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Summer, 1997 Vol. 7, No. 2

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A Note from the Editor

About this issue: The centerpiece of Summer, '97, is George Wedge's essay, in which he tries to establish some ground-rules for determining what the effect of drinking is on a particular creative artist. As many critics have noted, it is more complicated than the Romantic notion that drinking helps creativity a lot or the Treatment concept that any untoward drinking is deleterious. John Crowley employs some of Wedge's ideas in studying the effect of James Whitcomb Riley's drinking on his literary career. Ellen Lansky describes the very complicated interplay between alcohol (and other drugs) and the life and literary output of Paul and Jane Bowles; she concludes that all of these are inextricably intertwined. Michael Johnson, a practicing poet and essayist, reflects on the pros and cons of "Drinks" in his life, and comes down on the side of pro. My review of a new anthology of poetry on addiction, Last Call, as well as original poetry in the same vein by Eric Zuckerman and David Roskos, give our readers some specimens to study in the light of Wedge's insight.

We hope that you will enjoy this issue: it is particularly focused on the central question to which *Dionysos* perennially addresses itself.

Jim Harbaugh
Editor--*Dionysos*

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Beloved Enemies: Two Serious Ladies, The Sheltering Sky, Jane and Paul Bowles, and Alcohol

Ellen Lansky

IT MADE HER SAD TO REALIZE THAT IN SPITE OF THEIR SO OFTEN HAVING THE SAME REACTIONS, THE SAME FEELINGS, THEY WOULD NEVER REACH THE SAME CONCLUSIONS, BECAUSE THEIR RESPECTIVE AIMS IN LIFE WERE ALMOST DIAMETRICALLY OPPOSED (THE SHELTERING SKY 99).

In her introduction to The Viking Portable Paul and Jane Bowles, Millicent Dillon describes Paul Bowles and Jane Auer at the time of their meeting: "[h]e was twenty-six years old, blond, strikingly handsome, impeccably dressed, formal, polite, reserved, witty and charming, with a certain quality of detachment in that charm. She was twenty, dark-haired, wild, unpredictable, fey, gaminlike, intense and intensely interested in others, incapable of even the pretense of detachment" (ix). Dillon's list of dissimilar features suggests an "opposites attract" scenario: he provides what she's lacking and *vice versa*, and so the attracted opposites become the perfect couple.

Even the fact that Jane was a lesbian and Paul was/is "militantly anti-heterosexual" (Caponi 111) does not necessarily destabilize their "perfect couple" status. A significant, and heretofore unremarked, destabilizing force in the Bowles's marriage was her alcoholism and his responses to it. A result of her alcoholism and his responses is that, like Paul's characters in The Sheltering Sky, Jane and Paul Bowles's respective aims in life were diametrically opposed: she wanted to drink and he wanted her not to drink. Also, as Jane continued to drink, Paul developed an intense relationship with cannabis--in the exotic Moroccan forms of kif (a mixture of tobacco and marijuana) and majoun (a jam-like cannabis paste). Paul's biographer Christopher Sawyer-Laucanno notes that "[a]lthough Bowles had been smoking kif for years, it was only in the late 1950s that it became a regular habit" (358). His escalating kif habit notably coincides with Jane's progressing alcoholism and declining physical and mental health. This coincidence suggests that Paul's increasing drug use was in part a response to Jane's condition and his inability to control her drinking.

The alcohol-influenced relationship between Jane Bowles and Paul Bowles and the inscriptions of alcoholism in Jane's novel Two Serious

Ladies and Paul's novel The Sheltering Sky produce the intense and disrupting combination of antipathy and estrangement that often characterizes the relationship between alcoholics and their partners. The Bowleses were both partners and enemies who worked together (as partners or competitors) on novels in which they addressed their "private" experiences of antipathy and estrangement in the "public" forum of fiction. Through the medium of the Bowleses' first novels--his dedicated to her and hers to him--the married authors send messages to each other through the deployment of their autobiographical characters and through a reader whose role is to relay the messages. The messages concern the husband's attempts to control the wife's drinking and the wife's response to this attempt; their novels underscore the futility that lies in a concerned person's endeavor to make an alcoholic stop drinking. Furthermore, the novels also inscribe the husband's attempt to exercise his power as dominant husband and to impose his will upon his wife, but she is insubordinate and he fails. For the wife, drinking becomes an act of resistance; unfortunately, the substance that promises her liberation ultimately vanquishes her.

In the beginning of The Sheltering Sky, Kit Moresby's relationship with alcohol is a contributing factor to the uneasy relationship between Kit and her husband Port. In a key scene, Kit, Port, and their traveling companion, Tunner, are sitting in a cafe. Kit orders another mineral water and says to Tunner, "For once I feel as if I could get on the wagon and stay there. I can't drink in the heat" (9). Her remark indicates a history of problems with alcohol: specifically, trying and failing to abstain. She is not very confident about her ability to stay on the wagon because when Tunner asks Port if he wants another Pernod, Kit indicates that she'd gladly fall off the wagon "if it were real Pernod" (9): that is, real absinthe. Her knowledge of drinks, especially absinthe, suggests that her relationship to alcohol is different from Port's and Tunner's. They're drinking fake Pernod, socially; if Kit can't have real Pernod (with its promise of real intoxication), she'll stick with water.

Her uneasy abstinence also provides an explanation for her disproportionate response to Port when he begins to tell a dream to Tunner. She protests "with force" (9)--a strange and exaggerated response to Port's "small talk." She leaves the table crying, and Port says to a concerned Tunner, "Let her go. . . . She's worn out. The heat gets her down" (10). Her remarks about abstinence, her wistful comments about absinthe, and her melodramatic reaction to Port's behavior combine to suggest that Kit is worn out because the heat interferes with her drinking.

Port also exhibits some strange and exaggerated behavior. He overrides Kit's protest, and in his voice she hears "a certain ferocity which on the surface appeared feigned, but as Kit looked at him she felt that on

the contrary he actually was dissimulating the violence he felt" (9). Clearly, his ferocity is coming from a well of resentment and rage--perhaps jealousy. Since Port invited Tunner to accompany them, it seems unlikely that he is jealous of some kind of secret liaison between Kit and Tunner. It seems more likely that his resentment and rage and jealousy are connected to Kit's relationship with alcohol and her inability to "get on the wagon and stay there"--a predicament that Port does not understand.

In Two Serious Ladies. Mr. and Mrs. Copperfield also have an uneasy relationship whose "third side" is the wife's relationship to alcohol. When they arrive in Colon, Panama, Mrs. Copperfield feels "something trembling in the pit of her stomach" (41). Like Kit, Mrs. Copperfield is "not herself" when she's not drinking. When she meets Pacifica and Mrs. Quill, women who will drink with her, she feels acclimated. When Mr. Copperfield wants to visit Panama City and explore the jungle, she declines, preferring to stay in Colon. Though he is disappointed that she does not want to travel with him, he does not seem jealous of Mrs. Copperfield's attraction to Pacifica and Mrs. Quill. Rather, he's upset that Mrs. Copperfield wants to stay in close proximity to alcohol. He warns her that she "'is certain to get bored here unless [she starts] to drink. [She] probably will start to drink'" (108). Her desire to stay in Colon with her alcohol and her drinking womenfriends baffles and angers her husband.

The wife's relationship with alcohol practically negates her sexual relationship with her husband, so he tries to shore up his power position by manipulation and threats. To the husband's chagrin, the wife's preference for alcohol prevails. In The Sheltering Sky. Port--and Tunner as well--even use alcohol as a way to try to seduce Kit. On a long train trip, Tunner--who takes it upon himself to "husband" Kit--is able to seduce Kit because he brings along several bottles of champagne. The next morning, Kit does not remember arriving at the hotel. She no longer desires Tunner's presence in her room, but she does request a bottle of champagne. The bottle becomes a welcome corporeal presence, both as morning-after company and as a hangover remedy: "no sooner had she finished it than her hangover was gone, and she felt slightly tipsy, but very well" (92). Her experience with the bottle of champagne is much more pleasant than her experience with Tunner.

Port also uses alcohol to try to reinstate a sexual relationship with Kit, and the results are not what he anticipates. One afternoon, Kit has set out her last pack of cigarettes and ordered a bottle of Scotch--preparing for a solo cocktail hour. Port shows up and insists on joining her, as if he thinks she needs his presence in order to legitimize her drinking. In fact, when the bellboy arrives with Kit's order, "Port himself went to the door and in the hall took the tray from [the bellboy's] hands, bottle and all"

(166). When Kit asks him why he didn't let the bellboy into the room, Port explains that he "didn't want [the bellboy] running downstairs with the news" (166). His gesture signals an effort to "cover up" for the alcoholic, as if it is shameful for a woman alone in her room to order a bottle of Scotch.

After intercepting Kit's bottle, Port rigs up a mosquito net over Kit's bed, and the two of them spend the afternoon getting drunk in bed. Though the scene suggests a sexual opportunity, nothing happens. The bottle of Scotch becomes an unwelcome third party--turning Port's desired *tete à tete* into a *menage à trois*. Port, who acknowledges that he should not drink, complains that he feels "disgusted and miserable" (172). Then, angrily, he tells Kit, "I think all you drinkers are victims of a huge mass hallucination" (172). Kit, nettled, tells him to "[l]ie down again and sleep," and she leaves the room (173). Clearly, her relationship with alcohol is paramount. The "black-out" one night stand is Kit's first and last intimate moment with Tunner, and Kit and Port never have sex at all.

In Two Serious Ladies, the husband's inability to control his wife's drinking and her desires is further complicated by the fact that Mrs. Copperfield is a lesbian. Mr. Copperfield grows agitated when Mrs. Copperfield declares her intention to stay in the hotel with her girlfriends. When Mrs. Copperfield suggests that he go on by himself, Mr. Copperfield becomes enraged. He tells his wife she's a "horror," and then "he took an empty pitcher from the bureau, threw it out of the window into the alley, and left the room" (108). The empty pitcher comes to represent their empty relationship--Mr. Copperfield cannot "fill" Mrs. Copperfield's desires for women and alcohol. After this display of homophobic violence, Mr. Copperfield leaves Mrs. Copperfield a letter in which he lists what he perceives to be her shortcomings and faults, claiming "I hope sincerely that what I have written will influence you" (110). But his letter has no influence whatsoever, other than effectively ending the marriage. When Mrs. Copperfield appears again at the novel's end, she is drunk and Mr. Copperfield has disappeared. In his place is Mrs. Copperfield's companion and drinking partner, Pacifica.

These novels indicate an odd antagonism on the part of the authors, especially since the characters are clearly autobiographical. Like their real-life counterparts, the fictional husbands and wives have irreconcilable differences--especially around alcohol. Their conflicts remain unresolved, and the novels' terminal scenes are ominous: Mr. Copperfield has disappeared, Mrs. Copperfield is dangerously drunk, Port Moresby is dead, and Kit Moresby has lost her mind. The import of the unhappy endings was not lost on the authors. Dillon notes that "Paul, who admired the book enormously, did once say to Jane, 'You make me out to be a complete idiot in it.' In answer she only giggled, as if she'd been

caught in one of her jokes" (112). Jane "thought Kit was Jane Bowles" (176), and the end of Paul's novel scared her (Dillon 112).

