2008

"THE GOD IDEA" AND THE LITERATURE OF ADDICTION NARRATING THE SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

Jessica M. Natiuk
Western University

"THE GOD IDEA" AND THE LITERATURE OF ADDICTION: NARRATING THE SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

(Spine title: "The God Idea" and the Literature of Addiction)

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

Jessica M. Natiuk

Graduate Program in Comparative Literature

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

Abstract

This thesis explores the narration of the spiritual awakening in the Literature of Addiction from a sociological, critical and literary perspective. The term "spiritual awakening" has many synonyms, but here refers to an alteration in behavior which allows for remission of addictive behavior. The history of the Literature of Addiction in the United States and in Russia reveals changing attitudes towards those afflicted. Certain characteristics of addictive behavior are recurring in narrative representation. American modernist writers viewed addiction bleakly, but after the inception of Alcoholics Anonymous, the general public became interested in narratives of recovery. Contemporary addiction memoirs reflect the hegemony of Alcoholics Anonymous, and are informed by its epistemology and narrative structures, which grew out of older religious models. The Literature of Addiction is currently evolving against the dogma of Alcoholics Anonymous, and must seek a more liberal discourse for communicating the spiritual awakening which relieves addictive behavior.

To possess your soul in patience, with all the skin and some of the flesh burnt off your face and hands, is a job for a boy compared with the pains of a man who has lived pretty long in the exhilarating world that drugs or strong waters seem to create and is trying to live now in the first bald desolation created by knocking them off.

-- Charles Edward Montague

Dedication

To my Mom and Dad, without whom, for various reasons, I wouldn't be here.

And to Terry, without the encouragement of whom this would not have been written.

Acknowledgements

I'd like to thank my Supervisor, Dr. Vladimir Tumanov, for his invaluable support, and Drs. Anthony Purdy, David Darby and Melitta Adamson for their administrative mercy.

I'd also like to thank those members of the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba – especially River House – who provided indispensable information which made this project possible.

In addition, a heartfelt gesture of appreciation is extended to the Winnipeg Group of Alcoholics Anonymous, for their wisdom and guidance, as well as their willingness to impart first-hand details about the inner workings of that organization.

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Introduction

The term "spiritual awakening," often used with half-jocularity in modern speech, occupies a deserved pride of place in theological literature; yet far less attention has been paid to its function in more "popular" narrative genres. This thesis will endeavor to explore how the nebulous concept of "awakening" is effectively employed in mainstream fiction and memoir, and investigate some of the didactic purposes for employing a particular type of "awakening" in a particular type of narrative. Whether one is referring to a spiritual awakening or a "psychic change" (Alcoholics Anonymous), "conversion" (William James), "*metanoia*" (Christian theologians), or any one of a plethora of pseudo-synonymous terms, the meaning of the expression is heavily context-dependent, and varies significantly depending on discourse and didactic purpose. Offered in illustration of this point is the comprehensive definition of William James:

> To be converted, to be regenerated, to receive grace, to experience religion, to gain an assurance, are so many phrases which denote the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self, hitherto divided, and consciously wrong, inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right, superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities. This is at least what conversion signifies in general terms, whether or not we believe that a direct divine intervention is needed to bring such a moral change about.[1]

Utilizing this definition as a point of departure, this thesis shall endeavor to establish a contemporary and functional definition for the term specifically as it relates to narratives – fictional as well as those styled as personal, non-fictional memoirs – of alcoholism and addiction. In exploring the effects of a psychic metamorphosis on aspects of addiction, trauma, and recovery *in* narrative, I shall attempt to illuminate correlative connections between seemingly disparate incidences of and investigations into spiritual awakening, using as a touchstone those paradigmatic cases of Alcoholics Anonymous narratives. Insofar as these are considered verifiable "awakenings" from addiction,

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[1] James, 211.

parallels and comparisons will be drawn from varied literary periods: nineteenth-century Russia and Dostoevsky's exploration into the psychopathology of gambling addiction; the late Victorian Period in America and the commentary of Jack London on his "non-alcoholism"; and the modernist American work of Jean Rhys in the 1930s. As well, we shall examine the modern phenomena of the personal recovery memoir, which arose in response to the original chronicles engendered by Alcoholics Anonymous, and which as a sub-genre has evolved a "new" narrative formula adaptable to contemporary addiction-angst. Our investigation shall focus on Heather King's *Parched: A Memoir*, Elizabeth Wurtzel's *More, Now, Again: A Memoir*, and James Frey's *A Million Little Pieces* as representative of the trends in the narration of spiritual awakening in addiction literature today.

Although a spiritual awakening need not be religious in nature, as James notes and as analysis and comparison of these works will reveal, several literary cases will emerge where a behavioral change predicating recovery takes place in concurrence with a spiritual thrust – this occurs in all three of the memoirs studied here (and in numerous other works not pursued in depth in this paper, such as Cheever's *Falconer*). In counterpoint, however, I shall bring forth literary instances where a spiritual awakening is lacking (as in Rhys) or where a distinct spiritual ethos exists, yet one which is impotent for the purposes of relieving addictive trauma (as in Dostoevsky). It will be posited that the spirituality utilized by the individual must be coupled with a distinct desire for recovery, and with an admission of powerlessness against the addiction – as in Step One and Step Two of the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, which encourage

"deflation of the ego *at depth*"[2] so as to facilitate spiritual revitalization. As per addiction and its resolution, spirituality is useful in "curing the addiction" only insofar as it serves a pragmatic purpose in a behavioral sense – a function which is often impeded by personality disorders and other spiritual "blocks" in the addicted individual. It will be shown that, long before the "scientific" and psychological understanding of concepts such as "narcissistic personality" and "alcoholic grandiosity," authors have portrayed their addicted characters as possessing these traits, demonstrating the authors' keen perception in matters of psy sciences and the disease/dis-ease of addiction.

In contrast to literary depictions of addiction and its concomitant social and spiritual ravages, which abound the modernist period, personal recovery memoirs stand as examples of a more hybrid form of the Literature of Addiction. These works present the chronicle of an addictive experience where the recovery is anticipated from the outset due to publisher and consumer (as well as moral and social) expectations. Thus, the sequence of events presented from "addiction" to "recovery" follows a linear, relatively prescribed pattern. By the end of the average memoir,

> junkie talk is inevitably substituted for self-affirming, therapy talk. At the end of ... these memoirs, Humpty Dumpty is sewn up again, fear is overcome, the joyous first tastes of normalcy are relished, and our protagonists become intimately bonded with the cast of characters strewn from all paths of life at the treatment center.[3]

The purpose of these works tends to be somewhat moralistic, and even missionary. Apart from individual stylistic variations, many "follow similar paths to destruction, and ultimately redemption"[4]; based as they are on the original recovery stories in the Big Book of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, we find that "the explicit arguments

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[2] Raphael (quoting the Oxford Group – a precursor to AA), 84.
[3] Zambreno, http://www.newcitychicago.com/chicago/2413.html
[4] Ibid.

are highly conventional."[5] Narratological exploration reveals, however, how a close kinship with the spiritual autobiographical tradition – Puritan, Quaker, and Methodist in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries,[6] and later the Salvation Army and the Christian mind-cure movement – highlights their importance as valuable resources for assessing the manner in which religious and social groups evaluate and propagate their spiritual successes. Furthermore, we can observe the manner in which a pragmatic religious (or semi-religious) mindset influences behavior as well as the narrative expressing the alteration in that behavior (that is, the process of the conversion). Through present-day recovery memoirs we can assess the validity of our ever-changing definitions in their most active, pragmatic and contemporary sense, which is reflected in the "recovery community" existing in modern North American society.

The parameters of the spiritual awakening from a contemporary position stem primarily from the literature of Alcoholics Anonymous which posits that, with help from an attendant "Higher Power," an afflicted individual can recover and resume normal social interaction following their addictive nadir: after they have "hit bottom" and "admitted powerlessness," the program offers a path to recovery which leads to the experience of "a spiritual awakening as the result of [The Twelve] steps."[7] The efficacy of this awakening or psychic change in stymieing self-harm behaviors is delineated in Appendix II of *Alcoholics Anonymous*:

> The personality change sufficient to bring about recovery from alcoholism ... [is called a] "spiritual experience" or "spiritual awakening" ... these personality changes, or religious experiences, [need not be] in the nature of sudden and spectacular upheavals ... the psychologist William James [refers also to] the "educational variety" [of religious experience] ... these develop slowly over a period of time ... the newcomer realizes he has undergone a profound alteration in

[5] Shea, ix.
[6] Ibid, viii.
[7] AA, BB, 56.

> his reaction to life ... [tapping] an unsuspected inner resource which [he] presently identifie[s] with [his] own conception of a power greater than [himself].[8]

This "transformation of desire," as Fitzgerald calls it, allows for gradual withdrawal from and cessation of addictive behaviors. "In the process of affective redemption," she notes, "desire is not suppressed or destroyed, but ... transferred, transformed, set on fire ... the strength of the addictive behavior [is lost]."[9] Members of mutual-help groups "share" these stories of transformation with one another, thus granting a sequential order and definite meaning to what might be considered otherwise scattered events and perceptions. Valverde points out that disconnected events, when linked by such an overarching meta-narrative, can thus become "elements in a single narrative of tragic downfall" (and presumably, recovery, in many cases).[10] In these "tales" of "what it was like, what happened, and what it's like now" there is a specific moralistic and instructive purpose to the presentation of the "bottom", awakening, and recovery. In literature, the presentation differs greatly, as typically the moralizing aspect is not present or is far less dominant. The motives of a writer exercising creative control over a literary and artistic vision often will not coincide with the attempts of an addict to share his or her "experience, strength and hope" to "carry the message" to other addicts.[11] Cain dissects the manner in which alcoholics fashion and reify their experiences with addiction into a narrative which essentially de-problematizes issues of chronology and subjectivity for the overall purpose of telling a cohesive story that fits the paradigm[12] ("It was at that moment I realized God was testing me, and I hit my bottom" etc.) This narrative is typically linear and follows a pattern of disorder to order, ending with the

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[8] Ibid, 567.
[9] Fitzgerald, 95.
[10] Valverde, 24.
[11] *Cocaine Anonymous* slogan; the Twelve Steps of Cocaine Anonymous.
[12] Cain, 210-212.

subject's current interpretation of events in the present day following the cessation or remission of the disorder, disease or trauma. It operates in an objective, morally prescriptive way; like the spiritual autobiography, the tale is

> primarily concerned with the question of grace: whether or not the individual has been accepted into divine [sober] life, an acceptance signified by psychological and moral changes which the autobiographer comes to discern in his past experience.[13]

An especially fascinating aspect of the Literature of Addiction is the lack of narratives featuring "recovery" which are *not* memoirs, where the addictive behavior of a *fictional* character ceases and regeneration ensues. One theory, which will be studied more comprehensively below, holds that narratives of addiction and its consequences (*After Leaving Mr. McKenzie, Long Day's Journey into Night, Voyage in the Dark, Appointment in Samarra, Nightwood, Tender is the Night, The Sun Also Rises,* "The Swimmer," "Big Blonde," *The Man with the Golden Arm*) tended to emerge from a specific generational cohort of writers in the United States, born between the latter half of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth.[14] Crowley suggests that these narratives of addiction – which were spearheaded by London's 1912 *John Barleycorn* – were the product of a modernist malaise, which he ascribes to the widespread temper governed by "white logic" (London's term for the agonized sense of life's hopelessness and cosmic sadness).[15] This ethos resulted in "a mode of fiction that expresses the conjunction of modernism and alcoholism in a pervasive ideology of despair."[16] Following the progressive actions of Alcoholics Anonymous and Marty Mann's "Alcoholic Movement," the notion of *recovery* from alcoholism became a more popular subject, famed in novels like *The Lost Weekend* by Jackson, *Falconer* by Cheever and

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[13] Shea, xi.
[14] Crowley, 35-42.
[15] Ibid, 20.
[16] Ibid, x.

films like *Days of Wine and Roses* (all of which, incidentally, received direct support from AA). Once the blunt and deflationary pragmatism of AA's program provided an alternative to the seductive grandiosity of the modern temper,[17] fiction about drinking changed accordingly, with "the regeneration" from alcoholism/addiction emerging as a flourishing genre.[18]

The paucity of fictionalized recovery prior to the mid-twentieth century was not centralized in America alone; Russian novels of the nineteenth century abound with depictions of alcoholism/addiction from which there was no expectation of redemption. Before the widespread acceptance of mutual-help groups and therapeutic alliances for addiction, there was no societal or personal expectation that an addicted individual could "recover" – without, perhaps, improbable divine intervention; to some extent this exculpated those who were perceived irrefutably as "lost causes." The character of Marmeladov in *Crime and Punishment* (1864), for example, is depicted as an unredeemable alcoholic whose vague attempts at sobriety are disregarded as fantasy by all involved with him. Marmeladov's fictional world of nineteenth century Russia has a prescribed ending for the alcoholic-addict: degradation and despair without modern psychiatric treatment, rehabilitation hospitals, or social programs for the enhancement of sobriety. Dostoevsky was a proponent of the idea that a mystic regeneration from such an abysmal state was possible (Dmitry and Ivan Karamazov undergo such miraculous transformations), yet he could not have conceived of a world wherein such recoveries were commonplace, let alone facilitated by social agencies. Marmeladov, then, to a large extent, is not culpable for his actions; his end is not tragic, just predictable as per the

[17] Ibid, 157.
[18] Ibid, 155.

social circumstances. Compare Marmeladov's lack of complicity in his own fate to that of Mary in the 1956 American play *A Long Day's Journey into Night;* Mary, a drug addict, experiences temporary recovery after institutionalization and then willfully rejects it when she cannot cope with the realities of her sad sobriety. Her character exists in a fictional world which accepts recovery from addiction as a distinct possibility; therefore, her rejection of recovery is imbued with a sense of moral and spiritual failure which is not present for Marmeladov or for other addicted protagonists before the change in the Literature of Addiction after the mid-twentieth century.

If we have loosely determined, then, that the contemporary memoir or "recovery story" tends to serve an instructive purpose and thus ends in a predictable, prescriptive way with the enfranchisement of an altered, non-addictive, spiritual way of life, we can safely say that literature generally follows no such strictures. Upon glancing at the title of an American memoir, like 2006's *Broken*: *My Story of Addiction and Redemption,* by William Cope Moyers, our assumption is automatic that, since the individual in question survived his experience to craft a narrative of it, he or she must have achieved the requisite awakening by one means or another to halt the addictive behavior. The ending, as per all we know about such formulaic tales, will serve to adumbrate the message of enlightenment and strength of spirit that has been reported in the narrative. Compare this to the Russian novel *Moscow to the End of the Line*; on the last page, Venja, the narrator, is attacked by four undisclosed assailants and stabbed in the neck. As he is dying, his narrative continues:

> I didn't know there was pain like that in the world. And I writhed from the torture of it – a clotted red letter "*Ю*" spread across my eyes and started to quiver. And since then I have not regained consciousness, and I never will.[19]

[19] Erofeev, 164.

Venja dies at the end of his "memoir" amidst alcoholic hallucinations and abject terror. As Tumanov notes, this is distressing on a literary as well as a psychological level, since

> the last sentence of the novel turns the entire preceding narrative into a paradox: the narrator indicates that he could not have told his story, since he ceased to exist as a consciousness as soon as the action stopped ... [yet Venja makes] reference to the end of his *cogitative activity*: at the moment of death the hero ceases to think, and should, logically, lose the ability to narrate.[20]

Rarely, if ever, would a reader ever be presented with such a complex narrative conundrum in a non-fictional recovery memoir, let alone the tragic death of the first-person narrator. In a recovery memoir, narrative expectations are fulfilled rather than thwarted, not because these memoirs are inherently trite and unsophisticated, but because such narrative intricacy undermines the thematic and morally edifying aspects of the work itself. Raphael notes Shea's contention that in these narratives it is the recounting of "the pilgrim's progress of individual salvation"[21] which has primacy – not aspects of narratology. As such, the presentation tends to be consistent with its objective: extraneous details are filtered out, and less attractive facts are often buffed to high shine for the purposes of enhancing the message.

To some extent, this has brought into question the integrity of those writers who embellish their tales of redemption. The public defamation of James Frey for his partially fabricated 2003 memoir, *A Million Little Pieces*, served as a warning that the contemporary public takes its Literature of Addiction – at least the veracity of published memoirs – seriously, and demonstrated the intrinsically important function of narrative in the perception of addiction and recovery. Yet, it will be affirmed again and again that the narrative of a spiritual awakening (in Frey's case, via the *Tao te Ching* and the Hazelden Treatment Centre) is a construct, one which combines and recombines elements to

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[20] Tumanov, 95.
[21] Raphael, 70.

achieve a certain didactic purpose. Therefore, a certain epistemological leniency – like that accorded to much of AA's dogma – is required to accept a somewhat refurbished and aestheticized version of events, which, insofar as its purpose, is valid whether it is categorically "true" or not.

The above introductory comments are not intended to demean or devalue the personal narratives of recovery we will explore herein, nor privilege "literature" above them aesthetically or artistically. When we speak of "redemption into a universe two stories deep,"[22] it is to both these diverse types of works that we are referring. William James postulated the existence of two categories of people: the "once-born," who are healthy-minded, and thus experience life optimistically and with lusty vigor; and the "twice-born," who are pessimistic and prone to depression, and who must pass through a second birth – a revitalizing experience – to transform enough to live a successful and fulfilling mental and spiritual life. Thus, the experience of *metanoia* offers the twice-born the chance to live two "texts" – recombining the life before (in the active addiction) and the life after the psychic change into one intertextual whole. After the dissolution that is experienced in a prolonged addiction,

> there is seldom a *restitution ad integrum*. One has tasted the fruit of the tree, and the happiness of Eden never comes again. The happiness that comes, when any does come ... is not the simple ignorance of ill, but something vastly more complex ... the process is one of redemption, not of mere revision to natural health, and the sufferer, when saved, is saved by what seems to him a second birth, a deeper kind of conscious being than he could enjoy before.[23]

James explains how "man's interior is a battleground for what he feels to be two deadly, hostile selves, one actual, the other ideal,"[24] and cites Augustine as the prime

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[22] James, VAR, 188-189.
[23] Ibid, 183.
[24] Ibid, 193.

example for this "discordant personality."[25] Yet it was psychological genius, he notes, that Augustine "gave *an account* of the trouble of having a divided self"; in other words it was the narrative of his conversion which solidified the lasting impact of his experiences of "*the process of* achieving unification."[26] For the twice born, the "world is a double-storied mystery,"[27] and the stories we find in the literature of addiction body forth the eternal struggle of man to reconcile his divided, fundamentally addicted soul.

Literally, *metanoia* means "a change of mind," and denotes, in the Greek sense, "a reorientation, a fundamental transformation of outlook, of man's vision of the world and of himself, and a new way of loving others and God."[28] In Basil the Great's estimation, sin keeps man separated from God, yet far from emphasizing human sinfulness, *metanoia* offers a new dimension, becoming the realization of human insufficiency and limitation; it thus brings man from "conscious separation" into "conscious unity" with some Higher Power.[29] As for the relationship of narrative to the metanoic process, literature is a key representational step; it lends shape and meaning to a transformational experience as part of a larger whole, rather than an anomalous event among an endless procession of others.

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[25] Ibid, 194.
[26] Ibid, 194.
[27] Ibid, 188.
[28] http://em.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metanoia
[29] Ibid.

Chapter One:
The Addict in Literature – A Portrait of Spiritual Dis-ease

The Alcoholic – the Drug Addict – the Gambler. As literary characters, these archetypes (and we must call them archetypes, or at the very least stereotypes, for they are perennial figures of the human condition) have long held a fascination for the reader, no matter which mode of literature they emerge in and no matter what guises they take on. A literary representation of an addicted character or protagonist may involve a cathartic realization of his or her plight, followed by subsequent recovery; in Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, for example, the "dipsomaniac"[30] Sebastian Flyte is (at least partially) revitalized through his connection with his Catholic faith. Yet perhaps more often, fiction eschews the possibility of redemption from the addicted state and instead highlights the spiritual and social consequences of persisting in the maladaptive behavior. This thematizing of addiction is typified by such works as Erofeev's *Moscow to the End of the Line* which depicts a complete failure of spirituality to help rectify the damaged will with regards to addiction, and effect any control over the diseased behavior of the addicts in question (although, in Erofeev's case, it should be noted that Venja's alcoholism represents an alternative "spirituality" of its own, or at least a manner of equalizing the madness inside with the madness outside[31]).

That we are dealing with behavior must be emphasized, for addiction, whether a "palsy of the will,"[32] or an ineluctable compulsion which dictates self-abusive action, must be defined behaviorally, although differing opinions – medical, sociological, and psychological – abound. This investigation shall primarily treat addiction as a behavioral

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[30] Waugh, 177.
[31] Tumanov, personal communication.
[32] Benjamin Rush, as quoted in Valverde, 4.

phenomenon, since, for the purposes of literary study, there must be a concrete and discrete way of assessing the inception of "recovery" – which, at least in the realm of psychiatry – begins with the cessation of the behavior, and not with any promises, intentions or prayers on the part of the afflicted individual. In this spectrum, the recovery of Willie Seabrook in his early memoir, *Asylum*, could not be considered valid, since Seabrook tells his audience that "life is more pleasant, more tolerable, sober,"[33] so much more so that he even enjoys a drink on occasion: "Months have passed now since I took those rare drinks, and I still drink rarely. I don't think I worry much about it ... I seem to be cured of drunkenness."[34] Recovery from addiction – from a cognitive behavioral standpoint – is defined as having its inception with the complete abstention from the substance in question. "Sobriety," as defined by AA, is a far more complex term involving the "maintenance of [one's] spiritual condition in addition to physical abstinence. In every sense, the behavior sought by those in recovery needs to be one of complete and total abstention.

The history of the social interpretation of "alcoholism" and "addiction" has been the subject of many works in sociology and psychology, and need not be reiterated here. Suffice to say that the contemporary associations with the word "addiction" differ greatly from those held a century ago, and vary greatly even from those prevalent decades ago. At the beginning of the twentieth century, temperance movements sought to ban all alcoholic products on the notion that alcoholism posed a major threat to social integrity.[35] In the mid-twentieth century, following a vogue in habitual, social drinking, audiences gaped at Frank Sinatra's heroin-withdrawal in *The Man with the Golden Arm,* and

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[33] Seabrook, 256.
[34] Ibid, 263.
[35] Aronson, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4188/is_20060725/ai_n16637902.

recoiled from Ray Milland's delirium tremens in *The Lost Weekend.* Such extremes of aberrant behavior were appalling to a viewing consciousness rarely exposed to such depths of addictive depravity. Today, in contrast, television shows such as *Intervention* and *Celebrity Rehab* highlight addiction at the forefront of popular culture, as images of HIV-infected young men smoking crystal meth and sitcom stars suffering benzodiazepine withdrawal are broadcast directly into the family room. What was once taboo, morally repugnant, and marginalized behavior can now be construed as a "hip" sort of deviancy, fit for public consumption and participation on all levels. It is permissible to gape at the predicament of the addict as long as there is some measure of assistance provided to him or her; even as delirium tremens becomes entertainment, the public is comforted in its voyeurism by the recognition that while addiction is still accepted as a disease, any repudiation of the proffered "cure" is construed as moral failure.

Alcoholism was dropped from the Internal Classification of Diseases in the late 1970's, and is no longer found in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM-IV),[36] yet, having been successfully promoted in popular culture, the term "disease" continues to exist in widespread use. The concept of alcoholism as a disease was popularized by Alcoholics Anonymous, quite possibly to de-stigmatize those sufferers and rally public support rather than contempt.[37] Valverde says that if addiction is a disease, "it is not a medical entity, but rather a mixed medical-moral entity best left to the jurisdiction of religion."[38] However, sociological and psychological opinions of such a malady cannot necessarily alter a public consciousness which has adopted addiction as its current "pet" disease, whether that disease is medical or psychological, curable or incurable. Public

[36] Valverde, 44.
[37] Ibid, 122-124.
[38] Ibid, 43.

fascination has encouraged manifold depictions of addiction and alcoholism in films, television, magazines, and literature – perhaps for the benefit of moral enlightenment, perhaps to demonstrate the possibility of recovery from a hopeless state, or perhaps because the physical and emotional fallout from addiction, as in the case of an auto accident, is ferociously compelling (or even titillating). Essentially, where once addiction was something peripheral, not threatening to the dominant social consciousness, it has entered a new vogue as possessing significance for the fragile, conflicted human condition. When we speak of addiction and recovery today, we are speaking of something which is perceived on a very visceral level, and which consistently touches a chord in the collective consciousness.

