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University of Wisconsin-Superior

EDITORIAL

There has been an interesting, not to say curious, development recently: Theory and Culture Studies have discovered addiction. One instance is Avital Ronell's Crack Wars: Literature, Addiction, Mania (reviewed below by Marty Roth). Another is a special issue, On Addiction, of differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies (Spring 1993). I say curious, because the authors of neither of these texts have much of originality or substance to say about addiction, either about the condition itself or its complex interplay with literature and the arts, and, further, they fail to demonstrate (with few exceptions) special knowledge of or insight into the nature of addiction. Their attention to addiction is nontheless interesting--and important--since it may signal that the subject that has absorbed some of us for a number of years is beginning to enter the mainstream of academic fashion. If indeed this is so, I hope the results will be more promising than are suggested by these two excursions.

To cite just one example, the lead piece in differences is "The Rhetoric of Drugs," an interview with Jacques Derrida. Derrida begins with an admission: "Let us speak . . . [about addiction] from the point of view of the non-specialist which indeed I am" (1). He then proceeds to issue, with assurance, a series of sly obscurities couched in the rhetoric of deconstruction, e.g., "As soon as one utters the word 'drugs,' even before any 'addiction,' a prescriptive or normative 'diction' is already at work, performatively, whether one likes it or not. This 'concept' will never be a purely theoretical or theorizable concept. And if there is never a theorem for drugs, there can never be a scientific competence for it either, one attestable as such and which would not be essentially overdetermined by ethico-political norms" (2). Despite the Olympian "voice" exhibited here (as elsewhere in Derrida), I detect no real indication, in the entire interview, that either participant in the dialogue is particularly well informed. At one point Derrida brings into play Plato's Phaedrus. In that great dialogue where the Sophists are condemned and where, it is argued, sound rhetoric is always premised on true knowledge, Phaedrus says, "he is a madman or a pedant who fancies that he is a physician because he has read something in a book, or has stumbled on a prescription or two, although he has no real understanding of the art of medicine" (268c; Jowett tr.). Just so.

One welcomes--from whatever perspective--all who have insights into the at once fascinating and vexing field of addiction studies. But it is not a subject that, now, treats kindly the casual, idiologically generated musings of Derrida.

--RF

ALCOHOL AS MUSE*

Donald W. Goodwin

> Of course, you're a rummy . . . but no more than most good writers are.
> --Hemingway to Fitzgerald

Several years ago, without warning, the novelist William Styron lost a friend. The friend abandoned him "not gradually and reluctantly, as a true friend might, but like a shot--and I was left high and certainly dry." Dry indeed. The friend was alcohol. For 40 years, Styron had (his word) "abused" alcohol. Suddenly, at 60, he could not drink. A "mouthful of wine" caused nausea, wooziness, a sinking feeling, something Styron supposed Antabuse might do--but he was not taking Antabuse. Apparently he had never been treated for a drinking problem. The Antabuse-like reaction had no medical explanation. The author of Lie Down in Darkness and Sophie's Choice missed alcohol terribly. He wrote,

> Like a great many American writers, I used alcohol as the magical conduit to fantasy and euphoria, and to the enhancement of the imagination. There is no need to either rue or apologize for my use of this soothing, often sublime agent, which had contributed greatly to my writing; although I never set down a line while under its influence, I did use it--often in conjunction with music--as a means to let my mind conceive visions that the unaltered, sober brain has no access to. Alcohol was an invaluable senior partner of my intellect, besides being a friend.

When alcohol (his "daily mood bath") betrayed him, he became depressed. At first he thought it was withdrawal. But from subtle beginnings it got progressively worse until finally, six months later, he was plainly a suicide risk. He spent seven weeks in a hospital and recovered. This is all described in Styron's book, Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness.[1] For Styron, alcohol indeed functioned as a muse--or he believed it did. In his book Styron doesn't say whether the "friend" came back after his depression ended. At this writing it is too early to tell whether Styron's productivity as a creative writer continued--with or without the friend.

This essay addresses the question: Does alcohol facilitate creative writing? If so, how?

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* "Alcohol as Muse" appeared in the American Journal of Psychotherapy (46.3 [July 1992]: 422-33). Reprinted by permission of the Association for the Advancement of Psychotherapy.

Certainly this century has seen its share of drinking writers --particularly in America. Whereas in the nineteenth century only one well-known American writer could be described as alcoholic--Edgar Allan Poe--the first half of the twentieth century saw an epidemic of alcoholism among American writers. Draw up a list of well-known fiction writers, poets, and dramatists in the twentieth century and half or more were alcoholic or suspiciously close to it.

In the case of American writers who have won the Nobel Prize in Literature, the alcoholism rate is over 70 percent. First there was Sinclair Lewis--very alcoholic. Then came Eugene O'Neill--very alcoholic. Next was Pearl Buck, who hardly drank. (Women are less often alcoholic than men--protected, so to speak--and Buck was raised by missionary parents in China; hence very protected.) Then followed William Faulkner--very alcoholic. Then Ernest Hemingway--alcoholic ("Drinking is a way of ending the day"). John Steinbeck comes next--a "two-fisted drinker" by some accounts, alcoholic by others. Then we come to a Jewish laureate, Saul Bellow. Jews, like women, are "protected" against alcoholism, regardless of occupation, for reasons one can only guess at. Bellow drinks moderately.

These are the American laureates in literature, excluding T. S. Eliot, who spent most of his life in England and became a naturalized English citizen. Eliot is on nobody's list of alcoholics but he may have been more of a drinker than many thought, according to a biography by Peter Ackroyd.[2] Throughout his life, Ackroyd reports, "He drank a good deal" and confessed that he "needed alcohol to get himself in the mood to write." It appears that, for Eliot, alcohol was indeed a must--a friend. To my knowledge, none of the other alcoholic laureates admitted needing alcohol to write. But a number of other writers have said it helped.

One was the poet A. E. Housman, who said he usually wrote poems after several pints of beer in the local pub. He suggested that beer was part of the process. E. B. White, the great New Yorker essayist, said that he always had a martini before starting to write "to get up the courage." James Gould Cozzens, a great and all-but-forgotten novelist of the mid-twentieth century, drank heavily but denied being alcoholic. However, when he stopped drinking on his doctor's advice, he found he couldn't write. Apparently he needed alcohol whether he realized it or not. Some have maintained that alcohol destroys writing ability rather than helps it.[3] This is a hard case to prove. One can see a decline in writers such as Faulkner and Steinbeck, but whether the decline was due to alcohol is not known. Many abstainers and moderate drinkers lose their writing talent, it seems as a function of aging, or success, or both, or who knows what else. Dashiell Hammett stopped drinking and stopped writing. Eugene O'Neill stopped drinking and kept on writing but was unable to produce a

single play until, years later, he wrote his masterpiece, Long Day's Journey into Night.

Some alcoholic writers appear to survive alcohol, talent unscathed. Most people agree that John Cheever's best novel was The Falconer (although none of his novels were as good as his short stories). In Cheever's case he may have been able to write short stories but not novels while drinking. F. Scott Fitzgerald said he could write a short story while drinking, but he couldn't write a novel because he couldn't remember what had gone before. Cheever had stopped drinking when he wrote The Falconer in the last years of his life. Perhaps his brain "grew back." This is not entirely a fantasy. Studies often show that alcoholics have enlarged cerebral ventricles, indicating loss of cells. A year or two after they stop drinking the ventricles tend to return to normal size. Some have speculated that cells were not destroyed but that large ventricles were a manifestation of fluid shifts. In any case, Cheever is one of many writers whose drinking did not seem to impair their writing talent. (Of course, maybe they would have been even better writers if they had not drunk. To know this, each of the writers would need an identical twin who was a teetotaler and also a writer, and one still could not be sure.)

Other writers who seem to have survived a lifetime of excessive drinking include Hemingway and Fitzgerald. In the last ten years of his life, while drinking heavily, Hemingway wrote one of his best novels and a wonderful memoir of his early writing (and drinking) days in Paris. (The novel was The Old Man and the Sea; the memoir, A Moveable Feast). Fitzgerald was on and off the wagon during the last years of his life in Hollywood but managed to write fragments of what his friend Edmund Wilson thought would probably be his finest novel, The Last Tycoon.

In short, how often alcohol truly facilitates creative writing is not known. One has to recall all those moderate drinking or abstaining great writers of the nineteenth century in America to realize that alcohol certainly is unnecessary for many writers. Also, if not exclusively an American phenomenon, the alcoholism epidemic among writers was much more severe--and possibly still is --in the United States than in other countries. Obviously most fiction writers do not need alcohol. It is possible that poets have a greater need, if not for alcohol, then for other mind-altering drugs. In the nineteenth century, English and French poets were hooked on opiates and cannabis, respectively. Two thousand years ago, the Roman poet Horace wrote, "No poems can please for long or live that are written by water drinkers."

To understand the association of alcoholism and writing talent--when an association exists--it might be helpful to examine some pharmacological effects of alcohol on writers and most other people. This requires making assumptions about writing and alcohol that may miss the mark in individual cases. Here, nevertheless,

are some points where writing and alcohol may interact or serve common ends. Writing is a form of exhibitionism; alcohol lowers inhibitions and prompts exhibitionism in many people. Writing requires an interest in people; alcohol increases sociability and makes people more interesting. Writing involves fantasy; alcohol promotes fantasy. Writing requires self-confidence; alcohol boosts confidence. Writing is lonely work; alcohol assuages loneliness. Writing demands intense concentration; alcohol relaxes.

This, of course, may explain why writers (and many other people) drink, but does not explain alcoholism. Fitzgerald knew why he drank; it brought him closer to people and relieved his tortured sensitivity. People meant more to Fitzgerald than anything else. He yearned to be close to them, intimate, involved. His shyness prevented it and so did his fear of rejection, of having his inadequacy exposed and his sense of importance shattered. Alcohol was a bridge. "I found," says an alcoholic in one of his stories, "that with a few drinks I got expansive and somehow had the ability to please people. . . . Then I began to take a whole lot of drinks to keep going and have everybody think I was wonderful."

Alcohol also reduced the "sensory overload" to which writers are prone. As a writer, Fitzgerald felt he had to register everything--all the emanations and nuances of the world around him, the "inexhaustible variety of life." Like many writers, he had difficulty turning off this "afferent" side of his talent. Careful writing consists of an endless chain of small decisions--choosing the best word, excluding this, including that--and the good writer, while writing, is an obsessional. Restricting obsessions to a nine-to-five workday is difficult; the wheels keep turning, and writers are notorious sufferers of insomnia. Alcohol, for a time, emancipates the writer from the tyranny of mind and memory. Fitzgerald drank, as Baudelaire said of Edgar Allan Poe, "not as an epicure, but barbarously, with a speed and dispatch altogether American, as if he were performing a homicidal function, as if he had to kill something inside himself, a worm that would not die." The puzzling thing about Fitzgerald was not why he drank, but why he drank as Poe did. What was Fitzgerald's worm? What was he trying to kill? Nothing written by Fitzgerald or about him tells us. The origin of his alcoholism is as inscrutable as the mystery of his writing talent.[4]

The novelist Walker Percy had another pharmacological explanation for why writers drink. It involves an unproven assumption--that alcohol "numbs" the left brain hemisphere more than it does the right. Despite the lack of scientific underpinnings, it is an interesting theory. Percy holds:

> The writer . . . is marooned in his cortex. Therefore it is his cortex he must assault. Worse, actually. He, his self, is

> marooned in his left cortex, locus of consciousness according to Eccles. Yet his work, if he is any good, comes from listening to his right brain, locus of the unconscious knowledge of the fit and form of things. So, unlike the artist who can fool and cajole his right brain and get it going by messing in paints and clay and stone, the natural playground of the dreaming child self, there sits the poor writer, rigid as a stick, pencil poised, with no choice but to wait in fear and trembling until the spark jumps the commissure. Hence his notorious penchant for superstition and small obsessive and compulsive acts such as lining up paper exactly foursquare with desk. Then, failing in these frantic invocations and after the right brain falls as silent as the sphinx--what else can it do?--nothing remains, if the right won't talk, but to assault the left with alcohol, which of course is a depressant and which does of course knock out that grim angel guarding the gate of Paradise and let the poor half-brained writer in and a good deal else besides. But by now the writer is drunk, his presiding left-brained craftsman-consciousness laid out flat, trampled by the rampant imagery from the right and a horde of reptilian demons from below.[5]

Wonderful stuff--alas, unprovable. Nevertheless, Percy has captured what many writers believe alcohol does for them: it provides inspiration.

