DIONYSOS

the literature and intoxication triquarterly

Winter 1990 Vol. 1 No. 3

Contents

Editorial 2

A Thrice-Told Tale: Fiction and Alcoholism in Richard Yates's Disturbing the Peace
Anya Taylor 3

Children of Alcoholics in Literature: Portraits of the Struggle (Part One)
Timothy M. Rivinus & Brian W. Ford 13

The Incorrigible Dirigible (Poem)
Hayden Carruth 24

Politics and Recovery
A review of Judith McDaniel's Metamorphosis
Jet Wimp 27

A Taboo Lifted
A review of Thomas B. Gilmore's Equivocal Spirits
Donald C. Irving 31

A Mixed Bag
A review of Adult Children of Alcoholics Remember, E. Nelson Hayes, editor
Thomas B. Gilmore 35

The Truth of Fiction
A review of The Invisible Enemy, Miriam Dow and Jennifer Regan, editors
John J. Halligan 39

Brief Reviews 47

Notes and Comment 49

About the Contributors to Dionysos 51

University of Wisconsin-Superior

EDITORIAL

I find it difficult to recall a period when there has been so much creative confusion on the alcohol and drug scene as now. Mr. Bush and Mr. Bennett declare War on Drugs, and immediately editorialists, policy analysts, and intellectuals attack each other. Interestingly, the trenches are not being dug along the usual ideological lines. The current issues, for example, of two major conservative journals--National Review and Commentary--contain opposing arguments: Michael S. Gazzaniga, in the former, recommending drug legalization; James Q. Wilson, in the latter, condemning it. Not to be outdone, Jefferson Morley writes in The New Republic (2 October 1989) that crack cocaine is not such bad stuff. He knows; he's tried it and lived to joke about it. The learned journals have not hoarded their ammunition either. Irving Maltzman, in Journal of Studies on Alcohol (September 1989), revived the attack by the disease-model-of-alcoholism theorists on the controlled-drinking researchers (the Sobels, Alan Marlatt, et al.), reminding one once more of the strong, underlying link between libertarianism and the behavioral sciences on the one hand, and conservatism and medicine on the other. Finally, if things were not complicated enough, The New England Journal of Medicine has published (11 January 1990) a major finding that, after all, women can't tolerate as much booze as men!

With the big battalions emptying their inventories on one another, it is a relief to be able to state that the thoughtful voice of medical historian David Musto has not been absent from the battle (Insight cover article, 20 November 1989). History--as Aristotle reminds us--leads to art. One therefore dreams that the "billion-footed beast" "stalked" by Tom Wolfe in last November's Harper's would end the hostilities by putting the whole matter into a great novel of social realism. Dionysos would be delighted to publish such an effort by, for instance, Updike or Bellow or Roth or, for that matter, Wolfe himself (even though it would require twenty issues!). As it is, we make, I firmly believe, a solid start in this issue toward that goal. As Thomas Gilmore, John Halligan, and Hamilton Cochrane remind us, all human experience is first articulated as anecdote: as parable, fable, tale, story. This insight is made real here in Hayden Carruth's poem, in (as Anya Taylor demonstrates) Richard Yates's novel, and in the works explored by Timothy Rivinus, Brian Ford, Jet Wimp, Donald Irving, and the editor.

A THRICE-TOLD TALE
FICTION AND ALCOHOLISM IN RICHARD YATES'S DISTURBING THE PEACE

Anya Taylor

Intensive work in recent years on alcoholism in literature has demonstrated the large numbers of writers who were alcoholic, their preoccupation with alcoholic themes in their works, and in some cases, their loss of skill, discipline, and power as a result of alcohol abuse.[1] If heavy drinking has indeed been established as a prevalent disease of writers in America, we need to wonder if writing and drinking are connected by deeper links than the coincidences of biography, history, and social behavior; in other words, to wonder if there exists any underlying connection between drinking and story-telling.

This question has been partially answered by the pseudonymous "Elpenor" writing in Harper's Magazine. In "A Drunkard's Progress: AA and the Sobering Strength of Myth," "Elpenor" (who takes his name from Odysseus's crew member who fell off Circe's roof) ventures that the similarity lies in the compulsion to tell stories in Alcoholics Anonymous and in writing, to confess truly, to shape the chaotic experience in a communicative and healing form. Arguing that "drunkenness is the most verbal of human conditions," Elpenor writes, "drinking, all we did was tell stories, if only to ourselves. Drinking, we built ourselves a drunk's ladder of words, one end propped on clouds, the other floating on water." The drunkard makes up possible selves; in AA he or she "offers himself up, a creature as wretched and glorious as the powers of speech, for us to identify with . . . if he can only go on telling his story."[2]

Having made this important connection between drinking and story telling, between fluidity and fluency, Elpenor trusts that alcoholics will tell true stories, or at least fairy tales that are useful. He does not discuss the dishonest aspects of story telling among alcoholics, such as interpretations of experience that lay the blame on others or that deny the reality of the problem. Lies, defenses, denial, and evasion show the story telling skills of the alcoholic as well as his or her honest, healing confessions. Stories told by or to alcoholics at the bar, in the bedroom, or in an AA meeting, may be untrue, or, even if "true," may be one side of the story, biased, shaped, or slanted.

Stories told to alcoholics and by alcoholics about themselves may also be damaging, by telling in advance a story or prediction that may turn out to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Such stories, probable or improbable extrapolations from truly or falsely interpreted situations, may take on a power to influence future behavior in an almost magical way. In such cases, the story-telling common to writers and to alcoholics (sometimes the

same person) becomes dangerous.

The power of a damaging story is at the heart of Richard Yates's fine but neglected novel Disturbing the Peace (1975).[3] Its seemingly simple narrative is complicated by an inner layer of fiction which, told three times, increases in power until it finally destroys the outer layer of the larger fiction.

John Wilder's fictional life is the outer frame, the outside fiction in Disturbing the Peace. He is uneducated, unhappily married, dissatisfied with his meaningless advertising job, disappointed in his disapproving son, and alcoholic. At the start of the larger outside narrative of the novel, John Wilder returns drunk to New York City from a sales trip to Chicago. He is sleepless and truculent, refusing to return to his wife Janice, and relying on his friend Paul to extricate him from his duties. Since it is the beginning of a long Labor Day Weekend, and no detoxification centers were then available, Paul and the hospital authorities commit Wilder to the Men's Violent Ward at Bellevue, to keep him out of trouble in his drunkenness.

His four-day incarceration in the Men's Violent Ward becomes the "inside" fiction within the larger fiction of the novel. This episode, occupying chapter two and spanning forty-two pages, takes on a power of its own, dominating his life and obliterating his freedom to choose among possible outcomes.

That Wilder does not deserve this incarceration in the Violent Ward is a large part of its significance for him. The event happens to him, seems outside of his life and uncaused by it. Drunk though he is, he is hardly a candidate for a ward where men rave, stumble over floors slimy with their own spit, sexually assault one another, struggle in straightjackets, and suffer from grave and permanent mental illness. Wilder tries to endure the days until he may be released. But one act of protest--kicking and cursing a steel mesh grate--arouses the attendants, who subdue him with a drug that

> went to work in him--heavy waves of sleep as deep as drowning --and the last thing he knew as he turned and floundered and sank was that nothing in his life had ever been as bad as this. This was the worst. (38)

Feelings of helplessness, submersion, and entrapment close in on him. Wilder's understandable requests to be released seem no more sane than the schizophrenic furies of the obsessed Dr. Spivack, an inmate who had once been a doctor in the very same hospital, for all inmates are alike in the eyes of the staff.

When Wilder is finally released from the ward, he is a changed man, vulnerable to forces within the mind which he never before suspected, and uncertain about the boundaries between madness and sanity. His name begins to take on significance; he is wilder in behavior, and wilder in being closer than before to the edge. Images from his incarceration invade his ordinary experience: his wife snapping beans on a high stool merges in his mind with the ward's cop on a similar stool; his job becomes a prison "full of signs of mounting desperation" (71). Life begins to imitate the seemingly isolated episode during which Wilder first glimpsed the underside of human nature.

Possessed by this experience, Wilder increasingly views his present and past self as trapped and helpless. His small stature, his fear of water, his terror of the books his patronizing wife crams tightly and thus inaccessibly into the book shelves, his hatred of his domineering parents, his shame at having flunked out of college, and his nausea at the smug simplicities of family life lead him back to heavy drinking, to an unsympathetic therapist, to a vulgar AA group, and to a new mistress, Pamela Hendricks, who accelerates his downward plunge.

To this mistress Wilder entrusts the story of the Bellevue episode in its first telling. But as his wife Janice had edited his life in presenting excuses for his behavior to their son and their friends, so Pamela, too, edits his experience and so betrays their intimacy. She preempts the story, turns it into a script, reinterprets his own reactions to it, and takes the experience away from him. As he finishes his difficult recounting, she is already using it:

> God. Have you ever thought of what a movie that would make? . . . Think of the mood; the characters; the situations. It could be--well, I know this is a cliche, but it could be the world in microcosm. And you may be one of the very few patients they've ever had who can remember it all so vividly, because you were stone-cold sane the whole time. You know something, John? Just from the way you tell it, I'll bet you've really been thinking of the whole thing in cinematic terms all along. Even when you were going through it. (123)

Passively, Wilder allows her to tell him how he felt and to bleed the experience of its pain. She has found the very story to satisfy her hitherto frustrated cinematic ambition. "John, I refuse to let you throw this beautiful idea away just because you're feeling dumb and middle-class tonight. You be quiet and drink your beer; let me think" (123). In divulging the story, Wilder loses control of the experience; and his experience takes on its own life as her fiction.

Through her alumnae connections with exclusive Marlow

College in Vermont, Pam engineers the second telling of the story. On the campus, in vibrant autumn, young screen writers, set designers, directors, and producers swarm over and through Wilder's experience, interpreting and revising it, while Wilder listens to their revisions of what once was his story. Older, less educated, alien from the college community, and psychologically fragile, he watches his experience take external form in the retelling, in the sets and dialogues, in the takes and retakes of the actors, and in the motive-mongering of the writers and directors.

In this second telling Wilder watches the creation of an art work and he reacts intensely because the process is new to him. He differs from Pam's friends in that he is not inured to literature; literature is still "hot" for him; he does not experience his life cinematically, dubbing his agony "beautiful" or attaching cliches to his sorrow. He is the savage man--wilder than the others--who suffers his experiences raw, unlike the movie-makers who cook suffering into a publicly palatable form. He is innocent, embarrassed by his lack of education and slow reading, and mesmerized when he observes the objectification of fiction, his private chaos taking shape before him. This magical change, routine to those who have been inoculated by a literary education, is a terrible beauty to him. His private story enters the public world of "literature," where other people intrude into his event and make it theirs. They feel free to connect it with the archetypes and cliches--the Christ images, prison worlds, and microcosms--that often too facilely give literature its categories. Wilder's innocence leaves him still marvelling at the power of words, stories, pictures, and books, in awe of those who read, and fearful of their arcane, glib, and sophisticated manipulations of language.

For Wilder the process of transforming his experience into a story gives him new power and also further opportunities for dissociation. Because of his role as the one authentic witness to the story's truth, he is treated for once in his life as an authority. Mr. Epstein, philosophy professor and lecherous guru at the college, dignifies Wilder's story as an effort "to find order in the very chaos of it." But at the same time Wilder loses control of his event and of himself. The fiction is him, his inmost terror, and yet now no longer him, but another, a fictional character named Wilder. Being at once fictional, the Wilder of the story, and "real," a man who watches his story being acted by others, he is free to imagine himself as any other fictional character, and to roam at whim among the possibilities offered to him by competing stories available in the Bible, in films, and in newspapers. In his dissociated state, he chooses alternative roles: Christ; those short pugnacious movie heroes, Mickey Rooney, Alan Ladd, and James Cagney; and Lee Harvey Oswald, short, ignorant killer of the tall, successful, literate, womanizing President Kennedy (196). Further dissociation results

from the fact that the intense process of making the fiction renders worthless all his earlier years of "error and falsehood" (148), his boring years of work and marriage. The fiction alone insists on its truth, so that Wilder is cut off not only from the "Wilder" of the story, but also from his ordinary past. Floating in and out of these alien scripts, Wilder staggers up "the true road, the high lonely road of self-discovery" (148), as he supposes, though soon there will be no central self left to discover.