Gabor Maté, in his controversial work *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*, defines addiction thusly:

> Addiction is any repeated behavior, substance related or not, in which a person feels compelled to persist, regardless of its negative impact on her life and the lives of others. Addiction involves:
>
> 1. compulsive engagement with the behavior, a preoccupation with it;
> 2. impaired control over the behavior;
> 3. persistence or relapse, despite evidence of harm;
> 4. dissatisfaction, irritability or intense craving when the object – be it a drug, activity, or other goal – is not immediately available.[39]

However, the textbook definition of addiction alone offers limited human insight into its multilevel ramifications; since addiction has "biological, chemical, neurological, psychological, medical, emotional, social, political … and spiritual underpinnings … to get anywhere near a complete picture we must keep shaking the kaleidoscope to see what patterns emerge."[40] The kaleidoscope, in this case, is the Literature of Addiction, which serves to process the individual and social understanding of addiction as a venue for

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[39] Maté, 128.
[40] Ibid, 130

communication and reassessment of experiences in a cultural paradigm. When we consider the individual addict, both the internal psychological climate of the individual and his/her external milieu must be taken into consideration – the beliefs, memories, mind-states and emotions that feed the addiction or, alternatively, enhance the recovery. Literature offers us an unflinchingly intimate view of this behavioral phenomenon's inner workings, as well as a contained and controlled environment in which to explore psychical and behavioral possibilities.

Perhaps, then, we can say that it is not in psychology or sociology that addictive behavioral patterns and their underlying causes are most prominently displayed, but in this Literature of Addiction which provides the "most compelling way to broach [addiction's] unanswered questions ... [such as] why does one become an addict? And what does it take to derail such ravenous desires?"[41] It is within and through writing – in the crucible of literary alchemy – that the existential "truth" about addictive behavior is bodied forth. Through a vast array of works – as diverse in time period and presentation as Jack London's *John Barleycorn* (1912) and Elizabeth Wurtzel's *More, Now, Again* (2002) – we can "have the privilege of stepping inside the perilous lives of those who seek solace in a substance or excessive behavior."[42]

Addiction – from a sociological, epidemiological perspective – is illuminative of many aspects of the human condition which have contemporary relevance, and literature is just one avenue of exploration. However, literature involves narrative, which other disciplines and modes of study do not inherently possess. Assuming that the narrative in question is one which features an addictive nadir, a transformation, and a recovery, what

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[41] Shannonhouse, xvii. Introduction in *Under the Influence: The Literature of Addiction.*
[42] Ibid, xviii.

characteristics can we observe in the representation of the addict, in her path to recovery, and in the narrative strategies employed?

All tales of addiction, writes Pete Hamill, have certain similarities of form:

> They begin with the magic entry into Paradise, usually through the discovery of a magic potion. Or pill. Or powder. By whatever means, entry is suddenly gained into that mysterious place where we are relieved from pain, boredom, and the rigid prison of the self. Paradise is the world made brighter, more vivid, more charged with drama and laughter and the illusions of love; or, if the world is too relentless in its noise, reduced to emptiness and silence ... [essentially] the unacceptable world is transformed.[43]

Herein lies the crux of addictive behavior: the transformation of the natural, physical world into a landscape which reflects the presupposed 'desires' of the individual in question. For addiction is, primarily, about power: the power to change one's external reality by altering the internal environs. A substance or activity fills an "internal void," a perennial "psychic hunger," as Mate has called it.[44] Incompleteness and disempowerment are the baseline characteristics of the addict, in the sense that every addict is fundamentally addicted to "more." Such an individual is unable to tolerate his own emotions without artificial supports and is compelled to escape the painful experience of the inner void through any activity that fills his mind with temporary purpose.

This form of drive – compulsion, if you will – is the opposite of creativity; where creativity "can ultimately lead to the broadening of life, opening up and furthering transformation," addiction saps true regenerative energy in its linear and progressive degeneration of the individual.[45] It is also the opposite of passion; where "passion is divine fire [that] enlivens and makes holy ...[and] is generous because it is not ego-driven ... addiction is self-centered [and leads] into darkness."[46]This darkness coalesces

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[43] Hamill, ix. Foreword in *Under the Influence: The Literature of Addiction.*
[44] Maté, 335.
[45] Leonard, 11.
[46] Maté, 199.

out of fear and anxiety, since the mind of the addict is beset by constant worry, and is soothed only by the addictive substance or activity:

> The sparser the innate joy that springs from being alive, the more fervently joy's pale substitute, pleasure, is sought; the less our inner strength, the greater our craving for power; the feebler our awareness of truth, the more desperate our search for certainty outside ourselves. The greater the dread, the more vigorous the gravitational pull of the addiction process.[47]

Fundamentally, addiction is "a state of compulsion, obsession and preoccupation that enslaves a person's will and passion," and which "eclipses the energy of our deepest, truest desires."[48] It "bonds and enslaves the energy of desire to certain specific behaviors, things or people,"[49] since

> addiction attacks every part of what Freud called our "mental apparatus". Subjectively, however, the attacks seem focused on ... the will, which is our capacity to choose and direct our behavior ... addiction splits the will in two, one part desiring freedom and the other part desiring only to continue the addictive behavior.[50]

It is this split in the will which makes for such fascinating literary drama, as the addict, who initially believes she has invented a means for combating the material world's vicissitudes subsequently discovers her attachment is "nailed" to her substance or activity, and begins her descent into the centrifuge of dependence and need:

> The next stop is Hell. By then, almost everything has been cast aside: family, work, talent, friendship, hope, pride. Human will shrinks, or vanishes, and is replaced by the insatiable demand for more. More alcohol. More heroin. More cocaine and its ferocious derivatives. The resident of this particular version of Hell becomes one of the many millions of victims of self-inflicted wounds ... the destination is always one into unbearable solitude.[51]

As Hamill points out, each tale of addiction is "proof of man's endless capacity for folly and delusion ... and if [the literature of addiction has] a collective statement to make, it is a simple one: I, too, was human."[52] No one can stand in judgment, yet literary depictions of the addicted, as well as their personal memoirs, allow for a unique and

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[47] Maté, 390.
[48] May, 4.
[49] Ibid, 3.
[50] Ibid, 42.
[51] Hamill, x.
[52] Ibid, xi.

shifting perspective that study by the scientific and social disciplines alone cannot provide.

The Austrian psychiatrist Victor Frankl wrote of the quality or drive in human beings known as "search for meaning"; he suggested that an existential vacuum exists when we place a supreme value on selfish attainments, and posited that the "drug scene" was "one aspect of a more general phenomenon, namely the feeling of emptiness resulting from the frustration of our existential needs," which in turn "has become a universal phenomenon in our industrial societies."[53]

The Literature of Addiction (and Recovery) then contains lessons that humanity as a whole readership can benefit from, although the majority of the works published in this genre are not "didactic" per se and shy from a specific social objective. Since the human ego's "tragic flaw is to mistake form for substance and illusion for reality,"[54] it makes sense to analyze those truths presented in the stories of and about those who similarly confused form and illusion, free will and determinacy. Misplaced attachment to what cannot satiate the soul appears to be a common preoccupation, as we shall see repeatedly in the literature to be explored herein.

In the following sections we shall deal briefly with the pragmatic aspects of spirituality and conversion which have liberated many of those bound by addiction from their chains of insatiable desire. The pioneering efforts of Alcoholics Anonymous to utilize spirituality in the service of sobriety have made an immense impact on the Literature of Addiction, and any exploration of addiction narrative must start with

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[53] Frankl, 164.
[54] Maté, 395.

Alcoholics Anonymous' project of "carrying the message" of the spiritual awakening which allows for triumph over alcoholism/addiction.

Chapter Two:
"Spiritus Contra Spiritum":
William James, Carl Jung, and Bill Wilson

The story of the relationship between Alcoholics Anonymous and its spiritual forebears – Carl Jung, to whom Bill Wilson, co-founder of AA, attributed the original idea for the alcoholic spiritual awakening; William James, whose *Varieties of Religious Experience* was recommended reading for early AAs; and the Oxford Group, from the auspices of which the first proto-members of AA sprang – has been rehearsed repeatedly in the literature of the organization but far less so explored with any sort of critical or scholarly intention. In the interest of establishing some of the primary influences on addiction narrative, we will explore some of the narratological relationships that AA has utilized in crafting its particular brand of recovery literature, the stuff of which has burgeoned into the popular recovery memoir. The existing narrative interface of AA developed from the psychological community of the early to mid-twentieth century, theological-religious inspirations and pressures, and the guiding judgment of its founders – all factors which still dramatically influence much of the grand narrative of addiction and recovery literature.

Jamesian thought provides the basis for many of the initial notions behind Alcoholics Anonymous and its meta-narrative – that over-arching idea which encapsulates the ideals and direction of the organization. Beyond such prosaic concepts as "organization" or "club", however, many of the narratives involving Alcoholics Anonymous refer to it as an "entity" – as though in some fashion AA had been personified, elevated to some compound form of incarnation through the profound emotional associations maintained by those involved. In this sense, it should be duly

noted that, in addition to providing the means by which a spiritual awaking may be obtained, AA may function for some of its adherents as a Higher Power in its own regard; the spirituality of Alcoholics Anonymous can and often does set "the fellowship" or "the group" (GOD: Group-Of-Drunks) as the object of faith. The encouragement offered to members – "*Why don't you choose your own conception of God*?"[55] – hearkens back to Jamesian explorations of divinity. In connection to Buddhism and the Emersonian world view, James says:

> We must ... call these godless or quasi-godless creeds 'religions'; and accordingly when in our reflection we speak of the individual's relation to 'what he considers the divine,' we must interpret the term 'divine' very broadly, as denoting any object that is god*like*, whether it be a concrete deity or not.[56]

In this regard, the devotion to the dogma and practices of AA resembles something akin to a religion in its own right – a religion which emphasizes narrative, both the individual narratives of the members and the pre-existing meta-narrative – as being of intrinsic importance. Although the models from which the individual narratives developed were the spiritual autobiography, the conversion narrative and Salvation Army testimonials, the master narrative (what Valverde calls "the pre-existing narrative of [AA] alcoholism"[57]) draws together far more intricate threads of theology, psychology and psychiatry.

William James must be credited, in great part, with establishing several of the primary lines of thought which would lead to the development of AA's conception of spiritual awakening, as well as the understanding of narrative as a major part of the awakening experience. Bill Wilson – whose personal recovery narrative, as we shall see in the next chapter, established the form and structure for most subsequent AA narratives,

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[55] AA, BB, 12.
[56] James, VAR, 56.
[57] Valverde, 132.

functioning thus as the early twentieth century template for the recovery experience – read James' *Varieties* following his own spiritual awakening in the Towns Hospital, and derived much of his insight into the phenomenon from James' investigations. Like the drunks in James' series of lectures who undergo life-altering transformations, Wilson experienced, by his own affirmation, the "electric" effect of his surrender to the "Father of Light who presides over us all"[58] and subsequently discovered that all desire for alcohol had been removed from him. He was inspired to share his story with other drunks, and three-quarters of a century later his narrative still forms the centerpiece of that text which has now reached millions of dissolute alcoholics world-wide. As per the discussion above, if Alcoholics Anonymous functions like a religion, then "Bill's Story" is its Creation Myth. In the next section "Bill's Story" will be discussed more comprehensively, but for our purposes it shall suffice for now to recognize its centrality in the mythos of Alcoholics Anonymous and recovery literature by and large.

Bill attributed his spiritual experience partly to his sudden *willingness* to "believe in a Power greater than [him]self,"[59] since prior to his surrender and subsequent revelation he had had "scales of pride and prejudice"[60] blinding his spiritual vision. James held that free will could be demonstrated through its very exercise; the enabling act of free will, he noted, was to believe in free will itself and thus prove its efficacy.[61] Implicit in such a statement, as Raphael points out, was James pragmatic test of truth, which lies at the heart of AA' s down-to-earth praxis.[62] James wrote, in *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (1909), that "the truth of an idea is not a stagnant

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[58] AA, BB, 14.
[59] Ibid, 12.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Raphael, 77.
[62] Ibid, 77-78.

property inherent in it... truth *happens* to an idea. It *becomes* true, is *made* true by events. Its verity *is*, in fact, an event, a process: the process namely of its verifying itself, its veri-*fication*. Its validity is the process of its vali-*dation.*"[63]

Sobriety itself, as described by many members of AA, is a self-verifying process; James' definition is ideal for AA's purposes since the term "sobriety" in this scope is malleable and, at best, it functions as a moral rather than a medical or biological term. In the same vein, members will often contend that one of their dicta is "true" because it has been proven true "in the collective experience." Furthermore, one method of assessing the "spiritual awakening" is to work backwards from the altered behavior: if the addict finds at the present time that she is operating in a drastically different manner, and functioning capably without the drug of choice, it may be assumed that an "awakening" has taken place in the past since the end results hearken back to a psychic change having occurred. The verity of the awakening is "proven" by the process of its validation. For an organization as hybrid as AA, such epistemological leniency is of incalculable value.

James' pragmatism – the fluidity of his classifications, his emphasis on effect rather than cause – has proven an ideal basis upon which to found the sweeping epistemology of Alcoholics Anonymous. Chapter Five in *Alcoholics Anonymous* is titled "How it Works" and is perhaps the most widely and frequently read chapter in the book; most groups begin their meetings with the first three pages of this reading which includes the Twelve Steps and delineates the basic program of recovery. The essential notions of the whole organization rotate around the central idea of "what works" to maintain sobriety – what has been *proven true to work* by experience. "Our ideas did not work,"

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[63] James, PRAG, 89.

writes Wilson, "but the God idea did."[64] The malleability of this "God idea" – the notion of the Higher Power, so intrinsic to the awakening experience – is a central tenet of James' pragmatic approach to religious experience:

> Pragmatism is willing to take anything, to follow either logic or the senses, and to count the humblest and most personal experiences. She will count mystical experiences if they have practical consequences. She will take a God who lives in the very dirt of private fact – if that should seem a likely place to find him ... [pragmatism's] only probable test of truth is what works best ... what fits every part of life best and combines with the collectivity of experience's demands, nothing being omitted. If theological ideas should do this, if the notion of God, in particular, should prove to do it, how could pragmatism possibly deny God's existence?[65]

AA accepts fully that the "God idea" works in maintaining sobriety, and utilizes the notion of the "Higher Power" in much of its dogma and practice. Yet AA's "traditions" state that they shall never be affiliated with any religion or institution, emphasizing that "outside issues" such as religion and politics should never impinge upon recovery life. What then of the "religious" fervor displayed by AA's adherents? Essentially, the question of whether Alcoholics Anonymous is a "religious" organization is almost purely semantic. In the conventional sense, AA militantly maintains that it is unaffiliated with any denomination or belief system; although it has been noted that AA owes a significant debt to Protestant Christianity (whether or not this relationship is emphasized in common operation), this is largely irrelevant to the members of fellowship who come from diverse religious backgrounds and recognize no associations of that nature. Religion, in both the AA and Jamesian sense, means simply "the feelings, acts, and experiences, of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine."[66]James notes that immediate personal experiences of individuals are sufficient for an exploration of this

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[64] AA, BB, 52.
[65] James, VAR, 21.
[66] Ibid, 53.

aspect of religion, and neither theology nor ecclesiasticism need be considered.[67] A capacious definition of religion is required for an organization such as AA, which is precariously balanced between secular and sacred missions. James offers:

> Were one asked to characterize the life of religion in the broadest and most general terms possible, one might say that it consists of the belief that there is an unseen order, and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto. This belief and thus adjustment are the religious attitude in the soul.[68]

With this liberal categorization of the religious affiliation in mind, we turn to James' understanding of the conversion experience. It is extremely likely that *Varieties* significantly influenced and shaped Bill Wilson's conversion, despite his claim that he had read the book only after his transformation and was surprised to find his experience described therein. The phenomenon of conversion as delineated by James would have appealed to Wilson immediately; *Varieties* "brilliantly achieve[d] the pragmatic accommodation Wilson himself [was to seek] between Christianity and modern science, spirit and mind, free will and determinism."[69]

According to James, transformation/conversion is a process involving the re-organization of the mind's energies. A man's aims, James notes, form diverse internal groups and systems, and change frequently; often these aims are just *velleitates*, whimsies, but "whenever one aim grows so stable as to expel definitively its previous rivals from the individual's life, we tend to speak of the phenomenon, and perhaps wonder at it, as a transformation."[70] This process can happen for any variety of reasons, usually in correlation with highly emotionally charged circumstances:

> Emotional occasions, especially violent ones, are extremely potent in precipitating mental rearrangements. The sudden and explosive ways in which love, jealousy, guilt, fear, remorse, or

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[67] Ibid.
[68] James, VAR, 73.
[69] Raphael, 83.
[70] James, VAR, 216.

> anger can seize upon one are known to everybody. Hope, happiness, security, resolve, emotions characteristic of conversion, can be equally explosive.[71]

Although he presents several narratives of this "explosive" variety of mental rearrangement, James' examples *par excellence* are the developmental narratives of John Bunyan, and Leo Tolstoy, which are rehearsed at length as examples of the gradual regeneration of the 'sick soul' (to be discussed below). Adumbrating Bunyan's and Tolstoy's accounts are numerous other less numinous Every-Man chronicles bearing witness to some remarkable alteration in the mental organization of formerly peripheral aims – with the result being that "the new ideas that reach the centre in the rearrangement [are] now locked there, and the new structure [of the mind] remains permanent."[72] One should not assume that these new structures of the mind's energies can be formed only by divine operation; James is clear that since the mind is a system of mechanical equilibrium, changes in that equilibrium can be wrought by new information acquired in a variety of ways: that is, "the older medicine used to speak of two ways, *lysis* and *crisis*, one gradual, the other abrupt, in which one might recover from a bodily disease. In the spiritual realm there are also two ways, one gradual, the other sudden, in which inner unification may occur."[73]

James also categorizes two generally distinct forms of conversion processes: the first, the volitional type (akin to *lysis*), evolves through a gradual change. The second type, "the type by self-surrender" (associated with *crisis*), involves total relinquishment of the personal will, leading to the spontaneous giving over of one's self to the "new life."[74]

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[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid, 219.
[73] Ibid, 205-206.
[74] Ibid, 233.

The "crisis" is the more familiar way of achieving rearrangement; the crisis is Saul on the road to Damascus, Jean Valjean after his encounter with Petit Gervais, Christ at the end of Kazantzakis' *The Last Temptation of Christ.* "Crisis" accords with experiencing a sudden shift in the excitement of the "mental system" from which there is no easy return. James himself notes that these crisis awakenings are "more interesting," yet the volitional type is more common (insofar as such happenings are common). In both cases, all the combined influences which inspire the overall change may work subconsciously or half-unconsciously; "the slow mutation of our instincts and propensities, under the 'unimaginable touch of time', has enormous influence."[75] In the volitional conversion, "the regenerative change is usually gradual, and consists of the building up, piece by piece, of new moral and spiritual habits."[76] Those schooled in AA-speak might recognize this as a description of the "educational variety" of spiritual awakening. Although there is no blinding flash of revelation, and no sudden Emersonian epiphany, the necessary spiritual pieces still fall into place. This happens when there transpires in a human mind "a great oscillation in the emotional interest"[77] and, as emphasized, this change not need be spiritual in nature. However, "if the change be a religious one, we call it a conversion ... to say that a man is "converted" means, in these terms, that religious ideas, previously peripheral in his consciousness, now take a central place, and that religious aims form the habitual centre of his energy."[78]

James utilizes the authority of Professor Leuba, who, "in a valuable article on the

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[75] Ibid, 220.
[76] Ibid, 230.
[77] Ibid, 218.
[78] Ibid.

psychology of conversion" emphasizes the relationship of religious sentiment to "the feeling of unwholeness, of moral imperfection, of sin, to use the technical word, accompanied by the yearning after the peace of unity."[79] Leuba's assertion is that the term "religion" signifies the conglomerate of desire and "emotions springing from the sense of sin and its release."[80] It follows in both a sociological and a spiritual sense that the state of addiction, and its accompanying associations of sinfulness, amorality, and fallenness, would fit perfectly into this rubric: Leuba opines that an overwhelming sense of sin may beset one, causing them to "crave relief as urgently as does the anguish of the sickened flesh or any other form of physical misery."[81]

For religious aims to suddenly leap from the periphery to one's habitual centre of energy requires a stressor significant enough to drastically alter perception – and this is true of both *lysis* and *crisis* varieties of recovery. For an individual who scorns any version of faith in favor of addictive substances (and we shall meet many of that ilk in the narrative discussions to come, namely those whose "religious faculties [are] checked in their natural tendency ... by beliefs about the world that are inhibitive, [and] pessimistic and materialist beliefs"[82]), the consequences of persisting in the maladaptive behavior must be striking enough to re-order consciousness around a new set of spiritual ideas. *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, AA's manual for practicing the Steps, addresses this issue forcefully:

> Why all this insistence that every AA must hit bottom first? The answer is that few people will sincerely try to practice the AA program unless they have hit bottom ... for practicing [the Steps] means the adoption of attitudes and actions that no alcoholic who is still drinking can dream of taking. [83]

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[79] Ibid, 223. Professor Leuba in "Studies in the Psychology of Religious Phenomena". Vol. VII, 309, 1896.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid, 227.
[83] AA, 12X12, 24.

"Hitting bottom", for James, accords with both varieties of conversion, but resonates far more so with the "type by self-surrender." There are two explanations presented for the self-surrender form of conversion. The first is divine operation, better known as "the miracle," towards which James evinces no skepticism, but which he clearly segregates from other phenomena of awakening. The second is the sudden emergence of hitherto unrecognized subconscious forces into central consciousness; these quietly powerful forces only have efficacy, however, when the conscious mind relinquishes its dominion. In order to augment the influence of the subconscious, "the personal will must be given up ... in many cases relief persistently refuses to come until the person ceases to resist, or make an effort in the direction he desires to go."[84]

In the estimation of James and his noted authorities, self-surrender is indispensable for certain subjects to achieve conversion, since their very efforts to reorient themselves are the bulwark against which their progress crashes. "To exercise the personal will is still to live in the region where the imperfect self is the thing most emphasized,"[85] suggests James, since "with most of us the sense of our present wrongness is a far more distinct piece of our consciousness than is the imagination of any positive ideal we can aim at."[86] The "sin" which Professor Leuba elaborated upon, at this pivotal point in the proposed metamorphosis, almost "exclusively engrosses the attention ... in *a process of struggling away from sin rather than struggling toward righteousness,*"[87] and this process is futile as long as "a man's conscious will and wit ... as they strain towards the ideal, are aiming at something only dimly and inaccurately

[84] Ibid, 230. Starbuck's correspondence quoted in James.
[85] Ibid, 232.
[86] Ibid, 231.
[87] Ibid.

imagined."[88] If a sick soul has no precise notion of the changed mental state which it strives towards, success may "actually be interfered with by voluntary efforts slanting in the true direction."[89] Thus:

> If subconscious forces take the lead, it is more probably the better self *in posse* which directs the operation ... [the man must] ... fall back on the larger Power that makes for righteousness, which has been welling up in his own being, and let it finish in its own way the work it has begun ... the act of yielding, in this point of view, is ... making [a new life] the centre of a new personality, and living, from within, the truth of it which before had been viewed objectively.[90]

This process of "letting go", of "surrender", is what Bill Wilson, in writing *Alcoholics Anonymous,* demarcated into Steps One ("We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable"), Two ("Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity") and Three ("Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him")[91]. In most explorations of conversion or spiritual awakening, whether they be sociological, theological or psychological, the notion of surrender – to a divine figure, or simply to the reality of present existence – is paramount. Denial, that pervasive force which so often prevents recovery, is effectively demolished by the surrender of personal regard, since frequently denial is a function of an ego-driven defense mechanism. It is only when these defense mechanisms are disabled that other forces (subconscious, divine, or otherwise) can have their sway with the damaged personality. Ernest Kurtz has stressed how "God enters through the wound,"[92] and James concurs, noting that the theological way of stating the importance of self-surrender would be to say that "man's extremity is God's

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[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid, 209.
[90] Ibid 232, quote Starbuck 115.
[91] AA, 58.
[92] Kurtz, 26.

opportunity."[93] Both psychology and religion agree, he notes, that "there are forces seemingly outside of the conscious individual that bring redemption to life, [yet which] do not transcend the individual's personality."[94] Members of Alcoholics Anonymous routinely advise each other to "let go and let God" during difficult situations, and point out to one another that one "can't heal a sick mind with a sick mind." In James' schema, "the expansive confidence of the soul of faith gains no presence ... as long as the egoistic worry of the sick soul guards the door."[95] Deflation of the ego at depth allows for access to the inner depths of the spirit, inviting some force greater than the individual past the solipsism and defensiveness to fill the void from which dis-ease stems.

