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WRITING LIVES OF ADDICTION:  
A CONTEXT FOR LITERARY BIOGRAPHY AND CRITICISM

by

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis presents a series of case studies demonstrating that literary biography and literary criticism concerning writers who abused alcohol or who lived in relationships with those who abused alcohol can be enriched by an interdisciplinary appreciation of contemporary addiction theory.

It begins with an overview of the various constructions of addiction to alcohol and to other substances and activities, ways of thinking about harmful dependencies which have dominated Western attitudes since the eighteenth century. It then identifies the directions current addiction research and therapy have taken and focuses particularly on the paradigm in most frequent clinical use today; that is, the understanding of alcohol addiction as a disorder not merely of the individual subject but of a constellation of codependent relationships. Literary biography has all too often either trivialized or sensationalized the addictions of writers and their families, and in doing so, has made it difficult for critics to address textual questions which could be resolved more appropriately with a sensitivity to addiction theory in general and to the circumstances of the writer's life in particular.

To demonstrate that current thinking about alcoholism and codependency provides a valid way to read works by

writers who were either alcoholic themselves or who lived in domestic relationships with alcoholics, it presents "case studies" from eras prior to our own and argues that authorial anxiety about alcohol abuse and addiction was not only a significant factor in the production of the texts but in the preoccupations within the works themselves in ways which repay close reading. It provides readings of well-known nineteenth and twentieth-century novels: Anne Brontë's The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment, Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano, and Evelyn Waugh's The Sword of Honour trilogy. In doing so, it seeks to demonstrate that anxiety about alcohol abuse in the context of marriage and parent-child relationships is a recurring and meaningful element, attention to which deepens a reader's appreciation of the writers' theme and technique and, moreover, challenges—or complements, in unexpected ways—insights from more conventional criticism.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I am grateful for the limitless patience of my loving family, especially my children Caitlin and Geordie and my husband, Bruce—who must have wondered at times if this thesis was becoming an addiction.

In gratitude to them, to my sister Carol Ann, and to all the members of my immediate and extended family, friends,

students and colleagues whose interest in either addiction studies or literature rekindled my own, I offer this work.

And in memory of those whose experiences first drew me in this direction:

Et faciet Dominus exercituum omnibus populis in monte hoc convivium pinguium, convivium vindemiae, pinguium medullatorum, vindemiae defaecatae. Et praecipitabit in monte isto faciem vinculi colligati super omnes populos et telam quam orditus est super omnes nationes. Praecipitabit mortem in sempiternum et auferet Dominus Deus lacrimam, ab omni facie et opprobrium populi sui auferet de universa terra, quia Dominus locutus est.

Isaiah 25:6-9

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## INTRODUCTION

Many observers have noted the presence of alcohol abuse and other addictions in the lives and work of major literary artists. These readers and critics have done so with varying degrees of interest in, or success at, explicating the significance of that presence, partly because the history of post-Enlightenment constructions of addiction itself is complex. The most important tendency during the last two centuries, a tendency not without its own complicating effects, has been to "medicalize" the concept of addiction, shifting the emphasis from addiction as the property of the substance to addiction as the property of the individual who consumes the substance. This trajectory has not resulted in any unanimity on the origins of addiction, however; learned journals present competing theoretical models of addiction and conflicting empirical accounts that appear to confirm the value of those models. Moreover, the scope of discourses regarding addictions has been extended in two directions beyond these traditional poles: one moves beyond substance addictions to "process addictions" (e.g., gambling, sex, writing), while the other moves beyond the individual to the social network of relationships, familial and other, in which that individual functions.

Since the mid-1980s, the most significant contemporary construction of addiction to alcohol (and by extension, of addiction to other substances and activities) is the concept

of codependency, a paradigm whose impact is far-reaching in professional therapy, non-professional or self-help groups, and popular culture. Much criticism of fiction written by or about alcoholics is heavily dependent on older, outmoded models of addiction. Some literary critics have begun to integrate this contemporary manner of reading addiction into their reading of addiction-related fiction; this exploratory study seeks to continue to fill this gap. All the examples of lives and texts chosen for this exploration—those by Anne Brontë, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Evelyn Waugh, and Malcolm Lowry—predate contemporary addiction theories: I have deliberately made no extended reference to modern fiction that might have been influenced by those theories. Moreover, despite the prominence of addiction in their texts, these writers—with the exception of Lowry—have received little critical attention concerning this dimension of “addiction” in their literary lives.

Perhaps best known because it has moved beyond the confines of professionally-directed addiction treatment centers into two flourishing genres—self-help “recovery” books and “celebrity pathographies”—codependency<sup>1</sup> has been lampooned in parodies (such as those on Saturday Night Live) and attacked and defended in mainstream journalism.<sup>2</sup> Reacting

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<sup>1</sup> This neologism has been the victim of variant spellings, with and without the hyphen, with and without the capital “D,” hence the apparent inconsistencies in the citations.

<sup>2</sup> See Wendy Kaminer, I’m Dysfunctional. You’re Dysfunctional: The Recovery Movement and Other Self-Help Fashions (New York: Vintage, 1993).

to some of the more extravagant and poorly argued claims of some of its popularizers who have extended its meaning until in signifying almost everything, the label has come to mean virtually nothing, serious researchers now explore and evaluate codependency rigorously in scholarly and professional journals concerned with alcoholism. It has therefore become an important way of speaking about addiction, whether at a demotic or an elite level, and it provides a way to address addiction-related fiction.

The first chapter of my dissertation will situate codependency and its relevance for our readings of addiction-related texts in an historical frame of reference. This chapter, therefore, will begin by briefly tracing the nineteenth- and twentieth-century evolution of contemporary definitions/models of alcoholism: at one end of the spectrum the disease or medical model, and at the other, the psychosocial model, an umbrella term for several other psychological and sociological models. I have chosen this time frame for two reasons: first, because of the emergence of literary biography in this era, and second, because historians generally agree that pre-Enlightenment concerns about alcohol abuse were understood in terms of sin or vice. Though never entirely abandoned, the terms were nevertheless heavily secularized (and sometimes romanticized) in their nineteenth- and twentieth-century forms. This chapter will go on to summarize the research on the links between addiction and creativity in general and to provide representative

examples of the speculations regarding these links as they appear in specific literary biographies of canonical writers known to have abused alcohol. In a third step, it will identify and illustrate the ways in which literary critics have made use of these models when attempting to explicate problems in fiction concerning alcoholic characters. The initial effort of this chapter, then, will clarify some questions which remain to be addressed by contemporary studies in addiction and literature.

The second effort of the opening chapter will be to re-examine the theoretical shift during the 1980s—from the conception of alcoholism as a phenomenon of the individual who drinks addictively to the conception of alcoholism as a “family system”—by reviewing the clinical research and outlining the possibilities which that research affords for generating fresh readings of addiction-related fiction. This “family systems” approach obviously could be useful in explicating fiction by non-addicted writers about alcoholics and their relationships. It will become evident, I think, that there may be special implications for the readings of texts written by alcoholics and/or by codependents about alcoholics, codependents, and other characters who, on the surface, appear to have no explicit anxieties concerning alcohol. A related and very substantial critical problem concerns the predicament of the literary biographer of the alcoholic writer who inadvertently colludes in the suppression of the significance of the problem drinking,

thereby becoming, as it were, codependent himself. A particularly important cluster of concepts, to be explored in subsequent chapters, concerns the roles, according to clinicians, commonly (if not invariably) taken on by members of an alcoholic family, a cluster the critical understanding of which requires a study of the dynamics which perpetuate (not merely initiate) addiction. The roles to be explored are these: the "Chief Enabler" (usually the spouse); the "Family Hero"; the rebellious (and frequently substance-abusing) "Scapegoat"; the "Mascot"; and the "Lost Child".

Of the maladaptive family roles identified by therapists, that of the ironically named "Family Hero" is particularly significant because it recognizes and accounts for an otherwise infrequently noticed or poorly understood linkage between what is perceived by external observers to be high achievement and what is subjectively experienced as failure by the compulsive, overachieving codependent Hero. Family Heroes use their achievements to distract attention from, and to repair damage done by, the problem drinker ("rescuing," in the jargon of addictions). Because their sense of self-esteem becomes more and more focused on rescuing, they—like their siblings—tend to reproduce these dysfunctional relationships outside their families of origin as well, in marriages, workplace relationships, friendships, etc. One sees a tendency to assume extraordinary responsibilities: heroic achievements, deeds whose scope or pace seems impossible, compassionate "rescues" of others in

trouble (especially but not exclusively of other alcohol abusers), and a recurring sense of the inadequacy or futility of these achievements. The reproduction of these dysfunctional relationships outside of the family nexus may account for the generalized sense one has in reading fiction which does not explore the predicament of the family that the entire world, perhaps modernity itself, is in some way addicted. Clinicians argue that, for an alcoholic or codependent, the untreated addiction is central and will probably affect all aspects of his or her life in ways in which observers with no specialized awareness of addictions—including biographers and critics—are likely to deny or misconstrue. If no writer can be appropriately read when deracinated from his or her historical context, and if alcohol abuse is part of that history, critics and biographers have an obligation to be sensitive to the implications of that context of abuse. These will include, I think, for both alcoholic and codependent writers, an unusual predilection for dualisms; questions about compulsion, will and reason; and anxieties about self-deception and the metaphysical or existential futility of heroic deeds, especially of rescuing others.

In the subsequent chapters, I will provide readings of selected nineteenth- and twentieth-century fiction in the light of current models of addiction, pointing out, when possible, how a contemporary addiction-sensitive reading can serve to bring to light critical problems unaddressed or

misconstrued by literary critics who ignore outright the presence of addiction or who approach it with outmoded paradigms.

Chapters 2 and 3 will examine some selected nineteenth-century fiction written by codependents in the light of the context so established. Chapter 2 will concern itself with Anne Brontë's The Tenant of Wildfell Hall (1848) and will argue that the author's experience of her brother Branwell's addictions affected the novel in significant ways. Branwell's drinking, drug use and gambling have long been understood to have been the models for the behaviour of the alcoholic first husband Arthur Huntingdon and his friends. What this study will demonstrate, however, is that the strategies employed by his wife Helen Graham to minimize the transmission of alcoholism to their son and her preference for the apparent stability of written communication over the comparatively unreliable spoken word are connected with one another and that both anticipate contemporary therapeutic understanding of addiction.

Chapter 3 will consider Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment (1866),<sup>3</sup> which, like most of his fiction, reveals an unusual preoccupation with alcohol abuse (e.g., Poor Folk; The Brothers Karamazov). But Crime and Punishment is particularly fertile ground for an examination of the impact

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<sup>3</sup> Dostoevsky merits a place within a study of English-language fiction because of the impact of his travels in England on his interest in social problems (e.g., his horror at the Whitechapel prostitutes), his own strong interest in English writers (e.g., Dickens), and because of his own subsequent influence on English-language novelists.

of familial alcoholism on literary production. Dostoevsky's relationships with his alcoholic father and brother, his representation of the alcoholic Marmeladov family, and the psychology of Raskolnikov are all illuminated by an understanding of codependency.

Chapters 4 and 5 deal with important twentieth-century fiction. Contemporary addiction theory illuminates new dimensions of both Malcolm Lowry's masterpiece Under the Volcano and the fiction of Evelyn Waugh, whose preoccupation with alcohol abuse has been neglected.

Chapter 4 studies Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano (1947), long recognized as the novel par excellence about the alcoholic individual. It should also be read, however, as a text about the phenomenon of codependency. Reading Under the Volcano as a text about the maladaptive equilibrium of alcoholic relationships instead of focusing disproportionately on the Consul alone enhances our appreciation of Lowry's skill in characterization (often undervalued by critics) because it clarifies the problematic relationships of Yvonne, Hugh, and Jacques. Lowry's portraits of these codependents who orbit the Consul anticipate a contemporary therapeutic insight: the paradoxical alignment of rescuing with betrayal. The three who tried hardest to rescue him were also those who betrayed him most deeply. In the light of current understanding of codependency, Under the Volcano and other fiction involving alcoholism should be reconsidered as decentered texts.

Waugh's A Handful of Dust (1934), Brideshead Revisited (1945), The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold (1957), and The Sword of Honour Trilogy (1965)<sup>4</sup> particularly invite consideration. Waugh's alcohol and choral and bromide addiction have long been recognized, but, again, the link between his own substance abuse and his writing (with the exception of Sebastian Flyte's alcoholism in Brideshead Revisited and the eponymous protagonist's dilemma in The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold) has yet to be studied. As in Huxley's fiction, to which Waugh's texts bear a superficial similarity, the protagonists function in an "intoxicated" world populated by astonishingly heavy drinkers and others with comparable obsessions. The proliferation of plot details involving alcohol abuse includes disasters such as accidental deaths of children and the fall of governments. Waugh's conservative horror at what he saw as the disintegration of western civilization is especially evident in his preoccupation, as noted by critics, with marital infidelity and divorce. No less deserving of exploration are the roles alcohol abuse plays in this disintegration and the apparent ambivalence of the authorial voice to problem drinking, both of which have been much neglected by critics. This ambivalence, I suggest, can be seen in the marriages and other relationships in the constellations around Waugh's protagonists.

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<sup>4</sup> Originally published as Men at Arms (1952), Officers and Gentlemen (1955), and Unconditional Surrender (1961).

Among the conclusions to be drawn in the final chapter will be an appraisal of the role of the usefulness of current models of addiction as a way of reading literary biography, fiction in which an alcoholic and his or her family are prominent, and also fiction in which intoxication and addiction are used as tropes for modern social and political problems. It will also draw some conclusions regarding the significance for literary production of a writer's first-hand experience of alcoholism. Unless one rejects biographical criticism as utterly valueless, one must take a writer's addiction experiences seriously.

CHAPTER 1  
THE CONTEXT OF CODEPENDENCY

At the close of the twentieth century, it is clear that interest in addiction has reached an unprecedented level of concern in both popular culture and scholarly research. Tabloids, talk shows, websites, an apparently limitless proliferation of 12-step groups for every imaginable dysfunction, residential and non-residential treatment programs, endless self-help books (over two hundred available from Amazon.Com on codependency alone); memoirs such as New York Post writer Pete Hamill's A Drinking Life,<sup>1</sup> the Pulitzer Prize-winning Angela's Ashes<sup>2</sup> (and its author's sibling's companion volume Monk Swimming) and Newsweek Bureau chief Christopher Dickey's portrait of his alcoholic father, the poet James Dickey;<sup>3</sup> anthologies such as The Faber Book of Drink, Drinkers and Drinking,<sup>4</sup> The Invisible Enemy: Alcoholism and the Short Story<sup>5</sup> and Ounce of Cure: Alcohol in the Canadian Short Story;<sup>6</sup> recent biographies such as James

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<sup>1</sup> Pete Hamill, A Drinking Life (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Frank McCourt, Angela's Ashes (New York: Scribner, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Dickey Summer of Deliverance: A Memoir of Father and Son (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> Simon Rae, ed. The Faber Book of Drink, Drinkers and Drinking (London: Faber and Faber, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> Miriam Dow and Jennifer Regan, eds. The Invisible Enemy: Alcoholism and the Modern Short Story (St. Paul: Graywolf, 1989).

<sup>6</sup> Mark Anthony Jarman, ed. Ounce of Cure: Alcohol in the Canadian Short Story (Victoria: Beach Holme, 1992).

King's The Life of Margaret Laurence<sup>7</sup> which do not attempt to hide their subjects' struggles with alcohol; and special focus conferences and journals such as Dionysos . . . one might be forgiven for finding the sheer volume intoxicating, if not addictive, and for wondering if anything is left to be said.

The answer is yes.

As is the case with literary studies, the proliferation of concepts and methodologies concerning addiction can have a bewildering effect. Papers on models of addiction frequently allude to the analogy of the blind men, each grasping a different part of the elephant and developing a different vision of the whole.<sup>8</sup> There are a number of different debates regarding the nature of alcoholism(s): the most important of these is whether it (or they) is/are a disease. A related question is whether alcoholism is one entity or several superficially similar disorders differentiated by various causes and effects. But there is even dispute regarding the validity of the word "alcoholism" itself: an editorial in the respected British Journal of Addictions and the variety of responses to it indicates something of the depth and breadth of disagreement on the problem.<sup>9</sup> Inconsistencies in the

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<sup>7</sup> James King, The Life of Margaret Laurence (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> See G. Alan Marlatt and Kim Fromme "Metaphors for Addiction," Journal of Drug Issues 17 (Winter, 1987): 9-28.

<sup>9</sup> See "No 'Alcoholism' Please, We're British," British Journal of Addiction 82 (10, October, 1987):1059-60 and "The Future of the Word 'Alcoholism,'" Ibid. :1061-71.

definitions of the words 'alcoholism,' 'problem drinking,' 'dependency,' 'disease,' and even 'health' are problematic. Some commentators, for example, use the terms 'alcoholic,' 'problem drinker,' 'substance abuser,' and other terms more or less interchangeably; others distinguish carefully among shades of meaning, and some eliminate certain terms entirely: for example, some see 'alcoholism' as referring to too many different problems caused by too wide a range of different factors to be useful. As it is still in very wide use, however, not merely by the general public but by a majority of researchers and clinicians (for example, it figures in the titles of several prominent journals), its use will be retained here.

On the vexed question of whether alcohol addiction is a disease, there are, broadly speaking, two schools of thought. At the risk of oversimplifying an immensely complex problem, we can identify the first as the disease or medical model, which views addiction as an illness, and the other as the psycho-social or adaptive model, an umbrella term for several other psychological and sociological models.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> David Ward's excellent paper identifies seven approaches: the Alcoholics Anonymous Conception, the Psychoanalytic Conception, the Medical Model Conception, the Family Interaction Conception, the Behavioural Conception, the Sociological Conception, and the Transactional Analysis Conception. Some of these share much common ground (especially the AA and medical models), and some are in radical opposition to each other on these issues which have to do with definitions of alcoholism, etiology, alcoholic personality, epidemiology, treatment, and prognosis. "Conceptions of the Nature and Treatment of Alcoholism," *Journal of Drug Issues* 15 (Winter, 1985): 3-28. For a similar and valuable overview, also intended for therapists, see Ann Lawson and Gary Lawson, *Alcoholism and the Family: A Guide to Treatment and Prevention* (Gaithersburg, Maryland: Aspen Publishers, Inc.

We will, however, confine ourselves for the moment to the discussion of these two broad interpretive categories. The first is the AA/medical model belief, bolstered by the writings of E.M. Jellinek (and, as many commentators have noted, by misinterpretations of his writing)<sup>11</sup> and by a number of clinical and laboratory studies which have suggested that addiction to ethanol is caused wholly or in part by a physiological problem of some individuals which produces a spiraling addictive response to that substance. According to this model, true alcoholics (who at some point in their drinking careers drink compulsively once they begin a drinking bout) differ in kind, not in degree, from other drinkers—even from other heavy drinkers. Jellinek distinguishes five types of alcoholism and suggests that other patterns remain yet to be described. Of these five, only two, the Gamma and Delta types, are generally recognized as embodying the disease process. According to Jellinek, Alpha alcoholism is pure psychological dependence; though resistant to treatment, the Alpha alcoholic does not experience withdrawal if he stops drinking, nor does he progress through irreversible stages. The Beta alcoholic experiences physical complications such as cirrhosis but is

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Treatment and Prevention (Gaithersburg, Maryland: Aspen Publishers, Inc. 1998) 3-20. For an analysis of the often ignored distinctions between the medical and AA models, see William R. Miller and Ernest Kurtz, "Models of Alcoholism Used in Treatment: Contrasting AA and Other Perspectives With Which It Is Often Confused," Journal of Studies on Alcohol 55 (1994): 159-66.

<sup>11</sup> See Paul M. Roman and Terry Christine Blum, "Notes on the New Epidemiology of Alcoholism in the U.S.A.," Journal of Drug Issues 17 (4, 1987): 321-32.

not physically or psychologically dependent. Gamma and Delta alcoholics are the so-called "true" alcoholics: without therapeutic intervention, Gammas and Deltas progress through ever-worsening phases. Gammas shift from psychological to physical dependence, experience loss of control drinking (that is, they drink against their own wishes), suffer from withdrawal (which therefore requires medical supervision if drinking ceases), and suffer the most serious social and financial consequences. Gammas can abstain temporarily; Deltas appear to drink more moderately and can control their intake on a given occasion, but cannot go more than a day without drinking. Epsilon alcoholics are periodic or "binge" drinkers. Gamma alcoholism is more common in the United States perhaps because of the cultural legacy of Prohibition; Delta alcoholism is more common in Europe.<sup>12</sup>

According to the disease model, one of two problems exists with so-called Gamma alcoholics: they may be born with an inability to process alcohol normally, or they may acquire this problem through metabolic damage caused by excessive drinking. In either case, the result is the aforementioned "loss-of-control drinking." That is, the consumption of one drink sets up an irresistible craving for an indefinite sequence which the drinker is powerless to stop. Because the freedom to drink normally—which is to say, in a harmfree fashion—is replaced at some point by the compulsion to drink, abstinence is an essential feature of recovery. There is

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<sup>12</sup> Ann Lawson and Gary Lawson, 4-5.

some experimental evidence that the neuronal activity of alcoholics is measurably different from that of non-addicted drinkers<sup>13</sup> and also that there is a genetic basis to addiction. Partly as a way of eliminating the skid-row stereotype of alcoholics (an image which, for comparatively well-heeled problem drinkers and their families, often retards the recognition of the reality of their dependency), proponents of the AA/medical model argue that psychological and socio-economic problems are consequences—not causes—of alcoholism, and that alcoholism is a disorder or disease which afflicts all classes, occupations, ethnic groups, and virtually every other social category one can imagine. Statistical support for this position comes from the undeniable human variety one encounters at AA meetings and at professionally-run treatment facilities. In fact, specialized treatment facilities in the U.S. are something of a growth industry; and in addition to those which treat people from all walks of life, there are centres whose only clients are alcoholic physicians, and others which deal only with alcoholic clergy. Thus the cross-section of alcoholics in recovery is understood to be evidence that addiction is a disease and is not a consequence of a character defect.

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<sup>13</sup> Brief summaries for lay readers on the significance of the neurotransmitters dopamine, serotonin and norepinephrine in mood regulation can be found in Sharon Wegscheider-Cruse, Understanding Co-dependency (Deerfield Beach: Health Communications, 1989); and TIME (149) 18: May 7 1997, 36-43.

Although this approach, which has dominated the popular imagination for approximately twenty-five years, defines itself as new, its detractors now label it "the traditional approach." Indeed historians generally trace its origins to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, citing Benjamin Rush's Inquiry into the Effects of Ardent Spirits Upon the Human Body and Mind (1784)<sup>14</sup> and Thomas Trotter, who in 1804 identified it as a "disease of the mind"<sup>15</sup>

Although literary and historical examples of inebriation and addiction go back at least to Euripides, most Western historians agree that urbanization and industrialization in Great Britain and Europe were significant factors in both the acceleration of alcohol consumption and the medical and sociological categorizing of its harmful effects, including habituation.<sup>16</sup> In the nineteenth century we see clearly the roots of the double sense of alcohol addiction as illness and as maladaptive social functioning. In a rural economy, excessive consumption of ale, cider, and wine may have been

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<sup>14</sup> John Crowley, The White Logic: Alcoholism and Gender in American Modernist Fiction (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), 4.

<sup>15</sup> Tom Dardis, The Thirsty Muse: Alcohol and the American Writer (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1989) 12. See also Harry Gene Levine, "The Discovery of Addiction: Changing Conceptions of Habitual Drunkenness in America," Journal of Studies on Alcohol 39(1978): 143-74. Since the temperance movement was a significant force throughout the English-speaking world, studies in American, British and Canadian social history are mutually illuminating.

<sup>16</sup> The details in this summary are drawn from Brian Harrison, Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England 1815-1872 (London: Faber and Faber, 1971) and Jean Charles Sournia, A History of Alcoholism, trans. Nick Hindley and Gareth Stanton (New York: Blackwell, 1990).

infrequent and ritualized for celebrations; drunkenness could be the goal and the effect, but was largely confined to holidays. Any negative effects of workplace drinking which might impair a worker's or artisan's workday productivity would be less evident in a rural or village setting than in the industrial venues under the watchful gaze of factory managers, or, to take a more dramatic example, in the rapidly escalating complexity of transportation networks. An inebriated rider or coachman was likely to suffer or cause far less injury than, say, a locomotive engineer or steamboat captain.

Some historians, therefore, argue that the nineteenth-century reform movements against alcohol abuse were a delayed reaction to the social crises engendered by eighteenth-century socio-economic changes, which sent huge numbers of workers to cities ill-equipped to shelter them. Although inebriation and addiction were far from rare among the wine-drinking upper classes, it was the widespread consumption of plentiful and cheap distilled spirits which was perceived to be a threat to the moral and social fabric of the nation. Gin was cheaper than clean water or milk and often safer than the latter; few other beverages were available. (In the first years of the temperance movement, beer was promoted as temperance beverage.) Most medicines, not just the infamous laudanum, were concoctions dissolved in alcohol; some alcoholism, therefore, was iatrogenic, and physicians who saw alcohol abuse as a medical problem faced resistance from

their colleagues as well as from their clients who believed that spirits conferred energy and health on the drinker.

Spirits undoubtedly provided a temporary escape from the misery of the slums. The need for the working classes to exercise self-control was thus a theme of the temperance movement and was encouraged by those who feared the revolutionary possibilities of drunken mobs. Asylums were built to house the indigent mad; chronic dipsomania was perceived to be a species of madness and thought to be heritable. The nineteenth century, therefore, saw alcohol addiction as both a medical and a social question.

Because of our tendency to identify the entirety of the temperance movement with its late and extreme phase—the agitation for Prohibition—the achievement of the earlier phase, which was successful in virtually eliminating day-long alcohol use from the workplace, is sometimes undervalued. The Prohibitionist element, successful temporarily and only so in America, inadvertently made furtive and heavy alcohol consumption glamorous, thereby encouraging addiction, some argue. The modern "alcohol movement" and its version of the disease concept arose after the repeal of Prohibition and the founding of AA, but its roots are almost a century and a half older.

The disease concept of alcoholism is the model of addiction accepted by many credible and influential organizations, among them the American Medical Association, the Canadian Medical Association, the American Psychiatric

Association, the National Council on Alcoholism, the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (both American bodies), and the World Health Organization. But its hegemony is being challenged, principally in the learned journals, and occasionally in the popular media. As is the case with most disputes which claim to be scholarly, each side accuses the other of being "reductionist."

Proponents of the second interpretive category, which includes a variety of psycho-social alternatives, argue that one can in fact be addicted to anything. Psychologist Stanton Peele, for example, tirelessly argues that the propensity for an addiction is a property of the person and not of the substance, for two reasons: first it is obvious that some people can be addicted to experiences (destructive personal relationships, for example) and that these addictions are analogous to substance dependencies; second, that it is common for people to be heavy users of substances reputed (falsely, he says) to be addictive without themselves ever becoming dependent on them. Peele concludes that no substance is inherently addictive, but that the huge personal and social problems associated with addiction must be addressed by clinical help based on models other than the disease or medical model. He calls for an all-embracing model of addiction which will account for alcoholism and all other harmful, compulsive dependencies.

Peele does not reduce the issues to the level of a hunt for that mythical beast, the compulsive or addictive

personality, but focuses on social factors which can be identified as contributing to any given addiction. Among these factors, he identifies value systems, social class, ethnicity, and prior history of personality disorders as contributing factors to addictions. In doing so, he mounts a strong attack on the statistical reliability of studies conducted by disease-concept theorists. The methodological problem which he and others identify is that statistical conclusions which are inferred from studies of self-selected sample groups (which is always the case with AA and usually the case at professional facilities) cannot be accurately projected onto the general population. Peele and other psycho-social critics point to epidemiological studies which consistently demonstrate that, although any individuals from any group might be alcoholic, their statistical chances of being so are very far from being equal. The slogan that "Alcoholism is an equal opportunity destroyer" may be catchy and politically correct, but it is not statistically defensible. Certain groups are undeniably at greater risk than others. Ethnicity is a factor (for example, the Irish have a far greater rate of alcoholism than do Jewish people) and so is social class (middle and upper middle class persons have far fewer problems with alcohol abuse than do persons from the so-called underclass). The psycho-social critiques suggest that the disease concept (at least in the narrow sense of the term) is a powerful piece of scientifically unsubstantiated folklore, appealing because it is a useful

heuristic device for encouraging people to get into treatment, and because it seems to be consistent with shallow or perverse notions of American egalitarianism.<sup>17</sup>

Peele's critique, to which we will return, is very significant partly because of the questions it raises regarding the role of culture, particularly American culture. Any study of the historiography of alcohol addiction will show that the American ways of framing addiction experience have been profoundly influential in both social history and in literary analysis; although studies of British and European writers affected by alcohol abuse are certainly not lacking, they are outnumbered by American studies of American writers similarly afflicted and by American studies of those same English and European writers. Dennis Saleebey's assessment of the role of culture in the American experience of addiction is especially intriguing in the light of the tradition of the "American Dream" criticism which has flourished in commentary on writers such as F. Scott

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<sup>17</sup> Serious scholarly interest in addiction is not confined to the study of alcoholism, of course, as it is universally recognized that although alcohol dependency is undoubtedly the most serious form of compulsive behaviour in our culture, it has much in common with other harmful dependencies. Eating disorders are a case in point, and their epidemiology is fascinating, particularly when the epidemiological mysteries of alcoholism are kept in view. For example, alcoholism is an almost unknown problem in Jewish culture, but the incidence of eating disorders is much higher than in the population in general. In fact, obesity is only half-humourously referred to as Jewish alcoholism. Eating disorders are more prevalent in women than in men, and obesity is largely (though not exclusively) a problem of lower income groups while bulimia and anorexia are disorders only of middle and upper-middle class women. See Stanton Peele, "A Moral Vision of Addiction: How People's Values Determine Whether They Become and Remain Drug Addicts," Journal of Drug Issues 17(Spring, 1987): 187-215.

Fitzgerald (along with Hemingway and Faulkner, Fitzgerald is the canonical writer whose alcoholism has attracted the most commentary from observers), but it could be extended to any English-speaking or European community whose values are secular and capitalist.<sup>18</sup> Saleebey's thesis is that there are elements of American culture which encourage all addictions--"blooms from the same bush" (19)--and put everyone at risk. The ideology of individualism denies the genuine need for sociability, dependence, community, and so on. Frustration of this need contributes to the American "fascination with 'romance' and the perverse and pervasive interest in the doings of 'celebrities'" (20). At the same time, the ideology of capitalism offers the spurious and inadequate alternative of limitless consumption of substances and experiences to address that deeply felt but unacknowledged need. Fetishism replaces genuine meaning-making. The ethics of "staple values" (Ivan Illich's term) "support consumption, passivity, dependence and an external locus of control" and lead to a variety of delusions, for instance "that we can buy [author's emphasis] human qualities (e.g., friendship, or sexual allure) or solutions to human problems (e.g., a happy, exciting marriage); or states of mind (e.g., ecstasy [sic])." Hence, "[t]he addict is consumer par excellence. . . ." (21).

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<sup>18</sup> Dennis Saleebey, "A Social Psychological Perspective on Addiction: Themes and Disharmonies," Journal of Drug Issues 15 (Winter, 1985): 17-28.

Similarly, Craig MacAndrew locates addiction in our wider culture and history.<sup>19</sup> For MacAndrew, teleology, not biology, is the issue. He argues that our Western vulnerability to addictions is rooted in what he calls our "fundamental addiction" to our "object self," a post-Enlightenment, desacralized way of looking at the world and the self. Our culture's uncritical acceptance of "scientism" has minimized the sense of possibilities for "vertical" growth to a higher level of being. This epistemological shift has replaced a sense of the self in its rightful place within an infinitely larger scheme of things which gave meaning and purpose to existence, a vision insisted on for centuries by philosophers and religious sages of various traditions. Our focus on the object self "in its present inflated and culturally destructive form" (162-65) condemns civilization to substance dependencies, among other problems.

In addition to its possible relevance to "American-Dream" fiction, MacAndrew's perspective would also be useful for Lowry's Under the Volcano. One thinks both of the irony of the Consul's interest in the Cabbala (a system which ought to bring its devotees closer to Godhead but which in the malignant spirituality of the Consul brings him to hell) and also of the sense of alienation which pervades the novel, the sense that modern civilization itself is on the brink of

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<sup>19</sup> Craig MacAndrew, "On the Possibility of an Addiction-Free Mode of Being," Journal Of Drug Issues 17 (Winter, 1987): 153-70.

collapsing into chaos (or as Lowry himself put it, that civilization itself was "drunk"<sup>20</sup>). American fiction thus has no monopoly on this sensibility; and the early fiction of Aldous Huxley and Evelyn Waugh—as well as that of Lowry—has at least a surface affinity with the joyless sense of intoxication for which MacAndrew attempts to account.

