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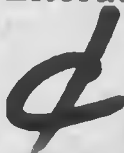

Dionysos

Journal of Literature and Addiction

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A Note from the Editor

About *Dionysos:* With this issue, we complete Volume 6 of *Dionysos*, in its new, twice-a-year version. We decided to send out this volume, like its predecessor, free of charge, in case there are still unexpired subscriptions out there. With our next Volume, Winter, 1997 (Vol. 7, # 1), we will begin new or renewed subscriptions. Thanks to all individuals and institutions that have already renewed subscriptions. Readers who have not yet done so but would like to continue to receive *Dionysos* are referred to the price list on the previous page.

A couple of other notes about *Dionysos*: Roger Forseth, editor emeritus, has agreed to be in charge of providing back issues. He has also put them on the world-wide web. Details about this can be found at the end of his Notes and Comment in this issue.

Our thanks to readers who wrote to congratulate us on the resumption of the publication of *Dionysos*. We believe that a magazine that offers cogent reflections on addiction will continue to be valuable at this point in American cultural history.

About this issue: The contents of this issue of *Dionysos* form, we hope, a piquant blend of viewpoints on addiction and literature. The two lead articles focus on the meaning of chemical use and misuse, but in two sharply contrasting worlds: the junky underworld of William S. Burroughs and the decorous cosmos of British comedy of manners, as practiced by Barbara Pym. In both cases, chemicals are involved in efforts, however compromised, to transcend, to reach altered states, to escape the tyranny of words and customs. Jim Harbaugh's review of Dan Wakefield's new book on creativity takes up the undesirable side effects on literary creators of such chemically induced transcendence. Finally, Patrick Collins' wry poem offers a vivid description of where one creator's chemical flight ended--on the floor of a shower.

In short, to quote Stephen Sondheim, "Something for everyone"--*Dionysos* for the summer.

Jim Harbaugh
Editor--*Dionysos*

The Word, Image, and Addiction: Language and the Junk Equation in William S. Burroughs' Naked Lunch

Andrew S. McClure

Anyone familiar with the work of William S. Burroughs will at some point have seen pictures of him holding a firearm. So when I suggest that the photograph of him on the cover of the 1989 Penguin paperback edition of The Job has some sort of special significance, it is not because Burroughs is holding what appears to be a sawed-off shotgun. Dressed in his usual dapper manner, without any discernible expression on his face, Burroughs is sitting with the shotgun on his lap, next to a stone plaque--it looks like it could be a headstone--with flowery embroidery surrounding a phrase that reads "BUR-ROSE." Whether or not Burroughs and the photographer intended anything more than a simple pun with the stone, the picture suggests a great deal about some of the most interesting issues in his work. The word play on the stone touches on Burroughs' larger philosophy about the relationship between words and images, what he terms the "word virus," which in Naked Lunch is closely interwoven with systems of control, addiction and what he calls the "junk virus."

That Burroughs and "BUR-ROSE" are indistinguishable when spoken, yet conjure up totally different visual images when written, deeply interests Burroughs. In The Job. when asked about how images and words are part of the "control mechanism," he replies:

> Image and word are the instruments of control used by the daily press and by such news magazines as Time. Life. Newsweek . . . Of course, an instrument can be used without knowledge of its fundamental nature or its origins. To get to the origin, we must examine the instruments themselves; that is, the actual nature of word and image . . . . The study of hieroglyphic languages shows us that a word is an image. . . the written word is an image. However, there is an important difference between a hieroglyphic and a syllabic language. If I hold up a sign with the word

> "ROSE" written on it, and you read that sign, you will be forced to repeat the word "ROSE" to yourself. If I show you a picture of a rose, you do not have to repeat the word. . . . It is precisely these automatic reactions to words themselves that enable those who manipulate words to control thought on a mass scale. (The Job 59)

With the sign reading "BUR-ROSE" we must also repeat the word "Rose" in the process of visualizing the image of the physical object, and it is surely no coincidence that this stone tablet appears on the cover of a book where he uses the word rose to illustrate his point about word and image: There is a semantic muddle between the author's name, the way it sounds when spoken, and possible visual images it can create when written, however impossibly irrelevant or meaningless they might be.

Burroughs deals with this issue of word and image in Naked Lunch in a complex and ultimately terrifying way. In the above passage from The Job, Burroughs indicates a concern about thought control through the manipulation of language because people tend to have "automatic reactions" to words and the images they create. In this paper I am not only interested in examining how the author works out or exposes the problem of the muddling of word and image illustrated above in Naked Lunch; I am also interested in how Burroughs, in critiquing the very medium through which he gets his ideas across (i.e., the word), actually attempts to exploit its manipulative potential--the sheer power of the word--to reveal an insidious relationship between language and the "junk sickness."

In Naked Lunch, the language problem is inextricably glued to the problem of addiction. There is an astounding parallel between the word and junk: Both are part of the control mechanism, and both are mediums for addiction. And it is certainly no coincidence that Burroughs allegedly wrote the notes that became Naked Lunch under the influence of heroin addiction, although there remains a good deal of uncertainty about how truthful Burroughs is when he says in the "Deposition" to Naked Lunch that he has "no precise memory of writing the notes" (xxxvii; for more discussion on the debate about the composition of Naked Lunch see Mottram 26, and Leddy passim). Burroughs sees both language (verbal, spoken language) and junk addiction as forms of sickness, but to go beyond this parallel, in Naked

Lunch he uses junk addiction--perhaps the most tangible and naked form of addiction, and certainly one with which he had extensive personal experience--as a means to explore as fully as possible the consequences of other forms of addiction and sickness, particularly addiction that comes from language. The ultimate result of addiction, regardless of the form in which it manifests itself, is the degradation of the addict. In the words of Robin Lydenberg, "The 'evil' virus of addiction takes many forms--addiction to drugs, sex, religion--but all are variations of a pattern of control and domination of the individual's will" ("Beyond Good and Evil" 76).

The title of the novel, and Burroughs' explanation of it, define what he is doing with language: "The title means exactly what the words say: NAKED Lunch--a frozen moment when everyone sees what is on the end of every fork" (NL xxxviii; references to Naked Lunch hereafter abbreviated as NL). The full consequences of this statement are radical and far-reaching, especially when we explore the question of how or if the "frozen moment," where we can really see what is on the "end of every fork," can even be achieved through the medium of language. Burroughs acknowledges that it is doubtful to what degree language can accurately capture the "frozen moment," but he is certainly interested in trying.

In the Rolling Stone interview, Burroughs describes what he as a writer is trying to convey through language: "What is a writer trying to do? He is trying to reproduce in the reader's mind a certain experience, and if he were completely successful in that, the reproduction of the experience would be complete. Perhaps fortunately, they're not that successful" (Palmer 49). The best way to reproduce the experience through language is by saying "exactly what the words say" or exactly what you mean. But limitations constantly prevent this from ever being possible--the "BUR-ROSE" tablet is just a small example of the potential for unintentional ambiguity or imprecision in language. If he could use language to its full potential--if he could say exactly what he meant at anytime, the power of the word would be unlimited. Burroughs says, "If I really knew how to write, I could write something that someone would read and it would kill them" (Palmer 49).

Burroughs believes that the word, like heroin in the addict, inhabits people in the form of a virus (see The Job 11-16, 200-204)--it is not natural that we should have the manipulative power and the

lapses in meaning that spring from verbal languages, nor is it natural for an addict to have a life that is defined by need alone. I am not suggesting that Naked Lunch is an anti-drug pamphlet. What Burroughs accomplishes through portraying similarities between junk and the word is to show what happens when people are controlled by these viruses: "Junk is the mold of monopoly and possession. The addict stands by while his junk legs carry him straight in on the junk beam to relapse. Junk is quantitative and accurately measurable. The more junk you use the less you have and the more you have the more you use" (NL xxxvii-xxxix). The junk virus is of course a form of evil: "Junk yields a basic formula of 'evil' virus: *The Algebra of Need*. The face of 'evil' is always the face of total need. A dope fiend is a man in total need of dope. Beyond a certain frequency need knows absolutely no limit or control" (NL xxxix). Naked Lunch illustrates as nakedly as possible "The Algebra of Need" in every worst possible scenario.