The distinctions are blurry between the lives of the authors and the lives of the characters in their autobiographical first novels. In fact, both novels end with an eerily prophetic moment. What Jane foregrounds in her novel's last scene with Pacifica and Mrs. Copperfield is a set of dynamics that are almost identical to the dynamics that characterized Jane's relationship with a Moroccan woman named Cherifa. Jane met Cherifa in Tangier in 1948--five years after the publication of Two Serious Ladies. Dillon notes that "Paul introduced Jane to Cherifa" (157), which is ironic because Cherifa would become a significant point of contention in Paul's and Jane's relationship. Jane pursued Cherifa with the intense preoccupation and single-mindedness that characterize the behavior of alcoholics. Like Mrs. Copperfield with Pacifica, Jane Bowles was willing to buy Cherifa's company. In her article "East Side: North Africa," Jane writes that her friendship with Cherifa and another woman named Tetum came about "with the help of frequent gifts and a smattering of Arabic" (280). Dillon states that Jane Bowles "recognized that the power she had in the situation came not from her person, but from her money" (183). Cherifa wheedled as much cash as she could from Jane, and she also demanded that Jane give her a house in Tangier that she and Paul had owned. Paul had never trusted Cherifa nor liked her relationship with Jane; nevertheless, as Dillon notes, "Paul agreed to do what Jane asked" (270). Cherifa got the house. Though Jane knew Cherifa was exploiting her, their relationship produced things that Jane craved: pursuit, manipulation, catastrophic melodrama, euphoria. Mrs. Copperfield gets the same things from Pacifica; Jane's autobiographical fiction prognosticates her own future lifestory.

Paul's novel's final scene is similarly prognostic. This scene was particularly disturbing to Jane Bowles because, as Dillon notes, "to Paul The Sheltering Sky was fiction, not life. To Jane it was prophecy" (176). Paul Bowles told Dillon that Jane "thought Kit was Jane Bowles. Well, in a way she was of course, but she wasn't. . . . I remember that she said to me that the end made her very sad, because she didn't know what I meant" (176). Apparently, what made her very sad was her sense that Kit's fate predicted her own.

For Jane Bowles, detachment, boundaries, and aesthetic distance were foreign concepts, perhaps unintelligible. Alcoholics generally do not understand limits of any kind. Millicent Dillon notes that Jane Bowles "never made any true distinction between her life and her work" (Viking Portable intro. x), and when Paul began writing fiction, she made no distinctions between her life and his work. Paul explains to Millicent Dillon, "You know how these things are; you use a living model to build

your mythical character" (176). But Jane Bowles would not have known "how these things are"; for her, Kit was Jane and The Sheltering Sky was a story about her life. One can attribute Jane's fears about Kit's mad disappearance to the catastrophizing tendencies of an alcoholic who is unable to distinguish between fiction and life. But one also has to account for the fact that Jane Bowles, like Kit, eventually found herself wearing the formless dress of a madwoman. Paul Bowles's fiction was ultimately prophetic of Jane Bowles's life.

Read together, Paul's novel and Jane's novel engage the reader in a curious participatory relationship that transgresses traditional reader/text and fiction/life boundaries. Rather like Tunner in The Sheltering Sky, the reader is a figure whose function is to mediate between the husband and wife. The reader's job is also to publicize the author's private position on the spouse's behavior with regard to alcohol and drinking. Paul's novel is both "For Jane" and "to Jane." The Sheltering Sky is a cautionary tale from Paul to Jane: Kit, the protagonist modeled on Jane Bowles (with the marked absence of Jane's lesbianism), goes mad because she drinks and she refuses to conform to modern culture's (and her husband's) expectations for a married woman. The reader's role is to validate Paul's message, to provide public support for his objections to Jane's wayward drinking. Jane's novel is likewise both "For Paul" and "to Paul," and hers is also a cautionary tale to and for Paul. Mrs. Copperfield leaves Mr. Copperfield (on their honeymoon, no less) because he's no fun ("a Gloompot"--Dillon, 176) and because she prefers alcohol and the company of drinking women to her gloomy husband. In this case, the reader's role is to validate Jane's position and garner public support for her objections to Paul's interference with her drinking and lovers.

The Bowleses' readers have been and continue to be willing participants in this triangular relationship. Jane and Paul Bowles were and continue to be enormously popular cultural icons. As expatriates who lived exotic lives and wrote about them in their fiction, the Bowleses attract readers who want to participate in the scenes that their lives and fiction proffer. Jane Bowles's readers have come to regard her as a cult figure. They read her books and they feel that they know her. Recently, in fact, Millicent Dillon reported to The New Yorker that an eighteen year old high school student read her biography A Little Original Sin, and became so obsessed with Jane Bowles that she arranged to become the official guardian of Jane Bowles's remains, currently buried in Malaga, Spain. Spanish officials have apparently been reluctant to turn over Jane's remains to the student since the story of this student's quest made the front pages of the newspapers and generated renewed interest in the life, work, and remains of Jane Bowles.

Paul Bowles's books have induced readers to make pilgrimages to Tangier, and his readers worship him, too. Michelle Green notes that "Paul became a magnetic force in a scene enlivened, at various times, by Truman Capote, Tennessee Williams, William Burroughs, Bryon Gysin, Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac" (xii). Green, who made the pilgrimage to Tangier herself in the 1980s, remarks that receiving visitors was part of Paul's daily schedule. Each day, she observed that he would receive "friends, as well as journalists or film crews who had traveled thousands of miles" (343). They read his books and the mass of biographical material, and they travel to meet the man. Then, for many, it seems that they want to write their own books about Paul-and-Jane, adding to the growing collection of biographies--textual monuments to the Bowleses.

Finally, the last scene of Bernardo Bertolucci's film The Sheltering Sky provides an opportunity for an appropriate closing comment not only on the outcome of relationships such as the Bowleses' but also on the way in which alcohol--as a pervasive substance in the lives and work of Jane and Paul Bowles--dissolves the traditional boundaries between author/text/fiction/life. In the film, Kit Moresby, played by Debra Winger, approaches the narrator, played by Paul Bowles. This moment illustrates perfectly the way in which the lives and work of Jane and Paul Bowles are inextricably linked for their readers, critics, biographers, disciples. To Debra Winger--who bears an astonishing resemblance to the photograph of Jane Bowles on the cover of Dillon's biography--Paul Bowles says, "Are you lost?" Debra Winger/Kit/Jane, who has been catatonic to this point, suddenly brightens and smiles. "Yes," she says and breathes with gratitude.

The scene suggests that the celluloid figure of Paul Bowles can and will rescue her. But the end didn't happen that way in the book--nor in the lives of Jane and Paul Bowles. In life, Paul was unable to help Jane, and when Jane died, his life was over. Paul told Millicent Dillon that Jane's death "disconnected me. I think I lived vicariously largely and didn't know it. And when I had no one to live through or for, I was disconnected from life" (421). Paul Bowles is in the world but not of the world--which is not so much the hard, "tough guy" existentialist position that many critics and biographers attribute to him, as perhaps the lingering effects of his own drug use and his despair over Jane's untreated alcoholism and early death.

His position also allows one to draw some conclusions about the long-term effects of alcoholism upon alcoholics and their partners. The untreated alcoholic finds himself or herself in the graveyard before his or her time (F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Carson McCullers); in an institution (Jane Bowles, Zelda Fitzgerald); or in a long living death (Djuna Barnes, Katherine Anne Porter, Dorothy Parker). The alcoholic's partner's fate isn't much better. Unwilling or unable to recognize and

address the issues around his or her alcoholic, the partner's life, like Paul Bowles's presence in Bertolucci's The Sheltering Sky. is spectral, celluloid, vanishing.

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Drinks

Michael L. Johnson

[Editor's note: An earlier version of this essay appeared in Cimarron Review.]

HOOCH, BOOZE, FIREWATER, JUICE, BUSTHEAD, MOONSHINE, TIPPLE, GROG, ET CETERA.

* * *

The first time I got drunk--or even had an alcoholic drink, except for communion wine--was at a festivity celebrating my great aunt and uncle's golden wedding anniversary. I was thirteen and found myself lost among the legions of grown-ups, the majority elderly, milling through that long-espoused couple's rambling Edwardian house. Bored and feeling out of place, unnoticed by my parents in their socializing, I was the quintessential teenage candidate for a pact with the Devil.

The Devil took the form of a second cousin from St. Louis (on another branch of the family tree) who was staying with us country kin for a week that June and had come along to the party. She was fourteen--and perfectly tanned, already as curvaceous as a fifties pin-up, rife with flirty mischief, equipped with huge brown eyes you could fall into and never climb out of. Ever since she had arrived several days before, I had, as Jimmy Carter would say, lusted in my heart for her. And followed her like a puppy. In other words, I was prepared to do anything she wanted me to do--putty in her pubertal hands.

What she wanted was a cup of punch. Now, my mother had told us both not to drink the punch because it was (wonderful word) "spiked"--generously, as I soon discovered--with vodka. But what did that warning mean if Pat, my precocious cousin's palpable name, *wanted* some? I *had* to boldly go to the punch bowl. Boldly or not, I crept through the kitchen to the dining room and got us each a brimful cup of the fruity confection, which we then smuggled out to the dark, unpeopled veranda.

Glorious potion! The more I drank, the more the night grew slow and sweet and enfolding and magical. I forgot where I was entirely. If God were a child-woman, I deemed, God would look like Pat. The world drifted through me with sensuous ease, and she and all the flowery scents of my aunt's late-spring gardens encircling the house blurred into expansive gentleness. Space dissolved into a languid flowing. Time buckled.

Which is why I can't remember exactly how Pat and I wound up, much later, in the balcony of the Star Theater, a few blocks away, sort of watching East of Eden (I swear that's true!), bleary but cuddled tumescently together in rumpled suit and dress, and abruptly aware of my father standing above us in the cinematic dusk, not a little eroded himself but as God Almighty stern as James Dean's daddy in the movie and not about to condone incest, announcing that the merriment was over and we were sure as hell going home.

* * *

Alcohol can be like that, its power a lot like the power of sex it tends to get wrapped up with: it can lift you into Elysium and then plunge you into some, well, lesser place. High tide followed, in too short order, by low tide. Which figure of speech makes an appropriate transition to the story of the second time I got drunk.

When I was in high school, my friends and I, usually all male, obtained beer by hanging around outside a liquor store until some sympathetic-looking adult--that is, some rummy whose judgment was damaged beyond repair--happened along and could be persuaded to take our collective money inside and buy the stuff for us. Then whoever had a car would drive us all out on a backwoods road, and there we'd drink the beer, laugh about how much fun we were having drinking it, and sometimes act a good deal more inebriated than we really were--that whole pyramid-of-cans-in-the-pale-moonlight scene that Alan Jackson sings about.