Wilder's break-through becomes a break-down. He is broken by the force of the fiction he unleashed, by its autonomy, and by the presumptions of others toward it. We do not know if Wilder would have suffered a nervous breakdown if he had not told his story to Pam. The episode of the ward might have continued to undermine him from within, and might eventually have erupted whether he told the story or not. Nor do we know if the story would have been harmless if others had not tampered with it, if they had listened with respect and acknowledged the truth of his suffering. But certainly for one reason or another losing possession of the story of his own vulnerability upsets his delicate balance. Although his mental illness--manic-depression induced by alcoholism--makes him a special case, his loss of balance has nevertheless a bearing of fiction-making as a whole, where the lived experience, especially when the living is still going on, is necessarily sacrificed to the exigencies of the new creation, to its shaping, its suspense, and its probabilities.

Wilder recovers from this breakdown, returns from the hospital, and even resumes for a while his home and job, as if the brush with art were too dangerous and the "real" world were a relief from its intensity.

From the third retelling, however, he never recovers. Nor is it the retelling alone that destroys him, but the intricate interrelation of his alcoholism, his rage, and his discoveries about human kind: women exploit him; tall, literate men succeed; movie-making and the literary scene are riddled with cynical ambition. These discoveries increase his helplessness and tendency to blame others for his pain.

When Pam, in sexual and professional collusion with a screenwriter named Chester Pratt, summons the passive Wilder to Hollywood to sell his script again, giving up wife, job, and friends, Wilder is forced to undergo yet a third fictionalization of the same central episode. This time the episode is extended into three parts, with a beginning, a middle, and, ominously, an end. The third retelling is on a larger scale than the first (the intimate, ill-fated confession to Pam), and engages more intensely professional contributions than the second (the Vermont screening).

A producer, Carl Munchin, begins the expansion by questioning the very nature of the hero of the episode, while that hero, more and more denatured, listens.

> "I mean who _is_ this guy?" he demanded. "What's he like when he's _not_ in Bellevue? How does being in Bellevue change his life? I want a revised, shortened version of this script of yours to serve as part one, you see. Then I want to see a part two and a part three. You follow me?"
>
> "I'm not sure," Wilder said. "What would happen in parts two and three?" (214)

Wilder listens to his future as planned by the producer, hears that the hero (who is also himself) will be built up for a real breakdown, that the producer will "pull out all the stops," let him go crazy. "Wipe him out . . . so that he can't live in civilized society any more. Make him a real paranoid schizophrenic . . ." (214).

That Wilder can discuss this plot as if the hero were someone else is a sign of his intensifying schizophrenia, but in some sense any extension of autobiographical narrative into its hypothetical possibilities involves an element of the same risk. The risk is that, by the magical power of the word, the fictional version will influence the real, will suggest or determine or even cause its unfolding. As many superstitious and magically susceptible people fear too much praise or suggestions of danger to loved ones, or knock on wood when fearful futures are predicted, the fictions seem to create in advance the patterns that a life will take, without leaving the possibilities open to natural process. The fiction becomes a haunting prophecy, and the human being tends toward the choices already patterned for him within the fiction as if those choices were commands written in stone or spells cast in full ceremony rather than hypotheses. The superstitious power of the fiction takes on a magical life of its own, a power to ordain the real life it originally imitated, mimesis in reverse. Less primitive but similarly dangerous is the view that the fiction is a projection based on present evidence of the likely future course; such an educated guess may seem even more damaging, since it is based on observable probabilities.

Thus the producer's desire to "'watch him go down beyond the reach of psychiatric help'" (215) is Wilder's prophesy of doom. As Pam knows, this version of the episode "'suggests that anyone who's spent a week in Bellevue is destined for a life of madness. What kind of nonsense is that?'" (217). But the screen writer's understanding of the hero's collapse, which will indeed correspond to Wilder's own, either because of the writer's

uncanny vision or because of the predictable conjunction of such a character in such a situation, further seals the doom. "'He's unhappily married and he's got kids he can't relate to and he feels trapped. He's solidly middle class. I don't know what he does for a living, but let's say it's something well-paid and essentially meaningless, like advertising.'" When the screen-writer goes on accurately to imagine the quack psychoanalyst and the girl friend who offers hope, the producer wittily interposes his criticism of what is really the larger plot of Yates's novel: "'Hold it right there, Jack . . . I can't help feeling there's a quality of cliche about everything you've said so far'" (219).

The cliche of the novel is repeated in the cliche of the script, and the idea that the hero is inexorably living a cliche known to unravel in this way fixes Wilder's view of his future. For the cliche is yet another form of script from which Wilder cannot escape. The producer's view of the hero as "doomed," a "dark character" who "systematically destroys everything that's still bright and promising in his life, including the girl's love," and who "sinks into a depression so deep as to be irrevocable" (219) is a reading of himself that the mesmerized Wilder accepts. He, who has timidly allowed himself to be manipulated, reads his own story through other people's eyes and falls into their plots. When the writer prophesies that the hero "winds up in an asylum that makes Bellevue look like nothing," he goes on to comment on the inexorability of plot as it grows out of and fulfills character: "'And I think you'll see, Carl, when the whole thing's on paper, that there's an inevitability to it. The seeds of self-destruction are there in the man from the start'" (220).

Hoping that Pam will rescue him from the trammels of this version of his life, Wilder sees instead that she will sacrifice his safety (which she had earlier realized was tied to the script) for the success of the terrifying and fatal fiction, which will be further exploited to increase the fame of the rival lover, Chester Pratt, and indirectly her own power. Correctly assessing the evil around him, but allowing himself to play into it, Wilder reviles her: "'Go shack up with Chester Pratt again! Get him together with Munchin and the three of you can make a movie about me! Oh, I'm a Dark Character, all right, baby; I'm Doomed; I've got the fucking Seeds of Self-Destruction coming out of my ears . . . '" (222).

Since he cannot prevent the movie from being made, though lamely he tries (249), this script dictates Wilder's fate. The view of his character, the forecast of the plot, the details of this version of his past, take over what little self remains from the dissolutions of alcohol and drug treatment and from the attacks of madness. The fiction determines his end in an asylum, deserted by friends and doctors, because it is the likely course, given such a reading of his character, and because the prophecy

discourages him, and leaves him no strength to imagine other scripts for himself. As the alcoholic defeatist in Raymond Carver's short story "Chef's House" says, "'I don't have that kind of supposing left in me.'"[4] Here, too, a failure in flexibility and in the creative power to invent new scripts, or new outcomes for continuing scripts, traps Wilder in the scripts that other people write for him, which inevitably enhance their power and diminish his. The most accessible script still available to him is the role of Jesus Christ, surrounded by conniving and mocking enemies, a role that Wilder accepts in his madness, glorifying his victimization. He thrashes briefly in a world of delusions and drifting unformed fictions until all those images are extinguished and he is without identity, real or fictional, his own or invented by others.

When his wife, remarried to his former friend Paul, visits the asylum, she sees his face "gone slack and his eyes bland. He looked like a middle-aged man to whom nothing had ever happened" (227). Bewildered and mindless, he accepts the asylum's scheduling of his days as he had accepted the earlier scripts for his life, and for occupational therapy does "interpretive" dancing. Yates places the word "interpretive" as a terse answer alone on a line, so that the reader can reflect on the centrality of interpretation in the novel: Wilder falls because he submitted the one thing that did once happen to him to repeated retellings, and these retellings aroused the creative and destructive interpretations of others. He has been sucked dry by the daemon of art.

The interplay of reality and fiction in Yates's novel points not only to the dangers of fiction-making for fragile mortals, but also to the difficulty of self-invention, self-creation, and self-determination in the composition of one's own life-script. As the first is in the ancient tradition of poetic enthusiasm, so the second is in another ancient tradition. Wilder's unwitting absorption into an imposed fiction links him to the heroes of Greek tragedy whose fate heads them off at the cross roads even as they struggle to change the story already plotted by the gods. In Wilder's case, too, the story has already been told: it needs only to be lived out, the depletions prophesied being the natural end of the story and also the result of the story. Unlike Oedipus, however, Wilder has no struggle left. His three retellings of the one event of his life--in conjunction with his other troubles and with the passivity common in modern and especially alcoholic hero-victims--have emptied him of the will, hope, and vitality needed to create "real" biographies as well as "fictional" stories.

By layering the fictions of his novel, Yates restores the ancient notion that stories can be magical and representations dangerous. The outer layer of the fiction seems closer to ordinary life outside the fiction, more random, loose, and

chaotic. The inner layer seems more potent and organized. Wilder is both an ordinary man in the outer layer (though of course a character in Yates's novel) and also the hero of a fiction in the inner layer. So magnetic is the inner fiction that Wilder allows the outer, ordinary layer to crumble away and the fictionalized Wilder to take over. The fiction is electric, gives off a flash, but electrocutes the life. Wilder flies toward the flame, but burns up by trying to merge with it.

The intimate confusions among lives and fictions in the metafictional layers of this novel draw also on Romantic and late Romantic questioning of the relation of art to life. William Butler Yeats's alternatives--perfection of the life or of the work--are mutually exclusive in this novel, too. John Keats's little town emptied of its folk, who have been drawn off to the sacrifice and trapped on the urn forever, points to the magnetic power of the art work to absorb the world of ordinary life; similarly in Keats's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," his knight-at-arms, having entered the fictional dream of ecstacy, is abandoned on the cold hill-side. So in this novel, the work of art swells with importance, and the ordinary human life is emptied, maddened, and discarded. Art saps life, and the human agent is an ephemeral vehicle briefly taken up and tossed away. The tradition of the poet exhausted by the creative enthusiasm that momentarily possesses him receives a contemporary representation in Yates's novel, as the anxious and inferior mortal is destroyed by the autonomous life of his tale.

The inner fiction is Wallace Stevens's Jar in Tennessee, radiating order to the unkempt terrain around it, but unlike the Jar it cannot simply be removed, and the terrain restored to its original state of dishevelment. For the inner fiction has sucked up the surrounding outer fiction of ordinary life. Wilder's innocence, his wildness, his ignorance of literary conventions, his fear of reading, make him susceptible to such a draining away. Fictions, words, plots, books (inaccessible because too tightly shelved), the self-sufficiency of readers, are filled with holy dread for him. Like a savage fearing to be photographed, Wilder believes that these representations are not mere play, or mere art, but have influence on his life; like a savage who has been ritually bewitched, he succumbs of his own accord to the oracles of the fiction that he obediently enacts.

* * * * * * * * * * * *

NOTES

[1] Thomas B. Gilmore, Equivocal Spirits: Alcohol and Drinking in Twentieth Century Literature (Chapel Hill: U of N. Carolina P., 1987); Donald W. Goodwin, Alcohol and the Writer

(Kansas City: Andrews and McMeel, 1988); and Tom Dardis, The Thirsty Muse: Alcohol and the American Writer (New York: Ticknor, 1989).

[2] "Elpenor," "A Drunkard's Progress: AA and the Sobering Strength of Myth," Harper's Magazine 273, 1637 (October, 1986): 42-48.