Burroughs makes a direct connection between the junk virus and the problem of language in the portion of the "Deposition" entitled *Post Script. . . Wouldn't You?: "I Don't Want To Hear Any More Tired Old Junk Talk And Junk Con.* . . . The same things said a million times and more and there is no point in saying anything because *NOTHING Ever Happens* in the junk world" (NL xlv). If the junky defines his existence through a cycle of need and fulfillment, and if the algebra of need is the only end in the junky's life, not only will nothing ever happen, but there is no need to say anything anyway if the only sort of discourse consists of "junk talk" and "junk con." Also, the junky is strangely liberated from the word virus; when Burroughs recounts his years as a junky, he writes: "I did absolutely nothing. I could look at the end of my shoe for eight hours. I was only roused to action when the hourglass of junk ran out" (NL xli). Indeed, heroin addiction seems to free the junky from being controlled by the word, but it is only through replacing one sickness with another; one must be addicted to one medium or the other--total freedom from addiction seems unlikely.

Although I'm not entirely convinced by many of Burroughs' ideas about the all-encompassing reach of various control mechanisms, some of his ideas about the tension between word and image and pictorial and nonpictorial language are not only plausible, but highly significant in our understanding of what he is doing with language in Naked Lunch. For example, one of the central problems with language

is that it tends to perpetuate a type of thinking that is not always parallel to reality--language tends to cause "either/or" thinking, which "does not even correspond to what we now know about the physical universe" (The Job 48-9). Burroughs also notes problems resulting from what he calls "word- locks":

> There are certain formulas, word-locks, which will lock up a whole civilization for a thousand years. Now another thing is [the] *is* of identity. Now, whatever it may be, it's not a chair, it's not the word chair, it's not the label chair. The idea that the label is the thing leads to all sorts of verbal arguments, when you're dealing with labels, and think you're dealing with objects. (The Job 49)

The problem of labels and objects is closely related to the image/word problem, and brings to mind the "BUR-ROSE"/Burroughs ambiguity; it is also an issue dealt with at length in Naked Lunch, and a significant portion of this paper will look at that question.

One of the ways Burroughs attacks this problem is to attempt to make language as pictorial as possible. According to Frank D. McConnell, part of what Burroughs tries to do with language in Naked Lunch is to strip allegory and symbol from it, to use language to say exactly what he means. As McConnell puts it, "There is no symbolization (past the sheerly verbal level of naming) at all in the book, and Burroughs would not want us to look for any" (671). Allen Ginsberg illustrates a similar idea in his poem on Burroughs:

> The method must be purest meat
>   and no symbolic dressing,
> actual visions & actual prisons
>   as seen then and now.
>
> . . . .
>
> A naked lunch is natural to us,
>   we eat reality sandwiches.
> But allegories are so much lettuce.
>   Don't hide the madness. (qtd. in NL xxxiv)

Besides trying to create the naked lunch effect with language, part of the word play involved in Naked Lunch actually exploits the impossibility of making a perfect "reality sandwich," without any "symbolic dressing." Both issues are a result of the shortcomings of the word Burroughs discusses at length in The Job. Language should be an extension of the senses, and words have significance in proportion to their closeness to objects and the senses. Indeed, Burroughs says, "An essential feature of the Western control machine is to make language as non-pictorial as possible, to separate words as far as possible from objects or observable processes" (The Job 103). He gives a long list of non-pictorial words that are therefore meaningless and "gathered from one of the periodicals admittedly subsidized by the CIA" (The Job 104). Separating language from reality enables the control mechanisms to operate at full power: "If you see the function of word as an extension of our senses to witness and experience through the writer's eyes, then this may be dubbed blind prose. It sees nothing and neither does the reader" (The Job 104).

Other aspects of language make it distinctly viral and problematic. For example, Burroughs notes that the verb to be--"The *IS* of identity"--creates a false sense of reality: "You are an animal. You are a body. Now whatever you may be you are not an 'animal,' you are not a 'body,' because these are verbal labels. The IS of identity always carries the implication of that and nothing else, and it also carries the assignment of permanent condition" (The Job 200). All of the complex problems of labeling, naming, matching words to images, trying to use language to describe things that are impossible to describe, is in itself a form of addiction: We are addicted to the idea that this flawed language system conveys some accurate picture of reality. More specifically, since verbal, non-pictorial or perhaps semi-pictorial language is our only means to communicate, and we seem compelled to define our existence in verbal terms, we are like the junky in that we have ideas we can never fully explain because the medium of language is incapable of reproducing our thoughts; in a similar fashion, the junky can never satisfy his need for more junk. Junkies, like people who use verbal language systems, then, are caught in an endless cycle of trying to satisfy an insatiable need. Robin Lydenberg further expands the connection between language and addiction:

> There seems to be a need which always brings us to the belief in a primitive or mythical first stage of language, the promise of transcendence and magical oneness of metaphor. Burroughs sees this symbolic notion of vertical transcendence as the "lie" which keeps us from facing the horizontal facts that we are "dying animals on a damned planet." So, image itself is an addiction--as Burroughs puts it, "junk is image"--and the only way to cure this addiction may be the nauseating visions of Burroughs' prose. ("Beyond Good and Evil" 80)

While I will not argue that Burroughs is trying to "cure" this addiction in the way he cured his own heroin addiction with apomorphine, he is trying to make us aware of it by showing us the most radical possibilities and worst case scenarios that can result from language--he wants to give us a "reality sandwich" and show us what is on the "end of every fork."

One of the ways Burroughs shows the potential power of the word and how it can be used as a controlling mechanism is by putting himself in the position of ultimate authority--he is literally the man with the shotgun, the judge making his case against the word by unlocking his "word horde": "The Word will leap on you with leopard man iron claws, it will cut off fingers and toes like an opportunist land crab, it will hang you and catch your jissom like a scrutable dog. . . ." (NL 230). Through the persona of William Lee he admits that the attack or the judgment--the means by which he will show us what is on the end of every fork--is completely whimsical: "'Well,' I said, tapping my arm, 'duty calls. As one judge said to another: "Be just and if you can't be just be arbitrary"'" (NL 4). This is why things in Naked Lunch happen without any discernible order: Since there is no way to make "just" representations, why not be entirely arbitrary? Why not write about the "only thing a writer can write about: *what is in front of his senses at the moment of writing*" (NL 221), without trying to impose any conventions on what is being written? That the writer is using the medium of the word working in a mind that is perceiving reality through the medium of junk makes it all the more effective. Only by radically altering the word--doing with it that which we would least expect--can we see it in its full nakedness: "The way OUT is the way

IN. . . . " (NL 229). Burroughs wants to upset the "hierarchies" inherent in language (Lydenberg, "Beyond Good and Evil" 81)--things do not progress in a linear order; often they are purely arbitrary, just as words in a syllabic language have an arbitrary relation to objects and images: "The Word is divided into units which be all in one piece and should be so taken, but the pieces can be had in any order being tied up and back and forth, in and out fore and aft [. . . .]. This book spill off the page in all directions [. . . .]" (NL 229). The book is a collage of voices and images because the word is most effective when it is used in unexpected ways: "'So I got an exclusive why don't I make with the live word? The word cannot be expressed direct. It can perhaps be indicated by mosaic of juxtaposition like articles abandoned in a hotel drawer, defined by negatives and absence. . .'" (NL 116).

Burroughs puts himself in a relationship with the word that is strangely contradictory. In some of the above examples we noted the power he tries to unharness through language. But there is also a strong sense that Burroughs feels totally controlled and locked in by the word. Just as Burroughs wants to show us the most horrible realities of junk addiction--the worst consequences of being fully controlled by junk--he illustrates how language controls him as a writer: "Gentle reader, I fain would spare you this, but my pen hath its will like the Ancient Mariner" (NL 40). There are numerous examples in Naked Lunch where language seems to take control of his writing. The passage where the professor at Interzone University gives his lecture on the Rime of the Ancient Mariner is particularly compelling because in it we see where Burroughs' pen "hath its will" like the Mariner, and where Burroughs is trying to have his will with us, the readers, through his narrative discourse. The passage is, as Anthony Hilfer notes, "An explication of the relation of the Ancient Mariner to the narrative voice of Naked Lunch . . . ." (254)--the Ancient Mariner being the character who compels the Wedding Guest to listen to his story. By putting his readers in a position analogous to the Wedding Guest's, Burroughs indicates that he actively wants to do something to his reader. For example, Hilfer cites a passage where Burroughs comments, "the ugliness of that spectacle buggers description" (NL 39). In this sentence, "The narrator is admitting that he is sodomizing language, and thereby screwing up the reader's imagination" (Hilfer 255). Note the word play with "bugger": In a figurative sense it suggests that the "ugliness" defies or transcends description--but

literally, and Burroughs wants to be literal, to "bugger" description has much more powerful connotations.