At least that's how it ran for the others. I never drank much of the brew--indeed, never have esteemed it or been able to accommodate it in the yeasty volume necessary to have a roaring happy spree. So I didn't join in very well, and the pretense (maybe not in all instances) of extreme drunkenness struck me as merely silly, on a level with the acting in high school productions of, to cite plays that my peer drama types actually put on, The Princess and the Pea or H.M.S. Pinafore.

None of that illicit imbibing did anything for me. Nothing in it like the transformative witchery of my night with Pat, from whom, incidentally, family conspiracy and her own fickleness kept me unrequitedly isolated for many years after that week-long romance. If there was no big high in beer with buddies, there was no big low, either--reasonable compensation, I guess. But then came a trip in the spring of my senior year to Kansas City, Missouri, where I competed in the National Science Fair. On that occasion I also had an inarguably dangerous experience with drinking. I went from too high a high to a low that was brain-searing awful but not as grim as the low I narrowly avoided.

A few hundred budding young scientists from all over the country had come together at one of the main hotels in K.C. Parents accompanied some of them. Most were chaperoned casually by teachers from their sponsoring schools. Such was my case; after all, I was a mature and responsible young man, scarcely in need of careful surveillance.

Like my competitors, I spent the first day at the fair setting up my project, a linear accelerator that required a truck for transport and a ladder for assembly, in the hotel's exhibit hall. That done and a burger under my belt, I went up to the tenth-floor suite I shared with three other guys, one of whom was a pseudosophisticated rich kid from K.C. who had earlier gone on and on about his knowledge of the local nightlife. Well, perhaps his sophistication wasn't so pseudo after all: when I opened the door to the suite, he was sitting naked on the parlor couch, grinning like a possum, a long-legged, disheveled, and likewise naked blonde woman who looked to be in her mid-twenties curled up next to him, a half-empty bottle of Chivas Regal nested like a glass homunculus between the largest uncovered breasts I'd ever seen. On the coffee table: an array of alcoholic options that would have made a bartender proud. It was, as the woman exclaimed, standing unsteadily to her daunting full height, offering her bottle to me, "time to party."

Though middle-class Episcopalian enough--and enough idealistically romantic about women--to be as much offended as intrigued by all that public nakedness, I accepted the bottle. I poured a Falstaffian quantity of Scotch into a glass and, wincing, drank it neat. Oh well, when in Rome. . . . And the putty-in-her-hands principle wasn't far behind.

Other science-fair kids turned up, most of them, as you might expect, socially clumsy male nerds made edgy by blonde wantonness. But everybody drank and drank from the plenitude of potables with which my roommate had supplied us. Within a couple of hours, the woman had retired to one of the bedrooms to be about her trade with him and, I surmised, another victim or two--not my scene. Somebody was vomiting on the couch. One kid was pontificating in a monotone about planarian metabolism, another staring like an autistic into a calculus text. And I, after God knows what quantity of Scotch, had decided that I could fly.

That old-fashioned parlor had tall windows, the sashes all the way up to let in the spring air, let out the smoke from jackleg puffing, and accentuate the cut-loose mood. I don't remember what prompted me, but I forsook whatever *gemütlichkeit* I was reveling in and made my weaving, ebullient way over to one of those gaping rectangles. I put my hands on the sill, stuck my reeling head out, and looked at the toy streets below, a few tiny cars sailing here and there. I lifted my arms Superman-style and teetered forward.

I was yanked backward by the ankles, my stomach slamming down against the sill, several people holding me, pulling me into the room. My suddenly half-sober saviors were cursing, frightened, whirring around me in their scolding, while I cursed them. Then I was lying on a violently revolving bed, nauseous, curled like an embryo. I prayed--nay, abjectly begged--for sleep, again and again. Its mercy came only in fits and starts during the hellish remnant of the night.

Just after dawn of what seemed like a day a week later, I heard the voices of angry adults blaring in from the parlor. My eyes opened like flaming umbrellas, the empty Chivas bottle on the bedside table before them, where someone--I knew who--had placed it in the giggling darkness of her departure. Urp. To this day I can't drink Scotch without queasy flashbacks.

I took my reprimand lying down and then carried the ravaged flesh of me, crapulous and jittery, into the shower. Newspaper photographers wanted pictures of selected exhibitors, including me, for a story on the fair, so considerable recovery work was in order.

That evening, when the paper came out, my picture was spread across two columns on the front page of whatever section of the Kansas City Star presented the story: me atop a ladder, adjusting something on my accelerator, trying my damndest to look like one of the prodigies monastically consecrated to the advancement of American science whom the city was saluting. But I could see in that earnest face the pallor of death warmed over. And I hoped my parents wouldn't.

Every so often I hear about some fraternity member who's gotten tanked up and fallen out a window or off a fire escape or roof, and I wonder whether it was an accident or an immature drinker's attempt to fly on illusory chemical wings. At seventeen I'd had my own bout with Dionysian madness I couldn't handle. I have absolutely no doubt that, except for my fellows' intervening sanity, I would have tumbled to my end.

* * *

The lesson lasted awhile. I drank very little for years. A swig of beer now and then--that was about it. But I wasn't dry. Once, chased by campus cops, I nearly broke a leg in an attempt (successful) to sneak a case of Lone Star through steam tunnels and into my room at Rice University. After I graduated there, with a major in English, in 1965, alcohol was going out (at least for young people); other drugs were coming in--though I remember sometimes having a glass of wine or a daiquiri. And, yes, believe it or not, there was another incapacitating--but not hairy--encounter with Scotch in the late 1960s, warranted by a friend's

return from US Army service near the Berlin Wall. At any rate, one of the reasons for my normal moderation, besides the failed attempt at flight through the skies over K.C., was a job I had between my junior and senior years in college.

That summer I worked as a research assistant for a psychiatrist who oversaw the alcohol-rehabilitation program at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Houston. My office was next to his in the ward. There about forty patients, at any one time, struggled through the stages of a six-week regimen of treatment. It entailed isolation from the outside world (and, of course, from alcohol), intensive use of tranquilizers, and a rigorous schedule of therapy sessions that served both to educate the patients about their disease and to help them come to terms with their individual and, inevitably, badly screwed-up lives.

My main mission was to search through books and articles, taking careful notes about any research concerned with the neurophysiology of the hypothalamus, a lower part of the brain that my supervisor was convinced played a key role in alcohol addiction. I also sat in on therapy sessions three or four times a day and later, with his encouragement, even tried to guide a few--sorcerer's apprentice's catastrophes, given the attitudinal turbulence summoned up in such gatherings. And I spent my sparse spare time playing pool in the ward's recreation room with those patients who could get their alcohol-deprived wits and nerves together sufficiently to manage a cue.

Two experiences during that summer job have lingered in my noggin inerasably.

The first involved a game of eight ball. Half a dozen patients were standing around kibitzing while I played a man in his late forties with a youthful but worn face who was *good*. I made a pair of decent shots after my break, but mostly I watched him clean the table. Finally, just as he was about to give the coup de grace to the eight on the edge of a corner pocket, he raised his cue, looked me firm in the eye across the felt, and said, "You're a young dude with your life ahead of you. Whaddaya think of all us old drunks with nothin' left to lose?"

What was I to say? The other men--all ex-military, remember--were staring at me, waiting to see how I would respond. I felt like I'd wandered into Ken Kesey's One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest, which I'd read only months before, and I figured I wouldn't leave the confrontation with my anal virginity intact. I'm sure I looked as frightened as the proverbial doe caught in the high beams of headlights.

My opponent held the cue cocked at his side like a sword. Then he recited, my God, a stanza from The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám:

Ah, my Belovéd, fill the Cup that clears

Today of past Regrets and future Fears--
Tomorrow?--Why, Tomorrow I may be
 Myself with Yesterday's Sev'n Thousand Years.

Others joined in on the next stanza:

Lo! some we loved, the loveliest and the best
 That Time and Fate of all their Vintage prest,
 Have drunk their Cup a Round or two before,
 And one by one crept silently to Rest.

On that mortuary rhyme the men broke off, with choral precision. Interstellar quiet, save for some talking down the hall. Then raucous, relieving laughter as they slapped each other on the back and trailed out of the room.

"You see," said my tester, popping the eight home, laying his cue on the table and leaning toward me, knuckles of his fisted hands on the felt, cheeks satyric beneath the fluorescent light, "all us drunks are actually poets."

The second experience involved a patient in the throes of delirium tremens. New to the program, nuts from abstaining for ten days or so, he'd put on his street clothes one night and stolen away, headed on foot for a bar. The next morning, when the police brought him back after finding him prostrate on a sidewalk, he had no idea how much booze he'd guzzled; but a modicum, after a ten-day dry spell, might well have propelled him into stark trouble. And that's where he was, all right. He looked like he might burst apart like a cheap watch.

For some reason one of the ward nurses hadn't checked in that morning, so I was delegated to keep tabs on the man while he dueled such demons as an emergency Librium injection couldn't exorcise. There were plenty. Through an anguished and extended subsidence, I sat by his bed and tried to calm and reassure him--first with whatever soothing words I could muster, then by holding his hand--as he wept and trembled and erratically gazed into his private Congo. When he finally fell asleep, I stayed beside him for several stunned minutes, as exhausted as he in my own way, appalled.

I learned much from those and other experiences in that program. I learned that I didn't want to attend medical school and become a psychiatrist, a possibility I'd been entertaining when I took the job. At the age of twenty I knew more about the disastrous muddles people can get themselves into with alcohol than most of my middle-class friends ever would. I lacked whatever temperament might urge a person to spend his or her life puzzling such muddles and helping people straighten them out

or at least acknowledge them--with an always imperfect record of accomplishment.

That self-understanding arose also through the realization that, to borrow from William Faulkner, my heart was in conflict with itself. The VA program was well conceived and professionally implemented, and I respected the members of the staff. But there was something too cool, bureaucratic, abstractly manipulative about those doctors, nurses, social workers, and aides. I sympathized strongly with their ever-frustrated intentions and, to a lesser degree, with their approach. But I didn't like them as people as much as I liked the patients, any of whom struck me as more caught up in the triumphs and tribulations of humankind than his wardens were. I've never encountered a person afflicted with alcoholism, even one hunkering in an alleyway, who didn't fairly radiate remarkable sensitivity to the world, extraordinary but disturbed emotional intelligence, funky romanticism. Indeed, such traits may be intricately implicated, as some research suggests, in the predisposition for alcohol addiction, and yet they seemed--and still do--preferable to clinical dispassion, a trait with a tendency toward arrogance and indifference. In short, I identified more with alcoholics than I did with doctors; so I decided, finally without feeling bleakly dichotomous about my resolution, to become a poet instead of a shrink, an artist instead of a scientist.

* * *

I've held to the spirit of that decision, by and large, writing and publishing over a thousand poems in the last thirty years. By the early 1970s I'd gotten shut of alcohol's negative associations and, in the great tradition of Anacreon and other well-known boozier-poets, even found writing under the influence fruitful. One way or another, alcohol has figured in the creation or subjects of many of my poems.