No synopsis of various psycho-social models of addiction is complete without a brief comment on the status of the psychoanalytic approach. Although Freudian and neo-Freudian paradigms remain influential in literary studies, psychoanalytical approaches to addiction among addiction professionals appear to be uncommon.<sup>21</sup> John McFadden, a rare exception, argues that unconscious guilt is a sufficient cause of substance abuse and is strongly reinforced in Western culture by moralistic belief systems. He suggests that moderate drinking, not abstinence (the violation of which induces great guilt in alcoholics who have absorbed

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<sup>20</sup> Malcolm Lowry, Under the Volcano (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1966) 121.

<sup>21</sup> Gary Forrest, a clinical psychologist, and John McFadden, a clergyman-psychotherapist interested in ego analysis, are rare exceptions. Of all the books cited in the bibliography, Forrest's is the only one which could be described as Freudian, and of all the journal articles, only McFadden's is Freudian. Forrest's Alcoholism, Narcissism, and Psychopathology is a curious exception that proves the rule, because for all his stress on the significance of infantile narcissistic injury as a developmental component of alcoholism, his work in fact devotes a good deal of attention to subsequent 'family modelling' and other interpersonal transactions as causative factors. See also psychiatrist Timmen Cermak's "The Relationship Between Codependence and Narcissism," in Tim Rivinus, ed. Children of Chemically Dependent Parents: Multiperspectives From the Cutting Edge (New York: Bruner/Mazel, 1991) 131-52 on the question of dual diagnosis; i.e., on treating a patient with pathology coexisting with codependency.

conventional AA/medical wisdom), is an appropriate treatment goal.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the brevity of its significance in treatment modalities, Freudian theory did stake its claim and had a lingering and disproportionate effect on literary biography, hence its inclusion here. More than a generation ago, psychiatrist Karl Menninger had argued that alcoholism was a disorder marked by orality and infantilism. Menninger's observations led him to conclude that alcoholics were deeply troubled by their subjective experience of parental abandonment or betrayal. Alcoholism was the consequence, and psychotherapy was the appropriate treatment. Although current thinking about addiction has virtually abandoned this approach, it remained alive and well among some literary critics whose use of it will be noted briefly in a later section. While the disinclination of treatment professionals to employ or recommend psychoanalysis may well be rooted in an ideological scepticism about the links between early childhood experience and subsequent alcohol addiction, it is more likely the case that pragmatism and compassion tip the scales in the direction of therapies which are perceived to be faster and more cost-effective. But even treatment professionals who do think that alcoholism is to some degree a consequence of early childhood experience do not recommend

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<sup>22</sup> Incidentally, this recommendation, suggested by a minority of other researchers for reasons different from McFadden's, is undoubtedly the single most incendiary subject of North American debate at the moment (It is a more acceptable treatment goal in the United Kingdom.) Forrest insists on the necessity of abstinence, and suggests that psychotherapy be accompanied by active participation in AA.

analysis until the client is well into recovery. The reason for their reluctance is that, in their experience, a client who is still drinking and is undergoing analysis typically interprets the long search for mysterious childhood traumas which 'cause' his problem drinking as permission to rationalize his current drinking. He thus refuses to take responsibility for his sobriety. Therefore, recovered alcoholics and treatment professionals will argue that if there are emotional problems underlying the addiction, these cannot be identified accurately or treated until the client has achieved sobriety. Psychology and psychiatry are not scorned per se. However, recovering alcoholics and their families are cautioned by treatment professionals and AA to select therapists whose approaches to addiction are complementary to and consistent with those of mainstream addiction treatment. As public interest in addictions rises, more therapists who assimilate these approaches into their own practice are available, and classic Freudian therapy has been largely eclipsed.

Ironies abound; we will note only three here. One is that Peele's respected work on other harmful compulsions, especially addictions to experiences (e.g., running, eating disorders, and personal relationships) has become absorbed back into the current and considerably broadened popular notion of the disease model, a fact which clearly disturbs him. For example, his book Love and Addiction is praised and cited by feminist therapist Robin Norwood, author of Women

Who Love Too Much (1985),<sup>23</sup> one of the first works which purported to explain why certain women become addicted to various self-destructive relationships with men. Norwood calls this behaviour a 'disease'; she, like many popular writers and therapists, seems uninterested in the distinction between a metaphor and a synonym. A second is that the so-called disease or medical model is employed by addiction treatment professionals (or paraprofessionals, as some of their detractors insist on calling them) who, by and large, are people with training in social work and some sorts of therapy, but who are very rarely physicians. In actuality, despite the A.M.A.'s formal acceptance of the disease concept in 1969, it seems to be a matter of consensus that the average physician is reluctant to attempt to treat alcohol addiction and sees the problem as beyond (or beneath) his competence. Moreover, much has been made of the indisputable historical fact that this construction of addiction, though influential in the English-speaking world and elsewhere, is American; and in the American experience, the establishment of both the National Council on Alcoholism and the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, with their status, prestige, and access to media, was a triumph for a congressional lobby group heavily dominated by AA persons and

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<sup>23</sup> Robin Norwood, Women Who Love Too Much (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985).

others sympathetic to their philosophy.<sup>24</sup> It is often suggested that the counsellors and other treatment (para)professionals who urge the disease concept so strongly on their clients and on the public have done so because in pathologizing addictive disorders, they enhance their own prestige by borrowing authority from the medical profession. (One is reminded here, of course, of Foucault's account of the medicalization of madness in his Histoire de la Folie.)<sup>25</sup> A third irony, at least to the purists, is that despite their insistence on the disease nature of addiction, the treatment (para)professionals pragmatically and eclectically use therapeutic approaches which derive from other, psycho-social models, particularly the family interaction and transactional analysis models. These are not easily reconciled ideologically with one another. Thus, some observers are worried about a serious dissensus between researchers on one hand and clinicians on the other.

Three tendencies in recent years have emerged to fill this gap. The first is that research in the "hard" sciences has provided further evidence that there is a biochemical basis for addiction, that dopamine, serotonin, and norepinephrine, mood-regulating chemicals in the human brain, are modified by experiences—not just by substances. Hence behaviours such as gambling, sex, running (and yes, reading

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<sup>24</sup> Lincoln J. Fry, "Social Thought, Social Movements and Alcoholism: Some Implications of AA's Linkages with other Entities," Journal of Drug Issues 15 (Winter, 1985): 135-46.

<sup>25</sup> See Michel Foucault, "Madness and Civilization," The Foucault Reader ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984) 123-41.

and writing), could all be addictive in the narrowest sense of the term, not simply analogously so.<sup>26</sup> A related hypothesis under experimental investigation is that addictions can be auto-opioid; that is, one can become addicted to the chemicals one's own brain produces as a response to certain stressors such as exercising.<sup>27</sup> Second, clinicians' observations and the psycho-social theories derived from them are anecdotal and need empirically verifiable confirmation; research studies on social behaviour which challenge, extend, confirm, and "fine-tune" the claims made by clinicians that previously had the truth value of story have been and are being done.

In summary, it is clear that the complex dissensus regarding the origins of addiction has led to a necessary clinical eclecticism, and understanding the necessity for this therapeutic pragmatism is important in contextualizing the addiction issues which are relevant to the study of literary problems. Partly as a consequence of this pragmatic attitude towards the contemporary situation of the alcoholic, the third and most significant response to this gap has emerged: abandoning or at least indefinitely putting aside

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<sup>26</sup> For example, see J. Brisman and M. Siegel, "Bulimia and Alcoholism: Two Sides of the Same Coin?" Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment 1(1984) 113-18; and Joseph P. Frawley, "Neurobehavioral Model of Addiction," Journal Of Drug Issues 17(Winter, 1987): 29-46. For an accessible overview of current thinking on addiction and brain chemistry for lay readers, see J. Madeleine Nash, "The Chemistry of Addiction," TIME 149 (18, May 5, 1997): 37-42.

<sup>27</sup> Caroline Davis and Gordon Claridge, "The Eating Disorders as Addiction: A Psychobiological Perspective," Addictive Behaviors 23(4, 1998): 463-75.

the quest for the cause of addictions, many addiction theorists and clinicians have argued in the last fifteen years that the murky origins of alcoholism are far less important than whatever it is that currently keeps the addiction in place. This view of alcoholism is essentially dialogic in nature. For optimal recovery of the chemically-dependent individual, his or her family should get treatment too. The corollary is that family members of alcoholics—the codependents—develop very specific, predictable, identifiable problems which need to be addressed whether or not the alcoholic accepts treatment. Treating alcohol addiction as a familial rather than a purely individual disorder is now unquestionably the preferred therapeutic approach in North America and it is a source of insights, therefore, for reading addiction-related biography and fiction.

In its earliest incarnation, this 'systems approach' or 'family interaction model' was concerned with treating the family members merely to enhance the alcoholic's recovery. There was a simplistic and therefore severely flawed awareness that there was something about the dynamics of the family that was encouraging and reinforcing the addiction, and the family's worst secret fears—that they were somehow to blame—seemed to be confirmed by this approach. This view inevitably had to mature in order to accommodate the puzzling reality that there were many troubled families whose members obviously despised the problem drinking, and who consciously did everything they could think of to minimize the damage

done by the alcoholic, but to no avail. As this line of thinking evolved, it became apparent that the alcohol-related problems of the family members themselves were so serious that they ought not to be subordinated to those of the drinker. Thus the focus shifted from the alcoholic individual to the entire family. As psychiatrist Peter Steinglass concluded:

As alcoholism takes hold in the family, an interactive process occurs in which on the one hand family behaviour undergoes changes to accommodate alcoholic behaviour (a reactive response), while at the same time, alcoholism is becoming an organizing principle for the family life (an active response). Thus, even as these families try to co-opt alcoholism by adjusting their interactional behaviour to minimize the impact of the condition on family life, they are also finding alcoholism insidiously becoming a way of life.

It is this second aspect of the formula that contains the more serious consequence for the family. For the family not only acclimates itself to living with alcoholism, it also comes to count on certain types of alcohol-related behaviors for assistance in the overall regulation of its life. And as the family increasingly builds its daily life around alcohol-related behaviors and issues, it no longer suffices to think of it as a family

with an alcoholic member. Instead the term *Alcoholic Family* is now the appropriate one.”

One debate among those who counsel alcoholic families concerns the degree to which their problems differ from those experienced by other dysfunctional families, and a second concerns whether their relational difficulties precede or follow an addicted individual's substance abuse. I do not propose to digress further to attempt to answer these questions.” I allude to them only for the purpose of clarifying what is otherwise a perplexing tendency among some mass-market “recovery” writers to use the adjective “codependent” to apply to individuals whose emotional problems appear to result from over-investment in the lives of others but who have no direct connection with anyone's substance abuse. Thus the historical evolution of the term has been something like this: originally used (like the discarded but more precise term “co-alcoholic”) to describe a troubled person whose life revolves around a relationship with someone with an alcohol addiction, it has also come to be used to label a troubled person whose life revolves around someone else in a maladaptive relationship *resembling* the relationships in alcoholic marriages and families. The

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<sup>28</sup> Peter Steinglass, *The Alcoholic Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1987) 101-102.

<sup>29</sup> Readers wishing to pursue these questions will find items in the bibliography whose titles are self-explanatory. Of particular value is psychiatrist Timmen Cermak's “Diagnostic Criteria for Codependency” *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs* 18.1(1986): 15-20.

latter shift in usage is particularly prevalent (though not exclusively so) in opportunistic self-help tomes whose stunning conceptual sloppiness largely deserves the derision some journalists and other critics have accorded it.<sup>30</sup> It should be noted that although the term has thus taken on a life of its own in the patois of pop culture and has been abandoned, therefore, by some cautious clinicians (though still used with care by other responsible professionals and supported by experimental studies<sup>31</sup>) I am using codependency in this study in its original and much narrower sense to apply only to the unresolved emotional problems of individuals whose difficulties evolve in the context of their familial relationships with alcoholics—the difficulties examined with such precision by Peter Steinglass, who does not use the vexed term “codependent” at all.

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<sup>30</sup> For example, see David Rieff, “Victims All? Recovery, Codependency, and the Art of Blaming Somebody Else,” *Harper's* Oct. 1991: 49-56; Wendy Kaminer, *I'm Dysfunctional, You're Dysfunctional: The Recovery Movement and Other Self-Help Fashions* (New York: Vintage, 1993); and a solemn Heideggerian critique by Gary Greenberg, *The Self on the Shelf: Recovery Books and the Good Life* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

<sup>31</sup> In response to demands for more diagnostic rigour, researchers have conducted empirical studies. Those confirming the validity of the concepts described by clinicians include the following: Patricia V. Roehling and Eva Gaumont, “Reliability and Validity of the Codependent Questionnaire,” *Alcoholism Treatment Quarterly* 14(1, 1996): 85-95; C.H. Hinkin, “Psychological Symptomatology in Spouses And Adult Children Of Alcoholics—Examination of The Hypothesized Personality-Characteristics of Codependency,” *International Journal Of The Addictions* 30.7 (1995): 843-61; A.T. Carson, “Psychological Correlates Of Codependency In Women,” *International Journal Of The Addictions* 29.3 (1994): 395-407; Deborah Lyon, and Jeff Greenberg, “Evidence of Codependency,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 61.3 (1991): 435-39, and Paul H. Wright and Katherine Wright, “Measuring Codependents' Close Relationships: A Preliminary Study,” *Journal of Substance Abuse* 2(3,1990): 335-344.

A frequent theme in the writing of those concerned with alcoholic families (for instance, Black, Woititz, Wegscheider, Gravitz and Bowden, and Schaefer) is that the behaviour, thinking, and patterns of feeling which characterize the maladaptive response of the alcoholic's family members to the problem drinking are carried over into other areas of these persons' lives—for example, into work, friendships, and marriages—and create profound, discernible difficulties there.<sup>12</sup>

What follows is a summary of the observations made by some of these writers of addiction scenarios.

Parental alcoholism affects the family in several different respects: in addition to the very obvious ways in which a parent's addiction can inflict misery on the family (for example, the failure to earn an income, the neglect and

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<sup>12</sup> As an indicator of the growth of this approach, according to Rachel V.'s book Family Secrets, as of 1987, there were 24,000 registered Al-Anon and Alateen groups around the world (239-240). In addition to these, beginning in 1982, there were 1200 registered Al-Anon Adult Children of Alcoholics groups, with new groups affiliating monthly. (Although Al-Anon has always been open to all family and friends of alcoholics, the reason for the separate Adult Child groups is that there is a growing recognition of the fact that the difficulties children feel towards the enabling spouse hinder their emotional honesty when both are present. Although some codependency issues are the same for child, spouse, or parent, some are particularly sensitive for children; hence, the separate Al-Anon Adult Child group.) Since AA and its affiliated groups are by definition anonymous, their World Services organization does not and cannot enumerate the number of individuals involved, but as each group meets weekly, the number of registered groups is an indicator of interest. The National Association for Children of Alcoholics, founded in 1983, publishes a newsletter, sponsors conventions, conferences (one was held in Montreal in November, 1986), and workshops; it also aids its members in dealing with the flood of publications on related topics by operating a clearinghouse of books sold at a discount to its members. Rachel V. has a specific interest in AA affiliated groups; her information does not even begin to touch the growth in interest among professional counselling agencies whose approach is similar.

abuse, the humiliation caused by inappropriate, embarrassing behaviour and so on) alcoholism is now understood to be a family problem in two other paradoxical ways which are more subtle, and in the long run, more serious. It is these more subtle ways which are of particular interest in the readings I will provide in subsequent chapters.

First, one common pattern among alcoholic families is that in their well-meaning attempts to deal with the alcoholic and the problems caused by the alcoholic drinking, the members attempt to "rescue" the problem drinker from the consequences of the drinker's behaviour. In the jargon of addiction counselling, "rescuing," which is an exercise in futility, is distinguished from genuine "helping." The rescuers unwittingly reinforce the drinking by their confused attempts to maintain the equilibrium of the family—their individual and collective self-esteem. This reinforcement, ironically, is the unintended and disastrous consequence of what is called "system enabling"—that is, the system of relationships around the alcoholic that enables the drinker to continue and increase his self-destructive behaviour, which in turn stimulates more frantic "enabling" by the family.

Second, family members, irrespective of whether they themselves drink, develop compulsive patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving which are very much like those of the alcoholic in some respects, and which often become life-long personality traits. As the alcoholism of the drinker

progresses and the personality of the alcoholic disintegrates, family members often unconsciously assume certain predictable roles in the drama, taking on increasingly distorted responsibilities in a futile attempt to keep the family intact and to maintain the aforementioned individual and group self-esteem. Unless something happens to intervene in the acceleration of this dialectical dependency spiral, these family members can become addicted to their own roles, thereby perpetuating their own problems and those of the drinker. Thus is born the recent concept of the 'Adult Child of an Alcoholic,' abbreviated in addictions jargon to 'Adult Child.' The behaviours of the Adult Child, originating in childhood as a necessary ad hoc survival strategy in response to the madness of his or her household, outlive their usefulness. The rigid roles so frequently assumed become psychologically addictive and debilitating, if not downright crippling. Role rigidity virtually guarantees that the Adult Child will experience difficulties in areas of his life which one would not immediately recognize as being related to his experience of addiction.

An identification of the codependency roles is necessary here. The most commonly used analogy compares the family system to a mobile, an art object.<sup>33</sup> If one part is touched, the other parts also move in order that the equilibrium or homeostasis of the whole be restored. The family roles are commonly identified as follows: the spouse is usually the

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<sup>33</sup> Lawson and Lawson, 54.

'Chief Enabler,' and the children (as youngsters and ultimately as adults) are identified as the 'Scapegoat,' the 'Mascot,' the 'Lost Child,' and the 'Family Hero.'<sup>34</sup> It is common for children to assume more than one role, particularly when the family is small. Common to all the roles is the implicit function of distraction; common to the Chief Enabler and the Family Hero is the particular tendency to "rescue." Both allow the individuals in the family to deny the reality of the addiction, at one level, and on another level, alternately to consider themselves totally helpless and totally responsible for what happens.<sup>35</sup>

No matter how many arguments and pleas concerning the drinking there are, the spouse, as Chief Enabler, frequently covers up for the alcoholic's drinking bouts. He or she calls in to tell the alcoholic's employer that s/he has the

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<sup>34</sup> Clients need an accessible nomenclature; this range of identifiers is Sharon Wegscheider's. Other influential therapists have provided parallel taxonomies with different labels; for example, Claudia Black's system is very similar: what she calls the 'responsible' and 'placator' children are obviously the Heroes; her 'adjuster' is the Lost Child; her 'acting out' child is the Scapegoat. See Wegscheider's Another Chance: Hope and Health for the Alcoholic Family (Palo Alto, California: Science and Behavior Books, 1981) and Black's It Will Never Happen to Me: Children of Alcoholics as Youngsters, Adolescents, Adults, Denver, Colorado: M.A.C. Publications, 1982. Any doubt that the two writers were independently describing the same personality types is dispelled by Black's own introduction to Rachel V's Family Secrets: Life Stories of Adult Children of Alcoholics, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987, in which she explicitly 'translated' the labels (xxvi-xxvii). For some reason, Wegscheider's names—not Black's—are the ones which have become standard in family-based alcoholism treatment or counselling centres.

<sup>35</sup> This is commonly referred to as "all-or-nothing functioning." See Herbert L. Gravitz and Julie D. Bowden, Recovery: a Guide for Adult Children of Alcoholics (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985) 49-50, and 64-70.

flu and can't make it to work. The enabling spouse cleans up the physical evidence of the drinking (the vomit, the damaged furniture and clothing, the drinker himself). He or she pays the bail for drunk driving arrests, pays bills for which the drinker supposedly had assumed responsibility, and perhaps, most important, assures the children that nothing is wrong. Ironically, in this attempt to deny the seriousness of the problem and minimize the children's discomfort, what happens is that the children invariably learn two lessons which have disastrous consequences. One is that they should not trust their own feelings or the evidence of their own senses. The second is that honest discussion of issues with the non-drinking parent is not permitted. As the spouse's attention becomes more and more preoccupied with the drinker, the children lose another parent who should be available to them in a consistent, predictable way, which loss is likely to have all sorts of negative consequences in later life.

The Scapegoat is often (but not always) the second child. His or her role is probably the only one which is so obvious that it is recognized in a common sense sort of way by people with no special knowledge of addictions. The Scapegoat is the family rebel, who seems to want approval only from his or her peers—usually the most undesirable sort. The Scapegoat often has problems with legal and school authorities, promiscuity, and a chemical dependency of his or her own. In general, the Scapegoat is attracted to dangerous, risky activities. If the family's denial system is very

strong, the Scapegoat can be blamed for all the family's feelings of embarrassment and general lack of self-esteem. If there is some measure of honesty about the parent's drinking problem, the Scapegoat can be blamed for the drinking. Either way, s/he provides a sort of escape valve for some degree of expression of the family's anxieties, thereby temporarily distracting a hostile or pitying gaze away from the alcoholic.

The Mascot (often the youngest child) provides comic relief, achieving the same end by means of tension-breaking quips or pranks. He or she is frequently the class clown and relies on his or her antics in all situations to get attention. Once again, if these survival tactics harden into a rigid role, the Mascot experiences problems in later life if these strategies are used as an all-purpose response in situations where they are not appropriate.

The Lost Child is just what the name implies: he or she is quiet and withdrawn, is often described as a dreamer, and is largely unnoticed either by family members (whose behaviour is so much more flamboyant) or by outsiders. It is the Lost Child who often has the family artistic sensibility; the Lost Child is prone to eating disorders, using food as a surrogate for parental nurturing.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> One measure of the Lost Child's 'lostness' is that, despite my interest in this aspect of addiction, in the first drafts of this introduction I forgot to mention this role. After correcting it, I noticed that a newspaper story on codependency had overlooked the same role.

It is the role of Family Hero—usually, but not always that of the oldest child—which requires the most explanation here, for two reasons. First, it is the role which is most relevant to the writers and fictional characters to be discussed later. Second, if the Family Hero charade is successful, it is the role least likely to be associated by outsiders with serious psychological problems; in a sense, although the Hero is more visible than the Lost Child, his or her difficulties are as invisible as those of the overlooked sibling. The implicit task of the Family Hero, who is seen as a high achiever by everyone, is to enable the family to deny the seriousness of the addiction by making the family look successful. Family Heroes (who are just as hurt, tired, and neurotic as their more obviously troubled Scapegoat siblings) are well-liked, are considered leaders, and are perceived as successful in school, in athletics, and in their jobs. They are often mistaken for the “resilient” offspring who appear to be unaffected in any serious way by family trauma. Like their Scapegoat siblings, however, Heroes become addicted to excitement. They appear to thrive on crises and accept virtually impossible challenges, especially when these involve saving other people from critical situations. Because the drinking parent’s life is focused on drinking and the Enabler’s life is focused on the drinker, the Hero receives an inadequate kind and amount of parenting and frequently provides a sort of parenting for his or her

siblings—and sometimes for either or both parents as well.<sup>37</sup> Because Heroes encourage others to confide their problems to their compassionate ears, they are sometimes perceived as being extraordinarily empathetic and emotionally open. This, however, is misleading, for they have learned not to reciprocate by sharing their own pain. They hate being dependent on anyone, seeing vulnerability as beneath them.

Family Heroes become addicted to extraordinary accomplishments because only outrageous achievements give them the sense of control over others and the approval for which they have an increasing hunger. For no matter how great the praise is for the Family Heroes' achievements, when the glow wears off, they are left with a dark, guilty secret: they are really powerless failures. After all, no matter what they do, no matter how much they martyr themselves, no matter how much control they seem to gain over situations, it is never quite enough. The alcoholic parents are still drinking, are they not? But perhaps if they try harder, perhaps if they make life easier for the alcoholic, s/he will be happy enough to stop drinking. This is not what happens, of course; the family does not understand the physical dimension of the dependency and blames itself inappropriately for the addiction. The Family Hero, especially, feels a

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<sup>37</sup> The influential clinicians identified above have been criticized for basing their theories on anecdotal evidence. However, research studies by others have given experimental confirmation. For example, see Linda R. Goglia, Gregory J. Jurkovic, Afton M. Burt, and Katherine G. Burge-Callaway, "Generational Boundary Distortions by Adult Children of Alcoholics: Child-as-Parent and Child-as-Mate," American Journal of Family Therapy 20.4 (1992): 291-305.

responsibility to everyone to compensate for the alcoholic's (and everyone else's) inadequacies and to try to "rescue" them all. And so, Family Heroes spend their lives rescuing everyone, alternating between the thrill of accomplishment and the terrible guilt and anger which drive them to further self-imposed burdens and emotional exhaustion. Like the alcoholic, the Family Hero is likely to continue in this behaviour, infringing on other persons' autonomy, until s/he has had enough or has "bottomed out," a process which can be hastened by honest and loving confrontation initiated by others. If neither happens, the Family Hero's addiction, like that of the alcoholic, comes to dominate his or her life and lasts until death. The Family Hero can and must learn the difference between "rescuing," which is rooted in his own need to feel powerful, and genuine help, which respects the autonomy of the persons around him and leaves room for what, in Christian terms, is called grace. Refusing to rescue alcoholics and others from the consequences of their own actions is the refusal to promote dangerous illusions and is more genuinely compassionate than all the illusory rescues which assume that dignity and grace do not exist. The Family Hero must learn the difference between that which is his responsibility and that which is not, and hence is better left to other individuals, and, if one has a religious perspective, to God. Promoting personal autonomy is promoting genuine bonds with others and with life.

This element of contemporary thinking about alcohol addiction, the tendency of family members to respond to the seriousness of a spouse's, parent's or sibling's chemical dependency by taking on distorted responsibilities, will provide a useful corrective to some problems in literary biography and, far more importantly, will provide an approach to fiction by and about alcoholics and codependents.

### **Addictions and Literary Criticism**

With such a lack of agreement among professionals whose interest and expertise lie in this field, it is not surprising that the calibre of work among those who have sought to discuss literature within the context of addiction (or vice versa) has not been high.

There are three areas of studies available. The first concerns the question of the relationship between drugs in general (alcohol in particular) and creativity. The second focuses on the addictions of particular writers. With some exceptions which include some textual analysis, these are usually merely catalogues of riotous and/or pathetic biographical anecdotes, a staple of "celebrity pathographies" whose voyeurism has replaced the excessive tact of their predecessors. Some biographies occasionally indicate that certain specific incidents appeared as barely transmuted autobiography in particular pieces of fiction. Few attempts have been made to address the question of the relationship

between the particular compulsion and the particular text; these attempts constitute the third area.

There does not appear to have been a great deal of study devoted to the first question in the last thirty years. Marcus Grant's excellent bibliographical survey, "Drinking and Creativity: A Review of the Alcoholism Literature,"<sup>38</sup> identifies the problem:

The presumption of a positive correlation between heavy drinking and high creative achievement has long been a feature both of the mythology of alcoholism and the mythology of creativity. In fact, although the relationship is frequently mentioned, little work has been done upon the nature of the relationship in order to determine whether or not it really exists and, if it does, how it can best be described. It has remained one of the tantalizing anomalies of the alcoholism field that, whilst the trend in occupational program development has been towards emphasising the loss of efficiency that accompanies excessive alcohol consumption, it has been difficult to ignore the impressive list of writers . . . who have achieved considerable popular artistic success at the same time as drinking very heavily indeed.

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<sup>38</sup> Marcus Grant, "Drinking and Creativity: A Review of the Alcoholism Literature," British Journal on Alcohol and Alcoholism 16 (1981): 88-93.

Although Grant cautions that it would be possible to produce a much longer list of major writers who did not drink heavily, he does point out that even a preliminary list of writers who were either "well-documented" alcoholics or who "simply have a reputation for heavy drinking" is impressive in terms of sheer numbers. Grant's alphabetical list is as follows:

W.H.Auden; Baudelaire; Brendan Behan; John Berryman; James Boswell; Robert Burns; Raymond Chandler; C. [sic] K. Chesterton; Coleridge; e e cummings, Ernest Dowson; William Faulkner; Scott Fitzgerald; Dashiell Hammett; Ernest Hemingway; Hoffman; Samuel Johnson; James Joyce; Jack Kerouac; Sinclair Lewis; Malcolm Lowry; Jack London; J.J. Marquand; Alfred de Musset; Guy de Maupassant; Flann O'Brien; John O'Hara, Eugene O'Neill; Dorothy Parker; Edgar Allan Poe; Arthur Rimbaud; Theodore Roethke; Jean Rhys; Schiller; John Steinbeck; Wallace Stevens; Dylan Thomas; Paul Verlaine; Evelyn Waugh; Oscar Wilde; Edmund Wilson; Tennessee Williams and Sergei Yesenin.

Grant appropriately reiterates how inconclusive most of the studies he cites have been, noting that many are merely anecdotal about the author's drinking; others comment on the excessive drinking as part of the writer's way of imposing a distance between himself and his society; and still others record the writer's conscious use of autobiographical

material about his own drinking experiences as subject matter. Interestingly, Grant subscribes to the notion of a canon: he specifically excludes from his survey clinical studies of the effects of alcohol upon creativity of in-patients since those studies presume that artistic merit is "absent or is of no importance" (91). Moreover, he concludes his article by actually suggesting, albeit cautiously, that artists may be a special group entitled to special claims:

If preventing the drinking can be seen as interfering (possibly to ill effect) with the artistic productivity, then writers have a case for arguing that they, at least, are an occupational group whose drinking is indeed part of the job. At the same time, however. . . it would be simplistic to allow a crude causative relationship to be used to describe something which is at least symbiotic and probably a great deal more complex than that.

(92)

It is not hard to imagine what a mainstream treatment professional or AA person would say about Grant's suggestion. The exaltation of the author's stature would be immediately dismissed as denial-related posturing no different from the rationalizing of any other alcoholic who is temporarily able to continue to function in his or her roles because of the particular phase of his or her drinking. Grant would be told that his reverence for the special authority of artists is misplaced; where drinking is concerned, writers and other

artists differ in neither kind nor degree from the rest. Moreover, the notion that alcoholics are over-represented in American writers would likely be challenged: since the widely accepted figure is that one out of three American families has a member with a drinking problem, it is certainly questionable whether there are proportionally more writers who are drunks.<sup>39</sup>

Two seminal papers, read on the same day to the same conference of British physicians in 1959,<sup>40</sup> minimized any positive consequence that drug or alcohol use might have on literary creativity. In an inaccurately titled paper, "The Effects of Alcoholism on Literary Imagination," Dr. Emanuel Miller questions the importance of the alcohol and drug use of Coleridge, Baudelaire, Robert Southey, Leigh Hunt and others. He points out that much of the exotic in their work could have been derived from the cultural trends of Romanticism as well as from their specific drug/alcohol experiences and warns us that we should give priority to the evidence that their work was highly disciplined and polished. He cites no research studies; instead, he argues from anecdotal evidence and what might be called a sort of literary common sense that drugs might merely facilitate

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<sup>39</sup> This often-quoted figure, from the National Council on Alcoholism, refers to the number of adults who have a family member (anywhere) who abuses alcohol (Rachel V, Family Secrets, xvi), but the figure may be increasing, as a 1987 Gallup poll shows that one in four families has an alcohol abuser present in the home ("Out in the Open," Time 130 (Nov. 30, 1987, No. 22): 65.

<sup>40</sup> Emanuel Miller, "The Effects of Alcoholism on Literary Imagination," British Journal of Addiction 56 (1960): 67-70.

access to suppressed feelings, "perhaps making what Jung terms archetypal patterns more accessible to conscious manipulation." Any releasing effect, Miller argues, is subordinate to this conscious manipulation, which is "of the very essence of the imaginative creative process" (70). In "The Influence of Drugs on Literary Imagination," Linford Rees provides a description of the effects of various drugs on mental processes in general; and without citing any research on the specific question of creativity, asserts that "[t]he only value that alcohol might have in promoting literary work" is that small or moderate amounts of alcohol "which are just enough to relieve distress but not enough to cause impairment of intellectual functions" might temporarily help "those persons in whom severe emotional distress prevents effective work . . ." (4). Both conclusions are plausible speculation, but speculation nonetheless. From a personal, not clinical, perspective, the writer Donald Newlove makes a similar case, generalizing from his own experience to that of other writers. His harrowing autobiographical account of his alcoholism and eventual recovery is very clear about the relationship he believes exists between addiction and writing: "most good work done on drink is despite drink, not because of it, with drink only adding one more fog between desire and fulfilment" (118). In an empathetic passage on the alcoholism of poet Theodore Roethke, Newlove writes: "this cunning disease offers feelings of instant success and riotous fame to one who lusts

after them as he did . . ." (139). Newlove provides the standard AA/disease-concept wisdom about why it progresses: "after long exposure to the soft punch of alcohol, drop, drop, drop, the original reason gives way to the craving; you drink because you want it and need it, drink because you drink" (145). These two clinicians and one author are very sure that alcohol abuse does not enhance creativity.