If Burroughs is "screwing up" our imaginations it is ironic but not surprising that the lecture leads to a discussion on the futility of verbalization. The professor says,

> "What the Mariner actually says is not important. He may be rambling, irrelevant, even crude and rampant senile. But something happens to the Wedding Guest like happens in psychoanalysis when it happens if it happens. If I may be permitted a slight digression. . . An analyst of my acquaintance does all the talking--patients listen patiently or not[. . .]. He is illustrating at some length that nothing can ever be accomplished at the verbal level . . . ." (NL 87-8)

This passage shows the paradox hinted at above about language and addiction. Burroughs, like the Mariner, must endlessly tell his story, the actual content of which is not particularly important, by practically forcing his reader to listen. Yet the tremendous irony is that by unleashing his "word horde" on us, he only wants to show that "nothing can ever be accomplished at the verbal level." This paradox parallels the Algebra of Need: The writer makes an enormous effort to tell his story (like the Mariner), only to show that the words of the story "accomplish" nothing; likewise, the junky is caught in an endless cycle of never having enough junk and always needing it, only to find it, run out, and look for more over and over.

As mentioned previously, one of the things Burroughs attempts to do in Naked Lunch is to de-symbolize language and make it as pictorial as possible, in an effort to say "exactly what the words say." At the very end of the Ancient Mariner lecture, through the character of the Professor, Burroughs gives an example of the absurd extremes figurative language can reach:

> "Gentlemen, I will slop a pearl: *You can find out more about someone by talking to them than by listening.*"
>
> Pigs rush up and the Prof. pours buckets of pearls into a trough . . . . (NL 88)

When the professor proposes to "slop a pearl," he is clearly alluding to the figurative words of Christ, "Don't cast your pearls before the swine" (Mt. 7:6). By no means were the Biblical words meant to be read literally, but Burroughs shows the absurdity of the literal meaning of the phrase, which causes one to wonder how a figurative or symbolic meaning can function at all. If you use words in their literal nakedness, as Burroughs does here, casting pearls to the swine means exactly what it says, and it is perfectly natural that "Pigs rush up and the Prof. pours buckets of pearls into a trough." It is not natural that the maxim should mean anything other than what it says.

In his article, "The Central Verbal System: The Prose of William Burroughs," Michael Skau provides some revealing insights into the problems with language and image we have discussed to this point. He writes,

> Burroughs believes the tyranny of the word traps humanity in mortality, time, and flesh. It has saddled human beings with a verbal program which perpetuates falseness in all aspects of life. To combat this verbal control and manipulation, Burroughs engages in the disintegration of the word and patterns of words, employing such traditional devices as word play, malapropisms, typographical errors, verbal excision, and allusions. (401)

We have already noted examples of how Burroughs can use allusions and other types of word play, but the idea of "the disintegration of the word" can illustrate additional ideas on the relationship between language and addiction in Naked Lunch. Elements of word play and hints at the "disintegration of language" are evident from the very beginning of Naked Lunch. Consider the opening scene:

> I can feel the heat closing in, feel them out there making their moves, setting up their devil doll stool pigeons, crooning over my spoon and dropper I throw away at Washington Square Station, vault a turnstile and two flights down the iron stairs, catch an uptown A train . . . . Young, good looking, crew cut, Ivy League,

> advertising exec type fruit holds the door back for me. I am evidently his idea of a character. You know the type comes on with bartenders and cab drivers, talking about right hooks and the Dodgers, call the counterman in Nedick's by his first name. A real asshole. (NL 1)

Language and junk operate on two levels here. First, Lee the addict has that nonverbal intuition Burroughs seems to attribute to junk addicts: he can "feel the heat closing in, feel them out there. . . ," as if he had some sort of telepathic ability derived from "the silent frequency of junk" (NL 51). Lee can feel them and doesn't need to have someone tell him the heat is after him. Also, the description of the "Young, good looking. . . advertising exec type" suggests something about the "disintegration" of the word. The man is clearly a "type," and Burroughs' hint, "you know the type," implies that words are inadequate or too cumbersome a means to describe him; since we "know the type" we ought to have a picture of him in our minds that exists separately from the futile description Burroughs can give us through the word. The difference parallels the distinction between the sign with a picture of a rose on it, and the sign with the word "Rose" written on it to which Burroughs refers in The Job.

But there is a larger problem with word and image occurring here. We read that the "advertising exec type" is also "A real asshole." We have discussed at some length Burroughs' interest in stripping language of allegory and symbol, but in this instance, "asshole" seems to be merely figurative; it is simply a derogatory term. "Asshole" is not supposed to literally signify its original image in an instance like this. Since the phrase comes early in the novel, a reader is not likely to be aware of the elaborate word play involved in the book. The phrase in its symbolic form is there for a very important reason, because as the novel progresses Burroughs progressively plays with the relationship between the word "asshole" and images it can represent, and "asshole" becomes less and less symbolic. William Lee says the man on the train is a "real asshole"--but is it possible for a man to a real asshole? Burroughs ultimately strips this word down to its most literal form, which is so grotesque that it really "buggers" the imagination. But before Burroughs gets to that point, there is a curious passage where he plays with the word and its image:

> Reading the paper. . . . Something about a triple murder in the rue de la Merde, Paris: "An adjusting of scores." . . . I keep slipping away. . . . "The police have identified the author. . .Pepe El Culito. . .The Little Ass Hole, an affectionate diminutive." Does it really say that? I try to focus the words. . . they separate in meaningless mosaic. . . . (NL 68)

The problem Burroughs has with what he says he sees in the paper reflects back to the opening passage: what is "a real asshole"? If the "words" that "separate into meaningless mosaic" are capable of creating the image of a murder in the "rue de la Merde," perpetrated by a "Culito," a "Little Ass Hole," they are certainly capable of creating an "author"--though it is not clear whether this "asshole" is the author of the murder or the author of the words. That the narrator "keep[s] slipping away," while trying "to focus the words" underscores the muddle between word and image; if we try to make complete sense out of the verbal system which enslaves us, we are bound to lose our grip on reality, because words are not an accurate reflection of what we "know about the physical universe."

The episode where Benway tells the story of the "man who taught his asshole to talk" (NL 132)--Lydenberg calls it the "carny man routine" (Word Cultures 20)--is the culmination of Burroughs' exposure of the relationship between word and addiction. It is an example of the "unpleasant literalness of Burroughs' style" (Lydenberg, Word Cultures 20), taken to its most absurd and hideous extreme. It is also an answer to the problem of the true naked meaning of the phrase, "a real asshole," which Burroughs has touched on only in a veiled way to this point. What is particularly curious about the episode is not just its development of the literal possibility of what "a real asshole" is, but that it shows how language is a terrifying means of control--that is, using language implicates us in the worst possible results that spring from its instability.

The carny man's "asshole" eventually becomes his sole verbal unit, and takes over the body completely:

> "After a while the ass started talking on its own.[. . .] Then it developed sort of teeth-like little raspy incurving hooks and started eating. [. . .] the asshole

> would eat its way through his pants and start talking on the street, shouting out it wanted equal rights. [. . .] Finally it talked all the time day and night, you could hear him for blocks screaming at it to shut up [. . .], but nothing did any good and the asshole said to him, 'It's you who will shut up in the end. Not me. Because we don't need you around here anymore. I can talk and eat and shit.'" (NL 132-33)

Lydenberg notes that this episode "reveals perhaps most thoroughly the violence and aggression in the act of naming" (Word Cultures 39), and ultimately becomes a poignant example of the worst consequences of the various limitations of our verbal system that Burroughs critiques in The Job. The word "asshole" in the figurative sense is not pictorial at all (what does an "asshole" look like?); if we have a sign with the word "asshole" written on it, it does not seem likely to create any sort of concrete image other than the physical orifice, which when ascribed to a person--"he is an asshole"--must become the carny man, who is literally transformed into a talking, walking asshole. The carny man is the only literal picture that can spring from the idea that a person can "be" an "asshole." Of course the absurdity of the carny man is obvious; it could never really happen, but as Burroughs says, verbal, syllabic language tends not to correspond to reality. The carny man routine illustrates how our addiction to words that are separate from images, like junk addiction, is a sickness--this scene represents perhaps the most radical potential for language to distort reality in the novel.