Psychologically, this points forward to the influence Carl Jung was to have on the development of Alcoholics Anonymous and the writings of Bill Wilson. The two were only to exchange ideas in correspondence in 1961, but long before there was any meeting of the minds Wilson was crediting Jung as one of the spiritual founders of AA. In fact, as writers like Raphael have noted, Wilson always made more of his debt to Jung than to James, despite the myriad correlations between James' work and the epistemology of Alcoholics Anonymous. In essence, Kurtz points out, both James and Jung added immeasurably to the burgeoning organization, as "both were figures of intellectual world-renown who took religious insight seriously, [yet] neither was 'religious' in any conventional sense of the term."[96] Both emphasized the pragmatic function of religion, and both lobbied for an acceptance of spirituality which was beyond the bounds of conventionality.

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[93] James, 232.
[94] Ibid, 233.
[95] Ibid, 93.
[96] Kurtz, 113.

Religion, of course, had been used with marginal success for centuries with alcoholics and addicts, but always *on* them, rather than in accordance with their desire for sobriety. The Salvation Army and the Quakers both had programmes for alcoholic rehabilitation; although their methods were not foolproof, Valverde reminds us that significant inroads were made into curing the vice of drunkenness by their tactics.[97] It was assumed that bringing the inebriate into contact with an elevated morality would, by some presumably osmotic spiritual process, encourage an awakening from the addictive torpor. The genius of Jung, in contrast, was his suggestion – most likely inspired by James – that a spiritual awakening could be sought intentionally by whatever means necessary by the addict with the express purpose of saving himself from destruction. The significant difference in the efficacy of this statement with respect to the psychology of the alcoholic in question – namely, one Rowland Hazard, an American patient at Jung's Swiss clinic in the 1930's – was that Hazard had already committed himself to a program of recovery with the doctor, and he had already evinced that he was "willing to go to any lengths."[98] No initial motivation to recover needed to be inspired; Hazard was receptive to Jung's advice, and took the necessary action to find a spiritual awakening in the Oxford Group since he had been told his life depended on his success. Hazard was "as willing to listen as the dying can be,"[99] and this was a powerful factor in his utilizing the help given him.

Jung made a "simple declaration" to Rowland Hazard in 1933 that science alone "had no answer" to the riddle of alcoholism, and that his position was "hopeless, so far as

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[97] Valverde, 91.
[98] AA, BB, 56.
[99] AA, 12X12, 24.

any further medical or psychiatric treatment might be concerned."[100] In response to his patient's frantic query about whether there could be any hope, Jung spoke of "a spiritual or religious experience – in short, a genuine conversion," cautioning, however, that while "such experiences had sometimes brought recovery to alcoholics, they were … comparatively rare."[101]

Even James had not spoken of *facilitating* a spiritual conversion; his text speaks generally of involuntary awakening which comes either from divine operation or subconscious processes. That religion could be harnessed to save a man from a death-in-life – much the way it could save a soul from damnation – was an inspirational notion to Hazard. The pragmatic aspect of the doctor's dictum appealed to his battered psyche:

> The slender thread of hope led Rowland H. to join the Oxford Group, a nondenominational evangelical movement that emphasized the principles of self-survey, confession of sins, restitution to those one had harmed, and the giving of self to others. Within the Oxford Group [he] found, as Bill wrote later, "the conversion experience that released him for the time being from his compulsion to drink.[102]

Wilson wrote Jung in 1961, and expressed his belief that the doctor's interaction with the seemingly hopeless case was "the first link in the chain of events that led to the founding of Alcoholics Anonymous." In reply to Bill's letter, Jung illuminated the profundity of his instinct for the pragmatic function of religion:

> The craving for alcohol was "the equivalent on a low level of the spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness, expressed in medieval language: the union with God … you see, alcohol in Latin is *spiritus* … and you use the same word for the highest religious experience as well as for the most depraving poison. The helpful formula … is: *spiritus contra spiritum*. Or roughly, holy spirit versus ardent spirits, or God against liquor.[103]

This phrase, *spiritus contra spiritum*, captures a paradox that serves as a beacon lighting the unconventional pathway of "a spirituality of imperfection," as Kurtz terms it, but also

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[100] Kurtz, SPIR, 112.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Raphael, 133. Quote from Jung.

one of pragmatism: a religion of "what works". According to Kurtz, the early members of Alcoholics Anonymous had groped for insight, using their reading of William James and shared reminisces of "mythic" tales like the story of Roland H. What emerged from the trial-and-error process of the early days of AA was the gradual understanding that the insights which were accumulated via the pragmatic process were best conveyed in narratives – those stories that "disclose[d] in a general way what [they] used to be like, what happened, and what [they] were like now."[104] This re-framing of events -- reifiying them to fit an accepted paradigm of "how it works" – offers a method by which the effective path to spiritual awakening can be disseminated. For Alcoholics Anonymous, narrative was the very path back to life, since it was via narrative that members communicated their individual experiences of movement toward spiritual conversion, and enabled others to replicate the process. In this regard, for example, the Steps themselves are formulated on an internal narrative: they both *tell* the story of what has gone before ("We *admitted* we *were* powerless over alcohol – that our lives *had become* unmanageable"[105]) and prescribe the narrative format for the next tale in a sequential order of enlightenment.

[104] AA, BB, 58.
[105] Ibid, 59.

Chapter Three:
"Having had a Spiritual Awakening ..."

The notion of the recovery memoir as popular literature is not "new", nor should it be considered solely a result of the commercialization of addiction. When the Big Book was published in 1939, first-person accounts of the movement from alcoholism to sobriety formed a large part of it – approximately 400 of its 573 pages, with the first 164 pages forming the essential text which contained the body of the "design for living" based on the Twelve Steps. Although those stories have changed throughout the four editions of the book (to reflect the concerns of changing membership), they have remained an enormous part of the book's message of recovery. "The Grapevine", the monthly journal publication of AA World Services Inc., also publishes a great deal of narrative from AA members around the world, and they, too, publish special pamphlets and books comprised of their most popular stories on certain themes (*Spiritual Awakenings, AA in Prison*). In addition to the published literature, group meetings frequently have autobiographical segments, where narrative of recovery or relapse is related orally to the group, with specific mores governing the delivery and reception of this "sharing". The importance of narrative to Alcoholics Anonymous and subsequently other methods of addiction treatment cannot be overstated; stories about the self function in different ways and enact various outcomes: "telling one's story" is not a single technique, even within one organization. In AA, personal narratives are often used to construct a group identity and enhance group solidarity:

> Storytelling in AA closely resembles the 'coming out' stories that are the basic building blocks of the gay movement, or the narratives of violence and abuse that constitute various survivor groups. In those contexts, as well as in AA, the storytelling functions as much to bind the group together and create a sense of commonality as to build up individual identity.[106]

[106] Valverde, 133.

However, we also see narrative functioning to solicit individual uniqueness, to elicit sympathy for pain, to validate the authority of the group, to replace analysis by professionals; it is even utilized by some to gain approval as entertainers.[107] It could be said that the narrative in AA bears little psychoanalytic inquiry into the deep self; instead, "story telling functions ... as a way to enlist individuals into AA's pre-existing narrative of alcoholism."[108]

Valverde has noted that the roots of the AA narrative seem to lie, at least in part, in the Salvation Army narratives of alcoholism: countless narratives, published in Salvation Army sources (like the *Social Gazette*) have titles such as "The experiences of a dipsomaniac," and function to promote the life of the saved, in a time when heavy drinking was perceived – by the Sally Ann, anyway – as a direct outcome of a life of poverty and deprivation. These "tales of life in the underworld always involve a slippery slope downward, and an in-the-nick-of-time intervention by the Salvation Army or by God himself."[109] Like the stories in AA publications,

> the melodramatic narratives of sin and salvation all have identical endings, but each sinner's long road to the freedom of salvation is portrayed as highly individual, and much effort is spent documenting these struggles in all their colorful variety ... just as [psychiatry has] reveled in the peculiarities of the case study even as they purported to uncover the fundamental, unchanging laws of the psyche, so too the discourse of evangelism reconciled the endless variety of actually existing sins and vices with the ideal of a single, redemptive truth.[110]

Anthropologist Paul Antze argues convincingly for the association of such narratives with "a common ancestry in Anglo-American Protestant religious belief and practice. Once certain substitutions are made, he states, "there is a point-by-point

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[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid, 132.
[109] Ibid, 89-90.
[110] Ibid, 91.

homology between AA's dramatic model of the alcoholic's predicament, and the venerable Protestant drama of sin and salvation."[111]

Raphael cites O'Shea and McCarron in positing that AA, like its temperance movement predecessor the Washingtonian Society, revived the *temperance narrative* and fashioned it into the *recovery narrative*, both of which are literarily and psychologically descended from the *spiritual autobiography*, in which "devout Protestants have recounted the pilgrim's progress of individual salvation ... at least since colonial times in America."[112] The process of the autobiographer coming to discern psychological and moral changes in his past experience determines whether he has achieved his *metanoia* and whether acceptance into the divine life is possible; in many respects the stories in the Big Book function in precisely the same way.

In this sense, then, the Big Book may be characterized as a collective spiritual autobiography that comprises individual recovery narratives, with the first narrative, "Bill's Story", bridging the gap between the one and the many by making his singular experience representative.[113] According to Raphael, Bill Wilson would not have had access to any arcane material such as temperance narratives, but *his* story derived directly from the didactic spiritual autobiographies written by members of the Oxford Group, another early AA predecessor and the "modern" counterpart to a traditional and recurrent type of Protestant evangelism.[114]

Howard Feinstein has noted the aspects of "Bill's Story" which correspond directly to the spiritual autobiography: "It is a tale typical of Christian spiritual biography

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[111] Antze, 173-4.
[112] Raphael, 70.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid, 71.

that depends on three elements for its power to convince: the uniqueness of the crisis; an ensuing conversion to a new belief, and marked improvement in health proving its curative value."[115] According to Raphael, these required elements were pieced together by Wilson: "["Bill's Story"] reflects [Wilson's] artful shaping of his own life narrative for the exemplary purposes of Alcoholics Anonymous."[116] Rumbarger notes that much of the reaction to the narrative is based on "the assumption of the literal truth of [Wilson's] personal witness ... which he subsequently crafted into a life-saving message to [an] audience of alcoholic drinkers."[117] In Rumbarger's estimation, then, the tale may be read as "didactic fiction, a homiletic distortion of the historical record in the interest of building up AA."[118] Many recovering alcoholics, trusting in the absolute literalism of the document, tend to take umbrage at the suggestion that Wilson's narrative was artfully constructed for the purposes of the fledgling organization:

> It is a common belief in Alcoholics Anonymous that the program sprang full-blown from the brow of Bill W., with obstetrical assistance by Dr. Bob, in 1935. But AA's creation myth is less Greek, after all, than Judeo-Christian. The founders are seen to resemble not Zeus giving forth Athena so much as the latter-day prophets retrieving the tablets (inscribed with the Twelve Steps) that Moses carelessly dropped on the way down Mount Sinai. The entire Big Book, trailing streams of glory from above, is sometimes said to be "divinely inspired" and its quasi-biblical text thought to be as sacred as the Scripture it has supplemented or supplanted.[119]

It has already been noted that AA's formulation of its own mythos and narrative expression developed from the spiritual autobiography and the temperance narrative, and the Big Book itself stands as a collective spiritual autobiography of sorts that comprises individual recovery chronicles. "Bill's Story" stands as representative of all recovery stories – a goal that is partly achieved by the privileging of his narrative as part of the canonical body of the text, with the other narratives relegated to functioning as

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[115] Feinstein, 307.
[116] Raphael, 51.
[117] Rumbarger, 761.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Raphael, 67.

supplementary material. Insofar as the tale responded to a need in AA for a base narrative of an exemplary recovery, "Bill's Story" may be deemed "generic" – equivalent to and interchangeable with any other alcoholic's story."[120]

When members of AA tell their stories, orally or in written form, they are expected to, with deference to protocol, follow the triadic formula suggested in "How it Works", from Chapter Five of *Alcoholics Anonymous*: "Our stories disclose what it was like, what happened, and what we are like now"[121]:

> "What we used to be like" is often the most colorful portion of an alcoholic's [narrative], especially when the drunken years featured blackout, prodigious hangovers, marital combat, death-defying car wrecks, drunken driving arrests, and the like ... [but] the battle of the bottle, however sensational in the retelling, lies in the past; the present focus should be on attaining a purposefully *un*dramatic life without booze. Those more advanced [in sobriety] ... tend to foreshorten their narratives. A brief drunkalogue serves only as a prelude to "what happened" (the turning point that led to AA) and "what we are like now" (the development of soberly spiritual values).[122]

Cain illustrates further the general structure of what she has termed "the AA story," which corresponds to Valverde's previously mentioned pre-existing narrative of alcoholism. Using a sample of 29 personal stories, Cain abstracted a general story structure which included categories such as "first drink," "negative effects of drinking," "suggestion (by others) that drinking may be a problem," "denial," "attempts to control drinking," "entering AA," "giving AA an honest try," and "becoming sober".[123] She notes that most recovery narratives which use AA as their basis resemble one another because "the individual learns to tell his drinking history according to the AA structure, and as the AA identity is internalized the life story comes to resemble the [prototype] more and more."[124] Essentially, there is a process of transformation of identity in the

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[120] Raphael, 71.
[121] AA, 58.
[122] Raphael, 17.
[123] Cain, 235.
[124] Ibid, 236.

alcoholic narrator, where the identity and the narrative constituting the identity – the "back story" of a person's life – are reconstituted through reinterpretation, as members "learn that their past has been a progression of alcoholic drinking and alcoholic behavior"[125] and come to place the events of their own lives into the AA framework.

Two particular portions of the narrative which reinforce these notions of construction and reification are "the memory of the first drink" and "hitting bottom," with the "first drink" uniformly falling into Section A ("what we used to be like"), and the experience of "hitting bottom" falling into Section B ("what happened"). Section C ("what we are like now") is the logical outcome of the spiritual awakening which alters behavior, which also presumably happens in Section B but often continues in the "educational variety" throughout Section C. A sort of epilogue often follows Section C, here dubbed Section D, wherein the narrator explains his or her experience with the sequential Steps which continue to form the basis of ongoing day-to-day recovery. The model is simple, and serves as a cultural vehicle, from the standpoint of anthropology, for identity acquisition. Telling a narrative in this prescribed way performs the explicit purpose of providing a model for alcoholism, and the narrative "ultimately becomes a process negotiated by the drinker and those around her ... in what is simultaneously a social and a cognitive process."[126]

The AA story, then, is a learned genre, a cultural device, which acts to mediate self- understanding for newcomers acquiring the alcoholic identity.[127] There is a cultural model of alcoholism encoded in each narrative, with "Bill's Story" being the prime example of AA propositions for recovery, appropriate episodes (to serve as evidence of

[125] Cain, 244.
[126] Ibid, 216.
[127] Ibid.

alcoholism), and appropriate interpretations of events as per AA epistemology[128]. The reader of the text of *Alcoholics Anonymous* is prepared for the ensuing propositions about AA-alcoholism by those preset in "Bill's Story". These include but are not limited to the following:

> *Alcoholism is a progressive disease; the alcoholic is powerless over alcohol; the alcoholic drinker is out of control (or is insane [as per Step Two]); AA is for those who want it, not those who need it; and AA is a program for living, not just for not drinking.*
>
> These propositions enter into the stories as guidelines for describing the progression of drinking, the desire and inability to stop, the necessity of "hitting bottom" before the program can work, and the changes that take place in one's life after joining AA.[129]

The original vision of recovery set forth by Wilson in "Bill's Story" was clearly modeled, notes Raphael, "on religious conversion," and his narrative describes "an epistemological reversal leading to a radical shift of values"[130] which became the model for recovery chronicles of the time and still retains paradigmatic status today.

The model for the AA narrative which emerged from Wilson's recovery featured as its centerpiece Wilson's experience of "spiritual awakening." Whether this conversion experience was a construct or not (Raphael posits that the experience was unconsciously reworked, a Freudian "screen memory," perhaps based on some of the literature of the Oxford Group[131]), its inclusion in the narrative which attained such primacy in AA literature lent significant support to the notion that spiritual conversion was the path to sobriety. Wilson's experience in the Towns Hospital happened four years before the Steps were written, and a year before the official founding date of Alcoholics Anonymous. Therefore, when it occurred, it was not predicated upon any pre-existing notions of spiritual awakening and sobriety as per contemporary configurations, since the

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[128] Ibid, 228.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Raphael, 62.
[131] Ibid, 34.

AA narrative structure had not yet been formulated. To a large extent, that a spiritual conversion is considered an appropriate mechanism for alleviating addiction in the present day can be traced back to Bill Wilson's centralizing of the event in his 1939 narrative:

> My friend [Ebby T.] suggested what then seemed like a novel idea.
> He said, *"Why don't you choose your own conception of God?"*
> That statement hit me hard. It melted the icy intellectual mountain in whose shadow I had lived and shivered many years. I stood in the sunlight at last.
> ... These were revolutionary and drastic proposals, but the moment I fully accepted them, the effect was electric. There was a sense of victory, followed by such a peace and serenity as I had never known. There was utter confidence. I felt lifted up, as through the great clean wind of a mountain top blew through and through. God comes to most men gradually, but his impact on me was sudden and profound.[132]

The expanded version of this story – also in Wilson's own words – appeared in *AA Comes of Age* in 1957:

> "If there is a God, let Him show Himself! I am ready to do anything, anything!" ...
> Suddenly the room lit up with a great white light. I was caught up into an ecstasy which there are no words to describe. It seemed to me, in the mind's eye, that I was on a mountain and that a wind not of air but of spirit was blowing. And then it burst upon me that I was a free man. Slowly the ecstasy subsided. I lay on the bed, but now for a time I was in another world, a new world of consciousness. All about me and through me there was a wonderful feeling of Presence, and I though to myself, "So this is the God of the preachers!" A great peace stole over me and I thought, "No matter how wrong things seem to be, they are still all right."[133]

Whether or not Bill had read James' *Varieties of Religious Experience* before he had this conversion, he had certainly read it by the time he wrote *Alcoholics Anonymous* and *AA Comes of Age.* It can be assumed that the tales of conversions of drunkards in Lectures IX and X served to shape rather than merely validate Wilson's experience; and it cannot be contested that Wilson's experience and his narrative of it served to shape the arc of subsequent AA narrative structure.

An Appendix was added to the second edition of *Alcoholics Anonymous,* entitled "Appendix II: Spiritual Experience." It clarified, for the growing numbers of alcoholics

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[132] AA, 14.
[133] AA, AACOA, 63.

who sought conversion after the publication of the first edition, that "these personality changes, or religious experiences [did not have to be] in the nature of sudden and spectacular upheavals"[134] like Wilson's:

> In the first few chapters a number of sudden revolutionary changes are described. Though it was not our intention to create such an impression, many alcoholics have nevertheless concluded that in order to recover they must acquire an immediate and overwhelming "God-consciousness" followed at once by a vast change in feeling and outlook ... Happily for everyone, this conclusion is erroneous.[135]

The Appendix affirms that the "educational variety" of religious experience, as discussed above, is equally valid for the purposes of achieving sobriety. AA lays its greatest emphasis on the Twelve Steps as the method for attaining the spiritual experience and asserts implicitly that only after the completion of the steps is actual access to a spiritual awakening possible: "Having had a spiritual awakening *as the result of these Steps.*" This suggests strongly that a recovering alcoholic or addict cannot expect to recover / have an awakening / stay sober without completing the Steps and "[trying] to carry this message to alcoholics, and [practicing] these principles in all [their] affairs."[136] Thus the inner narrative described in the Steps becomes a part of the AA narrative via its association with spiritual awakening and the paradigmatic recovery of Bill Wilson.

In the next section we shall explore the manner in which these initial principles of narrative composition in stories of recovery from alcoholism became the basis for the popular recovery memoir, which not only pays extensive homage to but also frequently subverts and manipulates these principles. The intersection of various literary forms provided for the formation of the recovery memoir, which developed from that curious autobiographical novel of alcoholism, *John Barleycorn.*

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[134] AA, BB, 569.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid, 60.

Chapter Four:
The Structure of "Recovery Memoirs" Part I: John Barleycorn

Jack London's *John Barleycorn* exists as a curious forerunner to the current popular trend in rehabilitation and recovery memoirs. The relatively recent explosion of interest in true-to-life addiction stories has been attracting increased public attention throughout past decades, with publications like William S. Burrough's *Junky* (1953) and *The Naked Lunch* (1959), Claude Brown's *Manchild in the Promised Land* (1965), Frederick Exley's *A Fan's Notes* (1968), Barbara Gordon's *I'm Dancing as Fast as I Can* (1979), Pete Hamill's *A Drinking Life: A Memoir* (1994), Caroline Knapp's *Drinking: A Love Story* (1994), Augusten Burrough's *Dry: A Memoir* (2002), and the famed and de-famed *A Million Little Pieces* (2003), by James Frey. At one time, it was a courageous feat to admit one's addiction and be exposed to public censure; surely this is a minority stance today since, far from inspiring contempt, an addict in recovery may well find that their once-fallen status brings considerable cache. Today best-sellers like *Smashed: Story of a Drunken Girlhood* and *Broken: My Story of Addiction and Redemption* as well as various autobiographies of born-again rock stars (*The Heroin Diaries: A Year in the Life of a Shattered Rock Star* by Mötley Crüe's Nikki Sixx; *Save Me From Myself: How I Found God, Quit Korn, Kicked Drugs, and Lived to Tell My Story* by Korn's Brian "Head" Welch) shout tidings of abstinence and spiritual rebirth. A publishing phenomenon seems to have occurred with regard to the types of narratives we explored in the previous chapter. Whereas once these narratives functioned almost solely to establish a sense of commonality and trust between members of an AA group, and to further the

concepts of the program which required propagation, the current trend in recovery narrative is to be marketed on an international scale for profit and fame.