One reason writers have trouble writing is what George Simenon calls "stage fright": they are not sure they can do it, or do it well anyway. Like baseball players who bat .300 one week and go hitless the next, writers are at the mercy of something beyond their control. The batter's reputation, his income, and professional future depend entirely on reflexes over which he has little influence; the writers depend on something called inspiration, which is just as capricious. Some days you hit the ball, others you don't. This is why early success for some writers has been disastrous. How can you do it again when you have no idea how you did it before?

(This may explain why baseball players seem also to have a fairly high rate of alcoholism. John Lardner described one ballplayer as a right-handed hitter but a switch drinker: "He could raise glass with either hand." Babe Ruth, the greatest of the alcoholic ballplayers, died early. The funeral took place on a hot day and went on and on. Walking outdoors afterward, one Yankee said, "Christ, I would give my right arm for a cold beer," and the other said, "So would the Babe.")

There are three opinions about whether alcohol provides inspiration for writers. One holds that it never does, another that it sometimes does, and a third that it is essential.

According to the first view, drinking writers create their own masterpieces not <u>on account of</u> alcohol, but <u>in spite of</u> it. Still, Fitzgerald and Simenon (among others) believed they had to drink to write. (Fitzgerald said that his "creative vitality demanded stimulation.")

Rather large numbers of drinking writers believe alcohol helps <u>sometimes</u>. "Drink heightens feeling," Fitzgerald told a friend. "When I drink, it heightens my emotions and I put it in a story. . . . My stories written when sober are stupid . . . all reasoned out, not felt." "A writer who drinks carefully is probably a better writer," says Stephen King. "The main effect of the grain or the grape on the creative personality is that it provides the necessary sense of newness and freshness, without which creative writing does not occur." The reasoning goes like this: As a child the writer could spend hours alone in his fantasy world, but as an adult he may find he has lost the knack. A reverie may be an escape, but it is also necessary for his work, and alcohol makes it easier. John Cheever noted that growing older is accompanied by dulling of the senses: "subtle distance comes between you and the smell of wood smoke." Alcohol permits the writer to see things freshly. Its toxic effect on the brain can restore the sense of wonder at the world that children experience, that is essential to the motivation to write.

Drinking <u>does</u> produce a kind of chemical trance, an "altered state of consciousness" in the current jargon. If alcohol really does help writers write, this may be why. "Genius," William James said, "is little more than the faculty of perceiving in an unhabitual way." Nongeniuses, intoxicated, see the world in an unhabitual way.

In Malcolm Lowry's <u>Under the Volcano</u>, the consul, drunk after a day and a night of imbibing, told his wife that "unless you drink as I do, can you hope to understand the beauty of an old woman from Tarasco who plays dominoes at seven o'clock in the morning? All mystery, all hope, all disappointment, yes, all disaster, is here, beyond those swinging doors"--for the drinker. The critic Art Hill comments: "This capacity to invest the ordinary or the ugly with an aura of beauty--very real, however fleeting--is the one positive justification ever put forward for the alcoholic's addiction. All other reasons are defensive, mere excuses."

On this basis drinking writers sometimes deride nondrinking writers. Norman Douglas, in <u>South Wind</u>, asks: "Have you ever heard of a teetotaler conspicuous for kindliness of heart, or intellectually distinguished in any walk of life? I should be glad to know his name. A sorry crew! Not because they drink water, but because the state of mind which makes them dread alcohol is unpropitious to the hatching of any generous idea." Even Bernard Shaw, a teetotaler, acknowledged the mythical potency of drink. "Not everybody," he wrote, "is strong enough to endure life without

an anesthetic" and conceded that "drink probably averts more gross crime than it causes."

Of course, alcohol-induced revelations often cannot be trusted. The same is true of chemical-induced revelations in general. Oliver Wendell Holmes sniffed ether and reported of the universe: "The whole is pervaded with the smell of turpentine." Williams James tried nitrous oxide, wrote down a cosmic discovery, and found the next day that the cosmic discovery was "Higamous, hogamus, woman's monogamous, hogamus, higamus, man is polygamous." After LSD, a psychologist received the ultimate secret of the universe: "Please flush after using."

The next morning, after scribbling feverishly on bar napkins, the writer is often faced with unintelligible drivel.

Except for providing inspiration, does alcohol otherwise help writers write? Ironically, once the creative process gets underway, writers often have trouble stopping it, and alcohol may serve a need here too. It happened with Truman Capote. Interviewed, he said that once he began writing

> in fearful earnest, my mind zoomed all night every night, and I don't think I really slept for several years. Not until I discovered that whiskey could relax me. I was too young, fifteen, to buy it myself, but I had a few older friends who were most obliging in this respect and I soon accumulated a suitcase full of bottles, everything from blackberry brandy to bourbon. I kept the suitcase hidden in a closet. Most of my drinking was done in the late afternoon; then I'd chew a handful of Sen and go down to dinner, where my behavior, my glazed silences, gradually grew into a source of general consternation. One of my relatives used to say, "Really, if I didn't know better, I'd swear he was dead drunk."

James Thurber also found a drink helped terminate writing. It often needed terminating. Sometimes his wife would come up to him at a dinner party and say, "Damn it, Thurber, stop writing." "She usually catches me in the middle of a paragraph," Thurber commented. Once his daughter looked up from the dinner table and asked, "Is he sick?" "No," said Thurber's wife, "he's writing."[4] Thurber was a compulsive as well as an obsessional writer. He rewrote and rewrote. He said of one story that there must have been two hundred forty thousand words in all the manuscripts put together and he spent two thousand hours working at it. Yet the finished story was less than two thousand words.

There is another way alcohol may facilitate creative thinking. Some people believe they write best when feeling poorly. T. S. Eliot said he wrote best when anemic. Turgenev said he could write

only when painfully in love: "Now I am old and I can't fall in love any more, and that is why I have stopped writing." With Freud it was bowels. His best work came after a bout with an irritable colon. "I can't be industrious when I am in good health," he wrote. Perhaps a little hangover helps the Muse along.

Writing, in any case, is hard work. In Anthony Burgess's words, it is "excruciating to the body: it engenders tobacco addiction, an over-reliance on caffeine and Dexedrine, piles, dyspepsia, chronic anxiety, sexual impotence." How he overlooked alcohol addiction is a mystery. Simenon recommends that no one write unless he has to.

> I think that anyone who does not need to be a writer, who thinks he can do something else, ought to do something else. Writing is not a profession but a vocation of unhappiness. I don't think an artist can ever be happy.

So why do writers write? "Because," Simenon said, "I think that if a man has the urge to be an artist, it is because he needs to find himself. Every writer tries to find himself through his characters."

Who is the "self" writers seek? Are writers different from other people? Are their selves harder to find? Does alcohol aid in the search? Historian Gilman Ostrander has an interesting theory about this. Here are excerpts from a letter that Dr. Ostrander wrote about his theory:

> Alcoholism is basically a disease of individualism. It afflicts people who from early childhood develop a strong sense of being psychologically alone and on their own in the world. This solitary outlook prevents them from gaining emotional release through associations with other people, but they find they can get this emotional release by drinking. So they become dependent on alcohol in the way other people are dependent on their social relationships with friends and relatives.

Writers, Ostrander believes, are also loners and this is one reason they write. "It is a profession which allows the individual to be tremendously convivial all by himself. Writing and drinking are two forms of companionship." Ostrander also believes his theory explains why alcoholism is more prevalent in some ethnic groups than in others. The high alcoholism rate among the Irish and French, he says, is at least partly traceable to the fact that Irish and French children are brought up to be "responsible for their own conduct. When they grow up and leave the household, they are expected to be able to take care of themselves. Individualism

in this sense is highly characteristic of these groups." Jews and Japanese, on the other hand, have a low alcoholism rate, and this is because children are not expected to be independent.

> Infants in these families are badly spoiled, that is to say, their whims are indulged in by parents and older relatives, so that, from the outset, they become emotionally dependent upon others in the family. . . . It is never possible for them to acquire the sense of separate identity, apart from their family, that is beaten into children in, say, Ireland. . . . They are likely to remain emotionally dependent upon and a part of their family in a way that is not true in societies where the coddling of children is socially disapproved of.

And this is why Ostrander believes most Jews and even hard-drinking Japanese do not become alcoholic. "They never had the chance to think of themselves as individuals in the Western sense of the word. They are brought up to be so dependent upon others in the family that they are unable to think of themselves as isolated individuals." They do not need alcohol to give them a "sense of emotional completeness."

It is a hard theory to prove. Still, whether most alcoholics are loners or not, most creative writers are, or believe they are. In the biographies of famous writers, no theme recurs so frequently as loneliness, shyness, isolation. Simenon, for example, has declared that he is haunted by the problem of communication.

> I mean communication between two people. The fact that we are I don't know how many millions of people, yet communication, complete communication, is completely impossible between two of those people, is to me one of the biggest tragic themes in the world. When I was a young boy I was afraid of it. I would almost scream because of it. It gave me such a sensation of solitude, or loneliness.

This may be one reason writers write. They can communicate with their characters. It may also be one reason they can write. Distance gives perspective. It may further--if Ostrander is right --be one reason they drink.

Both writing and drinking bear certain similarities to trance states. Psychiatrist Arnold Ludwig observes that trances "tend to lessen the differentiation between self and others and therefore . . . [promote] greater social cohesiveness. . . ." When writing, Simenon was almost literally in a trance (he died in 1989). He saw nobody, spoke to nobody. "I live just like a monk. All the day I am one of my characters. I feel what he feels." For eleven days--

he wrote a chapter a day--he was in the "character's skin." This is one reason his novels were so short. After eleven days he was utterly exhausted. And after he finished a novel he could never remember what it was about. Trances, Ludwig says, often end with amnesia; so, at least for Simenon, did novel writing. Faulkner also used to stare at people when they asked about something he wrote. "Hell, how do I know what it means? I was drunk when I wrote it."

The loner theory explains much. For example:

1. Writing and alcohol both produce trancelike states. A gift for creative writing may involve an innate ability to enter trancelike states. Being a loner--shy, isolated, without strong personal ties--may facilitate trancelike states when it is time to write and encourage drinking to overcome the shyness and isolation when it is time to relax.

2. Creative writing requires a rich fantasy life; loners have rich fantasy lives--the ultimate loner is the schizophrenic who lives in a prison of fantasy. Alcohol promotes fantasy.

3. People with so-called multiple personalities are said to be loners regardless of the personality they assume. Writers are often said to have multiple personalities: many are chameleons, always changing, particularly when drunk. Invariably shy--even Hemingway--they become gregarious when drunk, behave like fools, are often mean.

Drunk or sober, they wear different masks for different occasions. They drink to become close, and then, when they become mean drunk, alcohol became their excuse the next day. As Stephen Longstreet described Hemingway: "He was a mean and cruel man, for all his vitality, audacity, and charm. His father had given him a shotgun at seven, and he was to spend a great deal of his life slaughtering thousands of birds, animals, big fish, and, in the end, the biggest game of all--himself."