Naked Lunch, then, explores the relationship between word and image parallel to the heroin addict's insatiable need: the junky's life is defined by never having enough heroin, and it is an endless search for the "final fix." Language, by the same token, functions in such a manner that people have concepts and ideas and are always searching for the most accurate means to express them, but are fated by the viral and unstable nature of the verbal language system with which we operate to always come up empty, or to find that what we say is bound to evoke an image different from what we mean (or no image at all). Thus, Burroughs' statement, "I don't have the Word" (NL 227), is analogous to the junky always looking for the next fix, only to either get it and want another soon thereafter, or to have it postponed, which is what happens to Lee in the final lines of the novel when he finds

himself turned away by the Chinese pusher and unable to score, suggesting that the cycle of need is never totally satisfied, either for the word or for the junk addict: "'No. . . No more. . . No mas' [. . .]. If I knew I'd be glad to tell you . . . . 'No good. . . no bueno. . . hustling myself . . . .' 'No glot. . . . C'lom Fliday'" (NL 234-35).

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Original Poetry

I Once Lay on Shower Bottoms
Patrick E. Collins

I once lay on shower bottoms.

Cold blue tile against my eyes and nose pressed a cold comfort to
the thud of thought and skin that had been my head.

The empty, near-flat Popov bottle tossed against the dull white
toilet brush receptacle I could see past the angled
open shower door when I turned my head flat above the floor.

I'd missed the trash can.

I'd turned the gas on.

The cold would stop my thoughts a minute, and I would think
so this is what Plath thought.

I loved the smell of gas then.

So heroic mixed with vodka.

I would be Lord Hamlet's father's ghost when I awoke.
And then it seemed too quiet.

I hit my head against the tile again, then raising up,
against the steel hot water handle.

My head got wet.

I was afraid again.

Propped on hands and knees I would crawl out of the shower stall
onto the bathroom proper floor and hit my head on the white wall heater.

I turned the gas off and lay my head down on the toilet rim.

At first, I thought I would end this tale with a few smug lines
about Mithridates dying old or how some row all the way to God
in schizophrenic boats and finally reach a fertile shore.

I considered ending in rhymed couplets.

But this afternoon I passed an old red dog sitting lion-like beside a bush.

Review of *Creating from the Spirit: Living Each Day As a Creative Act*, by Dan Wakefield. New York: Ballantine, 1996.

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For the second issue in a row, I am reviewing a non-fiction book by Dan Wakefield, novelist, essayist, and TV scriptwriter. The seeds of Wakefield's latest book lie in the workshops on Spiritual Autobiography that he has been giving for some years. The book contains writing exercises from the workshop, as well as specimens of writing by participants, on various subjects. The focus in Wakefield's last book was "miracles," in the broad sense of transformative moments in people's life stories that they often describe as autobiographical climaxes. In the new book the central concept is creativity, and Wakefield spirals off from it in several directions.

Two of those directions contrast neatly: Wakefield has done interviews with famous creative people, writers, musicians, chefs, architects, and scientists, and he cites them at length to document his point that there is something spiritual about the creative act. Just as people in *Expect a Miracle* felt the touch of Something Greater at moments when their lives took a new turn, so these creative people experienced something similar when they wrote a song or a story, or designed a building. But Wakefield also opines that ordinary people also experience creativity, not just in what they write or draw, but even in the way they live their daily lives. Their efforts may satisfy only an audience of one, but that's enough.

One of the famous people he cites, in fact, is Studs Terkel, and Terkel's books, especially *Working*, seem to be models for some of what Wakefield is doing here. Like Terkel, Wakefield shows ordinary people seeing in an extraordinary light what they do and what they make.

Wakefield is writing in a popular, inspirational vein; he is not attempting anything academic or theological. And so "spirit" (as in, for instance, the Jewish-Christian notion of the "Creative Spirit") is not rigorously defined, any more than "miracle" was in his last book. This is just as well, since he is trying to reach a broad audience, and in particular people who would feel inadequate in the face of theological discussion--the same people who may be falsely convinced that only a special elite really creates.

Wakefield feels that ordinary people miss their chance at finding their own creativity because of more myths than the one just cited, that only rarely talented and highly trained people are truly creative. Part Two of *Creating from the Spirit* is a debunking of many other myths about creativity. It is at this point that Wakefield's argument becomes especially relevant to the concerns of *Dionysos*; for one of the myths that he attacks at length (three

chapters out of 12) is the hoary Romantic shibboleth that use, and preferably misuse, of alcohol and other drugs are at least desirable, and perhaps essential, in the creative process.

As I mentioned, Wakefield is writing for a popular audience--several chapters are how-to (how to write your story, how to live your day creatively)--so it is no surprise that his treatment of the interplay between drugs and creativity isn't as nuanced as much of what has appeared over the years in *Dionysos*. A more scholarly treatment of the subject would surely take into account John Crowley's work in this journal, much of which was subsequently published in *The White Logic* (see the searching review by former editor Roger Forseth in the last volume of *Dionysos*). Crowley, it is true, concentrated on the creations, rather than on the alcoholic creators, as Wakefield mostly does (although note that Crowley doesn't see *The Sun Also Rises* as the straightforward apologia for alcoholic excess that Wakefield does). But whatever the details of the argument, it is very near the heart of what *Dionysos* tries to search out in literature.

Wakefield takes the sensible position that drug use, while it may sometimes spur creativity in the earlier stages of both drugging and creativity, eventually becomes utterly destructive of that creativity. Typical of Wakefield's view is an anecdote from the early '60's, when Wakefield witnessed Timothy Leary trying to stimulate the creative juices of Jack Kerouac--already in serious trouble with alcohol and other drugs--with psilocybin, an effort that dismally failed. But while I agree with Wakefield on this point--and given the biochemical facts of the addictive process, it is hard to gainsay--I think the tenacity of the drugs-and-creativity myth calls for more nuanced reflection. (Consider for example Cassie Carter's article on Jim Carroll in the last volume of this journal: she noted that Carroll, in part under the influence of the paradigmatic life of Rimbaud, coupled his drug use with the anti-bourgeois stance of his poetry.)

One way to critique this Romantic notion is to describe, as Wakefield does, the deleterious effect of drugs on a creative person's output over time. So Rimbaud and Kerouac and Jack London can be invoked as specimens of brilliant artists whose drug abuse burned them out (and in some cases killed them) at an early age. Wakefield also cites Faulkner and Fitzgerald and Hemingway. But, as Wakefield notes, while we have all heard about these famous drunks at great length, other, equally suasive arguments are less familiar. He points out that Poe's drug abuse was almost unique among 19th Century American literary figures, a point not often stressed. And Wakefield also tries to cite evidence drawn from the group of artists, small as yet, who have continued to produce on the other side of addiction--after entering some kind of recovery.

In this context he notes (after Tom Dardis) that some of Eugene O'Neill's finest work was done during the long period of his life when he had stopped

drinking, another fact rarely cited. And he also invokes John Cheever and Raymond Carver. But here especially I think the truth is more complex than he indicates.

To make his case, Wakefield says this about Cheever's work after getting sober: he "lived another seven years to finish his most important novel, *Falconer*, . . . and also a short, lyrical novel called *Oh, What a Paradise It Seems!*" In short, far from experiencing a decline after getting sober, Cheever saw his work get better.