The proliferation of rehabilitation centers, detoxification units, and advertised medical and non-medical options for achieving sobriety from drug and alcohol addiction would have been unimaginable for anyone contemporaneous with Jack London, including the other modernist writers investigated here. London's notion of alcoholism as any form of "disease" would have been fuzzy at best, like even the discourse coming from the social scientists of his time; and his intention in writing *John Barleycorn* was completely divorced from any ideas regarding treatment of alcoholism. It was intended at first, Hamill points out, as a tract in support of women's suffrage and (as he saw it, the inevitable Prohibition which would follow.)[137] London relates his experiences not to demonstrate how he came to recognition of his flaws and found redemption, but to highlight the manner in which a man with no inborn tendencies to drunkenness could become a heavy drinker because of societal pressures. His narrative is neither a plea for social assistance, nor a spiritual story of his awakening into abstinence; it is, instead, a colorful drunkalogue designed not to reveal its narrator's deviancies but to demonstrate, paradoxically, his (self-perceived) normalcy with respect to alcohol. He writes,

> I was no hereditary alcoholic. I had been born with no organic, chemical predisposition toward alcohol. In this matter I was normal in my generation. Alcohol was an acquired taste. It had been painfully acquired. Alcohol had been a dreadfully repugnant thing – more nauseous than any physic. Even now I did not like the taste of it. I drank it only for its "kick". And from the age of five to twenty-five, I had not learned to care for its kick. Twenty years of unwilling apprenticeship had been required to make my system rebelliously tolerant of alcohol, to make me, in the heart and the deeps of me, desirous of alcohol.[138]

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[137] Hamill, xv.
[138] London, 5.

The narrator's expressed purpose is to reveal how he "learned to drink because alcohol was accessible,"[139] and in doing so to encourage Prohibition, thereby limiting the amount of alcohol available to others like him – but ostensibly in no wise because of his own inherent relation to alcohol.

London was a confirmed, self-diagnosed "non-alcoholic," yet his "alcoholic memoirs" stand ironically along with texts like de Quincey's "Memoirs of an English Opium-Eater" – as a protean form of contemporary addiction literature. Indeed, Crowley has judged it "one of the most moving and dramatic histories of the making of an alcoholic in the literature of drinking.[140] Leonard calls *John Barleycorn* "a classic study of denial" (xvi) and present reader reception tends to agree. To anyone familiar with the stereotypical depiction of the "addictive personality" – characterized by grandiosity, immaturity, and egoism, among other fatal characteristics – London almost seems to be constructing a parody of alcoholic denial, the very variety Wurtzel avers is now impossible since societal knowledge of the disease is "too pervasive":

> There is a special kind of denial which is completely postmodern, something that only awareness of addiction – whether it's via public service campaigns or from seeing Betty Ford interviewed by Larry King – can produce: the nondenial denial. It used to be that you'd actually say that you weren't a drunk, that you'd had a few too many, but nothing outlandish. Nowadays, you can't get away with that; knowledge of the nature of dependency is too pervasive. So you start to have people like me, people who say, I am an addict and I like it, try and stop me.[141]

Yet London, writing in 1912, knew nothing about "postmodern denial", and his readership similarly knew nothing of the "nature of dependency". The medical and social information regarding addiction was woefully inaccurate by present standards, with the notion of "monomania" being the most popular explanation for that distinct sort of deviancy called inebriety or alcoholism (which did not acquire its present meaning until

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[139] Ibid, 6.
[140] Crowley, 20.
[141] Wurtzel, 59.

well into the twentieth century; at the time, the term primarily referred to the long-term physical and mental *effects* of heavy drinking[142]). Valverde points out that in the late nineteenth century, monomania and/or dipsomania were perceived as forms of moral insanity, involving not so much "an alienation of reason" but "lesions of the will."[143] London saw no cause to believe that his will suffered in any way through his tumultuous relationship with alcohol; at least, not for the first twenty-five years of his drinking. It is for others, with wills less strong and bodies less immune to deterioration, that he is concerned:

> Please remember, as I recite this development of my drinking, that I am no fool, no weakling. As the world measures such things, I am a success ... and a success that required a pretty fair amount of brains and willpower. My body is a strong body. It survived where weaklings died like flies ... I am a fact. My drinking is a fact. My drinking is a thing that happened, and is no theory or speculation; and, as I see it, it but lays the emphasis on the power of John Barleycorn – a savagery that we still permit to exist, a deadly institution that lingers on from the mad old brutal days ... and takes very much of all the best we breed.[144]

London's text is not laden with the irony typically found in a recovery narrative; such irony is usually developed through the "I-then" (*histoire*) vs "I-now" (*discours*) tension, which highlights past actions against the backdrop of the present reality.[145] It is a function of the narrator's own self-criticism and self-recognition, indicating his consciousness has evolved since the events he is relating. London's book is devoid of this perspective.

Today's reader, armed with the requisite 'postmodern understanding' of addiction, sees through his rhetoric and notes the psychological distancing and transference London achieves through his sometimes defensive, sometimes affectedly ambivalent remarks. Yet there seems to be the dimmest recognition that something is amiss: London's character at times seems almost to meld with his alter-ego, and in

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[142] Valverde, 47.
[143] Ibid, 45.
[144] London, 169.
[145] Chatman, 63.

London's characterization of the demon John Barleycorn and his infernal White Logic, there occasionally peeps the slightest hint of recognition that Barleycorn is a manifestation of himself, and not some personification of properties inherent in alcohol as a substance. As a reader of Jung, London shows a psychoanalytic understanding on inner conflict and conscious motivation.[146] At times London's control of his narrative design wavers; it is as though he senses his actions or personality may be at least partly to blame for his increasing dependence on alcohol, yet his unwillingness to pursue any line of thought that depreciates his masculinity keeps him in bondage to his own developed self-image. Even as he relates the manner in which his physiological need for alcohol steadily mounts –

> I was learning what it was like to have no appetite. I was learning what it was like to get up shaky in the morning, with a stomach that quivered, with fingers touched by palsy, and to know the drinker's need for a stiff glass of whiskey to brace up. (Oh! John Barleycorn is a wizard dopester. Brain and body, scorched and jangled and poisoned, return to be tuned up by the very poison that caused the damage.)[147]

-- his self image continues to be bolstered and protected by the "science" that he knows of alcoholism:

> The point is that the charm of John Barleycorn was still a mystery to me. I was so organically non-alcoholic that alcohol itself made no appeal; the chemical reactions it produced in me were not satisfying because I possessed no need for chemical satisfaction. I drank because the men I was with drank, and because my nature was such that I could not permit myself to be less of a man than other men at their favorite posture.[148]

In London's assay, alcoholism is the province of the unredeemable, and incompatible with the virility, strength and fame which were his. He argues that "comparatively few alcoholics are born in a generation. And by alcoholic I mean a man

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[146] Crowley, 19.
[147] London, 80.
[148] Ibid, 99.

whose chemistry craves alcohol and drives him resistlessly to it,"[149] that "microscopically unimportant excessivist, the dipsomaniac,"[150] whom he characterizes as

> the man whom we all know, stupid, unimaginative, whose brain is bitten numbly by numb maggots; who walks generously with wide-spread, tentative legs, falls frequently in the gutter, and who sees, in the extremity of his ecstasy, blue mice and pink elephants. He is the type that gives rise to the jokes we see in the funny papers.[151]

Such a man falls into Category A of two possible types of drinkers, with London himself being, predictably, a denizen of Category B:

> ...the type of drinker who has imagination, vision ... it is not his body but his brain that is drunken ... any man [can] roll in the gutter. But it is a terrible ordeal for a man to stand upright on his own two legs, unswaying and decide that in all the universe he finds for himself but one freedom, namely, the anticipating of the day of his death. With this man this is the hour of the white logic ... when he knows that he may know only the laws of things – the meaning of things, never.[152]

London's notion in setting down his "alcoholic memoirs" is to, rather than depict his struggle against addiction and his subsequent sober triumph, sway popular opinion towards Prohibition – which he considers, from a Social Darwinian perspective, a step forward in evolution.[153] He lectures Charmian, in the opening pages, of his inherent distaste for alcohol, and she agrees: "No, you have shown yourself no alcoholic, but merely a habitual drinker, one who has made John Barleycorn's acquaintance through years of rubbing shoulders with him."[154]

London's autobiographical novel was published in 1912 and possibly reflected some of the ethos expressed in a 1908 document published by a committee of MPs, prison doctors and inebriety experts, featuring the division of inebriety into three distinct sections:

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[149] Ibid, 6.
[150] Ibid, 8.
[151] Ibid.
[152] London, 9.
[153] Crowley, 21.
[154] London, 7.

> The first type of inebriate consists of "persons born with an excessive degree of the common capacity for deriving pleasure from the use of alcohol"; these are often superior, well-educated persons, who have plenty of willpower, but simply possess too much desire, too much virility. These individuals (clearly gentlemen) have stronger desires than working-class men, but typically they also have stronger wills ... [the aim for therapy is thus to] alter the ratio between self-control and desire.[155]

One could draw definite similarities between London's character, and the manner in which he presents himself in the memoir, and this rather out-dated elucidation of one facet of the alcoholic personality on the other hand. Yet although London makes acknowledgement of the possibility that such a character may be reconcilable with alcoholism or inebriety ("it is the penalty the imaginative man must pay for his friendship with John Barleycorn"[156]) he seems to hold fast to the notion that he is somehow immune to such a fate. If London expresses any type of "denial" it would be this "relative denial" which corresponded to the understanding of alcoholism in his time. It would categorically not be the "denial" cited so frequently today as "addictive behavior.".

It is only thanks to the distance and knowledge we have gained that we may perceive London's book as a "study in denial." The term and all its semantic connotations mean nothing in London's ethos, since the contemporary understanding of addiction was not to develop for another sixty or seventy years. If London is "in denial" he would have been in denial of a disease which, functionally, did not exist at the time. Alcoholism and addiction as perceived today are constructs which have evolved historically, through decades if not centuries of discourse, and which culminated in Alcoholics Anonymous' redefining the nature of "disease" to co-opt the veracity of the medical model:

> Insofar as the men who started meeting together ... to stop drinking had a theory of their situation, the basis of the theory was the statement "alcoholism is a disease". The insistence that alcoholism was neither a sin nor the inevitable result of alcohol availability, but rather a condition afflicting a specified minority of drinkers, would appear to bring AA into the domain of the medicalization of deviance ... AA's peculiar definition of alcoholism as a *non-medical* disease ... [amplified] the

[155] Valverde, 92.
[156] London, 9

> authority of the medical model by labeling the vice of alcoholism as a disease ... [which was] particularly significant because it was unique for its time.[157]

This hybrid definition of alcoholism as a medical-moral entity was not accessible to London. Denial is categorized as a symptom of the disease of addiction; it cannot be a symptom if the disease does not medically exist. And in its present form, alcoholism/addiction did not exist in 1912, not in any sense that could lead us to condemn London for not viewing his particular situation differently. He was a "high bottom alcoholic," and in the early twentieth century there was also no concept that one could be alcoholic and still be leading a successful, functional life. To the end of his days – and he died of uremic poisoning; his drink-damaged kidneys could not prevail over the cocktail of booze, opium, heroin and tobacco he was constantly filling his body with – London believed that "[he] was thoroughly master of [himself], and John Barleycorn."[158]

In his study of alcohol and American modernism, John Crowley calls *John Barleycorn* "a generically indeterminate narrative on the border between fictional autobiography and autobiographical fiction."[159] He notes the rhetorical slant in the novel's subtitle, "Alcoholic Memoirs", and posits its effectiveness for London's purpose and position over "Memoirs of an Alcoholic":

> London ... [presents] himself as an ordinary man writing for the average reader. Whereas the first title marks London himself as "an alcoholic", the second applies the term only to the written recollections of his "habitual drinking", which is presented as normal – or at least not diseased in the sense suggested by the term "dipsomaniac." [160]

In the Victorian paradigm, "inebriation" was classified as both disease *and* vice. In the modern paradigm, "alcoholism" popularly came to be perceived as a disease, yet a somewhat less severe disease than "dipsomania" or "monomania", with all their attendant

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[157] Valverde, 123.
[158] London, 167.
[159] Crowley, 19.
[160] Ibid, 22.

implications. "Insofar as the idea of the drunkard as a degenerate still prevailed upon London, however, he had cause to insist on his being no drunkard – an insistence that was complicated by his wish to conceal his drinking problem, even from himself."[161] In *John Barleycorn*, the "conflation of Victorian and modern paradigms and their accompanying terminologies results in some confusion for London's depiction of the 'alcoholic', since the term is used inconsistently"[162]: at times London refers to the Victorian paradigm, which implies dipsomania and degeneracy, and at times to the more modern definition of disease. London asserts consistently, however, that his drinking is fundamentally different from alcoholism under any definition: "Drinking, as I deem it, is practically entirely a habit of mind."[163]

Crowley calls London the first American writer to drink in the modern spirit, and suggests that *John Barleycorn* is the prototype for the modernist drunk narrative, in that London exemplifies "the artist-as-meaning-maker, the sole source of order in a deranged universe."[164] Tracing a century of genealogy from Jack London to James Frey, and his hybrid auto-biography/novel, *A Million Little Pieces*, we can note the effect that London's dark triumph of the will has had. Instinctively, we can say that London legitimized the popularization of the addiction memoir; insofar as we recognize authors of mass-publicized addiction narratives as minor celebrities, London, too, was a celebrity in his lifetime, and his words carried weight that the Salvation Army narratives of alcoholism and recovery did not.

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[161] Ibid, 24.
[162] Ibid.
[163] London, 339.
[164] Crowley, 34.

In assessing London's perceptions and representation of addiction, however, we must remember that "perceiving alcohol addiction as an illness that requires unburdening and reflecting on in narrative form is relatively recent development, which arguably has been encouraged by the growth of AA."[165] In a later section we will examine that form of the Literature of Addiction which is increasingly popular in mainstream culture, the confessional memoir. At this juncture, however, we turn our focus to the rise of the addiction narrative in modernist America, as prompted by Jack London, and an exemplary example of the early Literature of Addiction – Jean Rhys' *Good Morning, Midnight.*

[165] Hurwitz et al, 30

Chapter Five:
Spiritual Lack in Addiction Narrative: Good Morning, Midnught

Having explored the concept of the spiritual awakening in contemporary addiction narrative, we can thus establish the necessity of some sort of behavioral alteration or psychic change to occur in order for a character to transcend addictive behavior. Whether we ascribe traditional religious meaning to this fundamental change, or whether we view it in more psychological and sociological terms, it remains that certain circumstances can effect a "transformation of desire" in the addicted individual, leading to a shift in the "habitual centre of his personal energy"; this perspectival adjustment allows, often with the help of some religious or Higher power, for triumph over addictive behaviors, and the resumption of something akin to a normal (read: conducive to social cooperation and not markedly deviant) lifestyle. We have seen how this mental and spiritual transition is bodied forth in personal recovery memoirs and in their progenitor, the spiritual autobiography; we have also examined some of the theological, philosophical and sociological roots from which our present understanding of spiritual awakening has developed. While avoiding too much conflation of social science with literature, we have noted the presence of some of the more aggravating personality traits of the unawakened addict or "sick soul" as presented in addiction literature, and have posited how the action of certain behaviors on this index of maladjustments can lead to spiritual growth and possibly even that morally privileged state of inner peace known as "sobriety."

Yet much of the literature of addiction – the vast majority of it is fiction before the 1970s – does not feature a spiritual awakening; or, if the narrative does prize religious or spiritual sentiment, this factor is impotent in permanently altering the addictive behavior of a character. Unlike the vast majority of the non-fiction narrative we have

explored, much of the *fiction* of addiction features a marked pessimism regarding abstinence or recovery, and tends rather more to enforce the notion of the "doomed man [whose] vice is irreparable ... [and who] cannot resist"[166] his drug or process addiction of choice. As John Crowley remarks, drunkenness in narrative is often related to social disorder, and, inasmuch as it appears in the literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, it is treated not merely as an individual defect of character, but a symptom of disorder in contemporary culture at large.[167]

It cannot and should not go unnoticed that the majority of works selected for this thesis are works of American literature; both in fiction and memoir, American literature occupies a predominant place in no less than four distinct categories of addiction literature. Although one cannot sensibly assert that addiction/alcoholism are uniquely American or North American phenomena, there is a very defined niche for self-focused, introspective literature of addiction and recovery in these areas, perhaps reflecting a privileging of personal focus in areas both of illness/deviancy and recovery therefrom.

Firstly, the original "recovery literature" began in the arena of spiritual autobiography and the Protestant temperance ethic, and early Americans uniquely developed this genre, especially as it related to combating the sin of drunkenness though religion. Secondly, Alcoholics Anonymous began in the United States, and all the original recovery literature of the Big Book was set in that county (and occasionally in Canada). Thirdly, the United States has been a champion in publishing of latter-day popular recovery memoirs, as was addressed in the previous section.

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[166] Crowley, 7.
[167] Ibid, 9.

Furthermore, the period of time between 1809 and 1928 in the United States produced – as suggested by sociologist Robin Room, and corroborated by Tom Dardis, Donald Goodwin and Donald Newlove – over one hundred writers who were both known for habitual drunkenness and who focused with unusual force upon alcoholic protagonists in their works. "The chief modernist vice was drunkenness," [168] notes Crowley, and Goodwin rejoins ironically, "what is hard ... is to think of *non*alcoholics among American writers of the twentieth century."[169] Certainly the focus here is not on the addictions of writers but the addictions featured in their narratives; yet there remains an indubitable link between the prevalence of alcoholism among American modernist writers and the prevalence of alcohol in American modernist fiction.

Defining the modern temperament, Krutch described a "gloomy vision of a dehumanized new world" in which "man must henceforth live if he lives at all, for all his premises have been destroyed and he must proceed to new conclusions."[170] This lost generation of modernists, painfully aware of the spiritual predicament of the time, "awakened to the fact that both the ends which its fathers proposed to themselves and the emotions from which they drew their strength [were now] irrelevant and remote."[171] To Crowley, such notions of bleakness and "white logic" characterize the province of the intellectual, since "the more highly developed the reflective powers of the individual become, the more likely ... [is this negativity to] become an active rebellion which expresses itself in self-regarding vices."[172]

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[168] Ibid, 35.
[169] Goodwin, 4.
[170] Krutch, 13-14.
[171] Ibid.
[172] Crowley, 35.

It is worth noting at this juncture that Bill Wilson was born in 1895, within two years either way of such writers – and habitual "drunks" – as Dorothy Parker, Dashiell Hammett, James Thurber, F. Scott Fitzgerald and William Faulkner. Raphael notes that *Alcoholics Anonymous* belongs in the context of such alcoholic novels as Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night*, O'Hara's *Appointment in Samarra*, Jackson's *The Lost Weekend,* and Lowry's *Under the Volcano.*[173] Can it really be convincingly illustrated that this group of writers was a "lost generation", a group doomed to addiction as a method of combating or managing existential despair? Perhaps not. But the prevalence of alcoholism and addiction as subject matter for the fiction of this period cannot be denied, and the thematic importance of addiction, while paramount to the narratives in question, seems all too easily linked to these "self-regarding vices" of the time.

Jean Rhys' early narratives locate many thematic and structural pivot points around the alcoholism/addiction of her female characters. All four of her pre-war novels, *Quartet* (1928), *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie* (1931), *Voyage in the Dark* (1934) and *Good Morning, Midnight* (1938) "thematize alcohol dependency and relate it to the question of female agency and female desire with which they are centrally concerned."[174] Only in recent years have the critics begun to read Jean Rhys with any focus on the addictive behavior of her characters, many of whom also fall into categories reserved for other "Twelve Step" organizations (love/sex addiction, codependency, compulsive and neurotic tendencies, etc.). Nardin notes that despite the alcohol-soaked ethos in which Rhys' characters operate – according to Wedge's count, at least forty-two percent of

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[173] Raphael, 13.
[174] Nardin, 1.

pages written during the pre-war period contain references to alcohol – the role of alcohol in Rhys' early novels "rarely receives more than a passing mention from critics."[175] To ignore the function of alcohol and alcoholism in Rhys' novels is to ignore a rich exploration into what Valverde calls

> the constellation of ideas that challenge the assumption that there is a binary opposition between "voluntarism" and "addiction". In considering why their heroines start, stop, or continue drinking, the novels link alcohol dependency to social issues instead of presenting it as the vice or disease of particular individuals. Their exploration of addiction thus helps to elucidate the wrenching dilemmas that women faced in the patriarchal world of early-twentieth-century Europe.[176]

Rhys' work is especially interesting as per the challenge she poses to "the dominant early-twentieth-century view of alcoholism as a 'volitional monomania' characterized by failure of the will."[177] In characterizing Sasha Jansen as a woman who, although neurotic and depressed, suffers from no psychological impairment and is alcoholic by her own election, Rhys gives form to ideas that do not appear in the alcoholism literatures of the social sciences and humanities until later in the century. Such social prognostication is not uncommon among writers who themselves struggle with addiction; Rhys' canny observation of the psycho-social dynamic surrounding the female alcoholic was one gleaned from years of personal experience. Her Sasha in *Good Morning, Midnight*, offers a unique perspective on addiction, displaying the manner is which a woman may opt for alcoholic dissolution rather than face her inability to attain dominance or agency in a patriarchal society. As Nardin suggests, Sasha actively refuses a recovery which would reinforce the dominance of the patriarchy and its oppressive strictures.[178] While some would not agree that Sasha's self-destruction makes a social statement about female agency, preferring to characterize her actions as more chronically

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[175] Ibid.
[176] Ibid, 2.
[177] Ibid.
[178] Ibid.

alcoholic than revolutionary, the narrative raises interesting questions about the potential uses of alcohol and the function it may serve in adapting the socially maladapted - that is, the manner in which alcohol may function as the pragmatic answer to a severely underdeveloped ability to face life's vicissitudes.

Wurtzel, almost three-quarters of a century later, speaks of the "nondenial denial", in which the female addict openly defies society, announcing, "I'm addicted, try and stop me"; Rhys, too, depicts a woman who maintains the efficacy of her alcoholic solution until the point of death. For both Wurtzel and Rhys the addiction is a source of power over the patriarchy, a manner in which to refute expectations and enact some form of self-possession over life:

> I watch my face gradually breaking up – cheeks puffing out, eyes getting smaller. Never mind. 'While we live, let us live,' say the bottles of wine. When we give, let us give. Besides, it isn't my face, this tortured and tormented mask. I can take it off whenever I like and hang it up on a nail. Or I shall place on it a tall hat with a green feather ... and walk about the dark streets so merrily? Singing defiantly, 'You don't like me, but I don't like you either. "Don't like jam, ham or lamb, and I *don't* like roly-poly ...'[179]

Her only comfort in her straits is the erroneous belief that she has chosen active alcoholism over just wasting passively away. Nardin postulates that much can be gleaned about the modernist gendering of alcoholism from Rhys' narratives, especially when laid against the aforementioned "white logic" male narrative of the period:

> Rhys' pre-war tales offer a proto-feminist alternative to what ... Crowley's study ... calls the modernist drunk narrative: the story of a sensitive, artistic male who heroically and freely chooses alcohol for its power both to affirm his cosmic despair and render it bearable.[180]

In *Voyage in the Dark*, protagonist Anna Morgan begins drinking voluntarily, and her alcoholism "develops insidiously from modest beginnings ... she continues drinking

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[179] Rhys, 44.
[180] Nardin, 1.

because alcohol darkens her intellect and renders her situation bearable."[181] Her alcoholism emerges from her failure to grasp the physiological and psychological effects of alcoholism; Anna Morgan is unaware that she has a drinking problem, and slides inexorably toward her downward spiral. Sasha Jansen, in contrast, has full knowledge of her alcoholic situation; far from struggling against it, she has reached a point of conciliation with her drinking which reads like a modern-day parody of "acceptance", kin of the nondenial denial. Her solution to her spiritual dis-ease, which manifests itself in a pattern of "hope followed by hopelessness,"[182] is to utilize her alcoholism as a means to an end: the escape from a life which is constant abrasion to her soul:

> It was then that I had the bright idea of drinking myself to death ... I did try it, too. I've had enough of these streets that sweat a cold, yellow slime, of hostile people, of crying myself to sleep every night. I've had enough of thinking, enough of remembering. Now whisky, rum, gin, sherry, vermouth, wine with the bottles labeled 'Dum vivimus, vivamus ...' Drink, drink, drink ... As soon as I sober up I start again. I have to force it down sometimes. You'd think I'd get delirium tremens or something.
> Nothing. I must be solid as an oak. Except when I cry.[183]

Sasha cries "in the middle of the night", the prototype of a woman who, through her woundedness, her spiritual dis-ease and her active alcoholism, disturbs any form of the demure, more softly romantic image associated with women of her time and in her social class. Her suffering, as well as her erratic behavior, signifies the embodiment of the "dark feminine,"[184] and Rhys describes with brilliant accuracy

> how the increasing dependence on love and alcohol intermesh and lead to fear, isolation, debilitating self-consciousness, a consuming sense of rejection, and finally, a hatred for humanity. The result of this progression of feelings becomes so unbearable that they end in revenge, paranoia, and madness.[185]

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[181] Ibid, 8.
[182] Ibid.
[183] Rhys, 43.
[184] Leonard, 124.
[185] Ibid, 130.