[3] Dell reissued Disturbing the Peace (1984), Easter Parade (1983), Eleven Kinds of Loneliness (1982), A Good School (1984), Liars in Love (1982), and Revolutionary Road (1983) in conjunction with the publication of Young Hearts Crying (1984). References in this essay are to the original edition (Delacorte, 1975), with pages in parentheses in the text. Early reviews were astute and enthusiastic; see, for example, Mark Taylor, Commonweal 103, 20 (Sept. 24, 1976), 631-34; William H. Pritchard, Hudson Review 291 (Spring, 1976), 151-52; and Barbara Nelson, Library Journal 100, 2344 (Dec. 15, 1975).

[4] Raymond Carver, "Chef's House," Cathedral (New York: Random, 1984) 32.

CHILDREN OF ALCOHOLICS IN LITERATURE
PORTRAITS OF THE STRUGGLE

(Part One)

Timothy M. Rivinus
Brian W. Ford

> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns into shapes, and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name.
> A Midsummer Night's Dream

Abstract. The critical application of findings derived from the children of alcoholics (COA) movement and from clinical sources can shed light on both classic and less well-known works of literature. This critical inquiry probes the foresight, insight, and empathic power of literature regarding the nature of addiction and the experience of growing up in a chemically dependent family. Works by Betty Smith, Mark Twain, Thomas Hardy, Eugene O'Neill, Theodore Roethke, D. H. Lawrence, and John Cheever, works we consider to have been pioneering in their courage and insight, will be discussed. We also hope to suggest that what one less well-known author presented here (the poet Paul Smyth) describes as "the power of metaphor to save our lives" may lie at the core of the aesthetic force of these works.

I

In the autobiographical novel, A Tree Grows in Brooklyn, Betty Smith writes of her experience of being a child of an alcoholic. Francie, the novel's protagonist, in the period following her alcoholic father's death, had stopped making her usual entry in her school journal.

> Since her father's death Francie had stopped writing about birds and trees and My Impressions. Because she missed him so, she had taken to writing little stories about him. She tried to show that, in spite of his shortcomings, he had been a good father and a kindly man. She had written three such stories which were marked "C" instead of the usual "A." The fourth came back with the line telling her to remain after school.
>
> "What's happened to your writing, Frances," asked Miss Garnder.
>
> "I don't know."

> "You were one of my best pupils. You wrote so prettily. I enjoyed your compositions. But these last ones . . ." she flicked at them contemptuously . . . "I'm referring to your subject matter."
>
> "You said we could choose our own subjects."
>
> "But poverty, starvation and drunkenness are ugly subjects to choose. We all admit these things exist. But one doesn't write about them."
>
> "What does one write about?" Unconsciously, Francie picked up the teacher's phraseology.
>
> "One delves into the imagination and finds beauty there. The writer, like the artist, must strive for beauty always."
>
> "What is beauty?" asked the child.
>
> "I can think of no better definition than Keats': 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty.'"
>
> Francie took her courage into her two hands and said, "Those stories are the truth."
>
> "Nonsense!" exploded Miss Garnder. Drunkenness is neither truth nor beauty. It is a vice. Drunkards belong in jail, not in stories. . . ."[1]

In negating Francie's attempt to transform her life into something beautiful, Mrs. Garnder recreates the isolation and denial often experienced by the child of an alcoholic. Francie seeks and finds a true and lovely rendering of her story. To her teacher, only denial or dressed-up reality is appealing.

Truth and beauty come from the creative search for a balance between opposing forces. Francie's (Betty Smith's) struggle with love and shame for her father gives birth to a creativity that illuminates the worlds of all children of alcoholic parents. Unfortunately, Mrs. Garnder tries to stifle Francie's attempt to come to terms with her past. Yet, it is this reworking of one's past that may become part of the healing process for many children of alcoholics.[2]

Francie's father had "been a good father and a kindly man" at his best, but he was also an alcoholic. And because of the disease of alcoholism, he was largely an absent father. He brought Francie and her family embarrassment, shame, and great sadness. Yet, he had a disease, not a vice. He belonged in treatment or Alcoholics Anonymous, not in jail.

Coming to terms with one's past by writing a novel may be a victory over the pain of early childhood experience in a chemically dependent family. Such creative rebirth may emerge with the help of a teacher, mentor, or author. It may happen during psychotherapy, during a group healing experience, in a writing course, or following the reading of another's creative effort in a novel, story, poem, or play.[3] In a great work, the creative experience and genius of the author can reach out, touch, and even help to heal another. Smith succeeds in her portrayal of Francie, a child of an alcoholic who seeks to heal herself by writing. Unlike Mrs. Garnder, Smith does not reject what is real. On the contrary, Smith may heal by her creative example.

This essay attempts to present a few examples, drawn from English and American literature, of art's ability to speak to the lives of its readers by recreating the experiences of children of alcoholics. These authors appear to have drawn on their personal experiences for their fictions; they presage both the mutual help movement for children of alcoholics and the professional interest in their plight.

II

There is no more famous odyssey of the child of an alcoholic father in literature than Mark Twain's The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. Despite the fact that most American high school and college graduates have read Huckleberry Finn, few may recognize that they have been witness to a clinically accurate description of the ravages of alcoholism and of the plight of an alcoholic child.

On the surface, Huck's story is one of carefree survival. What appeals to the adolescent in all readers is the pleasure and implied effortlessness of much of Huck's journey. However, Twain gives us glimpses of a deeper level of Huck's struggle. In Chapter VII, jauntily entitled "I Fool Pap and Get Away," Huck escapes from imprisonment and abuse by his alcoholic father in a remote log cabin. Huck fools his father into thinking that the house has been broken into and that he (Huck) has been killed. Huck removes his father's possessions from the cabin.

> I took the sack of corn meal and took it to where the canoe was hid, and shoved the vines and branches apart and put it in; then I done the same with the side of bacon; then the whisky-jug. I took . . . everything that was worth a cent. I cleaned out the place. . . . I fetched out the gun, and now I was done.[4]

Huck sets out with his inheritance: his father's whiskey jug and

gun. He is the caricature of an American myth--the myth of frontier survival with his "hooch" and his firearm. By escaping an abusive parent, Huck appears to survive all odds. At one level, it appears that Huck's freedom can be achieved without scars or permanent damage. Indeed, Huckleberry Finn has sustained many readers with its joyful sense of innocence and safety. Yet, at a deeper level, the abuse Huck receives from his father is real and is often replicated in the novel.

Huck describes his feelings when his father reappears in his life after a long absence; Huck recalls past abuse by his father and his fear of his Pap:

> I reckoned I was scared now, too; but in a minute I see I was mistaken--that is, after the first jolt, as you may say, when my breath sort of hitched [on seeing him again], he being so unexpected; but right away after I see I warn't scared of him worth bothring about. . . . He was most fifty, and he looked it. (19)

Huck's alcoholic father has aged, weakened by the ravages of chronic alcoholism. But the spell of past abuse and bondage is not easily broken, and the old tyranny is easily reestablished. Huck, wealthy from an adventure with Tom Sawyer, is not a son to his father but a chattel to be exploited to fuel his father's addiction: "Looky here--mind how you talk to me"; Huck's father scolds,

> "I'm a-standing about all I can stand now--so don't gimme no sass. I've been in town two days, and I hain't heard nothing but about you bein' rich. I heard about it away down the river, too. That's why I come. You git me that money to-morrow--I want it." (21)

The narrative continues in a description that is accurate to this day of the most pathological form of the addicted parent-child relationship. An irresponsible father tries to gain custody of a son, to exploit him as a source of supply.

Huck's father encounters a judge who doesn't know him and who takes a position that the courts have often taken in cases of abused and unwanted children: ". . . so he said courts mustn't interfere and separate families if they could help it; said he'd druther not take a child away from its father" (22). Huck's father cons the Judge, promising to be a good father. ". . . the old man he signed a pledge--he made his mark" (23). The signing of a pledge was one of the successful rehabilitation methods of the Temperance Movement; but Huck's father promptly

gets drunk again and breaks his pledge and his arm:

> . . . and rolled off the porch . . . and was most froze to death when somebody found him after sun up . . . The judge he felt kind of sore. He said he reckoned a body could reform the old man with a shotgun, maybe, but he didn't know no other way. (23)

Reform of the alcoholic parent is not as easy as the law might hope. The judge's harsh judgment is characteristic of a naivete in a time and in a society that has not yet understood addiction as a disease nor the principles of its treatment.

The tyranny of the alcoholic parent over the child reaches its climax in Chapter VI. Huck is the object of ritualized physical abuse by his father. He is kidnapped, locked up, and made his father's slave, in a cameo of the struggle over racial slavery against which background the novel is cast. Huck witnesses his father's delirium tremens, hallucinations, and paranoia. He barely escapes being murdered by his father. Yet, Twain romanticizes the experience, lightly touching it with humor in the way a survivor might.

Can we speculate on Huck's legacy and outcome? One legacy is the trauma of his abusive parent. Huck, the victimized child, is often revictimized: by the king and the duke, two physically powerful and experienced villains. While Huck could hardly be expected easily to escape them, their arrival in the narrative suggests that Twain's imagination demanded that the abusive relationship with the father be replicated. The loving interlude with Jim, and, later, the potential for a healthy, loving relationship with the feuding Grangerfords and the deceived Mary Jane yields to the violence and a return to passivity in the grip of the Mississippi's strong current and of the two drunken villains. This occurs, perhaps, not just because Twain wishes to present Huck with obstacles or tests in his odyssey but because he understood imaginatively the repetitive patterns of the lives of children of alcoholics and would not deny imagination's truth.

One of the problems readers have had with The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn has been the long ending sequence at the home of Tom Sawyer's uncle and aunt, Silas and Sally Phelps. Tom arrives and reasserts all his old authority over Huck, the authority of the (relatively) privileged child from a secure family over the abused and abandoned child of an alcoholic father. In the process, Jim is neglected, tormented, and kept ignorant of the reality of his freedom so Tom can amuse himself with fantasies of adventure. Huck is dubious, but there is no suggestion that Jim's care for him and the relationship established between them on the river might make him insist that it is not right to take

liberties with the freedom and safety of this fine young man. Does Twain's imagination fail him here? Does he return to Tom Sawyer because he can't find his way out of a greater story? Or is his imagination already as bitter as it was clearly to become (in such works as The Mysterious Stranger)? Must Huck be portrayed as being as incapable of full humanity and courage, as is one of his minor alter egos earlier in the novel, Buck Harkness, whom the implacable Colonel Sherburn dismisses as "half a man"? Is Huck's failure, then, Twain's real message about humanity? The approach to the novel through the window of experiences and realities of children of alcoholics suggests a possibility more consonant with Twain's stature than either imaginative failure or metaphysical bitterness and cynicism. Huck is nearly incapable of taking action; he is acted upon. He is a victim, and he acts like one; Twain's imagination is true to a pattern of victimization. When forced to choose between turning Jim over to the whites or lying to protect him, Huck chooses friendship over what he calls his "conscience." Tom Sawyer's novelistic high-jinks make no such absolute demand for choice; Huck, therefore, remains passive, frustrated, so much the victim of his father as of his culture that he cannot protest even the physical abuse of Jim at the end of the "evasion." Huck can only escape from civilization, as suggested in the famous final passage of the novel: "But I reckon I got to light out for the territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me, and I can't stand it. I been there before" (281). Civilization implies to Huck civilizing bondage, abuse and the vague, unmanly "frills" against which his father had fulminated. From the clinical view, Huck's legacy may be seen this way: he may continue to "move on"; as the child of an alcoholic, Huck stands an excellent chance of continuing his pattern of victimization, one permutation of which might be to become an alcoholic himself--particularly if, along with his "genetic" heritage, he continues to tote his father's whiskey jug, keeps it filled, and remains alone.

* * *

Like the American The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. the English Tess of the d'Urbervilles. by Thomas Hardy, gives a detailed example of the plight of a child of an alcoholic. In this romantic tragedy, and with the inexorability of Greek tragedy, Tess unconsciously and dutifully "inherits" a fate bequeathed her by her parents.