American poet and scholar George Wedge, a frequent contributor to Dionysos, however, has frequently urged caution regarding this line of reasoning. Cognizant of the alcohol-related illnesses and premature deaths of so many writers, and sympathetic to and respectful of the role AA has played in saving the lives of many people, Wedge has often pointed out, nonetheless, that careful scholarship must acknowledge that drinking sometimes has coexisted with significant literary production. Moreover, it sometimes may even have facilitated it in alcoholic writers before their alcohol-related health problems interfered with their productivity.<sup>41</sup> To overlook this evidence is another kind of "denial," he has suggested. Without romanticizing this phenomenon, one can see that in remarkably long "plateau" periods, writers whose drinking ultimately ruined their lives and possibly their writing as well were, for a time, writing quite well even as other aspects of their personal lives were

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<sup>41</sup> Professor Wedge has made this point frequently, particularly with regard to American poets who are outside the scope of this study. For a particularly relevant article of his, see "Literature and Addiction Across Eras and Cultures," Dionysos 7:2 (1997): 23-34.

deteriorating. As I shall argue in the following chapter, this question is particularly pertinent to literary biography in the case of the Brontë family.

Until the founding of Dionysos in 1989, most articles on alcoholic writers belonged to the second category: they tended to be mere anecdotal summaries of prodigious drinking bouts and the spectacular and titillating escapades which were the consequences. One indicator of the dismal poverty of analysis or even of research in these papers is the fact that the articles by Bob Dunham and Alfred Kazin are obviously derived (without using citations) from a TIME article, which itself is a reprise of Donald Goodwin's article on F. Scott Fitzgerald.<sup>42</sup>

Goodwin's important paper—later expanded into a book<sup>43</sup>—at least had the merit of posing the following questions (although he admits that his own tentative answers are merely speculative):

How to explain the high rate of alcoholism among authors? Is the association purely chance? Do writers drink because of the nature of the life they lead? Do bad or obscure writers become alcoholic as often as famous writers? (Perhaps

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<sup>42</sup> "The Writer's Vice," TIME 96(Oct. 5, 1970): 52.

<sup>43</sup> Donald W. Goodwin, "The Alcoholism of F. Scott Fitzgerald," Journal of the American Medical Association 212 (1970): 86-90; Alcohol and the Writer (Kansas City: Andrews and McMeel, 1988). See also his "Alcohol as a Muse," American Journal of Psychotherapy 46:3 (1992): 422-33.

fame itself leads to alcoholism.) Do writing ability and alcoholism perhaps have common roots? Is there some characteristic of a good writer—something innate—that predisposes a person to alcoholism? (86)

Dr. Goodwin's chronicling and assessment of Fitzgerald's drinking behaviour and its ruinous social, financial, and medical consequences is not original; it is dependent on Fitzgerald's standard biographies (for example, Arthur Mizener's. In turn, Matthew Bruccoli used Goodwin's account of Fitzgerald's alcoholism in his biography). Goodwin argues neither from Fitzgerald's fiction nor from published studies on alcoholism. Reviewing the possibilities, he flirts with both the psychoanalytic and the medical approach. Thus, he attributes to Fitzgerald's family background (especially the influence of his mother) the two paradoxes of his egotism/sense of inferiority and his conflicting professional goals: "his desire to be a great writer, assured of love eternal, and at the same time a popular writer, meaning a wealthy writer" (89). But by associating the mystery of the origin of writing talent with the mystery of what appear to be generational vulnerabilities to alcoholism and manic-depressive illness, Goodwin also hints at a possible biological origin for Fitzgerald's malaise. In noting that it is difficult to account for writing talent solely in terms of upbringing, he suggests that this gift, like tendencies

towards alcoholism and manic-depressive illness, might be inherited.

This suggestion is particularly intriguing because Goodwin subsequently authored respected studies indicating that there is a genetic basis for alcoholism,<sup>4</sup> but in his paper on Fitzgerald, this idea is merely hinted at and is subordinate to his speculations on the relationship between drinking and writing. Since Goodwin's hypothesis on Fitzgerald has been very widely cited by critics interested in literature and addiction, usually but not always approvingly, it requires attention. Goodwin suggests that alcohol use serves a common end with writing by lowering inhibitions, increasing one's interest in people, promoting fantasy, enhancing self-confidence, and reducing the "sensory overload" that writers are prone to so that they can be obsessional about "the endless chain of small decisions" required in careful writing (90). However, as he admits, this accounts for why writers and others use alcohol—not for why they abuse it.

Goodwin finished this 1970 paper noncommittally and published a similarly inconclusive piece on Eugene O'Neill's alcoholism the following year. To his musings about the

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<sup>4</sup> One such study involving a number of Danish twins who had been adopted separately; the twins who were the biological offspring of alcoholics had four times the rate of alcoholism as did the children born of non-alcoholic parents. His study reinforced the claims of those who argued for a genetic basis to alcoholism and is cited by virtually everyone who addresses the question. Donald Goodwin, "Alcoholism and Heredity: A Review and Hypothesis," Archives of General Psychiatry 36(1979): 57-61.

effects of early family life, he added a long argument that O'Neill's ethnicity (Irish) was a contributing factor to his alcoholism. However, this paper's most interesting feature is its account of the effect of O'Neill's sobriety on his writing. Although O'Neill was the sort of drinker whose flamboyant drinking behaviour inspired spectacular anecdotes, he tried to be abstemious when he was writing (as did Fitzgerald, Lowry, and Sinclair Lewis). He was a binge drinker and a binge writer, but alternated the two activities: "You've got to have all your critical and creative faculties about you when you're working. . . I try never to write a line when I'm not strictly on the wagon" (101). After a prolific fourteen-year career in which at least one of his plays was produced annually, and five years into his recovery from alcoholism, O'Neill embarked upon an extraordinarily ambitious project: he began a cycle of plays about the entirety of American history, redrafted the scheme again and again (the cycle growing from five to seven and then to eleven plays) and rewrote endlessly. In his obsession, he decided that none should be produced until the entire cycle was complete. It was never completed, and the dying playwright and his wife destroyed all but one of the finished plays (100). He set aside the cycle to write only three other plays: one, Long Day's Journey Into Night, about his alcoholic family, and another, A Moon for The Misbegotten, about his alcoholic brother Jamie. (The third was The Iceman Cometh.) It would appear that the obsession

about drinking remained despite the cessation of drinking itself, a pattern observed in many alcoholic writers who were temporarily or eventually permanently sober. Goodwin speculates that "[i]f O'Neill had kept drinking, he might have controlled his obsessive self-criticalness, his inability to say 'Yea' to a completed work. Without alcohol, there was nothing to interrupt the rhythm of his writing." However, as a physician, Goodwin also knows the medical probabilities: "alcohol might have killed him before he wrote two of America's finest plays. In the end, his talent survived sobriety" (104). Arguments of this kind are recapped in Goodwin's Alcohol and the Writer (1988).

Studies examining the relationship between alcoholism and writing which examine the texts themselves and not just the circumstances of their composition, the third category, were rare until the beginning of publication in 1989 of the interdisciplinary academic journal Dionysos. Some representative examples of biographical criticism demonstrate the typical approaches. The psychoanalytic model of addiction had been used as an interpretive tool in two papers on Fitzgerald's writing and in Douglas Day's biography of Malcolm Lowry. In contrast, Art Hill's paper on Lowry's Under the Volcano and Roger Forseth's paper on the fiction of Sinclair Lewis argue from AA/medical model assumptions, as do Tom Dardis and Thomas Gilmore's full-length works.

Typical of the attempts to address addiction issues in fiction in terms of the psychoanalytic approach to alcoholism

are two similar accounts of the fear of betrayal so prevalent in Fitzgerald's novels; both cited the theories of Karl Menninger, published almost forty years earlier in Man Against Himself.<sup>45</sup> Robert Roulston, referring to Menninger's belief that his alcoholic patients as children had endured bitter, unendurable, and unforgettable disappointment, linked the overall bitterness of The Beautiful and Damned (especially its misogynistic fascination with betrayal by women) to what he saw as Fitzgerald's neurotic anger about his own childhood—especially towards his mother. He argued that Fitzgerald, in the act of "killing off" the parents of his protagonist Anthony Patch in a few sentences near the beginning of the novel, committed "a kind of literary parricide" (158), and went on to remind us that Fitzgerald's fourth novel was originally a project about matricide. Instead, it eventually became Tender Is the Night whose chief character, Dick Diver, is also an alcoholic (as is Nicole's father too, a neglected detail). Although he quoted Goodwin's paper on Fitzgerald when it suited his purpose, Roulston never raised—even for the purposes of refutation—the possibility that Fitzgerald's alcoholism was a disease. Instead, Roulston read this very early novel as evidence of the underlying personality disorder of which Fitzgerald's own alcoholism was a subsequent symptom. In discussing Anthony Patch's alcoholism, he briefly pointed out that "[his] love

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<sup>45</sup> Robert Roulston, "The Beautiful and Damned: The Alcoholic's Revenge," Literature and Psychology 27 (1977):156-63; and William Wasserstrom, "The Goad of Guilt: Henry Adams and the Fitzgeralds," Journal of Modern Literature 6 (April, 1977): 289-310.

for Gloria indeed, often seems, no less than his craving for alcohol, an addiction which saps his will as it intoxicates him" (159). One wishes that Roulston had expanded on this idea. William Wasserstrom also noted this same fear of betrayal, citing Menninger's definition of alcoholism as "a suicidal flight from disease" and his attribution of it to fear of parental betrayal (and by extension, to fear of betrayal by the world.) Wasserstrom's emphasis is slightly different. He adds a quotation about "an obsession with treachery, unyielding condemnation of the traitor's guilt combined with an unalterable devotion, beyond pathology, to the betrayer. . .," which commentary is certainly suggestive for a further study of the relationship between Jay and Daisy in The Great Gatsby. It is also suggestive, moreover, of the ease with which an addiction to a relationship can be represented in the same terms as an addiction to a substance, a point to which I shall return. Neither of these essayists, however, shows any awareness of the lack of professional consensus on the etiology of alcoholism; this lacuna undermines the credibility of what were otherwise plausible arguments and is all too often a weakness of criticism, no matter what its assumptions about alcohol addiction are.

Douglas Day's 1973 study of Malcolm Lowry occupied intermediate ground, since it did integrate some textual criticism with biography. In trying to account for Lowry's prodigious addiction to alcohol, he favoured the psychoanalytic explanation. Although Day confessed his

diffidence on the subject, it is clear that he regarded Lowry's very early subjective experience of parental abandonment as having been critical. Throughout the biography, Day returns again and again to evidence of Lowry's orality and infantilism. The congruence between his and Robert Roulston's analysis is suggestive: though he never makes this point in his reflections on Under the Volcano, Day might have noted the possible matricide motif built into the novel's subtext. Lowry kills off two mothers of his alter ego, the Consul (three, if one counts Yvonne, for reasons which will be discussed later). The Consul's own mother dies in childbirth, and his stepmother (Hugh's mother) dies as well. By contrast, Gordon Bowker's Pursued by Furies (1993), an updated and far more thorough biography, avoids espousing any particular theoretical account of addiction, including the psychoanalytic. It does not spare the reader the details of Lowry's disastrous compulsion. Any serious study of alcoholism and literature would profit by an exploration of Bowker's meticulous work.

Not all of the seminal studies on the links between addiction and literature reflect the psychoanalytic approach; some clearly share some if not all of the assumptions of the AA movement and medical model, even if these are not specifically identified as such. Although Art Hill's essay "The Alcoholic on Alcoholism"<sup>46</sup> uses biographical commentary

<sup>46</sup> Art Hill, "The Alcoholic on Alcoholism," Canadian Literature 62 (1974): 33-48.

on Lowry's own drinking problem, his argument is superior to most of the aforementioned studies by his more detailed textual analysis. One of his insights, for example, concerns the fact that Lowry provided a "reason" for the Consul's excessive drinking that involves an episode that is unlikely to have been chronologically possible. Hill argues that the Consul could not have been culpable for the mysterious deaths of the German officers; he would have been too young to hold the naval rank necessary for such responsibility. Hill argues persuasively that this was not an error on Lowry's part but a tactic which accurately reproduces a characteristic of an alcoholic's defence system: the need to justify the drinking (about which the drinker feels profound though inconsistently expressed remorse) in terms of a particular incident or problem in his life. Hill points out the tendency among drinkers and those who observe them to rationalize:

People who are not compulsive drinkers have a tendency to seek explanations for those who are. It . . . gives them a sense of the fitness of things ("there's a logical reason for everything"). The fact is that the vast majority of alcoholics do not know why they drink. Those who have permanently renounced alcohol are quite definite on this matter. Those who have not cannot be trusted on this or any other matter having to do with drinking. (35)

What is remarkable about this detail is that, as Hill points out, it shows that Lowry understood a feature of his own addiction which other addicts still 'in denial' cannot see clearly until they are in recovery. Alcoholics lie about their drinking, and since "almost every decision an alcoholic makes is influenced by its possible effect on his ability to get a drink, now or two weeks hence" (36), alcoholics lie frequently and skilfully: "Lowry the Writer pulled off the remarkable feat of dissociating himself from the drunkard, and writing about him with the clearest eye that has ever been fixed upon him. And he did this all without ever conquering his addiction" (37).

In addition to being a careful commentary on a particular novel, Hill's "The Alcoholic on Alcoholism" is also a polemical refutation of critics who have been hoodwinked, he says, by other substance-abusing artists (like Dylan Thomas) into believing that their habitual use "of a medium of oblivion can be a *moyen de connaissance*." Hill attributes this myth to the writers themselves and to their "sympathetic friends," who, in trying to explain why the writer spends so much time "in a state of boozy ineffectuality," rationalize

that it makes him do what he does, and does very well, even better. If a banker or a welder or a jockey said it, it would be properly labelled nonsense. But so deep is the mystery of creativity,

even among artists themselves, that a writer can get away with it. (44)

His observation about Lowry's characterization might have a wider application. Lowry, he says, was not able to create characters in the ordinary novelistic sense. All his major characters are versions of himself, a point conceded by critics and by the author himself (38). However, the same point has been made innumerable times by Fitzgerald's critics, and also by Evelyn Waugh's critics. Further study might clarify whether this is a common tendency of alcoholic authors. Is there a link between the need of the alcoholic writer as alcoholic to create a special persona for himself in his own day-to-day life (often doing so very skilfully) and the fact that he must create personae in his fiction? Are all alcoholics (who by definition have strong denial systems) artists in the sense that they are the authors of their own fictional versions of their behaviour? Do alcoholic writers tend to create characters who are more clearly autobiographical than the fictional characters of non-addicted writers? As the addiction progresses and the range of their experience correspondingly narrows, perhaps the narcissism linked by so many observers to alcoholism makes this possibility likely. It might also account for the use of doubles, an element of characterization to which alcoholic writers and writers from alcoholic families seem particularly drawn. This latter conjecture, of course, would

require a large-scale study with statistical evidence, an enterprise far more ambitious than this current thesis.

A remark Hill makes of another particular incident could be applied to the whole of Under the Volcano and possibly to any passage about alcoholism written by any alcoholic writer, though one should bear in mind George Wedge's caution regarding such generalizations: "The wonder of it is that Lowry could write [about a certain drunken experience]. Obviously, he could not have done so without having had the alcoholic experience, but the writing of this passage was, none the less, a triumph over-not of-alcoholism" (45).

A landmark article which similarly devotes attention to textual analysis as well as to biographical data is Roger Forseth's "'Alcoholite at the Altar'," on Sinclair Lewis's addiction and his writing.<sup>47</sup> Like Hill, Forseth (the founding editor of Dionysos, incidentally) accepts the "disease assumptions," especially that of the deviousness of alcoholics, including those who are temporarily on the wagon. After providing an invaluable survey of the ways in which and the reasons why literary criticism and biography have failed seriously to assess the relationship between their subjects' addictions and their achievement, he makes an important recommendation:

[I] believe it is most pertinent for the scholar to consider the effect compulsive addiction has on the

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<sup>47</sup> Roger Forseth, "'Alcoholite at the Altar': Sinclair Lewis, Drink, and the Literary Imagination," Modern Fiction Studies 31.3 (1985): 581-608.

literary imagination when the alcoholic writer is sober. For the alcoholic . . . the obsession with alcohol is always present, though its influence is often difficult to detect because the temporarily sober alcoholic is the most devious of people.

(584)

Forseth goes on to describe Lewis' ritualistic separation of his drinking and writing (like O'Neill, Fitzgerald, and Lowry, it appears that Lewis wrote sober) and draws attention to his "savage and moving dissections," his "vision that is at once utopian and antiutopian," his "almost sentimental compassion for those very characters and situations that have just been savaged" and explains that "[t]hese contrary impulses are central to the alcoholic whose addiction remains unresolved: to feel remorse for that which has just been destroyed" (584). Once again, this particular insight might usefully be applied to the writings of other alcoholic authors. Perhaps much of Fitzgerald's much-discussed dualism—particularly his ambivalence about both the 'American Dream' and romantic relationships with women—could be accounted for in the same way.

Forseth's attention to the circumstances of composition has been echoed more recently in two admirable and substantial books: Thomas Gilmore's Equivocal Spirits: Alcoholism and Drinking in Twentieth-Century Literature (1987) and Tom Dardis's The Thirsty Muse: Alcohol and the

American Writer (1989).<sup>48</sup> Both acknowledge their debt to AA, contextualize their studies historically, interrogate the deceptive tact and blind spots of standard biography, and correlate the drinking careers of the writers with their writing. Both books belong on the shelves of any researcher who takes these questions seriously. Thomas Gilmore's emphasis is on the representation of drinking and alcoholism in literature, especially the power of fiction to represent the drinker as a complex human being without resorting to the clichés which characterized temperance tracts and which still emerge from social science abstractions; Tom Dardis's emphasis is on the production of the texts, painfully accomplished while their authors struggled with their addictions. He concludes that the work is produced despite, not because of, the addiction. So does John Crowley's 1994 study The White Logic: Alcoholism and Gender in American Modernist Fiction,<sup>49</sup> which is, however, less dependent than the former on AA constructions of addiction. Crowley's book is distinguished by its attention to textual analysis, by its sense of history (especially the significance of Prohibition as a constraint against which young artists believed they had a duty to rebel, some in ways which destroyed their health

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<sup>48</sup> Tom Dardis, The Thirsty Muse: Alcohol and the American Writer (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1989); Thomas B. Gilmore, Equivocal Spirits: Alcoholism and Drinking in Twentieth-Century Literature (Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press, 1987).

<sup>49</sup> John W. Crowley The White Logic: Alcoholism and Gender in American Modernist Fiction (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994).

and creativity), and by its attention to constructions of masculinity. John Crowley comes close to arguing that alcoholic artists set the agenda for modernism, an alcoholic one of nihilism and despair.

At the close of the twentieth century, it now seems clear that of the many directions in which post-eighteenth century thinking could go in order to find a substitute for its lost metaphysical sense, two are particularly relevant for the rise of the novel. One surrogate for the sacred is the aesthetic, which can invite the Dionysian as well as the Apollonian element in its writers and other artists. The other object of idolatry, seen clearly in the rise of the nineteenth-century novel, as John Knapp has suggested, is the human relationship, the family.<sup>50</sup>

Gilmore's, Dardis's, and Crowley's studies are essential studies of the alcoholic writer as an individual subject in a broad historical backdrop. What they lack, however—and what this study seeks to offer as a complementary way of reading alcoholism—is attention to the significance of alcoholic family systems analysis as a useful approach to reading alcoholic fiction. Studies whose approach is similar to my own would include Gary Storhoff's examination of the alcoholic family in Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury<sup>51</sup> and

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<sup>50</sup> John Knapp, "Family Systems Psychotherapy, Literary Character, and Literature: An Introduction," *Style* 31(2, 1997): 223-54.

<sup>51</sup> Gary Storhoff, "Caddy and the Infinite Loop: The Dynamics of Alcoholism in The Sound and the Fury," *The Faulkner Journal* 12(Spring, 1997):3-22 and "Jason's Role-Slippage: The Dynamics of Alcoholism in

Jill Bergeron's doctoral dissertation on codependency in American drama.<sup>52</sup> John Knapp's excellent overview of the history of family systems therapy in general and its potential for literary criticism has insights that would be very useful for reading fiction about alcoholic marriages and families. An area for further study here is the historicity of the family itself, whose alterity requires particular sensitivity or at least circumspection on the part of literary scholars. When this area of scholarship matures, one looks forward to a fuller understanding of the significance of drinking practices in other times and cultures as well.

For now, we may draw some conclusions about the current state of dialogue between addiction studies and literary criticism. First, the image of the alcoholic writer who drinks in order to write better is no longer in vogue. Alcohol use may provide relief from stress and promote writing in the ways Goodwin suggested, but alcohol use per se is not addiction. Second, despite the absence of empirical research, most authors and critics who have seriously considered the question believe that alcohol addiction eventually and almost inevitably interferes with writing, often after other alcohol-related problems have become

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The Sound and the Fry, "Mississippi Quarterly 50 (Summer, 1997): 519-35.

<sup>52</sup> Jill Stapleton Bergeron. Codependency Issues in Selected Contemporary American Plays. Ph.D. Diss., Louisiana State University, 1992.

evident. However, this issue has been all too often understood by biographers and critics to mean nothing much more than debilitation, that frequent impairment takes up far too much of an author's time, energy, and money, to be adequately compensated by some colourful plot details. Third, a corollary to the second point, too little critical work has been done which relates obsessional drinking with particular questions in the texts. Fourth, the credibility of even the best of what has been done (which is otherwise fascinating and plausible) is undermined by the critics' apparent unawareness that the validity of the models of addiction they are using as interpretive tools is in dispute by experts in addiction. It is disheartening to think that some ostensibly good criticism might be dependent on notions about addictions that are the equivalent in that field to the practice of a Ptolemaic approach to astronomy.

This, of course, is not to suggest any likelihood of impending consensus among specialists in the field of addictions studies. But it would be intellectual cowardice for literary critics to avoid dealing with addiction-related questions on this account. Critics who are intrigued by addictions, or who at least find themselves having to construe addiction in novels or in biography, have a responsibility to apply their scholarly skills and sensitivities—that is, become better acquainted with controversies in the addictions field, to reconsider textual issues in the light of current thinking about addictions, and

perhaps even to reconsider addiction theories in the light of texts which deal with compulsive drinking. A better-informed literary critic might even have all that much more to offer to the ongoing conversation about the enigma of compulsion.

What this introductory chapter has worked to show is that alcohol addiction studies are at least as richly perplexing as is literary criticism and that a fruitful dialogue between the two areas of study is both possible and desirable. Much remains to be done in both fields; however, much information is already accessible. If literary critics interested in addiction issues in fiction are to transcend what sometimes seems mere cleverness, they must take the additional trouble to better inform themselves about the debates in that area. Otherwise, with no prospect of consensus in sight on so many questions which plague addiction research, the credibility of almost any argument applied to an "alcoholic" text—no matter how internally consistent and interesting—will be undermined by the controversies within the addictions field.

Because of the transgenerational nature of so much alcoholism and because of the current theoretical dissensus on its origins, codependency is the most important contemporary approach available for therapeutic intervention. The following case studies will demonstrate that understanding the family dynamics of addiction will suggest a helpful approach to biographies of alcoholic or codependent writers, and more importantly, will open up a useful way to

read their fiction. I offer these provisional analyses, however, in the awareness of the difficulties presented by time and distance: the "alterity" of both drinking practices and family life in nineteenth-century England presents an even greater challenge in nineteenth-century Russia.

## CHAPTER 2

"I FEEL HIS DEGRADATIONS, HIS FAILINGS, AND TRANSGRESSIONS AS  
MY OWN":

THE CASE OF ANNE BRONTË AND THE TENANT OF WILDFELL HALL

In her introduction to Anne Brontë's The Tenant of Wildfell Hall (1848) Brontë scholar Winifred Gérin praises the novel's modernity, by which she means its boldness in depicting Helen Graham's struggle to escape from the world of her alcoholic husband and to support herself and her young son through her painting.<sup>1</sup> Gérin suggests, however, that the plot-within-a-plot device represents something of a technical failure. Anne Brontë's decision to have Helen share with Gilbert Markham (who becomes her second husband) the harrowing tale of her first marriage by handing him her journal, a journal which Markham passes on in a series of letters to his brother-in-law, is seen as an error of execution, a consequence of authorial inexperience. It is clear that Gérin would have preferred to see Helen's personal history dramatized in dialogue with him. Gérin also comments briefly on the autobiographical sources of the novel: Anne's unhappy years as a governess at Thorp Green with its atmosphere of intrigue and adultery; her brother Branwell's alcohol and opium addiction; Anne's decision to stay on there for Branwell's sake (she had arranged for him to become tutor

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<sup>1</sup> Anne Brontë, The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, ed. G.D. Hargreaves (London: Penguin Books, 1979).

at Thorp Green after a series of ignominious dismissals from other posts); the horrific years of Branwell's final decline; and the opinion that Lowborough (the sensitive recovered addict) and not Huntingdon (the shallow hedonist) was modelled on Branwell. Juliet Barker's meticulous biography on the Brontë family rounds out these details and is unflinching in its account of Branwell's alcohol and opium use. Barker makes the common error of supposing, however, that heavy drinking and literary productivity are incompatible, and because of his output of poetry she concludes implausibly that Branwell's drinking cannot have been disastrously heavy until after his dismissal from Thorp Green.<sup>2</sup> Drinking habits vary; so do writing habits. There is ample evidence, particularly from twentieth-century American writers whose alcoholism and writing practices have been subject to close—perhaps even glaring—scholarly scrutiny, that although some alcoholic writers stay sober for extended periods for writing (alternating the compulsion to write and the compulsion to drink, it would appear) other alcoholic writers drink heavily and steadily (so-called "maintenance drinking") and are still productive until the cumulative toll on their mental and physical health impairs or ends their work. As pointed out in the preceding chapter, this productive "plateau" phase of active alcoholism in which the drinker's work is more or less acceptable, and sometimes even superior, can last for many years.

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<sup>2</sup> Juliet Barker, The Brontës (London: 1994) 367-75.

This observation is of general relevance because so many biographers overlook the presence or severity of an alcohol or other dependency in the life of an artist who is still productive, and then, having minimized or dismissed the significance of the addiction, fail to construe adequately the significance of alcohol issues in his writing.

What I wish to argue in this chapter, however, is the more particular case that the epistolary form of Anne Brontë's novel with its imbedded journal is not a technical failure at all. And my argument for saying so relies on attending to author Anne's experience of her brother's addiction in a way not addressed by critics.<sup>3</sup> The question of which hard-drinking character in The Tenant of Wildfell Hall most resembles Branwell is, I believe, a red herring.

(Juliet Barker identifies, incidentally, a number of other relevant drunkards: for example, the alcoholic curate Mr. Collins, whose wife Patrick Brontë advised to leave;<sup>4</sup> and the alcoholic brother of the sisters' friend Ellen Murray, whose

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<sup>3</sup> None of the standard studies addresses this question; neither does the only study which looks at The Tenant of Wildfell Hall as a representation of alcoholism: Annette Federico's "'I must have drink': Addiction, Angst, and Victorian Realism," Dionysos 2 (Fall, 1990): 11-25. Jan Gordon's excellent study of the relationship between the novel's orality and its textuality is silent on the special anxiety about orality engendered in an alcoholic context. See "Gossip, Diary, Letter, Text: Anne Brontë's Narrative Tenant and the Problematic of the Gothic Sequel," ELH 51 (4, Winter, 1984): 719-45. After completing this chapter, I read Jerome Bump, "The Family Dynamics of the Reception of Art," Style 31(2,1997): 328-51, which comments briefly on Tenant as a novel which could be read in terms of Family Systems Theory.

<sup>4</sup> Barker 341-42.

effect on his family angered Charlotte so greatly.<sup>5</sup> It is the narrative strategy itself and not the character portrayal of the young male alcoholics which ought to be of interest to addiction-sensitive readers.

The epistolary form is appropriate for two reasons: first, because of the consistent pattern within the novel of details which privilege the written word over the oral word, and second (and this is related to the first reason), because of the centrality of alcoholism in Helen's life. Helen is the spouse and daughter of alcoholics, and like all codependents, she lives in a world of forgotten or broken promises, suppressed information, gossip, twisted arguments, misunderstood confrontations, rationalizations, and lies. The oral word is thus unreliable: unremembered or ineffectual if true, malicious if false. The written word, by contrast, offers at least a measure of fixity. It provides a refuge, as it were, from many problems: among these, the evasions of argumentative drunkards and the gossipy rationalizations of uncomprehending onlookers. As Helen's husband Arthur Huntingdon creates an alternate and spurious reality for himself in his drinking, so Helen must create an alternate but authentic reality—a record of her own experiences and feelings on paper. Helen's being made to offer her journal to Gilbert, I will suggest, proceeds not from a want of art conducive to dependency on a Richardsonian gimmick, but from a knowledge that those who live inside a world of addiction

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<sup>5</sup> Barker 471.

cannot or will not talk about it (just as those who live outside that world too often cannot or will not listen to representations of it). The contemporary flood of publications about therapeutic strategies for spouses, siblings, and children of alcoholics all uniformly recommend journal-keeping and letter-writing as a means of clarifying issues to oneself and to one's alcoholic relatives and others.<sup>6</sup> Provisionally, if not ultimately, the writing of words can serve the intention of reclaiming one's own life. This is why the written word means so much to Helen Graham; it may also be part of why it means so much to Anne Brontë. The "modernity" of the novel may lie partly in its subtle emphasis on the healing power of writing, as well as in the frequently noted feminist tendencies of both Helen and Anne.

Coexisting paradoxically with this pattern, however, is another. Misinformation and suppression of accurate information have created the work's "narratable" situations

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<sup>6</sup> For example, see Eleanor Agnew and Sharon Robideaux, My Mama's Waltz: A Book for Daughters of Alcoholic Mothers (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998). For case studies on the therapeutic use of clients' personal writing from exercises in codependency workbooks, see Karin B. Jordan and Luciano L'Abate, "Programmed Writing and Therapy with Symbiotically Enmeshed Patients," American Journal of Psychotherapy 49 (1995):225-236. Cf. Sharon Wegscheider, Another Chance: Hope and Health for the Alcoholic Family (Palo Alto, California: Science and Behavior Books, 1981); Claudia Black, It Will Never Happen to Me: Children of Alcoholics as Youngsters, Adolescents, Adults (Denver, Colorado: M.A.C. Publications, 1982); Janet Woititz, Adult Children of Alcoholics (Hollywood, Florida: Health Communications, Inc., 1983); Robert Subby and John Friel, Co-Dependency and Family Rules: A Paradoxical Dependency (Hollywood, Florida: Health Communications, Inc., 1984); and Rachel V., Family Secrets: Life Stories of Adult Children of Alcoholics (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987).

(to use D.A. Miller's term).<sup>7</sup> The novel betrays its anxiety about its forced dependence on written communication in several moments when it is clear that honest oral communication would have eliminated serious problems for the characters. The substantially defining irony of the novel may be that after twenty years of marriage to Helen, Gilbert is passing on her journal, which he had sworn never to share, to his brother-in-law Jack Halford (and presumably Rose, Gilbert's gossipy sister) on the eve of their annual visit.<sup>8</sup> In this novel, therefore, the closural questions begin in the first part of the letter to Halford and are never resolved.

Returning to the outset of the novel, we see that oral communication is represented in the text far less positively, in general, than is written communication. It is clearly less powerful: Gilbert Markham's introductory letter to Jack Halford is an attempt to "atone" (33) for his failure to reciprocate when Halford had told him anecdotes about his own life; Gilbert invokes the authority of the journal he later passes on so that Halford's "credulity may not be too severely taxed" (34). Gilbert's reluctance to discuss the experience and his fear of Halford's disbelief are both credible, as is his decision to explore his experience in writing.