I'm afraid I disagree. I find *Falconer* too schematic and allegorical to be considered Cheever's best work--in fact it feels more like a romance (in the Hawthorne sense) than the rest of Cheever's work, and I think Cheever's great metier was lyrical fiction, not romance. I prefer the novel that preceded it, *Bullet Park*, if only because it seems to me more convincing as a depiction of addiction. Cheever had trouble finishing it in large measure because of the ravages of his own alcoholism. This seems to be reflected in Nailles, the central character, who ends up locked into his dependency on a tranquilizer, as hopeless as his creator was when *Bullet Park* appeared, in the late '60's. By comparison, Farragut's sudden recovery from heroin addiction in *Falconer* seems unearned. Then, too, I think Cheever was much more reserved than Wakefield is about *Oh, What a Paradise*: Cheever had had something grander in mind, and his journals and letters suggest that he felt this slender work gave evidence of failing powers. The tone of *Oh, What a Paradise* is more elegiac than "lyrical." Cheever's greatest accomplishment in sobriety was surely the publication (in 1977) of *The Collected Stories*, for which he most deservedly received the Pulitzer Prize; but while this project certainly involved creativity, it was creativity of a retrospective kind.

But while I do not agree that Cheever did his best work after recovery, I am of course not suggesting that he should have evaded or postponed his recovery. It is hard to imagine Cheever, if he had continued to drink, creating anything at all after *Bullet Park*. The novel ends, as I mentioned above, with Nailles, stoned on his black market tranquilizers, flying along on his commuter train, the Cheever Man brought to a complete impasse. Perhaps more to the point, surely creative artists who have found a way out of the trap of addiction are entitled to rest on their laurels, or at the very least have lives. Why insist that they top themselves creatively? Must *The Last Tycoon* be, as Wakefield contends, the best (alas, unfinished) work of Fitzgerald's life because he had stopped drinking? It is too simple to say that work done under the influence must be somehow flawed, and work done in recovery must somehow be superior. People abuse drugs precisely because they do work for a while; they stop--if they can--to save their lives, and only secondarily to restore their creativity.

Even as I say this, though, I think of the later work of Raymond Carver, whom Wakefield also cites--not just the fine poetry he wrote after getting

sober, but also the differences between harsh early versions of a story like "A Small, Good Thing," and the more humane later version, which ends with three people, linked by a child's accidental death, breaking bread together. Some creators do in fact seem to work better in recovery. Of course, recovery from addiction is still such a new phenomenon that there isn't a lot of data. Even the experience of recovery itself, as powerful as it is, has yet to be as tellingly depicted in literature as the experience of addiction. Finally, the bleak truth may be that addiction kills so many brain cells that many recovering litterateurs may simply lack the wherewithal to create.

Wakefield is a bit harsher on other drugs, to which he devotes a separate chapter, than he is on alcohol. I don't think this distinction is that helpful these days, when many older people mix alcohol with tranquilizers (like Cheever's characters), and younger people--and some not so young--mix it with street drugs. As I have indicated, Wakefield can also sound a bit prim and reductive on the subject of drugs and creativity. But in the end I support his efforts to divorce drugs from art, despite our small differences on fine points, if only because I live in Seattle. When Kurt Cobain killed himself here a couple of years ago, a local paper interviewed a member of his band, Nirvana. This musician--the bass-player, Krist Novoselic--insisted that heroin had had little to do with Cobain's death. He argued this on the grounds that heroin had been around a long time, that it had long been readily available in Seattle--both of these are true enough--and that Cobain's use of heroin had been "a small part of his life," sensationalized by the media. Tellingly, when the interviewer then asked Novoselic what *had* caused Cobain's death, Novoselic lamely replied that he hadn't figured that out yet. (See also the May 30th, 1996 issue of *Rolling Stone*, which describes young people moving to Seattle specifically so they can follow in Cobain's footsteps as musicians and as junkies--and as suicides? The Romantic myth is alive, six blocks from where I'm writing this.)

Young people have for too long heard only this Romantic version of drug-fueled creativity. Wakefield's cautions, even if a bit uninflected, deserve a hearing, too. And I hope that *Dionysos* will continue in its way to deconstruct the old tale about the drug-soaked, suffering artist.

Mildred's Mad Tea Party: Carnival in Barbara Pym's Excellent Women

Joe B. Fulton

In a moment of exasperation, Mildred Lathbury of Barbara Pym's Excellent Women informs the reader that she feels "like Alice in Wonderland" (35). Indeed, Pym makes numerous allusions to Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and structures Excellent Women around a party in which tea, if it is not actually served, is thought of a great deal. Pym does not create the "mad tea party" of chapter four solely to characterize churchy, "excellent women" intent on serving mild beverages to one and all. Rather, Pym patterns this tea party after the Mad Hatter's to objectify the topsy-turviness that the newcomers, the Napiers and Everard Bone, introduce into Mildred's otherwise placid world.

Critics often characterize Barbara Pym's novels as gentle social comedies concerned with the prosaic. Edith Larson, for example, discusses the "potential of the mundane" and the "celebration of the ordinary" as major traits of Pym's art (17). Mason Cooley similarly lauds Pym's "wellmannered fictions" (5), and Lotus Snow cites "trivia" as a predominant concern of Pym's novels (97). Pym herself said that she wrote about the "boring cosiness of the everyday" (Private 245).

But Pym's concern for the ordinary obscures the true hallmark of her novels; as sudden, unexpected incidents erupt through the surface calm for which Pym is famous, the ordinary serves as a foil for the *extraordinary*. Although the placidity of her novels receives the most attention, the hallmark of Pym's work is really the incongruous, the unexpected, and the unsuitable.

Food and drink provide the quotidian core of Pym's stable universe, but they also provide a background against which something extraordinary typically occurs. In Less Than Angels (1955), for example, the anthropologist Alaric Lydgate disrupts a quiet, suburban meal with his comment that, in Africa, many tribes "relish even putrescent meat" (147). More darkly, at the end of Pym's career, Marcia of Quartet in Autumn (1977) has her tenuous sense of order upset by the discovery of an "alien brand" in her hoard of "United Dairy bottles" (64). These disruptive elements do not simply ripple the surface of Pym's world. Rather, they have a profound function in her

novels that is as salutary as her "celebration of the ordinary." For in Pym's world the "boring cosiness" of life both insulates and isolates one character from another. As extraordinary events fracture their comfortable lives, Pym's characters secure larger, more meaningful social bonds.

In this article, I will focus on Excellent Women to examine Pym's use of food and drink within Bakhtin's theory of carnival, in particular his concept of the "banquet dialogue." Bakhtin argues that banquets bring people together in an intimate "table talk" where dialogue dissolves the usual boundaries between individuals; a "free and familiar contact among people" replaces, at least temporarily, the usual stratification of social life (PDP 123).[1] Bakhtin grounds his view of carnival in Rabelais, and spends a great deal of time outlining the seminal role played by food and drink. "Bread and wine," Bakhtin asserts, represent "the world defeated through work and struggle," and so eating and drinking are by their nature celebratory (RW 285). Moreover, the very act of consuming complicates individual and social boundaries:

> Eating and drinking are one of the most significant manifestations of the grotesque body. The distinctive character of this body is its open and unfinished nature, its interaction with the world. These traits are most fully and concretely revealed in the act of eating; the body transgresses here its own limits: it swallows, devours, rends the world apart, is enriched and grows at the world's expense. . . . Here man tastes the world, introduces it into his body, makes it part of himself (RW 281).

According to Bakhtin, one acknowledges one's "unfinished nature" by eating and drinking. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White see Bakhtin's carnival as always "in process . . . always *becoming*" (9). Populated by people in the process of becoming, the communal banquet suggests not just a physical opening up, but an opening up on the level of consciousness. Considering the creation of identity, Bakhtin maintains that a unitary identity does not exist, and that one constructs identity throughout life by the constant accretion of elements "transgredient" to consciousness (AH 27). "Transgredient,"

as Todorov explains, refers to "ingredients" of consciousness "that are external to it, but nonetheless absolutely necessary for its completion" (95). Along with the food and drink they consume, carnival celebrants ingest the elements of consciousness "transgredient" to their own.