Sasha's imperiled and desperate actions indicate a mind-state upon which the operation of divine grace is unlikely. Like such paradigmatic cases as the Underground Man of Dostoevsky, Sasha is so embittered, so egoistic, so pessimistic and self-loathing, so confirmed in her beliefs, that she virtually closes herself off to any action which would relieve her distress. Subconsciously, she seems to covet misery, and presents herself as a woman aligned with James' concept of the "sick soul" – a personality type which accords also to the Consul from *Under the Volcano,* Raskolnikov from *Crime and Punishment*, and Alexei from *The Gambler;* indeed, most addicted characters in the literature we have discussed display some aspect of this personality, which is unable to tolerate distress without psychically manifesting negative energy:

> We might speak of a 'pain-threshold', a 'fear-threshold', a 'misery-threshold' ... The sanguine and healthy-minded live habitually on the sunny side of the misery-line, the depressed and melancholy live beyond it, in darkness and apprehension. There are men who seem to have started in life with a bottle or two of champagne inscribed to their credit; whilst others seem to have been born close to the pain-threshold, which the slightest irritants fatally send them over.[186]

Sasha's unenviable emotional position – whether it be due to her alcoholism, biochemical imbalances, sociological factors, the dominance of the patriarchy – translates, for her, into the belief that the world is "a pack of damned hyenas"[187]; she muses about her relationships and perceptions of the human race, seeming to long for intimacy at the same time as she protests generalized contempt:

> What I really mean is that I hate them. I hate their voices, I hate their eyes, I hate the way they laugh ... I hate the whole bloody business. It's cruel, it's idiotic, it's unspeakably horrible. I never had the guts to kill myself or I'd have been out of it long ago ...
>
> Only five minutes ago I was in the Deux Magots, dressed in that damn cheap black dress of mine, giggling and talking about Antibes, and now I am lying in the misery of utter darkness. Quite alone, no voice, no touch, no hand ... How long must I lie here? For ever? No, only for a couple of hundred years this time, miss ... [188]

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[186] James, VAR, 157.
[187] Rhys, 172-3.
[188] Ibid.

For a personality like Sasha's, "the good quality of successful moments themselves when they occur is spoiled and vitiated. Riches take wings; fame is a breath; love is a cheat; youth and health and pleasures vanish."[189] Because of her innate character "defects", every good, "terrestrial or celestial, is imagined only to be turned from with disgust." Furthermore, her ability to overcome her world-sickness is significantly compromised by her anhedonia.[190] That she is also addicted to luminal, an early barbiturate, and precursor to valium which depresses the body's systems, means her already depressed and neurotic outlook is exacerbated by her drug use.[191] Feminist critique of the novel would balk at any assumption that Sasha creates her own problems through her depressive outlook and alcohol abuse; Nardin strongly suggests that Sasha chooses addiction as a means to combat the dominance of the patriarchy. In fact, Linet's reading of the novel posits Sasha as a victim of sexual trauma whose powerlessness is explained in the narrative as part of a negotiation with trauma's "central dialectic".[192] My reading of the novel absolutely privileges Sasha's alcoholism, presuming it to be the dominant guiding narrative factor, and I put it forth with full consideration of its anomalous status. When feminist issues are de-emphasized, Sasha still acts like a "garden-variety"[193] alcoholic, and her behavior is categorically aligned with psychological studies of the personality types prone to addiction.

Sasha's alcohol consumption affects her narrative style; her perspective and outlook change based on the amount she has consumed at any given time. Rhys' use of this first-person, stream-of-consciousness strategy privileges the bleak, perspectivally

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[189] James, VAR, 161.
[190] James, VAR, 119.
[191] www.wikipedia .com
[192] Linett, 1.
[193] AA saying, personal communication.

skewed stance of protagonist Sasha, who correctly adduces some factual information about her situation but veers farther away from accurate self or social assessment as her alcoholic mind gains dominance. Rhys uses fragmented text in a strategic, mimetic way, with the aim of making Sasha's damaged psychological state "legible in the precarious, partial ways that can be done."[194]

Her sense of time is specifically impaired: she reports that she is rapidly aging and that other people think she is degenerating; she describes her friend Sidonie "half-shutting her eyes and smiling the smile which means: "She's getting to look old. She drinks." [195] However, Sasha experiences no forward movement in life. Linet notes, too, how "a discomfiting sense of timelessness" and fragmentation of one's experience of continuity can result from the experience of trauma.[196] Yet even more so, alcohol is inextricably linked with repetition, monotony, dolorousness in the narrative: it freezes Sasha in time, awarding her the power to experience life as she desires in the moment, but which ultimately forbids the possibility of any real growth. She can utilize alcohol for its power to manipulate her emotional nature ("I have another drink. Damned voice in my head, I'll stop you talking"[197] – "I'll have one more drink first and then I'll think about it"[198]). Alcohol mutes her rage, and by its use and abuse she achieves the power to "control" her experiences of things. Over the course of her adult life she has come to appreciate alcohol as a tool by which to shape her internal reality:

> Two Pernods arrive … I drink half the glass in order to swallow convenablement. And then I feel like a goddess. It might have made me sick, but it had done the other thing … Will I have another

[194] Linett, 2.
[195] Rhys, 11.
[196] Linett, 2.
[197] Ibid, 187.
[198] Ibid, 71.

> littler Pernod? (Food? I don't want any food right now. I want more of this feeling – fire and wings).[199]

Yet in this realm of active alcoholism, Sasha develops no skills for emotional regulation or self-soothing when alcohol is unavailable, and thus often finds herself confronted with emotional situations for which she is woefully unprepared. Sasha's negative and pessimistic outlook always attains dominance over any other emotion since she has honed her skills so finely for self-degradation and self-loathing. The only constants in her emotional makeup seem to be the obsessive focus on self:

> My life, which seems so simple and monotonous, is really a complicated affair of cafes where they like me and cafes where they don't, streets that are friendly, streets that aren't, rooms where I might be happy, rooms where I shall never be, looking-glasses I look nice in, looking-glasses I don't, dresses that will be lucky, dresses that won't, and so on.[200]

The pattern of the narrative, when held up against the contemporary memoir, reveals startling similarities; most contemporary memoirs follow, as has been noted, the "what it was like, what happened, and what it's like now" formula, and tend to rehearse from a first-person perspective the main events in the active addiction which led to the conversion or awakening. Sasha's narrative functions largely in this way, yet never evolves past the moment of her potential transformation. The narrative ends not with Sasha's transformation but with her ultimate renunciation of positive change in her life. The painfully repetitive quality that characterizes Sasha's life ridicules the time-honored romance plot wherein the introduction of a new romantic stimulus re-invigorates the heroine and produces a salutary effect. Sasha tells us she still believes happiness is a possibility – ..."Tomorrow I'll be happy again, tomorrow, tomorrow ..."[201] – yet a more likely possibility is that she will succeed in her slow suicide ("I made up my mind to kill

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[199] Ibid, 87.
[200] Ibid, 46.
[201] Ibid, 48.

myself – the usual whiff of chloroform. Next week, next month, or next year I'll kill myself"[202]).

Expectations based on other fictions and films suggest that a happy ending should be possible for this alcoholic woman; readers of today, experiencing Rhys' narrative in a modern addiction ethos, might expect Sasha would have a spiritual experience, combat her addiction and malaise, and recover – that is, find a new man, stop drinking, and embrace what remains of her life as full and fortunate. However, Rhys' purpose in crafting Sasha and her maladapted pattern of behavior is to highlight the social circumstances which make alcoholism a palatable option for women when compared to social and emotional conformity, however ironically she may body forth this objective. Sasha has generally resigned herself to despair, and in her bleaker moments she castigates herself for any positive expectations she might have based on popular narrative cliché: she warns herself against her "film-mind ... For God's sake watch out for your film mind."[203]

Like many addicts (and much akin to Alexei in *The Gambler*), Sasha has no spiritual connection on which to rely for comfort. Her reliance is not on a Higher Power, but on things material to soothe her dis-ease. When she is in labour with her ill-fated child, she calls for drugs to relieve the pain, while the other women at the hotel cry for spiritual help in their distress. This early evidence of Sasha's reliance on things chemical to make her emotions manageable in large part belies the idea that the patriarchy has driven her to addiction:

> "Courage, courage," [the midwife] says, "All will be well. All is going beautifully."
> ... At least two women are having babies.

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[202] Ibid, 86.
[203] Ibid, 176.

> "Jesus, Jesus," says one woman. "Mother, Mother," says another ...
> "Chloroform, chloroform," I say when I speak. Of course I would. What nonsense! There is no doctor to give chloroform here ... No Jesus, no Mother, and no chloroform either.[204]

Alcoholics Anonymous holds that no individual can "get sober" until they cease to place their reliance on people, places and things, and instead place their reliance on some form of "[higher] power ... which can solve [their] problem."[205] Sasha, despite recognizing her alcohol addiction, at no time demonstrates any desire to escape from her insular, self-absorbed, depressive and materialistic lifestyle since she does not recognize the inextricable link between alcoholism and depression although at times she dimly perceives that her life might be fuller with increased human and spiritual contact. At the end of the narrative she is tormented by an apocalyptic vision of a godless world which subdues and objectifies women, which denies individuality and moves as ineluctably as a automaton:

> Venus is dead; Apollo is dead; even Jesus is dead.
> All that is left in the world is an enormous machine, made of white steel. It has innumerable flexible arms, made of steel. Long, thin arms. At the end of each arm is an eye, the eyelashes stiff with mascara ... the grey sky, which is the background, terrifies me ... And the arms wave to an accompaniment of music and of song. Like this: 'Hotcha-hotcha-hotcha ...' And I know the music; I can sing the song ...[206]

Sasha's expectations of abandonment in this patriarchal, materialist world cause her to refute God, and subsequently any other human being who might relieve some of her solipsistic torture. Her basic perception of God is as a trickster, a purveyor of false hope, another man who is destined to betray her as Enno did: she reflects "how God is very cruel ... very cruel. A devil of course. That accounts for everything – the only possible explanation."[207] This statement is a reaction to the death of her baby and her

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[204] Ibid, 56.
[205] AA, BB, 45.
[206] Rhys, 187.
[207] Ibid, 140.

husband's subsequent abandonment of her; yet one wonders whether God can be blamed, or whether her consumption of substances might have accounted for the impaired health of her child. Transferring her hatred to a Higher Power, she denies the impact of her addiction on her life experiences, and the character defects (note that Linet would refer the reader to a more nuanced reading of Sasha's character provided by trauma studies, which would not give credence to any notion of moral laxity[208]) which have contributed to her loneliness and desolation:

> Then I shall think of this hotel, the exact shape of the bed and the comic papers in the lavatory. There was that quite ordinary joke that made me laugh so much because it was signed God. Just like that, G-O-D, God. Joke, by God. And what a sense of humour![209]

The belief that she is the butt of some cosmic joke leads Sasha to try to defy what she perceives as God's cruel mockery. In that sense, her embracing of alcoholism correlates with her desire to refute and punish the male figures over whom she feels she has some measure of power; in her youth, after her abandonment by her husband, she began to drink heavily to hide from the shame of prostitution, which, she freely admits, was a path taken more to supply her material wants than escape from dire need. During her time with her nameless clients, "when [she] could still feel gay on half a bottle of wine, when this happened, and that happened"[210] she discovered that "when [she] had a couple of drinks [she didn't] know if it [was] today or tomorrow"[211] and was able to detach from her lurid activities (another example of the way alcohol is utilized as a mechanism by Sasha to bring reality under her control).

Sasha is unable to recognize that her disconnection with God stems from the combination of her life experiences and her alcoholism; she believes she must use alcohol

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[208] Linett, 2.
[209] Rhys, 184.
[210] Ibid, 144.
[211] Ibid.

to combat the measures God has taken against her. This misperception of the nature of God and by extension the nature of man has Sasha entrapped in an alcoholic hell, from which only some form of psychic change or spiritual awakening could rescue her. Rene offers the opportunity for a change in the manner Sasha's perceptions operate, but, in defiance of traditional romantic story-lines, Sasha's narrative ends with a different sort of male communion – one which effects a change of some kind, yet even Rhys seems to be ambivalent to the nature of the change. In this reading, I opt to cast Rene as the possible harbinger of change, whereas other readings (Nardin, Linet) have characterized him as a violent potential rapist from whom Sasha successfully defends herself, and "it is only her traumatized desire to be humiliated causes her to fantasize that she can communicate with him and call him back."[212]

As a result of her failed marriage and her ill-conceived notions of sexual relations, Sasha is drawn to men, as they provide her with marginal enhancement for her fragile self-esteem, but she simultaneously repulses them when they respond positively to her. Of Rene, she thinks, "perhaps I should manage to hurt him in return for all the many times I've been hurt."[213] It is telling that she perceives Rene as a gigolo and believes he wants to use her and have her pay him – since that is precisely what she herself has done in the past, precisely what she currently intends to do, and not remotely what Rene intends. Her projection of her own predicament is remarkably disfigured, and blinds her to the possibility of real positive change through her association with Rene.

She feels the greatest aversion to a man she calls "the commis voyageur", the man who has the room next to hers in the cheap Parisian hotel:

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[212] Linett, 3.
[213] Rhys, 73.

> The man who has the room next to mine is parading about as usual in his white dressing gown. Hanging around. He is like the ghost of the landing. I am always running into him.
> He is as thin as a skeleton. He has a bird-like face and sunken, dark eyes with a peculiar expression, cringing, ingratiating, knowing. What's he want to look at me like that for? ... He is always wearing a dressing gown – a blue one with black spots or a white one.
> ... I don't like this damned man.[214]

Sasha is drawn to Rene and disgusted by the commis, yet ultimately it is Rene she will scorn and the commis she will embrace, if fatalistically. It should be noted that religious descriptors are used for both men, portending some spiritual as well as sexual decision Sasha must make. The commis is like a nightmarish, priestly (connoting his male authority for transformation) apparition:

> It's the commis, in his beautiful white dressing gown immaculately white, with long, wide, hanging sleeves ... he looks like a priest, a priest of some obscene, half-understood religion ... I put my hand on his chest, push him backwards and bang the door. It's quite easy. It's like pushing a paper man, a ghost, something that doesn't exist.[215]

Rene, on the other hand, is identified loosely with gods in the narrative; Sasha refers to him as Phoebus Apollo, possibly because of his potential to bring light into darkness. When he leaves her, exhausted with her emotional games, she mourns his loss as she might mourn the loss of a personal God in her life: "Phoebus Apollo is walking away from me down the boulevard to hide himself in la crasse. Only address: Mons P. Apollo, La Crasse ... But I know quite well this is all hallucination, imagination. Venus is dead; Apollo is dead; even Jesus is dead."[216]

Yet Rene, if he has an association with godliness, must be a wounded God (Sasha remarks on "[the] a long scar, going across his throat ... from ear to ear. A long, thick, white scar"[217]) who longs for comfort and integration with another soul and who tells

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[214] Ibid, 14.
[215] Ibid, 35.
[216] Ibid, 187.
[217] Ibid, 174.

Sasha that he wants to love her because he believes she "won't betray [him]."[218] His potential for the emotional transformation of Sasha is unmatched by anything but alcohol in the novel:

> I have my arms around him and I begin to laugh, because I am so happy. I stand there hugging him, so terribly happy. Now everything is in my arms on this dark landing – love, youth, spring, happiness, everything I thought I had lost. I was a fool, wasn't I? to think all that was finished for me. How could it be finished?[219]

Sasha's inability to build on this joy she feels with Rene, her incapacity to accept aught but darkness instead of the "light" associated with Rene, is a central thematic concern which is reflected in the title of the narrative. Emily Dickinson's poem runs: "Good morning, Midnight! / … Sunshine was a sweet place, / I liked to stay – / But Morn didn't want me – now – / So good night, Day!"[220] The irony is that Sasha's alcoholism, presumably pursued in order to attain some agency in the system of patriarchy, seals her off from the transformational power of a God she perceives as "male", and thus reinforces the vicious cycle she finds herself in – where "midnight" is the only "morning" she will experience despite her proclamations that her torment will end "tomorrow." She feels she is justified in her alcoholic hell, because of what the world has done to her; she cannot see that the relationship between alcohol and misery is often causal, and that her solution to misery has turned viciously against her.

The consummation of the relationship with one man or the other will symbolically mark the inception of a new phase of Sasha's life. As stated, my interpretation of the novel posits Rene as the potentially redemptive influence which tries to break down barriers and rebuild Sasha, but which she rejects, in large part because of her self-undermining beliefs. The commis is the discomfiting, cyclical, nightmarish (read:

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[218] Ibid, 73.
[219] Ibid, 177.
[220] Epigraph.

addictive) force she is irrevocably drawn to, despite her better judgment and inner conviction. Her attempts to avoid the commis (when, for example, she vainly tries to change her dark room for "a light room" elsewhere in the hotel) represent the time when redemption is still possible, when she is still struggling against the dark forces in herself. In effect she seals her own fate when, after the departure of Rene and the collapse of all her illusions, when the alcohol loses its functionality, she willingly calls the commis to her and rejects the essence of that briefest of Renaissances she experienced through her abortive contact with Rene.

Her internalized belief seems to be that, if anyone attempts to make intimate contact with her, physical or emotional, a nefarious ulterior motive must be lurking: she mourns, "As soon as you have reached [a] heaven of indifference, you are pulled out of it. From your heaven you have to go back to hell. When you are dead to the world, the world often rescues you, if only to make a figure of fun out of you."[221] This defensiveness has become automatic, and is a learned response from years of disillusionment. Insofar as she no longer has any capacity for empathy, she does not recognize that Rene, too, fears abandonment; her understanding of pain is as a primarily female affliction, represented by the wild kitten, the brodeuse Lise, and the mulatto woman the Russian painter tells her about. Sasha thinks that her sensitivity is highly developed, that she is uniquely aware of pain and suffering, and that she has a keen emotional perception for sadness. Yet her awareness does not encompass the possibility that men, too, may be hurt, may feel abandoned; this sadness she sees as having an aesthetic quality only, like the painting of the Jew playing the banjo. Rene calls her a "child" when he first meets her, and in many ways Sasha's impulses are childish,

[221] Ibid, 91.

displaying little or no regard for others. Thus it is without compunction that she savages Rene emotionally, accuses him of duplicity, mocks his "fake" wounds, deprecates his attempts to make love and calls him a gigolo.

Rene's basic function in the novel is to present the possibility of positive change: he is a representation of the opportunity for spiritual transformation for a woman who refutes God in all his guises; he offers her a sexual experience which, despite its negative connotations in some readings, he promises her will invigorate her and alter her torment The images of bread and sexual communion are strongly linked with the offering to Sasha of a new form of sustenance: one that is based in spirit and intimate connection:

> He says: "It doesn't matter. What I know is that I could do this with you" – he makes a movement with his hands like a baker kneading a loaf of bread – "and afterwards you'd be different. I know. Believe me."
>
> I watch the grimacing little devil in my head. He wears a top-hat and a cache-sexe and he sings a sentimental song – 'The roses all are faded and the lilies in the dust'. [222]

Sasha has considered the possibility of a transformation before the advent of Rene: yet her planned evolution was then simply a further expansion of the materialism and self-absorption that kept her locked in self-hatred. "I must go and buy a hot this afternoon, I think, and tomorrow a dress. I must get on with the transformation act."[223] Sasha's attempt to transform is material, materialistic, not spiritual. The transformation Rene promises – that afterwards, she will be different – frightens and entices her. She accepts the happiness he offers, but quickly her joy is soured by her inability to "bridge the gap," to get past that "difficult moment when you are out of practice – a moment that makes you go cold, cold and wary."[224] They drink whisky together in her hotel room, and begin to fight. Sasha attributes the conflict to taking "whiskey on top of brandy," which

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[222] Ibid, 175.
[223] Ibid, 63.
[224] Ibid, 178.

"make[s her] feel quarrelsome" with "sparks of anger, of resentment shooting all over [her]."[225] Rene attempts to subvert her drinking and arguing by physically subduing her; Sasha senses that her identity is being threatened, that her defenses are being broken down: "my mouth hurts, my breasts hurt, because it hurts, when you have been dead, to come alive ..."[226]

Some time in the middle of their struggle Sasha's drunken consciousness fragments; Linet and Hermann speak of this as a result of sexual trauma, noting that the "defense of splitting" protects her from the emotional experience.[227] Here, we read Sasha's dissociation from the event as a result of the unchallengeable fact of her extreme drunkenness, and her uncertainty that she can spiritually withstand the process of "coming alive again." She hears herself speaking to him, telling him he should just take her money and go, while her inner self begs him to hear her internal wish for him to stay. Is her dismissal of him and the emotional kinship they have briefly fostered simply an attempt to protect the calcified egotism that she survives by, or is it, as other readings have suggested, an ironical (in light of the end of the narrative) last gesture at self-preservation against male violence?

Sasha's "betrayal" ends their brief tête-à-tête; Rene hastily departs; her potential "conversion" is aborted. By the time she hits her bottom – when she discovers Rene has not taken her money, was perhaps not even a gigolo, that his desire for and kinship with her were perhaps real – the opportunity for union with him and whatever kind of transformation that might involve has passed. The narrative style shifts at this point to reflect Sasha's shattered consciousness: as she imagines herself flying over Rene,

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[225] Ibid, 179.
[226] Ibid, 182.
[227] Linett, 3.

watching his movement away from her, she wills him telepathically to come back. Yet the man she wills to her bed is not Rene; it is the commis voyageur, who has been listening and senses his opportunity to strike:

> He stands there, looking down at me. Not sure of himself, his mean eyes flickering ... he doesn't say anything. Thank God, he doesn't say anything. I look straight into his eyes and despise another poor devil of a human being for the last time. For the last time ...[228]

Gregg and Holden, interestingly, read *this* ending, with the commis, as redemptive; having rejected the gigolo and penultimately recognizing her alienation, Sasha "accepts her responsibility to the reviled Other, getting rid of her scorn, of that which is considered repulsive and less than human."[229] Others have suggested that Sasha's final "Yes-yes-yes-yes" (an ironic nod to Molly Bloom) is an acceptance of death, with the ending being one of resignation rather than affirmation,[230] and my reading of the novel concurs. Leonard, having characterized Sasha as that archetypal figure of addiction, which she calls the Madwoman, comments, how "Sasha's gesture of welcoming the madman [the commis], the novel ends ... accepting [him] ... she finally acknowledges in herself all of the rage and contempt which she has been projecting onto others."[231] A sort of ambivalent redemption, then, has occurred: Sasha has embraced "the end" in her union with the commis, but has taken from it an enhanced understanding of her alienation. Linet notes, however, that Sasha is deluding herself in thinking she has despised "another human being for the last time" – in the cyclical world of this novel,

> the repetitions of "for the last time" belie its ostensible meaning. It is mere fantasy for Sasha to imagine that time will stop repeating itself, that she will be transformed. A similar dynamic occurs at the end of *Voyage in the Dark,* when Anna Morgan thinks hopefully of "starting all over again ... being new and fresh" ... [Sasha] will start all over again, but only to relive the past ... to

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[228] Rhys, 190.
[229] As quoted in Linett, 17.
[230] Linett, 18.
[231] Leonard, 128.