John Cheever--going to AA meetings, trying to stay sober--wrote: "I write to make sense of my life." Writing made his life less chaotic, less depressing. When it worked, it did so barely: "That bridge of language, metaphors, anecdote and imagination that I build each morning to cross the incongruities in my life seems very frail indeed." For years alcohol had healed the incongruities, but it was killing him and writing was all he had left. "His loneliness," wrote his daughter Susan, "was so sharp that it sometimes felt like intestinal flu."

The creative person is a sensitive person. "You see," Truman Capote once said, "I was so different from everyone, so much more intelligent and sensitive and perceptive. I was having fifty perceptions a minute to everyone else's five. I always felt that

nobody was going to understand me, going to understand what I felt about things. I guess that is why I started writing. At least on paper I could put down what I thought." The writer and editor William McIlwain thought that was why writers drank: "A writer perhaps can't stand all the things he sees clearly and . . . must take the white glare out of the clarity." Many writers complain of too much clarity. Malcolm Lowry said he felt as if he had been born without a skin. Faulkner sometimes drank because of the exhaustion that came after the tension of writing: "I feel as though all my nerve ends were exposed."

I once received a letter from a self-styled "obscure" writer who said he felt the same way as Faulkner:

> I doubt that you will find one writer who dips his pen into the emotions of other people's blood and tears, who, if honest, will not admit that after writing something frightening he is himself frightened, sometimes something sad may leave him sobbing over the keys of his typewriter, completely wrung out from the emotion that has been transmitted to paper. . . .
>
> This extreme sensitivity must have some effect on brain chemistry. The micro-electricity of the mind's synapses must move at a fearful pace as selections are made as rapidly as fingers can move over a typewriter or a quill scratch ink on foolscap. It is exhausting work. The brain is overcharged, running at full tilt. There is no "stop" button to turn off the circuitry. Alcohol pushes the "stop" button.
>
> I wonder what would happen if a study were made of the brain wave patterns of creative people at their work? Would the electroencephalogram show that the circuitry was pushing close to the point normally denoting mental disturbance? I think it would. Genius is close to insanity, if not in itself a form of insanity. . . . Which of the many little gray cell circuits must short out to place a person over the threshold and into the institution?

He concludes: "Since I stopped drinking, my creative ability has been diluted . . a bottle of booze could, and did, turn it on."

Instead of an EEG, a PET scan might be more informative. It is unlikely, however, to solve the mystery of why writers drink, and some drink so much.

SUMMARY

It has been argued that American writers do not drink any more than American plumbers. If so, as one commentator said, American plumbing would be a mess. No one can question the fact that American writers in this century have been excessive drinkers. Explanations why this might occur are presented in this paper.

Walker Percy locates the problem in the duelling hemispheres of the brain. Others think alcohol is (as Hemingway said) a good way to end the day and shut off the creative process. An historian has proposed that alcoholics are loners, that writers also are loners, and this is why so may writers are alcoholic. Although the argument for this view is persuasive, it does not explain why the United States has so many more alcoholic writers than other countries, or, why the "epidemic" occurred in the twentieth century. Alcohol was largely not a problem for Americans in earlier centuries and, although there have been alcoholic writers in European countries, their numbers never approached a majority. Drinking is the "joy of Russia," but there have been very few alcoholic Russian writers. Dylan Thomas, Brendan Behan, and Evelyn Waugh notwithstanding, alcoholic writers have not been common in the United Kingdom or Ireland.

It is easy to think of reasons why writers drink. It is more difficult to explain why so many drank in this country during this century.

NOTES

1 William Styron, Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness (New York: Random, 1990).

2 Peter Ackroyd, T. S. Eliot: A Life (New York: Simon, 1984).

3 Thomas B. Gilmore, Equivocal Spirits (Chapel Hill: U of South Carolina P, 1987).

4 Donald W. Goodwin, Is Alcoholism Inherited? (New York: Oxford U P, 1988).

5 Walker Percy, Lost in the Cosmos (New York: Farrar, 1983).

6 Donald W. Goodwin, Alcohol and the Writer (New York: Viking, 1991).

MARLA II*

Jack Williams

The Debutante

The day her first period began, Marla disappeared into her room. Neither her mother nor her father could draw her out. They tried bribery, force, cajoling. None of it worked. Months passed and she stayed in her room. She left it, of course, long enough to go to school, she came out for meals and visits from friends or relatives, but on the whole, she rarely left her room. It was her sanctuary, her garden.

The reclusions ended as abruptly as they began. One afternoon her parents were chatting in the family room, sipping wine and beer, when Marla came out of her room. She was wearing white shorts and a red t-shirt, her school's colors. She was walking on her hands.

Honey, Marla's father said, touching his wife's arm. Look.

They stared. Their mouths fell open as they witnessed their daughter's coming out.

Hi, mother, Marla said. Hi, daddy.

Is she walking on her hands? Marla's mother asked.

Marla walked the length of the room and turned around at the fireplace. She headed back through the kitchen.

Well, we heard those noises, those funny sounds, her father said.

Yes, but I thought that was some of her awful music, her mother said.

Marla stopped in the kitchen and turned around. Her t-shirt was hanging backwards, toward her neck, showing off a pale, tight stomach.

What do you think? she asked. It's better than stilts, I think.

Her mother sipped her wine. Her father smiled and pivoted in his recliner. Neither spoke.

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* The Marla stories are selections from Glass Was Everywhere, a novel in progress. Marla [I] appeared in Dionysos Vol. 2, No. 3, Winter 1991.

I started with headstands, Marla said, but any idiot can do a headstand. Besides, your face gets real red and your toes go numb. So I worked my way up to a handstand, which isn't easy. My face gets red and my toes still get numb, but now it's worth it. Who do you know that can do a handstand?

They nodded.

A handstand, her mother finally managed. Well. A handstand.

The doorbell rang while her parents were looking at each other.

I'll get it! Marla said happily. She set off for the front door, moving fluidly, lithesome despite the inversion.

For a moment neither of her parents moved. Then it occurred to each of them--simultaneously, it seemed, from the way they nearly knocked each other down as they struggled up from their drinks, their recliners--that whoever was at the door might be someone important, someone they didn't want Marla to greet upside down.

It could be one of the neighbors, Marla's mother said, feigning hope.

Work, maybe it's someone from work, her father mumbled.

But my God, what if it's--her mother said.

Impossible. It's not. Don't even think about that, said her father. There's no way he'd come around today.

They tore towards the front door anyway. Marla's mother bruised her shoulder when she knocked into a wall. Her father jammed a toe when he kicked the baseboard trying to round the corner too quickly.

They got to the hallway in time to see Marla letting their priest into the house. He was laughing.

Now that's some trick, he was saying.

You like it? Marla answered. She turned a circle, to show him how complete was her mastery of the handstand. She didn't seem tired.

Her parents hobbled into the foyer to greet the priest.

Father Grable, Marla's father said, extending his hand.

Oh, don't mind him, Father Gable, her mother said, glaring at

her husband as she rushed past. You know what a joker he is. She shook his hand and sighed.

Thank you for coming, she said.

Well, I thought I'd better make my rounds, Father Gable said. We need to check in from time to time. I see Marla has learned how to do a handstand.

Yes, you must check in, Marla's mother said.

Absolutely right, said her father, miserable about his toe.

Father Gable smiled and looked at the family. He held out his hands, as if he were blessing them.

Watch this! Marla said.

You Were Moe

Maybe it was a poor decision, but after a bout of guilt over not living up to her familial obligations, Marla offered to take her twin cousins to the amusement park. It was a huge place, loudly hawking the fact that it was the only park in the southeast with four roller coasters. Four!

She moaned when she saw the first one, a behemoth that twisted and writhed, turning loops and impossible corners, turning stomachs. The children tugged on her hands like the leashes of anxious dogs.

Let's ride this one! said Jefferson.

Come on Marla! cried Shelley, a roller coaster!

She relented--what else could she do? The trip was her idea. They joined the line that ran through a maze-like covered area of turnstiles, a corridor of rows. The rows moved slowly, and Marla wound up staring into the face of a man wearing a t-shirt that said I'm with stupid with an arrow pointing up. They were adjacent to each other and because the line seemed to move in entire rows when it moved at all, they seemed to always be next to each other.

I want to ride in the front car! cried Jefferson.

Yeah! cheered Shelley. The front car!

Marla was staring at the man, thinking that he looked vaguely familiar. Did she know him? Had they met before? His shirt was idiotic but she had a queer notion that she knew the man.

--and some popcorn and some cotton candy, said Jefferson, apparently cataloguing what he wanted to eat for lunch.

And some ice cream, Shelley added. I love ice cream.

Sure, said Marla. Anything you want. Whatever. Anything.

The line barreled forward and when it stopped, she was beside the man again. The children buzzed around her legs.

She was positive she knew the man, she just couldn't place him. It was awkward having to stand beside him, separated only by a chain, and try to act uninterested. She thought of the parties she'd been to recently, the gatherings. Had she met him at some social function?

Let's just ride the roller coasters over and over, Jefferson said. A million times, over and over.

A million billion! Shelley squealed.

When the line flung itself forward, Marla was once again beside the man. It seemed inevitable that she speak, say some word of acknowledgment, for she could feel him staring at her. He had on sunglasses, but she felt his eyes.

This is some line, she managed to say.

Giraffes, right? the man said. You told me about how long giraffes are pregnant.

His words were vaguely familiar to her, though she still couldn't remember him. But she had done a paper on giraffes once--it was her 6th grade term paper--and how could he know that?

I'm sorry, Marla said. Do I know you?

At the bar, the man said. It's been a while.

She remembered him then. She didn't want to, but she remembered him. He had told her some horrible story about his mother. It had been a long time ago but she remembered. She remembered the hangover.

What's the shirt mean? she asked, aching for the line to move.

God, he said. I'm with stupid. Get it?

Suddenly the line moved again, rescuing Marla. The man was somewhere behind them. Marla and the children came up to the stalls which led to the roller coaster. A huge sign explained that every car had to have both seats filled.

Marla groaned. There were three of them--one would have to sit with a stranger. She dreaded the idea. She might even have to sit with the man with God.

She looked around frantically, wondering what to do. The roller coaster glided in. People began deboarding. She could hear people screaming and falling. A hand tapped her shoulder. She winced and turned around.

You were Moe, Jefferson said. I did Eenie Meenie to see who to ride with. You were Moe.

Moe? Marla asked.

You were Moe, Jefferson said, taking her hand.

No Good Samaritan

At the worst hour, with the night so thick with a low fog it seemed to have a taste and a smell at the same time, the car broke down. It blew a tire, pulling immediately to the right into the emergency lane, the breakdown lane. Marla wrestled with it, fighting the pull of the ruined wheel, and skidded to a halt. She heard metal grinding on metal.

When she opened the car door, several bottles followed her out, sounding against the rough asphalt. The pebbly lane was dotted with cigarette butts and paper and chunks of glass. A sign near the car declared EMERGENCY PARKING ONLY. Marla laughed harshly, wondering for what other reason someone would stop. It was a wonder she hadn't flattened any of the other tires in the glass-strewn lane.

She screamed.

The night was dense with fog and the late hours which only appeal to the sleepless, the lonely, the drunken. Marla waited for someone to pass. No one came.

Even though she knew better, she opened the trunk and felt for the spare tire. It squashed in her hand and she heard air wheeze out of the eye-sized hole. Some time ago, somewhere, she had struck something. She hadn't had the tire patched, for whatever reason. She simply hadn't had it done.

Marla began walking, reckoning that she had at least three miles to go before she reached an exit. She turned back once so that she could watch her emergency lights flashing, but even from a rock's throw away the lights were faint and muddled by the fog. The amber glow seemed swallowed up in the thickness of the night. She shivered and pulled her coat around herself, bothered that she

had to leave the keys in the ignition in order to make the lights work: another shortcoming, another failure.

