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Volume 9: Number 1 (1999) IN

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Journal of Literature  
and Addiction

Winter 1999  
Vol. 9, #1



# DIONYSOS

Journal of Literature and Addiction  
Winter, 1999 Vol. 9, No. 1

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# Dionysos

Journal of Literature and Addiction

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## A Note from the Editor

With this issue *Dionysos* begins its tenth year of publication (we're only at Vol. 9 because of the year without publication when this journal was moving from Wisconsin to Washington). This issue celebrates the anniversary in several ways:

First, it contains a fine article on Stephen Crane and the Temperance tradition by George Monteiro. The influence of Temperance narratives on modern recovery narratives has been a fruitful area of study during these ten years. It also contains an exegesis of a poem by John Berryman, a representative of the huge cohort of American alcoholic writers that has been frequently studied in these pages. Finally it includes a beautifully crafted poem by one of our most frequent prose contributors, George Wedge.

Second, this issue offers a stimulating article on "spirituality" and recovery narratives by a British colleague, Kevin McCarron. The article bristles with insights, with some of which I disagree: for instance, I think Prof. McCarron is right in considering the pragmatism of AA the truly American feature of the Twelve Step program; but, perhaps because I am an American, I am much more comfortable with the pragmatism that he finds too breezy by half. In any event, I hope his article will stir you, as it has me, to further reflection.

Third, and very pragmatically, we include an index of the contents of ten years' worth of *Dionysos*. Because of its length, we will omit for once Roger Forseth's valuable Notes and Comment, and publish a double-size version of it in our Summer issue. But a glance at the index suggests what a rich harvest Roger, the founding editor of this journal, first sowed back in 1989. Many thanks to our contributors, to our Editorial and Advisory Boards, and especially to you, our readers.

*Dionysos: The Journal of Literature and Addiction* is published twice yearly (winter and summer) at the rate of \$3.00 per issue, \$5.00 annually for individuals, and \$8.00 for institutions, USA and Canada (all other: \$5.00/\$8.00/\$11.00, payment in dollars by international money order) by Addiction Studies, CSY331, Seattle University, 900 Broadway, Seattle WA 98122-4460. Please send manuscripts (two copies, plus self-addressed envelope, documentation according to The MLA Style Manual [New York: MLA, 1985] section 5.8), communications, and subscriptions to: Jim Harbaugh, S.J., Editor, *Dionysos*, Addiction Studies Program, Casey 331, Seattle University, 900 Broadway, Seattle, WA 98122-4460. Note: Copy deadlines are: March 31st (summer issue); October 15th (winter issue). *Dionysos* is indexed in the MLA Bibliography.

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ISSN: 1044-4149

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## The Drunkard's Progress: Bowery Plot, Social Paradigm in Stephen Crane's *George's Mother*

George Monteiro

Brown University

Thus alcohol stands indicted as an impostor. He who is fully under its influence may be happy after a fashion, but his enjoyment is based upon a mockery. He feels like a giant, while he is really shorn of his natural force. He drivels the veriest nonsense, while he thinks he reasons better than Plato. His maudlin attempts at smartness are the feeblest and the flattest of human utterances; but they seem to him wit almost superhuman. When he is so far gone as to stammer in his speech and totter in his gait, and be helpless in mind and body, his sense of his wisdom, his strength, his greatness, and his goodness is at its highest point.

Jonathan Townley Crane, *Arts of Intoxication*<sup>1</sup>

### 1.

The *Illustrated London News* called *George's Mother* (1896) "a more than commonly able temperance tract." It allowed that Crane's novella sketched rapidly, though convincingly, "a very commonplace 'Rake's Progress'--the descent of a young New York working man, by means of friendly clubs and saloon-haunting, from dignity, self-respect, and the estate of the dutiful son to becoming a 'tough,' and breaking the heart of his old mother." "Mr. Crane's vein of bitter irony is to be seen in the maudlin friendship of the bar-loafers," continues the review, "but in the picture of the little brown old mother there is heart also."<sup>2</sup>

The promising suggestion that *George's Mother* recalls Hogarth's "Rake's Progress" has not been much explored by scholars.<sup>3</sup> What can be looked at here is the way George's social progress (up and down) ties in, roughly, with his progress through drink (up and down). Just as George Kelcey moves, in order, from the street to the saloon, the back room, Bleecker's apartment, and the club's room above the saloon, he then reverses the procedure by returning, in order, to the saloon, the street, and, finally, the vacant lot where he becomes part of the street gang.

George's progress is not that of a rake, exactly (actually he is sexually repressed) but that of a lout and a drunkard. Initially, George accompanies an

old acquaintance to "a little glass-fronted saloon that sat blinking jovially at the crowds." Charley Jones, ordering whiskey for himself while George drinks beer, exchanges a few words with the barkeep, and then addresses his new friend:

"This is th' hang-out fer a great gang," said Jones, turning to Kelcey. "They're a great crowd, I tell yeh. We own th' place when we get started. Come aroun' some night. Any night, almost. T'-night, b'jimini. They'll almost all be here, an' I'd like t' interduce yeh.

They're a great gang! Gre-e-at!"<sup>4</sup>

That evening George returns to the saloon and is introduced to Bleecker. Shortly thereafter Bleecker and his crowd repair to the backroom to hold their private drinking party. Charley Jones drinks whiskey, but while George is also drinking, we are not told what, Bleecker works his spell over George, who not only "admired Bleecker immensely" but "developed a brotherly feeling for the others." (127) Back home, in bed, George "had a pleasurable consciousness that he had made a good impression upon those fine fellows. He felt that he had spent the most delightful evening of his life." (130) The next time he runs into Jones, he is told that Bleecker will host "a blow-out" the next night and that he "expressly" wants George to come. George arrives at Bleecker's "apartments," is introduced to the other guests, and, along with them, is offered drink. "There were upon it [the table] a keg of beer, a long row of whiskey bottles, a little heap of corn-cob pipes, some bags of tobacco, a box of cigars, and a mighty collection of glasses, cups, and mugs." (142) Kelcey takes a mug of beer. Later he switches to whiskey. When, still later, he trips over a pair of outstretched legs and strikes his head, he reacts by pouring himself "an extravagant portion of whiskey." (147) Kelcey gets very drunk, wants to sing a song, but instead passes out.

He awakens the next morning to a scene of widespread destruction. "After the tumults of the previous night the interior of this room resembled a decaying battle-field. The air hung heavy and stifling with the odors of tobacco, men's breaths, and beer half filling forgotten glasses. There was ruck of broken tumblers, pipes, bottles, spilled tobacco, cigar stumps." (150) It is of particular interest that Crane makes so much of pipes, tobacco, and smoke. During the earlier private party in the back room of the saloon, the entrapped men have been described as garlanded by smoke: "the tobacco-smoke eddied about the forms of the men in ropes and wreaths. Near the ceiling there was a thick gray cloud." (129)

As early as 1883 the W.C.T.U. had targeted tobacco as a grave danger to temperance, forming in that year a department called "Effort to Overthrow the Tobacco Habit."<sup>5</sup> By 1895 the *Union Signal*, a W.C.T.U. publication, was arguing for everyone's "right to fresh air" and advocating that "smokers be permitted to smoke only in such places and ways as would not interfere 'with the rights and freedoms of any other individual.'"<sup>6</sup> One temperance piece

attacks the widespread use of tobacco by pretending to extol its personal and social advantages:

How sweet it makes the breath! What a clean and wholesome odor lingers behind in the garments of those who use it! But one of the most conspicuous advantages accruing to mankind from smoking is its unselfishness; for, in this respect, it presents itself in striking contrast to the injurious habit of drinking. A man calls for a glass of ale, and there he sits, a selfish being, with perhaps a dozen or more around him, yet none but himself derive the least pleasure from the foaming beverage before him. Not so the smoker. He can purify and sweeten the air of the largest room; and, let it be ever so crowded, all present have a share of his smoke to enjoy. All present depart freshened and sweetened by the emanations from his pipe.<sup>7</sup>

On the morning after the drunken celebrations at Bleecker's place, George awakens with a strong thirst. But when he finally manages to get himself a drink of water, it is "an intolerable disappointment. It was insipid and weak to his scorched throat and not at all cool." (151) Bleecker invites him to go out for a cocktail. George makes "a movement of disdain for cocktails," but accompanies Bleecker to the street. Once outside, he goes his own way, parting company from his host of the night before, "the only man of them who knew much about cocktails." (152)

It is not much later that George begins to wonder whether he still cares for beer. He recalls that "he had been obliged to cultivate a talent for imbibing it."