> repeat "for the last time" is to suggest an endless present, a series of reenactments ... endless cycles of pain.[232]

The modernist fascination with alcoholic dissolution, as we have noted, did not much outlast Jean Rhys; after the 1940s fiction devoted to recovery began to emerge, and the AA narrative began to be reflected in the Literature of Addiction. Before we proceed to the contemporary addiction memoir in America, we shall look briefly at how another major national culture has related to addiction – in turning our attention to Russia and Dostoevsky's *The Gambler.*

[232] Linett, 13-14.

Chapter Six:
Cross-Cultural Perspectives: The Russians and Addiction
The Gambler

Thus far this investigation has focused almost exclusively on North American (primarily American) views of addiction and spiritual awakening, but we shall greatly magnify our flourishing study of "narrating addiction" if due consideration is given to the immense contribution made by Russian Literature to the subject. While this chapter is not meant to be an in-depth exploration into the Russian psyche or the complex theological systems of that nation (obviously that might form a thesis in its own right), it shall provide an examination of one of the primary literary achievements that country has produced in connection to our analysis. Dostoevsky, who wrote *The Gambler* concomitantly with that great novel of awakening *Crime and Punishment* in 1864, is responsible for some of literature's most influential psychological and spiritual works, and many texts in his oeuvre utilize addiction and other forms of soul-sickness as metaphors for the great struggle towards righteousness. His novel *The Brothers Karamazov,* which shall not be discussed here because of spatial considerations, was considered a prophetic work of spiritual redemption, and much of the central familial conflict in that novel is related to concerns of alcohol, gambling, and love/sex obsessions. Clearly, tracing even a partial path through addiction and (potential) awakening as explored by Dostoevsky hearkens back to a spiritual journey begun in the early nineteenth century by Pushkin (with *Eugene Onegin*, *The Covetous Knight* and especially *The Queen of Spades*), of which the profound effects are still felt in the current addiction literature of the Western world.

Dostoevsky's *The Gambler*, in its prophetic way, has much in common with the modernist works of addiction that have been discussed thus far. It is the only work in this investigation which addresses the "process addiction," yet the representation of Alexei's moral and mental collapse is as devastating as any tale of alcoholism or drug addiction. Dostoevsky's staggering insight into the inner mechanisms – sociological and psychological – of the addicted mind belies the inchoate understanding of addictive processes widely held in the nineteenth century, especially in Russia -- a nation so intimately associated with literature featuring excess (of emotion, drink, pleasure and pain). Not surprisingly, as in the cases of Rhys, London and Wilson, Dostoevsky's writing was informed by his generous private experience with addiction, and much of his personal narrative is invested in the story of Alexei, that inveterate young teacher-cum-gambler possessed of a soul-destroying egoism which renders all spiritual action on his proud soul virtually impotent. This egoistic mentality the author saw as all too prevalent among absentee Russians, those traveling abroad who had lost the spiritual connection with their homeland.[233] Dostoevsky's famous letter to Strakhov describes his protagonist as "*a typical figure*" in regards to his spiritual alienation:

> I depict a man of a most simple nature, a man who, while developed in many respects, is yet in every way incomplete, who has lost all faith, and at the same time does not dare to be a skeptic, who revolts against all authority and at the same time fears it. He comforts himself with the thought that in Russia there is nothing he can do, and therefore condemns in the harshest manner those who would summon the absentee Russian back to Russia ...[234]

"The main point [of the narrative]," Dostoevsky wrote, "is that all [Alexei's] vital sap, all his energies, his impetuousity and boldness, will be absorbed by roulette. He is a gambler, but not just an ordinary gambler."[235] Here Dostoevsky reveals, long before any

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[233] Savage, 112-113.
[234] Dostoevsky, Personal Correspondence. Quoted in Savage, 229.
[235] Ibid, 229-230.

contemporarily understood definition of addiction, how he perceived the malady of Alexei as a peculiar "dis-ease", one which is consistent with spiritual and social deprivation; the young man's situation "is a description of a sort of hell,"[236] a prison of his own making. Alexei's descent into the abyss is intensified in its pathos since he is "in his way, a poet, but he is ashamed of the way his poetic feelings are expressed and he feels [gambling's] ugliness deeply. Nevertheless, his need to risk something ennobles him in his own eyes."[237] Although intuitively he knows, in starting to gamble – initially for Polina and then for himself – that he is going to "wreck his own life,"[238] he finds quickly that "the excitement [of gambling] makes the stress and distress of that tepid life disappear, [nullifying] the basic needs of affection, sex, safety, hunger and sleep."[239] Upon realizing that his gambling urges lead to "agonizing, unbearable pain," as "euphoria and anguish alternate in his soul,"[240] Alexei remains irredeemably addicted and unrepentant, still believing that he "has only for once to show will power and in one hour [he] can transform [his] destiny!"[241]

The idea of risk as ennoblement of character comes to Alexei as a result of his growing "abandonment of himself to Fate, or to Chance."[242] His appointment as a teacher to the children of a socially disenfranchised military family has few rewards, and he chafes in his inglorious position, especially since he is obsessed with the older sister of his charges and wishes to win her respect. At the outset of the narrative, Alexei asserts to Polina that he is each day increasingly willing, in accordance with his passion for her, to

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[236] Ibid, 230.
[237] Ibid, 230.
[238] Dostoevsky, 21.
[239] Moore, vii.
[240] Leonard, 43.
[241] Dostoevsky, 179.
[242] Savage, 120.

commit his life completely to Fate. He demands of her, "How can I help being a fatalist? Do you remember the day before yesterday, on the Schlangenberg, I whispered at your provocation, 'Say the word, and I will leap into that abyss!' If you had said that word I would have leapt down then. Don't you believe I would have leapt down?"[243] Polina brushes the statement aside, but Alexei perceives that she looks "on [him] as that empress of ancient times looked on the slave before whom she did not mind undressing because she did not regard him as a human being. Yes, she did not regard [him] as a human being!"[244] Because of the modesty of his status, Alexei is constantly tormented by the clamoring of his ego, which prompts unusual, at times childish activity with regards to his work and social interaction.

Whereas initially Alexei believes his gravitation towards fatalism to be motivated by his love for Polina, he shortly comes to note that the casino inspires in him a similar exasperation with intractable, unalterable reality, and gives rise to a burgeoning desire to thwart the universal law. Alexei recognizes, while meditating on the action of the roulette table, that "a strange sensation [is rising up in him], a sort of defiance of fate, a desire to challenge it, to put out [his] tongue at it."[245] Concomitant to this sense of defiance seems to be a gradual obscuring of his judgment and morality, a sense that morals might be untenable in a universe ruled by Fate. Gambling presents itself as an alternative to the strictures of destiny.

> And yet it seemed to me that all this was deserving of very close attention ... as for my hidden moral convictions, there is no place for them, of course, in my present reasonings. Let that be enough for the present. I speak to relieve my conscience. But I notice one thing: of late it has become horribly repugnant to me to test my thoughts and actions by any moral standard whatever. I was guided by something different.[246]

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[243] Dostoevsky, 43.
[244] Ibid, 15.
[245] Ibid, 30.
[246] Ibid, 20.

Implicit in Dostoevsky's treatment of the narrative is the idea that, "to the man who, having lost God, is in the process of losing himself, free and responsible choice has been obviated, so that he is left facing a universe which is subject to ... an irreversible deterministic law."[247]Alexei lives in a dead world, divorced from all guiding spiritual principles; his lack of faith makes him vulnerable to addiction, which is in Dostoevsky's ethos corresponds to a form of evil. "The abandonment of self to fate is an unmitigated moral and spiritual disaster for man,"[248] Jackson notes, since the perception that the universe is meaningless denies the existence of God, and concomitantly any form of ethical design for life.

Alexei's perception of the emptiness of human choice and the futility of faith stems from with his unenviable social position and the alienation occasioned by his émigré status; his egoistic frustration is born of rebellion against a social and spiritual order which is profoundly immobile, and will not yield to his desires. It has been suggested above that alcoholics and drug addicts use substances to manipulate their perception of reality; the influence their drugs of choice enacts on a rigid reality allows for a greater "sense of ease and comfort," and a decreased sense of restlessness, irritability, and discontent.[249] Alexei's overriding sense is one of total disempowerment, and fury at his impotence – hence the hyperbolic "slave theory" with which he regales Polina – in a universe dictated by Fate; thus, he commends his spirit into the hands of Chance, the only force he knows which will combat Fate's mastery:

> To Fate, which is by definition mechanistically rational and calculable, nothing can be opposed except blind, irrational Chance ... For such a [man as Alexei], the fascination of the gaming table

[247] Savage, 120.
[248] Jackson, 188.
[249] AA, BB, xxvii.

> is that of the alteration of the calculable with the incalculable. Watching the spinning roulette wheel the gambler is, as it were, at the metaphysical source of being, and what he sees in front of him is none other than a symbolic model of the cosmic mechanism. The seduction which draws his soul is that of an ultimate and groundless freedom which, containing equally within itself every possibility, is devoid of the power to actualize any of these possibilities and can give birth only to an ineluctable necessity.[250]

Ironically, Alexei's escape into Chance negates itself, since he fatally fails to recognize that Fate and Chance are two sides of the same spiritless, godless coin.[251]

Gambling represents for Alexei an affirmation of the meaninglessness of the universe; if the universe is meaningless, then everything is possible, and the moral correlative of that belief suggests that all is permissible[252] -- an argument strangely reminiscent of that other famous Dostoevskian skeptic, The Underground Man. Alexei's turn to the dark forces implied by gambling is both a dangerous inquiry into the sources of power and an arrogant form of self-assertion. It is the a physical manifestation of the same urge to hurl himself from the Schlangenberg: "all gamblers possess this desire for free-fall, since to gamble is, indeed, to plunge. The sensation of plunging inspires vertigo, and clearly it is avidness for this vertiginous sensation"[253] which impels Alexei to his offer on Snake Mountain. Furthermore, it is this sensation which overcomes him when he makes his gratuitous affront to the Baron: "I can't make up my mind what happened to me, whether I was really in a state of frenzy ... at times it seemed to me that my mind was giving way. Goodness knows what impelled me [to act]! *I felt as though I were plunging into space.*"[254]

Yet for Alexei, this feeling of "free-fall" is a desirable one, and synonymous with a sort of "freedom," where the constraints of society are not imposed, and where

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[250] Savage, 120.
[251] Tumanov, personal communication.
[252] Jackson, 189.
[253] Ibid, 124.
[254] Ibid, 122.

"ungrounded rationality of pure possibility is injected into daily life."[255] This illusion of freedom is one which Alexei clings to as his gambling accelerates; "through chance, risk, the turn of the wheel, the gambler challenges fate and seeks to escape its tyranny"[256], unaware that he is dooming himself to permanent captivity in yet another ego-driven master-slave relationship. In seeking to resist the slavery of his love obsession and his unfulfilling social position, Alexei inadvertently reinforces his own bondage, and condemns his future to penury and despair:

> Had I any doubt of myself? And now more than a year and a half has passed, and I am, to my own mind, far worse than a beggar. Yes, what is being a beggar? A beggar is nothing! I have simply ruined myself! However, there is nothing I can compare myself with, and there is no need to give a moral lecture! Nothing could be stupider than moral reflections at this date! ... The point is that – one turn of the wheel, and all will be changed, and those very moralists will be the first (I am convinced of that) to come up to congratulate me with friendly jests. And they will not all turn away from me as they do now. But, hang them all! What am I now? Zero. What may I be tomorrow? Tomorrow I may rise from the dead and begin to live again! There are still the makings of a man in me.[257]

Alexei initially comes to gambling in search of a transformation, one which will vault him from his lowly position of "Zero" to a man of importance; "his desire for money is linked with a deep feeling of humiliation and entrapment,"[258] and he erroneously believes that wealth and personal power will transform his reality. Even after gambling has destroyed his life and stripped him of everything but his limitless egotism, he persists in the belief that gambling will be the agent by which he achieves his rebirth.

> [Alexei's] sense of bondage and need for liberation has a particularly disturbing character; it points to a profound feeling of weakness and inadequacy. He seeks in roulette a radical and decisive change in his fate. What he seeks in gambling is the restoration of a lost sense of being, self-determination, and mastery. Through gambling, he imagines he will become a different man ... will no longer be a zero and a slave. But it is precisely the craving for power, the need to challenge fate, that poisons his relationship with Polina.[259]

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[255] Ibid, 121.
[256] Jackson, 188.
[257] Dostoevsky, 169-170.
[258] Jackson, 196.
[259] Ibid.

Early in his descent, Polina asks him ironically, "Then you still continue in your conviction that roulette is your only escape and salvation?"[260] The statement is most ironic because, were Alexei able to conceive it, he might see that the possibility of a real union with Polina – with whom he might travel back to Russia, and find succor for his émigré woes – could provide the hope and salvation which gambling cannot. One is reminded of Raskolnikov's initial rejection of Sonya's love, preferring his suffering over the simple spiritual solution she offers. Similarly, Alexei is blinded by a distorted image of haughty Polina as "an ancient empress sadistically bent on tormenting a passionate lover"[261] – when in fact it is his appalling and erratic behavior which keeps her at bay. She cannot fathom his increasingly bizarre actions, which stem from his twisted perception of her as a (typical, Dostoevskian) cruel temptress. In fact she possesses a far purer soul than he, with his dreams of radical autonomy and power. This obvious personality disorder Alexei manifests is exacerbated by his increasing tendency to "draw Polina into the orbit of his gambling obsession."[262] His rage at a good woman, whom he perceives as the object of his frustration, is entirely misdirected, but even at the conclusion of the narrative he will only dimly perceive this. What Alexei believes to be his fate, as Savage has rightly noted, "is merely a projection of his inner despair ... with an inner change, a coming to himself, Polina would at once be his." [263] But Alexei, in his current moral and psychological state, is incapable of love, since his "neurotic gambling

[260] Dostoevsky, 22.
[261] Jackson, 202.
[262] Ibid, 197.
[263] Savage, 121.

passion has consumed all his psychic energies."[264] Polina and Alexei do not evolve into spiritual partners since

> in the relationship as determined by Alexei, they meet, not as persons, but as unbounded egos capable of nothing between total domination and absorption of the other, or total and suicidal submission. Polina's ... behavior ... results from her striving toward a relationship of love which is conceivable only when each party ceases to be an ego and becomes a personality in an inward relation to the authority of truth (through faith in God).[265]

This potential for conversion through a transformative human experience recalls Sasha's abortive relationship with Rene, with whom she might have developed a basis for a recovery from her alcoholism had she not been so spiritually and emotionally damaged. Polina desires an equitable relationship with Alexei, but his extravagant behavior and morbid obsessions speak against the sensibility of fostering a union: "When a limitless egoism, acknowledging no authority and therefore deprived of meaning and value, is brought into an erotic relationship, there result the convulsive lacerations described by Dostoevsky – the writhings of the disintegrating self in the throes of the knowledge of its own nothingness."[266] Only obedience to some power greater than "Fate" could transform Alexei from "an unbounded, ravenous and chaotic ego to a bounded personality, and make possible a relationship of love in which the tyranny of subject over object is replaced by the mutual intercourse of subject with subject." [267]

Dostoevsky's emphasis in his letter to Strakhov indicates how integral he intended the separation from Russian culture and religion to be in Alexei's downfall. The suggestion seems to be that perhaps, if the would-be lovers were not alienated from Russia, their souls would not be so conflicted. When Polina and Alexei spend the night together, Polina deliriously asks, "Shall we go away? Shall we go away tomorrow? ...

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[264] Jackson, 206.
[265] Ibid, 123.
[266] Ibid, 122.
[267] Ibid, 124.

Shall we overtake Granny; what do you think? I think we might overtake her in Berlin."[268] To follow Granny would be to return to Moscow, back "to Russian soul, Russian nationality, Russian identity, and away from the artificial, rootless, spiritually dead world of Roulettenberg. Russia, in Dostoevsky's design, means spiritual salvation."[269] Yet Alexei has already rejected the possibility of salvation; he will be heading not to Moscow, but to the "Sodom and Gomorrah of Paris."[270] It is partially this refusal to reconnect with a spiritual and cultural heritage which keeps Alexei adrift in his addictive passion. Not having the internal strength to achieve selfhood – which he might have with a social support network in his homeland – he turns to outside spectacle to fulfill what he erroneously believes are his needs.

It does seem, at the end of the narrative, that Polina is still willing to work at healing the "psychological wounds, resentments, and humiliations"[271] on both sides, but this sort of labor of the spirit is alien to Alexei, who perceives that their romantic situation will change as soon as he learns to apply his "willpower" more successfully to roulette. In this cyclical manner -- wherein Alexei destroys his chances at happiness by gambling but then continues to gamble with the fixed belief he will achieve happiness thereby -- Alexei fails utterly to achieve any human connection or self-understanding which would help to alleviate his mania. His own characterizations of his state of mind make clear that he is psychologically unbalanced; his addiction to gambling is a symptom of a larger mental and emotional problem, which in its turn is inflamed by his obsession with the power of fate and chance. Whether he can be deemed an "addict", in the sense

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[268] Dostoevsky, 149.
[269] Jackson, 206-207.
[270] Ibid, 207.
[271] Ibid, 196.

implied when that term is used in contemporary discourse, is unclear, although he seems to possess all the attributes of someone with a pronounced addiction. However, it would be reductive to assume that Dostoevsky's depiction of this tortured Russian soul was written to criticize the evils of gambling, or posit the existence of an undiscovered addictive disease. Dostoevsky uses "gambling" as a metaphor for the existential problems which face those who have no foundation – cultural, social, spiritual – on which to stand. Just as the addicts and alcoholics in much of the literature describe themselves as "empty", and needing to be "filled", the characters in *The Gambler* are possessed by an "evil" illusion that money and prestige will fill the emptiness inside them – emptiness which, Dostoevsky implies, can be attributed to their emigration from the positive influence of Russia. One might note that Marmeladov, another incorrigible addict, is spiritually "saved" through his repentance even though he cannot overcome his addiction. His ultimate salvation – in the Dostoevskian sense – transpires because of his connection to the Russian spiritual world; unlike Alexei, he is not blinded by the Western ideology of autonomy and power. It is the humility he evinces which allows for the salvation of his soul (even as his body expires from his addictive actions). Alexei, possessed by a more radical ideology, is too proud to repent, and thus has no access to the "saving grace" potentially bestowed by Russia.

The narrative framing of *The Gambler* uses a diary-format (hence the book's subtitle, "Notes of a Young Man") which demonstrates great gaps of chronology as well as some significant misinterpretation of facts. There is even a strong implication that Alexei may have written portions of the narrative while in a madhouse, and he wonders at one point if perhaps he may still be incarcerated and only imagining the events of his tale.

Although this fear is never verified, his suggestion of it arouses strong skepticism in the reader, who begins to doubt his interpretations of events. The first-person narration allows the reader to assess the validity of some of Alexei's claims, including his characterization of Polina, which is strikingly inconsistent and uninformed. As the pathological gambler persona gradually overtakes the narrative, Alexei disappears as a personality; as Astley says caustically to him at the end of the narrative,

> You've grown rusty ...you have not only given up life, all your interests, private and public, the duties of a man and a citizen, your friends (and you really had friends) – you have not only given up your objects, such as they were, all but gambling – you have even given up your memories. I remember you at an intense and ardent moment of your life, but I am sure you have forgotten all the best feelings you had then; your dreams, your most genuine desires now do not rise above *pair, impair, rouge, noir,* the twelve middle numbers, and so on, I am sure![272]

Thus Alexei fails at his quest for transformation, unmotivated as he is by anything beyond his own desire for domination and some assurance that his will is not impotent in a sterile universe. The reversal which transpires for him is the cruel opposite of the one he had hoped for. Still, he envisions salvation at the roulette table, couched in the rhetoric of Christian theology: he insists he plans "to begin anew, to rise again,"[273] as soon as possible, so that "tomorrow, tomorrow it will all be over!"[274]

Yet, having embraced a universe of futility and having transgressed so many moral boundaries, Alexei has ultimately condemned himself to "the despair of unbelief and the unconscious recognition that in a fate-ruled universe there is no tomorrow, but only a meaningless finality: death without resurrection."[275]

It is interesting to contrast the fate of Alexei with that of Raskonikov, the literary figure who emerged from the canon simultaneously with him. Raskolnikov, although not

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[272] Ibid, 174.
[273] Ibid, 179.
[274] Ibid, 180.
[275] Jackson, 209.

addicted to any substance, exhibits a similar mania to Alexei's, suffers from similar "evil" preoccupations, and demonstrates a similar lack of faith. Yet where Alexei shall experience the hell of death-in-life without hope of resurrection for the rest of his days, Raskolnikov is granted an awakening from his morbid fascination with power – his desire to be a Napoleon – and offered a Lazarus-like resurrection of his dead spirit by Sonja, who intercedes in his fate on God's behalf. This revitalizing human connection (which is also evidenced in such works as Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Illych*, where the transformation of Ivan is effected through his contact with Gerasim, and *The Brothers Karamazov*, where Dmitry is purified of his obsessions and addictions with help from Alyosha and Grushenka) is one of the major harbingers of spiritual awakening. My contention stands that spiritual transformation is frequently assisted – in this Literature of Addiction and in texts which feature emotional disturbance and trauma – by the action of others on the "sick soul", whether this action occurs in a treatment center, in an AA clubroom, or simply within a supportive, therapeutic relationship. In the next section we will explore how three awakenings are stimulated through the ethos of the mutual-help culture of the last decade in America.

Chapter Seven:
The Structure of Recovery Memoirs Part II:
More, Now, Again: A Memoir of Addiction – Parched – A Million Little Pieces

This section will deal with the legacy of the AA narrative and the other literary works which adumbrated that development. In the interest of establishing conclusions about the Literature of Addiction, we shall at last turn our attention to the 'hybrid' child of the AA narrative and the "fictional autobiography" of addiction: the modern illness/addiction quest memoir. This format is arguably the most contemporary, popular, and mainstream vehicle for the narration of the spiritual awakening. Despite the existence of many works of literature which feature recovery from illness, trauma, or various sorts of debilitating circumstances (homelessness, obesity, anorexia, amputations), it is primarily in contemporary quest memoirs from the Literature of Addiction that an overt focus is placed on the "development of a spiritual design for living" as a remedy for disease/dis-ease. This epistemological and narratological shift in the expression of addiction is one that developed from the influence of AA, from the increasing application of narrative therapy in treating alcoholics and addicts, and from the gradual appearance after the 1940s of such fictional narratives which recognized that a spiritual solution could answer the malady of addiction – whether they applied this solution or not (*Brideshead Revisited, Long Day's Journey into Night, Falconer, A Fan's Notes, Moscow to the End of the Line*).

In the contemporary addiction memoir, the perfect fusion of the heritage of the Literature of Addiction with the "spiritual solution" as propagated by the ethos of AA is accomplished. Interestingly, these memoirs also casually represent the domain of fiction and its capacity for expressing the spiritual awakening, since the structure and form of

modern memoirs often result from some mating of literal truth with fictive construction. This "development" in the addiction memoir was made widely known with the controversy surrounding the reception of *A Million Little Pieces* which, despite being touted as the true experience its author, was revealed to be rife with "facts" partially from the author's imagination. Our brief investigation into the Literature of Addiction shall rightly end with this novel which fuses fiction and experience in a construct catering directly to the recovery-community influenced expectations of an "American public [now] deeply interested in stories of recovery, personal transformation, and heroic self-reliance."[276] That this perfect construct was derided as a "cheat" when it was revealed that its factual bases were unsupportable is a telling aspect of the current American sensibility regarding the narrative strategies of relating recovery from addiction.

Although addiction memoirs of an inchoate form did exist before the advent of Alcoholics Anonymous, as we have seen from our investigation into *John Barleycorn* (and the briefly considered *A Fan's Notes*) these memoirs do not necessarily reflect the addict's desire for recovery/sobriety/abstinence, which today typically constitute one of the governing factors in the narrative, both structurally and thematically. Hurwitz et al. point out that one of the major determining characteristics of the addiction narrative is its consideration of addiction as a malady requiring a spiritual "cure." In latter-day addiction memoirs (those published in the last fifty years),

> the addict's illness is perceived as a psychological and emotional journey in which the sickness of the body gathers less significance. Addiction narratives inherently tend to moralize experience of the addictive processes, diminishing ... consideration of physical or physiological aspects of addiction ...
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> What separates the addiction narrative from other contemporary illness narratives is its tendency to understand addiction as a spiritual affliction. Here the addictive substance or activity is of less

[276] Hamilton, 1.