For me, for reasons I've not thoroughly pondered, the 1970s were the decade of wine, the 1980s that of gin (usually Tanqueray in dry martinis, an art form less wussy yuppies have recently stumbled upon), and the 1990s that of whiskey (usually Wild Turkey on the rocks). It's predominantly a positive history of a balanced and cheerful relationship between the bottle and me. Alcohol infrequently inveigles me into anger or somberness, but that's not its typical effect--nor ever its fault, for that matter, since I'm the one who brings the sloppily packed baggage of moods to our meetings. And once in a blue moon I still slip the fulcrum of balance in the relationship and go too far, maybe say something weird and private in a public situation or, worse, wind up playing volleyball in a motel swimming pool crammed with people I've never seen before and not being able to reconstruct how I got there. But typically I drink only at

happy hour--or two--just as my parents and their parents did, and during that interlude alcohol "clears" the day much as Edward Fitzgerald's English version of Khayyám's poem promises it does.

If I happen to be mowing then or tending to one of the other unfinishable labors of homeownership, so much the better: alcohol makes the boredom bearable and can even transform it into flights of meditation. The lambent, lengthening sunlight blends with the drone of the mower or the rhythmic scrape of the rake and cooling air and muscles flushed with blood to yield moments of perceptual expansiveness and soulfulness. I can understand why the novelist Harry Crews once recommended to me the invigorating but probably stupid practice of working out while drinking. Sisyphus should have kept a plump wineskin at the top of his hill in Hades. Maybe he did.

But that's where the treacherous aspect comes in, too. If you use alcohol as a support (the sort of thing that Don Giovanni in Mozart's opera of the same name means when he refers to "il buon vino" as a "sostegno") against boredom, emotional distress, or whatever *and* if you're unlucky enough to harbor the ill-understood factors that induce addiction, then you will wind up with a nasty problem--for which the only known solution is total abstinence. Which is to say, such *veritas* as is *in vino* can become not only chaotic but psychotic, suicidal. No more jovial imbibing during happy hour, at parties, after weddings or funerals, certainly not when you're alone, or else you may lose your job, family, house, car, liver, brain--and be at last, as Jaques summarily phrases it in As You Like It, "sans every thing."

In its deceptive supporting role, alcohol can function as much more than a momentary anesthesia and pick-me-up. Enough of it can take you to a threshold--Brick in Tennessee Williams's Cat on a Hot Tin Roof says it's where he feels a "click" in his head--beyond which you visit a mellow world, a personal Cockaigne. The narrator of Albert Camus's novel The Fall suggests the nature of that world when he speaks of the power of gin to bring into you a "golden, copper-colored light." But, of course, if you're wired a certain way, that coppery province may cease being just a tourist attraction and become the place where you need to reside--at terrible cost. The click threshold can be the virtually tangible boundary of a danger zone. I've sensed it as such at times, but I've never gotten trapped on the other side.

I don't know why I haven't or why countless others have. And I don't know anybody, when the speculation is cleared away, who does. It has nothing to do with moral character, as was once widely and conveniently believed. And the rich and famous are as prone to alcoholism as the poor and inconspicuous. Creative people may be unusually susceptible--much of canonical modern American literature, for example, was written by a

pantheon of alcoholics that includes F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Berryman, Tennessee Williams himself, on and on. I'm not prepared to claim it unconditionally, but there does seem to be a rough correlation between alcoholism and open and imaginative emotionality. Or maybe it all reduces to a question of one gene, regardless of which poets are drunks and which drunks are poets. Or maybe not.

Or maybe alcohol has to do with a broader issue. Arthur Koestler argues in The Ghost in the Machine that evolution may have fashioned in humankind what Hamlet calls "a piece of work . . . infinite in faculty" but nonetheless one profoundly flawed, inherently blocked, somehow, from achieving a harmonious lifeway. If he's right--and, however you name the defect (original sin, implacable consciousness of mortality, endorphin deficiency, and so on), I think he is--then much of human doing can be seen as compulsive striving to overcome that built-in limitation. Pursuing sexual *jouissance*, driving exotic automobiles, eating rich desserts, seeking Christian salvation, making oodles of money, smoking marijuana, snorting cocaine, injecting heroin, and drinking alcohol--all are examples of endeavors, however stopgap in their effectiveness, to break through. To have a taste of something beyond pettiness, loneliness, routine, discord, anxiety, despair. One way or another--just punch the right button--we're all so-called addictive personalities, all addicted to . . . something more and else. Though some addictions or levels of addiction are, admittedly, less injurious than others.

In this perspective the recent and widespread resurgence of puritanism and prohibitionism in regard to everything from chocolate to cigarettes to alcohol to crack appears in no small measure arbitrary, historically accidental, conventionally ideological, ultimately futile. I oppose children's using drugs, and I'd willingly decapitate those who sell them drugs; but teaching children, as our schools now do, that there's something evil about the adult use of tobacco, alcohol, you name it--and, by extension, something evil about the users--involves sheer humorless intolerance, yuppified hypocrisy, holier-than-thou smugness. I keep up with the medical research on these habits, at least with the reports in the popular media, and I scarcely oppose concern for public health; but the researchers change their recommendations, sometimes contradictorily, every few months, and I'm tired of censorious Pharisees who haven't the courage or vision to fix the real screw-ups squandering their tuck on persistent niggling efforts to force me to chew sugarless gum and live William Bennett's unexamined life of virtue. I don't suffer fools gladly.

So I'll risk the stakes and take mine straight. Let the meddlers mind their own knitting. Loosen up. Stop blaming the victim. We're all going to be "with Yesterday's Sev'n Thousand Years" anyway. If you can, have some Wild Turkey--or your own poison. If you can't, let me have mine in

peace. If you wish, join me out on the patio. I'm no barhopper: I like to settle into my spot in the cosmos and speak in peaceful tones as the sun makes its exit. And maybe I'll tell you another story about drinks.

Literature and Addiction Across Eras and Cultures

George F. Wedge

Two problems in contemporary discourse on addiction and literature need to be addressed. One is that the discourse focuses on individual authors case by case or on a representative group of authors from an era. Yet case studies in isolation are essentially anecdotal. Studies of temporally or culturally uniform groups are most useful if the results conform with what we know about other times and cultures. Presumably, the effect of alcohol on physical and psychological well-being had not changed fundamentally between the drunken accidental drowning of the Chinese poet Li Po in 762 and the death by "alcoholic insult to the brain" of Dylan Thomas.

Lacking diachronic or multicultural studies to serve as context for current studies, how are readers to judge the validity of the studies we do have? Do external pressures (such as prohibition) or social pressures within writing communities (such as Paris in the twenties) account for the addiction of a particular author or groups of authors? Or have there always been some authors who, rightly or wrongly, separately or as "schools," thought alcohol or other drugs useful in their work? Are we studying biography or literature? Lives or texts? Knee-deep in answers, we seem sometimes to have lost track of the question.

The second problem is that our discourse relies heavily on the diagnostic tools of contemporary theories of addiction. Valuable as these tools are for treatment, they do not offer sufficient insight into the lives and fortunes of those who recovered without them or who did not recover. Applied injudiciously, they encourage judgmental conclusions about such authors (e.g. "this writer was in life-long denial"). In a paper presented at the Claremont conference, Roger Forseth discusses the difference between British and American attitudes toward Dylan Thomas's drinking. Forseth demonstrates that when treatment modalities differ across cultures, even closely related cultures, widely different conclusions are drawn about the effect of addiction on the work of the same author. It should be noted as well that focusing on how addicted writers fit or fail to fit "established" diagnostic criteria contributes to a general failure to assess how drinking affects the work of authors who drink but do not become addicted. Indeed, though many non-addicted authors categorically deny there is any effect, we may be encountering only another interesting extension of the term "denial."

We can rejoice that a number of recent books testify to the recovery from addiction or near addiction of such writers as William Styron in Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness (NY: Random House, 1990),

Pete Hamill in *A Drinking Life: A Memoir* (NY: Little, Brown and Co., 1994), and Wilfrid Sheed in *In Love with Daylight: A Memoir of Recovery* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1995). It is worth noting, however, that none of these writers wholly bought into addiction theory. Indeed, like Dr. Johnson two centuries ago, Hamill did not seek any formal diagnosis; he simply perceived a change in the effect of drinking on his life and work and stopped drinking. Hamill gives us a thorough account of the progress of his drinking, its utility to him during one part of his writing life, and his decision to abstain when it was no longer an aid. We lack a detailed record of Dr. Johnson's problem with alcohol, but when he was asked to "take a little wine," he replied, "I can't drink a little . . . therefore I never touch it. Abstinence is as easy to me, as temperance would be difficult." Johnson's oft-quoted observation that he "inherited a vile melancholy from [his] father" and his abstinence after a severe bout of depression invite comparison with the accounts in Styron and Sheed of the relationship between their depressive disorders and intemperance.¹

Dealing with our subject author by author, age by age, while limiting interpretation to what can be gleaned from contemporary experience in diagnosis and treatment, denies that a theory can exist underlying the general study of addiction and literature. A successful theory is more likely to arise from consideration of literary texts and techniques of literary-biographical criticism than from treatment modalities. It must be able to account for at least the following matters of concern in our studies:

- (1) why some drinking writers become addicted and some do not and how (if at all) the drinking relates to literary creativity,
- (2) why (or perhaps if) writers seem more likely to become addicted than the general population,²
- (3) how portrayals of addiction in literary works are related to the author's use or non-use of alcohol, and
- (4) how the lives and works manifest or run counter to the attitudes toward drinking of the culture in which they were produced.

Although the possible connections between drinking and its effect on authors have been written about from the dawn of modern biography in Johnson's *Life of Richard Savage* (1744), little has been done to show what similarities (if any) exist across the eras. Even less has been attempted in comparative studies of addiction and literature across cultures from which we have data. Individual authors in practically all world cultures have been known to be addicted, and coteries of addicted writers have existed in most European cultures throughout the modern

period. To show a connection between addiction and the creative aspects of their contribution to their cultures requires careful analysis of evidence about how drinking relates to habits of composition. In "Alcohol and Literary Creativity--The Finnish Experience," Anja Koski-Jannes presents the results of interviews in which Finnish writers discuss their thoughts about the effect of drinking on various stages of the composing process. For some stages of composition, writers reported that alcohol was possibly helpful; for other stages, it appeared not to be (Journal of Creative Behavior [1985], 19.2, 120).

An article of this length is hardly the place to propose a theory, if I had one, but it is possible to present some data that point in the direction of a theory. My basic assumption is that in all times and places a writer is a writer, that the worldwide community of writers shares a single problem --producing the text--and shares a finite number of strategies for accomplishing this task. Demonstrating that strategies used by writers from differing times or cultures are the same may help in creating a theoretical base for future studies. Some strategies, such as going to a battlefield to write from direct experience, involve more personal risk than others; some place a writer at greater risk of addiction. At some times or in some cultural situations, a particular strategy may be more fashionable or less fashionable, but individual authors in any time or place may employ a strategy that encourages use and/or abuse of addictive substances.

