs commenting on the concepts of addiction studies. The papers themselves range from a few pages long, with no footnotes, to elaborately revised essays of up to 18 pages (including 53 notes and two tables). A very useful feature of the volume is its index, allowing the reader to locate references to particular authors or theorists (although the footnotes are not indexed, so citations of secondary sources can be overlooked if they are not named in the text).

Most of the contributors are from English departments, although there are also some professional writers, psychiatrists, and legal/social experts. Almost a third of the contributors are at Sheffield. Some of the names will be familiar to readers of Dionysos: Tom Dardis, Roger Forseth, Jean-Charles Sournia, and Nicholas O. Warner, to name a few. The subjects of the papers vary widely. There is an informative article on the legal issues associated with intoxication and some psychiatry-based papers. The film studies essay tries to establish an enormous range for addiction studies, arguing that "an

individual's relationship to its culture is figured in patterns of dependence" (159) in order to make addiction studies a suitable rubric with which to analyze (capitalist) culture. (The author of that essay, Erica Sheen, also makes the truly astonishing claim that "it [is] a well-attested fact that many people have children in order to have an excuse to buy toys and children's clothing" [161].) There are several feminist essays, including a valuable consideration of Marguerite Duras and an interesting theoretical analysis of "the place of women in contemporary theories of mass culture" (143).

The majority of the papers in Beyond the Pleasure Dome are readings of individual authors, including Jack Kerouac, William Faulkner, Malcolm Lowry, Patrick Hamilton, James Joyce and Thomas DeQuincey, among others. There are some surprising omissions--William Burroughs and F. Scott Fitzgerald, for instance--and no contributor analyzes genre fiction (John Mortimer's Rumpole stories seem ripe for the picking, to name just one possibility). But overall the book provides good coverage of the issues and figures important in literature and addiction studies. It brings to notice some new writers, and new works by familiar names.

Because the book is a collection of essays by different scholars, it gives a good idea of the principal debates in the field, particularly the growing concern about how biography and literary analysis interact. Most of the essayists use biographical information, and many actively query the relationship between such sources and the literature. Collectively these essays achieve a great advance on the traditional dichotomy of either ignoring or sensationalizing addiction.

Several essays stand out from the collection. Renate Günther's "Alcohol and Writing: Patterns of Obsession in the Work of Marguerite Duras," mentioned above, looks at Duras' interlocking passions for literature and alcohol, and yields valuable gender-specific insights. Roger Forseth's essay, "That First Infirmary of Noble Minds: Sinclair Lewis, Fame--and Drink," achieves equally interesting results applying a similar, but nongendered, method to Lewis' life and work. Caryn Chaden's essay on Oliver Goldsmith is a clear and persuasive reading of his plays, shedding light on the inability of Goldsmith's characters to "step outside the addictive systems he portrays" (85) in his dramas.

Of the theory-oriented essays in Beyond the Pleasure Dome, Tim Armstrong's on Theodore Dreiser is particularly successful, arguing persuasively that "addiction is central to [Sister Carrie's] depiction of desire and the city" (132). Armstrong draws together commentary on energy, desire and addiction, with thought-provoking results. Kevin McCarron's essay, "Alcoholism as Metaphor in William Golding's The Paper Men" is perhaps the ideal conference paper: concise, insightful, and clearly argued. He demonstrates the symbolic significance of Wilf Barclay's alcoholism through an inspired reading of the text; in fact, McCarron's essay is unusual in this

collection in eschewing biography altogether, providing instead an overview of Golding's other literary representations of drinking. Most readers of Beyond the Pleasure Dome will be looking for criticism on authors and theorists in whom they take an interest; these five essays reward attention whatever the reader's specific literary interests.

Unfortunately, involvement in literature and addiction studies is sometimes attended by a lack of intellectual rigor (often accompanied by sentimentality), and this collection is no exception. Catherine MacGregor's essay, "Codependency and Crime and Punishment," is inexplicably placed in the section on Medical and Legal Paradigms, which makes its simplistic comments and pop psychologizing ("children of alcoholics always blame themselves for their parents' drinking problems; that is simply the way they think" [27]) even more glaring. The essay is marked by its earnest concern for adult children of alcoholics in general and Dostoevsky in particular; such sympathy may be laudable, but the results are distinctly unprofessional, as MacGregor quotes the reaction of "a very bright friend of mine" (36) to Crime and Punishment, and calls Dostoevsky "Fyodor," as if he were another of her friends. Even more troubling is that, according to one of her footnotes, Roger Forseth pointed out to her an earlier published essay on the same subject which she admits is "similar to my reading." She acknowledges its existence, but makes no use of it in her own essay.