He was born with an abhorrence which he had steadily battled until it had come to pass that he could drink from ten to twenty glasses of beer without the act of swallowing causing him to shiver. He understood that drink was an essential to joy, to the coveted position of a man of the world and of the streets. The saloons contained the mystery of a street for him. When he knew its saloons he comprehended the street. Drink and its surroundings were the eyes of a superb green dragon to him. He followed a fascinating glitter, and the glitter required no explanation. (159)

Bleecker and the boys form a club with dues set at a dollar a week. The saloon-keeper donates "half the rent of quite a large room over the saloon." (161) On leaving one meeting of the club, Kelcey's legs are described as being "like whalebone when he tried to go up-stairs upon his return home, and the edge of each step was moved curiously forward." (161)

In time George loses his job and in need of money approaches his friends Bleecker, Jones, and O'Connor for a loan. They do not lend him the money, and he discovers that now he is "below them in social position." (172) But the seeds for new friendships and loyalties had already been sown when he helped the street tough Fidsey Corcoran beat up a man the latter had provoked

into fighting. As George nears his home after being rebuffed by his erstwhile drinking friends, he encounters Fidsey and another member of the street-gang. They invite George to partake of a "big can" of beer they have sneaked away from a "new barkeep." (172) An argument breaks out, but it does not keep any one of them from his "smoke" at the can. Somehow Fidsey and the boys maneuver Kelcey into confronting one Blue Billie. But George avoids fighting when a little boy delivers the message that George's mother is sick. She dies shortly after George gets there. The reader last sees George, defeated and alone, as he sits staring at the wall-paper. "The pattern was clusters of brown roses. He felt them like hideous crabs crawling upon his brain." (178)

Much of what George has done self-destructively, when not out of sheer fecklessness, he has done vindictively. When he thinks of getting drunk he relishes in anticipation the effect his actions will have, presumably, on his mother. Invited to Bleecker's party, he thinks of himself as "a very grim figure." "He was about to taste the delicious revenge of a partial self-destruction. The universe would regret its position when it saw him drunk." (141)

The mother's arsenal of weapons will prove inadequate to the formidable task of wrenching George away from drink. Her boy is not amenable to "home protection," the bedrock of Miss Willard's temperance program.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, when all the cleaning and decorating and special cooking she can accomplish fails to reform George, this "poor, inadequate woman, of a commonplace religiosity" (as William Dean Howells called her)<sup>9</sup> turns to the church. By weeping at his truculent refusal to accompany her to prayer-meeting, Mrs. Kelcey manages to get him there. But sadly for her this one visit serves merely to confirm George's belief that he is damned. George is uncomfortable, angry, "wild with a rage in which his lips turned slightly livid." (157) Yet his interest is piqued when "one by one people arose and told little tales of their religious faith. Some were tearful and others calm, emotionless. and convincing. Kelcey listened closely for a time. These people filled him with a great curiosity. He was not familiar with their types." (157-158) At last, the clergyman, described as "a pale-faced, but plump young man in a black coat that buttoned to his chin" (157)--reminiscent of the clergyman who, fearing for his respectability, spurns Maggie--speaks. "Kelcey was amazed, because, from the young man's appearance, he would not have suspected him of being so glib; but the speech had no effect on Kelcey, excepting to prove to him again that he was damned." (158) The clergyman has spoken (though not to George), but he has not, as the temperance manuals preached, reached down to those young men who, going "down in evil ways," are "not riding a docile, well-broken steed," but "are on a monster, wild and blood-thirsty, going at a death rate."<sup>10</sup>

To his mother's bitter disappointment, George does not return to prayer-meeting. It is only as his mother lays dying in the next room that standing



before George is "the pale-faced but plump young clergyman."<sup>11</sup> "'My poor lad--' began this latter." (177) It is too late. Crane has had it both ways. The church has been ineffectual. And George, inadvertently in league with his mother's destructive impulses, has destroyed himself. Ironically, in the end the "Woman Without Weapons" (as Crane had considered entitling his work) has apparently all the weapons she needs to vanquish her son.

## 2.

There are nine steps in "The Drunkard's Progress," according to a nineteenth-century temperance print. Step 1 depicts the young man taking "a glass with a friend." In step 2 the incipient drunkard takes "a glass to keep the cold out." In step 3 he has had "a glass too much." In step 4 he is "drunk and riotous." With step 5, he attains "the summit"; sitting down now with "jolly companions," he is the "confirmed drunkard." Now begins the descent. With step 6 he comes to "poverty and disease." At step 7 he is "forsaken by friends." Step 8, taken in "desperation," leads him into "crime." In Step 9 he turns his gun on himself and blows his brains out, committing, as the caption says, "death by suicide." Although not every one of the steps corresponds exactly to the stages of George Kelcey's rise and fall as a drinker, the correspondence overall is close enough to suggest that Crane had this Temperance paradigm in mind when he constructed the plot of *George's Mother*.

When we consider what might be called the work's ethos, moreover, we find that it has strong affinities with the documented principles of the American Temperance movement. What I have in mind, particularly, are two documents dating from the early years of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union that can be brought to bear on *George's Mother*. The first document is "Which Shall Win?"--a piece by Frances E. Willard, the W.C.T.U.'s long-time president. The second one is the text of a resolution passed by the W.C.T.U. at its second national convention. In tandem they provide a useful perspective on Crane's intentions in the second of his paired novellas set in New York's lower east-side.

Miss Willard, quoted here from an 1877 temperance reader, exhorts:

The grog-shop is a two-edged sword, and cuts both ways at once. It is a rotating machine for the snaring of souls. It catches our young men and boys before they reach the church and Sabbath-school--while they are on their way--and they never reach its doors, or else it catches them as they return, and mars or neutralizes the blessed lessons there imparted. Between the two there is the old "irrepressible conflict" over again. It is war to the knife, and the

knife to the hilt, and only one can win. And in the warfare, we of Christ's army are outnumbered. There are twelve saloons to every church; twelve bar-keepers to every minister. The church opens its blessed doors two or three days in the week; the saloon grinds on and on with its mill of destruction all the days of every week; all the months of every year. . . . They have studied carefully the tastes, tendencies, and preferences of our boys and young men, their natural and innocent taste for variety, fondness for amusement, preference for young company, and they pander to all these in ways that take hold upon death.<sup>12</sup>

Miss Willard, soon to be the Union's president, was present at the second convention of the W.C.T.U., held in Cincinnati in 1875, which passed the following resolution:

That since women are the greatest sufferers from the liquor traffic, and realizing that it is to be ultimately suppressed by means of the ballot, we, the Christian women of this land, in convention assembled, do pray Almighty God, and all good and true men, that the question of the prohibition of the liquor traffic shall be submitted to all adult citizens, irrespective of race, color or sex.<sup>13</sup>

Among the suffering women, of course, were wives, mothers, and daughters. "Do you hear the cry of the women--/ Of the women whose hearts are broken?" asks one temperance poem calling for the dawning of a better day. "Of a day when wives' and mothers' sadness/ Shall be all forgotten in their gladness."<sup>14</sup> The suffering of one daughter in a home of alcoholics Crane undertook to dramatize in *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*. The suffering of a temperance-worker mother he undertook in *Maggie's* companion-piece, *George's Mother*. "Our women believe that special efforts should be made to help the mother in her unequal warfare with the dram-shop for the preservation of her boy," wrote Frances E. Willard in 1888, "[for] it is plainly perceived by them that something is wrong in the popular division of responsibility by which, although the father may be a moderate drinker, the failure of the boy to grow up good and pure is adjudged to be his mother's fault."<sup>15</sup> Many of Crane's readers have seen *George's Mother* as a try at adjusting this moral balance in the mother's favor and have stopped right there. But other readers have looked more deeply for evidence of Crane's more complex intentions.

Edward Garnett, for instance, sees *George's Mother* as no more hospitable to the mother than to her drunkard son. In Crane's picture of the mother, writes Garnett, "all the mysterious craving of maternal love, its fierce pleasure in self-sacrifice, its self-regarding heroism, and self-denial based on its egotistic interests, is presented with an unerring truthfulness that leaves nothing further to be said."<sup>16</sup> Maxwell Geismar insists that in this work in which "the alcoholic and oedipal worlds are interchangeable," Crane gives us

in the mother an "aging, sick, ugly symbol of maternal love [that] combine[s] the offices of nursemaid and mistress."<sup>17</sup> Eric Solomon says that *George's Mother* shows "two characters as similar in their fantasies and their egos yet seriously in conflict in their views of the proper life." When the mother dies, concludes Solomon, "the conflict is over, and neither side has won. The dreams have failed, and love has died."<sup>18</sup>

Brenda Murphy offers the most detailed account of the pernicious, self-destructive war the little woman who is George's mother wages on the prodigality of her own self-destructive son. Detecting the irony implicit in Crane's original title for the story, *A Woman Without Weapons*, Murphy demonstrates convincingly that not only does the mother possess an arsenal of weapons but that she uses them skillfully enough to emerge in death (her death is the final weapon) as victor. "George's mother has succeeded in wresting her son from the forces of sin. It matters little to her 'moral victory' that she may have destroyed both of them in the process."<sup>19</sup>

One can only speculate why Crane changed the title of his book. If *George's Mother* gives the son and the mother close to equal billing, perhaps *A Woman Without Weapons* implies that the book is principally the mother's. Indeed, most readers see the novella, more or less, as the dramatization of the downward course traveled by an alcoholic son, greatly to the crushing disappointment of his earnest, well-meaning mother. In this, Crane's story recreates the paradigmatic story of a mother's defeat by her son's alcoholism, as it is told in "Stolen; or, the Mother's Lament," a temperance-reader poem voiced through the mother:

They have stolen my child!--they have stolen my child, I say!  
 My beautiful boy!--my precious one!--they have stolen away!  
 And the earth is a heap of ashes, the sun is no longer bright,  
 Since out of my home and my heart has vanished their chief delight.

\*\*\*\*

'Twas not done in a moment, with a sudden wrench or blow  
 As Death knows how to rob us of treasures we prize below,  
 But it came with the trail of a serpent--the soft, insidious thing!  
 And it spoke to my son like a siren, while it plunged in my heart its  
 sting!

\*\*\*\*

I kept the old house cheerful with pictures and works of art,  
 With books, and a thousand nameless things that gladden the  
 youthful heart;  
 And though I'd no daughters to aid me in this delightful task,  
 I tried to be sister, and mother, and all that a child could ask.

I noticed his anxious brow--for a mother's gaze is keen--  
 And I missed the honest look in his eyes I had always seen;

While into his voice came a harsher tone, and he seemed to avoid my  
sight,  
For he knew that my heart was set on his doing exactly right.