One strategy employed by authors is conversation over drinks, sometimes simply for relaxation from the writing itself, sometimes for talking out a specific problem in their current writing project, sometimes as a way of drafting the work. Socializing over a drink was a prominent feature of the writing life in the coffee houses and taverns of 18th century London, in the cafes of cosmopolitan Paris in the 20s, and in the White Horse Tavern of Greenwich Village so well described in Dan Wakefield's New York in the 50's (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992). Greeks, Romans, and medieval scholar-monks speak of it. Radul Jovanovic describes it as a part of the "bohemian" life of the highly regarded Serbo-Croatian author Augustin (Tin) Ujevic in the 1930's ("Alcoholism and Literature," Alkoholizam, Beograd (1970) 10.1, 50), and Koski-Jannes finds it in the careers of a number of 20th century Finnish writers, particularly the group known as the "Tulenkantajat" or "Carriers of Fire" (123-125, 134 fn3).

Both socializing and oral composition are mentioned by Kate Millet, who describes herself as a "medium" drinker, in her response to a survey on the connection between writing and drinking:

[There] probably is an affinity. We also smoke. You can't write if you quit smoking. Drink and writing: the connection is talk. Alcohol is sociable. Especially for the

Irish like myself. Loquacity is really practicing--one talks (which is merely writing aloud) to rehearse for the harder test of paper. Talk is the sketch, the "drawing" (easier, quicker, more delightful) whereas doing it on paper is difficult and demanding--like sculpture. All sculptors draw for fun. All writers drink and talk for refreshment. Talk is not only cheap, it's free--you can't sell it. ("Booze and the Writer," Writer's Digest, October, 1978, 25.)

In A Drinking Life Pete Hamill reports that he found bar conversation a stimulating part of the writing life until he discovered that he was "performing [his] life instead of living it"; that was, for him, the ultimate darker side. Like Millet, he attributes his attitude toward drinking to his Irish heritage.

Characteristics Hamill ascribes to the "culture of drink" are, however, independent of ethnic heritage:

The culture of drink endures because it offers so many rewards: confidence in the shy, clarity for the uncertain, solace to the wounded and lonely, and above all, the elusive promises of friendship and love. . . . In the smug darkness of saloons, I learned much about being human and about mastering a craft. I had, as they say, a million laughs. But those grand times also caused great moral, physical, or psychological damage to myself and others ("Introduction").

The need for conversation at times exceeds all reasonable bounds. Friends of Julian MacClaren-Ross found that his penchant for drinking and talking whole nights away lost its considerable charm fairly quickly. On the other hand, as Richard Holmes has shown in admirable detail, Dr. Johnson accompanied the talkative Richard Savage through many rambles geographical and elocutionary without losing his affection for the poet, and it seems likely from what we know of both men's lives in the 1730's that drink was often a part of these sojourns (Dr. Johnson and Mr. Savage. NY: Pantheon, 1993, 34-44). Donald Goodwin notes that the combination of social drink followed by a solitary walk was a favorite strategy of A. E. Housman:

Having drunk a pint of beer at luncheon, I would go for a walk. As I went along . . . there would flow into my mind, with sudden and unaccountable emotion, sometimes a line or two of verse, sometimes a whole stanza. . . . ("The Muse and the Martini," J.A.M.A. 224:1 [1973], 36).

Brendan Gill, speaking of the poet Wallace Stevens, describes this process as composing on an internal dictaphone. Stevens's apparent mode

of composition has something both asocial and not at all lonely about it, as well as a suggestion of impishness that fits both the tone of his poems and of most descriptions of his (heavy) drinking behavior:

Morning and evening, [Stevens] walked the mile or so between his house and his office and even in rain or snow would never accept a ride. . . . His solitary walking had a purpose: he composed as he walked. *Ursa faber* poised on a curb waiting for a light to change was trying out on his inward ear sweet sounds--"the emperor of ice cream," perhaps, or "the auroras of autumn."

Rocking slightly from side to side as he lumbered forward, Stevens was as obviously engaged in putting one foot of verse in front of the other as he was in putting one physical foot in front of the other. Once, my sister, glancing out of a window, saw Stevens going by her house. As she watched, he slowed down, came to a stop, rocked in place for a moment or two, took a step backward, hesitated, then strode confidently forward--left, right, left, right--on his way to work. It was obvious to her that Stevens had gone back over a phrase, dropped an unsatisfactory word, inserted a superior one, and proceeded to the next line of the poem he was making.

Here at the New Yorker (NY: Random House, 1975), p. 57.

And all these strategies come together in descriptions of how MacClaren-Ross worked: the social drinking, conversation, periods of solitary walking, and composition on an internal dictaphone. It is described in detail by Walter Allen:

His capacity for almost total recall was one of his tools as a writer. He was relatively prolific, and people who knew the pattern of his day wondered when he did his writing. He was in the Wheatsheaf [a saloon-bar] from noon until three, in a cinema until six, then in the Wheatsheaf again, then from eleven till about one belatedly dining in a Greek restaurant at the wrong end of Charlotte Street. He was always, as I have said, ready to recite from works in progress, and this, I realised, was how he wrote. Like some poets, of whom Yeats was one, he composed orally and fixed what he had written in his mind by constant repetition and constant re-phrasing. After his meal at the Greek cafe, he took a taxi back to his hotel, settled himself with his manuscript-book in the deserted lounge and took down his story as it were from

his own dictation. His handwriting was the neatest and most legible I have ever seen; he scorned the typewriter as an unnecessary superfluity and sent his stories to editors and novels to publishers literally in manuscript.

As I Walked Down New Grub Street (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1981), 154.

But where the strategy led him is described poignantly by Dan Davin:

He was capable of prodigious stints of work when cornered and desperate. His liking for alcohol, and the unusually large quantities he was able to drink, did not seem to impair his stamina or his faculties. It was his habit to write at night. After spending all day in pubs and drinking clubs, he would return to his lair and write all night long, in that hand of unchanging neatness, with economy, clarity, and point. When things got desperate, and deadlines had to be met, he could work for days and nights at a stretch, without sleep or food or drink except coffee, though not without tobacco. One came to believe, in those later years, that it was only under stress that he would or could write at all; but the conditions of stress made it inevitable that he should write short pieces for immediate returns.

Closing Times (London: Oxford UP, 1975), 10-11.

This passage brings me back to my point about adhering too closely to treatment modalities. Those of us who look closely at the careers of writers who fell into addiction and destroyed both their later writing careers and themselves are prone to add still more stanzas to a long poem entitled "Lament for the Drunken Makers." It is not at all certain that the writers whose passing we lament would appreciate it. E. B. White, queried for the same survey to which Kate Millet responded, sent a note saying, "Sorry, can't help you about writing and drinking. Am too busy doing both" (Writer's Digest, October, 1978, 25).

The wisdom drawn from recovery programs that one cannot perform well while drinking or drunk must provoke a smile from the shades of William Faulkner or John Berryman. Our sense of loss is real; their lives and works were subject to remarkable stress, both personal and creative, some of it created by drinking habits, some not--sometimes stress intensified by attempts not to drink. We know also that they wrote some of their remarkable works while drinking and we do not know that they would choose differently given the chance.³ In the face of their accomplishments, to say that one cannot do what they did is still another extension of the term "denial." Berryman's The Dream Songs is too easily

dismissed in the title and substance of Lewis Hyde's frequently reprinted article, "Alcohol and Poetry: John Berryman and the Booze Talking."⁴

Drinking while writing strikes many of us as impossible because of the loss of control involved, but it is another strategy used by some writers, and it sometimes works. There is ample evidence that Jean Rhys wrote some of her work, particularly The Wide Sargasso Sea, while drinking, and drinking excessively. There is good reason to believe that her alcoholism was a symptom of Borderline Personality Disorder. Whatever explanation there may be for her drinking, she "needed" the alcohol to become calm enough to write, or so we are told by those who observed her.⁵ For Berryman, an extremely nervous person who used alcohol to calm himself for writing, Saul Bellow has put it as well as it can be put: "He drew [his poetry] out of his vital organs, out of his very skin. At last there was no more" (John Berryman. Recovery. NY: Farrar Strauss and Giroux, 1973, xiv).

In what I take as a classic example of reverse denial, Albert Rothenberg accepts John O'Hara's statement that he was sober when he wrote the story "Pal Joey." Admittedly, O'Hara did not have a glass at his elbow as he wrote, but the account Rothenberg offers from an Earl Wilson column leaves little doubt as to O'Hara's condition at the time:

I had an idea for a story. I said to my wife I'd go to Philadelphia. Hole up in the Hotel Ben Franklin a couple of days, lock myself in, eat on room service. Just work.

But the night before, we went out, and I got stiff.

I got up the next morning to start to the station, and I am dying.

Now as we got to the Pierre . . . I said to the cab, "Stop here." I went in. After a drink or two, I feel what-the-hell. Better take a nap. I check in.

Then began a real beauty. Just getting stiff and passing out. I started Thursday. By Saturday morning I'd drunk myself sober. I picked up the phone and said, "What time is it?"

The girl says, "Quarter after seven."

I asked her, "A.M. or P.M.?" The girl said, "A.M. and the day is Saturday." They knew me there.

At that point remorse set in. I asked, "What kind of a God-damned heel am I? I must be worse'n anybody in the world." Then I figured, "No, there must be somebody worse than me--but who?" Al Capone, maybe. Then I got it--maybe some nightclub master of ceremonies I know. . .

That was my idea. I went to work and wrote a piece about a nightclub heel in the form of a letter. I finished the piece by 11 o'clock. I went right home.

The New Yorker bought the story the same day, ordered a dozen more, and then came the play and the movie.

That was the only good thing I ever got out of booze, but mind you, Wilson, I wasn't on a bender at the time I wrote it. I was perfectly sober! Have you got that down in your notebook?

Creativity and Madness: New Findings and Old Stereotypes. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1990, 117-118.)

A lot may depend on what O'Hara means by "drunk myself sober," but it is difficult to believe that appropriate tests would have found his body free of alcohol on Saturday morning. O'Hara's eagerness to be believed suggests that he knew without a test that he was talking through his hat. I give the example so fully because there are other writers who claim to write well with a hangover, meaning only that they think they have "drunk themselves sober."

There are also milder examples of writing while drinking. The twelfth century Abbot of Cirencester, Alexander Neckam, wrote a number of poems in praise of wine, in one of which he said he wanted wine ever near him in his study as he wrote. His works were copious and he was among the admired scholars of his day. There is no reason to believe that he slipped into addiction.⁶

Ernest Hemingway, whose mid and late career offer instances of what can go wrong when excess has set in, none the less left us an account of how things can go right before alcohol gets the best of one. In the first chapter of A Moveable Feast, he describes writing the short story "The Three Day Blow." He was in Paris in a small neighborhood cafe observing the scene around him when he began working on the story. In the story, the young characters were drinking. The subject made him thirsty, so he ordered a rum St. Jacques. The story, he says, "began to write itself." But something drew him back up from it, and he ordered a refill, then became immersed in the story again until it was finished. What the drink appears to have done for him was to distance him from the distractions of the place in which it was being written. The story completed, he ordered a good meal with wine, and after eating, left the cafe sated and elated. The drinking had been a useful accompaniment to the writing.

