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EDITORIAL

With this issue, Dionysos begins its third year of publication. The seven issues so far published total 320 pages and contain 12 articles, 8 review-articles (including two film reviews), 16 book reviews, 13 article reviews, two poems, a work of fiction, and an interview. In addition, editorials, notes and comment, and other features emphasizing bibliographical information, work in progress, conference announcements, and news items are to be found in each issue. The reception of Dionysos, since its inception, has been without qualification the single most satisfying experience of my scholarly life. I must say, at once, however, that editing even a small periodical would be unthinkable without an enormous amount of help and support. Absent the intelligent and cheerful work--freely given--of all listed on the masthead, this enterprise would fold in a minute. In addition, the financial support and thoughtful encouragement of the administration of my university has, from the beginning, been unwavering. And it must be urged that the contributors, subscribers, and readers of Dionysos consistently and continuously affirm the hunch several of us had at that meeting three years ago in San Francisco, that there was, after all, a place in the world for one more magazine. Finally, the enterprise is, as of this moment, financially in the black (I add the qualification, since superstition, it seems, is an essential part of editing).

Glancing back at the original statement of purpose of Dionysos, I believe we can affirm that its central purpose has been reasonably followed: to devote itself to critical and scholarly and imaginative work concerning both the destructive and creative dimensions of intoxication in literary, artistic, and cultural texts, and in biography. That our work has scarcely begun may be inferred from the observation, quoted elsewhere in this issue, that an otherwise excellent biographer could still miss the obvious and tragic alcoholism of her subject: not only the effect of this protean and destructive disease on the individual and his life, but on his art as well. Paul Scott--all artists so afflicted--deserves better. In the pages of Dionysos, they will continue, "not dogmatically but deliberately," to receive "better."

--RF

ANNOUNCEMENT

The price of Dionysos as been revised as follows: the foreign price (other than USA and Canada) is \$4.00 single issues, \$10.00 annually for individuals, and \$15.00 for institutions. This adjustment is owing to increased overseas postal expenses. Payment in dollars by international money order is preferred. All other rates remain the same.

DRUNK DESCENDING A STAIRCASE: JOHN BARLEYCORN

John W. Crowley

"Alcoholism is like an elevator: you can get off at any floor, or you can ride it to the basement--but it only takes you down."

AA saying

Jack London missed the New York Armory Show in 1913. Had he been there, he would have seen Marcel Duchamp's Nude Descending a Staircase, the succès de scandale in an exhibit often said to mark the originary moment of modernism in America--unless it came the year before, with the founding of Poetry by Harriet Monroe. Between these events lay the production of John Barleycorn, finished in December 1912 and published the following August. London wrote the book at his California ranch, after he had rounded Cape Horn aboard the Dirigo in 1912.

This cruise was motivated in part by London's need to dry out. For years his drinking had grown ever more destructive to his health and his marriage. Although he had promised to quit, he went on a binge in New York during the weeks before sailing. But after five months at sea, beyond the bottle's temptation, London felt renewed. "When the alcohol passed from his system, he was triumphant and claimed that he did not need it at all. 'I have learned, to my absolute satisfaction,' he declared, 'that I am not an alcoholic in any sense of the word.'"¹

True believers in the Jack London cult have steadfastly taken him at his word. The mere suggestion that their hero was a common drunk--"common" because alcoholism, after all, is the great leveler--is met with fierce resistance. Clarice Stasz, who has written an admirably enlightened chapter on London's drinking, reports: "No point drew more extensive and impassioned criticism from London experts . . . than my discussions of alcohol. Indeed, the pressure of these individuals has been so strong that in the earliest versions of the book I accepted their stand that London did not have a drinking problem." The evidence adduced by the London devotees includes his "enormous productivity" and his "ability to go for periods at a time without drinking at all." But these grounds are undermined by the testimony of London's wife, Charmian, whose anguished entries in her unpublished diaries convinced Stasz finally that the experts' "objections are no longer credible."²

It's amazing that they ever seemed credible to any reader of John Barleycorn. But, then, London convinced himself that those dry months on the Dirigo, when he did not drink "because I did not desire a drink," had proved "there was no organic need for alcohol."³ And, besides, "not one man in ten thousand, or in a hundred thousand, is a genuine, chemical dipsomaniac. Drinking,

as I deem it, is practically entirely a habit of mind" (339). No harm, then, in an occasional social nip: "I would drink--but, oh, more skillfully, more discreetly, than ever before." Surely, the results would be different: "Never again would I be a peripatetic conflagration. Never again would I invoke the White Logic," which now "lies decently buried alongside the Long Sickness" (342-43). These were London's metaphors for the profound depression--the agonized sense of life's hopelessness and worthlessness--that he attributed to his drinking. Needless to say, the "White Logic" and the "Long Sickness" were soon disinterred when London picked up the bottle again. ("O keep the [hair of the] Dog far hence, that's friend to men, / Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!")⁴ He was dead within three years.

There's nothing unusual about such self-deception, of course, whether practiced by a drunk or his "codependents," who in London's case include the "experts" who pressured Stasz to profess their own hagiolatry. In literary studies, "denial" frequently informs the silences, evasions, or impassioned refusals by critics and biographers to recognize alcoholism when it's as plain as the (red) noses on their subjects' faces.

Upton Sinclair, for one, knew better about Jack London.⁵ And some fine recent studies make it irrefutable that, as Donald W. Goodwin argues, "alcoholism among American writers has been of epidemic dimensions," especially among those who came of age early in this century.⁶ Goodwin's speculations on this epidemic lead, I believe, to one inescapable conclusion: there is a correlation between the incidence of alcoholism among modernist writers and the ideology of modernism itself.

Duchamp's cubist nude, descending the staircase with insouciant grace, promises to reach the bottom without stumbling. (That's why drunks take the elevator!) But the swirling and blurry turbulence of the canvas shocked visitors to the Armory Show who were accustomed to sober realism in art. Insofar as Nude may have seemed like a portrait of delirium tremens--as well as "an explosion in a shingle factory"⁷--it stood for something basic to the ideology of modernism.

In defining "The Modern Temper" of his prematurely jaded generation, Joseph Wood Krutch outlined in 1929 a "gloomy vision of a dehumanized" new world in which "man must henceforth live if he lives at all, for all his premises have been destroyed and he must proceed to new conclusions." Painfully aware of its predicament, this lost generation has "awakened to the fact that both the ends which its fathers proposed to themselves and the emotions from which they drew their strength seem irrelevant and remote." For Krutch, the epitome of "The Modern Temper" is T. S. Eliot in his "bleak, tortuous complexities": "Here disgust speaks with a robust voice and denunciation is confident, but ecstasy,

flickering and uncertain, leaps fitfully up only to sink back among the cinders." Thoreau's "quiet desperation" has become the intellectual's status quo; "and the more highly developed the reflective powers of the individual become, the more likely is that quiet desperation to become an active rebellion which expresses itself in self-regarding vices."⁸

The foremost modernist "vice" was drinking; and it may be argued, I think, that "The Modern Temper" itself was one byproduct of the alcoholic epidemic among writers and intellectuals in the twentieth century. More precisely, if the effects of alcoholic depression were not solely responsible for "The Modern Temper," they are certainly inseparable from its ideology of despair.

In the formation of this ideology, Jack London played a pioneering role. Had he lived a little longer, he might have recognized his affinities to the expatriate writers of the 1920s, who bellied up to the bars of Paris in self-conscious defiance of Prohibition at home, certain that booze and artistic inspiration went hand in hand. There is no need here to call the roll of those whose careers suggest otherwise, whose drinking enfeebled their work and ravaged their lives.⁹ There was a cautionary tale to be read in London's narrative of alcoholic self-destruction, but it went unheeded, even by its author.

John Barleycorn remains, nonetheless, "one of the most moving and dramatic histories of the making of an alcoholic in the literature of drinking."¹⁰ It may also be considered, given its fictional contours, the first modernist "drunk novel," a genre that has flourished since 1913, reaching its apogee, perhaps, in Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano (1947). Before John Barleycorn there were temperance novels by the score and a few books, such as Stephen Crane's George's Mother (1896), that attempted to mitigate the relentless moralism of temperance fiction. But there was nothing quite like London's "Memoirs of an Alcoholic" (9), written ostensibly in the cause of Prohibition, but strikingly different from temperance novels in both its psychological subtlety and its inside understanding of the ethos of drinking. An early and avid reader in psychoanalysis, especially the work of Carl Jung, London died just before a Freudian tidal wave engulfed American culture during the 1920s. London's grasp of psychodynamics was nonetheless modernist in its awareness of inner conflict and unconscious motivation. His sociology of drinking was likewise modernist in its calculated detachment. The narrator of John Barleycorn, a participant-observer, abstracts general cultural patterns, along class and gender lines, from the details of his individual case.

This century's understanding of "alcoholism," a term that came into wide usage only after 1900, is itself part and parcel of the scientific and medical discourses that emerged at the end

of the nineteenth century, along with the disciplinarity of the social sciences and the professionalization of medicine. "Alcoholism" was defined within the same episteme that "wrote" literary modernism. There was no "drunk novel" before John Barleycorn because the modern alcoholic was only then being constructed in such texts.

London himself often used the term "dipsomaniac," a word loaded with overtones of insanity, which he warily declined to pin on himself--because that would have placed him in the disreputable company from which his cult has been laboring ever since to extricate him. If drinking was "entirely a habit of mind," then dipsomaniacs were mental and moral degenerates who lacked the will to control their noxious behavior.

This moral onus was lifted, in effect, by the deterministic assumptions of the "disease" model of alcoholism, which may be traced to Benjamin Rush in the eighteenth century but which became paradigmatic only in the 1930s--in the counterpoint to the epidemic of alcoholism itself.¹¹ If the disease model of alcoholism had already existed for London, his "denial" (a concept derived from Freudian psychology) might not have been weaker; but his perception of his own drinking would likely have been different. One root of London's denial was his awareness of the stigma attached to dipsomania, which he self-protectively takes to be exotically rare (only one in a hundred thousand!).

Equally rare for London is the man who can hold his liquor and also withstand the metaphysical nightmare that accompanies drinking. In distancing himself from dipsomaniacs, London distinguished between two kinds of drinkers:

There is the man whom we all know, stupid, unimaginative, whose brain is bitten numbly by numb maggots; who walks generously with wide-spread, tentative legs, falls frequently in the gutter, and who sees, in the extremity of his ecstasy, blue mice and pink elephants. He is the type that gives rise to the jokes in the funny papers.

The other type of drinker has imagination, vision. Even when most pleasantly jingled he walks straight and naturally, never staggers nor falls, and knows just where he is and what he is doing. It is not his body but his brain that is drunken. He may bubble with wit, or expand with good fellowship. Or he may see intellectual specters and phantoms that are cosmic and logical and that take the forms of syllogisms. It is when in this condition that he strips away the husks of life's healthiest illusions and gravely considers the iron collar of necessity welded about the neck of his soul. This is the hour of John Barleycorn's subtlest power. It is easy for any man to roll in the gutter. But it is a

terrible ordeal for a man to stand upright on his two legs unswaying, and decide that in all the universe he finds for himself only one freedom, namely, the anticipating of the day of his death. With this man this is the hour of the white logic . . . when he knows that he may know only the laws of things--the meaning of things never. (11-13)

In the rhetoric of this passage, the second type--the one recognizable as the modernist (male) artist¹²--is plainly superior to the clownish stumblebum. This prophet of the "White Logic" is a deadly serious man among men, a visionary with a tough-mindedness to match his rugged physical constitution.¹³ He wears the iron collar standing (more or less) upright. Blessed are they who roll in the gutter with pseudo-visions of blue mice and pink elephants; they enjoy some peace, at least, in the stupor of illusion. But the "imaginative man" must bear "the pitiless, spectral syllogisms of the white logic." He looks upon life "with the jaundiced eye of a pessimistic German philosopher. He sees through all illusions" (14). He is, in short, the modernist writer as Nietzschean hero: Zarathustra in his cups.

Although London celebrates this ideology of despair, in part by emphasizing the "manliness" required to embrace it, he also deconstructs it by acknowledging an epistemological dilemma. Exactly how is the "White Logic" visited upon the "imaginative man"? Does alcohol merely unveil what is otherwise hidden from common view? Or, rather, does alcohol itself produce the "pitiless, spectral syllogisms"? "Temperamentally I am wholesome-hearted and merry," London tells his wife. "Yet when I walk with John Barleycorn I suffer all the damnation of intellectual pessimism" (8). It is only when John Barleycorn sends the curse of the "White Logic"--"the argent messenger of truth beyond truth, the antithesis of life, cruel and bleak as interstellar space, pulseless and frozen as absolute zero, dazzling with the frost of irrefragable logic and unforgettable fact"--that the dreamer cannot dream and the liver cannot live. Then the victim "cries out, as in 'The City of Dreadful Night': 'Our life's a cheat, our death a black abyss'" (308).