O Love! is there any cross that can give thee such pain as this?  
O Love! can aught else so embitter thy cup of bliss,  
As to see the child thou hast nourished and cherished with tend'rest  
care,  
Torn out of thy holy embrace by the tempter's snare?

.....  
Who robbed me of this my joy, and took from my side the sire  
Who wept o'er the empty chair that stood by the table or fire,  
Until, grown weary with waiting for a change that never came,  
He sickened, and under the daisies we buried his grief and shame?

.....  
The serpent stole into my Eden--why not into yours?  
Not even the bond of affection our treasure secures;  
The child at your knee, full of prattle, whose future you can not  
divine,

May prove just as guilty a sinner, as wretched a wanderer as mine!<sup>20</sup>

Continuing through several additional stanzas, each contributing to a generalized condemnation of the evils of drink, this poem laments the fate of a woman not without weapons but with weapons that, save possibly for prayer, have failed her. Notice that like George's mother, the mother in this poem follows Frances Willard's domestic motto of "home protection" through cleaning and decoration of her son's home--but to no avail. When Crane dropped his original title, there was some loss--perhaps a certain flair--but the logic of his double-focus narrative--on both mother and son--dictated some sort of change.

George's mother is no stranger to a good fight. She has fought Intemperance as a member of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. When Charley Jones, the old acquaintance who will shepherd George along the primrose path to better society and "improved" drinking, first encounters George, he starts out by treating him to a drink. As natural as this moment might seem to the late twentieth-century reader, it had particular importance to Crane's contemporaries. The national meeting of the W.C.T.U. in 1874, in its "Plan of Work," provided for an "Anti-Treat Pledge," explaining: "'Come, let's take something together,' has been to thousands the keynote of destruction. We are laboring for the organization of a league which shall enroll as members those, who, though not ready to sign the pledge, are willing to refrain from 'putting the bottle to their neighbor's lips,' by pledging their honor that they neither 'be treated' nor 'treat.'"<sup>21</sup> This ritual of

treating, while seemingly promoting camaraderie, is deeply pernicious in that it vastly increases the amount of consumption, since "a man is expected to buy a round of drinks for every round he has received."<sup>22</sup> The thematic connection is then made perfectly clear when Jones asks George about his mother. "'How is th' ol' lady, anyhow?' continued Jones. 'Th' last time I remember she was as spry as a little ol' cricket, an' was helpelin' aroun' th' country lecturin' before W.C.T.U.'s an' one thing an' another.'" (118) These credentials serve, of course, to beef up the reader's respect for her skill in the war she conducts on behalf of her son's sobriety and Christian salvation. She herself seems to be aware, moreover, that she is far from being a helpless woman without weapons.

So common was the notion that each temperance fighter was engaged in nothing short of a war and that all methods and devices for carrying on that war were nothing less than weapons that the instruction manual published by the United Society of Christian Endeavor carried the title *Weapons for Temperance Warfare*. Presenting "Some Plans and Programmes for use in Young People's Societies, Sunday-schools and Christian Temperance Unions," this vade mecum carried an epigraph on its title page from John B. Gough (elsewhere called "the Cold-Water warrior"<sup>23</sup>), reading: "Fight the drink! Fight it, fight it wherever we find it, fight it in the social circle, fight it in the dram-shop, fight it at home, fight it abroad. I expect to my dying day to fight the drink with every lawful weapon."<sup>24</sup> The book, dedicated to Frances E. Willard, whose message in 1896 to the Temperance Committees "suggested the preparation" of "This Little Volume," also reproduces Miss Willard's inspiring message, mixing Christianity with temperance:<sup>25</sup>

Only a clear brain can think God's thoughts after him.

Only a steady hand can glorify the divine Carpenter by faithful industry.

Only a heart unhurried by artificial stimulants can be loyal in its love toward Christ and humanity.

I beseech you to be incessant and ingenious in efforts to teach total abstinence for the sake of Head, Hand, and Heart; and to take as your watchwords

HOME PROTECTION,

and

THE LIQUOR TRAFFIC MUST BE DESTROYED

Yours in the purpose to glorify God in our bodies and our spirits,  
which are his.<sup>26</sup>

When the motto "home protection" was criticized as "organized mother love," Miss Willard countered by advocating, proudly, what she called the "politics

of the mother heart,"<sup>27</sup> words that express the implicit creed by which George's mother lives and fights.

*Weapons for Temperance Warfare*, drawing on columns originally published in *The Sunday School Times*, offers practical advice on how to carry on war against the armies of intemperance. There are pieces on pledge signing, temperance budgets, and facts and figures. There are drawn-out plans and detailed sample programs for temperance meetings. There are suggestions for choosing the most useful biblical texts and the most appealing gospel hymns. In its list of hymns "especially adapted for use in temperance meetings" appear "Yield not to Temptation," "Throw out the Life-Line," and "Where is My Boy To-night?"--each dealing with the basic material of Crane's story of a boy and his mother. The hymn Crane has George's mother sing is by Isaac Watts:

Am I a soldier of the cross?  
 A follower of the Lamb?  
 And shall I fear to own his cause,  
 Or blush to speak his name?

Must I be carry'd to the skies,  
 On flow'ry beds of ease?  
 Whilst others fought to win the prize,  
 And sail'd through bloody seas?

Are there no foes for me to face?  
 Must I not stem the flood?  
 Is this vile world a friend to grace,  
 To help me on to God?

Sure I must fight, if I would reign;  
 Increase my courage Lord;  
 I'll bear the toil, endure the pain,  
 Supported by thy word.

Thy saints, in all this glorious war,  
 Shall conquer, though they die;  
 They view the triumph from afar,  
 And seize it with their eye.

When that illustrious day shall rise,  
 And all thy armies shine,  
 In robes of victory through the skies--  
 The glory shall be thine.<sup>28</sup>

Entitled "The Warfare" but known also as "Holy Fortitude; or, The Christian Soldier" this hymn was a favorite among Temperance workers and, of course, Methodists of all stripe.<sup>29</sup>

Echoing the language of "The Warfare," George's mother sees herself as truly a crusader. To fight against George's intemperance is to do the Christian God's work. Her opponent is the dragon of alcoholism that the ironically named (Saint?) George does not have the will to defeat.<sup>30</sup> This crusade will be fought in the home, the church, the saloon. This war will not be fought by George but over him.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Rev. J. T. Crane, *Arts of Intoxication: The Aim, and the Results* (New York: Carlton & Lanahan/ San Francisco: E. Thomas/ Cincinnati: Hitchcock & Walden, 1870), p. 145.

<sup>2</sup> *Illustrated London News*, 109 (Oct. 3, 1896), 439.

<sup>3</sup> Alice Hall Petry argues for Hogarth's influence on *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, especially on Crane's portrait of the mother, in "Gin Lane in the Bowery: Crane's *Maggie* and William Hogarth," *American Literature*, 56 (Oct. 1984), 417-26. Gerard M. Sweeney extends her argument in "The Syphilitic World of Stephen Crane's *Maggie*," *American Literary Realism*, 24 (Fall 1991), 79-85.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Crane, *George's Mother, Bowery Tales*, Vol. I of *The University of Virginia Edition of the Works of Stephen Crane*, ed. Fredson Bowers, intr. James B. Colvert (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1969), pp. 116, 117.

<sup>5</sup> Anonymous, *A Brief History of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union*, 3rd ed. (Evanston, Illinois: The Union Signal, 1907), p. 39.

<sup>6</sup> Ruth Bordin, *Woman and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty, 1873-1900* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), p. 109.

<sup>7</sup> Anonymous, "The Logic of Smoking," in *Readings and Recitations, No. 5*, ed. L[izzie] Penney (New York: National Temperance Society and Publication House, 1884), p. 73.

<sup>8</sup> She inscribed photographs of herself "Yours for Home Protection, Frances E. Willard"; see Bordin, *Woman and Temperance*, p. 44.

<sup>9</sup> W.D. Howells, "New York Low Life in Fiction," *New York World* (July 26, 1896), p. 18.

<sup>10</sup> Rev. T. De Witt Talmage, "True Help," in *Readings and Recitations, No. 3*, ed. L[izzie] Penney (New York: National Temperance Society and Publication House, 1886), p. 18.

<sup>11</sup> Crane's use of the adjectives "pale-faced" and "plump" is usually denigrating.

<sup>12</sup> Frances E. Willard, "Which Shall Win?" in *Readings and Recitations, No. 1*, ed. L[izzie] Penney (New York: National Temperance Society and Publication House, 1877), pp. 9-10.

<sup>13</sup> *Brief History*, p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> Caroline A. Soule, "The Cry of the Women," in *Readings and Recitations, No. 1*, p. 12.

<sup>15</sup> Frances E. Willard, *Woman and Temperance: or, The Work and Workers of The Woman's Christian Temperance Union* (Hartford, CT: Park Publishing, 1883), p. 237.

<sup>16</sup> *London Speaker*, 30 (Aug. 6, 1904), 436-37. This review is reprinted in George Monteiro, "Stephen Crane: A New Appreciation by Edward Garnett," *American Literature*, 50 (Nov. 1978), 465-71.

<sup>17</sup> Maxwell Geismar, *Rebels and Ancestors: The American Novel, 1890-1915* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1953), pp. 95, 94.

<sup>18</sup> Eric Solomon, *Stephen Crane From Parody to Realism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), pp. 60, 66.

<sup>19</sup> Brenda Murphy, "A Woman Without Weapons: The Victor in Stephen Crane's *George's Mother*," *Modern Language Studies*, 11 (Spring 1981), 88-93.