Like MacGregor, Marcy Lassota Bauman is interested in codependency, and both offer simplistic readings of richly complex literature. The title of Bauman's essay is "Faulkner's Fiction Makes Addicts of Us All," but the discernible traces of argument suggest that Faulkner's fiction makes readers behave, not like addicts, but like children of addicts. Bauman does not distinguish between the two: she writes that The Sound and the Fury poses difficulties of interpretation and meaning like those "which trouble all children raised in alcoholic homes. To understand Faulkner's fictions, we must assume the meaning-making strategies that children of alcoholics are forced to assume. In a sense, to understand the works of this alcoholic writer, we ourselves must become addicts, too" (291-92). Her conclusion might best be described as mawkish: "we have learned 'how to learn' in the way that children of alcoholics do, and we have learned that such knowledge often entails confusion and pain" (297). The study of literature and addiction, if it seeks academic credibility, ought to avoid the tone of a self-help book.

In short, then, like most conference proceedings, Beyond the Pleasure Dome contains some excellent work alongside some less successful criticism. A more ambitious introduction might have been attempted, but as it stands, Beyond the Pleasure Dome fills a much-needed role: this collection of essays by a diverse group of scholars complements such single-author books as Thomas Gilmore's Equivocal Spirits. Donald Goodwin's Alcohol and the

Writer. and Dardis' The Thirsty Muse. As a largely British production, it is an important counterweight to those American studies, which rely heavily on the insights of Alcoholics Anonymous (which here gets only two mentions in over 300 pages). Beyond the Pleasure Dome is definitely worth a look, regardless of the reader's level of expertise: as an introduction to the field of literary addiction studies, the book serves a valuable function, and for those already engrossed in the field, it offers the specific benefits of informed criticism and pointers toward other material.

Book Review

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Dan Wakefield, Expect a Miracle: The Miraculous Things That Happen to Ordinary People. Harper Collins: San Francisco, 1995.

Dan Wakefield has had a distinguished career as journalist, novelist, and screen writer. In the past fifteen or twenty years, his interests have shifted from fiction to non-fiction, and particularly to the role of writing in healing and spiritual growth. As he tells his own story in his recent book, Expect a Miracle, this shift arose from his own recovery from alcohol addiction and his return to religious participation, both described at greater length in earlier books. He has also been conducting workshops on the spiritual and therapeutic uses of autobiographical writing: some of the moving stories he recounts in Expect a Miracle come from participants in those workshops. Other stories come from prison inmates with whom Mr. Wakefield, like John Cheever before him, has worked.

Strictly speaking, only the 4th (of 9) chapters of Mr. Wakefield's book have to do with the subject of Dionysos, literature and addiction. That chapter is entitled "Miracles of Recovery," and includes, under the heading "A 'Hopeless' Alcoholic," the story of Roger Forseth, the founder and editor emeritus of Dionysos. Mr. Forseth notes with some bemusement that his academic career before recovery was a kind of miracle, since he "became a tenured full professor at age forty" despite--because of?--being "a drunk the whole time." This reviewer, the current editor of this journal, can empathize, having drunk his way through a doctoral program at the University of Chicago: actually, alcoholic disaster seemed to me preferable to the fate of Robert Pirsig's "Phaedrus," whose doctoral program at U. of C. ended with a psychotic break.

The rest of Mr. Wakefield's book takes up other kinds of miracles. Two early chapters are an attempt to define the word, not easy to do, given its different meanings in different spiritual traditions. Some of the "miracles" he goes on to describe are of the kind conventionally associated with the term: for example, Mr. Wakefield includes an essay on a visit to the shrine of Lourdes, in which he notes the careful medical scrutiny that is applied to "cures" there--only 65 have been declared genuine in all the decades since a medical board began studying the matter. And he also recounts at length the story of an Irish woman who experienced a very dramatic physical healing at the Irish shrine of Knock.