The pessimism of London's "White Logic" is certainly similar to other expressions of "naturalism" in American writing at the turn of the century, but John Barleycorn also points toward the modernist veneration of the artist as meaning-maker, the sole source of order in a deranged universe. John Barleycorn is finally less about its titular "hero" (alcohol personified) than its narrator, who attains through his duel with meaninglessness a dark triumph of the will. Like the depressive speaker of "The Waste Land," London defiantly shores fragments against his ruins.

In "The Thinking Man's Waste Land," Saul Bellow writes of a tradition "in which literature has lived uncritically." The

"alienation" of the modern writer is "accompanied by the more or less conscious acceptance of a theory of modern civilization. This theory says in effect that modern mass society is frightful, brutal, hostile to whatever is pure in the human spirit, a waste land and a horror. To its ugliness, its bureaucratic regiments, its thefts, its lies, its wars, and its cruelties, the artist can never be reconciled." The "horror" of modern life might account, perhaps, for the characteristic despair of modernist literature.¹⁴ But the fact remains that many of those writers who shared the waste land mentality were alcoholics. When Fitzgerald opined that there are no second acts in American writing, he neglected to mention that he and his cohort had all gotten drunk during the first act and passed out during intermission. What the modernists saw through a glass darkly had been foreseen in John Barleycorn--and, to a degree, called into question.

* * * * *

NOTES

¹ Andrew Sinclair, Jack: A Biography of Jack London (New York: Harper, 1977) 188.

² Clarice Stasz, American Dreamers: Charmian and Jack London (New York: St. Martin's, 1988) 345, 228.

³ Jack London, John Barleycorn (New York: Macmillan, 1913) 338. Other quotations are documented in the text. The book is currently available in Jack London: Novels and Social Writings, ed. Donald Pizer (New York: The Library of America, 1982), and in a separate edition: John Barleycorn: or Alcoholic Memoirs, ed. Clarice Stasz (New York: Signet, 1990).

⁴ A quotation, with my modest interpolation, from T. S. Eliot, The Waste Land (1922), lines 74-75.

⁵ "When John Barleycorn was published, Jack sent me a copy and I wrote to thank him. I praised him for his courage and frankness. But to myself I uttered a private prayer--that having gone this far in his understanding of the terrible dangers of drink, he would be able to go the one great step further, and give it up completely. I feared the hint of disaster which seemed implicit in his concluding words of John Barleycorn. I feared his insistence that he was not an alcoholic. . . ." Upton Sinclair, The Cup of Fury (Great Neck, N.Y.: Channel, 1956) 164-65.

⁶ Donald W. Goodwin, Alcohol and the Writer (Kansas City: Andrews, 1988) 1. See also: Tom Dardis, The Thirsty Muse: Alcohol and the American Writer (New York: Ticknor, 1989); Thomas B. Gilmore, Equivocal Spirits: Alcoholism and Drinking in

Twentieth-Century Literature (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1987). These three books are perceptively reviewed by Scott Donaldson in "Writing and Drinking in America," The Sewanee Review, 98 (Spring 1990), 312-24.

⁷ See H. H. Arnason, History of Modern Art (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice, 1968) 414.

⁸ Joseph Wood Krutch, The Modern Temper: A Study and a Confession (1929; New York: Harcourt, 1956) 16-17, 24-25.

⁹ See the long but still partial list in Alcohol and the Writer, p. 4. Goodwin adds that George Wedge has identified "150 famous American writers who were alcoholic or very heavy drinkers." What's difficult, indeed, "is to think of nonalcoholics among American writers of the twentieth century."

¹⁰ Dwight Anderson, The Other Side of the Bottle (New York: A.A. Wyn, 1950) 50.

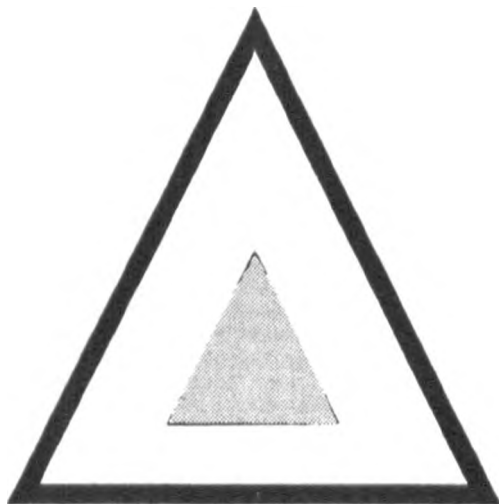
¹¹ By analogy, "dipsomania" is to "alcoholism" as "inversion" is to "homosexuality" or as "melancholia" is to "manic-depressive disorder." The second term in each of these pairs expresses a shift from late-Victorian to modernist discourse. On the history of the "disease" model, see Harry Gene Levine, "The Discovery of Addiction: Changing Conceptions of Habitual Drunkenness in America," Journal of Studies on Alcohol, 39, no. 1 (1978), 143-74.

¹² Feminists have been pointing out for some years that canonical modernist literature reflects the gender anxieties of Western culture at the turn of the century. The modernist ideal of the "artist" was gendered "male" (as was the modern alcoholic). See Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century, vol. 1: The War of the Words (New Haven: Yale UP, 1988).

¹³ I am invoking William James's famous distinction between "tough-minded" and "tender-minded," which is related in turn to his discussion of the "healthy-minded temperament" versus the "sick soul." The former settles its "scores with the more evil aspects of the universe by systematically declining to lay them to heart or make much of them, by ignoring them in his reflective calculations, or even, on occasion, by denying outright that they exist." The latter, on the contrary, is given to "maximizing evil . . . based on the persuasion that the evil aspects of our life are of its very essence, and that the world's meaning most comes home to us when we lay them most to heart." Whereas to the sick soul the healthy-minded way "seems unspeakably blind and shallow," the way of the sick soul, to the healthy-minded, "seems unmanly and diseased." The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature (1902; New York: Collier, 1961), 114, 116,

140. Note the gender reversal here. Whereas James follows Victorian assumptions in associating "manliness" with "healthy-mindedness," London anticipates other male modernists in appropriating "manliness" to a tough-minded vision of life (deep, muscular, dark), and thereby denigrating "healthy-mindedness" by implicit association with a tender-minded "femininity" (shallow, soft, light).

¹⁴ The pervasive bleakness of modernist literature, to which I am inured by familiarity, often bewilders students who are taking it in large doses for the first time. My students are always asking me why we have to read all this depressing stuff.



"WHY DID THEY MAKE SUCH A FUSS?":
DON BIRNAM'S EMOTIONAL BAROMETER

Roger Forseth

Charles Jackson. The Lost Weekend. New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1944.

On a miserable February night in Detroit, in 1946, I, along with several other eighteen-year-old Navy buddies, saw the film The Lost Weekend.¹ We were given free tickets to it at the USO, so we went--primarily to pass the time before heading for the bars. I remember even now the movie with the same vividness and immediacy that so many of us are able to recall the moment we heard the News on December 7, 1941 or on November 22, 1963. My identification with Don Birnam, the protagonist of The Lost Weekend, made me sense that I too had a special relationship with alcohol. It was a subliminal awareness, to be sure, but the shock of recognition caused by Don Birnam's obsessive quest became indelibly a part of me. Indeed, the experience of the movie was so sharp--and fascinatingly unpleasant--that I put off for many years the reading of Charles Jackson's novel. When I got around to it, however, I made the further discovery that the book is, in important narrative and affective ways, different from the film.

The Lost Weekend literally, emotionally, and aesthetically is framed by its first and last sentences: "'The barometer of his emotional nature was set for a spell of riot'" ; and, "Why did they make such a fuss?" As the story, set in Manhattan in 1936, begins, the thirty-three-year-old Don Birnam is sober, having once more been ministered to by his brother Wick. Temporarily left alone, in the chair that is his only safe geographical place, Birnam's

fingers touched the edge of a small book tucked in beside the cushion of the chair. He pulled it out and looked at the title. It was a copy of James Joyce's Dubliners his brother had been reading. He opened it and began to read at random, articulating the words very carefully in a whisper, paying elaborate attention to the form of each word but none to what he was reading. It was like the time, on similar occasions, when, keyed-up, desperate, he went out in search of a French movie, and sat in some airless movie-house all afternoon concentrating on the rapid French being spoken from the screen, because he believed a few hours of such concentration, even though he didn't listen to the sense, had a steadying effect. So he read now for some minutes, thinking that he might even read the book right through and then through again before his brother came back. Wouldn't that surprise him? he

said to himself with a smile, while his lips formed other words: The barometer of his emotional nature was set for a spell of riot. The smile faded, he stared and read again.

(8-9)

Stylistically and psychologically characteristic of the novel, this Joycean epiphany provides a key to Birnam. He is talented, charming, sensitive, educated, middle class, literary, and fashionable. The reference to Dubliners (specifically to "Counterparts," in which the drunkard Farrington sets off on a spree) is the first of many literary allusions, most of them involving alcoholic writers or artists (Poe, Fitzgerald, Burns, Utrillo). He is also preoccupied, to the exclusion of almost all else, with himself, his ruminations, his feelings, his mostly quietly desperate quest for psychic euphoria and physical comfort. In short, he is the alcoholic stripped to the essentials: the archetype of the now generally accepted image of an addict. Herein, I believe, lies the power--in the film as well as in the novel--of Jackson's characterization. He has caught in amber the clinically defined disease of alcoholism.²

The structure of the novel consists essentially of a series of interior monologues. Don Birnam, with infantile pride, dreams (day and otherwise), reminisces, and finally floats on a sea of self-indulgent, almost erotic, recollected images. We are informed that he had a childhood protected by an indulgent mother and an absent father, an adolescence complete with experiments in homoeroticism, ostracism from his college fraternity for carrying that impulse into adulthood, treatment in Europe for tuberculosis, and continuous emotional and material protection by brother, friends, and above all by his fiancée, Helen. This almost total narcissism seems to have misled several of the novel's early reviewers, who judged it more a tract than a novel.³ Such a misreading is understandable, since the novelized temperance tract had a long if largely undistinguished history, at least until Prohibition. But Jackson's method is anything but didactic. Rather, he is psychologically exact in remaining largely in the mind of the alcoholic, for that is always where the alcoholic is.

There are, in the novel, three especially effective motifs or themes that, in my opinion, overshadow the famous Yom Kippur fiasco, the mini-Walpurgisnacht scene in the Bellevue alcoholic ward, and the visual delirium tremens (all of which, because they are visual, are effectively dramatized in the film). They are the obsession with money, the auditory imagery and hallucinations, and, above all, the contempt for the codependents Wick and Helen.

Typically, the alcoholic Birnam's preoccupation with money is overshadowed only by his devotion to booze. Like a fugal motif it runs through The Lost Weekend, beginning with his filching of the cleaning lady's pay ("On the kitchen table was an

envelope addressed to Mrs. Foley. . . He tore it open and fingered through four five-dollar bills. "Twenty, my God" (9)). This discovery is, for him, pure magic. He has the bad habit, however, of neglecting to provide a bottle for the next morning's hangover ("Last night it had been merely drink. It was medicine now" [40]), so the hunt for more funds, accompanied by the predictable subterfuges, tricks, and lies, generates almost his entire physical activity. At one point he attempts to steal a woman's purse in a Greenwich Village lounge, with humiliating results, but for the most part his quests are successful. His custom is to hide money for the next day, and then to forget where he put it. We are caught up in the nearly constant search for it to the very end of the book where Birnam, having pawned Helen's jacket for five dollars to underwrite the beginning of a new Lost Week, discovers his hiding place during his Lost Weekend just past:

Thrusting the [five dollars] inside the pocket, his fingers ran into opposition. Something blocked the opening. He reached in with his hand and pulled out a fistful of bills.

He was thunderstruck. (240)

And so too are we, caught up as we are in Birnam's fear, fueled by alcoholic paranoia, that the funds might once again be lost.

Richly developed auditory imagery, hallucinatory and real, run through the novel:

Delirium is a disease of the night, he remembered. He was hearing things. His ears were made the fools of the other senses. When he opened his eyes and looked at the ceiling, the whispering stopped at once. The moment he closed them again, there was the whispering: What are we going to do about Don? (170)

The ringing of the telephone is a particularly effective device. At times it becomes Birnam's only connection with the outside world, and his invariable refusal to answer it reinforces the unreality of his reality. "The telephone rang."