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<sup>7</sup> D.A. Miller, Narrative and Its Discontents (Princeton: Princeton Press, 1981).

<sup>8</sup> For this reason, among others, P.J.M. Scott argues that Gilbert is not as much of an improvement on Huntingdon as is generally supposed. See Anne Brontë: A New Critical Assessment (London: Vision Press, 1983) 94-7.

The untrustworthiness of conversation emerges quickly in the portrayal of the neighbours. Chapter 1 introduces the Markhams, Wilsons, and Millwards, many of whom are incorrigible busybodies, prying into the affairs of the polite but resistant newcomer Helen and offering her unasked-for advice on cooking, household management, spirituality, and childrearing. Being open to the experience of others may be desirable, but it also invites difficulties, as the anecdotes about Gilbert's mother and the vicar make clear. Of particular interest is Mrs. Markham's resentment of the parenting theories of the Reverend Millward, a man she otherwise venerates: "I wish to goodness he had a son himself! He wouldn't be so ready with his advice to other people then; he'd see what it is to have a couple of boys to keep in order" (43).

The irony rebounds on Mrs. Markham, who attempts to convince Helen that giving her five-year old Arthur some wine with his cake is harmless and that her decision to make Arthur hate spirits will make him unmanly. Helen's argument is spirited, eloquent, and lengthy. It occupies most of Chapter 3, "A Controversy," and is echoed in her absence in Chapter 4 in Lawrence's dispute with the opinionated vicar, whose inadequacies are pointedly clear. (Neither the characters nor the readers know at this point that Lawrence is Helen's half-brother.) The details which follow are important because they demonstrate Anne Brontë's negative representation of ill-informed gossip, a concern to which I

shall return, but they also recapitulate nineteenth-century debates about alcohol problems which were of particular relevance to the Brontë family. Though the latter is of less relevance to my argument than the former, it is not without interest.

Lawrence, whose father died of drink, as the community is aware (64; see also the account in Chapter 31, 279), suggests to Millward what all modern addiction researchers know—that some people are incapable of moderation and that the tendency towards addiction runs in families. (Whether this is the case for genetic or psycho-social reasons is irrelevant here; Anne Brontë seems to leave this latter question unsettled.) Lawrence, who demonstrates in his own behaviour that he is capable of drinking his wine in moderation, attempts to defend Helen's course of action:

"But don't you think, Mr. Millward . . . that when a child may be naturally prone to intemperance—by the fault of his parents or ancestors, for instance, some precautions are advisable? . . . with some persons, temperance—that is, moderation—is almost impossible." (64)<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Juliet Barker, whose biography often seems somewhat unsympathetic to the Brontë sisters' distress (especially Charlotte's anger) occasioned by Branwell's drinking, the significance of which Barker has a tendency to minimize, is nonetheless moved by their father Patrick's suffering: "more touching [i.e. than Mrs. Gaskell's description of Branwell's DTs in her biography of Charlotte] is Patrick's note in the margin of his copy of Graham's Modern Domestic Medicine. Marking the section on 'Insanity, or Mental Derangement' with an asterisk, he wrote: 'there is also "delirium tremens", brought on, sometimes, by intoxication—"the patient thinks himself haunted by demons . . . ." Under the causes of insanity, Patrick could not fail to notice that the first of the 'passions and emotions most productive of this

Not only is Reverend Millward ignorant of and insensitive to Helen's and Lawrence's experiences of addiction; he may well be blind to his own excessive consumption of ale, which he rationalizes in religious terms. Helen's behaviour, he declares, is "criminal!—Not only is it making a fool of the boy, but it is despising the gifts of providence, and teaching the boy to trample them under his feet" (64).

Gilbert Markham's subsequent sardonic alertness to the volume of the vicar's drinking and to his verbal repetitiveness helps to undermine both the vicar's personal credibility, and again, the foolishness of the idle talk:

I thought Mr. Millward never would [author's emphasis] cease telling us that he was no tea-drinker, and that it was highly injurious to keep loading the stomach with slops to the exclusion of more wholesome sustenance, and so give himself time to finish his fourth cup. (102)

Lawrence is resistant to the vicar's harangue, as Helen was. (The argument faithfully sets out something of earlier nineteenth-century temperance quarrels. It should be remembered that staunch temperance advocates, who tended to be evangelical, had originally promoted beer as a temperance

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complaint' was love. Poignantly, however, and as if taking at least some of the responsibility for his son's mental and physical breakdown on himself, the cause Patrick underlined was 'hereditary disposition' (545). Patrick was the founder of the local temperance society (219) and was deeply pained that wine which had been medically prescribed for his dyspepsia occasioned rumours about his drinking. Interestingly, to attempt to dispel the gossip, he took the precaution of having his surgeon sign the prescription, a procedure not generally insisted upon (297).

beverage, believing it to be healthful; Anglicans defended wine as a digestive aid, and in general, clergy were slow to support the temperance movement. Moreover, the temperance movement was not originally a movement for abstinence even of a voluntarist kind, much less a prohibitionist movement.) Much later, in Chapter 51, although Millward and the community know far more than they did about Helen's predicament, which is no longer seen as scandalous, Millward remains as self-righteous and ignorant as ever: he still maintains that Helen was wrong to leave her husband (462). All in all, Millward's prestige in the community and his frequent presence in the midst of those whose distinguishing characteristics are their tendencies to tell Helen what to do and then to gossip frivolously or maliciously about her undermine the value of conversation.

Books rather than conversation figure largely in Gilbert's relationship with Helen. Helen is polite to but distant from him and the community; he attempts to breach this gap (in Chapter 8) by conversations on impersonal subjects and, more successfully, by lending her books and borrowing hers. In quick succession, he makes a gift of a puppy, then a book (a book approved of in advance by Helen), to little Arthur, then a copy of Scott's Marmion to her—which volume she accepts only after attempting to protect her independence by paying for it. The dog wins Arthur's heart, but Helen is to be approached through the written word. Chapters 9 through 15 chronicle the vicious rumours spreading

through the community that Arthur's resemblance to Lawrence must indicate that Helen and Lawrence are lovers. Though the lovesick Markham has been appropriately skeptical of the innuendo, his misunderstanding of a fragment of furtive conversation he overheard between Helen and Lawrence seems to confirm the slander. What he has heard enrages him so much that he physically attacks and seriously injures Lawrence (Chapter 14).

In Markham's ensuing confrontation with Helen, he takes her possession of Lawrence's copy of Humphrey Davy's Last Days of a Philosopher as one more corroboration of their guilt; and though she refuses to explain her painful mystery orally, she does give him her journal—with its most recent pages, registering her impressions of him hastily ripped out. Following the journal (which encompasses Chapters 16 through 44), we are reminded of the novel's double timeline: Markham resumes his letter to Halford in the present, and that letter recounts his resumption of his distanced relationship with Helen, a "reconciliation" (the title of Chapter 45) effected mostly through the reading of her letters to her brother Frederick Lawrence which Lawrence passes on to Gilbert with little or no comment. Although Gilbert apologizes to Lawrence for having attacked him, he tells Lawrence that "a little candour and confidence" on Lawrence's part might have prevented the quarrel (414), thus reminding the reader both of the negative power of slander and of the wistful desire for full disclosure. Helen leaves to attend her estranged

husband through his last, fatal illness, and the "reconciliation" is maintained, though in a strained fashion, through letters. Lawrence grants Gilbert permission to read her letters, passages of which Gilbert memorizes and enters in his own diary (Chapter 49, 444). Inscribing these fragments of her letters shows that his love for her grows. But it is a purely private devotion. Understandably reacting (or perhaps overreacting) to her concern for propriety, he neither attempts to contact her nor makes serious inquiries about her to her brother. Helen later berates him for his reticence, arguing that he should have been more assertive. I shall return to this incident. What I wish to stress now is that whether his conduct or her criticism of it was appropriate is beside the point: the very ambiguity points to a wistful desire for open, oral communication at the same time that the novel confesses its reliance on writing, its distrust of the very possibility of honest speech.

Gilbert becomes bold enough to pursue and confront Helen with his desire to marry her only when gossipy rumours of her second marriage reach him. The wedding he arrives at is of Lawrence and Esther Hargrave; ironically, Lawrence had sent Gilbert a letter, which had not yet arrived, about his impending marriage (Ch. 51, 468). This letter would have cleared up the mystery, but it also would have prevented the cautious Gilbert from seeking out Helen. Local gossip exacerbates Gilbert's reservations about courting her: he realizes that her double inheritance from her husband and

uncle have made her very wealthy. Aware of her sensitivity to scandal, he does not want to be seen as a fortune-hunting adventurer: "She's a widow, but quite young yet, and uncommon handsome—a fortune of her own besides, and only one child . . . I should think she'll marry none but a nobleman, myself" (Chapter 52, 476). The gossip, while not false about her wealth, leads to yet another of Gilbert's false conclusions. Happily, he does not physically attack anyone this time.

Gilbert has believed all along that he has been respecting Helen's wish for privacy. The final chapter, in which the lovers are brought together, is suffused with even more details about reading. Gilbert and the reader learn that Helen is angry that Gilbert neither wrote to her, nor, according to her brother's letters, inquired about her. When he does finally encounter her, little Arthur observantly "read[s]" Gilbert's reaction to Helen's not wearing a widow's cap. In her nervousness, Helen instinctively reaches for what had always been her comfort or escape—a book—and begins "to turn over the leaves in an energetic kind of abstraction . . . turning over a dozen leaves at once" (481). Deciding to clarify matters once and for all, Helen secures privacy for their long-deferred oral confrontation by dispatching little Arthur in search of yet another book. The lovers clear up their misunderstandings, declare their love for one another, and make a commitment to marry within a year—yet another deferral to be coped with by reading and writing. Gilbert's objections to "the misery of so long a separation"

are met with Helen's rejoinder, "It would not be a separation: we will write every day. . ." (486). At the moment that the time of their wedding is established, Arthur returns, saying, "Mamma, I couldn't find the book in either of the places you told me to look for it (there was a conscious something in mamma's smile that seemed to say, 'No dear, I knew you could not'), but Rachel got it for me at last" (487). A brief, epilogue-like account of their wedding and happy twenty years of family life concludes the extended letter to Halford and the novel's preoccupation with the ways in which writing and books can overcome problems caused by false gossip and inappropriate verbal reticence.

This same paradoxical pattern of details--indicating dependence on writing and distrust of yet yearning for reliable oral communication--is evident within Helen's journal. Nowhere is this pattern more obvious than in the subplot of Helen's timid friend Milicent and her husband Hattersley, one of Huntingdon's drinking cronies. Like Lowborough (and unlike Grimsby, who later dies in a drunken brawl), Hattersley eventually stops drinking and rebuilds his life. In Chapter 42, "A Reformation" (a 1990s writer might be expected to call it a "recovery"), in a gesture which strikingly anticipates current clinical interventions with alcoholics, Helen helps him to see reality by showing him the difference between the frank letters his wife (and Helen's close friend) Milicent sent to Helen and the timid ones she sent to Hattersley regarding his drinking (384-85). It is

only the written letters addressed to Helen which have an impact on Hattersley. Helen believes that Milicent ought to have confronted him herself, but Milicent is equally sure that "anything that I could have said. . . .[would] only have bothered him . . . ." Hattersley responds, "You never tried me, Milly" (386).

Whether Milicent's defeatism is justified is unclear; Helen's earlier verbal attempt to confront him was unsuccessful. When Helen had told Hattersley in Chapter 31 what Milicent would not tell him—despite his attempts physically to bully the secret out of her—that she was crying because of her "shame and humiliation" at his drunkenness, he reacted with "a stare of stupid amazement" at Helen's "impudence" and anger—expressed by throwing books at the laughing Huntingdon. In the subsequent chapter, "Comparisons: Information Rejected", Hattersley repeatedly blames their marital problems on everything but his own intolerable behaviour. His last defence, significantly, is Milly's silence: "if my ongoings don't suit her, she should tell me so" (299). Whether an oral confrontation would have made him see the light is debatable. What is clear, however, is that reading his wife's misery in her letters did so. It is the power of the written word that precipitates his reformation/recovery.

Neither oral nor written discourse between Helen and Huntingdon has any effect on Huntingdon's spiralling addiction, but Helen's own writing does permit her to explore

her own sometimes contradictory feelings, to make a permanent record of her confidences (the double meaning of the word "confidence" is important), and to preserve her sanity. As Huntingdon declines, Helen becomes stronger and wiser. The early journal entries record her earnest intention to "save" him (Chapter 17, "Further Warnings", 167) and "deliver" him (Chapter 20, "Persistence", 190), an inclination, incidentally, which is widespread among daughters of alcoholic fathers who marry men with drinking problems, as they so frequently do.

One of her entries ought to be quoted at some length here since it articulates so clearly the predicament of codependent spouses who are enmeshed with their partners:

And indeed, I know not whether at the time it was not for him rather than myself that I blushed; for, since he and I are one, I so identify myself with him that I feel his degradation, his feelings, his transgressions as my own; I blush for him, I fear for him; I repent for him, weep, pray, and feel for him as for myself; but I cannot act for him; and hence, I must be and am debased, contaminated by the union, both in my own eyes, and in the actual truth. I am so determined to love him—so intensely anxious to excuse his errors, that I am continually dwelling upon them, and labouring to extenuate the loosest of his principles and the worst of his practices, till I am familiarized with vice and

almost a partaker in his sins . . . . Fool that I  
was to dream that I had strength and purity enough  
to save myself and him! (273-74)

The journal chronicles, just as her subsequent letters to her brother demonstrate, her movement to a realistic awareness that the task of saving him is beyond her power: "I know I cannot help him" (451). The pattern, therefore, seems to be that writing is at first a private, illusion-filled refuge from reality, but one which soon becomes a refuge from the madness around her—her only way to confront reality. A typical journal entry, this time after the confrontation with Huntingdon about his infidelity, occurs after she reassures her devoted maid Rachel (who has urged her to grieve more volubly) "I am calm." This calm resolve apparently aside, though, she goes on to pen this:

I found my bed so intolerable that before two  
o'clock I rose . . . and sat down in my dressing-  
gown to recount the events of the past evening. It  
was better to be so occupied than to be lying in  
bed torturing my brain with recollections of the  
far past and anticipations of the dreaded future.  
I have found relief in describing the very  
circumstances that have destroyed my peace, as well  
as the little trivial details attendant upon their  
discovery. No sleep I could have got this night  
would have done so much towards composing my mind

and preparing me to meet the trials of the day . .  
 . . (317)

This orientation towards current experience rather than "the far past" and "the dreaded future" gives her the ability to focus realistically on her needs, including venting her pent-up emotions and planning a practicable escape scheme.

Helen's journal is the most important way in which the written word is linked with truth and therefore with some measure of power; it is not, however, the only way. The irresponsible Huntingdon is hostile to the world of writing, and not merely to Helen's journal. At the outset of Chapter 24, "First Quarrel," he prevents Helen from reading (221), tries unsuccessfully to do some reading himself (222), and attacks one of his favourite hunting dogs by throwing a book at it (223). Helen's victory over him consists not merely of her own escape but of her success in both physically protecting their son from his influence and legally protecting him from being disinherited. Because she has learned to distrust his promises, she insists that Huntingdon sign a statement about the property in the presence of witnesses. Despite his prolonged evasions and excuses, he finally does so, an important moment (Chapter 47, "Startling Intelligence," 431). Thus the written word redeems the future for Helen's family, much as her claiming her mother's maiden name—Graham—redeems her past. (It is worth noting, in passing, that taking her mother's name, Graham, and not her own birth name, Lawrence, is thus a repudiation of her

alcoholic father as well as her alcoholic husband.) The emotional struggle culminating in the signing of the document, which now has legal weight, emphasizes once again that the written word confers value and permanence in a context in which the oral word is inadequate.

Helen's journal writing takes place, not surprisingly, in the library. It is surely not an accident that in this large country house—a structure in which any one of many rooms could serve the purpose—it is this same library which is also the site for her painting, the activity that makes her escape possible. It is this room full of books that Huntingdon ransacks in his attempt to destroy her journal and her art. When Helen confronts the dissimulating and adulterous Annabella Lowborough with her knowledge of her affair with Huntingdon, she does so by scribbling her a note on the flyleaf of a book (Chapter 34, "Concealment"), a challenge which is rapidly followed by a confrontation in the library. Out of Helen's regard for the pain which the disgrace would cause Annabella's relative and Helen's friend, Milicent, they agree to not have a public exposure of the scandal. Because of this silence, Lord Lowborough later accuses Helen of having participated in the deceit (Chapter 38, "The Injured Man", 347). Lowborough's accusation is a significant challenge to the strategy of "enabling."

In her assessment of this novel, Elizabeth Hollis Berry comments as follows:

I believe that Anne Brontë is more than the simple moralist of the Brontë sisters, and that her achievements as a writer far exceeded Charlotte's suggestion that her writing was 'only a painful penance and a severe duty' meant to exorcise the demons of Branwell's alcoholism and her own 'undreamt-of experiences of human nature' at Thorp Green.<sup>10</sup>

This judgement is valid; the novel is no clumsy temperance tract. Nevertheless, it is all too easy to underrate the significance of Branwell's alcoholism either by ignoring it outright or by misdirecting critical energy into the trivial enterprise of connecting the novel's drunkards with particularly pathetic or lurid anecdotes involving Branwell. The real achievement of this novel exists at least in part because of, not despite, Anne Brontë's awareness of how people in addicted relationships function.

Despite our assumptions in contemporary literary theory about the inherent slipperiness of all language, written and oral, it seems to me that this Victorian realist text asks us to make a valid distinction between them. We have to take seriously not just Anne Brontë's didactic intention but current insights about writing and speech which emerge from recent awareness of addiction experience. Oral communication

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<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Hollis Berry, Anne Brontë's Radical Vision: Structures of Consciousness (Victoria: University of Victoria Press, 1994) 108.

in this novel is represented negatively, more often than not as ineffectual, mean-spirited, or false; and written documents—significant and trivial alike—are associated with truth. "I wished to tell the truth," Anne Brontë wrote in her preface to the second edition. "Oh, Reader! If there were less of this delicate concealment of facts—this whispering 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace, there would be less of sin and misery to the young of both sexes who are left to wring their bitter knowledge from experience" (29-30). Anne's truth is Helen's and Gilbert's truth: that documents—letters and books—have a power to maintain sanity, courage, and love in the presence of both malicious falsehoods and realities which cannot or will not be spoken. Readers of contemporary fiction and those who reconsider older novels in the light of contemporary theory ask questions that could not have been posed a few years ago and that cannot yet be answered with certainty now. I would suggest that one avenue of enquiry leading from The Tenant of Wildfell Hall to other alcoholic texts is this: does addiction create a whole different linguistic economy? It seems clear that writing achieves its special power in the alcoholic, codependent relationships within The Tenant of Wildfell Hall because there is no trust; one must enter a sphere where evidence replaces one's word. What remains unclear to me is whether the linguistic ideal remains oral, a nostalgia for the idea of full disclosure, of honest speech—or whether, in addiction-related texts, a new understanding

of the function of language emerges at some point. Is writing still "second-best," or does it in fact become primary? This—not the quest to determine which fictional drunkards are barely transmuted versions of particular historical drunkards—is the sort of question which ought to engage the energies of addiction-sensitive readers interested in the subtle but powerful impact of familial alcoholism on codependent writers.

## CHAPTER 3

**"EXPOSING ALL ITS RAMIFICATIONS": THE CASE OF FYODOR  
DOSTOEVSKY AND CRIME AND PUNISHMENT**

Nineteenth-century Russia is even further removed from our gaze than nineteenth-century England, and what I suggest in this chapter would profit from more detailed study of the structure of the family and of its culture of drinking. It is beyond doubt, however, that Dostoevsky was interested in exploring drinking problems in his fiction and that his family history indicates a highly personal motivation for doing so, rarely explored by biographical critics.

It is well-known that Crime and Punishment<sup>1</sup> represents an extraordinary fusion of what Dostoevsky originally conceived of as matter for two different novels: the Raskolnikov murder/repentance story and a rather Dickensian exposé of Russian alcoholism in the portrait of the Marmeladovs. Little attention, however, has yet been paid to the textual implications of Dostoevsky's own experience of familial alcoholism.<sup>2</sup> Doing so helps to illuminate a remarkable

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<sup>1</sup> The text to which the page references correspond is the Constance Garnett translation. To avoid being sent astray by nuances of translation, however, I also read the Monas and Coulson translations indicated in the bibliography.

<sup>2</sup> George Charles Noelke's "Alcoholism in The Brothers Karamazov," The Counsellor (November/December, 1986): 4-29 uses alcoholic family roles in its analysis and is therefore somewhat similar to my reading of Crime and Punishment. As far as I know, Noelke's paper is the only contemporary study of alcoholism in Dostoevsky's texts. Jean Charles Sournia, however, notes the existence of a 1927 thesis arguing a nineteenth century perspective: "Une famille de dégénérés héréditaires alcooliques dans l'oeuvre de Dostoevski: Les frères Karamazov": cited from Sournia, 214, n. 52.

ethical consistency in this complex and crowded novel: that "rescuing" others from the consequences of their own behaviour is pathetic and futile at best and contemptible and dangerous at worst is not only a recent insight of clinicians and self-help groups; it is also a recurring motif which unifies both segments of Crime and Punishment. More than a century before the interpersonal dynamics of addiction and the concomitant failure of "rescuing" were described by addiction professionals, Dostoevsky explored those issues in his fiction with an insight—perhaps not entirely conscious—that could hardly have helped but be substantially informed by his experience of his father's alcoholism, identified, though not analysed, by the standard biographies.

Biographical issues provide a useful point of departure for a consideration of the text: first, Dostoevsky's dreadful relationship with his alcoholic father, and second, the evidence of his own Family Hero role in later life, particularly significant in the circumstances surrounding the publication of Crime and Punishment. Examining his original intention is useful: it was originally to be a narrative with a sociological interest in Russian alcoholism. Attending to the subtle but powerful struggle with codependency in the final version of the book will help to clarify, if not entirely to resolve, two puzzles in the text: first is the problem of the relationship between suffering and redemption. Given the wide recognition of the crucial importance of place assigned to the embracing of suffering in the Dostoevskian

oeuvre's scheme of redemption, yet another treatment of this theme might seem as superfluous as a refutation of its centrality would be impossible. The suffering/redemption theme in Crime and Punishment, however, needs a more nuanced treatment than is usually given it in conventional readings, which maintain their consistency only at the price of misconstruing or ignoring outright the novel's many instances of suffering which are clearly non-redemptive. If we speculate that one of Dostoevsky's purposes in creating the world of this novel was to dramatize the moral and pragmatic implications of two different ways codependents can respond to misery, then some of the apparent contradictions built into that world can be better understood instead of evaded. The second textual puzzle, regarding Raskolnikov's renewal, is related to this: closure is deferred beyond the final chapter into an epilogue, and then again beyond the epilogue to another, unwritten story. The urge to escape narrative closure, I believe, is related to Dostoevsky's intuitive sense that recovering codependents must move beyond the psychological closure of the addiction-related roles generated by their experience of alcoholism.

A reader familiar with the dynamics of an alcoholic family might understandably find striking the clarity with which these are rendered in the predicament of the Marmeladov family. Dostoevsky's portrait of Marmeladov's daughter Sonia, in particular, the innocent prostitute who sells herself to care for her destitute step-mother and step-

siblings, provides us with an adult child Family Hero par excellence. As this family is so obviously alcoholic, one is not surprised by this. What is curious, though, is the impression that several other characters who have no apparent connection with problem drinking, particularly Raskolnikov himself, also act as if they are adult children of alcoholics. The lurid introduction to the Garnett translation suggests the reason for such an impression: "[Dostoevsky] was born in Moscow in 1821, the son of a former army surgeon whose drunken brutality led his own serfs to murder him by pouring vodka down his throat until he strangled." Although this melodramatic tidbit turns out to be problematic, for reasons I will discuss shortly, it provides a helpful point of departure.

I have repeatedly cited Roger Forseth's insight that biographers of alcoholic writers become at least temporarily codependent themselves, misunderstanding the implications of so much in the alcoholic's life which can only be understood in terms of addiction, and I would argue that a similar case can be made for biographers of writers who were adult children of alcoholics. The failure to recognize the centrality of codependency in an adult child's life will obscure patterns otherwise evident to an addiction-sensitive reader. The standard biographies of Dostoevsky<sup>3</sup> make no

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<sup>3</sup> Henri Troyat, Firebrand: The Life of Dostoevsky, trans. N. Guterman (New York: Roy Publishers, 1946); David Magarshack, Dostoevsky (New York: 1963); Konstantin Mochulsky, Dostoevsky: His Life and Work, trans. Michael Minehan (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967); Leonid P. Grossman, Dostoevsky, trans. Mary Mackler (London: Penguin Books Ltd.), 1974; and Geir Kjetsaa, Fyodor

secret of the fact that he had an alcoholic father and that alcoholism was a family problem: Fyodor's uncle and two brothers died of their "dipsomania" (see, for example, Magarshack 11). But no biographer or biographical critic has sought to link this experience with textual issues beyond making the obvious point that there are a lot of compulsive drunkards in his fiction. I therefore offer this view of the novel: although we cannot determine the extent to which Dostoevsky was able to come to terms with his own experience of addiction-related problems in his personal life (the biographies all discuss his own gambling compulsion), the design of Crime and Punishment makes it clear enough that at some level he recognized the futility of the "Hero" role with its constitutive element of "rescuing," and that he repudiated the genuine efficacy of action in that role.

What do we know about Dr. Dostoevsky from the standard biographies? For most of his life, Dostoevsky fils refused even to discuss his father, who emerges from most scholarly histories as an ill-tempered, demanding, miserly drunk given to unjustified accusations about his wife's fidelity,<sup>4</sup> physical brutality to his serfs, irrational, impossible expectations of those around him, and after his wife's death,

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Dostoevsky: A Writer's Life, tr. Siri Hustvedt and David McDuff (Toronto: Ballantine, 1989).

<sup>4</sup> His wife wrote a spirited letter in her own defence, but in a response typical of codependents, she asked her husband's forgiveness for "not having concealed the agonies of my soul from you." That is, she responded with irrational guilt to his unfounded charges, believing herself responsible for his emotional response to her legitimate feelings. The text of the letter is in Grossman (22).

sexual indiscretions with servant girls in their early teens, one of whom bore him a child (Grossman 39). He also carried on loud conversations with what he believed to be his wife's ghost, answering his own questions in a voice mimicking hers (Troyat 49). There are conflicting accounts of his death, but the most widespread belief is the grotesque version mentioned earlier, that he was murdered spectacularly by his own serfs who strangled him by pouring vodka forcibly down his throat and who may have escaped prosecution through bribery. All the biographers agree that Dr. Dostoevsky was drinking very heavily by the time of his death. The conspirators' motive, according to some, was revenge for the sexual abuse of their daughters (Magarshack 10-11; Grossman 40.) One version is that the family, revolted by his behaviour in life and embarrassed by the circumstances of his death, bribed officials to cover up the murder and record it as a death by "natural causes" (Grossman 40). Biographers who are skeptical of these melodramatic accounts—Joseph Frank and Geir Kjetsaa among them—plausibly argue that impoverished peasants could not have managed to bribe so many doctors and investigators. The skeptics suggest that Dr. Dostoevsky's death was of "natural causes," the result of an "apoplectic fit" (a stroke or heart attack) brought on by the heat, his drunkenness, and by his anger at his peasants for their incompetence in spreading manure on his fields. Magarshack suggests that the apoplexy may have been delirium tremens (11). The murder story was concocted, it is argued, by a

rival landowner who had his own reasons for wishing to cause scandal.

This dispute is a red herring, as far as I am concerned, since what the biographers are ignoring is that, one way or another, it was Dr. Dostoevsky's drinking which precipitated his death. The reason this oversight is so important is that children of alcoholics typically blame themselves for their parents' drinking problems. If drink caused Dr. Dostoevsky's death, then his children would feel responsible for his death as well. Fyodor, because he had sent his father a confrontational letter about his stinginess around the time of his death, did feel guilty for his father's demise for the rest of his life (Troyat 52; Mochulsky, 4-6). Some biographers suggest that he felt guilty about not loving his father and about feeling relieved at his death. These contradictory reactions are as understandable as they are irrational, and it is not necessary to subscribe to Freudian dogma to account for his ambivalence.<sup>5</sup> In addition to the unhappiness it caused during his lifetime, Dr. Dostoevsky's mismanagement of the estate created debts and hardships afterwards, one example being the necessity of a rather unpleasant marriage between Fyodor's sister Varvara and a

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<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, Freud's own assessment of Dostoevsky as a parricide, based on his reading of The Brothers Karamazov, is fascinating reading. See Freud's "Dostoevsky and Parricide" in Dostoevsky: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. René Wellek (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Princeton Press, 1963). See also Joseph Frank's assessment of both the murder and Freud's insights into Dostoevsky in Dostoevsky: the Seeds of Revolt (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton Press, 1976) 81-91, and 379-91.

much older businessman. Anyone feeling responsible for Dr. Dostoevsky's drinking problem and its consequences would thus have a huge burden on his conscience.

What I want to concentrate on is the struggle in Crime and Punishment to repudiate distorted notions of responsibility for other people's problems, but in passing, I should mention briefly how Dr. Dostoevsky is represented in the text. Dostoevsky may have dealt with his ambivalence about his alcoholic father by differentiating aspects of that complex relationship across four different characters whom he inspired: Dr. Zossimov, Marmeladov, Alyona, and Svidrigailov. Dr. Zossimov, the impecunious physician who is that rare thing in this novel, an abstainer, may be on one level, an idealized version of Dr. Dostoevsky. So, perhaps, is Marmeladov. Raskolnikov ministers to the dying drunk "as earnestly as if it had been his father" (154) [Sidney Monas and Jessie Coulson say "own father"], perhaps representing Dostoevsky's wishful thinking about his father's death. In this scene, one could argue, he gets to have his cake and eat it too: the drunken father who has been a source of misery to his family is killed off, but with a filial figure standing by to exude compassion. If one chooses to see the hapless Marmeladov as a fictional version of Dr. Dostoevsky, though, one must deal with the obvious difference between the bumbling and sentimental Marmeladov and the cruel, miserly father. It may be that Svidrigailov and Alyona are projections of those elements of his character,

Svidrigailov's sexual deviance and Alyona's life-denying miserliness being ways in which Dostoevsky could exorcise the memories he was unwilling to discuss. This possibility is particularly interesting in the case of Alyona, whom Raskolnikov hates with an extraordinary force. As if he has been Alyona's victim, rather than she his, he makes an odd remark: "I shall never, never forgive the old woman!" (239). If Raskolnikov is Dostoevsky's alter ego (at least insofar as filial psychology is concerned), he gets to explore his contradictory feelings several ways: first, through Alyona, he murders his miserly parent figure and moves slowly towards repentance; second, through Marmeladov, he compassionately attends the dying, affectionate father; third, through Svidrigailov's suicide, he learns that the sexually deviant father in a sense administers his own punishment. Interestingly, Marmeladov's death is a possible suicide as well; in some communities, coroners identify deaths attributed to alcoholism as suicides.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to his unnecessary appropriation of guilt for his father's death, the younger Dostoevsky seems to have exemplified the Family Hero role in other ways. All the biographies offer a wealth of anecdotes about Fyodor's life-long involvement with alcoholics other than his father and with other troubled people, many of whose problems stemmed from their own relationships with alcoholics, relationships

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<sup>6</sup> L. Rossman, MD, personal interview, 24 April 1999. For example, this is sometimes the practice in the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton.

which Fyodor seems to have taken on as his own. The repetitive nature of these relationships and their significance in terms of his literary production are remarkable. I will cite only a few here. His first—and very unhappy—marriage was to the consumptive widow of an alcoholic who had attracted his pity and ardour long before the death of her husband. Dostoevsky committed himself to taking care of her, her difficult son, and a rival lover, for whom he secured a teaching position. In fact, getting the rival a job seems to have been a condition for the marriage. Among the relationships he had with women between his two marriages, one was with Martha Brown, who lived with and cared for an alcoholic lover.<sup>7</sup> Despite life-long financial problems of his own, Dostoevsky was burdened by the debts of his two alcoholic brothers, Mikhail and Nikolai (Magarshack 39, 174, 271, 331).