> relevance: only when the addict has realized the burden of addiction may he or she return to a state of spiritual well-being, reflecting the ethos of Alcoholics Anonymous and similar organizations.[277]

Addiction memoirs are frequently categorized with illness narratives, yet while the latter often underscore the somatic aspects of the affliction, the former tend to deemphasize physical aspects of the disease in favor of more moral and spiritual aspects, manipulating how the balance between psychological and physiological addiction is expressed. In the words of Frank, "a published narrative of an illness is not the illness itself, but it can become the experience of the illness,"[278] in the sense that the telling is a transformative experience, for both the narrator and the reader/listener. From an anthropological standpoint,

> three characteristics of narrative – relation, by means of its introduction of a second point of view or perspective or mode; sequence, by its management of our psychological response to both; and temporal markers and the peculiar definition they bring in combination with the other two characteristics – are proto-interpretive. They result in a transformation of facts ... Narrative is a device that reflects on and transforms data or experiences.[279]

The autobiographical illness narrative, with respect to recovery, typically falls into one of five (sometimes overlapping) categories: the Alcoholics Anonymous/ Treatment Centre story; the growth story; the co-dependence story; the love story; or the mastery story.[280] Furthermore, Frank has suggested that, although individuals tell their own particular stories, they usually draw on "narrative types" that contemporary culture makes available to them, and he proposes three such narrative types: the restitution narrative, the chaos narrative, and the quest narrative.[281] The restitution narrative tends to be institutionally influenced, with the predominant notion being that illness is curable and a return to the "norm" of good health is attainable. These narratives tend not to emphasize

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[277] Hurwitz et al., 40-43.
[278] Frank, 22.
[279] Hurwitz et al., 11.
[280] Hanninen & Koski-Jannes, 1837-1848.
[281] Frank, 92.

struggles in the soul, but focus on the need to restore the physical body. The chaos narrative represents the opposite end of the spectrum since it never imagines improvement or change in the condition or the physical body; typically it expresses suffering with little or no narrative sequence (such as in Henri Michaux's 1967 work, *Miserable Miracle*).[282]

The quest narrative most commonly fits with the contemporary illness narrative, and figures prominently in the Literature of Addiction, with the quest narrative/AA story being a regularly observed combination of forms (although one of the memoirs discussed here, *A Million Little Pieces*, is a quest narrative which subverts the AA story, reforming it into a mastery story). In the quest schema illness or addiction is transformed into a journey through the sick person/addict's narration; "notably the quest narrative features a change in character as a result of suffering through sickness."[283] This change in character corresponds to the "personality change sufficient to overcome alcoholism" referred to in *Alcoholics Anonymous* as another version of the educational variety of spiritual awakening. Indeed, many quest narrative/AA stories thematize the act of writing and telling stories as part of the spiritual awakening process (see *More, Now, Again: A Memoir of Addiction* and *Broken: My Story of Addiction and Redemption,* both of which have their narrators seek continued spiritual sustenance during recovery via the transformative act of writing). There is, to some extent, the same process of identity acquisition in these memoirs that Cain speaks of with regards to AA sharing and story-telling. Here the non-addict personality is being created, and the narrator builds and nurtures self-hood through narrative. According to Castel et al., in exploring the

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[282] Ibid.
[283] Hurqitz et al., 22.

"autobiographical ability" of drug addicts in early recovery, which is similar to the ability to "narrate oneself" described by Ricoeur,

> recovery could be some form of mastery over the autobiographical discourse, an acquired ability to see oneself through an image, through a determined, cohesive, structured identity that can in some cases be positive ... the narrative is perhaps not only *a narrative about* recovering from addiction; it can also be a *component* of recovery.[284]

It was noted above that many memoirs tend to feature similar patterns of plot development, and many seem to have interchangeable thematic concerns as well as remarkably similar endings. Castel et al. suggested that there are striking parallels between addicts' own accounts of their experiences and the characterizations of the recovery process in addiction literature written by professionals. In the professional opinion, the similarities between addicts' narratives and the accounts of addiction written by researchers and practitioners "may be a product not so much of the intrinsic nature of recovery, as of the socially constructed nature of the narrative process."[285] It is important to remember that addiction is a "resource of great narrative versatility" which provides an "organizing framework" for all manner of experiences. Because of this thematic versatility, the reader must approach the addiction narrative with recognition of its "constructedness,"[286] and not perceive the narrative to be representative of factual information.

In considering any narrative account of addiction, whether it be AA vignette or full-length memoir, a number of factors regarding "narrative framing" must be taken into account before generalizations can be made.[287] One needs to decide 1) what kind of relationship the narrative is trying to establish with its readers; 2) how that relationship is

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[284] Castel et al., 56.
[285] Castel et al., 1508.
[286] Williams quoted in Hurwitz., 26.
[287] Hurwitz et al., 24.

tempered by narrative atmosphere; 3) how the addiction functions in the narrative (is it a metaphor for a "higher" focus such as the Imagination?); 4) what type of stance the reader is meant to take towards the narrator (typically in the "sick role", a role in the story defined and dominated by the experience of sickness and others' reaction to it); 5) what ethos the narrative is presented in (19th century Russia, etc. with the social perceptions of addiction at that time); and 6) how popular cultural cliché or evangelism might affect the narration of the experience of addiction.[288]

Asking these questions with relation to three popular memoirs of the last ten years, we find that all three are written in the confessional format, and are first-person quest narratives involving elements of the AA story and the mastery story. *A Million Little Pieces* (2003) is the controversial novel-memoir about James Frey's crack addiction and his experience in the Hazelden treatment centre in Minnesota; the book is unique not only for the narrator's refusal to accept addiction as an illness, but also his complete rejection of a "Higher Power" and most of the elements of Alcoholics Anonymous. Furthermore, the narrative begins with its narrator already sober, on his way to the treatment centre; the reader is not privy to any of his active addiction first-hand, yet the physical aspects of his recovery are grotesquely highlighted ("Blood and bile and chunks of my stomach come pouring from my mouth and my nose … [vomit] gets stuck … in what remains of my teeth"[289]). Many of the entrenched notions of recovery and the addiction memoir are subverted in this narrative, which is more akin to a personal mastery story featuring the triumph of the narrator. In a wholly different key, *Parched* (2005), by essayist/commentator Heather King, is a compassionate, biblically-framed

[288] Ibid, 24-27.
[289] Frey, 20.

exploration of alcohol addiction, which espouses an ethic of solidarity with fellow sufferers,[290] others who might be suffering from that spiritual thirst, those who cry, "Save us, Lord, or we shall perish / Turn us back."[291] Predictably, King's account is the most conventional representative of the AA narrative. *More, Now, Again: A Memoir of Addiction* (2002) by Elizabeth Wurztel focuses on the narrator's recovery from depression, the difficulty of which is exacerbated by the depression's mutation into an addiction to psychiatric drugs (Ritalin) and cocaine. Wurtzel's account provides the most in-depth analysis into AA, with the narrator's first recovery (followed by a long relapse) coming just halfway through the 329-page narrative. All three memoirs feature the treatment centre as one of the primary settings; the presentation of this institution is a current staple in contemporary addiction narrative, and one which evolved from presentations like that in Willie Seabrook's *Asylum* and Frederick Exley's *A Fan's Notes.* All three feature a spiritual awakening of sorts, two facilitated by AA (*More, Now, Again: A Memoir of Addiction* and *Parched*) and one via personal mastery – and the *Tao te Ching* – as well as a series of transformative human experiences (*A Million Little Pieces*).

Wurtzel's memoir is informed and influenced by her prior psychiatric history, and constitutes a response to and continuation of her earlier novel *Prozac Nation*, which was a confessional illness narrative about depression. Wurtzel is less likely to moralize the addictive process, which is a common narrative framing device (used extensively by King) since her views on addiction are profoundly related to mental illness; she does not characterize herself as "immoral" but rather sick:

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[290] Hurwitz et al. 32.
[291] Matthew 8:25, quoted in King, 209.

> There was not a single thing wrong with me. I was born with everything I needed ... and then something went terribly wrong. When I was eleven or twelve, all that joy just went away. I don't know where it went, and I don't know why. I could sit here and blame it on bad parents, on divorce, on my father's drugs, on growing up in a crazy time ... I could say that my chemistry got twisted, that depression took over my body and soul like a sickening plague of the cells, like the terrible disease it is. I could tell you I cut up my legs and arms with a razor blade and a knife on my key ring for hours every day, because the pain was a relief from pain, other kinds of pain ... I look back now and I know there are no reasons.[292]

Unlike Frey, who heroically decides to shoulder complete moral responsibility for his past actions, refusing to adopt any views of illness which would exculpate him, Wurtzel expresses a nurturing and forgiving attitude towards her former self, one which lays the responsibility for the addiction in darker outside forces. Her revelation is the realization that she herself is innocent: "But then I found out that when I took away everything that was awful, when I pushed all the dark away, I was just good. Underneath I was good."[293] Although by the end of the narrative she has "surrendered," her portrait of herself is of one who has long resisted help from others because of a deep sense of egoistic self-hatred, and she is saved by the realization that

> enough is enough of this sad family, with all its grief and depression and sorrow that get passed on and on, this miserable birthright, this ugly heirloom ... my great-grandfather was a drunk, my grandfather was a drunk, my father is a drug addict, and I am the fourth generation of sinners ...The legacy stops here with me. Anything that happened before is gone. This is my world. This is my home.[294]

Wurtzel's memoir deliberates on the psychic struggles which arise from her addiction and mental illness; obsessive-compulsivity occasioned by her stimulant use manifests itself in intense periods of trichotillomania, which are graphically described in the text. There is a definite focus on the notion of drug addiction having arisen out of depressive tendencies. Even as her narrator heads towards sober enlightenment, Wurtzel holds steadfast to her opinion that although addiction may be a spiritual illness, it is a

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[292] Wurtzel, 328.
[293] Ibid.
[294] Ibid, 328-329.

spiritual illness that is – in her case – born of and compounded by mental health issues. While this is certainly a defensible position, it obfuscates the message typically brought forward in the AA narrative, namely, that alcoholism/addiction is a spiritual malady, rather than a mental one, and that addiction is not a secondary but a primary illness. As noted, addiction narratives and especially ones influenced by AA tend to moralize the experience of addictive processes; by redefining the nature of the illness, Wurtzel has relieved her narrative of much of the moral thrust typically found in accounts of recovery from addiction:

> This is how you become an addict. You have no inner resources, you drive people crazy with all your neediness, years go by, you don't grow up, people lose patience, and all that's left is whatever gets you through. Lots of people will go out on a binge if they get fired or their girlfriend leaves, but not me. That stuff, I can handle. For me, it's the broken shoelaces that have got me hooked … It's the stuff that most people can handle that makes addicts get high. We get high over nothing.[295]

Wurtzel's narrative is consciously self-indulgent, and like many confessional addiction narratives, it is an extended meditation on the thoughts, feelings, psychology, and history of the individual occupying the sick role (most often the first person narrator. In *Brideshead Revisited,* however, the sick role is occupied by Sebastian, while Charles Ryder recounts the first person narration of his illness; Sebastian is given no voice to deliberate on his existential position). Wurtzel sets up a dynamic from the first pages of the memoir where we are given to understand the primacy of the development of self-hood for Elizabeth, who is the possessor of extraordinary gifts but who is possessed by overwhelming demons. Wurtzel, like Frey, manages to curry favor for her narrative representation of herself, ironically by depicting her narrative self in an unrelentingly unflattering light. The audience-narrator relationship is meant to be an extremely intimate one, as Elizabeth reveals directly to the reader certain aspects she is unwilling to discuss

[295] Ibid, 59.

with her doctors and counselors (aspects of her relationship with Hank, her opinions, the depths of her depressive and addictive depravity). The strength of this relationship is what exculpates Elizabeth from many of her grosser personality flaws and establishes a bond of identification between narrator and reader.

Wurtzel uses an interesting narrative device to communicate directly with the reader throughout the text: she breaks away from the main line of the narrative, in italicized print, to comment on and further elucidate certain episodes of the past, and her reactions to the present. However, this commentary does not stem from the "recovered," enlightened persona we see at the end of the narrative, but rather from some intermediate recovering stage, a persona which possesses more knowledge than the Elizabeth just beginning her journey, and yet less knowledge than the recovered Elizabeth who writes the entire text. This "intermediate" commentator is gradually phased out as "actively addicted Elizabeth" and "recovering Elizabeth" draw closer together.

> *Love is all around, and I know I've got to clean up. I know I cannot forsake this love. I know my friends don't deserve this. I know my life doesn't merit this.*
> *So I am going to finish writing my book. I am going to check myself in. I am going to do all of the things I am supposed to do. I'm committed to it – but what will end my loneliness? After I get off the rehab assembly line, after I finish being the recalled model that's gone back to the factory for new parts, who is the owner that is going to claim me?*
> *They can take away my drugs, but I cannot imagine that they will ever take away my loneliness.*[296]

This intermediate, expository narrator makes her last appearance about twenty pages before the text ends; the last commentary is in regards to Elizabeth's theological struggle with the Higher Power. She is Jewish, but finds that Christianity brings her solace in her recovery:

> *And then I think of the Velvet Underground's doleful song, "Jesus," from their third ... album ... "Jesus / Help me find my proper place / Help me in my weakness / 'Cause I'm falling out of grace." The only words in the song, repeated repeatedly, composed by Lou Reed, a Jew. You see, in this hour of darkness, it is easier to turn to the Son of God than to God Himself, for some reason. I'm not sure why.*

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[296] Ibid, 123.

> *So maybe I am not supposed to accept Jesus as my savior, but that trembling stir of awe would be enough for me. It would do the trick. It really would. If I cannot pray for it, I can at least beg for it. That faith will save my life.*[297]

With the disappearance of the intermediate narrator, Elizabeth achieves an integration of the self-hood she was previously lacking. When she comes to the understanding that addiction is a spiritual illness which requires a spiritual solution – peculiarly enough a more Christian one than she had been offered in the past; perhaps Judaism was insufficient for Wurtzel, lacking an adequate emphasis on forgiveness for sins – and commits herself to the behaviors required of a person working toward a spiritual awakening, she starts to experience the effects of sustained abstinence and moral regeneration:

> I had thought there was nothing left of me ... but it turns out that it might just be okay ... I start to think that maybe, God is doing for me what I cannot do for myself. That transformation I have been waiting for all my life, that moment when I would be me, really me, true to myself and feel all right – it has finally arrived. For the first time ever, when people ask me how I am, I say that I am happy.
> Happy.[298]

Elizabeth's ultimate recognition of her innate worth and redemptive potential is highlighted in the epigraph for the narrative, chosen from the position of full recovery, when she is able to reflect upon her growth. The passage, from Augustine's *Confessions*, reflects her belief in the importance of self-love as per the spiritual awakening: "Too late came I to love you, O your Beauty both so ancient and so fresh. Yet too late came I to love you. And behold, you were within me, and I out of myself, where I made search for you."[299]

More interesting than Wurtzel's rather typical recovery is her focus on the writerly aspects of construction in an addiction narrative. As Jerome Bruner has noted,

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[297] Ibid, 308.
[298] Ibid, 325.
[299] Epigraph to the memoir.

individuals relate to their lives as narratives, not as ongoing phenomenological trains of experiences. The events of Elizabeth's life and recovery have meaning as elements of her narrative, not because they are intrinsically imbued with significance. Her crafting of the structure of the narrative to reveal its constructedness indicates her awareness of the importance of the narrative process in achieving awakening:

> A life is a work of art, possibly the greatest one we produce. It is not simply art in the living. For we do not live our lives in any naked sense, save when we are caught aback and leave our faces behind. Rather, the art is in the *telling* – the telling after the fact to ourselves and others. But it is *not* a fiction, nor is it, for that matter, the real thing. It some amalgam of the two – both theatre and what theatre's about.[300]

Wurztel begins the body of her narrative (Chapter One is entitled "Revelation") with a rehearsal of the progression of her addiction, beginning each separate incident with the phrase "the first time":

> The first time I took Ritalin I had been clean for four months ... the first time I smoked pot was in high school, I think at a Neil Young concert ... the first time I got stoned I was a freshman in college ... the first time I did coke was also my first year in college, in Noah Kellogg's bathroom ... the first time I took Ecstasy it was 1985, it was still legal, it was the first time I had tried anything at all psychedelic ... the first time I took psilocybin mushrooms was with Ruby ... the first time I dropped acid, which was also the last time, I was a freshman in college ...
> The first time, the first time, the first time: It never gets any better than that.[301]

This summary is followed by a second litany of personal "firsts", some of which are directly related to Elizabeth's drug use, some of which are not. The reader is given to understand that once drugs entered Elizabeth's life, their effect subsumed any energy she might have directed towards activities of living:

> The first book I had published was Prozac Nation, and after that I got addicted to drugs. The first book I wrote was an illustrated guide to pet care, specifically parakeets, when I was six years old ... the first play I wrote was in third grade ... the first time I took trigonometry I was in eighth grade ... the first time I had sex I was nineteen years old ... the first time I qualified at an AA meeting, it was the Perry Street Group, in 1996 ... the first time I did drugs after I left [rehab] was the day I got home ... when you do drugs, you don't count first times because they recede so fast. You count grams and eightballs and ounces and lines, you count how much cash you've got before you have to go to the ATM and get some more.[302]

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[300] Bruner, 7-9.
[301] Wurztel, 15-16.
[302] Ibid, 16-17.

Wurztel underscores the constructedness of the narrative by this repetition, while at the same time emphasizing her recognition that the quest for the return to "the first time" is a fruitless one. The only quest worthy of her attention is the quest for selfhood, a lost commodity which can only be rediscovered by the recognition of her identity as an addict.[303] Paradoxically, learning to apply this definition to the self opens the addict to life experiences which are no longer circumscribed by the addiction, allowing the relative "true" self to emerge:

> Narrative accounts confirm that addiction expresses powerful attachment to a substance or an activity. The addiction narrative tends also to reflect on and transform the experience of this attachment, reordering, in many cases, the complex relationship between addict and substance or activity. The subjective experience of addiction is frequently implied through the identity of the addict in the narrative, conveying how the self (both sober and addicted) negotiates its relationship with the outside world.[304]

Prior to her recovery, Wurtzel utilized her drugs of choice to "steady and assure [her] selfhood ... since her relationship to others was "incomplete and without foundation", she sought "confirmation of identity outside the self."[305] At least this is "how the narrator-addict understands addiction as a result of reflecting on [her] experience in narrative form."[306] At the beginning of her narrative, intermediate-recovery Elizabeth tells us, "*Here is how heroin – how all drugs – makes me feel: Quite simply, it makes me feel okay to be me. Here is how I feel not on drugs: I hate me.*"[307] By the end of the narrative, in the Epilogue – entitled, "More, Now (Again)", another reflection on narrative construction – Elizabeth tells the reader: "All I have left inside is gratitude. All I can ever feel anymore, even when I'm in my worst moods and everything seems to go

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[303] Hurwitz et al, 32.
[304] Ibid, 33.
[305] Ibid.
[306] Ibid.
[307] Wurztel, 25.

wrong, is gratitude ... it is impossible to hate life or anything about it."[308] The progression from the initial perception to the end perception is not, Wurtzel assures us, the only relevant narrative. The first line of the Epilogue and the last line of the book are "Here's how the story begins"; hence, the reader is invited to assume that Wurtzel's recovery narrative is only the beginning of the life she intends to "write." The addiction and recovery as recounted in the memoir are thus established as only the first elements in a life narrative which, having been shaped in this particular text through the lens of the recovery process, will now continue without addiction or illness and dominant forces. A coherent self has been attained, and it is now possible to take that self from the narrative and into a social existence, post-awakening.

Heather King's *Parched* follows similar lines of development, structure and theme, but utilizes far more religious overtones, and even takes its title from Christ's utterance of "Sitio" ("I thirst") which John reports from the crucifixion.[309] King aligns her addictive "spiritual thirst" with that of Christ, and in doing so co-opts some of the mystique of the ultimate redemption – of fallen, sinful man ascending to God incarnate – for her own narrative of rebirth. Each of King's chapters is headed by a verse from the Bible, or from such religious thinkers as Dostoevsky and Gerard Manley Hopkins, reaffirming a constant ethos of religiosity, even as the narrative veers away from religious subject matter. Far more conventional and much less "post-modern" than Wurtzel's or Frey's memoirs, *Parched* is a far more conservative recovery narrative, and King "displays an ethic of inspiration as [she] demonstrates what may be accomplished in

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[308] Ibid, 328.
[309] John 19:28, as quoted as the epigraph to the memoir.

difficult times."[310] More than any book-length narrative discussed in this investigation, *Parched* fulfills all the public and publisher expectations which have come to define the Literature of Addiction memoir in the decades after AA.

King's memoir is not, like Wurtzel's, an *apologia pro vita sua*; she mounts no defense against her active addiction and portrays it in the typical fashion expected of an AA-descended narrative, that is, as an illness of mind, body and spirit which requires "unburdening and reflecting on in narrative form."[311] Like similar narratives, *Parched* organizes King's past experiences of addiction from the enlightened point of recovery, desiring the health of the sick narrator and her recovery from alcoholism; "the narrative seeks to return to what culture perceives as normal, namely, to be healthy and free of addiction."[312]

The narrative framing that King uses (as well as Frey and Wurtzel) recasts the entire life history of the narrator as a history of addiction; events that may have had no moral significance until the addiction was admitted become landmarks along the progression of the illness. In King's narrative, for example, forgetting to buy her father a present for his birthday – a relatively benign occurrence – becomes a profound indicator to the reader of the depth of her selfishness in active addiction. Once the addiction has been accepted as an organizing interpretive framework for the narrative, many events can be readily categorized as being of an addictive nature. This type of narrative representation of addiction is possible only if the mores of recovery have been internalized by the narrator: that is, if they have learned the AA recovery paradigm and are utilizing it to reconstruct their past experience in light of "what they have learned."

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[310] Hurwitz et al., 22.
[311] Ibid, 38.
[312] Ibid.

King's depictions of her alcoholic existence in the Prologue are heightened to reflect her active construction of a time when she was still willfully in denial and actively engaged in her addiction. In a moment of relative sobriety – in her first moments awake one morning – King assesses her situation:

> I let my gaze wander around my clutter-strewn, single-room-occupancy loft: dead plants, cracked windows, no sink, no stove ... I was an alcoholic, I knew that, and yet to stop ... it was impossible to describe the monumental abyss that would mean crossing. My entire identity was tied up in drinking. Every ounce of my mental, emotional and physical energy was devoted to drinking, My entire life revolved around drinking. And on top of that I was *physically* addicted: every neuron, every minute of the day and night, cried out for alcohol, like a plant during a drought. Not that this in the least made me want to stop. Or rather, I didn't believe I could stop and therefore didn't allow myself to want to stop.[313]

King suffers from Wurtzel's "postmodern denial"; she knows she is an alcoholic, but she is still determined to pursue her addiction to the bitter end, since she cannot conceive herself being capable of living any other kind of life. The sort of denial that is exhibited here is not a denial of the situational truth, but a denial of life itself: of all that is positive about a balanced, sanguine, and morally structured existence. King's rejection of life is born out of hopelessness in this early point in the narrative, yet that her redemption will arise somehow out of this morass can be presupposed by the reader. Clearly it is not in suspense of the ending that the reader waits on King's words; it is the intimacy which is fostered between narrator and reader and the implication of the reader into the addictive conflict that generates sympathy and interest for King's plight.