The noise stabbed his bladder and bathed his thighs with hot urine, but he was unable to move or care. The telephone rang from the bedroom, and rang out, and rang out. It sounded red; orange-yellow . . . like the screaming alarm of the prison-break. . . . Finally it ceased. At once the silence became as clamorous as the lately-jangling 'phone. (174)

Birnam's refusal to answer the telephone is symbolic of his refusal of help for his addiction. One of the best things in the book is Jackson's demonstration that for the serious drinker the codependent is forever a royal pain in the neck. What is all the

fuss about? Why are they interfering with my reason for being? What plans, schemes, tricks of theirs will I now have (always successfully!) to counter? One constantly hears of the suffering of the codependent. But what of suffering the codependent? The Lost Weekend is, to my knowledge, the only work that takes the alcoholic's point of view here. "The brother looked at him searchingly, almost sadly, he thought. 'I wouldn't keep asking you, Don, if I didn't think it would do you good. It would do you so much good'" (4). Birnam senses that in some respects his disease is as important to his brother and his fiancée as it is to him:

He thought again of Wick and Helen. Funny relationship. Closer than if they had been lifelong friends; but not because of any real affinity or interest in each other. In fact, each was the kind of person that the other did not care for at all. The only thing that held them together was him, of course.

(11)

That "of course" contains in a phrase the complaisance of the alcoholic, his faith that something will always bail him out; and Jackson skillfully brings the reader firmly to the side of Don Birnam. Leave him alone! Find the money! Open up the pawn shop! Discover the hidden bottle!

The Lost Weekend, as Thomas Gilmore points out, is no Under the Volcano.⁴ Malcolm Lowry feared that his book, which came out in 1947, would be overshadowed by the bestseller. But they are complementary, the one popular and the other high art. This distinction carries over to their respective films, and here, in my opinion, popular art wins out.⁵ The movie production of Charles Jackson's novel deserved all the awards it received. Yet it misses the somber power of the novel, primarily because of its facile, "happy" ending, which embodies a simple-minded exercise of will power, and above all because in it the codependents are depicted far more sympathetically than is justified by the tragic implications of the novel. Helen, in the film, is simply too plucky, Wick too normal, and the bartender too understanding, from Birnam's mad perspective to be altogether convincing. Their applause, as it were, of Don Birnam's acts of pouring the booze down the sink and starting his long-delayed novel, The Bottle, on the expendable typewriter (retrieved by the bartender!) are jarring, to say the least. This surely is not what the fuss in the book is all about.

The film's creators, in the end, exhibited a failure of nerve. Perhaps they thought their audience could not take the real thing. Perhaps they were right. But in Detroit, in that winter of opportunity, a young sailor discovered in the movie's warm rush of a conclusion an invitation to try himself the "source" of Don Birnam's creative impulse: ethyl alcohol. If all one had to bear were a few hangovers in order to write a

masterpiece, would it not be worth a shot? The scriptwriters, in their attempt to build a moral into the ending of The Lost Weekend, sent, I fear, the wrong message.

James Agee wrote of the book and the movie in 1945:

The causes of Don Birnam's alcoholism were not thoroughly controlled or understood, I thought, in the novel. In the movie they hardly exist. . . . There is very little appreciation . . . of the many and subtle moods possible in drunkenness; almost no registration of the workings of the several minds inside a drinker's brain; hardly a trace of the narcissism and self-deceit which are so indispensable or of the self-loathing and self-pity which are so invariable; hardly a hint, except through abrupt action, of the desperation of thirst; no hint at all of the many colorings possible in the desperation. The hangovers lack the weakness, sickness, and horrible distortions of time-sense which they need. (183)

I think he catches the essence of the problem with both the book and the film: they are too genteel. In the final analysis, however, I don't think that this judgment is quite fair; for what Agee appears to be asking for is Under the Volcano. Yet, after conceding that Don Birnam is no Consul, one may still confess that there is ample room in literature for degrees of suffering.⁶

NOTES

¹The Lost Weekend, (dir. Billy Wilder, Paramount, 1945). The screen play was written by Wilder and Charles Brackett, and starred Ray Milland as Don Birnam, with Jane Wyman (Helen), Philip Terry (Wick Birnam), Howard da Silva (the bartender), Doris Dowling (Gloria), Frank Faylen (Bim), Mary Young (the landlady). It won Academy Awards for picture, actor (Milland), director, and screen play. The script has been published: Charles Brackett and Billy Wilder, The Lost Weekend: Screen Play. From the Novel by Charles Jackson. Release Dialogue Script (S.I.): Paramount, 1945. OCLC: 12603981.

² "Early in 1944, a Hollywood producer had sought the help of Alcoholics Anonymous with the intention of devising a feature movie that would dramatize AA's understanding of alcoholism. This project was first sidetracked and then abandoned when the Charles Jackson best-seller, The Lost Weekend, was made into a motion picture accomplishing just that. Through 1945 especially, in the wake of the popularity of The Lost Weekend, Alcoholics Anonymous received helpful publicity from newsreel coverage and opportunities to carry its message through radio features and even regular programming" (Ernest Kurtz, Not-God: A History of Alcoholics Anonymous [Center City, MN: Hazelden, 1979] 120). See also 294n. John Crowley has pointed out, in a personal

communication, that the first edition of The Lost Weekend was a small printing. It wasn't until the movie achieved success that the book, in subsequent printings, became a bestseller.

³ The Lost Weekend received a number of important reviews: Edmund Wilson (The New Yorker, 5 Feb 1944: 78-81); Mark Schorer (The New Republic, 31 Jan 1944: 154); Harrison Smith (The Saturday Review of Literature, 29 Jan 1944: 5); and Philip Wylie (The New York Times Book Review, 30 Jan 1944: 7). The best review of the film is that of James Agee, Agee on Film. Vol. One, New York: Grosset, 1967: 182-84. It is perhaps worth noting that several of the reviewers (a) were in position to choose the books they reviewed; and (b) reportedly themselves had a "special relationship" with alcohol.

⁴ "The Place of Hallucinations in Under the Volcano." Equivocal Spirits: Alcoholism and Drinking in Twentieth-Century Literature (Chapel Hill: U of N Carolina P, 1987) 18.

⁵ In addition to Agee, see Robin Room, "Alcoholism and Alcoholics Anonymous in U. S. Films, 1945-1962: The Party Ends for the 'Wet Generations,'" Journal of Studies on Alcohol 50 (1989) 368-83; and Nicholas O. Warner, "Prohibition in the Movies," Dionysos 2.2 (Fall 1990) 33-37. For a (to my mind) curious contemporary review, in which the movie is treated as though it were a training film, see S. D. B., "A Student of the Problems of Alcohol and Alcoholism Views the Motion Picture, The Lost Weekend," Quarterly Journal of the Studies on Alcohol 6 (1945-1946): 402-5.

⁶ Charles Jackson (1903-1968) wrote three other novels, including Fall of Valor (1946) and A Second-Hand Life (1967). The themes of these works, respectively, homosexuality and "nymphomania," are both developed with a psychological realism of considerable sophistication.

BENCHLEY'S SOBERING REVELATIONS¹

Dan Wakefield

Peter Benchley. Rummies. New York: Random House, 1989.

It was one of those days: He woke late, the coffee machine went berserk, and the train broke down in the Jersey tundra on the way to New York. No wonder Scott Preston had to stop and have two double vodka martinis before going to his work as editor at the prestigious publishing house of Mason & Storrow. He vows he is going to quit drinking the following Monday (he tells himself that on weekends "the pressures are too great: lunches, dinners, cocktail parties"), and feeling both virtuous and rejuvenated, he breezes on into his office. What awaits him are not the expected manuscripts and phone messages, but his wife, his daughter, his boss and a woman "intervention" facilitator who have gathered to tell him he had better check into a drying-out clinic in New Mexico ("a lush bin" as Scott calls it condescendingly, denying his own alcoholism) or he will lose not only his job but his family.

So begins "Rummies," a new novel by Peter Benchley, which might have been more accurately as well as more hopefully titled "Recovery." At its best and most convincing--which is very good and very persuasive--it is about the successful treatment of an Ivy League, up-scale, Eastern intellectual establishment alcoholic, whose addiction of course is just as destructive as that of any streetwise ghetto dweller.

Scott Preston's education and coming to grips with the hard facts of his disease during the 28-day treatment at the clinic where he goes are told with wit, compassion and compelling insight. His evolution from a know-it-all, above-it-all, self-deluding lush to a vulnerable human being looking at himself and others with honesty is described in moving passages like this glimpse of his change of attitude in the clinic's group therapy sessions:

Preston was beginning to feel good. These were people who had probably never expressed a feeling for another person except perhaps a girlfriend or a mother, had certainly never articulated such a feeling before an audience. He was witnessing a kind of dawn, a birth of honesty and self-awareness, a reaching out by people whose lives had been tight little knots of isolation. . . .

¹ Reprinted from The Washington Post Book World, 19 October 1989. Copyright 1989 by Dan Wakefield. Reprinted by permission.

We feel his struggle as he gains the new and hard-won ability to speak the truth of himself and his own condition.

"I'm Scott. I'm an alcoholic." The word still didn't feel completely natural in Preston's mouth--like a false tooth, there but not really his--but he was used to it. He didn't feel he had to deny it.

There are no easy answers or miracle cures here, even for the gutsy and memorable counselor Marcia Breck, a former hooker, who wakes in the morning after helping others shed their delusions by having to face again her own temptations, the lilting inner voice that says, "Hell, why not have a couple of short ones, take your mind off it awhile?":

She laughed aloud, amused and amazed at the relentlessness of the demon that would live forever within her, pleased and grateful that she recognized all its cues and could parry every thrust. No. Not every thrust. Never say 'every.' Never get cocky, or one day you'll wake up on the floor of some gin mill and say to yourself, How did that happen?

The once-superior suburban souse Preston begins to admire as well as learn from such counselors, and from his motley crew of companions in treatment, who include an overweight mobster, a beautiful socialite, a short-stop for the Padres and a gay designer, all of whom come alive in their particular struggle for recovery.

Evidently Benchley, author of the suspense classic "Jaws," didn't think these human interactions and revelations of developing character were enough, and threw in a plodding plot line about a never-credible movie mogul named Stone Banner who founded the clinic but has slipped back into addiction, and tries to cover up his drug killing of the fading glamour queen Natasha Grant. When the characters whom we've come to believe in and care about get caught up in this hokey intrigue it leads them and us away from the reality of their plight into a never-never land of B-movie melodrama.

The real drama is in the transformation of the former rummy editor, who, in the final scene of the novel, catches the tempting scent of booze from the airport bar on his way back home. "He laughed softly and kept walking."

A HAPPY HYBRID

Thomas B. Gilmore

Ivan Gold. Sams in a Dry Season. Boston: Houghton Mifflin/Seymour Lawrence, 1990.

The dust jacket hints at large and misleading claims for this novel, inviting us to compare it with two other well-known novels about alcoholics: Ivan Gold's hero Jason Sams, it says, is "perhaps the most powerful fictional portrait of a drunk since Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano." and Sams "may remind other readers of Alan Severance, the brilliant but drink-addled narrator of John Berryman's novel Recovery."

Hedged though the invitations are ("perhaps," "may remind"), they still do Sams in a Dry Season a serious disservice. For one thing, Gold's language lacks the grandiloquence of Lowry's; it is more commonplace, earthy, demotic. Sams, a writer and teacher of writing (though lately he has been doing well at neither), refers to his recently hired competitor and probable replacement, a British woman, as "the limey son of a bitch" and to his wife's having "busted her butt" preparing a meal for this woman. Lowry, I think, would have been embarrassed to allow his characters such ordinary expressions.

There are more important differences. Sams is a less extreme version of an alcoholic than either Lowry's Consul or Berryman's Severance. Though threatened with the loss of his job, Sams still holds one; and though not functioning well, he is still functioning in a world of reality that matters deeply to him. Severance, in contrast, is in a hospital for alcoholics--and not for the first time. The Consul, while nominally holding a job, has actually abandoned it and seeks to abandon the world of reality altogether by his singular devotion to drinking.

One subtle but telling indication that Sams in a Dry Season is less extreme is that, in spite of his prodigious consumption of alcohol, its hero dreams, whereas the Consul suffers from the terrifying hallucinations that are a major means of development and revelation in the novel. Scientists have established the great psychological and physical value of dreaming, which occurs in the REM phase of sleep. Since the extreme alcoholic, one who has been drinking in large quantities for many years, no longer is able to dream, his only outlet or safety valve is hallucinating, the mind and body's desperate and unsatisfactory attempt to replace the lost benefits of dreaming. That Sams can still dream demonstrates that he is in a less perilous state than the Consul.