Tess's mother, Joan Durbeyfield, has, throughout Tess's life, tolerated an alcoholic husband, John Durbeyfield, who neglects Joan, his daughter Tess, and the rest of his family. As Tess comes of age, she struggles to free herself from her family and from the example endured by her mother. Ultimately, Tess

succumbs to the fatal grip of an addictive relationship and

abuse, ending her own life and that of her abuser.

Early in the story, Tess's father fantasizes of his relationship to nobility: "'Sir John d'Urberville--that's who I am . . . that is if knights were baronets--which they be. 'Tis recorded in history all about me.'"[5] Despite her own revulsion at her father's grandiose notions, Tess unconsciously fulfills her father's delusions when she aligns herself with a man whose family, through quick fortunes born of the industrial revolution, has adopted the name d'Urberville. Alec d'Urberville, Tess's lover, is the perverted embodiment of her father's dreams. Tess's ultimate murder of d'Urberville is, perhaps and in part, her means of restitution for the childhood scars suffered from her father's hollow, alcoholic dreaming and neglect.

While still a young girl, Tess is embarrassed in the company of friends as her father rides grandly home from the tavern in a field cart, alcoholically deluded, claiming to be of a noble line. Tess's friends, tittering at this drunken caricature, exclaim: "'The Lord--a--Lord! Why, Tess Durbeyfield, if there isn't thy father riding home in a carriage'" (20). Tess's pained embarrassment by her father is a common pain of the child of a drunken parent. Yet, her loyalty to her family also prevails. Instinctively she draws away from her friends, avoiding embarrassment, and returns to care for her family.

> She might have stayed even later [at the dance], but the incident of her father's odd appearance and manner returned upon the girl's mind to make her anxious, and wondering what had become of him, she dropped away from the dancers and bent her steps towards the end of the village at which the parental cottage lay. (24)

These are the steps that the child of a chemically dependent parent so frequently treads. Tess returns home, a child-parent, wondering about her father's (and her mother's) condition. Who, if not she, would care for her siblings? With this indecision and sense of responsibility, it is no surprise that Tess finds that she cannot easily free herself from her family.

Tess's mother's attitude toward Tess is complex. Tess is the oldest, a daughter, and the family "hero" in whom all family responsibilities and hopes reside.[6] It is Tess's responsibility to rescue the family name and fortune, to erase the stain of alcoholic family failure, by making a good marriage. Tess must fulfill the empty promises of Joan and John Durbeyfield's shared delusions of grandeur and must escape the "co-dependent" trap in which Joan Durbeyfield has found herself.[7]

In the alcoholic-dominated family system, the child must not

contradict the parent's version of reality, a version which tries desperately to keep the myth of normality alive.[8] Yet the parent's version of reality is clearly the reality that the child sees and hears in the world outside the family. Accordingly, Tess asks her mother whether her father's embarrassing behavior has anything to do with alcohol: "'Had it anything to do with father's making such a mommet of himself in thik carriage this afternoon?--Why did 'er? I felt inclined to sink into the ground with shame!'" (26). Tess's mother, in answer, recites word for word her husband's intimation of grandeur and noble ancestry. "'Twas on this account that your father rode home in the vlee; not because he'd been drinking, as people supposed'" (26). Tess responds, no longer trusting her own mature, questioning logic, no longer an adult, but a child--accommodating herself to the distorted reality of her mother and father: "I'm glad of that . . . will it do us any good, Mother?" "Oh yes . . . " Joan replies, emptily answering with "Irrelevant information" (26). The end of the conversation between mother and daughter signals the end of the possibility that Tess's perceived reality might be confirmed by her mother. (After all, Tess's co-dependant mother <u>isn't even drunk</u>.) The parents' distorted view and family myth prevail. Tess, the child, is left alone in her struggle to make her peace with the world apart from family myth.

Hardy astutely sums up the exchange in stout editorial defense of Tess by saying, "Her mother gave irrelevant information by way of an answer"; but this is not enough for the child with a need to know and be reassured. The author, like the oracle of a Greek tragedy, appears helpless to rescue Tess, caught in the tragic fatality of unopposed human forces: in this case, the alcoholic family system. It is Tess's fate repeatedly to accommodate herself to the distorted alcoholic-family reality. The author records and, perhaps, bears pained witness.

There is an implication that Tess's father may be ill. Tess questions her mother again, this time about her father's health. Her mother acknowledges:

> "It is fat round his heart 'a says. There it is like this." Joan Durbeyfield as she spoke curved a sodden thumb and forefinger to the shape of the letter C, and used the other forefinger as a pointer. . . he [the doctor] says to your father, 'Your heart is enclosed all round there and all round there: this space is still open,' 'a says. 'As soon as it do meet, so . . . off you will go like a shadder Mr. Durbeyfield,' 'a says. 'You mid last ten years: you mid go off in ten months or ten days.'" (26-27)

How often have children and spouses of alcoholics (and alcoholics

themselves) heard this uncertain, foreboding news from doctors? Most doctors, however, are unable to predict the time when the insidious addiction will be fatal. So, the child of the alcoholic lives in constant fear of the unexpected, the lethal.

"But where is father?" Tess asks in fear and concern. Blithely, her mother answers, "He's gone to Rolliver's Tavern to . . . get up his strength for the journey tomorrow . . . "--a response which minimizes and denigrates Tess's concern. Tess responds, "Oh my God! Go to a public house to get up his strength! And you, as well agreed as he, Mother!" (27). Joan Durbeyfield shifts her logic, and appears to agree with Tess. Joan promises Tess that she will go to the public house to get her husband and bring him home directly. Tess will stay to mind the children. But, then, " . . . neither father nor mother reappeared" (28). In not reappearing, both parents abandon Tess. Tess, the child-parent, is left alone to care for the home and her siblings.

These early exchanges between Tess and her codependent mother set the tone and the repeated patterns of the novel. Tess's parents are slaves to the disease of alcoholism. The child of the alcoholic family often inherits a sense of reality and necessity bound by alcoholic family requirements.[9] The phrase "repeat after me" sums up the fatalism which results.[10] Tess is unable to separate herself from the alcoholic-family legacy. The relationships with men (Alec d'Urberville and Angel Clare) are both dependent and ultimately destructive. They are based on principles taught her by her parents.

Tess's first, and ultimately fatal, relationship outside her family is with Alec d'Urberville. Her abuse by d'Urberville and her destructive return to him are addictive in nature and show the programmed and compulsive nature of Tess's legacy in action. Tess's relationship with her husband Angel Clare is more tragic still. Tess is never able to contradict the narrow morality expressed by Clare towards her. When Tess confesses her rape by d'Urberville and the birth of the child of that rape, Clare responds unforgivingly, "It isn't a question of respectability, but one of principle" (237). The fact that Tess meets not forgiveness, but only abuse, from her men and is unable to defend herself replicates the childhood behest of her family. Her execution at the gallows, as d'Urberville's murderess, is, in part, an execution of the metaphoric strangulation of her short life by an addictive system.

* * *

Hardy seemed to know the dark script of pathologic alcoholism. Tess is not just the tragic heroine of sinister, universal forces, nor is she only the victim of social forces in 19th century England nor even of the gender politics of the time.

Hardy, Tess is also the victim of the pathology of the alcoholic family system. It is a tribute to Hardy's special genius that he wrote the timeless tragedy of the alcoholic family more than a half-century before its clinical description.

The acuteness of Hardy's observation of the socially debasing and personally tragic effects of alcohol may have been based upon observations of his own family. The contrast between his father's family, who abstained from alcohol, and his mother's family, the Hands, who drank, is described by Hardy's biographer, Robert Gittings.[11] Hardy spent his early years in Puddletown, where his uncles, brothers of his mother, were characteristic of the "inhabitants of the still unreformed 'wet' town." They were:

> . . . long-limbed, sardonic, rough-mannered, quick-tempered, none of these three brothers, when Hardy first knew them, owned or leased his own cottage, but lived in rented lodgings. Their fortunes varied, and sometimes rose, particularly Christopher's. Like his brother-in-law, Hardy's father, he ultimately made a success of the profession of mason, and his son and namesake afterwards went to school with Hardy. Yet heavy drinking, for which Hardy himself said Puddletown was then notorious, prevented any of the Hands (his mother's relations) from getting as far as the Hardys. Christopher's drinking and knocking his wife about when she was with child, distressed his own mother.[12]

Furthermore, Hardy's grandfather was a smuggler of spirits.[13] These family realities may have led to the Hardy family's revulsion toward alcohol and its use.

Hardy's view of the corrupting effects of alcoholism on the individual may also have derived from his experience with one of his closest and most respected mentors and teachers, Horace Moule. Moule was a profound influence on Hardy's early intellectual development. Moule also was an alcoholic whose career in letters was subverted by his disease and who committed suicide finally at the nadir of alcoholic self-degradation.[14] Hardy's sense of betrayal by Moule may conceivably have provided a template for his portrait of Tess's betrayal by her father, mother, and ultimately, by her lovers.[15]

* * * * * * * * * * * *

NOTES

[1] Betty Smith, A Tree Grows in Brooklyn. (New York: Harper, 1943) 283-84.

[2] See the perceptive discussion of this process in D. C. Treadway's, Before It's Too Late: Working with Substance Abuse in the Family (New York: Norton, 1989) 163-191.

[3] See Robert Coles, The Call of Stories: Teaching and the Moral Imagination (Boston: Houghton, 1989) 127-29, 159-60, 183, 205.

[4] Mark Twain, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (New York: Bantam, 1981) 32. All quotations are from this edition.

[5] Thomas Hardy, Tess of the d'Urbervilles. ed. J. Gatrell & S. Gatrell (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983) 16. All quotations are from this edition.

[6] Note Sharon Wegscheider's discussion of this phenomenon in Another Chance: Hope and Health for the Alcoholic Family (Palo Alto, CA: Science 7 Behavior Books, 1981) 44-57.

[7] See T. L. Cermak, Diagnosing and Treating Co-Dependence (Minneapolis MN: Johnson Institute Books, 1986) 1-59.

[8] See Claudia Black, It Will Never Happen to Me (Denver CO: Medical Administration Co., 1981) 31-49.

[9] See P. Steinglass, L. A. Bennett, S. J. Wolin, D. Reiss, The Alcoholic Family (New York: Basic Book, 1987) 74-102.

[10] See Claudia Black, Repeat After Me (Denver CO: Medical Administration Co., 1983) 5-9.

[11] Robert Gittings, Young Thomas Hardy (Boston: Little, 1975) 14.

[12] Gittings 14.

[13] M. Millgate, Thomas Hardy: A Biography (New York: Random, 1982) 8.

[14] Millgate 68-71, 127-28, 154-56.

[15] The conclusion of this article will appear in the Spring 1990 issue of Dionysos.

THE INCORRIGIBLE DIRIGIBLE

Hayden Carruth

Never in any circumstances think you can tell the men from the
      boys. Or the sheep from the goats.
Nevertheless unavoidably and interminably--up to a point!--one
      observes tendencies, the calculus
Of discriminative factors in human affairs. Alcoholism, for
      instance, is the "occupational disease of writers"
(And a good fat multitone in vox populi too, that sad song), and I
      cannot but approve
My friends Ray Carver and John Cheever, who conquered it in
      themselves;
I cannot help, for that matter and to the extent I am friendly
      with myself at all,
Approving my own reformation, which began 30 years ago today,
      the 3rd September 1953.
Ah, your genuine lush never forgets the date of his last one,
      believe me, whether yesterday or yesteryear (*le trente-
      troisieme de mon eage*),
And one time I asked John, who had quit at 65, why he bothered.
      "At your age I think I'd have gone on out loaded," I said.
"Puking all over someone else's furniture?" he answered, and much
      can be derived
From his typical compression of judgment. We were men as men
      go, drinking coffee and squinting through cigarette smoke
Where we sat at a zinc-topped table at 7 o'clock in the morning.
We were men buoyant in cynicism.
Now I remember Lucinda de Ciella who drank a pony of Strega
      every morning before breakfast

And was sober and beautiful for ninety years, I remember her
saying how peaceful
Were the Atlantic crossings by dirigible in the 1930's when her
husband was Ecuadorian ambassador to Bruxelles.
Such a magnificent, polychronogeneous idea, flight by craft that
are lighter than air!
I am sure it will be revived.