Understandably enough, then, one motive for the writing of Crime and Punishment was financial necessity: in addition to his own debts, which were pressing, he had voluntarily assumed responsibility for the debts of his alcoholic brother Mikhail, who had died of cirrhosis of the liver shortly after being released from debtors' prison (Grossman 322) and for the maintenance of the widow and her four children. Keeping Mikhail's journal Epoch functioning was made even more difficult by the death of Apollon Grigoriev, "the journal's foremost contributing editor," another alcoholic (Kjetsaa

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<sup>7</sup> Grossman 329-33.

173). To stay out of debtors' prison himself, Dostoevsky made desperate overtures to publishers for cash advances, finally committing himself in the summer of 1865 to an unscrupulous publisher to whom he promised an entire new novel by November 1, 1866. The agreement was that all his existing and future works would become the property of the bookseller if the deadline were not met. This was a gamble, and his ambivalent reaction to the crisis, recorded in a letter to his friend Baron Wrangel, reads true to the figure of a tired Family Hero artificially invigorated by the challenge:

And now I've suddenly been left alone and things have become simply terrible for me. My whole life is broken in two . . . . Oh my friend, I'd readily go back to penal servitude for as many years, just to pay off my debts and feel free again. Now I'll start writing a novel with a stick over my head, i.e. from need, in haste. And meanwhile, it always appears to me that I'm really just beginning to live. Funny, isn't it? A cat's vitality. (Kjetsaa 177; and Mochulsky 268-9)

In Fyodor's case, this addiction to crises was related to his problem with gambling, itself a compulsive behavior. He fled from his creditors to Wiesbaden, gambled all his money away in five days, and then worked feverishly, in his own words, to beat the almost impossible deadline. In fact, he quickly

went on to produce not only Crime and Punishment, but The Gambler as well.

As the deadline loomed, friends suggested that he hire a stenographer and dictate the text of The Gambler; when the stenographer, Anna Snitkina (who was to become Dostoevsky's second wife), left after their first session, Dostoevsky said, "I am glad that you are a woman and not a man." Anna asked "Why?" and he responded, "Because a man would be quite sure to get drunk, but you, I hope, won't" (Magarshack 248). Clearly, Dostoevsky's sense of responsibility for his family's misfortunes, so entangled with alcohol abuse, was a compelling and recurring motive for his journalism and his fiction.

Not only was the life-context of Crime and Punishment's composition suggestive of Dostoevsky's experience of addictions, but the original intention for the novel was explicitly concerned with the miseries of alcoholism. In his letter to the publisher Krayevsky, he made his purpose clear:

My novel is called The Drunks and will deal with the current problem of drunkenness. Not only is the question analyzed, but I am also exposing all its ramifications, especially pictures of families, the upbringing of children in this atmosphere and so forth . . . .( Mochulsky 271)

This is obviously the Marmeladov story. Dostoevsky's interest in the ramifications for families is especially

intriguing and remains clear even in the final version of the novel with its murder and repentance plot.

My principal concern is with the inner dynamics of the text of Crime and Punishment. I have drawn attention, nevertheless, to extra-literary considerations—to his personal experience of addiction and to current thinking in addiction counseling—because they account for a striking feature of the text which has not been paid much critical attention by those who think that Dostoevsky was promoting suffering of an undifferentiated kind. In fact the saintly prostitute Sonia and the murderer Raskolnikov learn, as most of the others do not, to be reconciled to authentic, undistorted notions of personal responsibility which open the possibilities of genuine, intersubjective bonds. They grow beyond the manipulative, power-oriented relationships which characterize those around them.

The necessity of briefly summarizing this great baggy monster of a novel almost equals the impossibility of doing so. Raskolnikov, an impoverished student whose widowed mother and sister have made many sacrifices for his education, murders a loathsome old woman, a pawnbroker who has victimized him and many others. His motives are tangled. Another suspect is apprehended and then released although he has confessed to the crime; Raskolnikov fears that the wise detective Porfiry, so interested in psychology, knows that he is the killer. Having met the drunkard Marmeladov shortly before both the murder and Marmeladov's own death under a

horse-drawn coach, which event he witnesses, Raskolnikov becomes emotionally involved with the wretched family that he helps: the half-mad consumptive widow Katerina, who also dies shortly after her husband's scandalous funeral; her starving children; and especially Marmeladov's daughter, Sonia—the timid and religious prostitute who is their only means of support and to whom he eventually confesses the great secret that has been torturing him. She encourages him to confess publicly and to repent to God; he similarly challenges her to realize that she cannot go on as a prostitute. Raskolnikov's mother, Pulcheria, and sister, Dounia, who is engaged briefly to Luzhin, a domineering and unscrupulous businessman, arrive in St. Petersburg, as does Dounia's former employer, Svidrigailov, a sexual deviant who may be responsible for the deaths of three people: his wife Marfa Petrovna, a deaf-mute girl whom he has sexually abused, and a male servant. Svidrigailov, having eavesdropped and learned that Raskolnikov is the killer, promises Dounia to get him out of the country in exchange for sexual favours from her. She refuses. After having made arrangement to care for Sonia and Katerina's children, Svidrigailov commits suicide. Sonia and Raskolnikov's friend Razumihin, whom Dounia will marry, stand by Raskolnikov at his trial; Sonia follows him to Siberia, where he eventually moves beyond his formal confession of his transgression toward authentic repentance.

The explicit references to alcoholism are overwhelming. The Marmeladov family's predicament is treated with

compassion, but no sentiment: the narrator gazes unflinchingly at every detail of their suffering. Their cycle of misery is so obvious that any detailed analysis here would be superfluous: the exposure of the degradation, material poverty, fear, anger, pathos, and tissue of illusions on the part of the three adult Marmeladovs has perhaps no literary parallels of equal force. Katerina's delusions about the grandeur of her past and future, and Sonia's naive faith that her prostitution is helpful, are extreme and pathetic examples of "system enabling." But the Marmeladovs are not alone. Their sort of misery is everywhere in St. Petersburg. Raskolnikov passes "drunken men whom he met continually, though it was a working day" (2); it is a drunk who notices his potentially incriminating hat (3); and he himself walks like a drunk when he first meets the pawnbroker Alyona, then sees the drunks "abusing and supporting one another," feels free of his own burden when he drinks, yet has a foreboding that this feeling is not normal (7). Intuitively sensing a bond with Marmeladov, who, like him, experiences alienation and agitation (8), Raskolnikov feels a "thirst" for company (9).

Marmeladov's tavern monologue is an extraordinary catalogue of compulsive responses: he drinks, he says, to impose punishment on himself (13). For what is not clear—perhaps for drinking, in which case the irreducible tautology is a metaphor for the radical impenetrability of the mystery of human evil. Marmeladov tells us that he has married the

widow of a gambler to save her from destitution (a mirror image of the gambler Dostoevsky's marriage to the widow of a drunkard); however, Marmeladov spends the money his daughter earns from prostitution on drink. He has an incongruous, masochistic, skewed sense of personal responsibility: he has an apocalyptic vision of mercy and understanding plus an enjoyment of being beaten by Katerina in the here and now. (Interestingly, she calls him a criminal and a monster, labels which Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov consider for themselves as well.) Pulcheria's letter tells us that Svidrigailov gave Dounia a hard time when he was drunk (28). The passersby think that Raskolnikov is drunk (36); the abused girl (a child prostitute?) whom he tries to help is likewise drunk (42). The interlude in the tavern precipitates the horrific dream in which the drunken peasants emerge from their tavern to kill the little mare (49-50). After the murder, he can even tell the time (2:00 a.m.) by the despairing cries of the drunks coming home from the closing taverns (79). He is whipped on the way home from Razumihin's lodgings and is thought to be faking drunkenness (102). Dushkin tells the police that he gave Nikolay, the painter and suspect, the money for the loot because it would only be spent on drink (120).

Raskolnikov's musing on the idea of spending life on a ledge is provoked by his observation of the abused women begging for money outside the tavern (138-9). When he enters the tavern, the waiters almost force vodka on him. He reads

a newspaper article about the spontaneous combustion of a shop-keeper from alcohol (140).<sup>9</sup> He witnesses a drunken woman trying to commit suicide by drowning (149). The coachman who runs over Marmeladov cannot tell whether he was drunk or whether he deliberately strayed into the path of the vehicle (154)—as if the distinction matters. Razumihin is drunk at his own party (169) and stresses twice that Dr. Zossimov is not, as if his sobriety is an unusual accomplishment (176). Razumihin is very ashamed of his drunkenness before Dounia, and significantly (though erroneously) thinks that he cannot be forgiven (183). At Marmeladov's tragicomic funeral, just about everyone is drunk: naturally, in the confrontation with the villainous Luzhin, Lebeziatnikov suggests that he may be drunk (342). Porfiry says that he does not smoke because he drinks (386), and says that a witness's credibility could have been undermined by the fact that he was a notorious drunkard (394). Svidrigailov, though drinking very little, says he is drunk (404) and is thought to be so by his fiancée's parents (430). He dreams of comforting a five-year-old abused by her drunken mother (438) and must step over a drunk on his way to commit suicide (440). And Raskolnikov, on his way to confess—finally—has to pass a drunk dancing (452). When he kisses the ground, as Sonia had told him to do, the crowd, naturally, thinks he is drunk

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<sup>9</sup> Dostoevsky may have borrowed this bizarre detail from his reading of Dickens. Accounts of deaths from alcohol-related spontaneous combustion appear in nineteenth-century temperance tracts and novels by Dickens and others. See Warren S. Walker, "Lost Liquor Lore: The Blue Flame of Intemperance," *Journal of Popular Culture* 16(1982): 17-25.

(453). Obviously, Dostoevsky's horrified fascination with intoxication is far broader than the particular miseries of the Marmeladovs. It is hard to think of another novel in which alcohol abuse is more prominent.

The magnitude of the social problem is staggering. What is at stake, however, is not just a question of the sociological novel which he had proposed to Krayevsky. The fusion of the experience of addictions with the Raskolnikov murder plot invests the novel with a metaphysical dimension. This is no patchwork job: the informing principle of the language of addictions provides a symbol for human evil; the language of recovery from addiction points to spiritual reconciliation of God and humanity. A remarkable unity is apparent: that this is so is evident from the astonishing fact that, although none of the principal characters—with the exception of poor Sonia—comes from an alcoholic household, to some degree all of them behave as if they did.

And not only do they respond to situations the way that adult children of alcoholics do; they respond as "Family Heroes" specifically would. They waste much energy attempting to "rescue" one another from situations which are not their responsibility; and, in doing so, they raise the level of tension in their relationships. That Dostoevsky was repudiating "rescuing" is disclosed by the fact that all the rescue attempts fail, whereas the only characters to grow beyond their roles—Raskolnikov and Sonia—help each other to see and deal with reality, which is always open to growth and

genuine recovery. Raskolnikov and Sonia are defined over and against the other characters—some of them likable and some not—all of whom overestimate the extent of their own power.

Dostoevsky undermines the concept of rescuing through dramatizing its futility: he does so sometimes with poignancy and sometimes through caricature.

First, there are some extraordinary dreams or fantasies of rescue. It is striking that none of these succeeds, even in fantasy.

Raskolnikov's heartbreaking and horrifying dream of the death of the mare is a case in point. In it, a small mare given an impossible task, to pull a wagon load of drunken peasants, is beaten to death by the driver and cheered on by the tavern crowd. In the dream, Raskolnikov is a helpless child, powerless to protect the mare. But he is also the mare and the killer.<sup>9</sup> Without repeating the critical arguments for this position, I will point out that his dream is consistent with the emotional experience of a child of an addicted household: he tries to stop the suffering, his own and his parent's (or parents'); but he fails, and at some level he concludes that the perpetuation of the suffering is his fault because he did not try hard enough.

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<sup>9</sup> For an excellent account of the triple role of Raskolnikov in his own dream, see W.D. Snodgrass, "Crime and Punishment: The Mare Beating Episode," in *Crime and Punishment and the Critics* ed. Edward Wasiolek (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1961) 90-97.

In the contemptible Luzhin, we see a caricature of a rescuer: Dostoevsky exposes an unpleasant truth here about rescuing, that its primary purpose is not genuinely altruistic but is rather self-serving instead. Luzhin indulges himself in absurd fantasies about Dounia's total dependence on him. He wanted Dounia to perceive him as her benefactor, her rescuer from poverty; in turn, he imagines that Dounia would be "one who would all her life look on him as her saviour, worship him, admire him, and only him" (266). The incongruously religious language here is a clue as to how inappropriate his self-image is. That we are meant to repudiate his role of rescuer is emphasized by the fact that in his unsuccessful scheme to win back Dounia's affection, he goes about it by posing as Sonia's benefactor and then humiliating her. After her father's death, Luzhin offers her the small sum of ten roubles for her impoverished family, and then furtively places a hundred roubles in her pocket without her knowledge. At the funeral, he accuses her of theft (Part V, Chapters 1 and 2). The point is that his ludicrous fantasies undermine any inclination a reader might have to romanticize heroic fantasies of rescue.

Svidrigailov's rescue fantasies are more complex, as he is a far more complicated character, but the theme is nonetheless similar. He dreams of rescuing a pathetic waif (the child of a drunken cook), but the child metamorphoses into a harlot figure, thus tempting him with his own desires, which is all a "rescue" can do since it is not genuinely

concerned with the welfare of the Other. The problem here is very complicated and beyond the scope of this discussion; one might argue that there is something unselfish in Svidrigailov's choice of death rather than submission to his deviant fantasies. Even so, the point is that associating a failed rescue fantasy with the character of Svidrigailov certainly undermines any substantial merit there might be in such an argument.

Similarly, Raškolnikov recognizes (and then repudiates) his self-deceptive philanthropic murder motive (360). In a painful acknowledgement of very murky motives he recognizes his urge to be a Napoleon.

In addition to the fantasies, there are all sorts of actual rescue attempts which also fail. Here is an enumeration of some of these attempts.

Marmeladov's attempt to rescue Katerina from her misery by marrying her is an absolute failure.

Dounia's willingness to marry Luzhin for the sake of her mother and brother is inappropriate, as she learns. Although it is certainly not as revolting as Luzhin's scheme, she has a similarly exaggerated notion of her responsibility: she actually asks Rodion what right he has to refuse her sacrifice (172).

The late Marfa Petrovna—a rescuer par excellence—paid off Svidrigailov's card debts, thus freeing him from debtors' prison (407) and she bribed some officials so that he would escape a murder charge (258). However, she neither won her

husband's love, nor did she make him feel loved. Her well-meaning attempt to protect him from the consequence of his actions is obviously futile.

We also see failure in Pulcheria's attempt to protect Raskolnikov from the painful knowledge of Dounia's troubles. Her presumption enrages him; moreover, the intolerable manipulation one reads between the lines is symptomatic of an unhealthy relationship in which one partner wishes to have control.

Rodion's attraction to his first fiancée and his feeling that she would have preferred her had she been a lame hunchback (206) are disturbingly reminiscent of Luzhin's sick musings.

The pathetic Nikolay's absurd willingness to take on the responsibility for Rodion's crime should not be seen as a Christ-like sacrifice; it is an inauthentic martyrdom rooted in false, neurotic piety, a parody of altruism.

Dounia, as Svidrigailov correctly sees (404), was a rescuer, though one who grew somewhat beyond her role. She had tried to save Parasha, his servant girl, from him (410), and Dounia attempted to reform him. Counting on that element of her nature, Svidrigailov attempts to win her affections by offering to rescue Raskolnikov, and he appeals to her exaggerated sense of responsibility by saying that both Rodion's and Pulcheria's future depends on whether she chooses to be seduced by him (424-26). His history of seductions had followed this pattern: he was able to

"protect" women from the reality of their own responsibilities by claiming that they were innocent of all lusts and that he was guilty for both parties (410). But this skill certainly brought him no lasting satisfaction. All in all, the association of Svidrigailov's unsavoury seductions with rescuing certainly undermines that form of action as a way of responding to suffering.

Raskolnikov's and Lebedziatnikov's rescue of Sonia from Luzhin's malicious charges is also interesting: while motivated by worthy intentions, it too is futile, since, despite Sonia's vindication, the outraged landlady evicts them all anyway.

Nor has Dounia really learned her lesson: she and Razumihin ineffectually try to protect Pulcheria from the knowledge of Rodion's imprisonment (461); Pulcheria, in turn, conceals her intuitive awareness of the truth from them (464). The strain undoubtedly contributes to her mental and physical decline, which is reminiscent of poor mad Katerina's hysterical delusions. Similarly, Dounia and Razumihin fail in their attempt to protect Rodion from the knowledge of Pulcheria's death (464).

The failure of both the rescue fantasies and of the actual rescue attempts dramatizes the inappropriateness of trying to rescue others from responsibility and reality.

Sonia's pathetic attempt to save her family from destitution fits this pattern too. It is astonishing that critics uniformly praise her salvific influence on

Raskolnikov without attending to the parallel influence he has on her. Her encouragement of his reconciliation to life is so much a matter of consensus that it needs no discussion here, except to stress that she makes him see the reality that he can be loved, despite his great sin. What I want to stress is that he makes her see reality too:

"But you are a great sinner . . . and your worst sin is that you have destroyed and betrayed yourself for nothing. Isn't that fearful? Isn't it fearful that you are living in this filth which you loathe so, and at the same time you know yourself (you've only to open your eyes) that you are not helping anyone by it, not saving anyone from anything?" (279-80)

And he makes her see that she too has destroyed a life, her own (286).

Interestingly, the problem of Svidrigailov is pointedly relevant here. Raskolnikov has argued that she cannot save her family and that her little step-sister, Polya, will probably go the same route, a likelihood which Sonia has resisted up till this point. Without Svidrigailov's gift of money, which for once has no strings attached, Raskolnikov's prediction would have become the reality which Sonia had denied. If one adopts a particular theological perspective, it is possible to see Svidrigailov's gesture as a channel of grace: it is free, surprising, unconnected to the recipients' efforts, and is not manipulative. Moreover, Svidrigailov

reinforces Raskolnikov's repudiation of Sonia's rescuing by warning her that she cannot get through life paying other people's debts (431).

That Sonia and Raskolnikov can help one another is the psychological fulcrum of the novel. Their gift was reciprocal, and both their "pale, sick faces were bright with the dawn of a new future, of a full resurrection into a new life" (471). The language of healing is unmistakable. They are recovering not just from their Siberian maladies but from the infected relationships of St. Petersburg, and this apparently sudden recovery is not at all discontinuous with the rest of the novel, as is sometimes argued by critics who think that the Epilogue is flawed by a clumsy *deus ex machina* quality. This continuity is borne out by the Lazarus allusion in the Epilogue: Raskolnikov is surprised that Sonia had not pressed her Bible or her faith on him; she waited for him to ask. Similarly, he had asked her to read the Gospel to him on the night of his confession.

Sophisticated theories of narration have been used to attack and defend this controversial epilogue;<sup>10</sup> one should note, however, that the freedom Sonia leaves Raskolnikov for his own healing is consistent with the design of the plot and both are consistent with contemporary addiction theory. Dr. Zossimov, much earlier, had told Rodion that "your recovery

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<sup>10</sup> For example, see Steven Cassedy, "The Formal Problem of the Epilogue in *Crime and Punishment*: The Logic of Tragic and Christian Structures," *Dostoevsky Studies* 3(1982): 171-90.

depends solely on yourself" (194). Raskolnikov, who has trouble accepting affection from anyone, is mystified at the attention he has been getting and says, frowning, "I simply don't know what I have done to deserve such special attention from you. I simply don't" (195).

The answer is, of course, "nothing." The free gift of regeneration in the Epilogue is perfectly consistent with the design of the whole, with its powerful identification of distorted notions of human responsibility with the illness and limitations associated with addiction experience. In this regeneration, we come to understand something of Dostoevsky's own spiritual illumination, his sense of grace. But that is the beginning of a new story.

I have not intended to imply that any of the characters, no matter how ineffectual or contemptible, is represented as being beyond redemption. Even a Svidrigailov, one could argue, has fed the hungry and clothed the naked. It is clear, however, that the novel promotes not the vain delusions of rescue, but the painfully acquired wisdom of Sonia and Raskolnikov who assist one another in honestly acknowledging the reality of their limitations. In doing so, they implicitly leave room for grace. Seen in this light, the Epilogue which brings them closer together and brings Raskolnikov closer to repentance is part of the trajectory of the whole novel. The well-known "Serenity Prayer" of Alcoholics Anonymous asks for three gifts: "the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the

things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." The fatalists of the world, like Marmeladov (and possibly Svidrigailov) settle too easily for a pseudo-tragic and illusory acceptance of misery rather than the first grace. The rescuers, trapped in the accelerating cycle of their own pride, mistakenly think that they possess the second. Only Raskolnikov and Sonia, who learn to be open to the third gift, acquire this most difficult of all powers of discernment.

The degree to which Dostoevsky was conscious of the impact of his father's alcoholism on his own gambling, on his relationships with other alcoholics, and on his writing will perhaps be identified by a later generation of literary biography. Even the best of his biographical critics have failed to come to grips with the centrality of addiction in his life for much the same reason that ordinary people involved with alcoholics usually have failed in the same task—lack of awareness, and denial, complicated, of course, by the scholarly difficulties posed by our distance from nineteenth-century Russian family life and nineteenth-century Russian attitudes towards drinking. Now that the enigmas of alcoholism in general and codependency in particular have come to be better understood, however, biographical critics are met with the challenge to provide addiction-sensitive readings of Crime and Punishment and other texts in the Dostoevskian canon.

## CHAPTER 4

"IMMOLATED WIVES" AND OTHER "QUAKING, RUINED CREATURES":  
THE CASE OF MALCOLM LOWRY AND UNDER THE VOLCANO

Because of its powerful portrayal of Geoffrey Firmin, Under the Volcano (1947) has earned a reputation for being a novel par excellence about the alcoholic individual. Most critical attention has been focused on the novel's main protagonist, Geoffrey Firmin, just as traditional clinical interest in alcoholism has tended to deal solely with the drinker. Under the Volcano, though, is a remarkably rich text in its representation of the phenomenon of codependency—that is, of dysfunctional relationships which evolve in the context of alcohol abuse. Reading Under the Volcano as a work centred on the maladaptive equilibrium of alcoholic relationships not only enhances our appreciation of Lowry's skill in characterization but also helps to account for his mixed feelings about that skill. Most importantly, a focus on the way alcohol abuse affects others, and is abetted by them, clarifies the collateral damage evident in the problematic relationships of Geoffrey's wife Yvonne and his half-brother Hugh. Yvonne seems, obviously enough, a codependent spouse and, in current codependency jargon, an Adult Child of an Alcoholic; so, in a sense, is Hugh. In the course of demonstrating that Lowry's portraits of Yvonne and Hugh are "realistic" depictions of codependents, I want also to point out again the different type of narrative strategies

and reader responsibility that an authentic "alcoholic" text requires.

Most of the critical commentaries on the "supporting" characters in Under the Volcano—on Yvonne, Hugh, and Jacques—have been elaborations of or challenges to Lowry's own defensive remarks in his famous letter to his publisher, Jonathan Cape, a letter regarded by many scholars as the foundation for all criticism of the novel. In the letter, Lowry quotes the charges by Cape's reader that both the "[f]lashbacks . . . and the past and present thoughts and emotions . . . [are] often tedious and unconvincing" (61; Lowry's ellipses). Lowry reluctantly conceded the point, admitting that "the character drawing is not only weak but virtually nonexistent . . . ." His concession, however, did not erase a residue of self-justification: "But I have not attempted to draw characters in the normal sense . . . . though I did go to incredible trouble to make my major characters seem adequate on the most superficial plane on which this book can be read, and I believe in some eyes the character drawing will appear the reverse of weak. (What about female readers?)." The "weakness," he says, was a consequence of the intention that the four characters were "to be aspects of the same man, or of the human spirit" (60). Both Lowry's sensitivity to gender as a factor in his readers' suspension of disbelief and his sense that the characters were somehow abnormal and fundamentally similar to the Consul suggest his intuitive awareness of the nature of

codependency, about which there was no organized body of knowledge in his day.

As Lowry went on to write to his publisher, "There are a thousand writers who can draw adequate characters till all is blue for one who can tell you anything new about hell fire. And I am telling you something new about hell fire" (80). What Lowry had in mind was undoubtedly the Consul's hell fire, but his portraits of the codependents who orbited the Consul also show us something new: the three who tried hardest to rescue him were also those who betrayed him most deeply. It was not until the 1980s that researchers began to recognize the paradoxical alignment of rescuing with betrayal; thus, in this 1947 novel, Lowry was indeed saying something "new" about the nature of addiction. Accordingly, if the characters in the novel seem not to be adequately individuated, the reason is not lack of precision or artistry on Lowry's part, since real-life codependents never are adequately individuated. That is why they need professional counseling and/or self-help groups. Lowry's mixture of diffidence and stubbornness in his letter to Cape regarding their portrayal points to his partly conscious but extremely acute awareness of how the minds of codependents work.

In her 1980 study, "The Character of Yvonne,"<sup>1</sup> Carole Slade perceptively noted that surprisingly little attention had been focused on the three characters other than the Consul and that even less commentary had been given to Yvonne

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<sup>1</sup> Carole Slade, "The Character of Yvonne in Under the Volcano." Canadian Literature 84 (1980): 137-44.

than to Hugh and Jacques. Most studies—those written before and after Slade's—take a stand on whether Yvonne is believable (almost all pause briefly to refute a repeated but textually unfounded accusation that Lowry could not create credible female characters) and then pass equally quick judgement on whether Yvonne was selfish (her leaving the Consul, betraying him) or selfless (her enduring his behaviour for so long, then returning). Even in studies which take issue with Lowry's assertion in his letter to Cape that they were to be seen as a "quartet," as four aspects of the same character, however, the curiously disproportionate attention paid to the male characters persists. Neither have shifts in critical fashions away from traditional character analysis produced readings of Yvonne as a subject with her own discourse. Sue Vice's work, for example, blending an awareness of alcoholic experience with sophisticated textual theory influenced by Jacques Lacan and Peter Brook, treats Yvonne as a textual element whose interest for us is primarily as a voice heard only in the Consul's discourse, a substitute for the irrecoverable mother, who is again replaced by the bottomless bottle.<sup>2</sup> Slade's powerful apologia for Yvonne as a literary creation and as "an individualized character who resists easy definition in a traditional female role," and "a character of whom female readers can approve"

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<sup>2</sup> Sue Vice, "Fear of Perfection, Love of Death, and the Bottle," Malcolm Lowry Eighty Years On, ed. Sue Vice (London: MacMillan, 1989) 92-107.

(143), is one whose painstaking attention I wish to emulate but whose argument I will modify.

Set in Mexico, on the Day of the Dead, 1939, Lowry's Under the Volcano establishes its preoccupation with death quickly. In its first chapter, Jacques Laruelle and his friend Dr. Vigil reflect on the disastrous events of exactly one year earlier: the last day in the life of their friend, the alcoholic ex-Consul Geoffrey Firmin and his ex-wife Yvonne. The subsequent chapters recreate that day, climaxing with the deaths, so that the end of the text brings the reader back to the beginning. The narrative consciousness shifts among Jacques, Geoffrey, Yvonne and Hugh, the latter three constituting a codependent family. Thus, the Consul is surrounded by his wife Yvonne, who is herself an Adult Child of an Alcoholic, a younger half-brother Hugh, who at times is more like a Scapegoat/Family Hero son, and the Consul's childhood friend, Jacques. Jacques has his own moments as Family Hero and becomes part of the family by acquiring two of the Consul's functions—as lover to Yvonne and father figure to Hugh.

"Equilibrium is all," writes the Consul in his unmailed letter to Yvonne<sup>3</sup> (84). The context for his reference to the equilibrium he seeks is his question about how she imaginatively perceives him in the Cabbalistic scheme of things. The statement "Equilibrium is all," however, has an

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<sup>3</sup> Malcolm Lowry, Under the Volcano (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985) 84. All page references are to this edition and will be noted in the text.

ironic validity for codependency as well, particularly as the Consul later associates his secret knowledge with what he calls "the Great Brotherhood of Alcohol" (183). That phrase also suggests the leftist politics of Hugh, one of many details which implicate Hugh in the network of codependency.

Lowry knew enough about his own addiction and the reactions of those around him to recognize, paradoxically, that although some sort of help was desirable, nothing anyone does to rescue the alcoholic seems to accomplish anything—hence his ironic use of the Good Samaritan motif throughout the novel. The horizon provided by his own experiences permitted him a vision of what did not work, but his own addiction rendered him incapable of seeing that there were other responses which very well might have done so. Hence in Under the Volcano, the characters can make no clear distinction between "rescue" and "help," and the novel presents a dialectic of futility. Yet, it is also Lowry's authentic depiction of the dynamics of addiction that has prompted many a reader to take up its narrative again and again.

Although there is a sharp focus on rescuing in Under the Volcano, predictably enough the rescue attempts that it represents are futile. The novel ends not only in death for Geoffrey and Yvonne but also in grim hints of disaster ahead for Hugh and Jacques, as Hugh sets off on his self-imposed mission to run explosives to the doomed Spanish Loyalists and Jacques appears to be sinking into his own pattern of self-

destructive drinking. The position of these details in the narrative about Hugh and Jacques—that is, in the first chapter which establishes a retrospective point of view—suggests something of the cyclical nature of these characters' problems which is consistent with current theory about unresolved codependencies.

Certainly, everything we learn of the cyclical character of Yvonne's life does nothing to sustain the notion of the efficacy of rescuing. Returning to the Consul, whom she had divorced, and intending to persuade him somehow to rebuild their life together, she half forms the idea of taking him to a small farm on an island in British Columbia. Ultimately, her attempt to save him from himself leads to her own death: struggling unsuccessfully to maintain her equilibrium on the slippery log in the forest, she is trampled to death by the horse he "frees," a beast which, according to repeated details in Lowry's letter to Cape, symbolizes "the destructive force . . . which his own [Geoffrey's] final absorption by the powers of evil releases"(84). Thus, she is destroyed not only by his alcoholism, but perhaps more importantly, by her own attempt to rescue the Consul from it.

On the face of things, her return to him seems difficult to understand. It baffles Jacques (52), much as it would subsequent readers. Bitter quarrels over Geoffrey's drinking had precipitated her departure; she had had affairs with both Hugh and Jacques; the divorce had been made final; moreover, and perhaps most likely to make the prospect of a

reconciliation implausible, Geoffrey had never responded to a flood of passionate letters in which she declared her love for him and her desire for reconciliation. Why, then, does she return?

The short answer to this is that she loves him. Yet Yvonne's capacity to love is as complicated and damaged as was her life. It was powerful, potentially life-affirming, and courageous, but although it was not destroyed by the alcoholism which surrounded her for most of her life, it was twisted and tainted by it in predictable ways. The most important of these was that she became addicted to her notion of herself as a rescuer for Geoffrey. In a sense, the adulterous Yvonne is the obverse of Dante's famous adulterous lovers: they, who had sought to give one another pleasure, were punished less severely than other sinners because their sin partook of at least some unselfishness. Yvonne's imperfect but unselfish love for Geoffrey is authentic, as Slade suggested in "Under the Volcano and Dante's Inferno,"<sup>4</sup> but I would argue that her love is flawed by her need to sustain a particular and inappropriate image of herself. Her problem, I would also argue, should not be seen simplistically or moralistically: like other Adult Children, she does the best she can with the limited psychological resources at her disposal. Geoffrey, in turn, both wants and rejects rescue.

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<sup>4</sup> Carole Slade, "Under the Volcano and Dante's Inferno I," Malcolm Lowry: The Writer and His Critics, ed. Barry Wood (Ottawa: Tecumseh Press, 1980) 143-51.