As she walked she remembered how angry her father became at the first sign of car trouble, as if a dead battery somehow implicated him as a neglectful man, a squanderer. She could still see her father's face when a car sidled up to her and the man within offered her a ride. He had white hair and a thick wrinkled face, and his knuckles were the largest things on his knotted hands.

I saw the car back there and figured I'd find someone walking, he said.

I just need a gas station, Marla explained. I have a flat. In the close space between them she could smell her breath and its soured scent embarrassed her.

I can take you to one, he said. He smiled at her kindly. Something in his manner, something in his wrinkled face and worn clothes comforted her. He wouldn't harm her, she knew. In his car she would be safe. She fell asleep with her feet shoved beneath the heating vents, thinking of her father.

The man woke her in front of an all-night gas station.

God how can I thank you? Marla asked, adjusting her coat. She faintly heard it tear, and she wondered if her coat, too, was unraveling.

Help somebody else sometime, the man said. He smiled at her, and again she was struck with the aura of kindness he seemed to emit.

It's just that I was nervous, she said, because I had to leave my keys in the car to make the flashers work. You never know what people will do. You never know about strangers.

Yes, he nodded. Hm. Well, good luck.

As he drove away, Marla thought that even his wave seemed kind.

Inside the empty station, the attendant refused to help her unless she agreed to perform a lewd act for him. His demand, and the filthy floors and counters, frightened her so much that she ran out of the store, sobbing. She ran down the ramp. She ran toward her car.

The fog lifted as she jogged along and she watched cars shoot past her sporadically. They sounded like waves slumping in. On the horizon, like a silver sun rising or setting, she saw her car

and she followed it.

When she finally neared it, Marla realized that her lights were no longer flashing. She let out a cry and sprinted for the car. When she reached it she threw open the door, but even as she did she knew that she wouldn't find her keys. The ignition, of course, was empty.

That goddamn man! Marla cried. That goddamn man! She wept. She kicked the car. She gathered up the bottles that littered the floorboard and seats and spent herself breaking them against the EMERGENCY PARKING ONLY sign. Then she started walking. The sky creaked heavily and deep, like an old hinge, and then it rained. She shivered and pulled her coat around herself. She heard some threads go.

Singapore Sling

The road was called The Byway. It skirted the university, winding through a neighborhood of mammoth houses with weathered ceramic tile roofs. None of the houses had mailboxes on the street. Instead, they were screwed into the door frames, or else consisted merely of hinged flaps on the doors. In either case, the mailman was forced to make his rounds on foot.

The Byway divided the homes from a bell-shaped park that ran down from the curbs, ravine-like, so that swings and sandboxes were occasionally unusable following extreme weather. Because it flooded, the local children (most of them had nannies) loved to play in the temporary streams that coursed through their playground. Their hands and faces often were smeared with mud, and their nannies had them beat their shoes on the curbs so that the mud would chip off.

The road spilled into a wider stint of asphalt that in turn emptied into an eight-lane freeway that led to the suburbs. The watershed effect worsened during rush hour, sending lines of traffic, like the links of a huge chain being hoisted in, backwards into the Byway. The homeowners complained, of course, despising the idling vehicles and the inevitable gawkers, but there was little they could do. They had, after all, insisted that the Byway remain a two-lane road.

As she maneuvered down the winding road, Marla wondered if her hands were still trembling. She raised her left hand from the wheel, it quivered, and she immediately clutched the steering wheel even harder. Her right hand was no better.

Too many Singapore Slings, she said, trying to laugh.

She had happened upon the road, really. She was out driving,

meandering through neighborhoods which she had never before seen. She liked to ride down roads on which she'd never been, just to see where they were going. She knew they would end somewhere, but it pleased her all the same. There was something hopeful about the houses, something forgiving.

Marla stopped one of the nannies leading two children across the road. She asked what road she was on.

Hold on, the nannie said. Jeffrey, Elizabeth. Both of you stomp your feet. I don't want you tracking mud in. She watched the children knock their feet against the edge of the road.

Now. What is it you wanted to know? the nannie asked, turning back to Marla.

The road, Marla said. What's the name of this road?

The Byway, the nannie answered. She laughed, as if the question or the name were tremendously funny. This road's called the Byway and you've got no business being on it.

I'm sorry, is this a private road? Marla asked.

The nannie shook her head slowly. The sun gleamed once, like a match catching fire, then slid behind the house. The shadows stretched across the lawns.

No, the nannie said. It's not a private road. But I recognize you. I recognize you, all right, and you don't belong here.

Marla wondered what she had done wrong. Was there something on her face? Had she been speeding? She looked at her arms, looked into the rear-view mirror, looked out the car window. What was wrong with her? And how could the lady recognize her face? She was sure they had never met.

I'm sorry but--Marla began.

You're on the wrong road, the nannie said. She didn't shout, didn't even raise her voice, but Marla felt as if she had just been berated before a crowded room. The nannie looked at her once, hard and searching, and then gathered the children--Jeffrey and Elizabeth--and walked up a cobblestone driveway.

Marla stared after her. Her knuckles were white from gripping the wheel so tightly. She flexed her right hand--it was cramped--and then laid it over her left breast, pledge-style. That seemed to help, and she drove slowly down the hill, steering with one hand. She didn't look back until the road emptied into the next wider one, and then it was dark. She couldn't see anything.

Alarmed

Alarm. Marla ignored it, busy dreaming of a movie house with every seat filled. The man beside her was fat and his sweaty arms seemed to wrap around the arm-rests. He shoved popcorn into his mouth by the palm-full, spilling the lucky ones onto the sticky floor. He laughed too loudly; he talked to the screen. Marla cringed.

Alarm. She fumbled with it, beating at it so that it would chime again in nine minutes. She sank. The man breathed heavily during a love scene on screen and his fat fingers wandered to his lap. Who was this man? What was this movie? What was she doing here?

I could've told you that an hour ago, said the leading man.

Then get the light, his love interest said, disrobing.

The crowd murmured, chewed, sighed. Fat Man cried out.

Alarm. Marla reset it again. On screen the leading man tore through a darkened parking deck, chasing someone wearing a red vest. The camera became his eyes, peering around corners and down ramps in search of the red vest. Fat Man leaned toward her--he even smelled fat--and whispered the identity of the murderer. Fat Man said that he'd seen the movie before. The leading man panted as he ran. He labored.

The man in the red vest, Fat Man assured her, was nothing more than a red herring. Trust him. He offered Marla some popcorn.

Alarm. She knocked it off the nightstand, pulling its plug from the wall. In the theater in her dream, someone lighted a cigarette. Its red end glowed, pulsing with each inhalation. She was outraged--smoking in theaters was illegal. Hadn't they heard of the dangers of second-hand smoke? She turned to the woman on her right to speak of her disgust, but when she opened her mouth, she suddenly realized that the woman wore her hair in a tremendous sprayed bouffant, one that had gone out of style years or decades ago. Marla's mouth worked on the air.

The leading man received an anonymous phone tip and hurried to a sinister-looking alley alongside a wharf. Rats scuttled past him while he waited. The legs of the homeless, the disenfranchised, jutted from mounds of trash. Fog seemed to seep from the dim street lights, an invader, a mask. A man stepped from the shadows. The cigarette was ground out.

This is the good part, Fat Man said. Watch this. You won't believe this.

I knew it was you since the fight in the bar, the leading man said, addressing the man who had stepped form the shadows.

My God I hate rats! the other said. He produced a gun and shot one of the huge creatures. Christ Jesus, he swore, if there's one thing I hate it's a goddamned rat. Then he pointed the gun at the leading man.

No! Marla screamed. She stood up in the theater and shouted it as loudly as she could. Something seemed to give in her throat but she was unable to stop screaming. She wailed on like a drunken siren.

Easy lady, Fat Man said. He held out his fat hands, still damp and sticky.

A cigarette was lighted, then another, until they seemed to flash on like street lights.

I shoot rats, said the man from the shadows. He fired.

It's only a movie, mumbled Fat Man.

Marla screamed on. She couldn't stop.

Alarm. Alarm. Alarm. Marla sat upright in her bed and opened her mouth to continue screaming. The phone was ringing, she realized, and she was thankful, for its peal seemed to be screaming for her.

It was work. Was she coming in? People were waiting.

Of course, of course, Marla promised. She leapt from the bed. Her throat ached and her legs seemed without muscle or bone. She showered and dressed hurriedly, threw make-up at her face, and stepped into her shoes. She lurched past the mirror and flipped on the iron. Her blouse was wrinkled; it had been on the floor. She was in such a hurry that she tried to iron the blouse while she was still wearing it. When she touched the blouse with the iron, though, she burned herself and dark smoke billowed up. In anger she threw the iron across the room, then tore open the blouse--it was ruined anyway--and found an ugly burn on her left breast. She felt maimed, scarred, as she marvelled at her burned breast. Across it was a fierce burn, thin like a tail.

The phone rang.

Glass Was Everywhere

On New Year's Eve she toasted her ex-husband, the ball descending in Times Square on her t.v. screen. She toasted

Kentucky whiskey, old style sour mash. She toasted the exploration of space, the ever-improving subway system, the beauty of the hanging curveball.

Marla toasted Jesus and the disciples. She toasted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. She toasted hops, barley, and corn. She toasted breweries far and wide, foreign and domestic. She toasted azaleas, dogwoods, the thick scent of chestnut trees.

She toasted the inventor of gutters. She toasted Beethoven. She toasted Absalom and Achitophel, Sarah and Hagar. She toasted the importance of yearly teeth cleaning, the effect of recycling, the power of four-part harmony. She toasted the rain forests.

Marla toasted apple pie, Mom, and America. She toasted broccoli, butter beans, and squash. She toasted movie stars. She toasted her family, her ex-in-laws, the bartender. She toasted the milkman and potato salad and black coffee, and after the seventh toast she rested.

The festivities on the screen continued. She adjusted her party hat and freshened her drink. She put her feet up. She had a picture in the bathroom, above the toilet, of a man sitting in a bar. He had a martini in one hand and a cigarette in the other. It was a charcoal drawing called Rush Hour. The picture pleased Marla--she identified with it--and as she lit a cigarette, she thought she resembled the man in the drawing: Rush hour.

In Times Square, the camera panned the audience, giving witness to streamers and confetti, bloodshot eyes, people laughing, people hugging and kissing, people falling down. Horns went off.

Marla stood up to stretch her legs. Her throat was sore from smoking and all the toasts she'd made. She felt something wet above her left ear and when she brought her hand back from inspecting it, there was blood on her fingers. Had she fallen? Did she run into something? She couldn't remember, and she tried so hard to recall the event, whatever it was, that she forgot what she was after in the first place. She shrugged and wiped her hand on her pants leg.

Later she found herself standing by the window. She couldn't remember what she had been doing there. Her legs ached. Her head was sore and matted with blood. When she flipped on the overhead light to look for her lighter, she remembered that she dreamed she had been struck by lightning.

Marla stumbled into the bathroom. As she tried to sit down, she saw that the drawing had fallen from the wall. On its way down, it had apparently clipped the ashtray she kept on the tank of the commode. The picture and the ashtray were in a heap on the tiles, and glass was everywhere.

She stared at the mess for so long her eyes blurred, focusing on nothing. Her legs ached. Her head ached. Her throat ached. The glass on the floor reminded her of the mess left after a New Year's celebration, of parties she'd had. Confetti always littered the floors, scattered like the countless resolutions that had been uttered only hours earlier.

Marla felt lost as she looked at the glass. The room only vaguely looked familiar, and she decided that she might feel less strange if she said something, if she spoke, so she began naming things that were broken.

Rush hour, she said. Ashtray. Glass. Resolutions. She began to feel better, but her mouth tasted like copper.

Confetti, she said. In another minute, she decided, she would get up. She would fetch the broom and the dustpan.