Hayden Carruth: Tell Me Again How the White Heron Rises and Flies Across the Nacreous River at Twilight Toward the Distant Islands. Copyright 1989 by Hayden Carruth. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corporation.

POLITICS AND RECOVERY

Jet Wimp

Judith McDaniel. Metamorphosis: Reflections on Recovery. Ithaca, New York: Firebrand Books, 1989. 141 The Commons, Ithaca, NY 14850.

Judith McDaniel is a poet who is also a recovering alcoholic. Further, she is an author with strong feminist sensibilities who sees her self-discovery as a woman as integral to her recovery. In her introduction, "A Feminist Looks at Twelve-Step Programs," she explains that the way alcoholism manifests itself in women is determined to a large extent by the prevailing conditions in society, especially when those conditions are paternalism and capitalism. She describes having attended a retreat whose subject was women and alcohol, sponsored by a local Dominican Retreat Center, where the only speakers were men, and how after listening to the speakers the women were instructed to break into little discussion groups and to contemplate humility and how they might attain it. It is a tribute to the healing of the Alcoholics Anonymous program that the women involved were not permanently embittered. In fact they managed to utilize the experience in a way that empowered them, in a way that allowed them to see all the more clearly how the ambient patriarchy tries to impair the self-definition of those who are not white, male, Christian, or heterosexual. The AA meetings she attended she sees as much as feminist consciousness raising groups as recovery groups. She recognizes the paradoxical fact that it is our unshared secrets that gives society its crippling power over us; and through the process of sharing we become united, first in our recovery, if we are alcoholics, and then in the larger arena of political and spiritual autonomy.

It is probably true that anyone delivered to the doorstep of AA is a mystery to him/herself. And the process of penetrating that mystery, and being at peace with its solutions, is what the recoverer's life must be all about. Anything positive in life contributes to the discovery, anything negative detracts from it. The inner-connectedness that creativity in any field requires can be a powerful ally to the maintenance of sobriety.

The poems in this book are a chronicle of her recovery, and of her growth as a woman. Her poetic voice is often self-assured, ruminative. She is obviously indebted, in her tone and in her concerns, to Adrienne Rich. The poems have a strong sense of place and of identity. Many poets--even famous ones (in fact, usually male poets) hide in their poetry: Wallace Stevens, John Ashbery, T. S. Eliot. Other and greater poets use the poem as a vehicle of an ineffable and personally experienced truth: Rilke,

Yeats. Read one of Eliot's _Quartets_ after one of Yeats's poems about old age and words _banal_ and _self-important_ take on a new dimension.

I feel that risk taking of some sort is fundamental if poetry is to work as a human gestalt.[1] Judith McDaniel never hides in her work; but neither has she yet developed the craft to make her poetry completely satisfying. Her best lines are those redolent of mystery and myth:[2]

> Nine times they sang the magic songs
> nine times to welcome change
> nine times to dissolve
> the fiber of life as it was

or, describing the young girl who fantasizes while watching smoke from a pile of leaves:

> But she longed
> for the clarity of flame
> the crackle of pure
> scarlet and gold
> each time she would
> twist
> reshape
> puff herself into
> another dreamer's
> chimney.

Sometimes, particularly in the longer poems, the words become diffuse, the rhetoric clogged with euphemisms--_tried to build a present filled with light_, or easy and contrived observations, _she drank when being different made others feel afraid, left her standing all alone_. While I can't claim to know the author's thoughts, I have the feeling that this kind of writing consists of imposing a perceived solution on an experience that isn't ready for it. Being a recovered alcoholic myself, as well as a published poet, I've found that the only way the drinking and drug using history can be addressed is _directly_, in the syntax of the experience itself, not by lavishing ex post facto truths upon it. The point is: it's awful, and we have absolutely no idea of _why_ it's so awful. Alcoholism, as the expression goes, is the only disease that tells you you don't have it. What unnameable thing is it, then, that we suffer from?

Sometimes McDaniel's sparse metaphorical resources (perhaps a matter of inexperience) promote a vague posturing:

> and she thought how
> each loss and pain
> must rest in her
> like the fossil
> not an emblem
> of what had been
> but the present transformed
> always by what
> has been pushing
> back to become
> part of what is

It is very odd how a writer who considers feminine issues so germane to her recovery could fall prey to such a, well, male distancing from the self. Sometimes the writing is an autobiographical rambling,

> Nice. That was the thing
> in our family, that I should
> be nice--no matter what else,
> the neighbors should know
> how nice I was. Be nice,
> what a nice girl, how cute.

But the scarcity of poetical resources fails to make her experience ours. Often the book is interesting as personal revelation, as a hypothetical conversation with the reader. But it does not succeed in conveying that mysterious and redoubtable quality that we recognize as poetic (as opposed to experiential) truth. Truth, as every practicing poet knows, is the most infuriating and refractory attribute of the written word: it comes and goes of its own accord, not at our whim. When that door is open, we celebrate; when it is closed, all we can do is frown and glare at the uninscribed page. If we practice our craft, particularly, expand our expertise in the usage of metaphor (which, as Aristotle observed, is the essential quality in poetry that cannot be faked), if (when we are addicts or alcoholics) we refrain from the blinding to the self that indulgence always represents, then truth seems to come more readily.

But above all truth cannot reside in a litany of politically correct postures. I am uncomfortable with poets who offer solutions. Judith McDaniel's poetry is exceptional when she does not do that: it is immediate and involving and resonant. But we poets can't tell anyone else how to live; we're so continually and so imperfectly trying to find out for ourselves what it means to live.

* * * * * * * * * * * *

NOTES

[1] I once attended an embarrassingly self-indulgent reading by the poet John Ashbery in which the *shtick* of the major and longest poem was that a different *color* was mentioned in every line of the poem. Yawn. Amid the puce and taupe John himself was nowhere to be seen.

[2] The poetry quotations occur, respectively, on pages 42, 49, 57, and 52 of *Metamorphosis*.

A TABOO LIFTED

Donald C. Irving

Thomas B. Gilmore. Equivocal Spirits: Alcoholism and Drinking in Twentieth Century Literature. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987.

This pioneering work, the first book-length study of drinking and alcoholism in literature, is ambitious in all it tries to do: apply a "scientific" understanding of alcoholism to literature, indicate where literature goes "beyond" science, include "all major genres," identify where literature and biography intersect and, in an Epilogue, speculate on our age of "literary alcoholism" with remarks (somewhat anachronistically in a study of twentieth-century authors) about Boswell as "modern" in his ambivalence toward alcohol and Dr. Johnson as "post-modern" in his honesty.

We can learn something abut alcoholism from this study, but its chief value lies in its literary analysis. In eight chapters (three originally published in periodicals), Gilmore examines the fiction of Malcolm Lowry, Evelyn Waugh, John Cheever, Saul Bellow, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Kingsley Amis, and George Orwell--a play by Eugene O'Neill and poetry by John Berryman. Scientific knowledge about alcoholism and the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) are applied when either can help analyze character, event, pattern, or theme in the text. Although some readers will want a more theoretical grounding in literary theory, the book is free of clinical and critical jargon, avoids transforming the literature into case studies, and refuses to use AA as an ethical template to judge characters.

The title indicates the theme that ties all this together. Alcoholic spirits are "equivocal" in life and in literature because, on the one hand, alcohol can be inspirational, liberating, "a life-renewing force" heightening awareness and perception, while, on the other hand, it can be "potentially or actually destructive." In literature, as Gilmore demonstrates, it can be both simultaneously. Science can authenticate drinking behavior or the disease of alcoholism where the signs indicate, but since literature goes "beyond" science in its "spiritual dimension," he also invokes AA, a program built on spirituality, to aid his literary analysis (the twelfth step of AA's program for recovery speaks of "spiritual awakening"). Not surprisingly, he finds several affinities between the scientific literature, AA, and the depiction of drinking in fiction, drama, and poetry. What is surprising is that this approach has not been done so systematically before.

For example, the Consul in Lowry's Under the Volcano experiences hallucinations which indicate an advanced stage of

chronic alcoholism, and Gilmore assesses their authenticity with reference to the scientific literature. However, hallucinations in fiction are also a kind of dream literature that here reveal an apocalyptic vision which also, paradoxically, becomes "a new way of seeing" for the Consul. Alcohol is this "equivocal" because it is the means of the Consul's self-destruction at the same time it becomes the means to a vision of his possible redemption.

A similar paradox occurs in Waugh's Brideshead Revisited. Sebastian's volatile moods, low self-esteem and shame are classic symptoms of alcoholism, but at the same time, his alcoholic withdrawal and escapism become a spiritual quest for salvation. Waugh, of course, omits any scientific cause and effect for Sebastian's drinking, but Gilmore's analysis clarifies Waugh's sometimes puzzling attitudes toward alcohol as it relates to his characters.

From alcoholic visions and quests, Gilmore next examines illusion as the theme of O'Neill's The Iceman Cometh. The character of Hickey presents the appearance but not the substance of sobriety in the play because his speech reveals he has not progressed to the equivalent of Steps 4 and 5 of the AA program (made a moral inventory of himself; and confessed to himself and another person and to God) and thus there is no real change in his character. The "alcoholic" Hickey is distinguished from the "drunks" in the play who, unlike Hickey, have some "motivating explanation" in their background other than drinking to explain their behavior. This difference is so precise, Gilmore maintains, that he reads the play as a literary "anatomy of alcoholism" for its accuracy.

John Cheever "may be the American writer who shows the most thorough and diversified familiarity with drinking in modern American society," and the focus here is on "larger units" than the individual such as "marriages, families, or society." However, Cheever's "diverse" views (apparently in his life as well as his fiction) about drinking belie a generalization about what drinking means here (Cheever can parody AA and use alcohol for comic effect, for example), but his very complexity avoids stereotyping the alcoholic, a great virtue in Gilmore's view.

In fact, stereotyping becomes the theme for analysis in Bellow's The Victim. and Gilmore reveals rather nicely how the novel turns on an ironic reversal between the alcoholic Allbee's stereotyping of Levanthal's Jewishness and Levanthal's stereotyping of Allbee's drinking behavior. Both are victims until Levanthal's climactic drunken binge opens his eyes to his own and Allbee's humanity.

Fitzgerald in both his biography and fiction, of course, provides fertile ground for alcohol studies in literature.

Gilmore finds much authenticity about drinking in Fitzgerald's fiction but not unfailingly so. The Beautiful and Damned is "powerfully authentic" in its portrayal of the decline and fall of the alcoholic, and the signs of alcoholism in the Pat Hobby stories are consistent. But Gilmore interestingly detects a detachment--"a failure to see connections between drinking and behavior" in Gatsby. and finds Dick Diver in Tender Is the Night anincomplete character, perhaps because Fitzgerald feared repeating himself, perhaps because the author was going through a period of denial about his own alcoholism. In either case, Fitzgerald's alcoholism created flaws in his fiction, and his biographers have not done justice to the connection.

An even closer link between art and life exists in the work of the confessional poet, John Berryman. Gilmore documents the stages of his alcoholism and the spiritual struggle of his recovery in the poetry, but also notes here as in Fitzgerald, Waugh, and perhaps Cheever, that alcohol is "equivocal" not only in the work, but also between the author and the work.