That Lowry could render the impulse to rescue as both poignant and absurd is a measure of his sensitivity to the dynamics of addiction. In the Consul's heartbreaking letter to Yvonne, begging her to return (which letter Jacques finds inside the volume of Elizabethan plays), his own rescue fantasy is vivid—and frequent. In fact, it comes daily. He begins to quote the Psalm anticipating help from the hills and envisions the little red mail-plane which does come from over the hills: "I think that you will be on it, on that plane every morning as it goes by, and will have come to save me" (86). The absurdity is twofold. First, the mail plane does bear her equally passionate love letters to him which he ignores and loses, not reading them carefully until his last desperate binge in the Farolito. Appropriately, the last word of the last letter he reads is "Save" (407), which is probably a plea from Yvonne for him to save both of them. Second, despite its intensity, he never mails his own letter. His spiritual paralysis does not mean that his desire for her return is not strong, only that his desire to continue drinking is even stronger. In an odd way, he does not need to mail the letter, for the fantasy is reciprocal. Thus, on her return, Yvonne reacts to a photograph of a disintegrating glacial deposit, a rock split by forest fires, with an intense sorrow rooted in her desire to rescue the Consul and their marriage which she associates with the rock:

It was inevitable, so it said on the picture . . .  
was it really? Wasn't there some way of saving the

poor rock whose immutability so short a time ago no one would have dreamed of doubting! Ah, who would have thought of it then as other than a single integrated rock? But granted it had been split, was there no way before total disintegration should set in of at least saving the severed halves? . . . She longed to heal the cleft rock. She was one of the rocks and she yearned to save the other, that both might be saved. By a superlapidary effort she moved herself nearer it, poured out her pleas, her passionate tears, told all her forgiveness: the other rock stood unmoved. "That's all very well," it said, "but it happens to be your fault, and as for myself, I propose to disintegrate as I please!"

(99-100)

The pun on "fault" undercuts the bathetic possibility here, and the effect is one of balanced poignance and absurdity.

Yvonne's puzzling return is credible if we remind ourselves of the roles played by codependents. The clues to her motivation lie in the material concerning her youth in Chapter 9. It is clear that Yvonne is Geoffrey's "Chief Enabler," the role typically adopted by spouses of alcoholics; moreover she is also a typical Adult Child who was the enabler and rescuer of her own alcoholic father. As is frequently the case for other Adult Children, particularly Family Heroes, Yvonne not only lacked the nurturing and parenting from her own family to which children are entitled

during childhood but in fact took on a parenting role herself toward her father. Such children unconsciously become attracted in adult life to people and situations which seem familiar, even if unpleasantly so, as these allow them to reexperience feelings which are basic to their self-imagining. It is tempting to say, in the language of the novel, that it is *absolutamente necesario*. Family Heroes grow up to be spouses who are Chief Enablers, as Claudia Black (4) and Sharon Wegscheider (12), among others, have pointed out. Thus, after her father's death, Yvonne was attracted to two husbands for whom she played a role similar to that which she had played for him. When Geoffrey thinks of her as having married "partly into her past, into her Anglo-Scottish ancestry" (245), the context suggests her romanticized sense of ethnicity; the idea, however, is true at a deeper, psychological level. Even her name, Constable, which ironically suggests an institutionally sanctioned protector and enforcer of order, suggests this cycle: she is born to the name, as her father's daughter, and she lives the role. She acts out a script whose futile, self-destructive nature is evident in the fact of her death which occurs almost simultaneously with that of Geoffrey. One of Geoffrey's wild unspoken anthropological lectures passes, cunningly, he thinks, from Vedic drinking rites to invalid sacrifices to the cultic immolation of wives (349). Although the Consul sees this shift as a detour away from the forbidden subject of mescal, the displacement is minimal. The secret logic

points to what happens to daughters of alcoholic fathers who marry alcoholic husbands.

Yvonne's father was an alcoholic failure who blamed all his problems not on his drinking but on an event which never took place, his "besetting illusion that he had been cashiered from the army; and everything started up to this imagined disgrace" (302). It would appear, though, that he was merely the last of a long line of alcoholic Constables; Yvonne thinks, "God knows how many of them had been caught up in, or invited, the same kind of meaningless tragedy, or half-tragedy as herself and her father" (305). Again, a fictional example appears to bear out a therapeutic observation, that for either genetic or psycho-social reasons, alcoholism apparently runs in families. Lowry's interest in familial doppelgängers may also be displaced comically in his quirky little detail about the look-alike Quauhnahuac postmen, the "grotesque little creatures" who were all from the same family and who had been the town's postmen for generations (235-36). Although Lowry's own family was not alcoholic, his awareness of the generational dimension of alcoholism is clearly evident in his portrayal of the hard-drinking Taskerson clan as well as the Constables.

Like many—though not all—alcoholics, then, Yvonne's father was the product of an alcoholic family. Like most alcoholics, he was apparently surrounded by what we would now recognize as Enablers. First, there were those who

encouraged him in his deluded, impractical schemes; Yvonne twice associates these friends with the Mexicans who provoke the doomed bull in the pretence of playing with him and then participate in his humiliation, becoming his enemies (299, 302). In his letter to Cape, Lowry associated the bull (as well as the horse fatal to Yvonne) with Geoffrey's alcoholism. Thus, to Yvonne, her father's and her husband's drinking problems, which dominate their lives, are implicitly associated. It may be objected here that this correspondence does not have the sort of algebraic clarity one might wish; the bull is Geoffrey's alcoholism and the bull is also Captain Constable and not his alcoholism per se. In Yvonne's mind, however, her father and his drinking problem are inseparable.

Second, there was the judgmental Uncle Macintyre who financially rescued the hapless Captain Constable by securing a consular position for him to Iquique, which, in her flashback, Yvonne connects with Geoffrey and his posting to Quauhnahuac (300). After her father's death, Yvonne recalls in an interview, she "was rescued from Hollywood . . . and very unwillingly too, by my Uncle Macintyre . . ." (304). Typically, the rescuer here cannot or will not respect the independence of the person whom he is rescuing.

Third, and most important, there is Yvonne herself as Enabler. She has been robbed of her own childhood in two different ways. As her mother was dead when Yvonne was six, all her parenting would have had to come from her father;

yet, at age thirteen—when she was really still a child—the parent/child roles were reversed.<sup>5</sup> Yvonne was supporting him with the income from her film career. There are many details, implicit and explicit, in which her father and the Consul are identified with one another; for example, Hilo, the town in Hawaii in which her father's factory burnt down and which we may conjecture was home to Yvonne and her father, is the town nearest the world's largest active volcano—Mauna Loa. The most important way in which the two men are identified, however, is through the similarity of Yvonne's relationship to each, emphasized by the narrative techniques of association and juxtaposition. Significantly, the passage in which she thinks of her father's business failures and the failure of his mind is juxtaposed with one in which she associates her relationship with her father with her relationship with Geoffrey:

Yvonne glanced again at the Consul who was sitting meditative with pursed lips apparently intent on the arena. How little he knew of this period of her life, of that terror, the terror, terror that

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<sup>5</sup> Numerous empirical studies confirm the long-term negative consequences of "parentification." See Linda R. Goglia, Gregory J. Jurkovic, Afton M. Burt, and Katherine G. Burge-Callaway, "Generational Boundary Distortions by Adult Children of Alcoholics: Child-as-Parent and Child-as-Mate," American Journal of Family Therapy 20.4 (1992): 291-305. Lowry's first wife, the writer Jan Gabriel, left him because she feared she would become alcoholic too. She continued to try to get him help, writing to him on her own twenty-seventh birthday to urge him to seek treatment at the Menninger Clinic, which had a special psychiatric program for alcoholics: "I became your mother, now I am paying for it." Cited from Gordon Bowker, Pursued by Furies: A Life of Malcolm Lowry (Toronto: Random House, 1993) 242.

still could wake her in the night from that recurrent nightmare of things collapsing; the terror that was like that she was supposed to portray in the white-slave traffic film, the hand clutching her shoulder through the dark doorway; or the real terror she'd felt when she actually had been caught in a ravine with two hundred stampeding horses; no, like Captain Constable himself, Geoffrey had been almost bored, perhaps ashamed by all this: that she had, starting when she was only thirteen, supported her father for five years as an actress in "serials" and "westerns"; Geoffrey might have nightmares, like her father in this too, be the only person in the world who ever had such nightmares, but that she should have them . . . Nor did Geoffrey know much more of the real false excitement, or the false flat enchantment of the studios, or the childish adult pride, as harsh as it was pathetic, and justifiable, in having, somehow, at that age, earned a living. (302)

There is much to notice in this passage: her childhood terror, stemming from her awareness at some level that her efforts were not going to be enough to save her father, her "childish adult pride" at earning a living, pathetic but justifiable and no doubt central to whatever self-esteem she had, and the Consul's obscure shame and boredom (like her father's) concerning this most important part of her past.

To take her nightmares seriously would mean that these two men would have to acknowledge their own responsibilities and thus assume some of the disproportionate burden borne by Yvonne. To do so, however, would mean that they would have to confront and deal with their own addictions. It is clear from the tone of the unfinished sentence—"but that *she* should have them . . ."—with its italicized *she*, that Yvonne believes she must live by a set of rules different from those of these two men: she is not permitted to express her deep terrors. This inability to express fears in general and fears about the addiction in particular is characteristic of codependents. In their effort to deny the problem and maintain a semblance of order, parents in an alcoholic home "teach" the child to ignore and not share her feelings, as Black has observed (31-7). Undoubtedly her father's and Geoffrey's "boredom" with her fears and her achievements would only serve to stimulate more frantic attempts to win their love and some sort of recognition for her achievement and suffering on their behalf.

The fact that Yvonne was able to earn a living as a film actress, that is, by creating illusions, is significant for three reasons. First, in a general sense, she was rewarded by the larger world for her skill at being able to deceive, a survival skill she needed as the child of an alcoholic. Although her adult career failed, she was conscious that her acting skills were still very much a part of her life because of her relationship with the Consul: "she saw . . . that she

might under other conditions have become a really first-rate, even a great artist. For that matter, what was she if not that now (if greatly directed) as she walked or drove furiously through her anguish and all the red lights . . .” (306).

Second, it was her Hollywood experience which provided some of the common ground she shared with Jacques, with whom she subsequently had an affair. Note the emotional displacement in the metaphor used to express the peculiar sort of enthusiasm with which she could discuss Hollywood: “it was only to him [Jacques] that she’d been able to talk of Hollywood (not always honestly, yet with the enthusiasm with which close relatives may speak of a hated parent and with what relief!) on the mutual grounds of contempt and half-admitted failure” (306). That is, only with him could she have the sort of cathartic discussion one finds in healthy family systems (or in their absence, in counseling sessions or support groups). Ostensibly her feelings of “contempt and half-admitted failure” concern her movie-making experience, which she cannot share with the Consul (not because the film world is so foreign to him but because the terrors of alcoholism are too familiar), but they also obviously concern her relationship to her father. Even if Yvonne is not entirely (if at all) conscious of the powerful and perfectly natural resentment toward her father implied by her metaphor, it is impossible for an addiction-sensitive reader to ignore it.

Third, we should notice the type of actress she was: her film persona, "Yvonne the Terrible," was that of a daredevil cowgirl. In her desperation to get a particular role (necessary for both the financial support of her father and for her self-esteem, the two needs being increasingly interdependent), the "frightened, determined girl" lied about her riding prowess, was found out, and subsequently became a skilled stunt-rider (304). That is, in order to cope with her father's addiction, she became an accomplished rider, doing dangerous tricks. In the short run, she mastered the horse, but in the long run, as demonstrated by the symbolism of the novel, her mastery was illusory: she overcame neither her father's nor her husband's alcoholism and was killed by the horse that had been identified with the Consul's addiction.

Not surprisingly, Yvonne associates her misery with martyrdom, a common way for codependent children and spouses to see their predicament. In their confusion, codependents cannot see the sort of distinction T.S. Eliot made between authentic and inauthentic martyrdom in Murder in the Cathedral. Becket rejected the temptation "to do the right deed for the wrong reason"; that is, to become a martyr not in submission to God's will but in an attempt to seek the applause of the world. Codependents are out to save the world not entirely (and not even primarily) for altruistic reasons but in order to bolster their precarious self-esteem. In the second passage in which she associates her father with

the Consul, she remembers how she had written the Consul, pleading for a reconciliation, "at first hopefully, with all her heart, then urgently, frantically, at last despairingly" waiting for the response that never came: the "daily crucifixion of the post!" (300).

Reinforcing this pattern of Yvonne's inappropriate maternal role for her own father are her first marriage and Geoffrey's own shifting view of himself as both her child and her father. Although the brief account of her unsatisfactory first marriage to millionaire playboy Cliff Wright does not belabour the point, there are strong hints that it was not a union of two adults. Mr. Wright was Mr. Wrong. Yvonne thinks of the Consul's description of Cliff as astute: he is described as "infantile" and "at thirty still ten" (305). It is not an accident that the dead child of her first marriage was also named Geoffrey; her love for her first sickly Geoffrey whom she could not save from illness and death prefigures her subsequent relationship with the second infirm Geoffrey (his surname, Firmin, is an anagram of his condition) for whom she functions as both mother and daughter. Geoffrey associates the desolation he had experienced when Yvonne left him with that which he felt when his mother died, and he associates his "urgent desire to hurt, to provoke, at a time when forgiveness alone could save the day," with the approaching death of his stepmother, another experience of maternal abandonment (241-42). In their last moments together in Senor Cervantes's bar, he

angrily rejects both Yvonne and Hugh, accuses them of having used their concern for "saving me" as a cover for their own lust, and ironically asks maternal permission to betray her: "Mummy, let me go back to the beautiful brothel" (355).

Curiously, despite his "boredom" and apparent lack of knowledge of her teen years, the Consul seems to have assimilated at some level the identification of her father and himself. Near the end, in the Farolito, he recognizes this shift in roles:

He knew he'd half hoped all along Yvonne would come to rescue him, knew now, it was too late . . . .  
Ah, if Yvonne, if only as a daughter, who would understand and comfort him, could be at his side now! Even if but to lead him by the hand, drunkenly homeward through the stone fields, the forests—not interfering of course with his occasional pulls at the bottle. . . as he had seen the Indian children lead their fathers home on Sundays. (401)

Thus, we are reminded of how important her relationship with her own father was in influencing her relationship with Geoffrey. His last thought of her is that he has been "rescued at last" and in his hallucination, he asks her forgiveness, as her father might also have done (415).

As if to stress in ironic counterpoint the inappropriateness of Yvonne's being a parent figure to her father and two husbands, Lowry calls attention to her life-affirming but frustrated wish to have children of her own.

As part of her attempt at a reconciliation with Geoffrey, she tells him in her letter (unread until immediately before his death) how much she desires to have his child (387); he cruelly blames her for the barrenness of their relationship, accusing her of having drowned their (potential) children in a thousand douches (354). Certainly, this is part of a pervasive motif; there are dead and maimed children throughout: the child's corpse, Cervantes's dead son, her own dead baby, the row of fettered babies (idols) in Jacques's room (itself a wonderful image of what happens to the progeny of alcoholics), the suggestion that moments are "stillborn" (115), and the lack of issue from her marriage to Geoffrey. All of these suggest that her maternal energy has been misdirected and hence squandered.

Yvonne's tragedy, therefore, is that her own childhood was stunted: she was never truly a child herself. She had no mother to nurture her; worse, she became a parent figure to her father and two husbands. Her desire to give and receive love is genuine but is tainted by and expressed through her compulsion derived from her experiences. Thus her adulterous affairs are seen sympathetically by some critics who suggest that she was virtually driven into Hugh's and Jacques's arms by Geoffrey's failure to be a husband, and are condemned by others who see her betrayal of Geoffrey as a symptom of her inability to love (a criticism also made of Hugh, for whom a similar argument can be made). Both polarities of response, each partly justified, arise from a misunderstanding of

Yvonne's own needs, which can be explained only in the context of her relationship with her father.

Her reaction to Jacques's film featuring her namesake, Yvonne Griffaton, further illuminates her perception of her situation and therefore also deserves some close attention. It is her response to the fragment she sees of this film which inspires this "bereaved and dispossessed orphan" full of "guilty divorced dead helplessness" (307) to undertake a quest for meaning in life, a quest which takes her to Paris, where we know she ultimately met and married the Consul. Although she has arrived in the middle of the movie, her immediate response is the conviction that it is the best film she has ever seen because she identifies instantaneously with the troubled heroine, hunted and haunted by the heritage of her tragedy-plagued family. Interestingly, the ghostly ancestors provoke two different reactions. Once again, they appear to be both absurd and poignant. To the comparatively objective (and presumably addiction-free) film audience, they appear to be satirized as "static dead symbols of selfishness and disaster. . . ." However, to Yvonne Griffaton, they are "in her mind romanticized, so it seemed, heroic, standing weary with their backs to the walls of prisons, standing upright in tumbrils . . . standing upright in battle, standing upright in death" (308).

Yvonne Constable is ambivalent about, but vulnerable to, this sort of romanticizing. Not having seen the beginning of the film, she does not know (and never does find

out) what the rest of the audience knows; that is, the past. She does not know what the ancestors, and the events in which they had participated, had contributed to the celluloid Yvonne's life. Similarly buried in her own past is "so much that conceivably lent some meaning (though she doubted even this) to her own destiny. . . ." Both Yvonne's wonder if they are doomed by the dead weight of the past and cannot believe that the succession of tragedies was anything but meaningless:

Meaningless—and yet, was one doomed? Of course one could always romanticize the unhappy Constables: one could see oneself, or pretend to, as a small lone figure carrying the burden of those ancestors, their weakness and wildness (which could be invented where it was lacking) in one's blood, a victim of dark forces—everybody was, it was inescapable!—misunderstood and tragic, yet at least with a will of your own! But what was the use of a will if you had no faith? This indeed, she saw now, was also Yvonne Griffaton's problem. This is what she too was seeking, and had been all the time, in the face of everything, for some faith . . . yes, even what she was now on the point of finding, and losing, a faith in a cause, was better than none. Yvonne felt the need to have a cigarette and when she returned it looked much as though Yvonne Griffaton had at last succeeded in her quest.

Yvonne Griffaton was finding her faith in life  
itself. . . . (309)

Yvonne Griffaton's faith in life is regenerated through travel; Yvonne Constable chooses to renew her life and find meaning by going to Europe. What she found was the Consul.

However, Yvonne Griffaton's solution was not fulfilling for Yvonne Constable: "-But why was it . . . she had never found a faith in 'life' sufficient? If that were all ! . . . In unselfish love—in the stars! And yet, and yet, it was entirely true, that one had never given up, or ceased to hope, or to try, gropingly, to find a meaning, a pattern, an answer—" (310). That the foregoing is part of the same paragraph as is the description of the ending of the film might suggest that this questioning took place at that time. However, the use of the dash to preface this segment and the immediately ensuing description of the bull make clear that this reverie belongs to Yvonne's present. Faith in life has not been enough for Yvonne. What she is attracted to, as was Yvonne Griffaton at first, is a faith in a cause; that is, to faith in salvaging the Consul and her marriage. Ultimately, of course, it is a lost cause, doomed not by her "selfishness," but by her inability to understand how her family past in general and her relationship with her father in particular had affected her relationship with the Consul. The consequence of her ignorance is fatal for her.

Her dying hallucination discloses the truth about her life. If there is salvation implied here for her, as is

sometimes argued (for example, by Carole Slade, who traces her Dantean apotheosis), it lies in her recognition of the futility of rescuing. The metaphor used by both alcoholics and codependents for the disaster which either kills or precipitates renewal and recovery is "hitting bottom."

Yvonne's death occurs simultaneously with that of the Consul, whose body is thrown into the ravine, and it is appropriate that part of her own dying vision concerns her own subjective experience of being at the bottom of a ravine:

the horse—great God, the horse—and would this scene repeat itself endlessly and forever?—the horse, rearing, poised over her, petrified in mid-air, a statue, somebody was sitting on the statue, it was Yvonne Griffaton, no, it was the statue of Huerta, the drunkard, the murderer, it was the Consul, or was it a mechanical horse on the merry-go-round, the carrousel had stopped and she was in a ravine down which a million horses were thundering towards her. . . . (376)

Yvonne's insight thus links her alter ego Yvonne Griffaton, the symbolic horse, drunkenness, murder and the Consul, with her terror of horses and ravines which was associated with her adolescent film career during which she supported her father. Rejecting the idea that she has "hit bottom" (or at least, in her terror, refusing to stay there), she "escapes" in her hallucination to the home by the sea with Geoffrey about which she had fantasized as part of her notion of

rescuing him. The fantasy within this fantasy—that is, her detailed illusion of a renewed life with a sober Geoffrey—is itself destroyed: the house immediately catches fire with him in it.

It is the destruction of this illusory notion of rescue which imaginatively frees Yvonne: she is gathered upward to the stars alone, suggesting detachment, a condition toward which codependents are counseled to work. Near his death, Geoffrey has an important revelation as well: he reconsiders Jacques's tapestry, *Los Borrachones*, in which drunkards plunge into hell and the sober soar toward the light (242-43) and wonders if it might have a meaning beyond its obvious one:

He saw those people like spirits appearing to grow more free, more separate . . . the higher they ascended into the light; those florid people resembling huddled fiends, becoming more like each other, more joined together as one fiend, the farther they hurled down into the darkness. Perhaps all this wasn't so ludicrous. When he had striven upwards, as at the beginning with Yvonne, had not the "features" of life seemed to grow more clear, more animated, friends, and enemies more identifiable, special problems, scenes, and with them the sense of his own reality, more separate from himself? And had it not turned out that the farther down he sank, the more those features had

tended to dissemble, to cloy and clutter, to become finally little better than ghastly caricatures of his dissimulating inner and outer self or of his struggle, if struggle, there were still? (401-02)

What the Consul recognized here, among other things, was that his alcohol addiction implicated those around him in a hellish closure which denied their uniqueness, their difference, and it rendered them ghastly caricatures of himself. If Yvonne's last vision has any metaphysical or existential truth to it, it is that with her illusions of herself as a rescuer destroyed, she is now free—by herself.

Failed enablers and rescuers Hugh and Jacques should be understood as "ghastly caricatures" as well. Shortly before his death, the Consul broods about his "debauch" the preceding evening during the Red Cross Ball and asks himself this question: "What magnetism drew these quaking ruined creatures into his orbit?" (330) It is typical of the ironies in this text that the best-known rescue and relief agency in the world is associated with the activities which lead to the Consul's death. The question appears to refer to Senor Cervantes, the proprietor of the Salon Ofelia, but to an addiction-sensitive reader, the words 'magnetism,' 'orbit,' and the plural 'creatures' uncannily seem to prefigure the systems approach to alcohol addiction and hence to the futility of rescue. Hugh must be read as part of the Great Brotherhood of Alcohol, and so, probably, should Jacques.

The narrative consciousness of the text, distributed across all four characters, recapitulates a paradox of alcoholic relationships: as the life of the drinker becomes more and more focused on the bottle, the codependents' lives become more and more focused on the drinker. An even more important paradox is the sustained tension in the narrative regarding heroic rescues; the text suggests that they are desirable and admirable, but ultimately contemptible, pathetic, absurd and futile—what an addiction-sensitive reader now recognizes as codependency.

Yvonne is not the only one attracted to lost causes: the visit of the Consul's half-brother Hugh, which coincides with hers, is termed a "salvage operation" (106). Both Hugh's attempt to enforce sobriety on the Consul and the pattern of other incidents in his private life clearly suggest that he also behaves as if he were an Adult Child. He acts out two roles: that of Scapegoat and, paradoxically, Family Hero. In small families, it is not uncommon for children to assume more than one role (particularly if there is a significant age gap) and the two most commonly exchanged roles are those which on the surface might appear to be most dissimilar: the Hero and the Scapegoat. However, a frequent way to be the Scapegoat of the family is to be a rebel. It is easy to see that in certain contexts in our culture, rebels are perceived as heroic (Prometheus is an illustration, and Promethean allusions recur in this text) and this duality is true in the microcosm of the family as well.

Unlike Yvonne's life story, however, which could have been taken out of a self-help group narrative such as Family Secrets, Hugh's problem has a more puzzling etiology.

Although there is nothing to indicate that his own father was alcoholic, there are three possible reasons for Hugh's assumption of these roles.

The first concerns authorial imposition. We can remind ourselves of Lowry's defence of his characterization in his letter to Cape, wherein he argued that he was less interested in creating well-rounded, differentiated characters than he was in identifying Geoffrey, Hugh, and Jacques as three different aspects of Everyman. If this is the case, then it is astonishing that the characters are as plausible and complex as they are. It may be that the author who could recreate in prose the experience of alcoholism more authentically than has ever been done and yet could grasp neither its causes nor the essence of recovery could also faithfully portray the personalities and behaviours of the people who typically orbit the alcoholic without fully understanding their origin. Hence, he could take codependent character traits which would not typically evolve before the first phases of the alcohol addiction and distribute them anachronistically far back through Hugh's past. (The vagueness of the chronology of the Consul's own addiction is a similar and related problem.<sup>6</sup>)

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<sup>6</sup> In his biography of Lowry, Douglas Day estimates that the Consul only drank heavily in the last four or five years of his life but does not explain why he drew this conclusion. See Malcolm Lowry (New York:

However, there are two further possibilities. First, the death of Hugh's own mother and the disappearance (and possible suicide) of his father could not have been other than traumatic for the child, and the assumption of family roles which characterize alcoholic families most clearly also occurs in families with other traumas or dysfunctions. Second, there was a twelve year gap in the ages of Hugh and Geoffrey (as there was between Yvonne and Geoffrey), and in some ways, Geoffrey was a quasi-parental figure for him, all the more so in the absence of both parents. Geoffrey explicitly identifies himself as having acted as a father to Hugh after the death of Hugh's mother (123). It is probably unnecessary to point out that if readers wish to see this in Freudian terms, they can see Hugh's infidelity with Yvonne, his "father's" spouse, as Oedipal and hence as a classic instance of unconscious rebellion against authority.

If we examine the significance of Hugh's predicament in the design of the novel, we will see that it is congruent with the argument I have advanced regarding Yvonne. That is, although Lowry elicits sympathy for Hugh, he is using him to dramatize the futility of rescue attempts. Once again the broad outline is confirmed by the smaller details. After all, it is Hugh, the author of the "salvage operation," who inadvertently but materially contributes to the Consul's death by leaving his incriminating papers in the Consul's

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Oxford Press, 1973) 334. If Day is correct, then he would have had a drinking problem when Yvonne married him.

jacket, papers which give the fascist sinarquistas a pretext for shooting him. It is too simple to blame Hugh for 'causing' the Consul's death, as some critics have done. Obviously the Consul's behaviour has invited disaster. Let us say that in this case, the presence of the papers was a necessary, though not a sufficient condition for the Consul's death. As was true of Yvonne, Hugh's role behaviour is evident in other areas of his life, and as was also true of Yvonne, his motives for apparently admirable action are complex and more deeply rooted in personal need for self-esteem than they are in disinterested altruism. As Jung pointed out, "Every form of addiction is bad, no matter whether the narcotic be alcohol or morphine or idealism."<sup>7</sup> If there is a significant difference between Yvonne's and Hugh's actions, it may be that his futile gestures are more absurd than poignant.

The details which support this are many in number and diverse in scope, but the accumulated weight of them repudiates rescuing and tends to undermine the worth of heroic behaviour.

Perhaps the first detail we are aware of concerns the alarming pharmacological antidote—strychnine, a powerful toxin—which Hugh gives Geoffrey in his attempt to control his

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<sup>7</sup> Hugh's self-interest as a component of his motives has been noted by many critics, though never with any reference to the Consul's addiction. For example, see Dale Edmonds, "Under the Volcano: A Reading of the 'Immediate Level,'" Malcolm Lowry: The Writer and His Critics, ed. Barry Wood (Ottawa: Tecumseh Press, 1980) 94. Jung is cited in Craig MacAndrew, "On the Possibility of an Addiction-Free Mode of Being," Journal Of Drug Issues 17(Winter, 1987): 166.

drinking. Clearly, this rescue attempt is dangerous. So is the very funny shaving episode, but not far from the humourous surface is the idea that having Hugh take over yet another responsibility which should properly be the Consul's is potentially fatal. After all, that razor held by his sexual rival is perilously close to his throat. His impulsive decision to ride the bull is another example of his "ridiculous need for action." It is ludicrous, absurd, dangerous, funny, and temporarily successful. Lowry identified the bull with "the animal forces of nature the Consul later lets loose"; that is, with the same force as the apocalyptic horse which killed Yvonne represented. And Hugh's control of those forces, like Yvonne's, is only temporary.

But the episode which is first chronologically concerns his youthful desire to go to sea. Because his motive had been that he wanted to be a rebel, he "had never wholly forgiven" Geoffrey for encouraging his guardians to give him permission to go, thus neatly depriving his trip "not only of its heroic aspect but of any possible flavour of rebellion as well" (202). A good deal of the account of his sailing career consists of ironic anecdotes about incidents which deflate his romantic pretensions, particularly those which concern his proletarian sympathies. But the attraction to deeds which would be perceived as heroic continues. He is repeatedly described as "quixotic." Even though he is heartily sick of his experience at sea and wishes to go home, in a burst of

self-sacrificing generosity he transfers from the Philoctetes<sup>8</sup> to the Oedipus Tyrannus so that a 'real' sailor can return instead. His grand gesture is abruptly terminated by a bout of dysentery, not at all a dignified way for his voyage of self-discovery to end, but one perfectly consistent with Lowry's intentions. The ultimate authorial undermining of Hugh's misconceived, misdirected, and ineffectual altruism occurs as he sits in the forest singing leftist songs about brotherhood, accompanying himself on the guitar which he had interrupted his search for Geoffrey to buy. Meanwhile, his own brother is murdered by the local fascists.

It is primarily through Hugh's consciousness that we see the political dimension of the novel; in this respect he is different from Yvonne, whose focus is almost exclusively on marriage and family life. These concerns complement each other and balance the symbiotic moral polarities of private and public life. But the underpinnings of Hugh's ideology clearly indicate that he is tempted to do the right deed for the wrong reason, as is most evident in his attitude towards the Spanish Civil War. As is typically true for Family

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<sup>8</sup> The ships' names are intriguing. Obviously the latter is part of a network of multiple Oedipal allusions (there is even a cat called Oedipuss) linked to the questions of guilt, compulsion, generational conflict, etc.; but the former is more obscure. The Philoctetes myth, dramatized by all three classic tragedians, was interpreted by Edmund Wilson as a statement about the necessary pairing of a gift, creative genius, with an affliction. Forseth alludes frequently to Wilson and associates the affliction with alcoholism in particular. Incidentally, Philoctetes' wound was a snake-bite on his foot; Oedipus means "Swollen-Foot"; and the Consul's feet are so badly swollen from complications of his drinking that he cannot wear socks. See Roger Forseth, "Alcoholite at the Altar: Sinclair Lewis, Drink, and the Literary Imagination," Modern Fiction Studies 31 (3, Autumn, 1985): 581-608.

Heroes, Hugh is attracted to lost causes, because they provide opportunities for reinforcing, in a perverse way, his self-image. He concedes the truth of Geoffrey's hint regarding his motive for wanting to take a shipload of dynamite to the beleaguered Loyalists:

[T]he whole stupid beauty of such a decision . . . must lie in that it was so futile, that it was too late, that the Loyalists had already lost, and that should that person emerge safe and sound, no one would be able to say to him that he had been carried away by the popular wave of enthusiasm for Spain, when even the Russians had given up, and the Internationals withdrawn. (196-97)

In an odd way which would make perfect sense to Adult Children, Hugh's quixotic commitment is not a risky gesture at all, but the opposite. Insofar as his self-image, which is paramount, is concerned, it guarantees any or all of the following: a temporary sense of virtuous heroism (with the probable bonus of some measure of public admiration) regardless of which side wins; and/or another chance to confirm his sense of guilt if his side loses; and/or another chance to confirm his sense of guilt regarding his sin of pride if his side wins.

There is certainly no doubt that Hugh experiences profound guilt which may be antecedent to the particular deeds of which he is ashamed.<sup>9</sup> Yvonne's spirituality

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<sup>9</sup> It is sometimes argued in Freudian and Ego-Analytical approaches to addictions that a profound but unfocused sense of guilt in disturbed

expresses itself in prayer, but Hugh's is more explicitly theological (if simplistic) in nature. He thinks in terms of damnation and salvation, but it is clear from the tone of his meditation on atonement that he has little if any faith in grace. It would seem that he believes he has to win salvation all by himself rather than accept it as a free gift, and like other Heroes, he vacillates between his confidence that he is equal to the extraordinary task and the deeper residual despair that it is beyond his reach.<sup>10</sup> In his quest for meaning in his life, he asks what good deeds for which he has been responsible will be weighed against his guilt for other real or imagined sins, and concludes that even the best of his actions were tainted by his dishonourable motives.

Chapter 6 discloses Hugh's dilemma, and induces one in the reader. What are we to make of Hugh's relentless self-accusation? When he trivializes the good deeds of his life and mocks his own tendency to romanticize them, should we conclude that he is being too hard on himself and give him more credit than he does himself for action? Should we

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people precedes and precipitates conduct which is likely to be punished by society; it seems that such persons are looking for an external confirmation of their sense of being evil or worthless 'justified' by their transgression. See John McFadden, who argues that this is what causes alcoholism, in "Guilt is Soluble in Alcohol: An Ego Analytic View," Journal of Drug Issues 17 (Winter, 1987): 171-186. Similar observations have been made by family therapists regarding the Family Scapegoat role.