The merrymaking and revelry of the carnival feast also reveal the incompleteness or the "unfinished nature" of the individual by "making strange" the everyday order of things.[2] This "defamiliarization" causes the carnival celebrants to view their lives and assumptions with fresh eyes. Because carnival is "life turned inside out" (PDP 122), it can seem simultaneously comic and painful, even brutal at times. But to "degrade an object," as Bakhtin claims, "does not imply merely hurling it into the void of nonexistence . . . but to hurl it down to the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and a new birth take place" (RW 21). By disturbing regular social patterns, carnival establishes a "new mode of interrelationship between individuals" (PDP 122). In Excellent Women, Pym employs "scandalous" speech, dream sequences, "carnivalistic mesalliances," and other elements of carnival to disrupt and renew Mildred's life (PDP 117-23). Content to remain one of the "excellent women," the backbone of the church's social and charitable outreach, Mildred still wonders at times if her role offers a "full life" (256). By adapting the carnival "banquet dialogue," which allows "a certain license," to the English institution of tea, Pym subjects Mildred's world view--the excellent woman ideology into which she has been interpellated--to pressures from within and without (120).[3]

Prior to the arrival of the Napiers, Mildred leads a quiet life that centers around the act of drinking tea. Edith Larson argues that "the restorative ritual of tea drinking" is part of the "power of the ordinary" in Pym's novels (17). Pym's characters use tea to structure their everyday lives, and tea reveals their world view. Characters in a Pym novel use tea-drinking to suggest that human nature is "finished" and "closed," denying by their use of it the incomplete nature of the individual. Pym associates tea with the tick-tock inevitability of tea-time, with the stolidity of the Anglican church, and even with the certitude of England's empire-building past. And yet, tea in her novels also suggests a moribund ritual, a parochial outlook, and a geographic limitation. Thus, in Pym's world, the tea urn at a church "jumble" unites the everyday and the eternal in a secular sacrament, a communion of excellent women that confines as it comforts. In

Excellent Women. Pym employs carnival to undermine both the boring and cosy aspects of Mildred's life and to reveal human nature as "open and unfinished." In so doing, she agrees with her Miss Lathbury that "Perhaps there can be too much making of cups of tea" (227).

Helena Napier is the initial agent of carnival in this novel. Unused to cosmopolitan mores, Mildred is shocked by Helena's immoralism. Ostensibly referring to her housekeeping, Helena baldly states, "I'm such a slut" (8) and almost immediately repeats herself, "I told you I was a slut"(9). The repetition of "slut" is a jarring introduction to this woman, and is typical of carnival's "scandalous" speech. Belinda Bede notes that the "sacred character of the ordinary things of life is prominent in Pym's novels" (396), and Mildred equates Helena's poor housekeeping with a rebellion against the proper life and everything associated with it. Here, the carnival attacks, as Bakhtin says, "all that is high, spiritual, ideal" (RW 19). Like the Mad Hatter and the March Hare who have "no time to wash the things between whiles" as "it's always tea-time," so too is Helena a "slut" about the house (97). But the word casts doubt not merely on Helena's housekeeping, but on her morals as well. Although married, Helena is infatuated with Everard Bone, a fact that further scandalizes Mildred. For mild Mildred, even Helena's dirty dishes suggest perversion, for by not washing the dishes, Helena disrupts Mildred's celebration of the secular sacrament of eating and drinking. Like her language, Helena's housekeeping upends the established order of things and implies an outlook at odds with Mildred's excellent woman ideology.

The carnival really begins with the arrival of Helena's husband, Rocky, as Mildred finds herself playing hostess. Although they drink coffee, Mildred and Rocky discuss tea and wine, a carnival confusion this scene shares with Lewis Carroll's work; the Mad Hatter initially offers Alice wine, but then--without explanation--gives her tea (89). Mildred seems to have fallen down the rabbit hole, into a carnival wonderland that, as Bakhtin argues, engages in the "provoking and testing of a philosophical idea, a discourse, a truth" (PDP 114). Rocky's return in Helena's absence renders the challenge to Mildred's lifestyle an active one, and not merely an assault on her sensibility. Seemingly inevitably, Mildred gives him coffee in her flat, and the ideological conflict begins to brew.

Rocky's question, "I suppose you wouldn't dream of drinking a bottle of wine by yourself, would you?" (32), assumes that Mildred is

an excellent woman, but challenges her to at least "dream" of drinking something besides tea. In Bakhtin's terminology, Rocky's words constitute a "hidden polemic," in which "apart from its referential meaning, a polemical blow is struck at the other's discourse" (PDP 195). Little wonder, then, that Rocky leaves Mildred "a little dazed" (31), as his discourse suggests she relax her moral standards. Robert Long observes that the Napiers are "'worldly' characters, and what they bring with them, specifically, is sexuality" (48-49). As with Helena, Pym associates Rocky's carnival discourse with a sexuality that is veiled behind food and drink. Rocky directs his carnival discourse against the official ideology of the excellent woman, behind which stands the Anglican church. At times, Rocky and Helena openly deride the church and its communicants. In a later scene, for example, Rocky blurts out, "I can't do with religion before breakfast" (160).

While Mildred answers Rocky's question about drinking wine in the negative, she recognizes that her response is "rather primly" effected, signalling the coexistence of the discourse of excellent women with that of a more progressive Mildred, a process Bakhtin terms "internal dialogization" (PDP 198). Bakhtin's concept of "internal dialogization," strictly applied, refers to an author's loss of control over a text, but because Mildred authors this first-person narrative, I employ the term to illustrate her loss of control over her own thoughts. In a very real sense, she gradually yields control of her consciousness to the other voices she encounters in the carnival environment. The more progressive Mildred is indicated also by her acceptance, when abroad, of tea made from a "funny little bag," and of alien ways in general--it is "all part of the foreign atmosphere" (32-33). Rosemary de Paolo observes that "drink functions as a reflection of identity" in Pym's work (1), and Mildred's readiness to go beyond the parochial definition of a proper cup of tea reveals her willingness to alter her lifestyle. This willingness is likely prompted by the prim negative given earlier, and demonstrates her desire not to be categorized as an excellent woman. Later, when Helena leaves Rocky, Mildred quells her usual inclination and does not offer him tea because, as she says, "I did not want him to remember me as the kind of person who was always making cups of tea at moments of crisis" (166). While Mildred does not quite approve of "his frivolous attitude," she responds to Rocky's carnival discourse throughout the book by moving away from a hidebound self-definition (34).

Mildred first meets her future husband, Everard Bone, when invited to join Helena and Rocky for wine. The "straw-covered flask" Rocky proffers--probably a Chianti--recalls the English tourists in Italy who drink "pale straw-coloured" tea (320). The linkage of the wine and tea by geography (Italy), and by "straw," heightens the carnival confusion of tea and wine, and of the ideologies they represent. Drawn into the reunion against her better judgement, and into a mad tea party, Mildred finds herself mired in a conversation with Everard Bone that makes her feel "like Alice in Wonderland" (35).

> "It must be fun," I floundered, "I mean, going round Africa and doing all that."
>
> "'Fun' is hardly the word," he said. "It's very hard work, learning an impossibly difficult language, then endless questionings and statistics. . . ."
>
> "No, I suppose it isn't," I said soberly, for he had certainly not made it sound fun. "But there must be something satisfying in having done it, a sort of feeling of achievement?"
>
> "Achievement? . . . I sometimes wonder if it isn't all a waste of time" (35).

Given Mildred's earlier confused conversation with Everard's mother, who mistakes her for a "Miss Jessup," it should not be surprising that she is here again "mystified" by a member of that family (29). Similarly, Alice is mystified by the Mad Hatter, who speaks something that "seemed to her to have no sort of meaning in it, and yet it was certainly English" (93).

The real object of this exchange is to "test the truth" of Mildred's ideology. The carnival discussion of Everard's profession prompts Mildred to question her own:

> I began to see how people could need drink to cover up embarrassments, and I remembered many sticky church functions which might have been improved if somebody had happened to open a bottle of wine. But people like us had to rely on the tea-urn

> and I felt that some credit was due to us for doing as well as we did on that harmless stimulant (36-37) .