Tar

Steam breathed from manholes. Marla walked down the street, recognizing nothing and, vaguely, everything, as if the world had been reduced during the night to a battered steeple, a cracked sidewalk, a row of sullen homes. Autumn had pinched the air, making it clear and full of smells, and leaves hovered around fire hydrants and tree trunks. There were mounds of them.

The maintenance crew for the city was out in their beige coveralls and pale blue hard hats. A team of men with shovels and rakes stood beside the two trucks, one full of gravel, one pouring tar in a thick, complicated process. Marla watched the men rake and smooth the tiny rocks as the trucks inched forward. The air was thick with the scent of tar, and the cars that wound past the procession picked up the rocks that were scattered above the new surface and shook them under their wheels like dice.

She watched, leaning against a dogwood whose bare limbs branched up into the air. The men sang and shoveled, and despite the chill of the season their faces gleamed with sweat. Marla sweated too, fighting the quiver in her hands, the nauseous tug at her stomach, the howling in her head. It felt good to lean on the tree and watch the men working. Somehow the sight of them sweating, and the long table of new road, comforted her, though even as it comforted her it made her sleepy. Like the road, she was tired, and even her clothes smelled like tar.

As she watched, a man in the same uniform as the others save for a red bandanna peeking from his hip pocket strode up with several cans of blue spray paint. He slipped all but one into his deep pockets, then shook the can that he held out, and the tiny ball within it rattled.

He had a piece of paper in his breast pocket that he consulted regularly. He drew it out--she thought it was a combination of grids and numbers--nodded, and then stepped off forty paces. She counted. He leaned down with the can and sprayed a blue circle onto the black road. Steam was still lifting up and farther down the street, she could hear the team of men laughing as they inched the tar forward.

The man sprayed two letters--M H--within the blue circle. Then he checked his paper, nodded, stepped off forty more paces, and painted another circle. And in this slow but efficient manner, he made his way behind the men with the rakes and shovels.

Marla watched the man painting and the men paving until they disappeared around a curve. She shook the change in her pockets so that she wouldn't have to feel her hands tremble. She looked down and saw that her left shoe was untied, and when she bent to it, she saw that she was wearing two different socks. Mingled with the tar smell that was nearly overpowering she could make out the faint scent of paint.

What did the circles mean? she wondered. And the letters, what of them? She closed her eyes to think but when she did, she felt herself losing her balance. She hugged the tree.

When the man came walking back toward her, Marla called to him.

What are the circles for? she asked. What do they mean?

They're for the manholes, he said. See, we pave right over them, so I've got to mark where they are with paint.

I don't get it, Marla said, seeing that his pants legs were speckled with blue paint.

See, someone comes after us and cuts them out, he explained.

So they're like mouths, she said.

Sure, kind of like that, he agreed. But you can't have them tarred over, so somebody digs them out later on.

Marla looked at the circle with its initials that was nearest to her. Manhole? she said.

Manhole, he repeated, nodding.

But why tar them over? she asked. Why tar them over if you know you've got to come back and dig for them? The smell of tar seemed to be attacking her. She fanned her face, as if that would rid her of it, but she held on to the barren tree.

Why pave over a manhole? she repeated, watching the men rake out the tar as they paved the other side of the street. The rocks and thick blackness spread over one of the covers, smothering the steam. Cars detoured past orange pylons.

But the man didn't answer her. He only drew out a new can of paint and shook it so that the thing inside rattled. He checked that paper in his pocket. He began counting off his steps.

Long after he had disappeared, Marla looked after him, staring at the marks on the road, the instructions.

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ANNOUNCEMENT

NEW EDITORIAL BOARD MEMBER

Dr. Marty Roth, professor of American literature, popular culture, and film studies at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, has joined the editorial board of _Dionysos_. He is currently concentrating on the theoretical aspects of the culture of addiction.

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Review Article

MATT SCUDDER: FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT AGAINST CRIME AND BOOZE

George Wedge

> I had forgotten. I had forgotten the extremity of its cruelty and tenderness, and, reading it now, turning the Iliad open anywhere in its 15,693 lines, I was shocked. A dying word, "shocked." Few people have been able to use it seriously since Claude Rains (sic) said "I'm shocked, shocked to find that gambling is going on in here" as he pocketed his winnings in "Casablanca." But it's the only word for excitement and alarm of this intensity.
>
> --David Denby, "Does Homer Have Legs," The New Yorker 9/6/93

In his New Yorker article, Denby reports on the experience of returning to the Columbia University classroom to read again the Great Books curriculum and assess the current controversy over the "canon" of "greats." "My experience," he reports, "left me dismayed by the use both left and right were making of 'the canon.'" Perhaps the most telling of his criticisms is that the books, reduced to the status of "texts," had become weapons in an "ideological war" that ignores a central reality: "the books . . . were originally composed not for academics but for the instruction or pleasure of ordinary educated readers." These features of The Iliad reside principally in Homer's exactness in the use of detail, whether it be the horrors of war--a broken spear that quivers in the still beating heart of a dying warrior--or the "bitter sorrow . . . and a yearning for ordinary life, a yearning expressed with just a phrase, a caress of nostalgia that he slips into the description of the mesmerizing catastrophe before us."

Lawrence Block is no Homer, and we may hope that Hollywood will forbear from referring to his Matthew Scudder series as "epic." Yet, reading Denby while thinking about this review article and the current controversy about the portrayal of violence did drive home one point: across the gap between these two authors, there is an electric spark of technique, a modus operandi for portraying "cruelty and tenderness" in a barbarous yet civilized world.

Scudder is not a hero, just a good guy with a sometimes dirty job to do. He solves scuzzy crimes and brings their perpetrators to justice of one kind or another. His milieu, as countless blurbs remind us, is the tough, gritty streets of New York. A Dance at the Slaughterhouse,[1] the NYTBR writer says, is "Shocking . . . Darkly entertaining . . . This one has more voltage than most." This blurb, as likely to sell a book as any, comes first in the paperback edition of the novel. We are worlds away from Homer and the values of the "civilization" he portrayed, as well as from all

the "civilizations" between. Yet we provide "ordinary educated readers" capable of being "shocked," the feeling of "excitement and alarm of [a book's] intensity."

In two books that have appeared since my review article of Spring 1991 (Dionysos 3:1) Scudder's cases involve a set of S&M murderers who make "snuff" videos (A Dance at the Slaughterhouse) and a pair of serial lust murders (A Walk among the Tombstones).[2] The Devil Knows You're Dead,[3] will appear this fall and is by far the least bloody of all the Scudder books. In it Matt attempts to exonerate a hapless, homeless Vietnam survivor from the charge that he shot and killed a 1980s style, "yuppie" lawyer who lives comfortably, well beyond his visible means.

Three short stories in which Scudder figures are in the collection Some Days You Get the Bear.[4] One of these, "By Dawn's Early Light," later (much expanded) became one of the strands in the novel When the Sacred Ginmill Closes. It won both an Edgar award and a Shamus. "Batman's Helpers," the opening section of an abandoned draft of Slaughterhouse, bears no relation to the finished book and lacks, as Block admits in the preface, a proper resolution. Still, one finds it an interesting account of a typical Scudder activity when he has a job for a professional agency. "The Merciful Angel of Death" is a deceptively calm story about AIDS and assisted suicide, a story in which the "cruelty" is a cruelty of life itself and the humans are all "tenderness." Two stories, not in the Scudder series, have serial murder motifs: "The Tulsa Experience," told from the point of view of one of the murderers, and "Something to Remember You By," about a Kansas University psych major who frightens his "share-the-ride" companion by suggesting that he may not be a student and may have dark motives for "sharing." It is a bit closer to home for me than the gritty streets of New York, and I shall look at the proper young ladies in our classrooms a little more carefully in the future.

The serial murder motif, which figures in many contemporary crime novels, not just Block's, is certainly shocking and cruel, as, in quite another dimension, is the release to an uncertain life on the streets of persons in need of institutional care, like the veteran in The Devil Knows You're Dead. In Slaughterhouse there is even cruelty in the deaths of the Stettners, however justifiable the act of killing them may be.

What raises this series of books above the ordinary run of crime fiction is the "tenderness," Matt's sad but dogged devotion to what is right, and his perplexed, meditative attempts to figure out, in difficult circumstances, just what right may be:

- Is it right to use the young street black, TJ, who has figured more and more prominently in the later novels, as a helper? To let him put himself in danger? To leave him in his street life despite clear signs that the boy's intelligence and wit could

carry him far elsewhere? But he's just fine in the life he's got; to style it TJ's way, "he got it pat, Matt."
- Is it right to accept telephone services set up for him by TJ's friends, the young computer hacks in Tombstones?
- Is it right to accept employment offered by a drug dealer, one whose brother is a recovering addict known to Matt from AA? Right to let that brother puzzle out his own solution to his despair and his addiction?

Matt's world is full of moral choices, they are not easy choices, and his decisions are based on his interpretation of the rules of ordinary living that parallel the twelve steps of his recovery. The reader spends a lot of time going to AA meetings, or meetings with Matt's sponsor, and they are not mere interludes in the story but times of regeneration for a man who can tell a paper tiger from a real one as long as he stays in contact with his true self.

The point of view is first-person, and Matt's sorrow at the general state of the world of the streets--except for baseball, he pays little attention to the larger world--his grief over the messes that people can get themselves into, surrounds and not so much softens as enlightens the cruelty at the heart of his noir adventures. TJ's ingenuity and enthusiasm for the chase add a touch of astonishment, "shock" if you will, to this mix. At a point in Slaughterhouse when a recovering person less strong than Matt might get drunk, Joe Durkin, his friend on the NYPD, does. In his drunk frustration, Durkin opens out not only his horror but Matt's, at what is, perhaps, the most deeply sorrowful perversion encountered in any of these novels. In all the series, the other characters, especially those that recur from book to book, are fully and deeply portrayed; they are real, or more accurately, the reader is obliged to believe in their reality.

I do not know Dewitt Clinton Park in New York, though I am confident, given Matt's description of it, that I could find it and that there would be a statue in it of a World War I Doughboy with a rifle on his shoulder. There would be six lines from the poem "In Flanders Fields" engraved on the plinth, and they would contain a misquote. That is the measure of how much I trust Matt, believe in him as a reporter (and in Block as a researcher).[9]

There is a continuing love affair in the series. At the start of A Ticket to the Boneyard, Matt tells us, in the jargon of our time, that he "was between relationships." A few pages later, he receives a call from Elaine Mardell, a prostitute with whom he had a relationship years before while he was still on the police force. Through the succeeding books they become closer and closer, though she maintains her profession. Near the end of A Walk among the Tombstones, realizing that what he feels for her is love, Matt tells her that he wants her to give up her profession, and she tells him that she sold her "book" three months earlier. By the

end of The Devil Knows You're Dead they have married, though Matt keeps his old hotel room as an office. It has been far from an ordinary relationship; Elaine was at the center of the case in Boneyard and has been close to the action or a necessary listener to Matt's ruminations in all the cases since. It will be interesting to see what kind of a colleague-wife she grows into.

As I noted at the end of my earlier review article, these novels are about growth in recovery, the things that change and the things that stay the same when a detective, an unofficial one, becomes sober. They do not constitute an epic or have the sweep of a poem about a warrior's wrath. But they do employ scenes of heightened intensity, cruel and tender and compellingly human. They offer credible--incredibly credible!--detail and exactness as part of the convincing reality they create. They are books--not texts--for our time and perhaps more. And Block is surely the top of the line in this genre.

NOTES

1 Lawrence Block, A Dance at the Slaughterhouse (New York: Morrow, 1991).

2 ---, A Walk Among the Tombstones (New York: Morrow, 1992).

3 ---, The Devil Knows You're Dead (New York: Morrow, [November] 1993).

4 ---, Some Days You Get the Bear (New York: Morrow, 1993).