<sup>20</sup> Josephine Pollard, in *Readings and Recitations, No. 4*, ed. L[izzie] Penny (New York: National Temperance Society and Publication House, 1882), "Stolen; or, the Mother's Lament," pp. 83-87.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Helen E. Tyler, *Where Prayer and Purpose Meet: 1874--The WCTU Story--1949* (Evanston, Ill.: Signal Press, 1949), p. 30.

<sup>22</sup> John W. Crowley, *The White Logic: Alcoholism and Gender in American Modernist Fiction* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), p. 30. Crowley makes his point in a chapter on Jack London's *John Barleycorn* (1913).

<sup>23</sup> For John B. Gough pictured as "the Cold-Water warrior," see W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 98.

<sup>24</sup> Belle M. Brain, *Weapons for Temperance Warfare* (Boston and Chicago: United Society of Christian Endeavor, 1897), p. [1].

<sup>25</sup> *Weapons for Temperance Warfare*, p. [3].

<sup>26</sup> *Weapons for Temperance Warfare*, p. [5].

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Mark Edward Lender and James Kirby Martin, *Drinking in America: A History* (New York: Free Press/ London: Collier Macmillan, 1982), p. 107.

<sup>28</sup> *The Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs of the Rev. Isaac Watts, D.D.*, ed. Samuel Worcester (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1834), p. 563.

<sup>29</sup> *A Dictionary of Hymnology*, ed. John Julian (New York: Dover, 1982), p. 55; and Willard, *Woman and Temperance*, pp. 312, 350. Interestingly, in chapter five of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* a minister reads this hymn in "a peculiar style which was much admired in that part of the country. His voice began on a medium key and climbed steadily up till it reached a certain point, where it bore with strong emphasis upon the topmost word and then plunged down as if from a spring-board . . ." (Mark Twain, *Mississippi Writings* [New York: Library of America, 1982], p. 38).

<sup>30</sup> Crane's obituary in *Publishers' Circular* actually listed him as the author of a book entitled *St. George's Mother* (72, June 9, 1900, p. 629). Curiously, there exists a later book by Rev. J. Johns entitled *St. George and the Dragon: England and the Drink Traffic* (London: S.W. Partridge, n.d.). The author's preface is dated 1907.



**John Berryman's "Phase Four" and His Precarious Attempt to Find a Compromise Between Drunkenness, Sobriety, and the A.A. Twelve Step Program**

**Matts Djos**

Phase Four

I will begin by mentioning the word  
 "Surrender"--that's the 4th & final phase.  
 The word. What is the thing, well must be known  
 in Heaven. "Acceptance" is the phase before;

if after finite struggle, infinite aid,  
 ever you come there, friend,  
 remember backward me lost in defiance,  
 as I remember those admitting & complying.

We cannot tell the truth, it's not in us.  
 That truth comes hard. O I am fighting it,  
 my Weapon One: I know I cannot win,  
 and half the war is lost, that's to say won.

The rest is for the blessed. the rest is bells  
 at sundown off across a dozen lawns,  
 a lake, two stands<sup>1</sup> of laurel, where they come  
 out of phase three mild toward the sacristy.

John Berryman

John Berryman's inability to overcome his problems with alcohol may appear somewhat baffling, especially when we consider his remarkable intelligence, the horrific consequences of his drinking, and his apparent ongoing involvement in the A.A. Twelve Step program of recovery. However, a careful analysis of "Phase Four" may help to explain his difficulties in maintaining any semblance of normality, as well as his interest in compromising A.A., his misunderstanding of the Twelve Step focus, and his apparent inability to deal honestly and uncompromisingly with his alcoholism.

The fact that Berryman wrote the poem shortly before his suicide cannot be overlooked in developing any legitimate explication. Indeed, the very presence of this dramatic element may further confuse any analysis of

Berryman's perspective because it is tempting to circumscribe an interpretation with a host of biographical issues that may or may not provide some kind of insight into the poet's behavior, most especially as they are reflected in the basic thrust of the piece. Still, this should not exclude other considerations. Also, since the poem appears to focus on certain aspects of the A.A. program of recovery, I would presume that some understanding of A.A. principles is essential to a valid explication.

The poem deals essentially with the process of "bottoming out" and with the crucial first three steps of the A.A. Twelve Step program of recovery. That program is commonly perceived in three increments: admission of the drinking problem and the decision to seek recovery (steps 1-3); activity focused on the reintegration of the candidate into society with particular emphasis on truth-telling, a relationship to a higher power, and amends (steps 4-9); and the maintenance of sobriety by putting three basic principles into action: the taking of a daily, personal inventory; a conscious effort focused on spiritual fitness and a closer relationship with a Higher Power; and philanthropic community service with regard to other alcoholics (steps 10-12). The first three steps are commonly regarded as the foundation of recovery and serve as the focus of the remainder of the Twelve Step program. Essentially, they involve an admission of helplessness with alcohol, a recognition of the insanity of one's behavior, and a decision to seek the benevolent guidance of God as the candidate understands him.<sup>2</sup>

In explicating "Phase Four," it should be understood that the first three steps of A.A. do not include the act of "bottoming out," even though this particular event is a necessary but destructive predeterminant of an alcoholic's commitment to recovery. However, in writing "Phase Four," Berryman was very likely concerned with both the "bottoming out" phase and at least the first three steps, and there can be little doubt that he knew that these four stages necessarily had to serve as critical precursors to sobriety--at least according to the A.A. model. Thus, while Berryman may have ultimately hoped for some kind of shortcut or amendment to the program to suit his own particular perspective, he also very likely understood the inherent difficulty of adopting such a position, most especially since any such amendment would have compromised A.A.'s tenets.

Berryman's drinking very likely became problematic some time around 1947, when he first realized that he was beginning to have difficulties with his alcohol (168). Ten years later, in 1959, he was admitted to Regent Hospital in New York because of alcohol and stress. In 1967, he was admitted to Abbot Hospital for the same problems; but the heavy drinking persisted following his release, and his longest period of sobriety lasted only from September to December of 1968. In November of 1969, he was admitted to Hazelden, a well-known alcohol treatment center in Minneapolis, where he was diagnosed with "chronic severe alcoholism" (Haffenden 357). A student

who knew Berryman at the University of Minnesota and who was an orderly the night the poet was admitted remembered being surprised that

. . . such a man of wit and genius could be so incredibly broken down and so ordinarily intoxicated. . . . I went through the usual admitting procedure. His beard at the time was untrimmed and shaggy, his eyes hollowed out, and there were large blisters on his hands from wayward cigarettes. He trembled a bit, and talked incessantly. He was still quite intoxicated. (Haffenden 365)

It was at this time that Berryman began working with A.A., although he admitted later having conned his way through the First Step, which he regarded as "merely circumstantial" (Haffenden 374). Still, he continued with the program and even attempted a Second Step because of an apocalyptic experience with a Reverend Jim Zosel (Haffenden 370). We are also told that he even worked a Fifth Step with the encouragement of a Reverend William J. Nolan (Haffenden 372). It was at this time that he thought about abandoning his Roman Catholic faith to become Jewish, but nothing came of the idea.

After his release from Hazelden, Berryman sought weekly counseling for his drinking and marital problems, but his efforts apparently proved ineffective, and he was readmitted to Abbot Hospital in 1969. A year later, in 1970, he was admitted to the alcohol rehabilitation center at St. Mary's Hospital in Minneapolis. He continued with A.A. after his release and proudly earned his sobriety pins, even going so far as to attend weekly A.A. meetings at Stillwater Prison with other members of the St. Mary's group (Haffenden 408). He suffered a series of relapses during the next year and a half; and on Friday, January 6, 1972, he ended his life by jumping from a bridge high above the Mississippi.

The vocabulary and focus of "Phase Four," which was very likely one of his last poems, tell us a good deal about Berryman's frustrations and his concerns about acceptance, serenity, truth-telling, compliance, and surrender. Such struggles are commonplace among recovering alcoholics even though they are an integral part of the nomenclature and discipline of the A.A. program. In any case, Berryman's terrifying battle with alcohol, his own remarkable nomenclature of addiction, and his ongoing efforts at recovery at Hazelden are well documented in his biographical novel, Recovery, and in much of his other poetry--most especially those involving the retrograde, alcoholic persona, Mr. Bones.

In writing "Phase Four," Berryman establishes a set of propositions whose balance is so precarious as to appear almost irreconcilable. As such, the poem appears to serve as a qualified endorsement of the A.A. program, a rejection of certain of its principles, and a petition for understanding. He speaks of his battle as being half lost *and* half won (12), as if some kind of partial commitment to the A.A. program might be sufficient. Berryman was no doubt familiar with the book Alcoholics Anonymous, which makes it

clear that the candidate must be willing to go to any length to attain sobriety and that anything less than complete surrender will probably lead to failure. Bill Wilson, the co-author of the book and co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, writes, "Half measures availed . . . nothing" (59). Wilson's concern about the pointlessness of half measures has served as a cornerstone for many of the values and perspectives of A.A.--indeed, for many recovering alcoholics, it serves as a categorical absolute because it establishes an uncompromising perspective on sobriety and the Twelve Step attack. In presuming he had "won" in any degree, regardless of whether it was in halves or increments of some sort, Berryman was probably hoping to find some way of compromising his own program, and--in so doing--he may well have condemned himself to failure before the fact. Certainly, because of his familiarity with A.A., we should not be surprised at his use of the word, "half"; but it is interesting to note his corruption of the term and his attempts to appropriate its meaning to his own purposes. In this particular case, "acceptance," "lost," "half," and "battle" are perceived in contexts which A.A. would doubtless never endorse.