Mildred understands this mad tea party--like Alice's a party of four--as a clash between the tea-urn and the straw-covered flask, the latter representing the world view of geographically and morally unsettled people like the Napiers. Even as Mildred questions her identity, that is, her reliance on tea and all it represents, she phrases the imagined subversion in terms such as "might" and "if" that leave it flatly conditional. Mildred can only envision an indefinite "somebody" uncorking the bottle; she cannot imagine introducing the bottle herself. Dramatizing the conflict of what she takes to be discrete ideologies, on one occasion Mildred refuses alcohol *because* she has just had tea (107). Rocky, however, will not take no for an answer, and corrects her: "'Dear Mildred, you must learn to feel like drinking at any time. I shall make myself responsible for your education'" (107).

As Mildred leaves the mad tea party of chapter four, Rocky again confronts her with discomforting ideas. While Rocky gives Helena "majolica and a pottery breakfast set" (37), he gives Mildred a "little china goat" to be set among the "bearded archdeacons" on her mantelpiece (38). Robert Long rightly notes that the goat "has sexual implications" (49). I would add that the goat's grouping with the archdeacons "makes strange" the ideology they represent, prompting Mildred to rethink her settled assumptions. Bakhtin terms such collisions of sacred and profane "carnivalistic mesalliances" (PDP 123). Just as Mildred isolates herself from people like the Napiers, she segregates her archdeacons from less suitable statuary. The china goat parodies the archdeacons, and may even, like them, wear a beard. The goat suggests a capering sensuality that the archdeacons and Mildred have repressed. Here, Pym situates the carnival firmly in the disruptive mode Bakhtin favors for it, and uses it to unsettle the singular, official outlook of the church that governs Mildred's life. Like the straw-covered flask, the goat is a carnivalistic, pagan symbol that tests the truth of the archdeacons: does the church offer a "full life"? (256).

Pym ends chapter four with a potent image of carnival at work in Mildred's life. Like other carnival elements, dreams, Bakhtin argues, "destroy the epic and tragic wholeness of a person and his fate: the possibilities of another person and another life are revealed" (PDP 116-17). As she falls asleep, Mildred is "obscurely worried about

something," and determines to resist the Napiers, even planning trips to avoid falling in with them again (38). Like Alice, who exclaims in disgust, "At any rate I'll never go there again! . . . It's the stupidest tea-party I ever was at in all my life!" (102), Mildred retreats into the coziness of her everyday routine.

But, strangely, Mildred determines to resist another world view--her own world of church jumbles and tea urns. After such a "fantastic" evening that "couldn't really have happened" (38), Mildred neglects to say her prayers. Her last thought is of "Mr. Mallett, with raised finger and roguish voice, saying, 'Tut, tut, Miss Lathbury . . . .'" (38). In a waking state, and under the influence of alcohol, Mildred apprehends truths of her existence that she elsewhere resists: her life is cozy, but confining, and the community of believers she enjoys alienates her from a broader experience of life. Here, Mr. Mallett is the voice of her conscience, but his admonition, "Tut, tut," dialogically transmits the Napiers' mocking temperament, now a part of Mildred's consciousness. The carnival wonderland of the mad tea party renders Mildred resistant to the teatime world Mr. Mallett represents.

With Rocky in charge of her "education," Mildred similarly resists the demands of William Caldicote that she remain "an excellent woman" (69). William serves as a kind of suitor, but in chapter eight Mildred observes that her "annual luncheon" with William has become "something of a ceremonial occasion" and laments that the "relationship had settled down into a comfortable dull thing" (66). Like her life in general, Mildred's relationship with William needs disrupting, needs the kind of unsettling disturbance that would reconfigure it. Mildred's luncheon with William is pivotal in the novel in the sense that Mildred herself serves as the bearer of the carnival contagion. William desires the "boring cosiness of the everyday," but Mildred introduces an uncomfortable topic while drinking wine:

> I suppose it must have been the Nuits St. Georges or the spring day or the intimate atmosphere of the restaurant, but I heard myself to my horror, murmuring something about Rocky Napier being just the kind of person I should have liked for myself (69).

After a "marked silence," William remonstrates: "'But my dear Mildred, *you* mustn't marry . . . Life is disturbing enough as it is

without these alarming suggestions'" (69). If the Napiers offer Mildred a wonderland, William extends a looking-glass that reflects her humdrum life, which he prefers she continue indefinitely. Instead of acquiescing, however, Mildred becomes an agent of carnival, and alarms and disturbs William by suggesting she would consider a clearly unsuitable attachment to Rocky Napier, a married man. Significantly, Mildred disrupts the discussion almost in spite of herself. Her loss of control over her own language evidences an "internal dialogization" provoked by the Napiers' carnival temperament. Mildred, in Bakhtin's terms, "tastes the world," and ingests the Napiers' ideology, making it a part of herself (RW 281). Indeed, attempting to justify her strange behavior, she announces to William at the conclusion of their meal that "'You know I'm not used to wine, particularly in the middle of the day . . . . but it's rather pleasant to be unlike oneself occasionally'" (71).

Mildred's experiences with the Napiers, and her "annual luncheon" with William, prepare her for a later "mad tea party" with Everard Bone. Mildred is "not used to going into public-houses," but Everard steers her into one, and she hesitates, not knowing what drink to order. She vaguely orders beer, then is pressed to qualify this and orders bitter, "hoping that it wasn't the kind that tasted like washing-up water, but not being certain" (141). As it turns out, Everard senses that Mildred dislikes her drink, and "suddenly becoming less withdrawn" suggests he get her "something like gin and orange" (142).

Perhaps because the bar has "an almost ecclesiastical air," Mildred mentions she is reading a biography of Cardinal Newman, realizing that "I could hardly have chosen a more unsuitable topic of conversation for a convivial evening's drinking" (141). Indeed, the discussion is forced, and the two again find themselves locked in a conversation that, like the Mad Hatter's, makes no sense. The essential similarity of Everard and Mildred emerges from their discussion, though, and it seems clear that Everard's life, too, needs disrupting. Like Mildred, Everard is "quiet and sensible and a church-goer" (107). He prefers order, disapproves of the Napiers--especially Helena--and drinks only a bit more than Mildred. Mildred imagines Helena as a "large white rabbit" that Everard finds in his arms; like Mildred, Everard is in a "wonderland" (145). Just as Helena's immoralism has a wonderland effect on Mildred's usual order of things, it also upsets Everard's world view. Although Everard resists Helena's enticements,

he does become more human, and more interested in Mildred as a result. He becomes, in Bakhtin's terms, "open and unfinished" (RW 281).

Pym employs these carnivalistic elements in Excellent Women to turn Mildred's world upside down and undermine the "boring cosiness" of her life, best symbolized by the drinking of tea. Such carnival banquets abound in Excellent Women. from the dinner/lecture at the "Prehistoric Society," during which one conferee laments there is to be no discussion of the "ceremonial devouring of human flesh" (93), to Mildred's dinner with Mrs. Bone, who fears "The Dominion of the Birds" and so eats "as many birds as possible" (149). Each of these carnivalized scenes "makes strange" Mildred's otherwise serene existence and leads her to question her cozy life.

The Napiers, and Everard Bone, gradually lead Mildred further and further from her home and its teapot, and she becomes, like them, more accepting of strange foods, exotic drinks, and the ideologies they represent. In the terms of Pym's novels, her world view broadens. The mad tea parties of Excellent Women erupt through the surface calm in chapter twenty-five, when Mildred, serving at the Christmas bazaar, thinks, "Perhaps there can be too much making of cups of tea. . . . Did we really need a cup of tea? . . . It was the kind of question that starts a landslide in the mind" (227). Even this last question is provoked by the introduction of the Napiers into her placid life as, despite her best intentions, Rocky does remember her as "a woman who was always making cups of tea" (222). But Mildred's experience illustrates that carnival does not simply destroy a world view; it rejuvenates it. Mildred ingests and incorporates the Napiers' openness into her own value system. Thus, the reconstituted calm of the novel's conclusion differs from, but resembles, the calm of its opening. Anne Wyatt-Brown calls the ending "unsettling" (76), but carnival in Excellent Women is valuable precisely because it does "unsettle" Mildred's life, allowing her to emerge as "open and unfinished." As she herself says, "it seemed as if I might be going to have what Helena called 'a full life' after all" (256). By the end of the novel we know that, unlike Alice, who upon emerging from her dream of Wonderland is told "now run to your tea; it's getting late" (170), Mildred will not return to the confining world of tea-drinking. Rather, because her world has been so effectively undermined by carnival, she will pepper her days

with an occasional "gin and orange," fetched for her by "the great Everard Bone" (37).