Perhaps the most striking difference in the three novels lies in the role played by the family or domesticity, or in the

main character's attitude toward this. Severance has a family, but for the space of the novel is, to pun on his significant name, severed from it and from his familiar surroundings, sealed off in the rarefied atmosphere of the alcoholic hospital. The Consul has two family members in his life, a brother and a wife who returns to him early in the novel, both well meaning and, especially Yvonne, concerned about rescuing him from his self-destructive alcoholism. But rather than welcoming their solicitude, the Consul increasingly spurns it and them, and rushes to embrace his doom. To Sams, in contrast, his family is highly important. In spite of the strains in his family life caused by his drinking, his love for his wife and son are an important motive for him to stop drinking, as he does successfully toward the end of the novel. Moreover, even during the section of the novel which comes closest to constituting a bender for Sams--a brief and futile trip from Boston to New York to talk to his publisher and agent about an unwritten novel--Sams remains surprisingly (for an alcoholic) close to family, visiting his aged parents in his native haunts on the lower East Side and even dutifully attending an uncle's funeral.

Brief comparison with a third famous alcoholic novel, Charles Jackson's The Lost Weekend, will further underscore how different Sams in a Dry Season is. Wick, brother of Don Birnam, the alcoholic hero of Jackson's novel, has been acting as his caretaker; his brotherly concern has become mostly a combination of constant suspicion that Don will drink and disgust, both with himself and his brother, when he learns he was not suspicious enough and Don has contrived to get drunk again. Sams' parents, though they seldom see him and have had very little experience with drinking or drunks, are well aware that their son has a problem (more aware than he lets himself be); but instead of exacerbating the family ties, as in The Lost Weekend, Jason's problem seems to evoke an even greater caring or concern from his parents; it strengthens the family ties.

Differences, then, seem more important than similarities between Gold's and these other alcoholic novels. Finding and describing the proper category for Sams in a Dry Season is more promising than these failed comparisons (and even if they worked, what novel would not be diminished by comparison with the epic sweep of Under the Volcano?).

An enlightening way, I think, to approach Gold's book is to see it as a hybrid form, an interesting and unique merger of two previously separate species, the alcoholic novel and the Jewish-American novel. Let me give an example of how the second element in the blend can modify the first. Even though most students of alcoholism regard the isolation or loneliness of the alcoholic as one of his chief characteristics, the importance of family and, more generally, of social relations in the Jewish-American novel keeps Sams from experiencing this aspect of

alcoholism as intensely as most of his predecessors in the alcoholic novel have. The Jewish-American side of Sams in a Dry Season may also account in part for its marked irony and wit. This tone helps to soften the usual horror or shock of alcoholism and is established on the opening page: Sams was now "forty-three and intermittently aware that alcohol had become less useful to him than once it had been, at some indeterminate period in his life. He knew there might well come a day (comfortably in the future) when he would elect to give it up entirely." The irony lies in the reader's awareness that the future has probably arrived and that Sams's "electing" to give up alcohol won't be quite so calm and dispassionate a decision as he imagines. (At the same time, one may also note the hopefulness of this passage: in spite of its irony and Sams's complacency, he isn't completely self-deceiving or given to denial of a problem). Even the novel's title is ironic: the "dry season" for Sams as a writer has been caused by a wet one alcoholically.

Although he is approaching a crisis in his alcoholism and his life, it is important for Sams, as we would expect of the hero of a Jewish-American novel, to be witty about it. He once rejected the advice of a psychiatrist who recommended Alcoholics Anonymous to him: ". . . I'm not about to piss my life away chasing God in church basements" (37). His wit remains intact even when he is much closer to the crisis. Arriving at the funeral of his uncle, Sams is accosted by a female cousin, who says to him rather improbably yet accurately, for he has been drinking: "You look crocked, Professor. Your mother once told me you never touched a drop before noon." To which Sams retorts, "Don't be a cunt today, Cuz," and she ripostes just as neatly, "I try to be myself every day" (166).

One possible problem in effecting a merger of the Jewish-American and the alcoholic novel is that Jews, traditionally, aren't supposed to become alcoholic. Sams himself is ruefully aware of this tradition and, even if he weren't, is reminded of it by a black drunk who hurls it at him late in the novel when he is struggling to stay sober: "Did you know, by the way, that there be no Jewish alcoholics?" (223). But Sams embodies the sort of transition or change that Charles Snyder wrote about in his classic study Alcohol and the Jews (1958). Snyder saw that traditional Jewish sobriety and hostility to drunkenness as a curse of the goyim were being eroded by the forces of cultural change and the increasing intercourse of Jews with the society around them. Even as a child on the lower East Side, Sams is attracted by a church across the street and by the "beautiful, decked-out Christians" (107). He later marries a Christian, a West Virginian with a background obviously far different from his. When they move to Boston, he is disconcerted that she begins to frequent a Vedantic temple across the street from their apartment; but, having long since ceased to practice Judaism, he has no alternative to propose. The move to Boston itself Sams

tends to regard as a transplantation to alien gentile territory. In short, stripped of much of his traditional culture and religion, he has no adequate defenses against becoming alcoholic.

In doing so, Sams exhibits many of the familiar signs and symptoms of the alcoholic. He periodically swallows Antabuse instead of attempting a genuine, lasting sobriety. On learning at lunch with his department chairman that his job is in danger because of his drinking, Sams nevertheless cannot resist confirming his chairman's justified suspicions by tossing off half a glass of wine at a swallow, following it with a beer chaser, then exclaiming that he isn't supposed to drink "because of this pill I take" (18), which the chairman just might guess to be Antabuse. In New York, where Sams goes partly to escape his wife's increasingly open disapproval of his drinking, it predictably gets worse. Staying in a friend's apartment, Sams brings on himself the angry and painful charge of being a "lush" for having drunk some of his host's bottles of ale, though Sams wanted something stronger and takes care to buy it the next day. Ignoring his friend's conciliatory offer of a magnificent Italian meal that evening, and in spite of his own plans to have a Jewish delicatessen feast, Sams gets so drunk by himself that he makes do with a few scraps in his friend's refrigerator and, in an alcoholic blackout, barely remembers making some long-distance phone calls on the friend's phone, but not how many or to whom. The next day, at his uncle's funeral, he has to slip out to a bar for a quick drink. Monday, on the train returning to Boston, he has an anxiety attack; to quiet it, he asks his seatmate whether he has any liquor on him. In spite of this bizarre request, the seatmate is friendly; and as he gets off the train at Providence and Sams can barely stand to see him go or face the prospect of the remaining 45 minutes alone on the way to Boston, Sams is probably, in AA parlance, "hitting bottom"; for an intimate friend of mine, just before joining AA, later realized that he had hit bottom when he could not stand to be by himself for even a short time--literally could not stand himself any longer or what had become of his life.

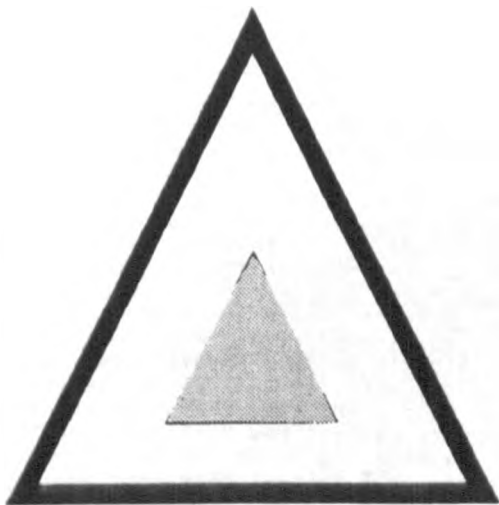
And sure enough, on entering his apartment Sams suddenly caves in and starts his ascent from the bottom. The suddenness of the scene helps it to avoid fulfilling its large potential for sentimentality, as does the word "blubber" to describe Sams's tears and the fact that this articulate, witty Jew unexpectedly begins to stammer: "Th-thank G-God! I'm f-f-free not to drink!" (205). This is, I submit, authentically and powerfully emotional, not sentimental. Sams's path in Alcoholics Anonymous is not entirely smooth, but it is successful.

For whatever it is worth, and if I may be forgiven the mingling of fictitious and real persons, I offer the following sketch as evidence of some sort of cultural progress, or at least change, over the last fifty years: an alcoholic F. Scott

Fitzgerald, being urged late in life to consider AA for himself, rejects it out of hand; Lowry's Consul had evidently never heard of AA and would doubtless have rejected it if he had; John Berryman came to respect it, struggled to stay sober in it, but ultimately didn't quite make it; John Cheever, ridiculing AA in Bullet Park, later successfully joined it; Gold's Jason Sams, after mocking it, also successfully joins.

My criticisms of Sams in a Dry Season are few. Gold is rather too fond of the device of parenthesis; the novel has some quasi stream-of-consciousness passages, a technique that by now seems pretty shopworn; and at least twice Gold slips without warning from third person singular to first person singular narration. At first I thought I had missed some artistic reason for this, but it appears to be a result of carelessness, as does the hurried ending of the novel. If one would like to know something about Sams's altered family life after he enters AA, or about how or whether his sobriety affects the threatened loss of his job, one will be disappointed; Gold closes without a word about these matters.

But if the reader resists comparison of Sams in a Dry Season with other and in some respects greater alcoholic novels, and sees it instead as an interesting product of the cross-breeding of the alcoholic and Jewish-American novel, he will doubtless enjoy it.



AN UNLICENSED PI IN AA: THE MATT SCUDDER NOVELS

George Wedge

Hard drinking is a cliché in suspense, crime and detective fiction genres. Often used as simple backgrounding for bar scenes or fancy parties, alcohol sometimes becomes a focal point for the psychological tension of the novel. James M. Cain's Serenade, and Graham Greene's The Power and the Glory are typical of their author's work not because they are about alcohol dependency but because alcohol dependency, like other obsessions, creates tension. Although Charles Jackson's The Lost Weekend (1944) may have drawn on his own experiences as a recovering alcoholic, his other novels, like those of Cain and Greene, are studies of psychological tension--a serial murderer (The Outer Edges 1948), a latent homosexual who discovers his sexual identity in mid-life (The Fall of Valor 1946), and a woman obsessed with sex (A Second-Hand Life 1967). Elmore Leonard, also a recovering alcoholic, employs alcohol dependency as a source of tension in the detective novel Unidentified Body #89 and comments on the effect of the cliché in relation to his own alcoholism and recovery in Dennis Wholey's The Courage to Change: "Drinking was always kind of a macho thing--that idea of the hard drinkers in westerns and detective stories, the shot standing at the bar. I'm sure I was influenced by that" (87).

William Kennedy's Pulitzer Prize novel Ironweed (1983) portrays the last stages of Francis Phelan's alcoholic purgatory. But Ironweed is the conclusion of a trilogy about crime and political corruption in Albany, New York, during the early decades of this century. Heavy drinking occurs in the first two novels (Legs 1975 and Billy Phelan's Greatest Game 1978), often heightening their central tensions, but only Ironweed focuses directly on alcoholism as the source of tension. To be sure, Billy Phelan in the second novel is well on his way to his father's condition; his fate, however, is determined by other tensions within his character, not least of which is stubbornness and loyalty to a code of behavior also similar to his father's.

To any such list of authors who study the psychology of the hard-boiled and the down and out and who occasionally make alcohol dependency one of the features of their fiction should be added the names of Jim Thompson (The Alcoholics 1953), David Goodis (Shoot the Piano Player 1956), James Lee Burke, and Lawrence Sanders. Burke's novels about the recovering alcoholic Dave Robicheaux, an ex-cop/private investigator, would make an interesting comparison with Block's Scudder novels. They are true to their setting, the Cajun country around New Orleans, and to the character of the people who live there, as the Scudder novels are true to contemporary central New York City and to those who live in its streets, taverns and tired hotels. Each author is writing crime novels featuring a central character who is a recovering

alcoholic, adding the tension of alcoholism to the tensions of the central plot of each novel.

Block learned his craft by writing. By age 20, learning by doing as had Hammett and Woolrich in the pulps and McDonald in a number of original paperbacks, Block was writing for the mass market, turning out pseudonymous soft-core sex novels at the rate of about one a month. His first published work was a lesbian novel for Fawcett in 1958; it was, he explains, a popular genre of the time. He summarizes the move from this genre through romance to suspense, mystery, and detection in Write For Your Life (1986).