5 Reading uncorrected galleys does present a small problem: only five of the six lines intended appear. I assume the error was caught before final printing and that the missing line was a final "in Flanders fields." Matt, in due time, finds the full poem and notes an error in the wording of the plinth. I am sure there are six lines on the plinth and the deficiency is a printing error. Can one have greater faith in fiction?

JEAN STAFFORD'S BELEAGUERED FORTRESS

Ann Hulbert. The Interior Castle: The Art and Life of Jean Stafford. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992. 430 pp. $25.00.

Virginia Ross

Ann Hulbert's biography The Interior Castle: The Art and Life of Jean Stafford is an impressive and clear-sighted analysis of the relationship between the author's life and work. Hulbert chronicles Stafford's youth in Colorado as the daughter of an unsuccessful writer of Western fiction; her development in the East and abroad; her marriages to Robert Lowell, Oliver Jensen, and A. J. Liebling; her work on three completed novels Boston Adventure, The Mountain Lion, and The Catherine Wheel: and her role at the New Yorker as a polished writer of short fiction. Instead of showing only how life events became transmuted in Stafford's work, Hulbert reveals convincingly how conflicts in Stafford's fiction were subsequently manifest in her life. She quotes Stafford's own description of a character, who was "'terrified by the patterns of her life and by her prophetic dreams and her prophetic insights, by the fact that she had imagined and had written much that had happened later.'"[1] In a particularly effective chapter, "Patterns," Hulbert shows that Stafford's deeply etched problems haunted her with lifelong insecurity and isolation in spite of her Pulitzer prize and her marriages.

That conflicts in her life surfaced in her fiction is not to suggest that Stafford was a confessional writer like her first husband Robert Lowell. In fact, she abhorred what she called "the absorbing bear-hug of egocentricity" (332) of the "baby bards" and consciously tried to avoid projecting her personal troubles onto a literary screen. Jean Stafford's signature as a writer, in fact, is the satirical distance she achieved from her own pain and loss.

An interesting dimension of this biography that is peripheral to Ann Hulbert's central focus is the perspective it offers on several brilliant figures of midcentury American literature. Hulbert traces Jean Stafford's relationships with Allen Tate and Caroline Gordon, her friendships with Peter Taylor and Katharine White, and her ambiguous position within a circle of poets who glamorized drinking and madness, a circle that included Lowell as well as Delmore Schwartz, Randall Jarrell, and John Berryman.

Hulbert's central concern, which engages her considerable analytical skills, is constructing a portrait of the artist within a life of disorder. She finds the central image of Stafford's self the interior castle, an image Stafford herself borrowed from the mystic writer St. Teresa of Avila and used for the title of one of her finest short stories. St. Teresa had urged readers to imagine the "soul to be like a castle made entirely out of diamond or very clear crystal, in which there are many rooms, just as in heaven

there are many dwelling places" (121). In Stafford's secular internal landscape, Pansy Vanneman endures a painful surgical procedure and retreats to the inner world under the influence of anesthesia. Pansy's experience is based on Jean Stafford's surgery following an automobile accident. Stafford writes: "The pain was a pyramid made of a diamond; it was an intense light; it was the hottest fire, the coldest chill, the highest peak, the fastest force, the farthest reach, the newest time. It possessed nothing of her but its one infinitesimal scene: beyond the screen thin as gossamer, the brain trembled for its life."[3] About Stafford's story "The Interior Castle," Hulbert observes: "Teresa's supremely receding chamber, beset by wicked serpents at its wall--provided Stafford with a central symbol: the bounded circle of the self, in thrall to darkness without and in search of illumination within" (121). After the anesthesia wears off, pain and bitterness return to Pansy. "She closed her eyes, shutting herself within her treasureless head."

Jean Stafford's own retreat into bitter isolation was hastened and intensified by alcoholism. The facts of Stafford's alcoholism are evident in this biography both from details Hulbert relates and from passages she quotes from Stafford's letters. Several friends and psychiatrists evidently urged her to quit drinking; periods of hospitalization allowed her to dry out. With a few notable impulsive exceptions, including his jail stint and the fight in which he broke Stafford's nose, Robert Lowell's appearances in this biography are nearly always sober, and he is preoccupied with monitoring the drinking of his wife. In letters from which Hulbert quotes, Stafford alternately admitted she was drinking too much and denied the extent of her habit. After breaking a vow to limit her drinking, Stafford admits to Peter Taylor, "I had seen for the millionth time what a prize jackass I am when I drink" (143). "One of the principal reasons I have become so reclusive," she explains to her ex-husband Lowell, "is that I don't want to drink, and I find that I can't not drink when I'm with people. If I drink alone--and sometimes I do occasionally--I fall down and break something" (368). Hulbert comments that "occasionally" probably hedges the truth. Elsewhere Stafford could make this sardonic self-assessment: "If she stays away from John Barleycorn, she is, in our opinion, an OK kid, and to tell you the honest truth, I think John Barleycorn is basically the root of her problem . . . who, in conjunction with J. Calvin and J. Knox, have mucked up this poor woman to a fare-thee-well . . . We wouldn't mind (after all, we're not straitlaced) if she and Barleycorn stole a few kisses from time to time. It's this going all the way that causes so much trouble" (369). The dark humor aside, Stafford's casting alcohol in the role of lover was apt, as it had clearly become her most important relationship.

The experience of reading The Interior Castle is a confrontation with Stafford's denial of the addiction she was up against. She found myriad excuses for literary dry periods and her

diminishing gifts. "Neurotic sleep" stalled her creativity, and she was plagued with asthma, bronchitis, arthritis and immobilized by an orthopedic corset. Toward the end of her life she claimed to have nothing to write because her marriage to A. J. Liebling brought her such contentment. There were various justifications for her drinking as well. At different times Stafford explained that she drank because her friends brutally criticized her fiction, houseguests caused her too much stress, and she could not tolerate being scolded by an editor.

Ann Hulbert contends that drinking did not significantly impede Stafford's early writing, but it clearly encroached upon her work by the time of her marriage to Liebling. Readers of Dionysos may speculate, however, that alcoholism cast a larger shadow over Stafford's life, and for more of her life, than even Ann Hulbert consistently acknowledges. Stafford's letters show her already turning to alcohol for solace before her first marriage at 24. Hulbert, like Stafford, ventures many explanations for Stafford's diminishing creativity. Perhaps Liebling's productivity daunted her. The material she was working with consisted of memories too powerful to approach. Even at the end of her life, when Jean Stafford was set up with a fellowship at Wesleyan through the intervention of Lowell and could not write, Hulbert attributes her literary trouble to the autobiographical truth of her past that continued to draw and deter her (339). While many factors undoubtedly contributed to Stafford's problems, alcoholism appears to have loomed larger than Hulbert suggests. In fact, that Stafford managed to produce the finely tuned fiction she did must have required a tremendous struggle against the stranglehold of her addiction.

Perhaps the satirical distance and comic edge for which Stafford's fiction is famous derive from a refusal or inability to confront the losses in her life, including the losses brought about by alcoholism. This distance was a defense Jean Stafford cultivated early. At 15, she won an essay contest with "Disenchantment," a poised, satirical story about her father, who had uprooted his family's secure life and moved them into a boardinghouse. At that young age Stafford had turned her sense of loss and homelessness into polished satire. During her last years, she wrote amusing advice columns based on personal agonies. Some of these chatty pieces seem almost a caricatured denial of pain. As a childless woman who hated Christmas, Stafford wrote the yearly Christmas roundup of children's books for the New Yorker. Her contributions to Vogue included "Suffering Summering Houseguests" and "Some Advice to Hostesses from a Well-Tempered Guest." Authentic warmth and simple satisfactions seemed to elude her. "I have never been able to demonstrate love except when I have been drunk," she wrote, "and the love I have shown then has been trumped up out of the bottle" (235). Her story "I Love Someone" chillingly concludes, "My friends and I have managed my life with the best of taste and all that is lacking at this banquet where the

appointments are so elegant is something to eat."[3] Despite the distance Stafford seemed to maintain from her younger self, her sense of disappointment persisted throughout life. In one of her last stories a character dreams of a child who finds an oyster that yields a pearl--only to see the pearl, too, open, revealing a thistle. This is, Hulbert observes, Stafford's "consummate image of disenchantment: the child's magical search crowned with painful disappointment. It was her final, desolate variation on St. Teresa's image of the jewel that awaits the spiritual pilgrim in the ultimate, interior chamber" (334-35).

In discussing Stafford's attraction to St. Teresa, Hulbert suggests that William James led Stafford to connect spiritual experience and the more accessible "mysticism" acquired through anesthesia. (Stafford had considered subtitling one of her stories "The Varieties of Religious Experience.") Hulbert notes that the chapter in James' _Varieties_ devoted to mysticism discusses St. Teresa and also deals with the mystical experience available through anesthesia and alcohol. William James writes:

> The sway of alcohol over mankind is unquestionably due to its power of stimulating the mystical faculties of human nature, usually crushed to earth by the cold facts and dry criticisms of the sober hour. Sobriety diminishes, discriminates, and says no; drunkenness expands, unites, and says yes. It is in fact the great exciter of the _Yes_ function in man. It brings its votary from the chill periphery of things to the radiant core. It makes him for the moment one with truth. Not through mere perversity do men run after it. To the poor and the unlettered it stands in the place of symphony concerts and of literature; and it is part of the deeper mystery and tragedy of life that whiffs and gleams of something that we immediately recognize as excellent should be vouchsafed to so many of us only in the fleeting earlier phases of what in its totality is so degrading a poisoning. The drunken consciousness is one bit of the mystic consciousness, and our total opinion of it must find its place in our opinion of the larger whole.[4]

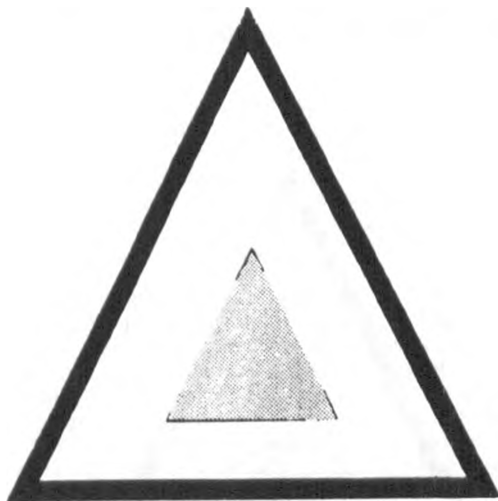
Hulbert observes, "Stafford certainly would have recognized this route to illumination, or at least warmth, through alcohol. She had been drinking far more than casually ever since college. But it was James' reflections on more presentable, medical anesthetics that seem to have pointed her toward a profane, literary approach to divine Teresa" (122).

Stafford's attraction to mystical and anesthetic experience could also lead to illuminating conclusions about her yearning for the experience alcohol brings, a connection that Hulbert does not explore. _The Interior Castle_ is an excellent study of Stafford's fiction and its relation to the conflicts in her life. But for the

tragic dimensions of alcoholism in Jean Stafford's life and its effects on her art, one must read between the lines.

NOTES

1 Ann Hulbert, The Interior Castle: The Art and Life of Jean Stafford (New York: Knopf, 1992) 288. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.
2 Jean Stafford, Collected Stories (New York: Farrar, 1944) 192.
3 Stafford 422.
4 William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience (New York: Library of America, 1987) 348-349.



THE SAMURAI

I He fights
He eats
He drinks

II He eats
He fights
He drinks

III He eats
He drinks

IV He drinks

V He drinks
He drinks
He fights

Jack Herzig

"The Samurai" first appeared in The Hollins Critic 18.3 (June 1981). Reprinted by permission.

THEORY SKIRMISHES

Marty Roth

Avital Ronell. Crack Wars: Literature, Addiction, Mania. Lincoln, Nebraska: U of Nebraska P, 1992. 175 pp. $25.00.