Notes

1 Although Bakhtin concentrates on unofficial carnival, he does differentiate between varieties that undermine, and varieties that reinforce, dominant ideologies. Some critics argue that all carnival serves the dominant ideology. For a discussion of the debate see Linda Hutcheon, "Modern Parody and Bakhtin," Rethinking Bakhtin: Extensions and Challenges. Eds. Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, Evanston: Northwestern UP, 87-103.

2 Victor Shklovsky's concept of "ostranenie" (translated as "defamiliarization" or "making strange") explains the way literary language "makes strange" the world we perceive in a text. Bakhtin broadens the term to embrace any carnival element that disrupts the expected order of things. Mikita Hoy discusses "making strange" and carnival in "Bakhtin and Popular Culture," New Literary History. 23 (1992): 765-82.

3 Although I employ Bakhtin's theories generally, my study is informed by Louis Althusser's work. I sometimes use Althusser's definition of ideology as opposed to Bakhtin's "world view": "Ideology is a 'Representation' of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (162). Interpellation is the process by which a subject is "hailed" into an ideology (173-74).

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NOTES AND COMMENT
Roger Forseth

"Addiction and Culture," a conference sponsored by The Claremont Graduate School, Claremont, CA, was held 29 Feb-2 March. 68 papers were delivered at such panels as: Cyberaddictions; Victorian Addictions; Theories of Alcoholism and Literature; Sex, Drugs, Rock; From Baudelaire to Bataille; The Pharmakon and the Logos; Addictions of Empire. Among the presenters from Dionysos were: Marty Roth, George Wedge, Nick Warner, Robin Room (Plenary Speaker), Roger Forseth, and Dan Wakefield (who also delivered a Claremont McKenna convocation address: "Booze and the Muse"). Dionysos had one of the more popular periodical/book displays. Inquiries regarding the program and presenters' addresses: Marc Redfield, The Claremont Graduate School, Humanities Center, Claremont CA 91711 (909/621-8612). . . . ** Dan Wakefield's Creating from the Spirit: Living Each Day as a Creative Act is scheduled by Ballantine for July publication ("This book challenges the 'dangerous nirvanas' of drugs and alcohol as false agents of inspiration, examines the stereotype of tortured artists . . ., and contrasts them with portraits of fulfilled and healthy creators"). See Jim Harbaugh's review, above. . . . "Ben Sanderson, played devastatingly by Nicholas Cage in 'Leaving Las Vegas' [based on a novel by John O'Brien], is something other than the usual movie drunk. Nothing about him offers golden opportunities to the good Samaritan. Already in the terminal stages of alcoholism as the film begins, Ben seems to sense his fate and want to face it in his own way, with crazy bravado and a whiff of desperate romance. This small, searing film watches transfixingly as Ben plays out his final hand" (Janet Maslin, The New York Times 27 Oct 1995: B8). Other comments on the film: "[W]hat alienated and eventually bored me was that there was no trace of that part of Ben that wasn't an alcoholic . . . . This character exists on screen only to drink and die. Contrast Ben with the Consul in . . . Under the Volcano. In the latter we see not only the drunken mess but what is buried under the mess: acute wit, a capacity for love and compassion, an artist's sensibility" (Richard Alleva, Commonweal 23 Feb 1996: 17); "[T]here is not one single moment of reality the entire length of it. . . . [W]hat extraordinary ideas people have about not only alcoholics but boozers and heavy drinkers and habitual drinkers, all of whom are different in their ways. I am not quite sure how it is that I first got my reputation as it still seems to stand. . . . Mind you, I wouldn't particularly like to see a film about me co-directed by my ex-wives. . . . Ray Milland in The Lost Weekend came nearest to being the drunk as I know him to be, mainly because he was a miserable sod. So am I. And I shall become more of one the more people distort the business of having one over just the one" (Jeffrey Bernard, The Spectator (London): 2 March 1996: 56)

[Editor's Note: Nicholas Cage won the Academy Award this year for best actor for this performance, as Milland did for Lost Weekend]. . . . "One problem in this important but only partly successful biography may be inherent in telling the story of an alcoholic writer. There is something circular in our interest in the life of any novelist. . . . The circle becomes vicious when the writer is an alcoholic, because alcoholics develop predictable, obsessive routines, both excruciating and boring to witness" (Tony Hilfer, reviewing Robert Polito's Savage Art: A Biography of Jim Thompson [Knopf 1995], in The New York Times Book Review 15 Nov 1995: 30). . . . Debby Rosenthal has proposed a special session, "Alcohol and Religion in American Literature," for the 1996 MLA convention (Mod. Langs. & Lit., Case Western Reserve U, Cleveland, OH 44106). . . . "In fact the vanguard artists did not on the whole show many signs of high self-regard. To the contrary, many of them were alcoholics; some, like Jackson Pollock, destroyed themselves directly through drink; others died very young as a result of drinking too much for their bodies to absorb, as in the case of my Bennington friend, the writer Shirley Jackson; others simply killed themselves outright. What the votaries of self-esteem never seem to remember is the extraordinarily high correlation between artistic achievements . . . and severe depression and suicide" (Joseph Adelson, "Down With Self-Esteem," Commentary Feb 1996: 37). . . . St. Martin's Press has just published The Cocktail: The Influence of Spirits on the American Psyche, by Joseph Lanza. . . . "The sober community is sometimes criticized for its insulariy and incestuousness" (Neal Karlen, "Greetings from Minnesober: Take a Tour of the Gopher State--the Land of Recovery, Home of the Inner Child, Capital of the Co-Dependent," The New York Times Magazine 28 May 1995: 35). . . . Data: The Brown University Digest of Addiction Theory and Application is an "authoritative review of recent research in alcohol and other drugs," now in its 15th year of publication (ISSN 1040-6328). . . . The Whitney Museum of American Art in New York has mounted a major exhibition: "Beat Culture and the New America: 1950-1965" (it will be at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis this summer; the M. H. de Young Memorial Museum in San Francisco in October). . . . "It's called designer dying. . . . It's a hip, chic, vogue thing to do. It's the most elegant thing you do. Even if you've lived your life like a complete slob, you can die with terrific style"--Timothy Leary, quoted in "At Death's Door, the Message Is Tune In, Turn On, Drop In," by Laura Mansnerus (The New York Times 26 Nov 1995: 7). . . . In Mark As Recovery Story: Alcoholism and the Rhetoric of Gospel Mystery, John C. Mellon "interprets the Gospel of Mark in terms of alcoholism and Twelve-Step recovery" (U of Illinois P 1995). . . . Social History of Alcohol Review 30-31 (Spring-Fall 1995) contains a bibliographic/historiographic essay, "Women and Temperance in America," by Catherine G. Murdock (51-60). . . . Alcohol

and Drug Research: A Directory of Anthropologists has just been published by the American Anthropological Association. . . . The contents of Dionysos. vols. 1-5 are now listed on the World Wide Web: www.uwsuper.edu/dep/other/dionysos/ The contents of vol 6- will be added. . . Back copies of the first five volumes of Dionysos are available ($3.00 per issue; $40.00 for the 5 vols., postpaid). Send requests, with check, to: Jim Dan Hill Library, U of Wisconsin-Superior, Superior, WI 54880 (715/394-8346). . . . "After the White House what is there to do but drink?"--Franklin Pierce ("Presidential Bellyaches," The New York Times 8 Oct 1995).

--Roger Forseth

**Editor's Note: Marc Redfield has graciously provided Dionysos with a list of the presenters at the Claremont conference. All will be contacted and asked if they would like to submit their papers for consideration in future issues of this journal.

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Jim Harbaugh, S.J. is working on a second book of 12 Step meditations, Getting the Love of God, which draws on The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola. He teaches in the Addiction Studies Program at Seattle University.

Andrew S. McClure is a graduate student in English at the University of New Mexico. His interests are in American Literature from the colonial era to the present; he is currently completing his dissertation on Native American Literature.