During the 60's and 70's, he published a number of psychological suspense novels under the name Paul Kavanaugh, including Not Comin' Home To You (1974) about a serial murderer similar to Charlie Starkweather, and The Triumph of Evil (1971) about a professional hit man hired as a political assassin. (The narrator of The Triumph of Evil, incidentally, has some traits in common with Raven in Graham Greene's A Gun For Sale--the source of the movie This Gun For Hire). After the First Death (1969) is narrated by a paroled murderer, an alcoholic who killed a prostitute while in a drunken blackout. In the opening scene, he wakes with a fierce hangover, no memory of the preceding night, and a second murdered prostitute on the floor by his bed. The teasing gradual return of his memory of the second crime, which he believes he did not commit, is a fascinating and authentic account of one of the ways such blackouts work.

On the flyleaf of Write For Your Life, Block acknowledges thirty-four novels--there are certainly more under various pseudonyms, even a few in his own name listed in the 1981 Contemporary Authors--two collections of short stories and three books for writers, two books on numismatics and a collection of correspondence and reminiscences, Manuscripts, 1960-69. Four series are named for their protagonists: Evan Tanner, Chip Harrison, Bernie Rhodenbarr and Matthew Scudder. Since 1964, Block has been Associate Editor of the Whitman Numismatic Journal and from 1977 to 1990, he wrote a monthly column on fiction for Writer's Digest.

During the fourth Matt Scudder novel, A Stab in the Dark (1981), Scudder hits bottom as a drinker and lands in treatment after a grand mal seizure. At the start of the fifth, Eight Million Ways to Die (1982), he emerges from a treatment center uncertain whether he can remain sober. To the usual tensions of a detective novel are added two questions dealing with character: Will Matt's employer, an intelligent and sensitive pimp named Chance, get out of his sleazy business? Will Matt be able to say at one of several AA meetings he attends, "My name is Matt and I'm an alcoholic"? This is the thirty-third acknowledged novel in the twenty-four years between 1958 and 1982, so that Block's

skill with the plot line is hardly surprising. What sets the book apart from other detective novels is that the plot is not the center of interest; the decisions Chance and Matt will ultimately make are as important to the reader as is a solution of the crime. The solution, when it comes along, is both gutsy and suitably complex but it is not the goal of the book. Although the novel grew beyond its genre the movie did not: the movie script eliminates Chance, substitutes a drug smuggling double-cross for the book's motive and turns Matt's AA attendance into an anomalous and faintly incongruous frame for a story told in flashback. One of many resonant exchanges between Chance and Matt might have served as a warning to the script writers:

"Damn, I been a good pimp! and I liked it. I tailored a life for myself and it fit me like my own skin. And you know what I went and did?"

"What?"

"I outgrew it."

"It happens. Lives change," I said. "It doesn't seem to do much good to fight it." (290)

In the four years between Eight Million Ways to Die and When the Sacred Ginmill Closes, Block's Writer's Digest column dealt frequently with problems in fiction writing for which the 1982 novel had given him new thoughts. One column outlined problems he was having with writing the next novel; he tried a Bernie Rhodenbarr book, he tried a new Matt Scudder, but he reported in "Writer's Block" that neither novel got past the halfway point. In Write For Your Life, he observes, "While I can't say that [Eight Million Ways to Die] was a difficult [book] to write, it was a demanding one, and I found it impossible to let go of it when I was done for the day (24)." On other occasions, Block had found an obsession with a piece of writing helpful, but this time it was not. Successful completion of the novel apparently demanded something more than shifting to another series character or taking the Scudder series on into a new case.

When the Sacred Ginmill Closes does not go forward in chronology; instead, the recovered Matt narrates the events of a complex set of interrelated cases he worked on in 1975 while still drinking. Matt is not the standard PI; he is an ex-policeman who leaves the force because he feels responsible for the accidental shooting death of a young girl after a hold-up in a bar. Divorced, living in a hotel and without regular employment, he does favors for friends. The "friends" he helps in When the Sacred Ginmill Closes are three brothers who own a bar and support the IRA, another bar owner who is being

blackmailed over a set of duplicate books, and a patron at these bars whose wife has been murdered. Matt's drinking is not yet out of control, but since he is telling the story in flashback, there is considerable room for commentary on his own drinking and that of his companions. The action, the crimes and the interest of the story again turn on character and on social interaction, in a study of personal ideologies and intimate betrayals. Matt's own character is part of this theme, including admissions that he accepted dirty money and drank bourbon a murderer bought for him ("Just as money knows no owner, whiskey never remembers who paid for it," he observes). Reflecting, at the end, on how much has changed in all the scenes of these old events, he says

So when I look ten years into the past I can say that I would very likely have handled things differently now. . . . [B]ut ten years ago I was always drinking and now I don't drink at all. I don't regret a single one of those drinks I took, and I hope to God I never take another one. (239)

To one who has attended open AA meetings, that makes the whole of the novel sound like an AA meeting talk, where the recovering person tells "what it was like, what happened, what it's like now." It has the authentic quality of dwelling on what it was like and giving short shrift to what it's like now. In the series, the novel serves a more important function. Those who have read the preceding books know "what it was like" as Matt lived it. Matt narrates this addition to his past history with the humor--often ironic and only funny if it's told with detachment--characteristic of a recovering person.

Both the succeeding novels, Out on the Cutting Edge and A Ticket to the Boneyard, use the meeting format overtly; in fact, Out on the Cutting Edge begins with Matt as the speaker at such a meeting. After the meeting he is approached by another member, Eddie, who will eventually ask to take his Fifth Step with Matt. Matt is working on the disappearance of a young woman from Indiana, but when Eddie dies without having taken the Step, and Matt is not quite convinced that the death was the accident it appeared to be (autoerotic asphyxiation), he finds himself working two cases. Both cases lead to his spending time in a bar called Grogan's Open House.

The owner, Mick Ballou, turns out to be helpful in solving the disappearance case and also turns out to be someone Matt can thoroughly enjoy trading stories with, someone outside A.A. with whom he has the kind of rapport that makes the injunction of the Fifth Step ("Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs") easier to follow because there is mutual sharing, mutual respect, and equal need for confidentiality. Ballou also appears in A Ticket to the

Boneyard, where neither man is willing to use the term "friend" to describe the other, probably because the bonding is spiritual not just the usual give and take of friendship. That the relationship is based in something spiritual is neatly understated in their mutual discomfort talking about God; Matt attends the "Butcher's Mass" with Ballou, who occasionally goes there seeking the peace he presumes his father found every day, but Ballou never takes communion and doesn't think of himself as a believer. Still, Ballou thinks Matt may be a believer because he thinks AA is where people go to give up drink and find God (Ticket 258). Matt says that he's not as quick to play God as he used to be, that "whether or not there's a God, it's beginning to dawn on me that I'm not Him." The conversation turns away from this subject to Ballou's observation that, needing to tell his story and to get some concrete help, Matt has come to Ballou rather than to friends on the police force or his sober friends [emphasis added]. Matt says he doesn't know why he had to tell Ballou the story or why he was certain Ballou would find a way to provide the concrete help. Implicit in this and other passages is that what these two hard-boiled, no-better-than-they-ought-to-be guys have recognized in one another is spiritual kinship, something more instinctive than friendship, deeper than that, for which only the awkward and inadequate word "love" is possible.

Through both these novels, a theme touched upon lightly in Ginmill is developed more fully, the changes in New York City (and implicitly in all large American cities) in the eighties. In Edge and Ticket, Matt has taken up the habit of passing out dollar bills to the homeless and poor, a substitution for dropping ten percent of his earnings in the poor box at churches, which had been his custom even when he was drinking. He figures that maybe half of it does some good, and the other half might as well buy a fancy car for a crack dealer as a Cadillac for a Monsignor. Out on the Cutting Edge focuses on the housing problem as part of the main plot. In short, Matt's world in these novels is both more personal--his primary concern is to preserve his sobriety in a tense profession--and more public--he is aware of the other human sufferings in that world. His approach to the public world is to help out directly, where he can, one person at a time.

Only the regular reader of Scudder novels will note that, as is characteristic of recovering people, Scudder's basic attitudes are not changed by recovery. In the story "Like a Lamb to Slaughter" Matt frets over the murder of Mary Alice Redfield, a very rich old bag lady, who willed Matt \$1200 for no reason that he can think of. Though he has no client, he considers the money an advance fee and keeps worrying the case, like a dog with a bone, until her brutal murder is solved. He is still in the active drinking phase, tithes \$120 of the inheritance to the church, and lights a candle for Mary Alice (the original title of the story was "A Candle for the Bag Lady"). His concerns and

behavior as a recovering person remain consistent with those in this story. In the introduction to the collection Like a Lamb to Slaughter, Joe Gores aptly observes that

This novelette has all the virtues of the longer Scudders: realism, compassion, beautifully crafted dialogue that evokes the rich tapestry of New York street life, and a resolution of the violence at the core of the story that is at once satisfying and moving. (xii-xiii)

Not the least of its realistic details is that the drinking man is recognizably the person who recovered--he just no longer drinks, and is a bit more reflective about how he does his good deeds.

A Ticket to the Boneyard is the grittiest and most horrific of these novels; a serial murderer Matt had set up on bogus charges twelve years earlier, when he was still a cop, is released and is out to kill Matt and "all his women." Matt's drinking life has come home to roost, the life in which expediency justified bad means to a good end. In the present, as in the past--say the way Matt dealt with the murder of Tom Tillary's wife in When the Sacred Ginmill Closes--Matt is obliged to handle things in an extra-legal fashion and to carry some guilt for it. This time he assuages the guilt by doing Fifth Step work with "a career criminal and a call girl," Mick Ballou and Elaine Mardell, one of the psychopath's intended victims. Matt even thinks he will sometime tell his AA sponsor, Jim Faber. He has, presumably, told God (as he understands Him) and himself. One is told not to expect perfection in AA, but spiritual progress of the kind AA does claim is an unusual thing to find in a mystery novel.

Block's research into the program has paid high dividends. His characterization of Matt as an individual following the program's principles is precisely on target. It is to Block's credit that he shows how the program works for one person, keeps the focus on that person's recovery, including such false steps as Matt's purchase of a pint of Early Times which he subsequently pours down the drain (Ticket 213-230) and his acting out of his self-loathing for having done so (230-236). Block avoids sweeping generalizations and is perhaps at his best in allowing Matt and Ballou to respect one another's very different tolerances for alcohol. Mick wishes Matt could drink with him but says he would break Matt's arm if he tried, while Matt envies Mick's capacity, rather wishes Mick wouldn't drink, yet would probably like him less if he didn't.

Comparisons are invidious. On the dustjacket for Ticket Stephen King and William Caunitz call it the best of the Scudder

novels. In a mood less calculated for selling this item, one might better observe that the last four Scudder novels are superb as suspense novels and as essays at a mid-life bildungsroman, for alcoholics are often seen as cases of arrested development and the progress of Matt Scudder in these novels is the process of growth. It is hard to say what there may be left for Matt to learn. At the end of A Ticket to the Boneyard, thinking of the street people and a cold winter, he observes, "But for most of us it's not that bad. You just dress warm and walk through it, that's all." There's an air of finality about those words that sends a chill through those of us who want the series to go on forever. There is simply nothing like the accomplishment in these four novels among all the novels that combine alcohol dependency and suspense.

[Postscript: Another novel in the series has just been announced. The title, A Dance at the Slaughterhouse, suggests that we will be seeing more of Mick Ballou as well as Matt.]

* * * * *

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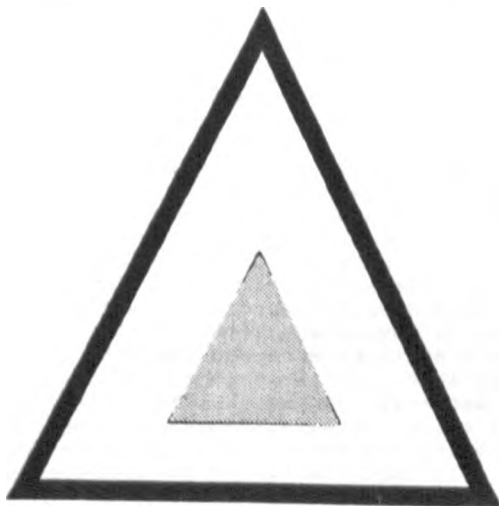
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SECRETS OF THE STREETS

Donald C. Irving

Seth Morgan. Homeboy. New York: Random House, 1990.