But most of the miracles he depicts are more modest, in keeping with the book's subtitle, "The Miraculous Things That Happen to Ordinary People." To ordinary people befall ordinary miracles--if that is not an oxymoron. Even so, Mr. Wakefield's book is a real page-turner, at least for this reader, in large measure because it consists of stories similar in form to the recovery stories in Chapter 4. These may be ordinary people, but stories like theirs engross me nonetheless.

Some of the fascination may stem from the fact that, whether the miracles in question are "Miracles of Healing," "Miracles of Presence," or "Miracles of Creation," to cite some of the chapter titles, all the miracles are presented as stories, with brief notes about the story-tellers prefixed to their accounts. Perhaps there is some kind of archetype deep in the human spirit that responds to comeback stories like these. Joseph Campbell might point out that all the great myths describe women and men who go on quests to the heart of darkness and literally "come back" with a treasure, often a gem of wisdom. This pearl of great price is much like what Mr. Wakefield embraces under the term "miracle."

Long or short, the stories tend to fall into the kind of shape adumbrated in the Big Book, Alcoholics Anonymous: "What it was like, what happened, and what it's like now." "What happened" is as various as the kinds of flashes of enlightenment that William James classically described. But the before and after tend to be pretty similar: Before, a person is desperate, with a desperation either quiet or noisy, and not particularly religious, or "spiritual," to use the term many people prefer these days. After, there is a sense, as James put it, of "throwing the burden down," of freedom, of everything that matters being different. This change is accompanied by at least an openness to spiritual matters. But this openness, however vague or inchoate, often turns out to be the first step on an unending spiritual path.

Expect a Miracle is in the noble lineage of James' Varieties of Religious Experience, a lineage that also includes Kurtz and Ketcham's The Spirituality of Imperfection and the stories in Alcoholics Anonymous. I think also of Martin Buber's Tales of the Hasidim, and of Elie Wiesel's remark that God made human beings because God loves stories. For a lot of people--the present reviewer included--the greatest "ordinary" miracle that life affords anyone is suddenly to realize that, amid confusion and disaster, one has been handed the makings of a story. Groups religious and/or spiritual help us to refine those makings. And books like Dan Wakefield's give us the notion that we are on the right track.

NOTES AND COMMENT

Roger Forseth

The Claremont Graduate Humanities Center announces a conference: "Addiction and Culture," 29 Feb - 2 March 1996. Inquiries: Marc Redfield, Conference Coordinator, The Claremont Graduate School, Humanities Center, Claremont, CA 91711; Tel, 909/621-8612 George Wedge delivered a paper, "'May Day' Is Not About Alcohol, So Why Is Nearly Everybody Drunk?" at the Hemingway/Fitzgerald Conference, Paris, 3-9 July 1995....Dan Wakefield's latest book is Expect a Miracle: The Miraculous Things That Happen to Ordinary People (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1995)....Don Goodwin reviewed Edmund Wilson's The Sixties in the American Journal of Psychiatry Dec 1994:1823-4....Alan Marlatt published (with Susan F. Tapert) "Harm Reduction: Reducing the Risks of Addictive Behaviors," in Baer, Marlatt, & McMahon (eds.), Addictive Behaviors Across the Lifespan (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1994) Dwight Heath edited The International Handbook on Alcohol and Culture (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1994 [in press]).... Andrew Delbanco and Thomas Delbanco published "Annals of Addiction: A.A. at the Crossroads," New Yorker 20 March 1995: 50-63 "Magnificent ... A classic," blurbs Timothy Leary "Tales of Neolithic cave men going graffiti mad on opium, urine-drinking Siberian mushroom eaters slaughtering psilocybin-soaked reindeer, and Zoroastrian religious heroes tripping on psychoactive mang make the activities of present day rock 'n' rollers look thoroughly timid," says the dust jacket of Richard Rudgley's Essential Substances: A Cultural History of Intoxicants in Society (New York: Kodansha International, 1994)...Robert Stone, writing in the New York Review of Books (6 April 1995: 4-5), thinks highly of In Love with Daylight: A Memoir of Recovery (Simon and Schuster, 1995) by Wilfrid Sheed....John Steadman Rice, in A Disease of One's Own: Psychotherapy, Addiction, and the Emergence of Co-Dependency (Transaction, December 1995), "examines the phenomenon of co-dependency from a sociological perspective, viewing it not as something a person 'has,' but as something a person believes; not as a psychological disease, but as a belief system that offers its adherents a particular way of talking about the self and social relationships."....Speaking of co-dependency (and enabling, dysfunctioning, and other family values) one could do worse than to consult Carolyn See's Dreaming: Hard Luck and Good Times in America (Random House, 1995)....Dylan Thomas biographer Paul Ferris has published Caitlin: The Life of Caitlin Thomas (North Pomfret, VT: Pimlico/Trafalgar Square, 1995)....Boozing is appropriately covered in Fitzgerald and Hemingway: A