Berryman also appears somewhat confused because he starts the poem at the "end"--what he regards as the "final phase" (2). In this sense, the poem reflects a common tactic among a good many individuals who are newly recovered and who may be tempted to "two-step" the A.A. Twelve Step Program.<sup>3</sup> Most veteran A.A.'s are likely to insist that such whimsical selectivity cannot, and will not, work. As a rule, a candidate would likely be advised that he can only begin at the beginning and rigorously follow the program step by step *precisely* in the order given, regardless of personal prejudices, fears, or selfish inclinations. By "beginning"--to use Berryman's own word--at the fourth phase instead of the first, be it only in his poem, he may well have provided some evidence that he was self-condemned to defeat before the fact. He writes,

I will begin by mentioning the word  
 "Surrender"--that's the 4th & final phase.  
 The word. What is the thing, well must be known  
 in Heaven. "Acceptance" is the phase before; . . . (1-4)

As Berryman should have known, quality sobriety can only be founded on an admission of powerlessness over alcohol, the crucial first step in the A.A. program of recovery. And such an admission is based on a full and uncompromising recognition of the power and pervasiveness of the disease. Berryman may have felt that he could somehow control his drinking or that he could recover from alcohol dependence in his own way; and from the perspective of A.A. at least, this may have been his nemesis. He may have "bottomed out" and passed through the "first phase," as he called it--although it is tempting to suppose that he probably had not had enough. He most certainly appears to have been incapable of taking the First Step without

qualifications of any sort. Also, in writing about being "final," Berryman may have anticipated his own death, especially because the word "Heaven" is found only two lines later.

In considering the implications of the poem's vocabulary, the word "surrender" is not as difficult to understand as Berryman suggests. As a still suffering alcoholic, he had already been compelled to surrender to his addiction anyway. That "surrender" might well have been extended to a submission to "life" without alcohol. According to the second and third steps of the A.A. program, this involves a willingness to defer to the sanity inherent in a positive relationship to a Higher Power of his own choosing. In Berryman's case, however, it appears that he had devised a cunning method for circumventing the spiritual tenets of the Twelve Step approach, a common strategy of alcoholics who are fearful of the prospect of living without liquor and who cannot consent to the possibility of a Power greater than themselves.

It should be understood that the Second Step, which precedes "surrender," is actually not an imperative action that is taken by the alcoholic; rather, it involves a redemptive spiritual relationship that happens to him. Alcoholics Anonymous makes this very clear in stating that the recovering alcoholic "Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves [sic] could restore us to sanity" (59). Thus, the Second Step is not so obviously defined as a separate "phase" in the alcoholic's history as a moment of grace leading to Step Three.

Berryman also appears to misconstrue the Third Step. It stipulates that the alcoholic commit his life and his will to the care of God *as he understands Him*. This step is necessarily the fourth "phase" in an alcoholic's history, but the poem makes it clear that this "phase" or step is his sticking point. Perhaps he was unable to make the critical decision involved in this step because the God he appears to describe could not be trusted, grasped, or understood by his "finite" perception. In his intellectual rigor, he appears to have felt that surrender to such uncertainty was untenable, although it is most certainly obvious that his spiritual perception had very little to do with sanity or sobriety. The higher power he does describe is a God of laurels, lawns, and lakes, a God whose sacristy is so banal as to be almost meaningless. In any case, this probably explains the title of the poem and the four phases: bottoming out,<sup>4</sup> admission, acceptance, and surrender.

It might also be noted that the surrender that comes with the Third Step is articulated by Berryman in catastrophic terms because he perceived it as an unwelcome consignment to oblivion. Of course, nothing could have been further from the truth. In any case, Berryman was thus restricted by his inability or, perhaps, his unwillingness to understand the full possibilities of spiritual recovery described by A.A.<sup>5</sup>

Berryman has also confounded himself in lexicon. He writes that he cannot understand the "word." "Surrender," which is preceded by "acceptance,"

is itself perceived as a "thing," but the unmanageability of his perceptions, like his life, disrupts any possibility for recovery. The A.A. First Step, that life had become unmanageable because the candidate was powerless over alcohol, is thus discounted through argumentation, rationalization, and subordination. At the same time, "surrender" is paradoxically inflated to an impossible dimension known only "in heaven," while "acceptance" is perceived in the context of "finite" struggle and "infinite" aid. But, here again, Berryman both understands and limits his perceptions. The "Serenity Prayer," a critical element in any A.A. meeting or program, petitions God to help the candidate *accept* what cannot be changed. This includes the fact of alcoholic dependence as well as the capacity to acknowledge powerlessness in all matters external to the self and in most matters involving the self. Such a petition is a tall order, but it is an honest admission of human limitations and compliance with the notion of oneself as an addict.<sup>6</sup>

Berryman is thus entangled in a pointless, finite struggle. He pleads remembrance by those who have attained sobriety, but his petition to these less "defiant" souls appears derisive:

if after finite struggle, infinite aid,  
 ever you come there, friend,  
 remember backward me lost in defiance,  
 as I remember those admitting & complying. (5-8)

Berryman seems to equate his defiance with a certain degree of bathos and a modicum of high-flown dramatics. Perhaps he models his behavior after the image of magisterial rebels like Faust who wagered with the devil or Ahab in Moby Dick who shook his fist in defiance at the Almighty and was struck by lightning for his arrogance. Berryman's posture is not unique, however. Indeed, such grandiose defiance is endemic among unrecovered alcoholics. It embodies, perhaps, the ultimate alcoholic fantasy: to usurp the prerogatives of both God and Satan.

Berryman also insists that his resistance is his "Weapon One" of self-preservation. Yet, that "Weapon," his bottle, his intellect, his defiance, is suicidal. He writes,

That truth comes hard. O I am fighting it,  
 my Weapon One: I know I cannot win,  
 and half the war is lost, that's to say won. (10-12)

The poet is thus immersed in false assumptions and a set of ambiguous generalities, oscillating between the pronouns I and We, trying to generalize about the human condition, and admitting his pain, confusion, and unmitigated resistance to recovery. When he writes, "We cannot tell the truth, it's not in us" (9), who is the "We"? Is it the unrecovered alcoholic? Berryman's "other" self? Humanity in general? Those who cannot or will not surrender? Berryman is not clear. Certainly, he would have recognized the implicit relationship between truth-telling, acceptance, and surrender, simply

because the fearless inventory required in Step Four of the A.A. program requires uncompromising honesty (it is common knowledge among A.A.'s that a person who does not undertake a fearless and thorough Fourth Step is likely to go out and drink again).

For the alcoholic, habituated as he is to grandiose fantasies of self, and hypocritical postures, the truth comes hard, but it is absolutely essential. Thus, although Berryman appears to resist a Twelve Step inventory, which would be his "phase five" or Fourth Step, he is wrong to suppose that it is not possible to tell the truth because it "is not in us" (unless, of course, he is speaking of himself). I would insist that this is the case regardless of whether he has chosen to follow the A.A. program, some other program of recovery, or no program at all. Thus, in establishing himself as "half" lost and "half" won, Berryman appears to equivocate between life and death in the same manner that he equivocates between sobriety and drunkenness.

Berryman seems to have presumed that the only acceptable means of dealing with his sickness was an obsessive preoccupation with the limits of his own resources for attaining sobriety. He apparently was determined to sober up *his* own way (despite his history of failure), to use the A.A. program casually and selectively (and perhaps hypocritically), and to become himself a weapon "one" against himself. Despite his qualified involvement in the program of Alcoholics Anonymous, then, he seems to be saying that he chose to battle with liquor on his own terms; but those terms necessarily required his own death--a kind of "half" victory in which he was sober but dead. The other half of his equation would diminish sobriety to a hypocritical, quasi-commitment to the A.A. Twelve Step program. Such a commitment represented a form of death-in-life, a prospect which he probably considered equally unpalatable.

In the final lines of the poem, Berryman discusses the "rest" who have attained sobriety--presumably through Alcoholics Anonymous. His description of "rest" echoes the pun of George Herbert's in his poem "The Pulley." In Herbert's classic poem, God denies man any rest by not pouring the "rest" of the cup of blessings on man as a portion of his divine inheritance.<sup>7</sup> Like Herbert's cup nearly four hundred years earlier, Berryman's cup of "blessing" is void of "rest." This includes the "rest" of the A.A. program of recovery (including Steps Five through Twelve), perceived obligingly as leading to the serenity that he coveted.

It appears that Berryman assumed that sobriety comprised some kind of resignation to inertia or the unwelcome dictates of a Higher Power. To use the lexicon of A.A., he appears to have concluded that a life without drinking was likely to be dull, boring, and glum. Certainly, this kind of perspective is commonplace among recovering alcoholics--most especially during the early months of recovery. The A.A. "Big Book"<sup>8</sup> is filled with stories about alcoholics who were fearful that a life of sobriety might be unbearable or

terribly monotonous; and it testifies again and again to candidates who felt at first that A.A. might in some way compromise their individuality.<sup>9</sup> A.A. notes that such people did not realize that their lives and personalities had already been compromised by their drinking behavior and that they could only regain a realistic sense of self through sobriety.

A.A. makes it very clear that a program of sobriety cannot be restricted to a reclusive sanctuary or a sacristy. The two stands of laurel<sup>10</sup> described by Berryman might foreshadow some kind of grace in sobriety, described in the poem as a form of "rest" for those who are "blessed" in sobriety. However, he appears to have rejected this "blessed" state in life; indeed, one wonders if the particular laurel he coveted had any significance at all--except in his own fantasies, because it was compromised by a refusal to affirm the sobriety promised by A.A. Similarly, his reference to the "sacristy"--that place where the sacred vessels are kept--has a direct connection to the sacramental wines, now reserved for the chosen few and denied those who are perceived as "blessed" and "mild" (and sober?!) in their humble acceptance of this blessed sanctuary.