"Homeboy" is street and prison slang for somebody you trust completely--that is, "more than money." In this comic and shocking novel set in the drug-driven underworld of San Francisco's Tenderloin district and Coldwater Penitentiary, the chief homeboy is Joe Speaker, a street barker for a sleazy strip joint which he uses as a front to sell heroin.

But Joe is also an addict who sometimes shoots up more than he sells (searching for a vein was "like doing penance right along with his sin"), so he supports his habit by burglary and pimping, including his true-love, stripper girl friend (stage name, Kitty Litter) whose addiction is her attraction (Joe "loved the consumptive blush rising to her cheeks when she needed a fix"). Joe also betrays his friend Rooski to the police. Rooski is his "risky" accomplice in crime because he too is a junky and therefore unreliable. The cops gun down the defenseless Rooski in a hail of bullets, and Joe is left with his conscience, his habit, a fabulous diamond he has inadvertently stolen, and much to atone for!

In Joe's comic-ugly world of inversion and violence, however, normal judgments about right and wrong don't apply because "heroin absolved him of guilt, becoming its own morality." Once we accept this transformed morality of the addict, we can also accept Joe as one of the good bad-guys. Despite his "dope rotted teeth" and shrunken veins, his broken nose, obstructed bowels, and prophetic "Born to Lose" tattoo over his heart, Joe can still feel sympathy for his fellow sufferers to whom he extends credit and dope in good homeboy trust.

Drugs are "tragic magic" in Seth Morgan's gritty depiction of the drug underworld. Users are both victims and contributors to the twin plagues of addiction and the AIDS epidemic. Yet, they continue to seek the "magic" for two reasons--thrills or escape--despite the probable tragic consequences: physical and mental degradation, violence, jail or death by overdose, suicide or murder. Joe uses heroin to escape the memory of a vicious, drunken father and a mother who became a prostitute and died of alcoholism. Kitty tries to escape the memory of the child she murdered, born of incest by her drunken father. Ironically, heroin "junkies appreciated the crack epidemic for the heat it drew off their traffic. They wished the cracker jacks success in filling the headlines and prison cells" so they can be let alone in their misery. In addition to the escape-seeking junkies and thrill-seeking crack users, there is a third cause of addiction here--being born with it, like Rooski, who "was alcoholic before

he ever tasted beer and addicted before he swallowed his first aspirin."

There's enough misery in this novel to make one depressed and frightened, except so much of it is presented as absurd and comic that we are simultaneously shocked and amused. However, an early, unamusing irony appears in the figure of Baby Jewels Moses, the evil-incarnate underworld king of prostitution, pornography (including snuff films), bribery, corruption, mutilation and murder--but who takes no dope or drink himself. The point, apparently, is that we can understand the human reasons for getting high despite the horrible consequences of addiction, but nothing redeems Baby Jewel's actions. The comic exaggeration that accompanies most of the other underworld characters does not inform Baby Jewels. The sweet-smelling lozenges he sucks incessantly and his grotesquely fat body are finally less comic than the consequences of the greed which he feeds with corrupt body flesh.

Eventually, Joe is arrested for Grand Theft Auto and sentenced to three years in Coldwater Penitentiary, a "purgatory, peopled by antic shadows who spoke in echoes." Joe is "instinctively prepared" for "this violent new world within a world," because he has been there before and knows its ways. Prison is "home" (the place "where they can't throw you out"), and Joe continues his homeboy role there.

He also continues selling drugs through various smuggling schemes. Although he kicks the heroin habit himself, he continues taking pills ("zuuzuus and whamwhams") and reefer. And for those who prefer or can only afford booze, there's pruno, prison hootch made from yeast and fruit stolen from the mess hall.

Prison has its own rules: do your own time, don't look back, forget the streets, and don't snitch, gamble, borrow or do drugs, or "you'll dig your own grave," but there is as much addiction, perversion, violence and betrayal inside as on the streets. Nonetheless, Joe learns who is worthy of trust, and when he can help others, he begins his movement toward atonement and redemption.

There's confusion about prison's purpose: is it for punishment or rehabilitation? Joe thinks it's only a "fantasy finishing school." Captain Reilly, the prison personnel officer, believes convicts are people to be rehabilitated, but he is defeated by overcrowding, understaffing, and corruption. In fact, the institution neither punishes nor rehabilitates in this novel. Rather, personal vendettas by guards or convicts do the punishing, and individual acts by homeboys or decent officials do the rehabilitating.

In either case, Coldwater is not a safe place for Joe to work out his salvation. Both the police and Baby Jewels want the diamond he's hidden, and both pursue him relentlessly behind bars. Baby Jewels' inside henchmen finally send Joe to Z-block, the psych wing and a "terminal" unit where the prisoners are kept drugged and locked in iron cells usually until they die. Joe is given massive doses of Prolixon (used to treat schizophrenia) which makes him hallucinate, and he tells where the diamond is. He's saved from being killed by the intervention of prison homeboys on the inside and, on the outside, by homicide Lieutenant Tarzon (pronounced Tar-zone) who decides to help Joe when he discovers his own long-lost daughter (addicted at 13 and a runaway) was killed by Baby Jewels in a snuff film. In the apocalyptic climax of the novel, a prison riot produces surreal acts of dope fixes, revenge murders, violent sex, and destruction which can only be quelled by the army.

Despite these glimpses of apocalypse and armageddon, Homeboy is finally a comic novel, in part because of the exaggeration of names, behavior and dramatic situations, as well as the inflated street talk, but also because it has a happy ending: love triumphs. Joe is released from prison and he and Kitty and their love child drive off into the future, not dreaming of their next fix, but of raising armadillos for dog food as a legitimate business. Poetic justice reigns: Baby Jewels is eaten by sharks, the diamond is auctioned and the proceeds donated to drug rehabilitation, and one of Kitty's prostitute friends goes to work for the judge who owned the diamond (and has a cocaine habit) and finds a willing partner for her overactive libido with Lt. Tarzon.

Homeboy combines exciting adventure, sentimental love and relentless depiction of the brutal physiology of addiction and the detritus of the drug user's environment. Two styles, or kinds of language, juxtapose lyrical descriptions of nature or idyllic love-making with the street talk that always barter--whether drugs, money or people. The constant shifting between the comic and the serious has a purpose that is also explained by Captain Reilly's description of what an average day's events in prison are like: "the horror mixed with the absurd acquired the farcical dimensions of a Grand Guignol, a ball and chain bouffe. Of course that was the deadly illusion. Behind each jest snickered the secret shiv." The horror which lies behind the comic opera sums up the theme, the method and the effect of Homeboy.

For literary antecedents, Homeboy most immediately calls to mind Nelson Algren's The Man With the Golden Arm and A Walk on the Wild Side. though Algren is psychologically more penetrating and realistic. The hallucinating world of the addict compares with William Burrough's The Naked Lunch on the one hand, but on another, the comic energy and hopeful ending of Homeboy suggest

the exuberant zest for life among the marginal characters that Henry Miller celebrates.

Among contemporary works, however, Homeboy ought to be juxtaposed with a remarkable and affecting memoir entitled Foreplay (Random House, 1989) by a woman (known only by a pseudonym, Catherine Roman) who lived the life of Morgan's characters. Her odyssey takes place in Canada, particularly Toronto, and she faithfully renders the street talk of the North American drug and crime underworld. She was a member of a biker gang, abused alcohol and drugs, was a mafia moll, stripper, prostitute, and ultimately wife and widow who was weaned (but not redeemed, exactly) from the streets by her own strong will, intelligence, wit, and a few genuine friends. Both Homeboy and Foreplay present unsavory details about addiction, sex, and violence, and the author of Foreplay warns that it doesn't "come with coupons or recipes for happiness," unlike Homeboy. A quote from Foreplay defines the message of both works or of any street novel that purports to be serious: "The street mirrors the conscience and temper of the times in its extremes. . . . The truth is that society is afraid of the street because many of its best-kept secrets ultimately end up there. The street is as cruel as it is truthful. It spares no one." That is why Homeboy both shocks and fascinates.

Seth Morgan also lived through some of the dark side he writes about. He was born in New York City, attended private schools, and dropped out of the University of California, Berkeley, where he was an English major. Like Joe Speaker, he worked as a barker, and in 1977 was sent to prison for thirty months for armed robbery. When released, he became addicted to heroin and alcohol. Then in 1986, he traded addiction for writing and now lives in New Orleans.¹ In 1978, he won the PEN American Prisoner's Writing Contest. Homeboy, his first novel, has been widely and favorably reviewed, and is now published in a paperback edition by Random House (Vintage, 1991).

¹ Editor's note: Seth Morgan was killed in a motorcycle accident in New Orleans, 17 October 1990.

Brief ReviewsSPIRITUS CONTRA SPIRITUS

Joseph Roth. The Legend of the Holy Drinker. Trans. Michael Hoffman. London: Pan, 1990. First published as Die Legende vom Heiligen Trinker by Allert de Lange Amsterdam und Witsch Köln, 1939.

This simple legend (story of the miracles of a saint) is appropriately short--it amounts to only 49 pages in fairly large type with breaks between its 15 sections. It was Roth's last work; he died in 1939, not quite 45 years old, already considerably weakened by the effects of his alcoholism. In his last years, Hoffman says, "[Roth] advanced a sophisticated argument that while drink shortened his life in the medium term, in the short term it kept him alive--and he worked hard at testing its logic."

The holy drinker is an illegal resident of Paris, a coal miner from Polish Silesia named Andreas, a down-and-out drunkard sleeping beneath the bridges in tattered clothes, a prime candidate for some 1935 style AA work. On a spring evening in 1934 a well-dressed gentleman encounters Andreas on the steps leading down to the banks of the Seine from one of its bridges. He asks Andreas, "Where are you going, brother?" Andreas denies that he is this man's or anyone's brother and says he doesn't know where he is going. The gentleman persuades Andreas to accept two hundred francs, saying that it is obvious Andreas needs money and that God has sent Andreas to him. When Andreas insists that honor requires him to treat the money as a loan, the gentleman tells him to give it to the priest at Sainte Marie des Batignolles in honor of St. Thérèse de Lisieux.

Throwing money at a problem--where have we heard this before?--doesn't solve the problem, but awakening the vague spiritual longings described by Jellinek as characterizing the final stages of the downward spiral of alcoholism can make changes, even if the toper goes on drinking. With money, Andreas feels the urge to bathe, sees himself as others see him, and alters his appearance. In this improved state he is offered a job. There is a chain of what appear to be miraculous events. Andreas more than once saves back two hundred francs to give to the little saint, only to spend it on folly. In the end, he succeeds in paying his debt, even though he continues to drink, and dies in a state of grace at Sainte Marie des Batignolles.

Hoffman is surely correct in interpreting the word "legende" in the title as meaning "the story of the life of a saint." In seeing this as a reference to the life of Andreas, however, he is surely in error. The miracles in the story are attributed to St. Thérèse de Lisieux. The gentleman at the start

of the story attributes his conversion to Christianity to her. It is she who sets in motion the series of miracles that overtake Andreas; they form an addition to her acts as a saint. Andreas, a "holy drinker," does not perform miracles; he is not a candidate for beatification, much less canonization. His story is emblematic of the workings of faith and honor in the life of an ordinary man, testimony to the power of the child saint. The story is also a remarkable testimony to the AA position that spiritual hunger is one of the components of late stage alcoholism, the more remarkable because, considering the time and place of composition, Roth's testimony would appear to be independent.

--George Wedge

A CRAVING FOR TRANSCENDENCE¹

Thomas B. Gilmore. "James Boswell's Drinking." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 24 (1991) 337-57.

Paul H. Schmidt. "Addiction and Emma Bovary." *Midwest Quarterly* 23 (1990) 153-70.

Hamilton E. Cochrane. "'Taking the Cure': Alcoholism and Recovery in the Fiction of Raymond Carver." *The University of Dayton Review* 20 (1989) 79-88.

These pieces originally formed the panel, "Addiction and Dependency in Literature," at the 1989 meeting of the Midwest Modern Language Association. A common theme running through them is a thwarted craving for transcendence. Though the authors are concerned with three different centuries, three different countries, and--one may urge--three different cultures, their concerns are universal: the human propensity to confuse materiality with spirituality, the displacement of Spirit by spirits.

James Boswell was an alcoholic, perhaps the first person in literature that we can accurately so term, according to Thomas B. Gilmore: "des Boswell, in his attitudes toward his drinking, stand as an important transitional figure at the beginning of a shift in Western attitudes toward heavy drinking, a shift culminating in the concept of alcoholism? The answer, I believe,

¹ Adapted from my discussant remarks, "Addiction and Dependency in Literature" (Panel 46), Midwest Modern Language Association Annual Meeting, Minneapolis, 3 November 1989.