Anya Taylor. "Coleridge and Alcohol." Texas Studies in Literature and Language 33(3), Fall, 1991: 355-372.

Avital Ronell's Crack Wars marks the full-scale entry of culture theory into the field of addiction studies. With the exception of a lackluster essay on drugs by Jacques Derrida (1-800, 1989), a few fascinating pages in Clifford Siskin's Historicity of Romantic Discourse (1988), and Susan Buck-Morss' "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics" (October, 1992), little has appeared from that quarter. Entry is too mild a word, however; preemption or hijacking is more like it. As a discipline, culture theory has insisted on combining intellectual excitement and bad grace, and Crack Wars sets an extreme example. Intimidating and irritating, it is an opaque, provocative and self-indulgent book.

Ronell promises to tell everything there is to know about addiction, but the terms of the book's subtitle--"Literature, Addiction, Mania"--are treated very casually. The author's argument is located at both the sublime and a negligibly nuanced limit of the study of addiction in modern culture: "the history of narcotica . . . is almost the history of 'culture,' of our so-called high culture": "Our work settles with this Nietzschean 'almost'--the place where narcotics articulates a quiver between history and ontology."

Crack Wars opens with a series of parabolic utterances called "Hits." Is Ronell also a pusher (like an addict, she manipulates and teases) or an abuser? Unlike addictive hits, culture theory hits are presumed to take every time. Because I only vaguely understand them and therefore cannot question or resist these hits with any confidence, I am turned into someone who must swallow anything set in front of me.

The author's approach to the subject(s) consists of a series of opaque passes ("Toward a Narcoanalysis," "Scoring Literature," "Cold Turkey or, the Transcendental Aesthetic of the Thing to Be Eaten," etc.). Among the various probes there is a rapid parsing of desire in German philosophy in order to open up the place of addiction in Heidegger. I would have given a lot to read such a piece of work, which desperately needs to be done, stabilizing the enormous proliferation of synonyms for desire--urging, craving, yearning, hankering, etc.

As for crack wars, there is little discussion of crack and less of contemporary drug policy as a war (although the subject

keeps circulating as a riff). The author's approach to the history of drug politics is scatter-shot and I am reluctant to try to catch her up on her generalizations, but it seems to me that the interest of the state in the flow of narcotics goes back at least to Lucian's mythic account of Bacchus' conquest of India in imitation of Alexander (another drunk), although crack cocaine may be relatively unique in that it ruptures a liberal consensus about freedom. Hasn't the state's attempt to both release and jam up the flow of mood-altering substances (opium, cocaine, sugar, chocolate, gin) always had a tendency to implicate imperial power and take on the characteristics of a war?

As for treating literature as pharmacodependency, the hints that Ronell offers are right on: "The horizon of drugs is the same as that of literature: they share the same line, depending on similar technologies and sometimes suffering analogous crackdowns before the law." This treatment also has a long history that runs through Anacreon, Horace, Rabelais, Ronsard, Sidney and Tom D'Urfey, the author of Pills to Purge Melancholy, to mention only a few artists who were caught up in the analogies between intoxication and art:

> Nowe therein of all Sciences . . . is our Poet the Monarch. For he doth not only show the way, but giveth so sweete a prospect into the way, as will intice any man to enter into it. Nay, he doth as if your journey should lye through a fayre Vineyard, at the first give you a cluster of Grapes: that full of that taste, you may long to pass further ("Apologie for Poetrie").

For all its 140 pages, Crack Wars probably does not contain as much usable material as the other piece up for review, an article by Anya Taylor that details the shape of Coleridge's addiction to alcohol. This is a solid and comforting piece of scholarship, though I would have liked that author to theorize the radical difference between drugs and alcohol, which the article is specifically about: "Like De Quincey, he believes that inebriation calls up the brutal part of man's nature, whereas opium summons the serene, exalted, divine part." The contrast between Ronell and Taylor is instructive. That article is chock-full of carefully considered facts, but beyond anything it may have to tell us about Coleridge, it poses the question of most scholarship and criticism in the field: does addiction have life after the author? The book, on the contrary, seems capable of indicting any institution or practice as addictive (and there are present and future cases to be made for the addictive potential of capitalism or the bourgeois family), but it lacks a desire to communicate or work consecutively.

Ronell has written a book, while Taylor has produced only an article, but that difference almost doesn't matter. Crack Wars

becomes a shadow of the scholarship to which Taylor dedicates herself. As Ronell tells us, with both unbecoming candor and false modesty, "What follows, then, is essentially a work on Madame Bovary and nothing more." Exactly how Madame Bovary can serve as the litmus for a narcoanalysis is unclear because so many diverse aspects of the novel and its social history are raised, and the author's discussion of them is fascinating but diffuse. Moreover, as the representative of literature, Madame Bovary replaces the claims of many other modern works that traverse addiction in a more forthright and telling way, as Ronell again notes: "It should have been a more direct hit, like Burroughs, Artaud, Michaux, or maybe something from the American drunkyards."

I would be wrong not to acknowledge that Crack Wars is full of scintillating hits and bits, but Derrida's main point about unearned pleasure and profit seems relevant here: "We do not object to the drug user's pleasure per se, but we cannot abide the fact that his is a pleasure taken in an experience without truth. . . . A poem ought to be the product of real work (oeuvre), even if the traces of that work should be washed away. It is always non-work that is stigmatized." What I am sad and upset about is the implicit rejection of any claims I might have on Ronell as a colleague; that is, as her epigraph of epigraphs has it, "enough to make an honest soul vomit." The book tantalizes: too much of what is thrown out at me eludes my grasp and is, moreover, often followed by an imperious dismissal (as if what I would be so grateful for is not even worthy of consideration): "It is too soon to say with certainty that one has fully understood how to conduct the study of addiction." This is not the place to trace its intricate contours. It is either entirely self-effacing or far too easy to treat drugs. This is not the place to analyze that fatal encounter, nor certainly would it be appropriate to concoct foolish moralizations as if one already understood what addiction is about" or "We shall leave these terms to flood their undeconstructed history."

My strongest impression of Crack Wars is one of squandered resources, on the part of both the author and the publisher. The book looks empty; its pages have abnormally wide margins, and of 175 text pages, 38 are blank or nearly so and 14 are at most half-filled. There is no doubt that Ronell knows a great deal about literature, addiction, and mania; her book is worth reading, even worth engaging at some length, but, finally, it is a worthless gift.

MIDDLE-AGED SPIRITUAL DISEASE

Donald C. Irving

David Gates. Jernigan. New York: Knopf, 1991. 256 pp. $21.00

This is another novel about a middle-aged man whose life has turned into chaos. Through his alcohol-saturated brain, Jernigan narrates his own story of how he lost his father and wife in successive, bizarre accidents, lost his job to drink, has nothing in common with his teenage son, Daniel, and has estranged himself from all his friends but one. Reality is what goes on in his head, not in the world, and he ends up in "one of those drying out places" where he has to tell his story as part of the therapy.

On one level, Jernigan is a long fourth-step inventory in Alcoholics Anonymous's Twelve-Step Program for sobriety ("Step 4: Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.") However, Jernigan is more cynical than fearless, more judgmental than moral, and takes others' inventories more readily than his own. In fact, Jernigan is a completely convincing portrait of what must go on inside the head of a chronic alcoholic who is sometimes witty, intelligent and incisive, but mostly is confused and disconnected and, despite flashes of insight, pours out huge doses of cynicism, false bravado, and self-deprecation.

But Jernigan is not a case study, but a well-written and crafted novel. The hero may cultivate chaos, but the author controls plot, character, and style as consistently and orderly as the Aristotelian unities.

Jernigan's problem all his life is that he wants order, routine, and emotional security, yet he also wants to experiment with extreme situations. He deliberately hits his hand with a hammer to see what the pain feels like, and another time he shoots a bullet through the skin between his thumb and finger for the same reason; he's experimented with hard drugs in his youth and has been to AA before. His favorite poet is Wallace Stevens (whose highest reality or "rage for order" is so unlike Jernigan's own) and his favorite fiction is P. G. Wodehouse novels where reason, manners, and rightness so effortlessly prevail at Blandings Castle in contrast to Jernigan's fractured emotional and social, suburban life. The irony is not lost on Jernigan.

There's plot, too, with a beginning, middle, and end. The beginning relates the death of Jernigan's father and wife, his loss of job, and youthful adventures with drugs, friends, and girls. The middle offers hope to Jernigan when his son introduces him to his girlfriend's mother who works part time, raises rabbits for food, enjoys sex, and lives a comfortable accommodation with suburban living. She might be the steady, assured companion to help Jernigan, and the four of them move into the same house and

live together (as two couples), an unconventional, but economically efficient arrangement.

But Jernigan's drinking gets worse, and the climax occurs after a fight with his mistress and his son, and he drives from New Jersey to the New Hampshire woods in a terrible snowstorm where he finds an old trailer that his friend's father used as a getaway. Drinking and freezing, he cuts off his thumb and finger sawing wood for the stove. He passes out, but is saved when his worried son calls the friend who calls the state police who find him in time. Jernigan wakes up in the treatment center where he tries to write his story with the eight fingers he has left.

The novel ends, not with Jernigan's recovery, but with a fine consistency of character. He does enough to get along at the center: he makes his bed, eats, attends group meetings, and writes in his journal. But he still wants to do things "his way" despite the constant reminder that "his way doesn't work." At the end, he relates the things he still "won't do":

> one, see Danny; two, shave; and three, buy into this pretense that we're all little first-name humans here going soul-to-soul. I'm So-and-so and I'm an alcoholic. . . . But when it comes around to you, you have to give them something, if only a name and spiritual disease. That's the rule here. So what I've figured out is this. I stand up and say Jernigan.

So he ends where he began: in rebellion against convention and those who would help him, and in so doing, he also reveals he's spiritually dead.

David Gates lives in New York City and is music and book critic for Newsweek. This is a very impressive first novel.

LITERATURE LOOKS AT THE POLITICS OF FOOD AND DRINK

Constance M. Perry

The Summer/Fall 1991 issue of Mosaic: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Study of Literature, edited with an introduction by Evelyn J. Hinz, contains a dozen essays on "Diet and Discourse: Eating, Drinking and Literature." Nearly half of the essays focus on British authors, including Swift and his scatological verse, Byron and Don Juan, Dickens' novels, Christina Rossetti's The Goblin Market, and Tollope's Barsetshire novels. The novels of Russian writer Vasily Narezhny, Canadian writer Malcolm Lowry, French writer Michel Tournier and Australian writer Thomas Keneally are featured in separate essays while two essays offer wide-ranging studies of the role of fruit in modern poetry and food as an interdisciplinary metaphor. The issue concludes with a fifty-page selective bibliography on food in literature.