One may say, "But, ah! What comes after!" We know those tales well, and if not can read an excruciating version in Donald Newlove's

Those Drinking Days (NY: Horizon Press, 1981). The point is that if we are to have a theory which offers a proper account of connections between addiction and literature, we cannot ignore counterexamples. Hamill's phrase "the culture of drink" describes the area in which we must work. We must more fully accommodate Hamill's respectful attitude towards the good times as well as the bad.

A number of books in print present issues with which a theory will have to deal. Biographies and autobiographies of individual authors, as well as Donald Goodwin's Alcohol and the Writer (Kansas City: Andrews and McMeel, 1988), show the strengths and some of the limits of an approach that is dominantly biographical and clinical. Tom Dardis's The Thirsty Muse: Alcohol and the American Writer (NY: Ticknor and Fields, 1989) adds substantial literary criticism of the writers' works to the mix, and Thomas Gilmore's Equivocal Spirits: Alcoholism and Drinking in Twentieth Century Literature (Chapel Hill: UNC, 1987) studies the portrayal of alcoholics in works by both addicted and non-addicted authors. Linda Schierse Leonard's Witness to the Fire: Creativity and the Veil of Addiction (Boston: Shambala, 1990) considers how Jungian psychology applies to the study of drinking writers (and other artists).

Two books seem especially useful for the budding theorist: Alethea Haytor, in Opium and the Romantic Imagination (Berkeley: U. Cal Press, 1970), provides a thorough historical setting for the addiction she discusses and considers both addicts and occasional users, dealing explicitly with supposed benefits as well as documented ill effects. John W. Crowley in The White Logic: Alcoholism and Gender in American Modernist Fiction (Amherst: U MA Press, 1994), deals directly with attitudes toward drink in American society both preceding and during the modernist period and with how general attitudes affected gendering in the culture of drink and creative work by or about drinkers. These six book-length studies, together with articles in a number of languages, provide an initial sketch of the territory a general theory must map.

How much more vast that territory is may be inferred not only from the neglect in existing studies of possible neutral and beneficial effects of alcohol on parts of the composing process but also in the near total neglect of customs surrounding the oral performance of literary texts. These customs demonstrate how complex the relation of alcohol to literary work may be. The "drinking culture" that Hamill describes is observable in a number of times and places.

In the 7th century (B.C.E.) Greek world, lyric and elegiac poetry was performed by people who participated in after-dinner singing, as a myrtle branch passed around the group, carrying with it the obligation to sing. One of the themes of this poetry, as might be expected from the occasion

of its performance, was praise of drinking. And who that has read Bede or Beowulf can forget the place of such singing and composing in Anglo-Saxon society? The scop who sings in the drinking hall? The abbey herdsman Caedmon, who sees the harp approaching him and, certain he cannot compose verses, leaves the banquet hall for the stables, where an angel appears before him and draws from him a "Creation" hymn? (It is noteworthy that in both Greek and Anglo-Saxon society, the performers were not necessarily professional composers of verse.)

Conviviality, drink, and spontaneously created song. And, traditionally also, formal readings from an author's works. In one manuscript of the Canterbury Tales, an illuminated portrait shows Chaucer reading to a court audience. One might wish as well for a portrait of the extravagant reading Giraldu Cambrensis gave in 1186:

And when in process of time the work [Topography of Ireland] was finished and corrected, not wishing to place the candle which he had lit under a bushel, but to lift it aloft on a candlestick that it might shine, he determined to read it before a great audience at Oxford, where of all places in England the clergy were most strong and pre-eminent in learning. And since his book was divided into three parts, he gave three consecutive days to the reading, a part being read each day. On the first day he hospitably entertained the poor of the whole town whom he gathered together for the purpose; on the morrow he entertained all the doctors of the divers Faculties and those of their scholars who were best known and best spoken of; and on the third day he entertained the remainder of the scholars together with the knights of the town and a number of the citizens. It was a magnificent and costly achievement, since thereby the ancient and authentic times of the poets were in some manner revived, nor has the present age seen nor does any age bear record of the like.

H. E. Butler, ed. and tr., The Autobiography of Giraldu Cambrensis. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937), 96.

References to public readings of literary texts speak to the excesses and outrageous behavior of readers like Dylan Thomas or John Berryman and lead some observers to speculate that conviviality at these readings may contribute to the development of addiction. Thoughtful consideration of history suggests a more complex explanation. There are two strains of tradition for oral presentations. One tradition is formal: at the reading described by Giraldu, entertainment (i.e. food and drink) are an accompaniment. In what I shall call the "feria" tradition food (perhaps

and drink (certainly) have priority equal to the literature read: in Giraldus' times *feria* were presented by "wandering scholars" and singers of the drinking songs preserved in the Carmina Burana and the like. There appear always to have been those who attended readings for their substance and those who went for the party.

In our own time, roving writers and survivors of poetry slams have been invited to give readings in academic settings. Alongside scholarly presentations, creative writers have presented readings in the *feria* style. If Berryman or Thomas sometimes read while drunk, if Kerouac roamed the side aisles waving a bottle of wine to cheer a reader on, if even Edna St. Vincent Millay needed a good slug from her husband's pocket flask just before, and again immediately after, a performance, it was all part of the *feria* tradition. The drinking and outrageous behavior were part of what reader and audience sought. In the current decade, readings of this sort in academic settings have diminished in frequency because of strengthened rules about occasions when alcohol is served where minors are present. *Feria* have nothing significant to do with causing authors to become addicts. But that *feria* are part of a great many writing traditions within our society considerably complicates judgments about whether the author or the culture is "in denial."

With that, we are back to the questions underlying the whole of this article. If there is a relationship between addiction and literature, what are its parameters? What theoretical base can be devised so that this relationship may be addressed in an orderly, coherent way? The clues offered in the Koski-Jannes article and elaborated on a bit here, together with a deeper and broader consideration of historical and cultural information, provide interesting potential starting places for a theory.

References:

¹ References to Johnson are drawn from J. S. Madden, "Samuel Johnson's Alcohol Problem." Medical History 11 (1967), 141.

² An idea often asserted but difficult to demonstrate, though Anja Koski-Jannes reports: "A recent study has shown that among different occupational groups--writers, artists and journalists, along with managers and salesmen, are most likely to suffer from alcohol problems. Members of those professions were diagnosed for alcoholism twice as frequently as the general male population of Finland. . . . This indicates that the connection between drinking and writing is due not only to the visibility of writers, but it is also linked to the nature of their occupation." "Alcohol and Literary Creativity--The Finnish Experience," Journal of Creative Behavior (1985) 19.2, 120.

³ Students in creative writing classes I teach, aware of my research on writing

and addiction, often say that an early death is fair exchange for a masterpiece. They are unfazed by the observation that writing takes a lifetime to learn, and drinking comparatively no time at all.

⁴ Most recently in Richard J. Kelly and Alan K. Lathrop, eds., Recovering Berryman: Essays on a Poet. Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan, 1993, 205-228. Cf. my response, "The Case of the Talking Brews: Mr. Berryman and Dr. Hyde," in the same volume, 229-243.

⁵ George F. Wedge. "Alcoholism as Symptom: The Life and Work of Jean Rhys," unpublished paper presented at the Convention of the American Psychological Association, San Francisco, CA, August 19, 1991.

⁶ George F. Wedge. "A Study of the De naturis rerum of Alexander Neckam." Doctoral dissertation, U. Minn., 1967.

A Bleak Vindictive Wind:

The Drunkenness of James Whitcomb Riley

John W. Crowley

"Consider the advent of the great writer on campus in spring," Scott Donaldson sardonically supposes. "He is expected to behave outrageously, to drink himself insensible, and to molest at least one undergraduate." The very model of the modern potted poet was, of course, Dylan Thomas, who publicly and tenaciously drank himself to death during the early 1950s. Since then it has become routine for literary alcoholics to stagger around the lecture circuit for the delectation of audiences given to associating genius with drunkenness. After all, Donaldson remarks, "Let us not forget the antimaterialistic argument of the academy: that artists are so little valued in a philistine society that they become depressed and are driven to drink."¹

Although Edgar Allan Poe is the American prototype of the alienated artist who resorts to the bottle, his drinking did not become common knowledge until after his death, when Poe's character was assassinated by his vindictive literary executor, Rufus Griswold. The true forebear of Dylan Thomas and other notoriously alcoholic modern writers did not appear until the 1880s, in the person of James Whitcomb Riley, the renowned Hoosier Poet, indeed the bestselling versifier in American literary history.² The avuncular Riley, much beloved by children of all ages for several generations, still enjoys a reputation for nearly oppressive wholesomeness. Yet, like the equally respectable gentleman from Indiana, Booth Tarkington, Riley had to overcome a drinking problem that once threatened his career.

Born in Greenfield, Indiana, on October 7, 1849--the exact same day that Poe died in Baltimore!--Riley showed an early propensity for poetry. But he took up the literary life only after trying several other occupations, including a stint as an itinerant actor. When his first book appeared in 1883, Riley had already established himself as a popular platform entertainer. His act combined poetic recitations, usually in Hoosier dialect, with character sketches and impressions of such celebrities as Robert G. Ingersoll, the village atheist Americans loved to hate, and Luther Benson, a lawyer turned temperance firebrand who had locked himself up in the Indiana state insane asylum in order to get sober. When Riley performed his burlesque titled "Benson Out-Bensoned," he would always assure his hearers that he had no intention either of slighting "a theme of such moral importance" or of discrediting "a man whose hopeless misfortune can not

sink him beyond the reach of my warmest love and sympathy."³ A decade later it was a Riley Out-Rileyed who desperately sought the love and sympathy of his devoted admirers.

As his fame burgeoned during the 1880s, Riley carefully polished his act. His first publisher remembered that

for years before he found a public to buy and enjoy his books, he had charmed multitudes with readings from his own work. In fact this outlet was for him a most natural one, because he was a born actor as well as a poet. His imagination drifted easily into dramatic channels, and what he saw and heard as a boy among the homely, wholesome people of Indiana he later transmuted into poetry, and unconsciously began to impersonate the characters that marshaled themselves in his fertile brain (George C. Hitt, quoted in Dickey, p. 174).

Riley soon came to the attention of the Redpath Lyceum Bureau, which booked him for tours throughout the midwest. In 1886, he teamed up with Bill Nye, a literary comedian in the tradition of Artemus Ward and Mark Twain, for a long lecture campaign that set folks rolling in the aisles from Maine to Illinois. "Big Grins at Central Music Hall," Chicago headlines blared: "The Hoosier Poet and the Unforgiven Humorist Torture an Immense Audience--Nye Tickles Them--Riley Makes a Hit--The Poet and His 'Lyre' Send Them Home an Audience of Aching Sides and Tear-Dimmed Eyes" (quoted in Dickey, p. 239).