Finally, Gilmore shifts his analysis to three comic novels where drinking is "unequivocally good": Keep the Aspidistra Flying by Orwell, and Lucky Jim and Jake's Thing by Amis. Such "goodness" is questionable, given that the characters in these novels experience humiliation, withdrawal, and isolation because of their drinking. However, Gilmore argues that the drinking characters and events in these works are "comic" as means to satire and to comedy's happy ending and are not meant in either intent or effect to make fun of alcoholic characters or to authenticate drinking behavior or events.

This study doesn't do all the things it attempts equally well, but the approach is sound and can be applied to additional texts. Professor Gilmore has further lifted the taboo from alcoholism in bringing it to the foreground as a topic for literary studies, and he also raises provocative questions about drinking in literature in the contexts of literary history, culture studies, and the creative process itself--especially in the biographies of alcoholic and drinking writers.

A MIXED BAG

Thomas B. Gilmore

E. Nelson Hayes, ed. Adult Children of Alcoholics Remember: True Stories of Abuse and Recovery by ACOAS. New York: Harmony Books, 1989.

As Mark Keller, the distinguished alcohologist and author of the preface to this book, says of it, its stories achieve consistent literacy. He might, indeed, have claimed more: several of the stories achieve such moving eloquence and stylistic distinction that they could have won a place in any short-story anthology.

Keller's comment about the honesty of all the stories is also valid. The degree of perceptiveness about self, however, varies considerably. The author of "Bootlegger's Son," for example, maintains an intensely angry and vengeful attitude toward his alcoholic father; he appears proud of this attitude, unaware of its dangers to himself; and surprisingly, to me at least, he seems oblivious to the pain of his whole relationship with his father.

Nelson Hayes, the editor of the collection, provides an introduction in which he nicely summarizes what ACOAS (Adult Children of Alcoholics) learn about themselves in the process of "recovery." In addition, both the ACOAS and the reader of the stories learn to look for certain characteristic emotions among the children responding to an alcoholic parent or parents. Especially prominent are anger, helplessness, shame, guilt, and a feeling of responsibility for the ills of the family; as one story, "A Fairy Tale," puts this last feeling, ". . . I felt that everything was my fault and that if only I had been a better person, Mother would have stopped drinking long ago."

But this list of emotional reactions is by no means exhaustive, and some of the most interesting moments come when the reader is surprised or even shocked, as when the author of "Photos from Home" says, "I learned that abuse was love, and that those who loved you best abused you the most." That this is ironic does not much mitigate the shock. In another example, to hold her chaotic family together, an ACOA at about age twelve set about to make herself perfect--in athletics, in the classroom, in her home--and seemed to do a very convincing job of it, until her effort could no longer be sustained and she slid into disillusion and helplessness, followed by other frightening metamorphoses.

In fact, the suffering, the coping mechanisms, and the responses found in these stories take such a variety of forms that it is difficult to come away with a composite portrait of the ACOA that fits all of them. Another puzzle the reader may

occasionally be aware of, and that the book does little to resolve, is whether the ACOA can be differentiated from offspring of other types of dysfunctional families. My guess is that they cannot be; at least this book offers little help toward such a distinction. Of course, one could say that stories by definition are not equipped to make it. Still, some of them could have been more analytical, or the editor could have written a longer, more analytical introduction in which he considered such topics. They do arise, because in a story like "Daughters" (one of the best in the book), it is clear that the family would have to be regarded as severely dysfunctional even if the mother had not been alcoholic.

For a reason probably accidental, the stories in the second half of the book generally seem better than those in the first half, meaning that they are more sharply and consistently focused on the purpose of the collection. Some of the weaker stories could have been written by any person from a troubled background, so little apparent connection do they have with alcoholism. These needed a firmer editorial hand, or perhaps outright rejection.

Several stories particularly disturbed me by simply asserting or assuming the alcoholism of one or both parents rather than detailing or demonstrating it. This dearth of evidence might, I suppose, be defended on the grounds that the central focus of the stories is the children and their reactions. But unless we have a convincing picture of parental alcoholism, which the better stories supply, vital causal links are missing and we do not know what the children are reacting to.

There may be an untenable assumption in some cases behind this dearth of evidence: an assumption that alcoholism is always obvious and nonproblematic to the observer, and therefore needs no demonstration or argument. I believe, on the contrary, that alcoholics resist stereotyping as much as ACOAS do; that problem drinkers can be just as varied, mysterious, and difficult to categorize as ACOAS.

The final (and shortest) story in the collection does a splendid job of presenting this difficulty and accepting it, without attempting any easy resolution. By day, the grandfather is a successful and highly respected physician, whom apparently none of his patients ever suspect of having a problem; by night, he is an alcoholic, isolating himself in a remote room of his house to drink. Which is the "true" grandfather? Is he or is he not an alcoholic? Crazy as it sounds, one could logically deduce that there were two grandfathers, one alcoholic (known by his family), the other not (known by his patients).

Another story, one not found in this collection, may further serve to illustrate the imponderability of problem drinking.

There once was a father who, every evening, on arriving home from work, went straight to the kitchen of his home and mixed himself one of the world's strongest and largest martinis, followed by one and sometimes two more of these before the hearty dinner that he always ate. After dinner he had no more to drink, but read or watched TV for a short while, being almost always in bed and asleep by 9:00 and quite often as early as 8:00 or 8:30. His son, who never reflected on the matter for years, later came to wonder whether strictly speaking his father went to sleep that early (never arising before 7:30 the next morning) or more or less passed out from the potency of his own drinks. Yet, except for the very rare occasions when he had obviously had too much to drink, he never experienced the marked personalty change that we think of as one of the leading signs of an alcoholic. In fact, he never got into _any_ of the troubles we usually associate with alcoholism. And yet he may have had a drinking problem--_may_ have--though this vague, indefinite conclusion hardly deserves to be called one. This man was my father.

Undoubtedly many of the mothers and fathers in the stories under review here were such blatant alcoholics that no hesitancy in rendering this judgment was warranted. Still, had there sometimes been a little reluctance to judge, a little more awareness of the often baffling variety and complexity of forms that drinking assumes, it would have been a better collection.

THE TRUTH OF FICTION

John J. Halligan

Miriam Dow and Jennifer Regan, editors. The Invisible Enemy: Alcoholism & the Modern Short Story. Saint Paul: Graywolf Press, 1989. $9.50 paperback. Box 75006, Saint Paul, MN 55175. Phone: 612/6541-0077.

The Invisible Enemy. an anthology of short fiction about alcoholism, edited by Miriam Dow and Jennifer Regan, is a superb book. Both editors draw upon professional and personal experience in editing this book: Ms. Dow teaches high-school English and belongs to a faculty group for drug abuse and to Al-Anon. Ms. Regan writes poetry and fiction and is herself a recovering alcoholic. The editors' backgrounds are relevant because the selections in The Invisible Enemy have two major strengths. First, the stories have considerable literary merit. Second, they illustrate some major aspects of alcoholism: emotional withdrawal by and from the alcoholic; codependency and denial by family and friends; attempts to "rescue" the alcoholic and the ambivalence that accompanies such attempts; mood swings; the guilt felt by both alcoholics and by their codependents; and the economic difficulties often caused by alcoholism.

The book is divided into five thematic sections: "The Family and Alcoholism," "Children," "Progression," "Delusions," and "Trying to Stop." By and large, the five divisions make sense, although there is some overlapping. For instance, family life (or extended family life) is a subject in ten of the twelve stories in sections other than "The Family and Alcoholism." Similarly, an alcoholic is "Trying to Stop" (although vainly) in at least two stories besides the three that appear under that heading. In addition, I doubt that one story under "Delusions," Langston Hughes's "Minny Again," really belongs there. Still, alcoholism is a dynamic process, the stages of which are seldom entirely distinct from one another. And fiction itself is dynamic, and cannot be categorized as neatly as essays. Overall, then, the five divisions of The Invisible Enemy are useful but not definitive.

I. Under "The Family and Alcoholism" appear three stories: Susan Minot's "The Navigator," Alice Adams's "Beautiful Girl," and Peter Taylor's "The Captain's Son." Minot's story deals with the alcoholic father of seven children, his wife's codependence, his confrontation by his children, and his promise to stop drinking--which he keeps for about an hour. Adams's story presents a woman who is in a more advanced stage of alcoholism and whose family is in disintegration: she is divorced, her elder daughter scorns her, and her younger daughter, a college student,

continues to live at home but seeks complete privacy, smoking marijuana, and hoping to leave.

Of the three stories in this group, the most detailed in its treatment of family history and dynamics and one that is at times pathetically humorous is Taylor's "The Captain's Son." The title signifies that the father of Tolliver Campbell, the story's "anti-hero," was a captain at San Juan Hill during the Spanish American War. Told retrospectively by Campbell's brother-in-law, who was an adolescent during the post-Prohibition era of the story's events, this marvelous fiction is reminiscent of Faulkner in its contrast between the Old Southern landed wealth and the New Southern capitalism, and of Anderson and Twain in its study of adolescent initiation.

In the story, the narrator's sister Lila (the surname of this Nashville family is not given, and the narrator is known only as "Brother") marries Tolliver Campbell, who has migrated to her hometown of Nashville from Memphis. The couple live for several years with her family, Tolliver overseeing his inherited wealth but not pursuing a career except briefly on the staff of the governor of Tennessee. When Tolliver quits the governor's employ, Lila, told by her mother that she and Tolliver must move away, reveals that their marriage has not been consummated. Tolliver and Lila begin drinking heavily (giving them the courage to consummate their marriage), but Lila's parents fail or refuse to see the drinking until Lila collapses one day. The parents conceal Tolliver's and Lila's alcoholism, and in fact support it until Tolliver and Lila move to Memphis, where they buy a house, have a child, and continue their heavy drinking.

Taylor's story is a truly masterly study of the family dynamics of alcoholism, particularly of codependency. Its characters betray a smugness about Nashville and its bourgeois values: capitalism, the work ethic, thrift, modesty. Local expectations and appearances count for much, excessively much: for instance, Brother recalls that "During the Depression they [his parents] entertained very little, because they thought it would look bad to be dressing up and giving parties" (35). They seem to have an "either-or" attitude towards alcohol, serving only "fruit punch" at Lila's wedding reception even though the Campbells, having brought their own liquor, sneak off occasionally to the "rest rooms" and then reappear "wearing a stunned expression on their faces" (33).

Taylor also portrays well the dishonesty of the parents: dishonesty in their false politeness; their hypocrisy; their attempts to "protect" their son, the narrator, from the truth; their inability even to discuss Lila's and Tolliver's difficulties. For instance, the narrator's father jokingly suggests to Tolliver and Lila that they might live in the family home. However, the father fails to clarify his intention when

Tolliver immediately agrees. Again, although the father is quite thrifty, he does not object to paying for Tolliver and Lila's "extravagant . . . honeymoon" (29). Also, the father and mother want Tolliver to take up a career and give elaborate parties at which the guests might offer employment and partnerships to Tolliver; but the parents never speak of their designs to Tolliver! Only after Tolliver accepts and then quickly leaves the employment of the governor of Tennessee does the mother voice her feelings that Tolliver should have a career. Tolliver and Lila must leave, she says, but she relents after Lila reveals that their marriage is unconsummated. Lila and Tolliver become thoroughly alcoholic, but when Brother, sitting at breakfast one morning with his parents, observes that Tolliver is "'like a hung-over fraternity boy'," he is put down by his parents for speaking his mind: "'Nonsense: What idiocy . . . keep such observations to yourself'," says his father. And his mother says, "'I often wonder, Brother, what it is you are learning over at Vanderbilt University'" (44-45). Moments later, after Lila is heard falling on an upstairs floor, the father does not go upstairs with the mother because Brother might follow. Shortly after, the father leaves for work and there is no discussion of Lila and Tolliver then or thereafter, at least not in Brother's presence. The parents eventually get rid of Lila and Tolliver, not directly by ordering or asking them to leave, but by the father's pretending to misunderstand Tolliver's plans for a business trip to Memphis. When Lila and Tolliver move to Memphis, the narrator's mother says she can "hardly wait to come out to see their house," yet "she and father never . . . visit Memphis" (50).