Despite all that he professed in his earlier poetry, Berryman never seems to have been able to manifest Step Two and believe in a power *truly* greater than himself, so he self-destructed through alcohol and accepted death as his delivery and salvation. Although he gives every indication that he believed otherwise, he could not acknowledge that he was not surrendering his humanity, but his inhumanity. Surrender was thus perceived as some kind of covert degradation of his intellectual freedom, his integrity as a poet, and his connectedness to life itself. That he accepted and chose to be defeated by alcohol rather than surrender and offer up his own "demons" testifies to the insanity, albeit creative, of alcoholism. Finally, that he defiantly refused to surrender to life and to spiritual wellness is also tragic; for it imprisoned him in the drunkenness and alcoholic dependence that may have presaged his own suicide.

## Notes

1. Thomas Gilmore notes that in Henry's Fate it is printed "strands," but a letter addressed to him from John Haffenden pointed out that this is a typographical error.

2. The first three steps are as follows:

We admitted that we were powerless over alcohol--that our lives had become unmanageable.

Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.

3. In its most common form, "two-stepping" is the act of skipping from Step One (in which the candidate admits powerlessness over alcohol and the unmanageability of his life) to Step Twelve (at this point, having had a spiritual



awakening, the candidate carries the A.A. message to other alcoholics and tries to practice the A.A. twelve step program in all his affairs). It is a way of skipping those steps which are too rigorous or which may not appear all that pleasant. Berryman is reported to have "two-stepped" when he was in rehabilitation. Apparently, he may have even done some "thirteenth stepping," the act of taking an inordinate interest in members of the opposite sex at A.A. meetings and the like.

4. Thomas Gilmore suggests that the first phase is awareness, but I think that the majority of alcoholics who are "aware" of their drinking problem are not yet prepared to attempt recovery. As I previously noted, the "bottoming out" phase, in which the consequences of drinking have become so painful and so intolerable that the alcoholic is compelled to seek recovery, is probably "phase one."

5. A.A. does discuss the problems of release from the "bondage of self," a common concern among most of the world's great religions. The possibility that Berryman may not have been able to find such release may have led to his failure in dealing with his alcoholism.

6. Acceptance of the sort found in the Serenity Prayer also acknowledges the superior goodness and benevolence of God's plan over human concerns. The petitioner thus *would not want to change anything* because--as A.A. would likely suggest--he has come to understand that God's Plan exceeds his own grasp of the ultimate meaning of what is right and true. That is, A.A. might note that everything is as it should be. Hence, the prayer ultimately is not so much a petition for patience as it is a petition for understanding and wisdom.

7. The entire poem is as follows:

When God at first made man,  
Having a glasse of blessings standing by;  
Let us (said he) poure on him all we can:  
Let the worlds riches, which dispersed lie,  
Contract into a span.

So strength first made a way;  
Then beautie flow'd, then wisdome, honour, pleasure:  
When almost all was out, God made a stay,  
Perceiving that alone of all his treasure  
Rest in the bottome lay.

For if I should (said he)  
Bestow this jewell also on my creature,  
He would adore my gifts in stead of me,  
And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature:  
So both should losers be.

Yet let him keep the rest,  
But keep them with repining restlessness:  
Let him be rich and wearie, that at least,  
If goodnesse leade him not, yet weariness  
May tesse him to my breast.

8. "Big Book" is the term commonly used by A.A.'s when referring to the text Alcoholics Anonymous.

9. See Alcoholics Anonymous: The Story of How Many Thousands of Men and Women Have Recovered From Alcoholism. 3rd Edition. New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1976. 72-74, "The News Hawk," 251-260; "Those Golden Years," 327-334; "Physician, Heal Thyself!" 345-352; "Rum, Radio and Rebellion," 356-368.

10. Laurel was commonly a symbol of victory given to poets as well as athletes and heroes.

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## The Inner Temple

George Wedge

i.  
 Maybe I was ten--I know it was the year I sang  
 the whole Good Friday service,  
 hours of keeping watch,  
 waiting to perform another song  
 that told the next part of the story  
 nineteen and some odd hundred years already gone.

In between, they read and prayed,  
 dead voices in dead air  
 that kept music from seducing you.  
 I wanted the seduction of the story;  
 many stories I knew lay hidden  
 in stained glass behind Good Friday drapes.

Whatever year it was that I was ten,  
 my father was somewhere else,  
 mostly in Boston and environs.

That year, a fire somewhat smaller than Atlanta  
 destroyed a nightclub called Coconut Grove.  
 Fake palm trees and other flammable delights  
 circled the occupants like burning wagons  
 and smothered those who did not fry.

Had I said my father was a crepe paper decorator  
 working the hot spots sober, leaving them drunk  
 two or three days later when his pay ran out?

I know I thought about him while I looked  
 for the stained glass window with the burning bush.  
 I thought about postcards from Cape Cod and Plymouth Rock,  
 with three word messages like "Thinking of you!"  
 and a one word lie before he signed his name.  
 When you are ten, people who love you  
 stay with you or at least write a letter  
 if they're maybe in a fire.

We were singing the sixth of seven last words.  
 I had been fasting because I wanted to know  
 what it would be like when I got confirmed  
 and could eat bread, drink wine,  
 and believe they were something else.

My mouth opened and closed; the sound came out  
 high and sweet as it was supposed to,  
 but my lungs were bitter  
 and there was a taste in my mouth like vinegar.  
 It had nothing to do with Christ.

It was my father listening to my mother  
 tell him to go to Boston,  
 it was not knowing if he would come back,  
 it was not saying good-bye before the wind took him,  
 it was blistering in the fire.  
 It was my own thirst mimicking his.

Something about me drew the eye  
 of the choirmaster, an aging organist who gave us  
 pocket change from his salary when we sang well.  
 He took me aside after the singing  
 and paid me with water and a cookie,  
 made me rest on a cot as if I'd fainted,  
 but I was awake; I hadn't missed a thing.

I had been staring at the black drapes,  
 watching the small grey squares the sun made  
 where reds and blues and yellows ought to be.  
 All of a sudden I had seen a flame yellow sky  
 pointing down at the central pane,  
 a flame red earth pointing up there,  
 where my father danced and leaped between,  
 laughing at the fiery furnace,  
 stringing streamers in some lady's hair,  
 the flames pointing every way but out.  
 A window on the wages of sin, the fruits of love.

His smile beckoned me into light,  
 his streamer flowed outward in vast blue circles.  
 "Come on, Son," he whispered,  
 "Time is only a wasting away.  
 Love comes and goes and may not come again."

ii.

At Christmas, my father came from Boston,  
 not home exactly, but to the city.  
 He came to hear us sing at midnight  
 and there were lights everywhere  
 among the high voices.  
 A red robed acolyte carried the cross  
 reflected on the dark surfaces  
 of windows that shone outward,  
 black as night when the crucifer passed.

I was eleven, not quite ready for communion,  
 but after New Year she let him move home.

That summer, they sent me to the farm  
 so I could be a real boy, muscular and fresh in sunlight.  
 By mid-June everyone had had enough  
 and the farmer's wife returned me.  
 There was an ambulance for someone waiting.  
 We stood watching everything go somewhere else:  
 Furniture I never saw again drove off;  
 mother went to a sanitarium I couldn't visit;  
 father trimmed windows at five and tens,  
 traveling from one small town to another;  
 I touched down at grandmother's house.

Sundays, I walked cross-town to church,  
 to sing the early morning communion,  
 get ready to be an acolyte, a crucifer.  
 On the walk back down Washington Street,  
 I'd play with a cat in an empty storefront  
 near the City Mission I attended in the afternoon.  
 The girl next door went there  
 on her grandfather's bus.  
 I didn't like the fat hams of the men  
 who sweated beside me in the pews.

The girl's red lips were the same color  
as the flames of the burning bush.

I would play with my fingers on the window  
and the cat would bat its paws at them,  
press its nose and lithe body against the pane.  
I thought it liked me and would follow me  
if I broke the window.  
But I didn't break the window.  
I was eleven and knew an illusion when I saw one.

The Christmas I was twelve  
mother left the sanitarium.  
Then, New Year's day, she left town  
from the Greyhound Station,  
swearing no man of hers would ever  
be so thirsty again.

Nobody came on Palm Sunday except the Bishop,  
who found me conformably confirmed.

Acolytes didn't sing Good Friday or any other time.  
It had rained for a month.  
The covered windows were totally dark.  
I sat looking at strange rainbow drops  
of water on the back of my hand--  
not drops, really--flat, shiny places  
as lacking in perspective as stained glass.

He danced there in yellow light,  
swaying uncertainly, like a candle.  
He laughed at me, a man of fragments,  
black tracery lines cutting through  
his red robes, his blue eyes shining.  
He batted his hands against the glass,  
but I was twelve and knew all about illusion.

iii.

Mother took the bus back three times  
and I was still twelve in August  
when she sat with my grandmother  
saying it was now or never as far as she could see.  
She'd come to get me one last time.

He was sleeping one off upstairs  
and wouldn't come down.  
She said if she could come all these miles,  
he could come a few feet.  
I climbed the stairs and came down again.

I sat on the stairs halfway up or down.  
He had said it was over, time for me to go.  
That way, perhaps he'd get a little rest.  
The paper was tired of clinging to the walls,  
its dusty green bounced off the glass  
covering a sepia portrait of Napoleon Elliott,  
my grandmother's father, who fought honestly  
on the Union side and is buried in Nineveh.  
Upstairs, his grandson made bedspring squeaks;  
downstairs two women talked endlessly.