By 1889, Nye and Riley had come under the management of Major James B. Pond, Redpath's successor and the greatest impresario of lecture talent in the country; a thirty-week, coast-to-coast tour was planned for the fall. After three profitable but hectic months on the road, however, the "Twins of Genius" (as Mark Twain had dubbed them) were flagging. In January 1890, while Nye was laid up with the grippe, Riley, upset that shady business dealings had imperiled his earnings, teetered on the verge of nervous prostration: a sensitive soul driven to drink, he believed, by the pressures of the tour and the philistinism of his agents. As his biographer discreetly puts it, "Riley's heart sank within him, and as in other and previous periods of depression, he again became the victim of his dragon, his old-time foe, the blue flame. Friends wept, as Scotchmen wept for Burns, but, alas, the malady was not to be remedied by weeping" (Dickey, p. 255).

Nye recalled, less genteelly, that Riley had become "a wild, riotous, blazing, uncontrollable Vesuvius" (quoted in Dickey, p. 256). According to Horace Gregory, Mark Twain later recounted his own troubled travels with Riley, whose determination "to remain sublimely 'tight'" clashed

with his partner's effort to keep him sober enough to face an audience upright.

One day Mark Twain resorted to the expediency of locking Riley up in a hotel room and forbidding bellboys to release him until an hour before their joint appearance on the stage. This was a supreme test in the contest between two brilliant men, but Riley was manfully equal to the occasion. When Mark Twain returned to Riley's room that evening, Riley, if possible, was even drunker than he had ever been--he had resorted to drinking his whiskey through a keyhole with a straw, the bottle reverently held by a bellboy on the other side of the door.

Gregory concedes that this tale is "perhaps apocryphal," but he claims it is nonetheless "filled with the necessary elements of poetic truth."⁴

The truth, poetic or otherwise, is that Riley got repeatedly and conspicuously drunk during the lecture tour--to the point where it was abruptly cancelled after he made a sorry spectacle of himself at a performance in Louisville, Kentucky. Riley woke in despair the morning after, certain that he had lost public favor irretrievably. "The wind, a bleak, vindictive wind," he said, "had been blowing and sobbing till the icicles on the eaves looked dismal and weary. My faculties had been enchained. Furies, seen and unseen, seemed to be unwinding for me the skein of an awful destiny" (quoted in Dickey, p. 257).⁵

Fortune unexpectedly smiled. After Riley went home to Indiana, confessed his "weaknesses," and accepted partial responsibility for "this blight which has fallen upon me," he was warmly forgiven by his friends, who nurtured and cajoled him back to health. "In periods of thanksgiving after he had escaped from the clutches of his enemy," Marcus Dickey exclaims, "Riley wrote exquisite verse. His genius reached the pinnacle of achievement in a two-year total abstinence period" (Dickey, p. 266).

This assertion is contradicted, however, by the biographer's later judgment that Riley's best work had already been done before the fateful tour of 1889-1890: "After his fortieth year, reluctant as friends were to admit it, the moments were rare when Riley rose to the top of his power. The flow of youth in him was diminished" (Dickey, p. 274). It is possible that, like some other alcoholic writers, Riley found it harder to invoke the muse once he became sober. Moreover, as Horace Gregory shrewdly suggests, Riley's particular poetic talent may have been closely bound to his drinking:

Riley's skill in writing verses depended upon those facile charms that are seldom impeded by excessive use of alcohol; an undeliberated, easily flowing, drunken rhythm, with its slurred consonants runs through the

majority of his many verses, and if some of the verses are melancholy in tone and feeling, the feeling in them reflects the sentimental reveries of "the morning after." Within those reveries is contained the fantasy and dream of childhood, not childhood as it was and is, but in a moment of wistfulness, as it should have been (Gregory, pp. 51-52).⁶

For every writer such as Booth Tarkington, whose work flourishes in sobriety, there may be a writer such as Riley, whose flow of youthful inspiration dries up. It is, of course, for fear of such imaginative desiccation that many an alcoholic writer keeps right on drinking--often to a bad end.

The notion that alcohol might be in any way conducive to literary accomplishment has been strongly and reasonably challenged by recent scholarly studies (including my own book, The White Logic) that arise from the ethos of Alcoholics Anonymous, with its adamant belief in the efficacy of total abstinence. In this view, to find anything beneficial in addiction is to evince an especially pernicious form of denial. But as George Wedge points out in a provocative rebuttal to Lewis Hyde's influential study of John Berryman, the AA perspective has "a built-in prejudice against the possibility that an active alcoholic can write truthfully."⁷ However painful or counterintuitive it may be for recovering alcoholics to accept the possible "inapplicability of some features of the AA program to the discussion of the lives and works of alcoholic writers" (Wedge, p. 230), addiction studies may now have reached a pass where the matter of drinking and writing should be detached from a potentially reductive AA ideology--in order to admit a perspective that does not necessarily assume either the unalloyed advantages of sobriety for every alcoholic artist or the inevitable corruption of artistic achievement by drinking. "The point," Wedge argues elsewhere, "is that if we are to have a theory which offers a proper account of connections between addiction and literature, we cannot ignore counterexamples"⁸--even if they are contrary to AA convictions.

In the work of complicating our understanding of art and addiction, case histories such as James Whitcomb Riley's--which merits more intensive investigation than I have given it here--may prove to be useful in our measuring more precisely what is gained and what is lost under the influence.

1. Scott Donaldson, "Writers and Drinking in America," The Sewanee Review 98 (Spring 1990): 316.

2. David Perkins states that Riley's forty-four books, which were launched at the rate of one or more volumes every year from 1883 until his death in 1916, sold nearly three million copies between 1893 and 1949: A History of Modern Poetry: From the 1890s to the High Modernist Mode (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 117. This does not count sales before 1893, for which years no good records exist. It has been estimated, however, that Riley's first book alone sold above half a million copies in its first decade, 1883-1893.

3. Quoted in Marcus Dickey, The Maturity of James Whitcomb Riley: Fortune's Way With the Poet in the Prime of Life and After (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1922), p. 79. Other quotations are identified in the text. Not long before Riley first mounted the platform, Benson had published his compellingly lurid temperance narrative, Fifteen Years in Hell: An Autobiography (Indianapolis: Tilford & Carlton, 1877).

4. Horace Gregory, "James Whitcomb Riley: A Victorian American," in Poet of the People: An Evaluation of James Whitcomb Riley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1951), pp. 49-50. This story cannot, in fact, be strictly true because Riley was never Mark Twain's partner on the lecture trail--although Twain once introduced Nye and Riley at one of their performances in Boston. See Albert Bigelow Paine, Mark Twain: A Biography (New York: Harper, 1912), p. 876.

5. Dickey notes that "grossly exaggerated and painfully damaging" reports, falsely attributed to Nye, were circulated to the press by Riley's disgruntled agents in the wake of the Louisville debacle (p. 258). Such reports may be the source of Gregory's anecdote.

6. Without benefit of alcohol, Riley was persistently paralyzed by stage fright. William Lyon Phelps recalls an occasion late in Riley's career when he invited the poet to give a reading at Yale. Phelps found him in his hotel room "in a state of absolute hysteria": "He was walking up and down in his room like a caged wild beast, shouting out his woes, 'Oh, my God, why did I agree to do this, why, oh, why?'" Riley's high anxiety was not relieved until he actually went on stage, where he appeared "wholly at ease." Afterwards he told his host that he "always suffered agony during the hours preceding his appearance in public." Autobiography With Letters (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939), p. 406.

7. George F. Wedge, "The Case of the Talking Brews: Mr. Berryman and Dr. Hyde," in Richard J. Kelly and Alan K. Lathrop, eds., Recovering Berryman: Essays on a Poet (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), p. 233. Wedge is responding to Lewis Hyde's widely reprinted 1975 essay, "Alcohol and Poetry: John Berryman and the Booze Talking."

8. George F. Wedge, "Literature and Addiction Across Eras and Cultures" (pp. 23-34 in this issue), p. 31.

I'd Better Leave the Percodan Alone**Eric Zuckerman**

I know a man with an injured arm
who commands a nice supply; he keeps them
on his nightstand in a vial. The trouble

with these opiates is not the way they calm,
but how I sense this urge to reacquire.
For the cord they twang is a plumb-line down

from the brain-stem through my toes,
and a horsehair bow does a note inside
which allows some valves to close.

Book Review

Jim Harbaugh, S.J.

Sarah Gorham and Jeffrey Skinner, eds. Last Call: Poems on Alcoholism, Addiction, and Deliverance. Louisville, KY: Sarabande Books, 1997, xxii + 191 pages.

For some years I have made a practice of reading poetry about "alcoholism, addiction, and deliverance" when I am giving talks to various groups. It began when a recovering friend called my attention to Raymond Carver's "Gravy." From that poem I moved on to other poetry by Carver, which, like many of his masterful short stories, deals frankly and compassionately with the damage that alcoholism causes and the small shoots of hope that nevertheless keep turning up in this bleak landscape. From Carver's work there was a natural progression to the poetry of Carver's widow, Tess Gallagher, who lives in Port Angeles, across Puget Sound from the home of *Dionysos*, here in Seattle. And beyond Carver and Gallagher I have browsed in the poetry on addiction of other people. Some of these poems we publish in most issues of this journal (including this issue).

So I was intrigued to receive a copy of Last Call, a new anthology of poetry on addiction and "deliverance." And having read and re-read it, by myself and to friends, I recommend it without qualification. Old friends by Carver, including "Gravy," and "Luck," appear here. Gallagher is represented as well; I was particularly moved by her naturalistic dramatic monologue "3 A.M. Kitchen: My Father Talking."

The quality of the poets and the poems selected is very high throughout. Tone and style vary considerably, from the street-smart jive of the much anthologized Etheridge Knight to the literary elegance of Lynda Hull. Much of the poetry is ruefully funny, like Jeffrey McDaniel's; some is harrowingly poignant, like Jane Mead's; others, like Jean Valentine, work a more lyrical, impressionistic vein. But if any single thread links this disparate work, it is the motif that addiction and deliverance are complex experiences that affect every feature of the life of the addict, and of those who care about the addict. This in itself is an important contribution to the study, academic or literary, of addiction: it seems to me that nothing is more typical of ordinary American attitudes to alcoholism in particular than our habit of not seeing it at all. If we do notice it, we dismiss it as rare or unimportant as compared to addiction to hard drugs like heroin, or even to more socially acceptable drugs like tobacco. Last Call demonstrates that alcoholism (and other forms of drug addiction) matter greatly, not just socially, but also artistically; as many

critics (including Tom Dardis and Tom Gilmore) have stressed, alcohol abuse and literary production are strongly, and, in the last analysis, destructively, linked in the American imagination, from Poe to Kerouac to Jim Carroll (but see George Wedge and John Crowley, above, for a more nuanced treatment of this idea).

I would like to single out the work of one of the Last Call contributors because I have found her work especially congenial. I was not familiar with her poetry before. Her name is Cindy Day Roberts, and according to the "Contributors' Notes" she is "currently a program coordinator at the Central New York Community Arts Council where she also writes and edits two newsletters . . ." She is represented here by four poems, which is in my judgment much too few.