Taylor's story, then, deals skillfully with the alcoholism of Lila and Tolliver and the denial of the parents. In addition, Taylor adroitly uses point of view to suggest that Brother not only has observed alcoholism and its denial, but also that he himself has been deeply affected by the events of his early family life, often in ways that even decades later, as an adult, he recognizes only slightly and reflects upon barely at all. Hardly ever does he consider his father's duplicity and lack of courage. Apparently at no time during the years after Lila and Tolliver left Nashville does Brother try to learn what his father knew about them, and when he knew it, and why he behaved with such duplicity and lack of courage. Hence, Taylor uses point of view to reveal that Brother, in his naive credulity towards his father, practices an avoidance of his own, an avoidance that is common in the families of alcoholics. Also illustrating a naive point of view, Brother remembers that, shortly after the discovery of Lila and Tolliver's three-year marital celibacy and the onset of their alcoholism, he "spent a good many nights" away from home "at the fraternity house," where he did his "first real drinking" and "brought girls to the house" (49). Yet he shies away, many years later, from exploring the link between alcohol and sex in himself. He merely says, rather abstractly, that "I

don't know that that has any relevance except that I embraced almost any opportunity that summer that might help me interpret for myself what was going on at home" (49). Moreover, he says--and again, this is years after the events of the story--"I have never married," but he does not reflect upon why he has never married (51). He is, in the end, unwilling to ask the difficult question of how his early family life affected his own later life.

II. The second section of The Invisible Enemy. "Children," contains stories by John Cheever, Frank O'Connor, and Joyce Carol Oates. Cheever's story, "The Sorrows of Gin," takes place in his fictional New York suburb of Shady Hill and includes familiar characters from that locale such as the Beardens and Farquarsons, friends of the Lawtons, whose daughter Amy is the story's main character. Her father, the alcoholic, treats Amy ambivalently, a pattern of many alcoholic parents. Amy's mother is preoccupied with the social life and overlooks her husband's addiction. The second story is Frank O'Connor's "Christmas Morning." As a result of events leading up to Christmas and culminating on Christmas morning, Larry, the narrator, recognizes the selfishness of his father's drinking and concludes that his father is "mean and common and a drunkard" (77). Larry's anger towards his father contrasts sharply with the guilt that Amy, in Cheever's story, feels about the results of her father's drinking.

I suspect that Joyce Carol Oates's "Blue Skies" is less familiar to most readers than Cheever's and O'Connor's often anthologized stories. It traces the life of Sharon Richey, from the age of thirteen to her completion of high school. The adolescent Sharon sees the "subterfuge and deceit" of "Mum," her mother: about her lovers, about moving for no reason to another part of town where Sharon has "to begin all over among strangers" (79-80). For a while, Sharon is bewildered that Mum's "relatives and friends . . . drop out of Mum's life" but learns "not to directly inquire" about them (80-81): such subjects are off-limits between alcoholics and their children. Sharon also notices that her mother, while generally "fierce and exultant in her rage," will change when a man calls, becoming "gentle, teasing, melodic, sweet" (81), exemplifying the contrast between the private and the public personality so common to alcoholics.

Increasingly, Sharon sees the truth about Mum but does not ask questions, such as whether Mum's lover Gerald is married, and where Mum stays some nights. Nonetheless, as Sharon progresses in her adolescence, she recognizes and writes in her diary that her mother is "an alcoholic. She won't stop drinking until she dies" (86). Eventually, Sharon confronts Mum and insists that she stop drinking. Her mother agrees, but like Dad in Minot's "The Navigator," she agrees too quickly, trying to put off the issue. Sharon believes her mother's promise until one afternoon,

while returning home from school, she sees her mother drunk and recognizes the emptiness of the promise. Another time, when she sees her mother in the street, drunk and placating an abusive man, Sharon runs away. Eventually, in a role reversal that is frequent among alcoholic parents and their children, Sharon--together with her Aunt Lil--takes Mum to the hospital, where she finally dies. Overall, in "Blue Skies," as in the other stories in the "Children" section, Sharon is for the most part alone--acutely alone, for she is both an adolescent and the child of an alcoholic. Oates convincingly penetrates the aloneness of Sharon and reveals her inner state through sparing but effective use of diary entries and streams of consciousness.

III. In the section called "Progression," the first story, "Day-Old Baby Rats," by Julie Hayden, masterfully traces a day in the life of an alcoholic woman from New York City who, shortly after awakening, spills a Scotch that she pours for herself and, hours later, after a series of memory losses and misperceptions, stumbles into a confessional at Saint Patrick's Cathedral, thoroughly disoriented. Another story in this section is Tillie Olsen's "Hey Sailor, What Ship," in which Whitey, an alcoholic sailor, visits his married sister and her family at their home in San Francisco. A strain has developed between his sister's family and Whitey as a result of his alcoholism. Becoming ill, then suffering aphasia, Whitey angrily leaves his sister's house and "goes down in collapse," possibly in death (141).

The third story in "Progression" is Arna Bontemps's "The Cure" which deals with Buddy Joe Ward, a sixty-year old alcoholic whose sister, the narrator's grandmother, has cared for him since their mother died. "The Cure" illustrates the folly of trying to "rescue" or "reform" an alcoholic, and, unlike the other stories in _The Invisible Enemy_, it treats the pathos of an elderly alcoholic. Buddy Joe distorts the present and past. His sister recalls that years ago Buddy Joe was taken to jail, whereas Buddy Joe remembers only coming "in the house kind of late" (113). Buddy Joe hallucinates, believing in "ghosts," having seen, he says, "'more ghosts than I got fingers and toes. One stopped me on the road the other night'" (114). While distortions of memory and perception occur often in "The Cure," they are less important than are the attempts at his rescue by Buddy Joe's sister, efforts which she has made for years. Years ago, for instance, she placed him in a sanitarium in New Orleans. Then, after moving to California, she sent for him because he had "'cried like a baby'" (117). Finally, in an amusing close to the story, his by now elderly sister, attempting to control and rescue Buddy Joe, pours several "tiny fish" into a bottle of whiskey and returns the bottle to Buddy's familiar hiding place, but learns later that afternoon that Buddy Joe simply does not care about the taste of whiskey: "'Taste? Don't believe I know. I hold my breath when I drink it. Never did like the _taste_ of whiskey'"

(121). Buddy Joe's rescuer, like many would-be rescuers of alcoholics, never learns.

IV. In the section "Delusions," the first story is William Goyen's "Where's Esther," in which the narrator, a Nick Carraway-like Midwesterner who has moved to New York, laments the loss of Esther, an alcoholic who has been institutionalized at "Greenfarm." The story deals with both Esther's addictions (to alcohol, to manic behavior, and to the insults that she heaps upon her friends), and the addictions of her friends (to alcohol and to Esther). Ultimately, the delusions in this story are as much those of the alcoholic narrator as of the institutionalized Esther. Not only does she at times convince herself that she enjoyed Esther, but also she dreams of going "into the most beautiful bar" where she finds Esther, with whom she laughs and drinks; and she rounds out her delusion by saying "we never fought, not once" (149). The second story, "Minnie Again," is one of Langston Hughes's stories about Simple. In this story Simple traces a series of economic and legal difficulties experienced by Minnie, his alcoholic cousin, and concludes that he cannot rescue Minnie.

Louise Erdrich's "Crown of Thorns," the final story in this section, considers Gordie, who lives on an Indian reservation, and explores a combination which seems so difficult to treat: alcoholism combined with guilt. Gordie has been drinking since a month after June, his wife, died. At the opening of the story, shortly before six in the morning, Gordie gulps a "gold-colored can of beer" with hands which once felt June's "curve of hip and taut breast," which once fought in the Golden gloves, and which, since they also "struck June," now feel "unclean" (156). Dismissing the warning by his Uncle Eli of ending "'in the hospital'," Gordie, deluded, fantasizes about the chance to "'fight the big one'," but Eli reminds Gordie that he already "'did fight the big one . . . [and] you got beat'" (157).

Finishing his beer, Gordie once again focuses on his hands and notices that they have crushed the beer can and are now shaking. He leaves Eli's house, walks home, and after calling a bootlegger for wine, yields completely to delusions. He gets under the kitchen table and stays there, possibly for hours, possibly for days, then finds himself sitting at the table and wondering when June will return. Imagining that June is present, Gordie says that "'I was a bastard, but so were you'" (159-60). Trying to protect himself from the memory of June by means of noise, he turns on the television to full volume, then switches on a vacuum cleaner, an electric shaver, and a radio. However, the delusions worsen, and he imagines that June is outside the window, at first scratching at it, next pounding and shattering it. Desperately leaving the house, Gordie gets into his car, hoping that after driving the five miles into town, "another bottle would straighten him out" (161). However, his car strikes

a doe, and Gordie, thinking he can trade the doe for a bottle, puts the animal in the back seat. He drives on, but the doe, only injured, rises toward Gordie; he stuns it with a crowbar, but then imagines that the doe is June. He drives to a convent, and thinking that a nun is a priest who can hear his confession, tells her of having murdered June, and finally runs away. Erdrich's story is a fine treatment of the delusions that result from alcoholism combined with loss and guilt.

V. The final section of The Invisible Enemy has three stories on the theme of "Trying to Stop." The first is Raymond Carver's "Where I'm Calling From," his masterful story about a well-known "drying-out facility" (173). Another, Hortense Calisher's "In Greenwich There Are Many Gravelled Walks," begins with Peter Birge returning to New York City from a sanitarium in Greenwich where he has again taken his widowed alcoholic mother. But there the story largely ceases being about "Trying to Stop," although it illustrates both the reluctance of family members to speak about an alcoholic in recovery and a frequent polarity among the children of alcoholics: either a total aversion to relationships or an excessive eagerness to enter them.

Robert Stone's "Helping," the final story in the collection, skillfully calls to mind "Physician, heal thyself," for Elliot, the protagonist (a counselor) belongs to a "helping profession," as, in a sense, does his wife (a highly principled prosecutor). The story begins with Elliot, a Vietnam veteran and an alcoholic, becoming angry with Blankenship, a therapeutic client, and suggests that Blankenship is lying when he tells about his dreams of Vietnam. After Blankenship leaves, Elliot becomes angry about the "uselessness" of many books in his office and leaves for the public library, departing in anger when he forgets what he wanted there and when he feels that the librarian, his cousin, has been picking his brains about Vietnam. He picks up liquor from a package store and goes home, where he argues with his wife about his resumption of drinking. Grace, his wife, tells Elliot that she will not stay through another drunk. Grace tells about a child abuse case that she has brought against some abusive parents but has lost. The parents telephone and threaten Grace and Elliot; in response Elliot sits up with his shotgun but falls asleep. At dawn he goes out, meets a neighbor, speaks somewhat incoherently, and shoots futilely at a pheasant. Grace, having heard the shot, comes to the bedroom window, stands there naked, and Elliot, feeling "hope for forgiveness," waves to her and hopes that she will "show a hand" in return (217). "Helping" demonstrates the generalized anger that contributes to alcoholism and the difficulty of controlling that anger.