A transom above the door admitted slant light,  
and sunmotes hovering above the stairs  
made an opposed stairway on which figures moved  
slowly along precharted courses  
on sad, secret missions of eternity.  
One was a blonde woman, modishly dressed.  
Sure of herself, she moved in strong strides  
traveling like light itself back to its source.  
A child beside her peers back over his shoulder.  
Elsewhere, a tall man dallied, hunkering down  
in the pale, luminous late afternoon.  
A tableau, as in church windows,  
carefully spelling the story out in red and gold and blue.

Nothing really moved.



## *Spiritus contra spiritum: The Recovery Narrative and "Spirituality"*

**Kevin McCarron**

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It is of the essence of Protestantism and of German philosophy that religion should gradually drop its supernatural personages and comforting private hopes and be absorbed in the duty of living manfully and conscientiously the conventional life of the world.

Santayana

In *Equivocal Spirits*, Thomas Gilmore notes that a chief strength of literature is "its awareness that often the root cause or effect of the illness of alcoholism is spiritual" (Gilmore 9). With its understanding of alcoholism as a tripartite illness--mental, physical, and spiritual-- Alcoholics Anonymous similarly places great stress upon the spiritual. The link between recovery and spirituality is emphasized by a number of writers of recovery narratives. In *A Nice Girl Like Me*, Rosie Boycott writes of Jung's well-known letter to Bill W: "To Bill, Jung's letter meant a master's confirmation of what he, as a layman, had struggled to prove: that the alcoholic can only be rescued through experiences which must be accounted spiritual" (Boycott 204). In *Time Is All We Have*, Barnaby Conrad writes of his time at the Betty Ford Center:

There was no heavy insistence on religion as such at the BFC, yet since the treatment and preparation for subsequent after-care was based on the Alcoholics Anonymous program, it perforce placed considerable emphasis on the spiritual side of the patient's treatment and development during his time there (Conrad 252).

Caroline Knapp, in *Drinking: A Love Story*, writes of her own reluctant admission of alcoholism: "The gift of desperation has a spiritual quality" (Knapp 210). In *Any Woman's Blues*, Erica Jong's protagonist, Leila, says of AA: "[T]he Program led me to see my life in spiritual terms, and I blew it--maybe because I couldn't *take* my life actually getting better" (Jong 137).

The specific nature of the "spiritual" experiences within recovery narratives, however, is strikingly vague. Conrad writes: "I am not arrogant or wise enough to presume that there is or is not a God. But I know that I did go through some sort of spiritual awakening, and most of the other graduates of the BFC that I've talked with have told of similar happenings" (Conrad 252).

The imprecision of the phrase "some sort of spiritual awakening" is absolutely characteristic of the genre. Specificity is only achieved within recovery narratives confrontationally, when stressing the differences between religion and spirituality. In Getting Better: Inside Alcoholics Anonymous, Nan Roberts writes: "*Spiritual* and *Spirituality* are words one hears a lot of in A.A. 'It's not a religious program, it's a spiritual program' is a sentence A.A.'s utter over and over again to newcomers and nonmembers. Many of them feel the difference without being able to define it" (Roberts 145).

In Sobering Tales: Narratives of Alcoholism and Recovery, Edmund B. O'Reilly writes of AA meetings: "The AA distinction between religion and spirituality is almost universally appreciated, and theology as such is only rarely an ingredient in AA stories" (O'Reilly 154). Roberts writes of the founders of AA: "Neither Wilson nor Dr. Bob Smith was a religious person in any conventional sense of the term" (Roberts 129). Gilmore writes of literature's ability to portray the spiritual dimensions of alcoholism: "'Spiritual' should certainly not be reduced in meaning to 'religious'; any good definition of the term would be capacious, including many elements of the irrational and the emotional" (Gilmore 11). Both Roberts' use of the word "conventional" and Gilmore's use of "reduced" imply that a narrow religiosity is necessarily inferior to an inclusive spirituality, a view which pervades contemporary culture.

O'Reilly's reference to spirituality in AA focuses on the advantages of an ill-defined spirituality:

AA's indeterminate spirituality is a zone where inner experiences--feeling-states, imprecise cognitions, awkwardly intermingled ideas and affects--may be articulated in nonsectarian language, made accessible to others across a range of aptitudes, habits, and codes (O'Reilly 154).

Equally, however, it is possible to focus not on advantages, but on loss. It is certainly possible to argue that within the recovery narrative, as within the larger culture, the word "spiritual" has become an inchoate term of approbation without any determinable referent; that it is, essentially, different from religion precisely because it is both subjective and secular. Although there are, of course, numerous orthodox Christians within AA, it is a striking feature of the recovery narrative that so many narrators and protagonists are not practicing Christians. Indeed, the struggle to accept the "God part" is virtually a generic requirement. However, appearances to the contrary, recovery narratives rarely depict an individual's acceptance of God; rather they articulate the procedures whereby God is replaced. In this, recovery narratives reflect the growing tendency within Western democracies to substitute a secular humanism for a transcendent God.

This is by no means a recent phenomenon. In his book Emerson and Power, Michael Lopez writes: "The habit of using a traditional religious

terminology in the advancement of ideas that are neither traditional nor Christian, nor even religious, is one of the distinguishing features of post-Enlightenment philosophy and literature" (Lopez 157). The recovery narrative can be seen as a particularly American genre, indebted to the confluence of German metaphysics and Protestant theology which had such an impact on the intellectual life of America in the nineteenth century. Assessing the post-Hegelian tradition in 1846, Kierkegaard wrote: "The entire Christian terminology has been appropriated by speculative thought to its own purposes. . . . The concepts have been emasculated and the words have been made to mean anything and everything" (Lopez 157). Within the recovery narrative, the word "spiritual" certainly seems to mean "anything and everything." Roberts writes: "An atheist member of A.A. said, 'People use the word spiritual in ways that define themselves. I think it means the ability to get outside one's own immediate concerns to perform an altruistic act'" (Roberts 145). The spirituality which is so pervasive within recovery narratives forms part of a humanistic enterprise which has, with remarkable success, appropriated a religious discourse to strictly secular, albeit admirable, ends. Authors of recovery narratives employ a variety of techniques, including elision, qualification, chiasmus and conflation, to construct a model of spirituality which is thoroughly secular while shrouded in the language of religion.

It is often suggested, certainly in England, that the most American aspect of AA is its emphasis on public disclosure, but this, absolutely crucial, aspect of the program seems to emerge from the European Protestant tradition and is not a specifically American practice. What is truly American about AA is its pragmatism. AA is not interested in theological speculation; it is interested in the continuous sobriety of the alcoholic. To AA members, sobriety is God. To engage in debates about the precise ontological status of the individual's "Higher Power" would be pointless, even prejudicial to the individual's sobriety. It seems perfectly proper for AA to maintain a cautious disdain for theological speculation, but equally proper for the disinterested observer to note by what linguistic strategies its humanist value system has been constructed. Recovery narratives are transformative texts, employing the concepts and imagery of religion to construct humanist alternatives.

In discussing Bill W. and Dr. Bob, Roberts writes: "Some revere these two men as saints. This is not surprising when you consider the lives, directly and indirectly, they have saved" (Roberts 21). However, it is surprising if one believes that "saving lives" is not the only criterion for establishing sainthood. Roberts writes that many A.A. members "regard the Big Book and other authorized A.A. literature almost as Holy Writ" (Roberts 105). But the Big Book is not "Holy Writ"; it is a recovery narrative. And the persistent use of meretricious equivalences and conflation within the genre is

given its ultimate sanction by AA itself. Roberts describes one of the most important moments in the mythology of AA:

During the final months of his drinking in 1934, his old school-mate Ebby, who had gotten sober in the Oxford Group, suggested to his resistant friend, "*Why don't you choose your own conception of God?*" Wilson recounted his reaction: "That statement hit me hard," he wrote. "It melted the icy intellectual mountain in whose shadow I had lived and shivered many years. . . . *It was only a matter of being willing to believe in a Power greater than myself. Nothing more was required of me to make my beginning*" (Roberts 139).

This "Power greater than myself," or "Higher Power," may be, essentially, anything the alcoholic desires it to be. Roberts writes of AA: "Some members are religious, and some are agnostics or atheists. Many members choose to believe that their 'higher power' is their A.A. group" (Roberts 100). That one should be asked by an organization to surrender to a "higher power," but that this "higher power" could be that organization itself is as neat, and tautologous, a line of thinking as could be found. It is an example of the ease with which "equivalences," irrespective of their plausibility, are constructed and maintained within recovery narratives. Roberts writes of the last of the three central ideas Bill W. took from William James' The Varieties of Religious Experience: "Third was an appeal to a higher power, or at least a cry of help to another human being" (Roberts 61). Bill W. deftly turns James' God into his Higher Power, implying that there is no ontological difference between the two referents, then suggests that an appeal to the Higher Power is much the same as an appeal to another human being.

Boycott writes: "But the whole question of God in AA is a stumbling block" (Boycott 202). It is rarely a "stumbling block" in recovery narratives, however, precisely because God is envisaged so loosely. Conrad writes of his treatment: "It was reiterated that God, or the preferred term Higher Power, was as we perceived him as individuals, not the way some formal church tradition or TV preacher might have pictured Him" (Conrad 202). The use of the word "or" at the opening of the statement takes for granted that these two terms "God" and "Higher Power" are synonymous, and the second "or" assumes an equivalence between a centuries-old religious tradition and the hucksterism of a contemporary media evangelist--a thoroughly illusory equivalence, but one which permits the alcoholic to reject conventional Christianity in favor of an entirely subjective construct.