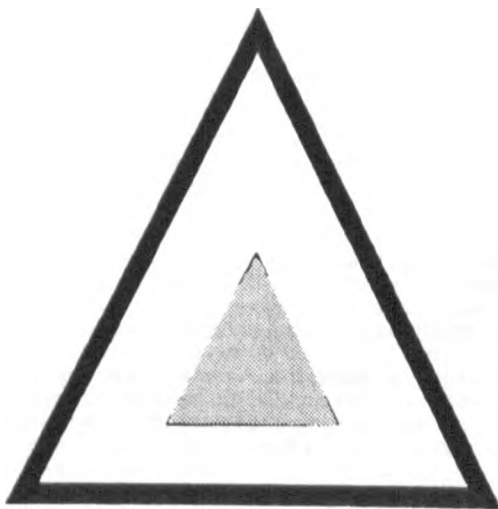
is that Boswell is such a figure; and . . . I further believe that Boswell may be regarded as the earliest alcoholic of historical record" (338). (But see Nicholas O. Warner, "The Drunken Wife in Defoe's Colonel Jack: An Early Description of Alcohol Addiction." Dionysos 1.1 [1989] 3-9.) Gilmore documents a central flaw in the standard biography of Boswell's later years by Frank Brady (1984): the biographer does not face the obvious evidence before him of Boswell's alcoholism. This propensity--a propensity bordering on compulsion--of researchers to ignore the plain evidence before them is scandalous. Gilmore concludes his richly documented article by reminding one that "alcoholism is not just a medical but a cultural concept; historically, its use would appear to have little or no validity before the later eighteenth century, when for the first time heavy drinking begins to be separated from religion and seen as a distinct problem requiring its own analysis and treatment. Boswell, though he failed to discover a successful treatment for himself (and sometimes failed to seek one), was often aware that he had a problem neither to be classified as a sin nor to be dismissed as a natural part of the common excesses of his own society" (357). In short, Boswell had begun the modernist secularization of the moral dimension of disease and thus began to perceive how spiritually, as well as physically and morally, crippling his addiction had become.

Boswell's alcoholic affliction was inextricably connected to his sexual excesses and serves to remind one that it's not for nothing that researchers speak of addictive behaviors. Paul H. Schmidt successfully argues that Emma Bovary is psychologically rather than chemically dependent (see also, Amy L. Mashberg, "Co-Dependence and Obsession in Madame Bovary." Dionysos 2.1 [Spring 1990] 28-40). Schmidt's focus is critical rather than biographical, but his tools of analysis, like Gilmore's, are indebted to the insights of AA, supplemented by the work of clinicians. He points out that it is the "icon of drink" (155), not drink itself, that mesmerizes Emma. She is addicted above all by her fantasies, material, sexual, social, and finally religious/spiritual: all filtered through the distortions of her compulsive sentimentality. Schmidt demonstrates that Flaubert's meticulous and terrifying delineation of Emma's addiction proceeds from image through metaphor and parable to tragic story. He urges, however, that it is not "enough to call her addiction" itself "metaphorical. . . . [H]er dependency is psychological, not biochemical, and not on what we normally think of as an addictive 'substance'" (154). Emma's corruption, like Boswell's, is fundamentally spiritual rather than moral. Her addictive behavior may lead to immoral acts, but those may be forgiven. It is her confusion of the immanent with the transcendent, of her ego with her soul, that one finds deeply explored by Schmidt.

James Boswell and Emma Bovary, in a sense, are so alive (in the pages of Thomas Gilmore and Paul Schmidt) that it saddens one

to realize there was nothing to be done about their dependencies. It is, then, exhilarating to turn to Hamilton E. Cochrane's account of Raymond Carver's recovery and its effect on his art. After his treatment for alcoholism and his acceptance of the fellowship of AA, Raymond Carver said he came "to believe in miracles and the possibility of resurrection" (79) in spite of the fact that he did not consider himself a religious person. The distinction between formal religion and personal spirituality is not uncommon among recovering alcoholics. They often have vivid memories of the failure of the mediating institution of church--or of the similar failures of medicine, school, and family. Yet something shines through it all: "Like myths of death and resurrection, of journeys to the underworld and back, [Carver's] stories embody both a tragic and comic movement. That one should lose family, friends, career, and self-respect to alcoholism is certainly tragic, but the story does not end there: 'what happened' signals a reversal and there follows an archetypal rebirth, a return from hell" (81). Cochrane then shows the particular relevance of the parable-like stories in the AA "Big Book" to the appreciation of Carver's narrative art. What Carver conveys, as do the homely stories in the Big Book, is precisely, for the recovering alcoholic, the transcendent embodied in the mundane. In a word, what takes place, in both real and symbolic terms, in Carver's later stories is the "possibility of rebirth through the powers of community and narrative" (83).

--Roger Forseth



LITERATURE AND ADDICTION: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE
UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD, HALIFAX HALL, 4-7 APRIL 1991

Sue Vice

The Literature and Addiction Conference held in Sheffield this April is the first of its kind, but, we hope, not only not the last, but the initiator of a possible series of such conferences which might follow on from each other and perform a kind of 'work-in-progress' function. At this conference there was a good deal of information exchange: people discussed their course contents; George Wedge tantalizingly mentioned his two-tier lists of addicted writers, the longer one including 250 names; contacts were established; and differing methodological approaches to the subject aired. Apart from the giving of papers, this must be the most significant function of such conferences.

One conceptual debate which surfaced right at the beginning of the conference and refused to go away was that surrounding accounts of the incidence of addiction, particularly alcoholism. Professor Alec Jenner, head of the psychiatry department at the University of Sheffield, and Robin Burgess, of the Council on Addiction in Northampton, gave talks which sparked off a spirited discussion on whether a disease-based or a societal model for addiction was more helpful. This was followed by not unrelated talks on the growth of addiction studies: Roger Forseth (University of Wisconsin-Superior), George Wedge (University of Kansas) and Nick Warner (Claremont McKenna College, California) spoke about their experiences as teachers, drinkers, friends of famous drinkers, and editors of Dionysos.

This was particularly illuminating for the British participants, as the development of courses on literature and addiction has only just begun. The joining together of two very different approaches to the area--that of treatment and that of textuality--reminded me of what Mikhail Bakhtin says of the carnivalesque: only with its entry into the realm of the literary can it realize its full subversive potential. On a more practical level, the relevance of literary approaches to medical, social and pharmacological ones was demonstrated by Archer Tongue, from the International Council on Alcohol and Addictions in Switzerland, who was very keen that a literary section be introduced into the 1992 Council Conference.

The wide range of papers given as the conference got under way pointed to what is both promising and problematic about the study of addiction in literary form. On the one hand, the rubric of addiction studies is exhilaratingly wide, and can encompass, as conference participants saw, a weakening of boundaries between genres and periods of literature, which is a rare and refreshing experience. On the other hand, it is so wide that it is

sometimes in danger of becoming a merely thematic issue (in which writers feature addicts in their work, or were addicts themselves) rather than the subject of a more rigorous investigation.

When drawing up the conference programme, this was something I and the other organizers Tim Armstrong and Matthew Campbell noticed: while some categories seemed clearly defined, such as the panel consisting of papers on De Quincey and Coleridge (given by Nigel Leask from the University of Cambridge, Robert Miles from Sheffield Polytechnic and Julian North from the University of Oxford), and the one which united Kerouac, Burroughs and Roethke (George Wedge of Kansas, Oliver Harris, editor of Burroughs' letters, and Timothy Rivinus of Butler Hospital, Rhode Island), others certainly involved the yoking together of heterogeneous material. Sometimes this appeared to work well. Martin Stannard from the University of Leicester, speaking on Evelyn Waugh, was a bedfellow of Drummond Bone, from the University of Glasgow, who innovatively untied Malcolm Lowry with Jean Rhys, and they were joined by Emeritus Professor Jean-Charles Sournia from Paris, author of A History of Alcoholism, who spoke on alcoholism as creative acting and gambling. This panel was created out of contingent pressures (absences and timing), but proved to be a fortuitous accident.

The speakers in the panel intitled "Real Toads"--Danielle Schaub (University of Haifa) talking on John Fowles, Kenvin McCarron (Roehampton Institute) on William Golding, and Brian McKenna (University of Oxford) on Patrick Hamilton--asked what the title of the panel suggested about their interconnections, noting that it is a quotation from Marianne Moore. I then realized that a complementary panel called "Imaginary Gardens" might have been a good idea, to emphasize the point that different kinds of reality and realism are raised by any study of addictive writing. This was an issue the panel participants themselves discussed: Danielle Schaub's notion of addiction to writing itself is central to studying literature and addiction, and led neatly into Brian McKenna's questioning of his own use of biographical detail about Hamilton--and he had earlier raised the issue of word-addiction by quoting the entry under 'drunk' from Roget's Thesaurus, a list of words which certainly ends up drowning the signified under the signifier.

Kevin McCarron also effected a reversal of what might be expected of discussing alcohol and texts by pointing out that in Golding's The Paper Men it is used as a metaphor, unlike, say, in Lowry's Under the Volcano, where everything is also a metaphor for it. Lowry was, incidentally, the most talked-about writer at the conference--there were four papers on his work, including one comparing him and Oliver Stone by John Orr (University of Edinburgh), and one on the literary hallucination by Tom Roder (University of Sheffield): it will be interesting to see if this

trend continues in future conferences.

The metaphoric was implicit in Marcy Lassotta Bauman's (Penn State University) talk on Faulkner and the processes by which his fiction turns the reader into an addict; and in Domnhall Mitchell's (University of Trondheim, Norway) talk on Poe's "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym," where figurative language and words themselves are the elements of addictive writing, rather than any pre-existent experience of addiction which is being rendered as if confessionally. In her paper on Steven Spielberg and product placement, Erica Sheen (University of Sheffield) pointed out that the series of films Back to the Future works along addictive lines, each one feeding the need to see the next, and incorporating into this form an imperative to buy Pepsi-Cola.

Two further significant non-historical and non-generic categories featured prominently in the conference: politics and gender. The political dimension of addiction often involved the same issues of metaphor, and the ways in which addiction can become a potent image for itself and for other things (for Lowry, for instance, it figured in, among others, the 'drunkenness' of a world at war). The panel "Welcome to the Pleasure Dome" which included papers on Goldsmith and gambling (Caryn Chaden, De Paul University), opium and the corrosion of empire (Barry Milligan, Duke University) and R. S. Hawker (Shelia Smith, University of Nottingham) was followed by a lively discussion. The discussion united the metaphoric qualities of opium as a transforming and fear-inducing substance, which Barry Milligan likened to contemporary paranoia about viral infection and AIDS, and literary representations of such experiences: the case of Charlotte Brontë's Villette was raised, and the thorny biographical problem discussed in relation to Lucy Snow's hallucinatory experiences--was Brontë writing about her own life, or only an imaginative experience? Does her description of Lucy's drugged wanderings share formal features with other opiate writings? Does it matter, and if so, how? In another panel, J. Gerard Dollar (Siena College, NY) speaking on "Addiction and the Other Self in Three Late Victorian Novels," interestingly cited the Gulf War as an instance of addictive behavior: the West is addicted to oil, and the war could be seen as an instance of pernicious withdrawal symptom.

The area of codependency was also raised here in Caryn Chaden's paper (and elsewhere, in Cathy MacGregor's paper on Doestoevsky's Crime and Punishment), which is again a subject not yet very familiar to British audiences, and provided a particularly useful introduction.

Matthew Campbell's (University of Sheffield) paper on the Joyces and conversion united politics, religion and alcohol, and featured a reading from Dubliners of the episode where a small boy pleads with his father, just returned from the pub, not to

beat him. In the same panel, Michael Ford (University of Manchester) shaded into philosophy and jurisprudence in his critical discussion of liberal notions of the subject and what this means for our conception of addiction. He cited a recent legal case of a woman who killed her child while under the influence, and noted that her defense rested on whether or not she was judged to have been responsible for her actions or helplessly addicted. The means of determining this were illuminating: having drunk most of a bottle of gin, was an inch left in the glass evidence of self-control and self-awareness, or its opposite? It seems that addiction is no more a closed case to the legal world than to the literary.