The Invisible Enemy would make an excellent choice for one's own library. Its selections illustrate major issues of alcoholism, and each story is an aesthetic achievement. Miriam Dow and

Jennifer Regan have edited a book that could also serve as a first-rate text for courses in literature or in the social sciences, as well as a Reader for such groups as Adult Children of Alcoholics and other chemical dependency support groups. A companion guide would for these purposes be very helpful. Such a guide could have three major parts: an explanation of the principal issues of alcoholism and a bibliography of major sources about it; an apparatus for the study of the fictional techniques in the selections; and a set of questions for discussion. As a supplement to the first edition or as an integral part of the second edition, it would enhance the book's usefulness. A minor quibble about the book: I wish the editors had dated each selection and cited the original place of publication.

Brief Reviews

"Elpenor." "A Drunkard's Progress: AA and the Sobering Strength of Myth." Harper's (Oct. 1986): 42-48.

The recovering alcoholic who is the author of this memoir preserves his anonymity with an appropriately literate pseudonym: Elpenor, the youngest of Odysseus's companions and the first to die. Befuddled with wine, Elpenor climbed onto the roof of Circe's hall on the eve of the Ithacan's departure from the island and leaped to his death the next morning. This Elpenor, luckily, survived his fall, tells about it, and sheds considerable light on the literary aspects of Alcoholics Anonymous: myth, narrative, and drama.

Elpenor explains, first of all, what is going on in all those church basements: alcoholics telling their stories to one another. These stories, cast in "as simple and straightforward a container of meaning as the mind could devise," provide not entertainment but salvation, the means of "recollecting" and "re-membering" the self, a way to connect with one's fellows, and, perhaps, one's creator:

> Drinking, we built ourselves a drunk's ladder of words, one end propped on clouds, the other floating on water. . . . The fellowship exists to ground the drunk's ladder on solid earth, on common ground, and whether we extend one end of it back up into the heavens or simply lay it down to bridge the chasms between ourselves and others, it is still made of words.

The recovering alcoholic tells a quest story in which the villain, the Demon alcohol, slowly robs the protagonist of everything--jobs, money, family, friends, and, finally, his soul. But the story proves in the end to be a fairy tale: the ogres of danger and death are overcome because its hero has "secret complicitors," because "Life itself wants him to survive." The alcoholic describes hitting bottom, the descent into hell, and however degrading and horrifying it is, the group knows he is all right: he's here, safe and warm, drinking coffee and telling about it. Members of the group, meanwhile, learn to listen, selflessly, "with appetite, imagination, and sympathy."

Elpenor notes the obvious similarities between AA and other therapies of the word, with psychoanalysis, for example, in which a patient talks to a sympathetic listener in order to arrive at a new, more helpful life story. What makes AA different? Elpenor suggests that alcoholics, social, self-dramatizing, performers all, require more than an audience of one. Alcoholics, according to Elpenor, crave the primitive, primal drama of AA: "childlike, we like our theater crude, dirty

and full of miracles." The culture of AA is preliterate: the slogans its oral tradition, the groups and clubs its tribes, the old-timers its bards.

This is a fine, gracefully written essay in its own right, a useful and moving primer on AA for the nonspecialist, but of particular interest to students of alcoholism and literature, reminding us that language unites these two topics, that, as Elpenor writes, "drunkenness is the most verbal of human conditions," and that, just as important, the miracle of recovery may be effected, in part at least, through the restorative power of narrative.

--Hamilton Cochrane

Daniel L. Hurst and Mary Jane Hurst. "Bromide Psychosis: A Literary Case Study." Clinical Neuropharmacology 7 (1984): 259-264.

In 1957 Evelyn Waugh published his autobiographical novel The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold, which contains a detailed and, in some respects, a dispassionate and ironical account of the author's addiction to bromides (bromide psychosis, or "bromism"). The Hursts' study (an earlier version was published in the Evelyn Waugh Newsletter 16 [1982]: 1-4) is an authoritative literary and pharmacological analysis of the schizophrenia-like condition that bromide poisoning induces. The authors point out that Waugh's clinically accurate description of Pinfold's addiction is so detailed and precise that Ordeal would be "useful in the education of psychiatrists and neurologists. Further, the novel reveals that even prominent public figures like Evelyn Waugh can suffer from medical conditions that go largely unrecognized" (263). The Hursts' research suggests that Waugh, if not classifiably alcoholic (see Thomas Gilmore, Equivocal Spirits: 17 [reviewed elsewhere in this issue]), was nonetheless subject to chemical addiction.

--Roger Forseth

NOTES AND COMMENT

Jack London's John Barleycorn, originally published in The Saturday Evening Post in 1913, has recently been reprinted three times: in The Library of America London, volume II (1982); in an Oxford World's Classics series paperback (1989); and in a Signet Classic (1990). . . . Donald Goodwin's Alcohol and the Writer is now out in a Penguin paperback; the University of Massachusetts Press has published John Crowley's The Mask of Fiction: Essays on W. D. Howells (1989). . . . Mosaic has announced a special issue: "Literature and Ingestion (eating disorders, starvation, substance use and abuse, ethnic foods, role of the cook, etc.)" (Inquiries: Dr. Evelyn J. Hinz, Editor, Mosaic, 208 Tier Building, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg R3T2N2). . . . According to The New York Times (15 March 1989) "a new temperance is taking root in America": "'There has clearly been a real change in life style,' said Dr. Howard Shaffer, director of the Center of Addiction Studies at Harvard Medical School. 'It is a new temperance movement, the new sobriety. I suspect it won't be permanent, but I don't see it changing for a long time" (15 March 1989). Speaking of temperance, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union is thriving. "'We were the first "Just Say No" people,'" says its president, Rachel Kelly. The WTCU currently "has about 50,000 members, with chapters in 72 countries" (Minneapolis Star Tribune [1 October 1989]). . . . Books "about addictions and other psychological problems--and the recovery from these problems--are rolling off the presses in record numbers," states Edwin McDowell in The New York Times (21 June 1989). "Books on these themes have become so prevalent that they have become known in publishing circles as 'bibliotherapy.'" "'It speaks to something desperate in our society that there is such a demand,' said Linda Gray, president of Bantam Books, which will soon start a new line of books titled Recovery, to keep up with what Toni Burbank, a Bantam executive editor, calls 'an exploding field.' Ballantine Books and Prentice Hall are also planning lines of recovery books. Publishers say the recent explosion of titles shows that candid discussion of once-secret subjects has become socially acceptable."

Conferences

The "Addiction and Dependency in Literature" session at M/MLA last November (announced in the Fall issue) was judged a resounding success by, among others, the editor who was the discussant. . . . A national conference on John Berryman: "His Life, His Work, His Thought" will be held 25-27 October 1990, at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. The organizers plan to have a panel dealing with Berryman's alcoholism (Inquiries: Richard J. Kelly, 5 Wilson Library, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis 55455; decisions by 16 April). . . . Two conferences on literature and addiction are in the early planning stages: at

the University of Sheffield, Great Britain, Spring 1991 (Inquiries: Sue Vice, Department of English Literature, Shearwood Mount, Shearwood Road, Sheffield S10 2TD); and at the University of Kansas, Fall 1991 (Inquiries: George Wedge, Department of English, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS 66045). Look for specifics in the next issue of Dionysos.

Research Notes

Beginning with the Spring 1990 issue Dionysos will contain a Works in Progress section. Please send items to the editor. We will also include research queries in this section.

NOTEWORTHY

"Life as we find it, is too hard for us; it brings us too many pains, disappointments and impossible tasks. In order to bear it we cannot dispense with palliative measures. . . . There are perhaps three such measures: powerful deflections, which cause us to make light of our misery; substitutive satisfactions, which diminish it; and intoxicating substances, which make us insensitive to it. Something of the kind is indispensable. . . . The substitutive satisfactions, as offered by art, are illusions in contrast with reality, but they are nonetheless psychically effective, thanks to the role which phantasy has assumed in mental life. The intoxicating substances influence our body and alter its chemistry. It is no simple matter to see where religion has its place in this series" (Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents [1930], ed. Peter Gay, The Freud Reader [New York: Norton, 1989] 728).

"To an important extent, the attitudes toward or treatments of drinking studied in this book are manifestations of literary modernism; to the extent that these attitudes or treatments show signs of change or evolution, they may indicate significant changes in modernism. . . . The whole modernist ethic and aesthetic, including the desirability of a constant search for ways of altering or destroying traditional modes of perception, may be under increasingly severe critical examination. . . . [I]n the end the reader may question whether any work of art is worth the sacrificial destruction of the artist" (Thomas Gilmore, Equivocal Spirits [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987] 170-71).

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS TO DIONYSOS

Anya Taylor is a professor of English at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, the City University of New York. She is the author of Magic and English Romanticism (University of Georgia Press, 1979) and of Coleridge's Defense of the Human (Ohio State University Press, 1986), and of numerous articles on Romantic and modern writers. Her "A Father's Tale: Coleridge Foretells the Life of Hartley," about Coleridge's relations with his alcoholic son, is forthcoming in Studies in Romanticism; "Coleridge and Alcohol," disclosing Coleridge's own drinking problem, is forthcoming in Texas Studies in Literature and Language; and "Coleridge on Persons in Dialogue," forthcoming in Modern Language Quarterly. Professor Taylor is at work on two books, Coleridge's Humanity (Macmillan), and Romantic Intoxication. In 1982 she initiated a course on Alcohol and Literature at John Jay, which she shares with her colleague, Professor Tom Dardis.

Timothy Rivinus, M.D., runs a Dual Diagnosis (substance abuse plus other psychiatric problems) Program for adolescents and their families at Bradley Hospital in Providence, Rhode Island, and is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Human Behavior at the Brown University School of Medicine.

Brian Ford has been teaching English in secondary schools for seventeen years. He earned his Ph.D. with a dissertation on the problem of religion in the poetry of Wallace Stevens. He is chair of the English Department at Noble & Greenough School in Dedham, Massachusetts.

Hayden Carruth is the author of The Selected Poetry of Hayden Carruth (1986) and of many other volumes of poetry, most recently Tell Me Again How the White Heron Rises and Flies Across the Nacreous River at Twilight Toward the Distant Islands (1989), and of Sitting In: Selected Writings on Jazz, Blues & Related Topics (1986). He is the recipient of many major awards and prizes for his poetry, and is professor of English at Syracuse University.

Jet Wimp is professor of mathematics at Drexel University. Much of his writing deals with the role that science in general and mathematics in particular plays in the human experience. His poetry has appeared in many magazines, including TriQuarterly; he is co-editor (with Ernest Robson) of the anthology, Against Infinity: an Anthology of Mathematical Poetry (Primary Press, 1984), the author of two chapbooks, The Drowning Place (Moore College of Art Poetry Series, 1980), and The Armies Vast and Abstract Will Appear (Slash and Burn Press, Philadelphia, 1988).

Donald C. Irving, professor of English & American Studies at Grinnell College, has had a long scholarly interest in America's literary landmarks, and is collecting materials toward a biography of the Chicago poet, painter, dancer, Mark Turbyfil.

Thomas B. Gilmore is the author of Equivocal Spirits: Alcoholism and Drinking in Twentieth-Century Literature (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987) and of a study of James Boswell's drinking (forthcoming in Eighteenth-Century Studies).

John Halligan has taught English at Johnson County Community College since 1978. His most recent article, on writing across the curriculum, was published in Kansas English (1989), and he is working on an article on writing in business and science courses. He has a Ph.D. from the University of Pittsburgh.

Hamilton Cochrane is an assistant professor of English at Canisius College, where he teaches courses in literature and creative writing. His essay "'Taking the Cure': Alcoholism and Recovery in the Fiction of Raymond Carver" was published in the Summer 1989 issue of The University of Dayton Review.

Roger Forseth is Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin-Superior. He has published articles on the writer and alcohol in Modern Fiction Studies and Contemporary Drug Problems, and is working on a biography of Sinclair Lewis and a book on codependence and literary biography in addition to editing this journal. His review article "Ambivalent Sensibilities: Alcohol in History and Literature" will appear in the March 1990 issue of American Quarterly.