Recounting his experiences at an AA meeting, Conrad cites a female alcoholic:

I . . . mentally ran through all the notions of God I had rejected. I knew I didn't believe in God the lion, God our father, God the

punisher of sins, or Jesus Christ as God. I considered other definitions of a Higher Power. I heard a few people say that their AA group was their Higher Power. One woman described God as a loving force, or the kindness generated by people (Conrad 113).

Again, the easy transition from God to Higher Power is noticeable, as is the use of the word "or" to establish an equivalence between a transcendent entity and the mere manifestations of social amiability.

Erica Jong relies heavily on conflation to steer her protagonist, Leila, through the spiritual dimensions of AA's program: "Her. Or Him. It doesn't even matter; it's a sort of vanity even to argue about the sex of God. We're talking about spirit here, the gift of life--and whether you choose to affirm or deny it. That's all this is about" (Jong 137). Jong moves from "God," to "spirit," to "gift of life," as though all three were synonymous. Recounting her experiences at an AA meeting, Leila suddenly realizes: "We were not human beings going through spiritual experiences; we were spiritual beings going through human experiences, in order to grow" (Jong 202). The meaningless chiasmus is succeeded by an equally meaningless intransitive--grow into what? The sentence is characteristic, not just of Jong's book, but of the linguistic slippages and disregard for precision encountered whenever religion is represented within the recovery narrative.

The implications of this are considerable--socially, quite as much as textually. O' Reilly writes: "The nineteenth-century temperance tale is a distinctive literary genre shaped in conformity with the multifaceted social movement that was an energetic agent in American culture and politics for well over a century" (O'Reilly 55). It is possible that O'Reilly underestimates the reciprocal relationship between society and literature. Narratives are not only shaped in conformity with social movements, they also inform those social movements in their turn. However, despite this reservation, it is possible to suggest that recovery narratives offer a microcosmic view of this century's drive to reject the divinity of Christ, or, from another perspective, they reflect its insistence on replacing the supernatural elements of religion with rational, moral ones. Nowhere can this avoidance of the numinous be more clearly seen than in the recovery narratives' representation of the related concepts of rebirth, regeneration, and resurrection. The seeds of this movement, however, can be found in the nineteenth century.

Throughout nineteenth century temperance fiction there is a clear shift from the religious to the secular and from the social and political to the individual and the personal, a move replicated in the processes of AA and within recovery narratives. Although preachers and ministers are ubiquitous figures in temperance literature, their usual function is to remind drunks of their obligations to their families, or, less often, to the community. Resurrection in such narratives is invariably represented metaphorically. In

Mrs. S. Graham Clark's "How His Easter Came," Godfrey Brent, previously a drunkard, vows to his aged mother to give up drink:

"My son," she quavered. . . . "It is Easter Sunday."

"Yes," he cried, "my Easter, mother! I am risen from the dead! For," his voice sank to a tender whisper and Sally, in the doorway, caught a rapturous breath,--"for I have been dead and am alive again--alive forevermore!" (Shaw, 236).

The insertion of the personal pronoun--"my Easter"--clearly signals the view of Christ's resurrection as a metaphor for personal growth. This metaphorical understanding of the resurrection pervasive in temperance narratives leads inevitably to the eventual abandonment of God, as understood in any orthodox sense, seen in later AA practice and in recovery narratives, both of which are indebted to this body of literature.

Recovery narratives reject the orthodox Christian tenet of literal bodily resurrection and reconstruct it in metaphorical, allegorical terms. In this, as in much else, they are thoroughly modern texts. The anthropologist Mircea Eliade writes in Rites and Symbols of Initiation:

For the earliest Christians, the resurrection established a new era of history--the validation of Jesus as Messiah, and hence the spiritual transmutation of man and the total renewal of the world. . . . It is impossible to attain to a higher mode of being, it is impossible to participate in a new irruption of sanctity into the world or into history, except by dying to profane, unenlightened existence and being reborn to a new, regenerated life (Eliade 118).

What is particularly striking here is the leap Eliade makes from the resurrection of Christ to the assumption that resurrection is a metaphor for an individual being "reborn to a new, regenerated life." This is the view of resurrection adopted by the recovery narrative--it demonstrates the possibility of individual regeneration.

In Those Drinking Days, Donald Newlove, a novelist, writes of his early days in AA: "I drew the line at Fundamentalism, the truth of the Scriptures, Bible miracles, virgin birth, resurrection of the body in any religion, and I was skeptical of the Crucifixion. . . . But . . . I was ready to accept the Crucifixion as a spiritual mystery, and most Christian mysteries as metaphors for the uses of adversity" (Newlove 107). Bill W. records that his newly sober friend Ebby looks to him like someone "raised from the dead" (O'Reilly 110). Resurrection is a trope, a rhetorical figure, gesturing only at the possibility of personal renewal in this life, and not at all toward eternal life.

Many of the protagonists of recovery narratives stress the "life and death" nature of their struggle with alcoholism. Conrad observes of a group session during his stay at the Betty Ford Clinic:

. . . [T]hey were sharing a--and the simple and unremarkable word came to me--"fellowship." I'd heard people who had been in the

Army or Navy or Marine Corps in wartime talk about unlikely and extraordinary fellowships created by sharing life or death situations.

This, too, I reflected was a life or death situation (Conrad 110).

Roberts quotes a counselor at Smithers, one of the most successful rehabilitation clinics in New York City: "This is a life-and-death situation--your life and your death. . . . Up to now your life has been abuse. What it can be is recovery" (Roberts 216). The rehabilitation program which Jerry Dunn begins his book God Is for the Alcoholic by outlining is called, significantly, the New Life Program. The dedication in Roberts' Getting Better reads: "To The Anonymous Alcoholics Who Saved My Life." This binarism--life and death, sobriety and addiction--is absolutely characteristic of recovery narratives, which are temporally and structurally organized around a before and an after. The "before" lists the effects of an always-escalating addiction on the protagonist, while the "after" depicts the restoration of the alcoholic to sobriety.

Although there is the imminent possibility of death unless the protagonist becomes sober, the opposite of death in recovery narratives is not life, but sobriety--a synonym for life. Recovery narratives articulate a process whereby death is not vanquished, as it is within the orthodox theological perspective, but is only temporarily forestalled, the deferral predicated absolutely on continued sobriety. Strikingly, however, recovery narratives obscure what is actually a temporary frustration of death and, instead, by employing the traditional rhetoric of rebirth, act as though their protagonists had *literally* died and been resurrected. Recovery narratives have numerous cultural services to perform, but a primary function of the genre is to persuade its readers that metaphorical death and literal death are of the same order of being; that they have the same ontological status.

Qualification and elision are, again, the characteristic rhetorical strategies employed to represent resurrection both by AA and necessarily by narratives which are indebted to the organization's redemptive powers. Describing his own conversion to Christ, which occurs in a Texas jail, Dunn writes: "Spiritually, I was dead. . . . I knew I was dead and the thing that I needed was life. I didn't know anything about theology. I didn't really know anything about the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. . . ." (Dunn 126). Dunn follows the same process offered by Eliade, quoted above: Eliade moves from the resurrection of Christ to the rejuvenation of the individual, and Dunn begins with the resurrection of the historical Jesus and sees it as exemplary of the redemption of the individual. In both cases the underlying assumption is that the two events, the historical resurrection and individual regeneration, are equivalent, that they possess an equal theological weight. Although, as noted earlier, a rigid distinction between "before" and "after" characterizes the genre, conflation is also a primary dynamic of the redemptive process in the recovery narrative. Dunn's observation "Spiritually, I was dead" is simply another way

of saying "Physically, I was alive." In other words, of course, "I was not dead." Recovery narratives reflect a pervasive contemporary disinclination to discriminate; equality is the *sine qua non* of contemporary life, and this is as true of the spiritual and the intellectual as it is of the physical and the literal.

Recovery narratives are indebted to a fundamentally Christian conception of the self, which they then reject. In his Howison lectures at Berkeley in 1980, Foucault suggested that while a pagan thinker like Seneca believed that the self could become a master in its own house "a Christian like Cassian regarded the self as a kind of groundless abyss from which dark powers constantly erupted, distracting us from the only sure source of salvation--a conversion in one's attitude toward one's self" (Miller 323). The Christian culture of the self thus stressed the need for a relentlessly suspicious form of self-examination, conducted under the watchful eye of a spiritual guide. Miller summarizes: "To bear witness against oneself properly, the Christian had to make all sins manifest . . . submitting the self to a 'kind of martyrdom'" (Miller 323). This process might include the display of scars and wounds, which, in recovery narratives, is performed through articulation of past activities, rather than as a physical demonstration. The persistent drive of the recovery narrative to depict literal death and metaphorical death as equivalent, utilizing the conventional imagery of rebirth and resurrection, forms part of a displaced Christian asceticism. In order to defeat the "demon drink," a phrase literally much in use in temperance narratives, the alcoholic must be removed from the snares and temptations of this world; this is achieved in large part through the symbolic staging of the alcoholic's own death, and included in this construct is the possibility of a personal, strictly secular, resurrection.

Roberts writes: "The two basic texts of Alcoholics Anonymous--its Twelve Steps to recovery and the Big Book, which contain the steps--are studded with references to God. Six of the Twelve Steps mention God directly or by implication" (Roberts 139). However, God is dead within the recovery narrative; the whole drama of fall, redemption, and resurrection is now contained solely within the human community.

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