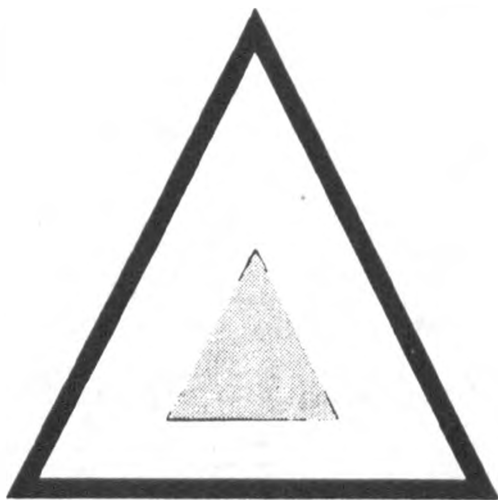
One way to consider these essays is in their different treatments of the politics of food. As Editor Hinz points out, traditionally, the study of eating and drinking in a work of literature typically focused on these functions as part of a mimetic setting or as conventional symbols such as the apple, the grape, bread, milk and honey, etc. What Hinz calls our current "collective obsession" with eating and drinking habits may also be identified as a deepening understanding of the politics of food. These essays show the impact of the politics of food on the areas of gender politics, literary politics, global politics, and mental health politics. Indeed, two essays refer to politics in their titles: "Port and Claret: The Politics of Wine in Trollope's Barsetshire Novels" and "'Poor Simulacra': Images of Hunger, the Politics of [Food] Aid and Keneally's Towards Asmara." Because food and drink are the material of a specific culture--as Carol E. Dietrich comments, ". . . all humans eat culturally" (129)--food and drink prove a rich source for understanding and critique of that culture. Mary Burgan's analysis of the feeding of infants in Dickens' England shows Dickens recording the rise of bottle feeding or wet nursing, the latter practiced even by Queen Victoria. Dickens decries these practices as causes of infant mortality and malnutrition and as signs of women's rebellion against their proper sphere. So the use of mother's milk versus infant formulas, the female control of sustenance and nurture, was for Dickens a salient source of gender politics. Gender politics also shape Christina Rossetti's Goblin Market, as Deborah Ann Thompson argues, insofar as the poem records the rise of a commodity economy in nineteenth century England and the concomitant rise of eating disorders among women, as women found both their bodies and their production of household food and culture passing beyond their control. Food and drink become a satirical tool for Byron to critique the literary politics of the day through which he felt supplanted in public opinion by newer Romantic poets. Trollope, too, develops a "wine code," upholding the drinking of vintage Port and discounting

Claret, as a vehicle to critique the social and professional classes in the Barsetshire novels. To bring the issue of food and drink onto the contemporary scene, Thomas Keneally's novel, Towards Asmara, about the recent Ethiopian famine, shows the way food and drink remain at the center of national and international power struggles. Mental health politics shape the thesis of Catherine MacGregor's essay on Yvonne in Lowry's Under the Volcano since Yvonne is the classic codependent, adult child of an alcoholic, once ignored by counselors and largely ignored in literary studies of this classic novel on alcoholism. Thus, these essays illuminate the many ways food and drink bear political significance from the control of food convoys in famished African states to the social control of women's bodies in Victorian England, whether she be the poor woman who gives her illegitimate child to a baby farm and nurses instead the offspring of the wealthy, or the wealthy mother who buys her freedom from child nurture at the cost of the opprobrium of social thinkers like Dickens.

The strength of this collection lies in its fundamental recognition of the importance of its subject, the representation of food and drink in literature. The entire collection shares the assumption identified by psychoanalyst Hilde Bruch: " . . . food is never restricted to the biological aspects alone. There is no human society that deals rationally with food in its environment, that eats according to the availability, edibility, and nutritional value alone. Food is endowed with complex values and elaborate ideologies, religious beliefs, and prestige systems" (as quoted in Thompson 91). Of course, as the issue's fifty-page bibliography indicates, the topic of food and drink in literature is not a new one. The bibliography's entries range from late nineteenth century publications to current pieces and cover literature from the Bible and Chaucer to Shakespeare to Proust to Emily Dickinson, to name some frequently cited works and authors. One weakness in the Mosaic collection is that it features only one essay on women's literature, Thompson on Rossetti's The Goblin Market, even though Editor Hinz's introduction foregrounds the topicality of feminist concern with food issues, and particularly the depiction of eating disorders in women's literature. Views of canonical authors such as Trollope or Dickens offer new insight, but the topic of food in literature, in particular, should have called for more research in the domain of women's literature. Dionysos readers will also wish to know that only one essay deals centrally with alcoholism in literature, the essay concerning Lowry's Under the Volcano.

In general, the most interesting essays were those that critiqued an already established discussion of food or drink representation in the work of a given author such as Ashraf Rushdy's critique of traditional views of defecation in Swift or Thompson's critique of feminist views of anorexia and bulimia in Rossetti. While traditional views of Swift's Gulliver or the poems featuring anality and defecation, such as Strephon and Chloe, have argued strenuously that Swift was using scatological imagery to

argue for a code of human decency, Rushdy turns this thesis around completely with a "new emetics of interpretation." He proposes that Swift's real intention was a carnivalesque appreciation of the alimentary canal and a broad satire on notions of politeness and decency. Feminist critics have given serious attention to the images of eating in Rossetti's Goblin Market, but have either disclaimed the anorexic and bulimic practices of the female characters' eating of goblin fruit or have tried to see these disorders primarily as tropes that identify "fears of female creativity" (92). Thompson's contribution shows the limitations of this polarity. She cites the documented origin of anorexia as a medical diagnosis in the Victorian period to argue that Rossetti is presenting these eating disorders as actual experiences in the poem as well as symbolically critiquing "bourgeois patriarchal ideals of femininity" (105). Overall, the essays tend to explore far more issues surrounding food than drink, especially excess in drinking. And overall, they prove how crucial serious consideration of an author's use of food and drink may be to our understanding of that author's themes and culture.



FUTURE ISSUES

George Wedge, who will guest-edit the Fall 1993 issue of Dionysos, The Beat Generation II: The American Perspective, is still accepting submissions, including reviews and notes as well as artices (Department of English, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS 66045-2115; 913/842-0382). . . . The Winter 1994 issue will complete five years of publication of Dionysos. A special feature of this issue will be a symposium, "Literature and Addiction: Critical and Idiological Issues." Details will be included in the Fall issue and in a special mailing to subscribers. . . . A future special, extra-cost poetry issue, edited by George Wedge and David Plumb, is forthcoming.

NOTES AND COMMENT

John W. Crowley's The White Logic: Alcoholism and Gender in American Modernist Fiction will be published in 1994 by The University of Massachusetts Press. Introductory chapters on Howell's The Landlord at Lion's Head and London's John Barleycorn originated as essays in Dionysos; other chapters center on The Sun Also Rises, Tender Is the Night, Appointment in Samarra, Nightwood, and The Lost Weekend. Crowley takes an historicist approach, in which the emergence of "alcoholism" as a medicalized category is related to what Joseph Wood Krutch called "The Modern Temper"--and to what London saw as the annihilating pessimism of "The White Logic." . . . John O'Brien (Dionysos, Spring 1992) authored, with Barney L. Rickenbacker, the article "Alcoholism" in the third edition of the Oxford Classical Dictionary (Oxford University Press, 1994). . . . Recovering Berryman: Essays on the Poet, edited by Richard J. Kelly and Alan K. Lathrop (University of Michigan Press, 1993), includes chapters on Berryman's alcoholism by Lewis Hyde, George F. Wedge, Roger Forseth, and Alan J. Altimont. . . . Sheffield Academic Press expects to publish the proceedings of the University of Sheffield Interdisciplinary Conference on Literature and Addiction in December. . . . The Fall 1993 meeting of the Midwest Modern Language Association (Minneapolis, November 4-6) will include two panels of interest to Dionysos readers: "Recovering Djuna Barnes and the Female Avant-Gardes" (Constance M. Perry); and "'To Want, to Want, and Not to Have': Literature and Addiction" (Jane Lilienfeld). . . . Steven L. Berg will resume his bibliographical column in the Winter 1994 issue of Dionysos. Greenwood Press will be publishing Steve's Jewish Alcoholics and Drug Addicts: An Annotated Bibliography this year. . . . "A 'new temperance' movement is underway in America, according to Dr. David Musto . . . [who] describes alcohol as 'the tobacco of the nineties.' Dr. Musto traced the history of alcohol use and public attitudes towards its consumption as the narrator of a public television program, 'Can You Stop People from Drinking?,' aired in December as part of the PBS series 'Nova.' Musto warns: 'Society could lose all of the good work done toward moderation if the pendulum swings again toward prohibition'" (Yale, March 1993:

19). . . . David W. Gutzke (History, Southwest Missouri State University) is finishing an interdisciplinary bibliography of historical studies on alcohol in British history, which includes a section on alcohol and literature. Gutzke is the former secretary-treasurer of The Social History of Alcohol Review (SHAR). . . . Note: Roberta O. Greifer, "An Annotative Bibliography of Novels and Autobiographies Depicting the Drug Addict," Grassroots (May 1975): 1-12. . . . Stanley Dry writes: "William Grimes, a cultural news reporter for The New York Times, has written a perceptive, informative and sometimes amusing account of the shifts and swings in American drinking fashions. From the beginning, he tells us in Strait Up or On the Rocks: A Cultural History of American Drink (Simon & Schuster [1993], $18), this was a tippling country" (The New York Times Book Review, 6 June 1993: 43). . . . "For a creative, ambitious alcoholic, Frank O'Hara was a perfect role model" (David Lehman, reviewing City Poet: The Life and Times of Frank O'Hara by Brad Gooch [Knopf], in The New York Times Book Review, 20 June 1993: 18). . . ."The Vogue of Childhood Misery," by Nicholas Lemann, an omnibus review of popular books on addiction and recovery, appears in the March 1992 Atlantic (119-24). . . . Joan Acocella's "After the Laughs," a profile of Dorothy Parker appearing in The New Yorker (16 August 1993: 76-81), begins to relate Parker's art to her alcoholism, but then gives up--apparently on the assumption that any explanation is either unnecessary or impossible. . . . Beam Me Up, Scotty by Michael Guinzburg (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1993) is a novel about "a stupid stinking drug addict and alcoholic" who, after joining Hard Drugs Anonymous, discovers he's addicted to murder. . . . An anonymous correspondent of Dionysos sent, from England, an article from The Guardian (20 October 1992), "A Toast to Great Literature" by Randi Epstein, wherein it is claimed that "Long term drinking hits your ability to do maths, but not your way with words." . . . "Columbia University's Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse has just reported that $1 of every $5 spent by Medicaid is attributable to the abuse of tobacco, alcohol and drugs" (The Wall Street Journal, 21 July 1993: A14). . . . "Poets down the ages have been great boozers or have hymned the praises of booze in their writing: Keats wrote of the glories of claret that 'fills one's mouth with a gushing freshness'; Tennyson drank and smoked heavily all his life; two of France's greatest 19th-century poets, Verlaine and Baudelaire, praised the magically invigorating powers of absinthe; Wales's Dylan Thomas, an angelic writer and a devilish soak, drank himself to a premature death in squalid circumstances in New York; and Oscar Wilde complained: 'Work is the curse of the drinking classes.' In recognition of this common link between poetry and alcohol, a firm in the Midlands, The Little Pub Company, has established a new annual prize. It is to awarded to Britain's finest pub poet, in appreciation of the 'importance of alcohol in stimulating the writing process'" (The Economist, 13 February 1993: 91).

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Donald W. Goodwin, M.D., is professor of psychiatry at The University of Kansas Medical Center. He is the author, most recently, of Alcohol and the Writer (Andrews and McMeel, 1988), and Is Alcoholism Hereditary?, Second Edition (Ballantine, 1988).

Jack Herzig is a poet living in Penn Valley-Narberth, Pennsylvania.

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

Constance M. Perry, professor of English at St. Cloud State University, is working on a book about the culture of alcohol created among American expatriate writers.

Virginia Ross was an assistant professor of English at Mercer University, and is currently doing free-lance (mostly medical) writing while working on a book about Nathaniel Hawthorne from a psychoanalytic perspective.

Marty Roth is professor of American literature, popular culture, and film studies at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. He is writing a book tentatively entitled Theorizing Addiction on the theorization of drink and intoxication, of alcoholism, and of addiction in culture and civilization.

George Wedge is professor emeritus of English and linguistics at the University of Kansas. He is editor of Cottonwood Magazine and Press, co-editor of Stiletto, and an advisory editor to Kansas Quarterly. He is working on a book, Writing Under the Influence.

Jack Williams, whose Marla I was published in in the Winter 1991 issue of Dionysos, has published poems in The Quarterly, The Chattahoochee Review, and Dionysos. He won the 1990 Agnes Scott College Writers' Festival Poetry Award. He is a technical writer working and living in Atlanta.

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