<sup>10</sup> This is a feature of an Adult Child mentality called "all or nothing functioning." Living with extremes and inconsistencies teaches the alcoholic's child that s/he is either perfect or worthless. See Gravitz and Bowden, 49-50.

accept his self-condemnation at face value? Or should we see his clear-sighted honesty as paradoxically redemptive?

Note that even after a series of allusions to actions whose apparent redemptive worth is undermined by the irony with which he views them, he is drawn (because of them? despite them?) to the most dangerous and hence attractive venture of all, one which involves a potential martyrdom for him. For example, believing that his dramatizing of the incident cheapened it, he discounted the moral value of his rescuing of the seagull which had been caught in a fence, beating itself to death (195).<sup>11</sup> Similarly, with his self-deprecating, ironic tone he made light of the Dickensian vignette in which he directed the "poor little hot dog man" with the new wagon who had not sold a single hot dog all month to a more profitable location. In doing so he trivialized the worth of his own action.

Even his passion for helping the Jews, he believed, was rooted in a dishonourable act of his own, a desire to atone for his peculiar expression of ambivalent anti-Semitism actualized in his betrayal of Jews via seducing their wives. This odd ambivalence persists: his anti-Semitism is not mild but very powerful, and it ultimately results in his desire to save them from the world's anti-Semitism. Is he attempting to save the Jews from himself? If the seduction of the Jews'

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<sup>11</sup> This rescue is echoed by Yvonne's liberation of the caged eagle immediately before her death, during her search for Geoffrey. Both are associated symbolically with what they are trying to do for the Consul, who is as self-destructive as the seagull.

wives prefigures his adultery with Yvonne, then the Jews and the Consul can be identified with one another. This identification is consistent with the crucifixion motif of the novel, no matter how ironically that motif functions. The Consul has identified himself twice with Christ, once in his ride in the 'Infernal Machine' when he was "like that poor fool who was bringing light to the world" (265) and once when he was about to tell the pathetic pariah dog that he would be with him in Paradise (272). Hugh has a ludicrous fantasy of saving Christ in atonement for losing the Battle of the Ebro. He is "Hero of the Soviet Republic, and the True Church" and Stalin awards him the star of Lenin for having "rescued Him . . . from a burning church where He couldn't breathe" (282). Somehow, betraying and saving the Jews is connected with betraying and saving the Consul. Ironically, the fascists who kill him misconstrue Hugh's cable and conclude, because of it, that the Consul is a leftist Jew.

The recurring guilty refrain that they are losing the Battle of the Ebro is associated with his relationship with Yvonne and is personalized: "I am losing the battle of the Ebro, I am also losing Yvonne, therefore Yvonne is . . . ." (280). There is more involved here than the simple notion of losing the woman he wants to his rival, his brother; the association involved in the unfinished "idiotic syllogism", as he calls it, suggests that he harbours some notion of saving Yvonne as well, presumably from the disaster which he

intuitively understands is implicit in her relationship with the Consul. There is an unmistakable sense of Hugh's conviction that the loss of the Ebro and the impending trouble for Yvonne are his fault: someone with a more mature and balanced conscience would respect Yvonne's autonomy and personal responsibility for her own life choices. This view, of course begs the question of the extent to which Yvonne was genuinely free to make autonomous, responsible choices if indeed much of her motivation was compulsive also, as I have argued. But my point is that both the clear and murky elements of their personalities are entirely consistent with what we now think are characteristic of people whose relationships evolve in the context of someone's abuse of alcohol. It is Hugh's tendency to rescue, however ineffectually, as it is also Yvonne's.

This whole question of freedom is central to any debate about alcoholism and is particularly important in the complex incident involving the death of the peon. Everyone who writes about Under the Volcano calls attention to its densely textured network of symbols, allusions, fluidly shifting associations and so on. Quite properly, readers are warned against the temptations of simple-minded allegorizing. Nonetheless, it fits the pattern identified here.

On the surface, at least, it appears that Lowry uses this episode to dramatize the futility of rescuing by undermining the integrity of the characters involved. There is the busload of would-be Samaritans, whose impulses towards

charity and courage (difficult to gauge) are drowned in a flood of rationalizations and recriminations about whose responsibility all this is. There is the squeamish Yvonne, who faints at the sight of blood and retires to the bus. There is the apparently well-meaning but ultimately equally faint-hearted Hugh (at least in his own self-judgement) who, after making a few quixotic feints at the sinarquistas, accepts the Consul's prudent advice and also retreats. There is the pharasaical Consul who persuades Hugh that to aid the Indian would make them accomplices in the crime that had been committed. (This ambiguity in itself is intriguing: it is not clear whether the "crime" referred to is one committed by the peon or the one committed against him.) The Consul's failure to be a good Samaritan to the Indian inevitably recalls the grim irony of the name and function of the Consul's wartime ship on which the obscure deaths of the German officers occurred (or did they?).<sup>12</sup> Worse than these is the despicable pelado, who actually steals the dying man's coins and apparently intends to use them to pay his bus fare. The most interesting point about the pelado is that he initially appears to have been the only person who actually did something, albeit a very small gesture (moving the man's hat to keep the sun from his eyes) in kindness to the victim and in defiance of the law. All in all, the "aid" for the

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<sup>12</sup> For a convincing explanation of why this episode may never have taken place, see Art Hill, "The Alcoholic on Alcoholism," Canadian Literature 62 (1974): 33-48. This remains the best reading yet of some of the textual issues related to alcoholism.

peon is, for one reason or another, either inauthentic or futile.

It is very important that the Consul is explicitly identified with the dying Indian. Quite apart from the fact that Lowry explicitly says so in his letter to Cape, this is made very clear in the novel itself: "Now he was the one dying by the wayside where no good Samaritan would halt" (415). In preventing Hugh from attempting to aid the Indian, we can see a symbolic rendering of his own refusal to accept aid from Hugh (or from anyone). The local fascists or sinarquistas who shoot the Consul and leave him to die are probably culpable in the Indian's death; the word "Companero," addressed to Hugh, is whispered by the old fiddler to Geoffrey as his danger increases. The Indian dies in a political cause, but the Consul's death is a sort of hollow parody of this martyrdom, first because he is mistaken for a Jewish leftist, and secondly, because he dies in pursuit of his own 'freedom' to destroy himself. The busload of Samaritans manqués are morally paralysed both by their awareness of the local law which would make them accessories to the crime if they interfered, and their fear of the sinarquistas, a local right-wing militia who represent a force which could be mistaken for legitimate authority. On the political level of the novel, the link between the Consul's self-destruction and the looming menace of fascism in Spain, Mexico, and indeed virtually universally is that fascism originates in the willingness—conscious or otherwise—

of individuals to surrender personal autonomy. And so, one could argue, does addiction. Although it is an evil sinarquista who pulls the trigger on the Consul, it is also clear that the Consul has been largely responsible for his own fate in freely choosing to give up his freedom. The sinarquista is merely a dramatic device to confirm externally what is already true in the Consul's psyche, or at least in the part of that fractured psyche which has the upper hand.<sup>13</sup>

That the dying Indian and the Consul are to be identified with one another, however, raises a problem. The tone of the narrative seems to indicate that the reader should be critical of the failure of the Consul, Hugh, Yvonne, and indeed the whole busload of well-meaning but ineffectual Mexicans to be Samaritans to the dying Indian; that is, that some sort of rescue or help would be desirable. And yet by associating active intervention with the pelado, it simultaneously seems to suggest that rescue or help is neither possible nor desirable. What are we to make of their failure to act? Lowry seems to be implying that they were morally obligated to do something, to interfere, to become engaged in this man's problem, which operates both at a medical level and an interrelated social or political level. However, he also makes it clear that there was nothing that could have been done; the Indian was not merely seriously

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<sup>13</sup> For an excellent account of the political issues behind the killing of the Indian, who seems to have been a Banco Ejidal courier, see Edmonds 69-73.

injured, but dying. Although a case can be made that Hugh and the Consul (and their fellow camion passengers) might deserve our sympathy for their predicament, it is clear that Lowry intends us to be critical of their moral paralysis, particularly when the post-hoc rationalizing of their inaction (288-89) becomes so absurd and contemptible as to embrace the appalling behaviour of the pelado (293-294). It is not altogether clear whether the pelado really intends to make the impression which Hugh infers or whether this is just more projection on Hugh's part; nonetheless, it is impossible to react to this synecdoche for false help with anything other than disgust.

The most important association of the Consul and the Indian is provided by the Consul himself, though, as he rants and raves against interventions of all kinds. There is an interesting progression through his tirade. At first he appears to be rationalizing, responding to Hugh's articulated guilt about not helping the Indian and not preventing the pelado from stealing the dying man's coins. It soon becomes an attack on Hugh's politics and his character, an undermining of his romantic belief in causes. The Consul, quoting Tolstoy, makes bitter fun both of idealists who talk and talk and avoid the dirty work, and of the motives of people who actually do go to war, arguing that they do so to avoid dealing with their own responsibilities. So far, so good: that he draws a connection between Hugh's politics and his desire to see himself as heroic, avoiding genuine

responsibilities is harsh, but fair enough. It is actually insightful. His attack on Hugh continues : "Isn't your desire to fight for Spain for fiddledeedee, for Timbuktu, for China, for hypocrisy, for bugger all, for any hokery pokery that a few mooseheaded idiot sons choose to call freedom—of course there is nothing of the sort, really,—[emphasis added]." But with the classic rhetoric of a drunkard, his outburst suddenly becomes a defence of his "freedom"<sup>14</sup> to drink and to destroy himself—even though he has denied the existence of freedom just moments before. The argument continues to shift from the universal to a highly personal focus:

'But as I implied, you bloody people, mark my words, you don't mind your own business any better at home, let alone in foreign countries. Geoffrey, darling, why don't you stop your drinking, it isn't too late—that sort of thing. You're all the same, all of you, Yvonne, Jacques, you, Hugh, trying to interfere with other people's lives, interfering, interfering . . . and that's precisely what's bringing about disaster in the world, to stretch a point, yes, quite a point, because you haven't got the wisdom and the simplicity and the courage, yes, the courage, to take any of the, to take—' (354)

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<sup>14</sup> Alcoholics habitually defend their misery and misconduct in libertarian terms that evoke John Stuart Mill. See Forseth 593-94.

Perhaps sensing the shallowness of the logic of his argument, he instead strikes at Yvonne and Hugh where they are most vulnerable; that is, in their guilt for their infidelity, before he returns to the question of freedom:

'What an uncommon time you two must have had, paddling palms and playing bubbies and titties all day under cover of saving me . . . Jesus. Poor little defenceless me—I hadn't thought of that. But you see, it's perfectly logical, what it comes down to: I've got my own piddling little fight for freedom on my hands.'

He continues:

'True, I've been tempted to talk peace. I've been beguiled by your offers of a sober and non-alcoholic Paradise. At least I suppose that's what you've been working around towards all day. But now I've made up my own mind, what's left of it, just enough to make up. Cervantes! That far from wanting it, thank you very much, I choose— Tlax —  
' Where was he? 'Tlax-Tlax. . . . ' I choose . . .  
. Hell,' he finished absurdly. "Because . . . .I like it,' he called to them . . . . 'I love Hell. I can't wait to get back there. In fact, I'm running. I'm almost back there already.' (355-56)

That this free choice is not what it seems is immediately evident: ". . . he wasn't quite serious . . . ." (356). As the references to Hell suggest, what he has is

only a spurious kind of freedom. Under the Volcano is Dantean and Faustian, to be sure, but with its Edenic and hellish allusions it also reminds one of Paradise Lost and the Miltonic conception of freedom. The mind being its own place, and the Consul, not remembering precisely where he is, choosing hell, reminds us that Milton's Satan thought that he would be punished with adamant chains. His eschatological punishment, however, was that he was to be given an eternity of time and space over which he could not possibly sustain his expenditure of finite energies, rhetorical and otherwise.<sup>15</sup> Adam and Eve, with their pre- and post-lapsarian limits, had authentic freedom—a constitutive element of which actually was the recognition of those limits. Geoffrey's "freedom" is not really "freedom" as some part of his psyche still recognizes; and about his choice, he knows, "he wasn't quite serious."

Shortly afterwards, the Consul and Yvonne are dead, and it is most unlikely that Hugh is free. Although we do not hear his voice again (the retrospective introductory narration is Jacques'), the trajectory of the plot suggests how self-destructive his sense of himself has become. Quite apart from all the guilt he brought with him to Quahnahuac, Hugh blamed himself for the pelado's death, bore some measure of responsibility for the Consul's death and perhaps for Yvonne's (her last articulate cry is for him) and doubtless

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<sup>15</sup> See Jules David Law, "Eruption and Containment: The Satanic Predicament in Paradise Lost," Milton Studies 16(1982): 35-60.

appropriated even more blame than necessary. The last we know of him is that he has set out on his suicidal mission to deliver explosives to the doomed Loyalists, his addiction to his notion of himself as a quixotic rescuer having reached its logical end. While Hugh lacks the Consul's compulsion for self-destructive drinking, he is no less a captive; his addiction to his role as rescuer is equally bleak since despite his awareness of its inadequacy, he can see no alternative.

Jacques Laruelle, the Consul's brother-like double who feels as if he has lost a son when Hugh leaves (54), is also a sign of the magnetic familial impulse to rescue. In his own way, he too, like Hugh and Yvonne, tried to help the Consul. He is the only one of the four the reader actually hears urge the Consul to quit drinking, now that Yvonne is back. Despite their great concern, there has been no explicit confrontation about his drinking. Only Jacques has challenged him. But, like those of the others, his attempts are futile. He too is a failed rescuer: he had once had an ambition to save the world through his particular art form, cinema. He had intended to make a version of Faustus with Trotsky as the protagonist and had abandoned the project. The economy of this strategy on Lowry's part is remarkable: Laruelle fails to make a film inspired by the ambiguously heroic Consul (who is ultimately a failure), about an ambiguously heroic doctor who tried to dominate the universe (and failed), featuring an ambiguously heroic political

figure who tried to dominate his own party, nation, and (if classic Leninist rhetoric is accepted) the world (and failed). The rescue/failure motif is like the Farolito itself, one door after another opening into a succession of smaller and smaller rooms. A more detailed reading of Laruelle's significance in the novel would confirm that it underlines the central and sustaining irony of Lowry's vision: rescuing, betrayal, and failure are all identified with one another. The trio of the Consul's erstwhile rescuers are in fact those who betrayed him sexually. Granted, the specific acts of rescue are not the same as those of betrayal, but it is undeniable that those others who attempt to take responsibility for helping the Consul are those who wound him most deeply.

Lowry's intuitive understanding that rescuing the alcoholic is in neither the alcoholic's interest nor in the codependent's is fused in the text with a yearning for the possibility of some kind of help. The paradox moves the text with a nihilistic energy to the only resolution possible in a context in which no distinction is made between rescue and help. A generation before any widespread comprehension of the dynamics of addiction, Lowry recognized the destructive closure implied in the roles codependents assume, and he represented it accurately. It is time to appreciate, if with some sadness, this dimension of his chirrigueresque masterpiece.

The gifted but disturbed Lowry, who was never able to resolve the tragedy of his own alcoholism in his personal life, was able to recreate in this novel a truthful fragment, and only a fragment, albeit a large and magnificently rendered one, of the reality of addiction. He knew that an alcoholic's psyche is seriously split, that the people who surround him—his codependents—become like him ("ghastly caricatures") and take to themselves responsibilities which should be his, that most of what they do to cope with his addiction will be futile at best and actually damaging at worst, and that they will make the same mistakes over and over again in other parts of their lives. Lowry's achievement in creating complex, believable characters was in fact greater than he gave himself credit for in his letter to Cape.

As Lowry repeatedly insisted in that letter, Under the Volcano was a work that would reward re-readings. The cabbalistic lore he invoked in this novel is not its only kind of secret knowledge, but codependency should no longer be an unwitting conspiracy within alcoholic relationships or among texts and readers. Awareness of codependency affords a new way of reading fiction which deals with alcoholism. Sensitized to the ramifications of addiction, literary critics should no longer make the same error codependents make; that is, to succumb to the powerful centripetal narcissism of the alcoholic and hence to ignore the other characters. Codependents must learn to disrupt the

pathological equilibrium of alcoholic relationships; readers of fiction about alcoholics have a parallel responsibility to "read against the grain." Literary critics need to recognize that a novel which rings true to an alcoholic's predicament is likely to be more decentred than readers have hitherto recognized. If we know what to listen for, we may hear more clearly the voices of the other characters, each a possible centre of interest previously unheard, ignored, or misunderstood. Listening to the voices of the codependent characters such as Yvonne and Hugh will enrich our appreciation of Lowry's achievement, providing something new, indeed, about hell fire.

## CHAPTER 5

"WHERE IS THE BEST PLACE TO HIDE A LEAF? IN A TREE": THE CASE  
OF EVELYN WAUGH

Juxtaposed with Malcolm Lowry, most other human beings—even heavy drinkers such as Evelyn Waugh—are bound to look temperate. Waugh's friend and biographer Christopher Sykes, despite giving plenty of evidence to the contrary, minimized the significance of Evelyn Waugh's prodigious drinking and explicitly denied that he was alcoholic. He did so no doubt out of loyalty but also because he believed, as have many biographers and critics of other gifted and disciplined writers with serious alcohol problems, that had Waugh been alcoholic, "he could never have achieved literary excellence of the kind that he did."<sup>1</sup> The detailed biographies written by Martin Stannard, Selina Hastings, and Douglas Lane Patey, however, leave little doubt about the matter; nor do Waugh's own private writings as exemplified in Mark Amory's edition of his letters and Michael Davies' edition of his diaries.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Sykes, Evelyn Waugh: A Biography (London: Collins, 1975) 49. Tom Dardis briefly alludes to Sykes's reasoning as a widely shared error in judgement. See The Thirsty Muse: Alcohol and the American Writer (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1989) 6. It may have been shared by Waugh as well: in his 1976 review of Michael Davies' edition of the diaries, Martin Stannard observes that Waugh had rejected Quennell's view of Hogarth's "debauchery": "His huge, efficient output alone proclaims him a temperate man." Evelyn Waugh, The Critical Heritage (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984) 494.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Stannard, Evelyn Waugh: The Early Years 1903-1939 (London: Paladin, 1988) and No Abiding City 1939-1966 (London: Flamingo, 1993); Selina Hastings, Evelyn Waugh: A Biography (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1994); Douglas Lane Patey, The Life of Evelyn Waugh: A Critical Biography (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998); Michael Davies, ed., The Diaries of

Keeping a diary was a life-long habit for Waugh, abandoned only during two protracted episodes: the fourteen months after the collapse of his first marriage in 1929 and then during his alcohol and drug-related breakdown in 1954, the latter experience resulting in what is unanimously agreed to be his most autobiographical novel, The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold.<sup>3</sup> Mark Amory, the editor of the letters, even makes a rueful joke to the effect that his task was simpler than that of an editor dealing with the handwriting of the diaries because Waugh's letters were written in the morning, when he was sober, whereas the diary entries were written at night, when he was drunk.<sup>4</sup> Although Amory is quick to claim that that observation may be unfair, the reason for this nervous jocularity is evident in the content of the letters and diary entries themselves.

A detailed examination of Waugh's own private chronicling of his drinking career would be a lengthy study in itself; a few details here may suggest something of the degree to which heavy drinking was a preoccupation in Waugh's life and are indicated here only because they establish a relevant background for significant patterns in his fiction. Letters about youthful sprees begin in his Oxford years: for

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Evelyn Waugh (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976); Mark Amory, The Letters of Evelyn Waugh (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980).

<sup>3</sup> Evelyn Waugh, The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold and Other Stories (London: Chapman and Hall, 1973).

<sup>4</sup> Mark Amory, The Letters of Evelyn Waugh (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980) viii.

example, on 13 February 1922, at the age of eighteen, he wrote to Tom Driberg that although his companion was tight, he himself was "cheery" on "3/4 of a bottle of Madeira, a glass of port, and two tumblers of cider."<sup>5</sup> The letters selected by Amory frequently quantify his drinking and that of his companions at luncheons and dinners, indicating not only a remarkable level of consumption but, more significantly, a self-conscious concern about that consumption. A letter to the Lygon sisters in 1931 jokes that he is learning to ride as a cure for drink;<sup>6</sup> and after a lifetime of letters both gleeful and rueful about his own drinking, he laments that "Forty years ago I was deliriously happy on two cocktails, half a bottle of champagne & a glass of brandy. Now I drink 1/2 a bottle of whisky without the smallest sense of inebriation."<sup>7</sup> Near the end of life, which from all accounts had become more and more melancholy, his comment on spending Christmas at home was that he had to "numb myself with heavy private drinking."<sup>8</sup> A few months later a letter to Ann Fleming recounts his doctor's concern with his dangerously heavy consumption.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Mark Amory, The Letters of Evelyn Waugh (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980) 7.

<sup>6</sup> The Letters of Evelyn Waugh 57. Maimie Lygon became alcoholic: see Martin Stannard, Evelyn Waugh: No Abiding City (London: Flamingo, 1993) 449.

<sup>7</sup> The Letters of Evelyn Waugh 611.

<sup>8</sup> The Letters of Evelyn Waugh 617.

<sup>9</sup> Selina Hastings, Evelyn Waugh: A Biography (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1994) 86.

It cannot be said that Martin Stannard or Selina Hastings, both comprehensive biographers, deny or trivialize Waugh's alcohol dependence; but neither do they show any particular interest in it. Martin Stannard's biography is widely regarded as hostile to its subject (an unfair charge, in my judgment), and although its detractors do not say so, its openness about the difficulties that Waugh's drinking caused himself and others is, I suspect, a source of their discomfort. Hastings' biography is considered the more positive of the two, but I suspect that had her work been published first, hers would have been considered—with equal unfairness—malicious. Both biographies show compassion concerning Waugh's depressions and respect for his difficult struggles towards *caritas*. Both meticulously record facets of his complex life, among them his relationships with other heavy drinkers such as his early love, Olivia Plunket-Greene, and, to take only one well-known example here, the notoriously bibulous Randolph Churchill. Both biographers suggest multiple reasons for his drinking: it was an antidote to boredom, an attempt to cope with insomnia plus other physical pains, and an unsuccessful strategy to ward off a lifelong tendency towards depression. (It cannot be said too often that in its lingering effects alcohol is a depressant; its first and temporary effect, however, is that of a stimulant.) This malaise was apparent in a youthful suicide

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<sup>9</sup> The Letters of Evelyn Waugh 618.

attempt recorded in Waugh's own autobiography A Little Learning, a recurrence of which was forestalled largely by Waugh's dogged religious faith.

The emphasis of Douglas Lane Patey's book is different; his intention is to provide critical readings of Waugh's writing in the light of biography. Patey analyses and contextualizes the impact of Waugh's homosexual experiences in his life and writing with particular care, making the case that the pattern is developmental, earlier homoerotic expressions of desire gradually becoming oriented in maturity towards more appropriate objects: women, a wife, and ultimately God. Patey's reflections on Waugh's sexuality demonstrate the same attentiveness that other critics have given to Waugh's religious convictions (a subject Patey also explores in Waugh's fiction with skill and grace), but despite his willingness to employ deeply personal concerns in literary exegesis and despite his openness about Waugh's drinking problem, Patey does not examine its impact as closely as one might expect a critic with his inclinations and intentions to do. Thus Waugh's alcoholism remains almost invisible in literary criticism, although it is visible, despite his biographers' tact, in biography.

Waugh's drinking may have started as early as his relationship with his hated Oxford tutor C.R.M.F. Cruttwell, who warned him about his frequent drunkenness, remarkable even among a heavy-drinking crowd,<sup>10</sup> a concern shared by his

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<sup>10</sup> Hastings 86.

parents.<sup>11</sup> His "massive, suicidal drunkenness" at Oxford<sup>12</sup> involved a drunk-driving incident in which the inebriated Evelyn was jailed along with the driver, Matthew Ponsonby. Ponsonby's sister Elizabeth later became alcoholic, as did her cousin Olivia Plunket-Greene;<sup>13</sup> her brother David Plunket-Greene became a drug addict. Even among this set, Waugh's drinking was remarkable. His friend Dudley Carew observed insightfully that Evelyn

went at the bottle as though he was engaged in a desperate, murderous struggle with one who was at the same time deadly enemy and devoted comrade.... Evelyn's drinking at that time was not, then, the sort of part-time vice in which most of us indulged; it was a serious not to say deadly business.<sup>14</sup>

Carew's sense that the bottle was simultaneously an enemy and comrade to Waugh has an uncanny ring in terms of Waugh's subsequent cuckolded protagonists, especially in his most mature work, The Sword of Honour trilogy.

"Quantitative judgements don't apply," writes the honourable old paterfamilias Gervase Crouchback, of The Sword

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<sup>11</sup> Hastings 119.

<sup>12</sup> Hastings 121.

<sup>13</sup> Her descent into addiction is the model for that of the alcoholic Angela in Put Out More Flags, according to Hastings, 415. See the account of her subsequent breakdown, Hastings, 552; see also Jacqueline McDonnell, Waugh on Women (London: Duckworth, 1986) 16. The arrest for the drunk driving episode recurs in both Handful of Dust and Brideshead Revisited.

<sup>14</sup> Hastings 142.

of Honour Trilogy, in giving his son Guy some spiritual counsel. In the matter of alcoholic spirits, however, quantitative judgements are not so irrelevant. More important, however, is the qualitative consequence of the drinking. Because of his drinking, Waugh lost his teaching position at Aston Clifton<sup>15</sup> (the source for the odious school in Decline and Fall). His heavy drinking was one of the reasons Lady Burghclere disapproved of the engagement of her daughter (also named Evelyn) to him;<sup>16</sup> this first marriage foundered when she-Evelyn left him for another hard drinker, John Heygate. The significance of her infidelity and the subsequent collapse of the marriage, a recurring detail in so much of his fiction, is noted by the main body of Waugh's critics and biographers. No biographer or critic, at least to my knowledge, however, connects his lingering anxiety about the adultery and marriage breakdown with anxiety about alcohol abuse, a linkage I propose to suggest and trace below. Although Waugh's subsequent marriage to Laura Herbert was undoubtedly a solid one, his domestic stability did not eliminate the problem drinking: he repeatedly expresses concern, apologizes, and resolves to cut back.<sup>17</sup> His wartime military career was negatively affected by his drinking episodes. Martin Stannard makes clear that his alcohol abuse

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<sup>15</sup> Hastings 148.

<sup>16</sup> Hastings 165. Douglas Patey is silent on this issue; he attributes Lady Burghclere's disapproval to rumours of Evelyn's homosexual relationships at Oxford (25).

<sup>17</sup> See the letters quoted in Hastings, 341 and 346.

was a significant factor in his lack of advancement; despite the patronage of his commanding officer Robert Laycock, who kept him on "as a kind of regimental mascot,"<sup>18</sup> Waugh abused Laycock's encouragement, and his frequent drunkenness was "grimly noted by senior officers" who did not trust him with classified information.<sup>19</sup> He crashed at least two army cars, bruised himself in drunken falls, and suffered alcoholic blackouts.<sup>20</sup> (Waugh also suffered from 'persecution mania': an addiction-sensitive reader of the diaries, letters, and biographies should wonder what the role of the alcohol-induced memory loss was; alcoholics are frequently bewildered and hurt by accusations about intoxicated behaviour of which they have no recall.) Waugh lost his position as aide-de-camp to a general by drunkenly spilling wine all over him. His response to the reprimand was that "I could not change the habits of a lifetime for a whim of his."<sup>21</sup> The connection between Waugh's frequent intoxication and the failure of his military career, very detailed in Stannard's account, is economically summarized by Patey: "[F]or all his intelligence and powers of perception; Evelyn seemed unable to grasp the

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<sup>18</sup> Martin Stannard, Evelyn Waugh: No Abiding City (London: Flamingo, 1993) 68.

<sup>19</sup> Stannard 69.

<sup>20</sup> Patey 164.

<sup>21</sup> Patey 212. Waugh professes relief in his diary and claims he was slightly drunk, omitting reference to the spill: Michael Davies, ed., The Diaries of Evelyn Waugh (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976) 559.

direct correlation between his indiscipline and the refusal of his superiors to entrust him with responsibility."

Moreover, his family life, though stable, was troubled: his son Bron, aged 15, was found drunk on a train with no ticket, perhaps running away; his favourite daughter Margaret would accuse him to his face of drunkenness, a point to which I will return.<sup>22</sup> Waugh subsequently worried about her drinking as well;<sup>23</sup> at a certain point his wife Laura was drinking too much.<sup>24</sup>

As the notes below indicate, many of the preceding details are drawn from Selina Hastings's biography. Abstracted in this fashion, my summary might seem to imply that her work is preoccupied with Waugh's drinking problems (and those of his family); but this is not the case. It is 623 pages long; and despite its wealth of anecdote and careful reference to diaries and letters, Hastings avoids using the word "addicted" for Waugh's need for alcohol and drugs, deferring it until page 621. Stannard rarely uses any variant of the word "addict"; an isolated example occurs late in his second volume when quoting a worried (and badly spelled) letter from Waugh's great friend Diana Cooper, who may have wisely foreseen that Waugh would not want to confront the role of his drinking in his current depression:

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<sup>22</sup> Hastings, 577-78.

<sup>23</sup> Hastings, 604-5.

<sup>24</sup> Martin Stannard, Evelyn Waugh: No Abiding City (London: Flamingo, 1993) 494; Hastings 612.

. . . I am fearful for you—having loved you for years. Lets not forget Pinfold with your laudenum [sic] & creme de menthe . . . till madness claimed you.

You will tell me that your present symptoms are totally differant [sic]—but drink-drug-escape-addiction [sic] can bring you by differant streams to the same Slough of Despond.<sup>25</sup>

Martin Stannard's comment is a taciturn "He was already there."

The focus of the discussion below is the suppressed linkage between Waugh's representation of drinking and marriage breakdown in what may be his greatest and most mature work, The Sword of Honour Trilogy. This suppressed linkage is the culmination, however, of a pattern which begins to emerge much earlier in a Handful of Dust (1934) and Brideshead Revisited (1945). The three novels of the Trilogy, always conceived of as a single work and demonstrating remarkable unity, were originally published in 1952, 1955, and 1961, respectively, and published with minor revisions in a single volume (1966) shortly before Waugh's death. These dates are worth noting because Waugh's 1954 breakdown, closely chronicled in The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold (1957), occurred during this time. The Ordeal and Sebastian Flyte's alcoholism in Brideshead are the only addictions in Waugh's fiction which elicit much critical commentary; because of its

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<sup>25</sup> Martin Stannard, Evelyn Waugh: No Abiding City (London: Flamingo, 1993) 483.

timing, the Ordeal merits some particular attention here: the Pinfold experience, which inscribes an attempt to confront addiction, illuminates the trilogy whose composition was interleaved with it.

Waugh's and Gilbert's breakdowns, involving terrifying hallucinated voices, would not be out of place in Under the Volcano. Without his doctor's knowledge, Waugh (as well as his eponymous protagonist) had been self-medicating, preparing a concoction to help him sleep in which he mixed the prescribed bromide along with chloral from another, older prescription, and washing both down with creme de menthe. This he took in increasing quantities not just for his chronic insomnia (itself sometimes related to his obsession with writing during his "creative" periods and sometimes with fretful boredom<sup>26</sup>), but as a painkiller during the day.<sup>27</sup>

In the frightening auditory hallucinations, lifelike voices accused Pinfold of being, among other things, a fascist, a communist, a Jew, a snob, a shallow Catholic, and a drunk. Most if not all of the charges were those which had been leveled periodically at Waugh, the falseness of the patently false ones (for example, communist and Jew) undermining by association the credibility of the charges

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<sup>26</sup> The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold 129.