Perhaps Rosalind Ballaster's (University of East Anglia) paper "Addicted to Love? Models of Mass Culture and the Female Reader" provided the interface between politics and gender; she analyzed the use and usefulness of models of addiction in assessing women's role as both consumers and the means of disseminating products through advertising. Other papers on the subject included Mary Condé's (Queen Mary and Westfield College, University of London) and Lori Rowlett's (University of Texas) on women, food, eating disorders and the improper body; Renate Günther's (University of Sheffield) on Marguerite Duras and écriture féminine; and Lissa Schneider's (University of Miami) on Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine, in which she showed how deeply imbricated femininity and ethnicity are in Erdrich's work (amplifying themes introduced by Peter Beidler--Lehigh University, Pennsylvania-- in his paper on Native Americans and their literature).

A digression at this point seems in order to point out that another feature of the conference was the expansion of the remit of addictive writing to include new and previously little discussed writers: as well as Erdrich, Timothy Armstrong (University of Sheffield) spoke on Theodore Dreiser, electricity and desire; and Susan Wiseman (University of Kent) spoke on Alexander Trocchi and the avant-garde. These talks were a complement to those on the kinds of writer that audiences would expect to hear about: Hemingway (Anne Beidler, Lehigh University, Pennsylvania), Tennessee Williams (David Plumb, San Francisco State University), beats (Robin Burgess) and even Joyce (Laura Skandera).

Sue Vice (University of Sheffield) gave a paper on the construction of Yvonne in Lowry's Under the Volcano as an alcoholic by virtue of her femininity, using Luce Ingaray's rereading of Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia," an article often used in psychiatric treatment of alcoholics; Elke Miltner (Cologne) gave one on the Dionysiac and gender, using passages from Lawrence's Women in Love and Sylvia Plath's poetry with a Jungian slant.

Masculinity wasn't entirely neglected; Neil Roberts (University of Sheffield) talked on Peter Redgrove and 'Drink as Menses Envy' and his reversal of the usual priorities, arguing that rather than seeing femininity as lack, Redgrove sees the masculine as constructed in this way. Antony Easthope (Manchester Polytechnic) showed and analyzed some current advertisements for beer, including the infamous Castlemaine XXXX one in which an Australian wife is seen by two men to be offering to sacrifice herself in favor of cans of drink. He suggested that in this scenario adult sexuality (the wife) is jettisoned in favor of the pre-Oedipal mother (the liquid), which was followed by a discussion of whether or not such portrayal of antipodean mores was tongue-in-cheek or not.

The George Orwell Lecture was given during the conference, by Jacques Darras (University of Amiens), on literature and addiction, fittingly enough; some participants were so impressed by his talk on the practice of addictive writing that they immediately incorporated references to it into their own. The conference culminated in talks by Roger Forseth and Tom Dardis (author of The Thirsty Muse) on, respectively, Sinclair Lewis and William Faulkner as pre-eminent practitioners of the genre. Sunday morning saw the remnant of the conference-goers, post-conference-dinner, listening to examples of creative writing by Tom Roder, David Plumb, Melissa Croghan (University of Pennsylvania) and the novelist Ron Butlin, who read extracts from his book The Sound of My Voice. about alcoholic biscuit-company manager Morris Magellan. After the reading Butlin discussed the symbolic and narrative potential of the subject of addiction in fiction.

The conference also saw the inaugural issue of the Psycho-Active Journal, edited by Tom Roder. A selection of the papers is to be published by Sheffield Academic Press next year, edited by the conference organizers--Tim Armstrong, Matthew Campbell and Sue Vice. We look forward to the next installment.

NOTES AND COMMENT

Psycho-Active Journal, according to editor Tom Roder,

is a new publication which will explore the ways states of "non-ordinary reality" (whatever that might mean) are represented in literature and the visual arts. It will focus particularly on states induced by alcohol and other drugs but also on those occurring spontaneously, "naturally," or by other means; e.g., fasting, sleep-deprivation, breathing exercises, hypnosis and love.

It welcomes original written and visual submissions, of an academic or personal nature, including articles, essays, obsessions, dream readings, reviews of relevant literature, poetry, short stories, and art work that deal with states of "non-ordinary reality." Psycho-Active Journal (ISSN 0962-2853), Physiology of a Fly House, 50 Clifford Road, Sheffield S11 9AQ, England (£1.25 per issue; three times a year). . . . Dan Wakefield will direct a day-long workshop, "Booze and the Muse: Breaking the Myth," at the New York (City) Open Center on 20 October 1991. . . . Three of Ivan Gold's books, Nickel Miseries, Sick Friends, and Sams in a Dry Season (see Thomas Gilmore's review above), will be published in paperback by Washington Square Press (Pocket Books), June 1992. . . . A new network, Academics Recovering Together, "provides contacts to professors, moving to different campuses, information on how best to use sabbatical leaves, and informal advice and support to those who feel they have been discriminated against because of their substance-abuse problems." For information, write Bruce E. Donovan, Brown University, Box 1865, Providence, RI 02912. . . . Robert E. Fleming (English, University of New Mexico), proposes to found a Sinclair Lewis Society. If sufficient interest is communicated to him, the Society will hold meetings at the annual meetings of the American Literature Association. Those interested may write to Professor Fleming at Department of English, Humanities 217, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131 (505/277-6347). . . . Sensing, perhaps, that the New Temperance Movement is getting out of hand, Jasper McKee has written The Booze Theory of Civilization, which includes on its cover: "Warning: The Surgeon General of the United States May Be Hiding Under Your Bed." It is a light-hearted apologia for what might be termed Texas Libertarianism (Rumdum Books, Suite 538, 2186 Jackson Keller, San Antonio, TX 78213; \$14.75 inclusive of all costs). . . . For a similarly motivated publication, see The Moderation Reader, issued six times a year for Citizens for Moderation, 4714 N.E. 50th Street, Seattle, WA 98105-2908 ("suggested minimum membership": \$20.00 per year). . . . Ken Kesey has recreated his cross-country Day-Glo-painted psychedelic bus to promote his latest book, The Further Inquiry (Viking). Some of us never age.

Conferences

A symposium, "The Psychology of Alcohol Use: Insights from Literature," organized by Miles Cox (North Chicago VA Medical Center), is scheduled for the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, San Francisco, 19 August (3:00 pm, Marriott Willow Room). Papers will be read by Nicholas Warner ("Beyond the Sober Eye of Reason: Drunken Consciousness in Edgar Allan Poe"); George Wedge ("Alcohol Dependency as Symptom: The Life and Works of Jean Rhys"); Constance Perry ("Women Under the Influence: Djuna Barnes's Nightwood and Anna Kaven's Ice"); and Roger Forseth ("Alcohol, Disease, and the Limitations of Artistic Representation"). The discussant will be Peter Nathan (University of Iowa). . . . NOTE: We have received numerous inquiries about the next "Literature and Addiction Conference." There is considerable discussion but, so far, nothing concrete. When there is, an announcement will appear in "Notes and Comment."

NOTEWORTHY

"There is a photograph in this biography of Paul Scott in his back garden a year or so before the end. He seems like a dingy zoo animal in his patch of London sunshine that does not warm his bones. He looks bloated in the midriff and puffy in the face--robbed of all his dignity, somehow. His eyes are dead. . . . If I have any reservation about Mrs. Spurling's book, it is that she doesn't seem to understand that the disease of alcoholism did this to [him]. . . . Even to the perceptive narrator of Scott's heartbreaking story, alcoholism presents itself with more disguises than a trickster: as amebiasis, as a lost sexuality, as the human condition, as--a favorite, this--great art. But, mercifully for the families, the artists, the people of our place and generation, we are beginning to see where alcoholism and life divide" (Kennedy Fraser, "Stones of His House" [a review of Paul Scott: A Life of the Author of "The Raj Quartet" by Hilary Spurling (Norton)], The New Yorker 13 May 1991: 110).

"His name is David Gates. He is 44 years old and he has written a novel, his first. It is called Jernigan and is published by Alfred A. Knopf. The protagonist and narrator is Peter Jernigan, a cruel and irresponsible yet also humorous alcoholic in his late 30's who from the perspective of a recovery program looks back on the mess he has made of the last year and a half of his life. . . . 'I think what I wanted to do [said Gates] was to push all my worst imaginings and all my worst qualities to a terrible extreme and see what came of it.' . . . But, he adds, unlike many first novels, Jernigan is not autobiographical. . . . For example, he says, he is not an alcoholic. 'But alcohol is a wonderful tool for taking a character down'" (Mervyn Rothstein, "The American Who Would Be Beckett," The New York Times. 18 June 1991: B1).

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

John W. Crowley is professor and chairman of English at Syracuse University. He is the author of The Black Heart's Truth: The Early Career of W. D. Howells (1985) and of The Mask of Fiction: Essays on W. D. Howells (1989).

Roger Forseth is the editor of Dionysos.

Thomas B. Gilmore, professor emeritus of English, Georgia State University, is the author of Equivocal Spirits: Alcoholism and Drinking in Twentieth-Century Literature (1987) and of "James Boswell's Drinking," Eighteenth Century Studies (Spring 1991). He is teaching literature and alcoholism this summer at Seattle University.

Donald C. Irving, professor and chairman of English & American Studies at Grinnell College, has had a long scholarly interest in American's literary landmarks and is collecting materials toward a biography of the Chicago poet, painter, and dancer Mark Turbyfil. He wrote the essays on the biographies of J. F. Cooper and Theodore Roethke for the St. James Press Guide to Biography.

Sue Vice is lecturer in English Literature at the University of Sheffield. She recently edited Malcolm Lowry: Eighty Years On (Macmillan 1989).

Dan Wakefield, the novelist and author of Returning: A Spiritual Journey (1988), is currently conducting workshops on alcohol and creativity.

George Wedge is an associate professor of English and Linguistics at the University of Kansas, where he has taught since 1958. He is editor of Cottonwood Magazine and Press, co-editor of Stiletto, and an advisory editor to Kansas Quarterly. His poems have appeared in Kansas Quarterly, Stone Country, High Plains Literary Review, and other literary magazines, and he has published articles on dialects and poetics. He is working on a book, Writing Under the Influence.

CONTENTS OF PAST ISSUES

All back issues currently are available: \$3.00 per issue (\$4.00 other than USA or Canada).

Dionysos 1.1 (Spring 1989)

- The Drunken Wife in Defoe's Colonel Jack: An Early Description of Alcohol Addiction (Nicholas O. Warner).
 Mixing Memory with Desire: The Family of the Alcoholic in Three Mid-Century Plays (George F. Wedge).
 Writing Cheever Drinking. A review of Scott Donaldson's John Cheever: A Biography (John W. Crowley).
 "I wouldn't have Korsakov's syndrome, would I?"
 A review of Barnaby Conrad's Time Is All We Have: Four Weeks at the Betty Ford Center (Roger Forseth).
 Alcoholics as American Celebrities. A review of Donald Goodwin's Alcohol and the Writer (Constance M. Perry).

Dionysos 1.2 (Fall 1989)

- Denial as Tragedy: The Dynamics of Addiction in Eugene O'Neill's The Iceman Cometh and Long Day's Journey into Night (Roger Forseth).
 The Critic Criticized: Herbert Fingarette's Heavy Drinking: The Myth of Alcoholism as a Disease (Thomas B. Gilmore).
 Making Use: The Last Poems of Raymond Carver. A review of Raymond Carver's A New Path to the Waterfall (Hamilton Cochrane).
 Hallucinations. A review of Ronald K. Siegel's Intoxication: Pursuit of Artificial Paradise (E. Nelson Hayes).
 The Great American "Rummies": Our Century's Writers and Alcoholism. A review of Tom Dardis's The Thirsty Muse: Alcohol and the American Writer (Constance M. Perry).

Dionysos 1.3 (Winter 1990)

- A Thrice-Told Tale: Fiction and Alcoholism in Richard Yates's Disturbing the Peace (Anya Taylor).
 Children of Alcoholics in Literature: Portraits of the Struggle (Part One) (Timothy M. Rivinus and Brian W. Ford).
 The Incurable Dirigible (Poem) (Hayden Carruth).
 Politics and Recovery. A review of Judith McDaniel's Metamorphosis (Jet Wimp).
 A Taboo Lifted. A review of Thomas B. Gilmore's Equivocal Spirits (Donald C. Irving).
 A Mixed Bag. A review of Adult Children of Alcoholics Remember. E. Nelson Hayes, editor (Thomas B. Gilmore).
 The Truth of Fiction. A review of The Invisible Enemy. Miriam Dow and Jennifer Regan, editors (John J. Halligan).

Dionysos 2.1 (Spring 1990)

- Alcohol, Literature, and Social Patterns (Paul H. Schmidt).
 Children of Alcoholics in Literature: Portraits of the Struggle (Part Two) (Timothy M. Rivinus and Brian W. Ford).
 Torn Between Knowledge and Desire: Alcoholism in John Berryman's "Dream Song #96" (Jennifer Manning)