One, "Poor Zelda," pays witty and touching tribute to the emotional complexities of Zelda Fitzgerald's tragicomic life. The others capture with epigrammatic brevity some subtle truths about the spiritual element of addiction and recovery, the element in which I am particularly interested. "The Leopard," with an epigraph from Thomas Merton, allegorizes addiction as the title animal, drowsy and slaked through most of the poem, all-destroying near the end. The title of "Enough" goes to what I consider the core of addiction: the inability of the addict, like Goethe's Faust or John Updike's Rabbit Angstrom, ever to acknowledge that what has been received is enough until very late (too late?). "Enough" also reflects on the role of story in recovery, another concept I think is crucial in understanding addiction, actual and fictive. Roberts speaks of the event this poem depicts, "[a] harvest moon walk," as "a story of forgiveness"; "a story of being alone / among friends"; "a story of wanting to be / a part of the world just by walking out into it." These three notes capture much of what makes recovery from addiction a "deliverance." Roberts goes on to other reflections on the point of her vignette, but the poem is too rich for me to summarize here. You'll just have to read it.

Finally, in "Let Go of It," she shapes a sailing incident into a "perfect symbol" for "[d]isaster," and of ways of reacting to disaster. And of course "disaster," however apparently well-contained, is what addiction really is, American blandness notwithstanding (cf. Jeffrey McDaniel's "Disasterology," earlier in Last Call).

Since I received my copy of Last Call. I have tirelessly recommended it to friends and to people for whom I conduct retreats. I am glad to be able to bring it to the astute attention of the readers of *Dionysos* as well. Since people who read one or two of the poems

invariably want their own copy of the book, I include the address of the publishers:

Sarabande Books
2234 Dundee Road, Suite 200
Louisville, KY 40205

(I have also seen copies in some of the classier chain bookstores.)

One reason, in addition to its excellence, why I am so vigorously recommending Last Call is that I hope there will be a follow-up. Quite candidly, I would love it if some of the poetry that appears in Gorham and Skinner's next anthology of "addiction and deliverance" would have made its debut in this journal.

NOTES AND COMMENT

Roger Forseth

"Alcohol and Addiction in Literature," a panel organized and chaired by Matts Djos (Mesa St C), was presented at the American Literature Association conference in Baltimore, May 25. Papers read were: Ellen Lansky (N Hennepin CC), "Beloved Enemies: Two Serious Ladies, The Sheltering Sky. Jane and Paul Bowles" [see above, pp. 5-12]; Jan Goggans (U CA-Davis), "'Drink and Dissipation' and Denial: Dick Diver's Dying Fall"; Nicholas Warner (Claremont McKenna C), "Mapping Addictions in Nineteenth Century Literature: The Semiotics of Drink in Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Marble Faun and John Hay's The Breadwinners." . . . Nick Warner's Spirits of America: Intoxication in Nineteenth-Century American Literature (U of OK P, \$27.95) will be published in October. . . . Dionysos contributor John Maxwell O'Brien ("Dionysos," Spring 1992) contributed the article "Alcoholism" to the third edition of The Oxford Classical Dictionary (1996). . . . "[T]here seems to be no limit to the things you can be proud about: the other day, I found myself stuck in traffic behind a car boasting the slogan, 'Proud to Be the Mother of a Recovering Drug Addict'" (Mark Steyn, "Dysfunction Junction," The American Spectator May 1997: 46). . . . Sobering Tales: Narratives of Alcoholism and Recovery, by Edmund B. O'Reilly, was published in June by U of MA P (\$50.00/\$16.95). . . . "An unknown visitor placed a bottle of cognac and three red roses on the grave of poet Edgar Allan Poe at Westminster Church in Baltimore in the icy darkness at 4:45 a.m. Sunday, Poe's birthday, carrying on a 48-year ritual" (AP 19 Jan 1996). For an update on the controversy over the cause of Poe's death, see Blake Eskin, "Mad Dogs and English Professors," Lingua Franca Dec/Jan 1997: 10-11. . . . U of Chicago P has published Timothy E. Donohue's In the Open: Diary of a Homeless Alcoholic (1996, \$22.95). . . . Addiction Notes: Conference on Cities and Addiction, "Balancing Public Health and Public Order," sponsored by the World Health Organization and The Addictions Forum, was held in Rotterdam, 21-23 April; Addiction Abstracts is published by Carfax Publishing Co, 875-81 Massachusetts Ave, Cambridge, MA 02139; "How We Get Addicted," Time cover story, 5 May: 68-76: "A.A.'s path to recovery still seems the best" ("For more on addiction and alcoholism, see our Web report at time.com/alcoholism"). "Perverse though it may sound, a great number of the support groups for the Internet-addicted are--you guessed it--on line. There is a Netaholics Anonymous, an on-line 12-step group, complete with a serenity prayer:

'Grant me the serenity to know when to log off.'" ("The Symptoms of Internet Addiction," The New York Times 1 Dec 1996: 8). . . . Pleasures and Pains: Opium and the Orient in Nineteenth-Century British Culture, by Barry Milligan, has been published by the U P of VA (1995, \$29.50 . . . "When you toast the New Year tomorrow night, will you be raising the medically correct one or two drinks, or will you feel more like draining the keg? America's drinking habits were ever the story of extremes. Overall, we're drinking less alcohol than at any time since the early 1960s. But a hard-drinking minority takes a disproportionately big swig of total alcohol consumption. About half of all the alcohol drunk in the country is consumed in srees of five or more drinks at a time, studies show" (The Wall Street Journal 30 Dec 1996). . . . Being Geniuses Together, Robert McAlmon's classic account of, among other things, literary boozing in 1920's Paris, has been reissued (in the Kay Boyle edition) by Johns Hopkins U P (\$15.95 paper). . . . "Certainly this novel [The Story of Junk, by Linda Yablonsky, Farrar] couldn't be more timely. After all, stories about middle-class heroin use have become a regular feature on television news magazines, heroin chic has become the fashion world's newest craze and 'Rent,' a musical about life among the users, transvestites and would-be artists of the Lower East Side, has become a hit, as has 'Trainspotting,' a high-spirited movie about Scottish heroin addicts" (Michiko Kakutani, "Getting Drugs, Getting High: Same Old Same Old," The New York Times 8 Apr: B5). . . . "I declare a moratorium. Just for today, let me not read about a serial killer who cannibalizes his victims, a cynical cop who attends A.A. meetings or a young mother who rescues a busload of blind babies from a religious maniac" (Marilyn Stasio, same paper [Book Review]: 30 March: 23) . . . Even the Wicked, Lawrence Block's latest Matthew Scudder novel, was published in Feb (Morrow, \$23). . . . Norman Kiell writes that Donald Goodwin was the Distinguished Lecturer in Substance Abuse Treatment, sponsored by the Department of Psychiatry of Cornell U Medical College, Jan 10. Dr. Goodwin spoke on "Alcohol and the Writer." . . . "It's certainly true that my father's novels and stories are redolent with romantic images of the perfect Martini and the ideal adultery, but those stories are fiction--images created by a man who never found either" (Susan Cheever, responding in The New Yorker [23/28 Dec 1996: 6] to James Atlas' "The Fall of Fun" (18 Nov 1996: 72-80). . . . "'There Is Something About a Martini.' It's more than just a potent drink, and more than the inspiration for some handsome ancillary equipment. It is Modern times, brought to you in a beautiful chalice" ("Four Great American Things: The Martini, Independence Day, Fireworks, Yankee Doodle Dandy," American Heritage July/Aug: 32). . . . The Last Party: Studio

54. Disco, and the Culture of the Night, by Anthony Haden-Guest, is published by Morrow (\$25). . . . "Endless nights in the saloons of chain motels after your 500th punch-and-cookies English department reception are not the nursery of serious poetic brooding and radiant deliveries. I'd heard Dylan Thomas read at Duke . . . six months before his sodden death at 39; and early in our acquaintance Jim Dickey was giving me and many of his other admiring friends cause to wonder if he would make it out of his 40's" (Reynolds Price, "James Dickey, Size XL," The New York Times Book Review 23 March: 31). . . . Edward Behr's Prohibition: Thirteen Years That Changed America (Arcade, \$24.95) and Harry's Bar: The Life and Times of the Legendary Venice Landmark, by Arrigo Cipriani (Arcade, \$21.95), were published last year. . . . Robin Room introduces John Seeley's "Looking Backward on Alcoholism (from 1 January 1999)," in Social History of Alcohol Review 32/33 (Spring/Fall 1996): 60-71. . . . The Recovery Network, "[d]esigned to serve people 'affected by or afflicted with' alcoholism, drug abuse, gambling or eating disorders, depression and related problems, . . . will offer two hours of programming a day, starting [in April], to cable systems in about 50 markets" (The New York Times 16 Apr: B6). . . . A selection from the recently discovered diaries of Frances E. Willard (1839-98), founder of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, edited by Carolyn De Swarte Gifford, has been published by U of Illinois P (1995). The Willard archive is now at Northwestern U.

David Roskos

Midway in my life's journey
 I woke up on a stainless steel gurney,
 pulled the IV's out,
 left against
 medical advice.

Didn't get invited anywhere
 anymore, not even to funerals.
 Boiled my future
 in a bent spoon
 stained with soot.

There is no climate control in Hell.

I will not be back here
 asking for another chance.
 Somehow, the lights
 of understanding
 have gone out.
 the line-breaks
 are broken.
 the last words,
 last rites--
 spoken,
 performed;
 perfunctory,
 with ritualistic
 familiarity
 & ease.

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ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

John Crowley is Professor of English at Syracuse University. He is author of The White Logic: Alcoholism and Gender in American Modernist Fiction (1994). He has recently edited an anthology of Washingtonian Temperance Narrative from the 1840s titled Drunkard's Progress.

Roger Forseth, former editor of Dionysos, is Professor Emeritus of English at the University of Wisconsin-Superior, and has published a number of articles on writers and addiction.

Jim Harbaugh, S.J. is the author of two books of 12 Step meditations, to be published by Sheed and Ward. Tentative titles: Getting the Love of God (late 1997); Not Hard to Swallow (1998). He teaches in the Addiction Studies Program at Seattle University.

Michael L. Johnson is a professor of English at the University of Kansas. A frequently published poet, he is currently working on a collection of essays titled Making Memories: A Personal Midwest.

Ellen Lansky's work on alcoholism and literature has appeared in Dionysos and is forthcoming in Literature and Medicine. She recently finished a Ph.D. in English at the University of Minnesota, and she lives in Minneapolis.

David Roskos is the editor of Big Hammer Magazine and Iniquity Press/Vendetta Books. His poetry has been published in numerous magazines, including The New York Quarterly, Exquisite Corpse, and Dionysos. Most recent books: Lyrical Grain, Doggerel Chaff, and Pedestrian Occupations. He lives in New Jersey with his wife Kathleen and their two sons.

George F. Wedge is Associate Professor Emeritus at the University of Kansas and editor of Cottonwood Magazine and Press.

Eric Zuckerman, formerly a chef, received an MFA from the University of Montana, and is currently studying at the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley. His poetry is forthcoming or has appeared in such publications as Spoon River Poetry Review, Anthology of Magazine Verse, Plainsongs, and Nimrod. He is a Jesuit of the Oregon Province.

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