<sup>27</sup> For a detailed account of Waugh's self-medicating and the genesis of The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold, see Chapter IX ("Mr. Pinfold Sees It Through") of Evelyn Waugh: No Abiding City London: Flamingo, 1993, 312-358. See also Daniel L. Hurst and Mary Jane Hurst, "Bromide Poisoning in 'The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold,'" Evelyn Waugh Newsletter 16:2 (1982): 1-5, and, by the same authors, "Bromide Psychosis: A Literary Case," Clinical Neuropharmacology 7:3 (1983): 259-64.

which had some truth to them. Although Pinfold attempts to comport himself with dignity on the ship, the other passengers exchange meaningful glances when he converses politely about imaginary orchestras and other nonexistent (and often persecutory) phenomena, and he is aware that they believe him to be mad or drunk. At the end, through the ministrations of his wife, his doctor and his priest, from whom he had hoped to have an exorcism, Waugh and Pinfold both recover, resolve to tackle the dependence on the sleeping draught,<sup>28</sup> and in an unusually post-modern twist (unusual for Waugh, that is), both turn their fresh and narratable experience into The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold.

In passing, I would like to draw attention to a little-noticed detail which should be of interest to those who read addiction as a family phenomenon. Two of the three demonic voices of the "Angel" family who cruelly urge suicide ("Goneril" and "Angel") are resisted by the positive spirit or daemon Margaret. That Margaret bears the name of Waugh's favourite daughter and that the spirit-Margaret expresses a life-affirming love for him are critical commonplaces, but that she defends him against the specific charge of alcoholism is not often remarked. "He was a hero," he hears Margaret say. What follows, and what Mr. Pinfold hears, is dialogue from a sort of nightmarish intervention:

"He was drunk," they respond.

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<sup>28</sup> Waugh substituted the drug paraldehyde.

"He says it's not drink, dear," said their mother, gently uncommitted to either side. "He says it's some medicine he has to take."

"Medicine from a brandy bottle."

"I know you're wrong," said Margaret.<sup>29</sup>

Taken together, it is all three voices—the paradoxically-named family of Angels, including the two apparently vicious members and one apparently gentle member—who precipitate his decision to cut down on his drinking and drug-taking: it is not just the hero-worshipping and endearing Margaret who is the catalyst. The relationship among the demons changes: sometimes in the guise of husband and wife, sometimes as brother and sister, their protean relationships inconsistent but always familial, they thus suggest something about the constellation of the family and of its potentially coercive powers. Waugh's daughter Margaret was confrontational about his drinking; Waugh appears to have displaced her concern onto the nastier familial demons (to whom she remains connected) and thereby distanced somewhat the demons' painful and yet ultimately salutary influence. The others hate him, Margaret claims, but she alone loves him. When the reassuring figure of Mrs. Pinfold reappears and dispels the anxieties that the BBC, the Gestapo, the psycho-analysts and the existentialists are not conspiring against him, the narrative moves in the direction of solipsism: Margaret

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<sup>29</sup> The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold 211.

confirms that everything Gilbert has heard he has been saying to himself:

"It's perfectly true, darling," said Margaret. "I never had a brother or a sister-in-law, no father, no mother, nothing . . . I don't exist, Gilbert. There isn't any me, anywhere at all . . . but I do love you, Gilbert. I don't exist, but I do love . . . Good-bye . . . Love . . .'" and her voice too trailed away. . . .<sup>30</sup>

The doctor's reductionist verdict is "a perfectly simple case of poisoning," but Pinfold believes "that he had endured a great ordeal and, unaided, had emerged the victor."<sup>31</sup> With renewed physical and literary vigour, he forgoes his habitual Sunday sherry with the neighbor and returns for a moment to his arrested novel: "He knew what had to be done. But there was more urgent business first, a hamper to be unpacked of fresh, rich experiences—perishable goods." Sober, he becomes productive again; he "wrote in his neat steady hand: The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold"<sup>32</sup>

The accusing familial voices of the demons are thus not really banished. To the contrary, they are exiled into an endless loop—displaced, contained, and domesticated in the

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<sup>30</sup> The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold 265.

<sup>31</sup> The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold 268.

<sup>32</sup> The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold 269.

meta-fiction, but not silenced—and not losing, perhaps, all of their power to confront or haunt.

Brideshead Revisited is the only other Waugh novel that elicits attention from readers and critics interested in addiction. Waugh's representation of Sebastian Flyte's alcoholism is interesting because of its authentic portrayal of the Marchmain family dynamics: Lady Marchmain's attempts to control Sebastian's drinking, the family's hiding and rationing the wine, spirits, and money necessary to purchase more, the congruence with Lord Marchmain's drinking, the gradual absorption of Charles into the family and his adoption of a rescuing/caretaker role with Sebastian are all worthy of comment. What I wish to draw attention to, however, are two less obvious dimensions of Charles Ryder's ambivalence to the Marchmains which echoes a pattern in A Handful of Dust and prefigures its more detailed but subtle elaboration in the Sword of Honour Trilogy. The first is that in his Oxford days, Charles is a heavy drinker like Sebastian; but although Charles's drinking sprees compromise his academic career, thus hastening his emergence as an artist, he represents his drinking as differing in kind from Sebastian's alcoholic drinking.<sup>33</sup> This in itself is not necessarily remarkable; heavy drinking, especially in undergraduate university milieus, is often simply outgrown.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Brideshead Revisited 124.

<sup>34</sup> Waugh frames his own Oxford homosexual experience this way as a developmental phase leading towards a more mature love of women and then, ultimately, of God. For a good assessment of this element of Waugh's life and work, see Patey Chapter 6. Patey does not discuss

In the body of Waugh's fiction, however, what is significant is that Charles, whose temporarily heavy drinking is differentiated so sharply from Sebastian's, is a cuckold.

Like the earlier A Handful of Dust and the later Sword of Honour trilogy, Brideshead Revisited concerns marriage and families in alcohol-related crises. All six novels explore heavy drinking and adultery but imply relationships which absolve the drinkers of responsibility for the marriage breakdowns. It is true that in a Handful of Dust, John Beaver's involvement with the Lasts begins when Tony invites him for a weekend and, having been "tight" at the time, forgets that he has done so. No character comments negatively on this; the alcohol-induced memory lapse appears irrelevant. Tony Last's drinking is represented as merely a spurious and post-hoc rationale for Brenda's adultery, no more meaningful in terms of causation than his staged seaside tryst with the prostitute Millie for the information-gathering detectives. Tony's drinking spree, involving a series of annoying phone calls to Brenda as she is getting into bed with her lover, ends as does Sebastian's and Charles' visit to their seedy club—in an arrest and incarceration for drunk driving. The episode is clearly of no consequence whatsoever to Brenda, except as a means to an end. In fact, her slight hesitation before accepting the solicitor's expedient is a rare suggestion of her ethical sense. The climactic sentence of the lawyer's draft of the

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Waugh's life and work, see Patey Chapter 6. Patey does not discuss Charles Ryder's drinking.

letter accuses the erring husband in these terms: "He began to drink heavily and on one occasion made a disturbance at our flat in London, constantly ringing up when drunk and sending a drunken friend round to knock on the door."

Brenda's immediate and later responses demonstrate the irrelevance of the inebriety: "Is that necessary?" she asks.<sup>35</sup>

Tony's exile and death require comment. His drinking, exonerated as a cause of Brenda's adultery, becomes a post-hoc guarantor of their permanent estrangement: during his two day delirium and blackout from drinking the native *piwari*, a search party of three Englishmen looking for him comes and goes, with the consequence that he is permanently trapped in his absurd jungle incarceration reading to Mr. Todd.<sup>36</sup> His drinking thus has an odd kind of innocence, leading to his demise, but not to the end of his marriage. Moreover, should it be necessary for Waugh to demonstrate yet again that a husband's abuse of alcohol is not an impediment to a marriage, the apparently widowed Brenda remarries, not the pusillanimous lover John Beaver (who disappears) but Jock Menzies-Grant, Tony's "drunken friend" of the night of their bad behaviour and arrest. In the alternate ending, in which Tony returns from his South American adventure and is reconciled, after a fashion, with Brenda, Tony becomes the cynical tenant of Mrs. Beaver's flat, and Brenda is pregnant with their second child. Either way, the significance of the

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<sup>35</sup> A Handful of Dust 146-7.

<sup>36</sup> A Handful of Dust 220.

alcohol abuse as a factor in the deterioration of the relationship is raised only to be denied. Thus one manner in which Waugh attempts to suppress his anxieties (which nevertheless remain visible) about the possible cause and effect relationship between a husband's alcoholism and a wife's adultery is by the strained implication that there is no cause and effect relationship. This strain, however, calls attention to itself.

The second way in which Waugh expresses but then displaces anxieties about alcoholism is to "normalize" it by contextualizing it amidst an endless stream of anecdotes about the heavy drinking of other characters. In A Handful of Dust, this pattern even extends to include the army mule Peppermint, who according to the Lasts' groom Ben, died drinking the company's rum ration.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, Charles Ryder's drinking is for a time paralleled by but ultimately subordinated to Sebastian Flyte's alcoholism. Insofar as it has an explanation, Sebastian's alcoholism is accounted for by the heavy drinking of his father; the drinking of both is explained in terms of the controlling personality of Lady Marchmain; and ultimately Sebastian's heavy drinking is to be understood by the reader to be different in kind from narrator Charles Ryder's own heavy drinking, which appears to end well before his marriage to the adulterous Celia and is therefore ethically and emotionally irrelevant. Tony's heavy drinking is made innocent by its timing during and after

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<sup>37</sup> A Handful of Dust 22.

Brenda's adultery. Charles' drinking is made innocent by its having flourished and ceased well before his marriage to an adulterous wife.

In The Sword of Honour trilogy, this pattern is elaborated. Heavy drinking is again normalized. The number of occasions on which characters consume alcohol and are drunk are astonishing—or would be to readers unfamiliar with the similar prevalence of drinking episodes in Waugh's other fiction, episodes the proliferation of which makes them difficult if not impossible to quantify.<sup>38</sup> The particular details are so prominent that one is tempted to say, paradoxically, that they may have no meaning at all. What this strategy provides, however, is a sort of protective colouration.

Although Guy Crouchback and his family and army colleagues rarely have a meal or even a conversation without intoxicants, Guy himself is rarely intoxicated, it would seem, and is represented as an abandoned and innocent victim of his wife's philandering. However, the trilogy is remarkable for its use of doubles who are heavy drinkers or complicit in Virginia's infidelities.

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<sup>38</sup> In Waugh's first novel, Decline and Fall (1928) Paul Pennyfeather's disastrous and farcical adventures—most of which involve excess alcohol consumption—proceed from his having been unfairly scapegoated for the drunken escapades of other Oxford students. The Bright Young Things in Vile Bodies (1930) and the gossip columnists who report their goings-on are generally drunk: Agatha Runcible dies mad because of the drinking during a car race (188), and the government falls because of a scandal concerning a drunken party in the Prime Minister's residence (76), neither of which causes much reaction, it would seem, because drunkenness appears to be the permanent condition of modernity.

Jeffrey Heath has provided a detailed and highly plausible reading of Waugh's novels, arguing that they are more closely connected with his private life than their author may have recognized,<sup>39</sup> and in Waugh's fascination with doubles, he may have failed to recognize—just as his characters have failed to recognize—their doppelgängers and the lessons which could be learned from the encounters with them.<sup>40</sup> Critics see Guy as a persona for Waugh and Apthorpe as a double for Guy, but do not extend the implications of this to Apthorpe's role as a foil for the author, a way of articulating anxiety about his own alcohol dependence. That Apthorpe is Guy's double is recognized by Guy himself and by every commentator: because of their age (36, somewhat older than the other Halberdiers), they are both known as "Uncle" to the younger recruits; they both have lived in Africa; their superiors consistently confuse them with each other. Guy's attitude to Apthorpe varies from vague dissatisfaction at Apthorpe's dishonesty and irritating extraversion to a kind of love for him: when Apthorpe is gone, Guy misses him badly. To my knowledge, however, although most critics discuss Apthorpe's absurd cause of death (Guy's well-meaning gift of a bottle of whisky, medically contraindicated), no exegesis treats Apthorpe's anxiety about his own drinking and the place of this drinking within the novel's themes.

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<sup>39</sup> Jeffrey Heath, The Picturesque Prison: Evelyn Waugh and His Writing (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1982).

<sup>40</sup> "Doppelgängers don't recognize each other." The Diaries of Evelyn Waugh 783.

One of the funniest segments in the novel concerns Apthorpe's treasured Victorian thunderbox, a portable field latrine Apthorpe wishes to reserve for his own use. In gratitude for Guy's reluctant involvement in maintaining the secret of its whereabouts, Apthorpe solemnly offers Guy the privilege of using it, another detail which reinforces their connection with one another. Using the same latrine is a scatological way of linking the two men, just as using the same woman—Virginia—links Guy with her lovers Tommy Blackhouse and Trimmer. Their ferocious Brigadier Richie-Hook has found the latrine, is using it, and has ordered that no-one else do so; his appropriation provokes increasingly elaborate strategies on Apthorpe's part to protect his own exclusive use. Richie-Hook's ultimate "biff" in the fight over the latrine is to blow it up. The explosion occurs while Apthorpe is using it. The experience unhinges him. His mental breakdown, obvious in his erratic behaviour, leads to his hospitalization.

Before discussing Guy's role in his death shortly afterwards, I wish to draw attention to the crafty Apthorpe's strategy in dissimulation: as he knows he must move the latrine again, he asks Guy where it should go to escape detection. Guy's answer is Chesterton's question: "Where is the best place to hide a leaf? In a tree." Apthorpe therefore hides his private latrine among all the others.<sup>41</sup> By a similar logic, filling a novel with hard-drinking characters and

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<sup>41</sup> Sword of Honour 119.

involving virtually every conversation and meal with incidental drinking serves to disguise and normalize heavy drinking in the trilogy, and indeed, in all of Waugh's prior fiction. Dispersing the drinking throughout the populace makes Guy look comparatively abstemious; his own drinking cannot be construed as heavy and cannot possibly be construed as a factor in his marriage breakdown.

The dipsomaniac Apthorpe repeatedly claims that he never gets tight, only merry—a condition which Guy recognized means that Apthorpe has difficulties with alcohol and in fact becomes morose.<sup>42</sup> The conflation between merriment and depression in Apthorpe's case thus parallels the general pharmacological effect of alcohol. Apthorpe repeatedly insists on insignificant occasions that he has not been tight: he has Bechuana tummy, he says<sup>43</sup>. It is clear, however, from his blackouts and hangovers that his intoxication and denial are exactly what they appear to be. The role of his drinking is particularly significant on two occasions. One is the thwarted reconciliation between Guy and Virginia and the other is Apthorpe's death, both occasions on which Guy's culpability is brought into question.

Although Guy has been haunted for eight years by the collapse of his marriage, his feelings for Virginia have not totally disappeared. At the time of their encounter in the Cavendish Hotel, Virginia is estranged from but still married

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<sup>42</sup> Sword of Honour 115 and 140.

<sup>43</sup> Sword of Honour 48.

to the American Mr. Hector Troy. The combination of Virginia's vestigial fondness for Guy and her promiscuous tendencies, on one hand, and Guy's sexual urges on the eve of his departure for battle, on the other, would appear propitious for an episode of sexual intimacy, if not for a permanent reconciliation.

Alcohol, however, becomes important for three reasons. First, Virginia attributes Guy's ardour at first to alcohol and then is pleased that he is sober and sexually aroused: "Silly of me to say you are drunk" (101). Apthorpe places three drunken phone calls to his alter ego Guy at crucial moments in the tryst, thereby disrupting them. Third, as Virginia's own intoxication grows, her mood turns resentful of Guy's fidelity to Catholicism: his desire for her, she concludes, is not really for her at all: it is simply that she is the only woman in the world sexually available to him (104). The moment passes and the immediate outcome is bitter: it is clear that questions of timing and of quantity of alcohol are significant here; had Apthorpe not phoned three times, breaking the mood, Virginia might not have had the chance to reconsider and to drink more, her own drinking leading her to turn against Guy's uxorious inclinations. It is clear that alcohol use—Virginia's and Apthorpe's—but pointedly not Guy's—is thus to blame for preventing the re-establishment of their marriage at this critical moment.

Jeffrey Heath, however, has argued very plausibly that Apthorpe's interruption here is providential: the trilogy is

about Guy's slow growth from *acedia* to *caritas*, the humanizing of Guy, as Waugh put it. Guy's acceptance of Virginia's bastard child toward the end is the effective sign of that humanizing. Heath argues that the delay is thus developmental and providential. Had Guy made love to Mrs. Troy at this point, the situation might have been reversed: a pregnancy might have driven Virginia back to Mr. Troy, who thus might have been provided with a spurious heir.<sup>44</sup> Waugh's ambivalent deployment of alcohol in this episode is fascinating: it is Apthorpe's and then Virginia's drinking which prevent the sexual reconciliation at that moment, thus neatly depriving Guy of any blame for the failure to reinstate the marriage, for whose initial collapse he was not responsible.

Apthorpe's death is similar in that it raises questions of Waugh's anxiety about alcohol use. Apthorpe's repeated denial that he is ever "tight" and his recurrence of Bechuana tummy are obvious deceptions. When Guy visits him, his army superiors encourage him to—indeed they insist that—he take a bottle as a gift even when he asks if that will be all right with the hospital: "Very much all wrong, Uncle. That's your risk. But it's always done. Not worth while calling on a chap in hospital unless you bring a bottle. But don't say I told you. It's your responsibility if you get caught."<sup>45</sup> In Apthorpe's case, alcohol is strictly off limits. Drinking it

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<sup>44</sup> Heath 224-25.

<sup>45</sup> Sword of Honour 184.

kills him; and Guy is in a morally ambiguous position: the hard-drinking Apthorpe has consumed the poison himself and Guy's colleagues and superiors have been implicated—the effect, again, is simultaneously to articulate and dissipate anxiety about alcohol abuse, and to absolve Waugh's persona, the flawed but essentially decent Guy, from responsibility. The reader is made to feel that the subsequent withholding of the military citation to which Guy was entitled for his bravery in the attack on Dakar (in which he rescued Richie-Hook, saving his life) because of the questionable death of Apthorpe is unfair. Guy again is represented as the victim of his own decency and passivity.

Accepting Virginia because of her child gives him the chance to be actively magnanimous. Having noted (as have other observers) Waugh's predilection for spiritual kinship outweighing blood ties, Heath prefers the original ending, in which Baby Gervase is to be Guy's only heir. His argument can be extended, however, to the ending in which Domenica and Guy have two boys of their own. Virginia's maternal instincts were minimal at best, and even before her death during the blitz, her Catholic friends the Plessingtons (who do not view Virginia's death as a tragedy, as they had feared her conversion to Catholicism might not have "taken") were involved with the baby: "Domenica got very fond of it. A marriage was the obvious thing" (573). Thus the chain of events deferring Virginia's reconciliation with Guy until her discovery of her pregnancy by Trimmer and her simultaneous

poverty when Troy ends the marriage lead to Guy's remarrying- and thus the events are providential. This providence, as I have suggested, includes Apthorpe's and Virginia's critical moments of drunkenness.

I have isolated the ambivalence about the role of alcohol use in the marriage breakdown and in Apthorpe's role as double. He is not the only one—Tommy Blackhouse, Guy's friend for whom Virginia abandoned Guy, later abandoning Tommy as well, is a heavy drinker. So is Ludovic, the officer who rescues Guy from Crete in an ignominious retreat and who may have killed two men. Ludovic's fear that Guy is aware of the murders is what precipitates his own avoidance, descent into madness, novel writing (an apparent parody of Brideshead Revisited), and ultimately his purchase of Guy's Castello Crouchback. Thus the plot makes clear that Tommy and Ludovic—both heavy drinkers—are doubles for Guy.

The trilogy expresses most completely this pattern in which anxiety about responsibility for marriage breakdown is fused with anxiety about alcohol abuse, and both are diffused through being distributed across a range of characters. This diffusion is a link to the more generalized anxiety about ethical responsibility which is at the heart of the morally ambiguous episode involving the displaced Jews in Jugoslavia.

The spiritual advice in Gervase Crouchback's last letter to his son Guy echoes in and animates Guy's prayer and ultimately his ethical action in Unconditional Surrender, the

last of the three novels. At Gervase's funeral, Guy comes to understand his father's insight into his spiritual malaise:

For many years now the direction in the Garden of the Soul 'Put yourself in the presence of God', had for Guy come to mean a mere act of respect, like the signing of a the Visitors' Book at an Embassy or Government House. He reported for duty saying to God: 'I don't ask anything of you. I am here if you want me. I don't suppose I can be of any use, but if there is anything I can do let me know,' and left it at that.

'I don't ask anything of you'; that was the deadly core of his apathy, his father had tried to tell him, was now telling him. That emptiness had been with him for years now even in his days of enthusiasm and activity with the Halberdiers. Enthusiasm and activity were not enough. God required more than that. He commanded all men to ask.<sup>46</sup>

Accordingly, Guy prays for a sign and prays to be attentive to it:

One day he would get the chance to do some small service which only he could perform, for which he had been created. Even he must have his function

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<sup>46</sup> Unconditional Surrender 437-38.

in the divine plan. He did not expect a heroic destiny. Quantitative judgements did not apply.

This asked-for sign comes in the form of his humbled wife Virginia Troy—pregnant and almost destitute after a series of failed marriages and other liaisons—whose adultery appears to have precipitated, if not caused, Guy's long-lasting accidie. (Guy sometimes fears that the melancholy of his mad brother Ivo, who starved himself to death—a madness which appears to be unmotivated—may also be his own fate. Ivo's tendency to depression may signal a familial predisposition.) Knowing that he will be the object of ridicule and gossip, the cuckolded husband takes her back and gives her child a home and a name (in fact, that of his own father, an action which ironically will help to perpetuate the dwindling Catholic dynasty). After Virginia's death in the blitz, Guy marries the young Catholic caregiver who had become very fond of the child, and in the alternate ending, goes on to father two more sons. The latter two details are compressed into and deferred until the last paragraph of the Epilogue. It would appear, then, that Waugh was not entirely at ease with his authorial decision to have Guy be reconciled to a fuller life.<sup>47</sup> Nonetheless, Guy's willingness to act meaningfully—if not "heroically"—in the light of his theological epiphany is clearly significant.

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<sup>47</sup> In the first edition of the novel this infant is the only one to bear Guy's name; in the subsequent editions, Guy's wife Domenica has also borne two children. Nevertheless, as the first-born, Trimmer's baby will be recognized as Guy's heir.

As I have argued, this quixotic resolution of Guy's marriage illuminates the trilogy in general, Waugh's treatment of marriage in his prior novels (especially Handful of Dust and Brideshead Revisited), and is a trope for his anxieties about his own drinking problems, anxieties which spill over into other relationships and responsibilities.

The phrase "Quantitative judgements don't apply" recurs when Guy stubbornly attempts to save a community of displaced persons—Jewish refugees—from bureaucratic indifference to their fate; useless to the Jugoslavian partisans and to the Allied war effort and resented by the peasants, the Jews are in danger. Ironically, Guy's gift of some American magazines to Mme. Kanyi falsely implicates her and her husband in "counter-revolutionary" activity; she is believed to be the mistress (hence an adulteress) of a British liaison officer (Guy), and her electrician husband's arguably heroic attempts to keep the electric light plant going with inadequate supplies lead to a charge of sabotage. Presumably they are sent to their deaths. Guy's military career and "crusade" thus ends in this "frustrated act of mercy."<sup>48</sup> Despite his good intentions, his innocent decision leads to their deaths. The affinity with Lowry's characterization of Hugh is remarkable.

The irony is deepened in the light of the insight he and Mme. Kanyi have already shared on the ubiquity of evil, on the absence of a safe home in the modern world:

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"There was a time when I thought that all I needed for happiness was to leave. Our people feel that. They must move away from evil. Some hope to find homes in Palestine. Most look no further than Italy—just to cross the water, like crossing the Red Sea.

"Is there any place that is free of evil? It is too simple to say that only the Nazis wanted war. These communists wanted it too. It was the only way in which they could come to power. Many of my people wanted it, to be revenged on the Germans, to hasten the creation of the national state. It seems to me there was a will to war, a death wish, everywhere. Even good men thought their private honour would be satisfied by war. They could assert their manhood by killing and being killed. They would accept hardship in recompense for having been selfish and lazy. Danger justified privilege. I knew Italians—not very many perhaps—who felt this. Were there none in England?"

"God forgive me," said Guy. "I was one of them."<sup>49</sup>

The phrase "death wish" provides a leitmotif throughout all three novels. A musician has seen it in Guy (519); it is the title of Ludovic's absurd book (532); Everard Spruce's secretaries associate the book title with Virginia's death (542); it motivates the apparent fearlessness of Guy's

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<sup>49</sup> Unconditional Surrender 565-66.

beloved and ferocious Brigadier Richie-Hook (559); and it links Guy's despair with that of his mad brother Ivo at the outset of the novel (15, 25, 484, and 517). And yet his father's recurring phrase—"quantitative judgements don't apply"—remains the register of meaning in a world which Guy has come to see as one huge transit camp.

Steven Trout has demonstrated that the remarkable continuity of the trilogy works to deflate and miniaturize everything in it, most importantly Guy's romantic notions of modern war as chivalrous crusade. Stripped of his illusions, and spiritually more mature, the humbled Guy is capable of acting meaningfully in the much smaller theatre of personal commitment: "mired ... in situations that ceaselessly deflate into pettiness and banality,"<sup>50</sup> he is nonetheless called to act responsibly. His failed act of compassion to the Kanyis, a sombre echo of the farcical failed act of compassion to Apthorpe, re-registers the anxiety about responsibility which, in Waugh's case, cannot be understood properly outside the context of his anxiety about alcohol abuse and marriage. His act of compassion to Virginia and her child, understood in Waugh's Catholic frame of reference as the salvation of her soul as well as that of her baby, is also a factor in her death: had she not converted to Catholicism in remarrying Guy and moved in to "a safe home" with Guy's Uncle Peregrine, she would not have died in the blitz. In the spiritual landscape

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<sup>50</sup> Steven Trout, "Miniaturization and Anticlimax in Evelyn Waugh's *Sword of Honour*," *Twentieth-Century Literature* 43(2, 1997): 141.

of the novel, Guy is clearly the author's intentional instrument of her salvation.

Set in the broader context of Waugh's writing, however, this reconciliation is perhaps the only closure possible for the writer whose closest friends believed he had never fully recovered from his first wife's betrayal. The three novels allow the decent but flawed protagonist to be absolved of both the alcohol abuse which apparently afflicts his metonymic doubles and almost everyone else and also of guilt for the marriage breakdown, (dis)placed onto Virginia. Moreover, in a striking act of wishful thinking, Waugh has made Guy the agent of the wife's punishment as well as her forgiveness: his act of *caritas* to her has also led to her death.

Guy's attachment to the Halberdiers is clearly a surrogate for a sense of connection to a family, a sentimental attachment beyond which he arguably matures as his cynicism about the indifference and hypocrisy of humans during war time is exposed and transcended. But again, though, this pattern has been adumbrated in the earlier books: Charles Ryder's initial comments on his relationship to his army is replete with powerful images from a betrayal within a marriage. The vehemence of the metaphor alerts the reader to its implications, as does Charles' self-conscious insistence a few sentences earlier that he drinks "three glasses of gin before dinner, never more or less ...."

Here my last love died . . . . I was aghast to realize that something within me, long sickening, had quietly died, and felt as a husband might feel, who, in the fourth year of his marriage, suddenly knew that he had no longer any desire, or tenderness, or esteem, for a once beloved-wife . . . . no hope of setting things right, no self-reproach for the disaster . . . . I knew it all, the whole drab compass of marital disillusion; we had been through it together, the army and I, from the first importunate courtship until now, when nothing remained to us except the chill bonds of law and duty and custom. I had played every scene in the domestic tragedy . . . . they engendered a . . . . growing conviction that it was not myself but the loved one who was at fault.<sup>51</sup>

The Sword of Honour trilogy is already frequently cited as "probably the greatest work of fiction to emerge from the Second World War."<sup>52</sup> The centenary of Waugh's birth in 2003 will probably stimulate a renewed appreciation of a writer already recognized as one of the master prose stylists of the twentieth century. A new generation of readers and scholars will no doubt rediscover his work and will require some critical apparatus, much of which is already available in thoughtful studies of its treatment of Catholicism, the

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<sup>51</sup> Brideshead Revisited 12-13.

<sup>52</sup> For example, in Trout, 125.

absurdities of twentieth-century bureaucracy, its place within a tradition of satire, its place within the Waugh canon, and so on. Its interpenetrating layers of surreal farce and serious theological reflection invite careful reading.

But this reading must involve a sensitivity to the heretofore unjustifiably ignored element of Waugh's struggle with alcohol abuse and the parallel struggle of his personae, in a line stretching back at least to A Handful of Dust and perhaps even earlier. We should take Guy's hint—or, if we prefer, Waugh's and Chesterton's—and become more aware of the leaves hidden in the trees.

## CONCLUSION

Biography is a genre which, since the eighteenth century, has aspired to a kind of truth different from that of fiction, drama, or poetry; literary biography has sought to represent with fidelity the experiences and thoughts of writers which might illuminate their works. At the close of the twentieth century, it is more than clear that in narrating lives, even skilled writers sensitive to the irreducible complexities and contradictions of their subjects operate from the premise that there is a stable, coherent self behind the work, and this premise necessitates the imposition as well as discovery of order, the selection and rejection of details and their explication.

Canonical writers who are alcoholic and writers from alcoholic families require biography that, in this process of selection and rejection, neither trivializes nor sensationalizes the drinking behaviour. Appalling though the latter can be, the former may perhaps do its subjects even greater disservice. The temptation for a biographer to do either is very strong; because of its sheer repetitiveness, much drunkenness is unbearably tedious when it is not spectacularly amusing or pathetic or otherwise startling. A responsible biographer, and a responsible reader of biography, will judiciously and compassionately respect the centrality of addiction in the life of the alcoholic or codependent. If a subject from an earlier era attempted to

get some kind of help, medical or otherwise, an understanding of the construction of addiction in that time and place is, of course, essential. A responsible biographer, however, will also construe an alcohol abuse problem in the light of current addiction theories. As I have argued earlier, using an outmoded theoretical approach to addiction, no matter how elegant and internally consistent, is an exercise analogous to using Ptolemaic astronomy. Since current addiction theory construes addiction as a transgenerational family phenomenon, a scholar writing a biography today or interrogating biographies of previous years must examine his or her subject's relationships with parents, spouses, siblings, and children with particular care. Every caveat above applies with equal force to literary criticism and to the hybrid genre, the so-called critical biography. In my application of current addiction theory to subjects whose lives and work predated this theory, I hope to have established the pertinence of this approach.

Most critics are teachers in the academy and are lecturing to and conducting seminars with students who may have a surprising and considerable familiarity with contemporary thinking about addiction. "System enabling" and its taxonomy of addictive behaviors have now entered into the patois of popular culture; the apparent saturation of North American consciousness by what we can deride as psychobabble should also suggest the existence and accessibility of more

rigorous thinking about addiction of which we see more commonly the debased and attenuated versions.

Literature instructors might pause to consider the number of students who have been taught to recognize patterns of addiction with varying degrees of sophistication, perhaps because of counseling for personal difficulties, available on every college and university campus in North America, or perhaps because addiction awareness is now widely (though inconsistently) integrated into secondary education. Reading addiction is therefore already an element of many students' repertoires of critical thinking skills, a resource to be tapped and refined, challenged, and engaged with ethical and aesthetic judgement.

The starting point for sensitivity to addiction issues in fiction should be, of course, the reading of the fiction itself, not the biography. Readers—professional critics and students alike—can react intelligently to the representation of alcohol intoxication or addiction in realist novels (and surreal passages) in which characters react in now familiar ways to the behaviour of characters who drink too much; readers can do so without resorting beforehand (or after the fact) to biography.

More subtle, far more interesting, and therefore more of a challenge for students, instructors, and critics who may find themselves turning to biography and criticism for explication, I would argue, are works whose plots feature an unusually high consumption of alcohol which seems to have

little or no consequence, or consequences which appear unrelated on the surface of the narrative to other anxieties and obsessions which may claim the readers' attention more dramatically. Endless drinking which does not seem to produce inebriation, or inebriation which does not, on the face of things, seem to create problems are both worth close reading, for their silences and tensions and contradictions which surface in other preoccupations can often be understood in terms of their writers' unresolved difficulties with alcohol abuse—their own problems or those of someone with whom they were enmeshed. It is these works, whose energies seem to pulse elsewhere in the plots, which probably have a sort of code which can be construed with the help of a careful biography—even one whose author has no particular awareness of the dynamics of alcoholism.

A critic who has detected the presence of subtle addiction issues in fiction by writers whose biographers have been blind or excessively tactful can contribute to the ongoing conversation and provoke fresh insights in research.

It is in this spirit that I conclude and submit this dissertation.

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