Dangerous Friendship by Matthew J. Bruccoli (Carroll & Graf, 1994)....The titles of two books recently published in English are suggestive: Marek Kohn's Dope Girls: The Birth of the British Drug Underground (Lawrence and Wishart, 1993), and A History of Vodka by William Pokhlebkin (Verso, 1993).... Ray Oldenburg's "Augmenting the Bar Studies" (Social History of Alcohol Review 28-29 [Fall 1993/Spring 1994]: 30-38), a discussion of barroom sociability, is a useful footnote to The Iceman Cometh.... "Zurich's open drug policy goes into withdrawal," reports Alan Cowell in the New York Times (12 March 1995)....Dan Barden writes about the changing customs of literary drinking in "So Type 'Em Up, Joe" ("Forget the barroom and the academic workshop. Today's American writers are trying out their stories in the twelve-step world of rehab."), GO Sept 1994...."James Robson [in his play King Baby] must be praised for his recognition that alcoholism is the very quintessence of modern hell. The drinker haunted by his dependence is to us what the madman deprived of his wits was to the Jacobean," writes reviewer Peter Porter (TLS 29 Jan 1993: 19).... Ernest Kurtz and Bruce E. Donovan offered courses ("Shame and Its Healing" and "Alcohol and Other Drugs on the College Campus," respectively) at the Rutgers Summer Schools of Alcohol and Drug Studies, July 1995. One wonders if such conferences might be willing to offer courses on literature and addiction.... "Determining what sorts of rants are acceptable is usually left to the discretion of the Speaker, though some general rules apply. Legislators cannot accuse each other of insanity or criminality. Nor can they call other individual members liars or hypocrites. And they can't accuse anyone of being drunk, even if he is," writes Sarah Lyall in her article on the art of insult in the English Parliament ("The Right Hon. Twerp Debates the Windbag," New York Times 26 Feb 1995). . Pontotoc, Miss. "A 5-year-old boy who was home from school with the chicken pox called 911 five times and got his mother arrested for smoking marijuana. 'The boy was so proud of himself,' Sheriff Randy Roberts said. . . 'He was tickled to death at what he'd done.' ... When deputies arrived, they found the woman smoking marijuana, and the boy showed them where to find a small amount of the drug hidden under a couch, the police said. The mother, whose name was not released, faced misdemeanor drug charges. The child was being cared for by relatives" (New York Times 21 Jan 1995).... "An Air Force captain charged with misusing drugs in Saudi Arabia during the Gulf War blamed his behavior on the weakness of his character. The captain's failure to offer the standard psychobabbings is breathtaking. Instead of excuses about pressure, addiction, codependency and whatnot, he flat-out told the court-martial judge: 'A man of stronger will and character would not do what I have done.' This is revolutionary candor" (Wall Street Journal 7 Sept 1991).

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Cassie Carter is ABD in English at Bowling Green State University, where she holds a dissertation fellowship. Her annotated bibliography of Carroll (1967-1988) appears in **Bulletin of Bibliography** 47.2 (1990).

Roger Forseth is Professor Emeritus of English at the University Of Wisconsin-Superior, and has published articles on Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Jackson.

Jim Harbaugh, S.J. has just completed a book of Sunday meditations for 12 Step people, called Not Hard to Swallow. He teaches in the Addiction Studies Program at Seattle University.

Rosemary Johnsen is completing her dissertation on Patrick Hamilton at Michigan State University. She has published in Studies in American Fiction.

David Roskos is editor of Big Hammer Magazine and Iniquity Press/Vendetta Books. He lives in New Jersey.

Mark Scott is Visiting Assistant Professor of American Literature at Mills College. His poems have appeared in Raritan, Poetry, The Wallace Stevens Journal, Santa Monica Review, Western Humanities Review and Sites.

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