The body of the memoir employs a more knowing, "recovering/recovered" voice which is refracted through the addicted voice, to interpret events and order disconnected elements of the narrative; this governing writerly voice of memoirist King relates her story from the standpoint of one redeemed. Following the Prologue, Chapter One begins

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[313] King, 4.

with a reference to Psalm 51, "Oh see, in guilt I was born / A sinner I was conceived."[314] King reconstructs her childhood years with metaphors and analogies which predict her addiction later in life, and recasts the addiction as the dominant force which has shaped her personality and perceptions:

> Perhaps it's true that geography is destiny, for the distinguishing feature of my New Hampshire childhood was the gigantic hole behind our house known simply as "The Pit". My older brother and sister set off cherry bombs in the pit, we staged snowball battles in the pit, the view from my bedroom window was of the Pit: a big, gouged-out pit with bare, dun-brown runnels and washes that had been excavated to provide gravel for Route 95, the interstate turnpike that ran a mile west of our backyard. Chin mashed to the sill, I gazed out over that unsightly gash, burning it into my brain as a metaphor for the dry well I already knew I was going to spend my life trying to fill.[315]

This emptiness in the psyche ("hole-in-the-soul") is an almost stock phrase used in recovery literature; it refers to the erroneous belief that "something outside of the self will provide relief and solace and well-being,"[316] with that "something" usually a substance designed to alter basic reactions to life. According to King's narrative construction, she has always felt the inchoate addiction inside her, clamoring for some purchase in her life:

> Born with a black cloud over my head, every tiny thing a struggle, I was tormented from the start by a skewed perspective and overwrought nerves that would later make obliviousness so inviting. I looked well-adjusted enough on the outside, but on the inside, my distorted thoughts had already begun to double back, settle into obsessive ruts, feed on themselves. Telltale signs of a prematurely twisted psyche – morbid sensitivity, exaggerated fear – leaked out all over the place, just as an apparently healthy gum, in the early stages of pyorrhea, when pressed sometimes oozes blood.[317]

King, in her formative years, recounts that she "was already willing to go to any lengths for a drop of approval, a dribble of the sense of belonging, a trickle of the feeling that [she] was loved."[318] She recounts the incident when, during the breath-holding competition at Field Day, she forces herself to "the verge of requiring CPR", but she wins

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[314] Psalm 51, quoted in King, 15.
[315] King, 15-16.
[316] Knapp, 55.
[317] King, 17.
[318] Ibid, 20.

the contest and receives a pat on the arm and a quick "Atta girl" from the camp counselor. "Already I was practically willing to die for [approval],"[319] King notes, in point of illustration of how her alcoholism manifested itself in a lack of self-worth and a cogent sense of her own identity. The body of the narrative is concerned with this search for identity, and the struggle to reclaim that which has been lost to illness, addiction and malaise – the act of writing is directed towards a return to that edenic state of integrity, of integrated person-hood.

The religious nature of King's narrative (at least, the outer framing) makes references to alcoholism as a *felix culpa* – another characteristic perception of the reframed recovery memoir. Describing her childhood fear of aliens, King comments, "I didn't know that the enemy was not outside, but within. I didn't know that the enemy had been creeping through the family of mankind, in one way or another, since Eve succumbed to the serpent. I didn't know that the enemy was me."[320] Here King seems to be categorizing addiction as the work of dark forces which desire man's downfall, forces which every man carries within his breast, and which are identified with evil in its most primal form.

Paradoxically – and the Literature of Addiction loves paradox, which is considered one of the hallmark features of The Big Book – it is this force seeking our downfall which simultaneously brings us closer to God:

> The sober alcoholic's first drink ... recalls the Christian paradox of the fortunate Fall (*felix culpa*). Without the original sin of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from the Garden, there would have been no need for divine redemption and thus no possibility of a heavenly city that transcends the edenic paradise lost. When some AA's introduce themselves as "grateful recovering alcoholics", what they mean is that without the fall into alcoholism, there would have been no salvation in

[319] Ibid.
[320] Ibid, 18.

> sobriety; without the nightmare of drinking, they never would have found a life in Alcoholics Anonymous that is, as the AA maxim has it, "beyond our wildest dreams.[321]

King's description of her first drink fits this paradigm: "They say normal people don't remember their first drink … but I remember every detail about mine: the moss covered stone wall we parked beside, the air smelling of fresh, rain-dampened earth, the spring peepers sending up their hopeful song."[322] Thus far King's identity has been presented as having no real foundation to attach itself to, with the possible exception of junior high school basketball and books. In addiction memoirs, "recollections of pleasurable experiences do not regularly feature in the narrative … furthermore, attachment to attachment to an addictive substance or activity is perceived as wrong, even as a sign of weakness … the quest narrative seeks elevation through sobriety."[323] The illness has already evolved, King implies, by the time she takes her first drink, and the introduction of the substance into her system does not seem to compound the problem; in fact, it mimics the solution:

> I knew this was a rite of passage, and it made me a little sad and scared to think I was leaving my childhood behind … And then I took a sip [of beer]: on top cool and clean, like the driest ginger ale and underneath, a whopping poisonous aftertaste that made me want to gag …
> I choked down another sip … I swallowed a third time, throat burning, eyes stinging, trying so hard not to throw up it felt like the top of my head would come off. The next sip went down a teeny bit easier. I rested for a minute, took a deep breath, garnered my strength. The next sip went down easier still.
> They talk about crossing an invisible line, but there was no invisible line for me: my awakening was instantaneous and it was complete. For halfway through the first bottle, suddenly, miraculously, I was transformed. Suddenly I felt pretty, competent, at ease; I felt embraced and welcome; I suddenly realized I *loved* Mercedes … and I'd never told her![324]

King perceives alcohol as the "solution" for which she has thirsted; upon her "conversion" after the first experience with alcohol, she says of being drunk that "that sense of connection, of being one with the universe, was so sublime that already I was

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[321] Raphael, 33.
[322] King, 64.
[323] Hurwitz et al., 40.
[324] King, 65-66.

prepared to make any sacrifice, overcome any amount of pain to recapture it."[325] This is a parody of the spiritual awakening, which the recovered King has constructed from the perspective of real spiritual conversion, and which is meant to function as a baseline for the comparison of King's transformative experiences. Having begun her descent into addictive nadir, King will find, like Dante in *The Inferno*, that while her path appears to progress unilaterally *down* the spiral of addiction, she is actually progressing upwards, towards redemption. From her privileged narrator perspective, armed with the notions of AA, King mourns her lack of knowledge at the time of the first drink:

> I didn't know that when it came to alcohol, I was bodily and mentally different from other people. I didn't know that when a drink entered my system, I was hardwired to want a second, a third, and so on to infinity. I didn't know that a craving had been triggered whereby I was bound to keep drinking until I got locked up in a mental institution or landed in jail or died ... But already I couldn't have stopped. I didn't know that by taking the first drink I had surrendered my free will: the thing that distinguishes a human being from an animal.[326]

The rest of the narrative centers on "the quest to undo the illness and the affliction of the individual [which is] a spiritual endeavor, in which the 'true' identity of the addict [King] needs to be recovered."[327] One hundred and fifty pages after her first drink provided such a brilliant solution to the trauma of life, King finds herself, not unexpectedly for the reader, in the depths of an addiction from which there seems no escape. A passage from her journal relates her existential terror at the prospect of continuing to live an alcoholic life:

> "The temptation I have been <u>powerless</u> to resist all my adult life – the one which has been responsible for virtually all of my misery, the one which has made me a failure, which has largely shaped my reputation and character in the cruel, unflinching eyes of the world – is, yes, the deadly demon ALCOHOL: my nemesis, my Armageddon, my albatross, the noose around my neck, my personal skull-and-crossbones. I hate to keep dwelling on it, but I must, for it has quite <u>literally</u> taken control of my life ..."[328]

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[325] Ibid, 66.
[326] Ibid, 67.
[327] Hurwitz et al., 40.
[328] King, 238.

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[325] Ibid, 66.
[326] Ibid, 67.
[327] Hurwitz et al., 40.
[328] King, 238.

In *More, Now, Again,* Wurztel's bottom, interestingly, comes when she misses an appointment to be photographed for an advertisement for purses; she subsequently slips into a working "coma", where she remains, snorting lines of Ritalin and typing her book, until she enters treatment. King's bottom is more spiritually systematic, and addresses all the elements of spiritual awakening prescribed by the format of the modern recovery narrative. A point comes – an existential crisis – in the trajectory beyond which she realizes her life will be worth nothing, a point past which she is not prepared to go: "These turning points or key moments are often accompanied or preceded by some experience or event that serves to trigger the decision."[329] In King's case, it is a vision of the supernatural world to which she had never before been privy, with demons and angels fighting for her spirit. At a loss for the appropriate action, King surrenders to that force with whom union was only made possible by the *felix culpa* of her alcoholism:

> Next thing I knew, I'd slithered to my knees beneath one of the trees. I rested my forehead against the flaking bark, breathed in the clean smell of resin. A clump of gray-green lichen bloomed; ants swarmed the trunk like black stars; wondrous things I had lost the capacity to wonder about. I touched and smelled and stared, trying to work up some kind of emotion, and I couldn't. I'm dead inside, I thought. If I don't stop drinking I'm going to die.
> I'd always been the first to scoff at paranormal experiences, but the very next instant I felt a force – there is no other word for it – physically pulling me down. It was like entering a kind of fifth dimension: for a split second I "saw" heaven and hell; good and evil; the terrible battle being waged for people's souls. One was being waged for mine, and the netherworld was winning. I didn't stop to think. I instinctively did what had never once, in all my years of drinking, occurred to me to do before. I opened my mouth and said: "Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name ...[330]

In the grand tradition of "what it was like, what happened, and what it's like now," King, having attained her sought-after self-actualization, closes her narrative with an epilogue which confirms that the behavioral aspects of her spiritual awakening have allowed her to sustain her sobriety. Her identity is circumscribed by the fact that she is an alcoholic, but she is, like Wurtzel, "grateful" for the chance to be healed:

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[329] Taieb et al, 996.
[330] King, 239.

> If I've made an "progress" it's that now I know I'll be an alcoholic until the day I die, and that is both my biggest cross and my greatest blessing. Staying sober has proved to be an authentic spiritual path: disciplined, rigorous and challenging beyond anything I could have imagined. It has led me, at long last, to writing. It had led me to Catholicism. Most of all, it has led me to the city of L.A., and the friends who, day after day, shore me up, show me the path, and fulfill the longing as much as I believe it is given to anyone to have it fulfilled on this earth. I've faltered and lurched at every step, but now I know we all pretty much do that, too.[331]

Gratitude for the opportunity to tell one's story, the imparting of one's suffering so that others may share in the joy of recovery, the offering up of one's path to redemption as a sustaining hope for others: these, too, are hallmarks of the addiction memoir. King confirms that her first drink was indeed a *felix culpa* when she states, in the final paragraph of the narrative,

> I just know that anything that is worthwhile about me arose, in one way or another, from the suffering of those twenty years of drinking. I just know that only a God of inexhaustible love, infinite creativity, and a burning desire to count every last one of us in could have taken a broken-down wreck like me and make something useful out of her.
> And as the great German mystic Meister Eckhart noted, "If the only prayer you said in your whole lifetime was 'Thank you', that would be enough.[332]

Having investigated the overwhelmingly emblematic *Parched* as exemplary of the spiritual awakening in contemporary addiction memoir, we now turn to our last text for scrutiny: that watershed of addiction memoir which has brought to the forefront of criticism the same issues of truth, subjectivity and constructedness in addiction narrative with which we have concerned ourselves here. Frey's publication, which the publishing company of Doubleday defines as "memoir/literature,"[333] should be recognized as the definitive hybrid of this already hybrid genre; this is not, per se, because the narrative accomplishes anything significantly different structurally from what occurs in other hybrid memoirs such as *John Barleycorn, A Fan's Notes, and Junky* (all of which straddle the line between "fictionalized autobiography" and "autobiographical fiction")[334]

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[331] Ibid, 272.
[332] King, 276.
[333] From the back cover of the novel.
[334] Crowley, 19.

but because a conflagration of certain sensitive issues sparked a nationwide controversy over the demarcation of certain literary genres. Our purpose here is not to dissect Frey's motives in relaying his affective redemption; yet there must be some consideration given to the furor which erupted when the events of the narrative were revealed to be a mix of truth and fiction, rather than the "literal expression of actual events" the text (and author) purported them to be. Frey's response to the accusations of fraudulent misrepresentation of his recovery was as follows:

> I didn't initially think of what I was writing as nonfiction or fiction, memoir or autobiography. I wanted to use my experiences to tell my story about addiction and alcoholism, about recovery, about family and friends and faith and love, about redemption and hope. I wanted to write … a book that would change lives, would help people who were struggling, would inspire them in some way. I wanted to write a book that would detail the fight addicts and alcoholics experience in their minds and in their bodies, and detail why that fight is difficult to win …
> I wanted the stories in the book to ebb and flow, to have dramatic arcs, to have the tension that all great stories require. I altered events and details all the way through the book …
> I believe … that memoir allows the writer to work from memory instead of from a strict journalistic or historical standard. It is about impression and feeling, about individual recollection. This memoir is a combination of facts about my life and certain embellishments. It is subjective truth, altered by the mind of a recovering drug addict and alcoholic. Ultimately, it's a story, and one I could not have written without living the life I've lived.[335]

This eloquent defense accentuates what has been put forth thus far about the recovery memoir; that, as a genre which absorbs all the influences in the Literature of Addiction which preceded it, it is quite necessarily a product of an intertextual, interdisciplinary nature, one which deconstructs and reconstructs at will to achieve the appropriate cathartic effect for narrator and reader. If the purpose of the quest memoir in the Literature of Addiction is to represent for the public domain a spiritual awakening which has allowed for behavioral changes to place the addiction in remission, whether its events are true in the phenomenal sense of the word remains almost entirely irrelevant. It is my contention that, had Frey's memoir been revealed as a "fraud" before his image and persona had entered public consciousness – if interviews with him had never been

[335] Frey, "a note to the reader", v-vi.

televised, and the readership had continued to perceive him as an author, rather than an Oprah-endorsed celebrity with whom they shared an intimacy via the talk show confidence – few would have raised objections. In my mind this speaks volumes for the relationship Frey as an author and narrator achieved with the reading public, and largely exonerates him from criticism as per the "truth" of his narrative. Even if we deem *A Million Little Pieces* as *sui generis,* it still stands as one of the most remarkable pieces of the Literature of Addiction written to date.

That said, as Hamilton has noted, much of the success of the memoir might be ascribed to American "fantasies of regeneration through violence" and Frey's constructed characterization of himself as "troubled, swaggering, prone to violence, intimate with death, [and] in hot pursuit of a radically autonomous selfhood."[336] It has been noted how important is the connection made between the narrator and the reader in illness narrative, since that connection mediates the reader's understanding of the narrator's quest for health. Frey's narrator is initially presented as rebellious, dangerous, masculine, and willful, which is consistent with initial presentations of narrators in addiction narrative; yet James' character does not undergo the prescribed evolution to moral integrity concomitantly with his accumulating sobriety. James remains the "anti-hero" of the recovery memoir from beginning to end and makes a unique connection with the reader in his indomitable refusal to follow the Twelve-Step program offered to him as a means of ensuring his sobriety. As Hamilton posits, "teasing out the literary and cultural affinities of Frey's imagined person or personified coping strategy helps us understand better the abiding attraction of radical autonomy as a personal ideal."[337] It seems that

[336] Hamilton, 1.
[337] Ibid, 2.

Frey's narrator must be understood as reactionary, challenging as he does the conventional depiction of the sick role in the addiction/illness quest memoir.

Above it was noted that *A Million Little Pieces* falls into the category of mastery story rather than, as most memoirs published in the last decade, AA story: "This [is] a story, above all, about success in self-creation … James constructs himself as a paragon of independence …clear-eyed, blaming no one, a rugged individualist. He may *formerly* have been dependent on drugs, but [at the end] … he is dependent on nothing."[338] AA stories characteristically feature an egotistical, sullen, and existentially terrified protagonist who blossoms into a mentally balanced, spiritually fulfilled, generous and grateful human being (via the "character change" which transforms the sick soul). Frey deliberately subverts this progression; while his character does evolve, almost no aspect of his evolution is mediated by AA or any related philosophy. Although he does agree to participate in several of the Steps, his participation is on his own terms; and the narrative of his recovery, far from being one of gratitude and awakening punctuated by redemptive experiences suspiciously like clichés, is instead a story of

> contemporary self-reliance, present[ing] a dangerous self whose autonomy is claimed through a privileged intimacy with violence. What James calls "The Fury", a sort of seething will-to-destruction within him … the frightening reality, he claims, is that "I want to kill kill kill" (Frey 285) … [and] it is only by struggling against this dark force that James can fashion his individuality.[339]

James' quest to actualize his identity veers far from the typical quest to return to health from the sick state of active addiction. Hamilton has suggested that *A Million Little Pieces* functions is some ways like a captivity narrative, and much of the interpersonal conflict centers around the coercive attempts by the staff of the Treatment Centre to force James to accept that he has an illness, and that he will die if he does not internalize and

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[338] Ibid.
[339] Ibid.

practice the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. His counselor, Joanne, herself an addict, warns him:

> James, you are an incredibly Addicted Person. You have been told by qualified Doctors that any drug or alcohol use is going to kill you. In all of my experience, I have never seen anyone stay sober and survive in the long term using anything but AA and the Twelve Steps. They may last a week or a month or in the best cases a year, but without the necessary support, all of them start using again and most of them die. Is that really what you want?[340]

Far from considering his addiction his *felix culpa*, that Fall which brings one back to the Creator, James stalwartly refuses to grant any credence to the concept of grace, and his militant atheism goes beyond a refusal to believe in a recovery God or a Higher Power, but rather extends to (at least, as he initially perceives them) all forms of spirituality. To Joanne's earnest statements that "a Higher Power can be anything you would like it to be" and "AA does not try to push any one Higher Power or Religion or particular belief on you," [341] James replies steadfastly,

> I'm not gonna believe in AA or the Twelve Steps. The whole thing is based on belief in God. I don't have that, and I never will ...Whether you're saying Higher Power or you're saying God, you're saying the same thing ... From where I sit, all Religion and Spiritual Thought are the same thing. They exist to make People feel better about living, to give them some kind of a moral code, and to help them feel better about dying by promising something better when their life ends, provided they follow all of God's Rules.[342]

In accordance with his own personal recovery path, James agrees to complete Steps One, Four, and Five, as those Steps make no reference to God. In the development of his individual recovery mythos – which comes to be shaped by three factors: his connection with Lilly and the other patients, his growing understanding of his own psyche, and the wisdom of the *Tao te Ching* – he is willing to concede to some direction since the action required by these select Steps does not conflict with his personal values. That the staff at the Treatment Center eventually come to support him in his

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[340] Frey, 222.
[341] Ibid, 223.
[342] Ibid.

unconventional decisions further enhances his status in his own story: Joanne says admiringly, "Despite the fact that I really can't endorse or condone your philosophy, I am gradually becoming a believer."[343] The narrative which James creates for himself inside the text mimics the outer narrative created by Frey, the author, which is essentially a "fantasy of the individual's eternal 'fight' that is made socially acceptable by its virtuous counterpart", and which functions as "an antisocial but alluring shadow" to the recovery fantasy of other narratives.[344]

James' construction of his situation contests the essential dogma of addiction recovery: that addiction is a "disease", or a "dis-ease" or an even an "illness." Although he admits that he is "sick", he applies this term to himself in a pejorative way ("I don't respond because he's right. I'm a sick, sick person"[345]) and in a manner which connotes a disorder of the mind or a maladjustment of social functioning. The baseline dictum for successful recovery at the Treatment Center is that "Addiction = Disease, Alcoholism = Disease."[346] James listens to a lecture on the nature of the addictive illness, where the speaker asserts that,

> addiction is a disease. Whether it is to alcohol or drugs or food or gambling or sex or anything else, it is a disease. It is a chronic and progressive disease. It is classified by most Doctors and by organizations such as the American Medical Association and the World Health Organization. It is a disease that can be arrested, or placed into a state of remission, but that is incurable. No matter how hard we try, no matter what action we take, addiction, she says, is incurable. Absolutely incurable ... It cannot be controlled, it cannot be held in check by force of the will, the decision to use or not use, to indulge or not indulge, to take or do or not take or not do, is not a decision that can be made because the disease always makes the decision for you. [347]

James' initial reaction to this characterization is anger ("I would like to stand up and scream bullshit this is all fucking bullshit"); his nonconforming opinion is that

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[343] Frey, 307.
[344] Hamilton, 2.
[345] Frey, 119.
[346] Ibid, 289.
[347] Ibid.

"addiction is a decision ... am I going to be a pathetic dumbshit Addict and continue to waste my life or am I going to say no and try to stay sober and be a decent Person. It is a decision. Each and every time ... String enough of those decisions together and you set a course and you set a standard of living."[348] It is through the transformative relationships he forms with others – relationships of compassion and empathy which require openmindedness regarding addiction – which eventually help him to mediate his discordant beliefs. He accepts a multiplicity in definition, while maintaining his personal standards for his own behavior:

> It's an interesting theory [that of addiction as disease]. It probably holds some weight. I can accept it for what it is, which is a possibility. I won't accept it as a root cause, because I think it's a cop-out, and because I don't think it does me any good to accept anything other than myself and my own weakness as a root cause. I did everything I did. I made the decisions to do it all. The only way I'm going to get better is if I accept responsibility for the decision to either be an Addict or not to be an Addict ... I'm a victim of nothing but myself ... if you want to call that philosophy stubbornness, then go right ahead. I call it being responsible. I call it acceptance of my own problems and my own weaknesses with honor and dignity. I call it getting better.[349]

James' quest to "try and stay sober and be a decent Person" is essentially synonymous with the quest for a spiritual experience; for the personality change to overcome alcoholism; for the transformation of desire; for *metanoia,* yet he rejects the religious discourse all those concepts of recovery are couched in. Apart from his refusal to consent to those dogmatic proposals which do not resonate with his personal mythos, James engages himself deeply with his recovery. Peele and McCarley instruct the reader of *A Million Little Pieces* to remember that "disagreeing with the Twelve Steps should not disqualify people from receiving treatment and support in overcoming an addiction ... as it is, objections like Frey's to the [AA program] are not only ignored – they are

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[348] Frey, 292-3.
[349] Ibid, 306-7.

labeled 'denial.'"[350] They suggest that the "one true thing" about Frey's narrative, which surmounts any difficulties regarding the divide between truth/memoir and fiction/novel, is the point it makes about those individuals seeking recovery who are unable or unwilling, for various reasons, to accept the notion of a Higher Power and to practice the Twelve Steps:

> That the crucial, original part of Frey's book – the heartfelt and accurate part – has not been heard indicates how difficult it is to break the AA hegemony in the United States. The worst thing about AA ... is its denial of the existence of valid alternative paths for ending addictions. We have reached an impasse, until more people who end their addictions quietly, on their own terms, come forward to reveal their personal experiences. But, in order to do that these silent veterans of addiction would have to violate what likely led them to their own brand of recovery: they value their privacy and they want to develop a meaningful life separate from a therapy program. Such people do not feel an urge to proselytize.[351]

James' version of recovery is based on, ironically, exactly what Alcoholics Anonymous strongly asserts is precisely what the alcoholic is devoid of: power. "Lack of power: that was our dilemma," observes The Big Book, adding that the program within the book is meant to "help [alcoholics] find a Power which will solve their problem."[352] Although James admits that, when actively addicted, he was "weak and pathetic and [he] couldn't control [himself],[353]" he goes on to add: "An explanation ... doesn't alter the circumstances. I need to change, I have to change, and at this point, change is my only option ... All that matters is that I make myself something else and someone else for the future."[354] At what point precisely this personal strength emerges is unclear: Peele and McCarley have noted that there is a distinct disjunction in the manner in which James represents himself: "The two parts of Frey's book – the outlandish claims about his drunken and drugged behavior, and his fearlessness in turning to himself for a cure – are

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[350] Peele & McCarley, 458.
[351] Peele & McCarley, 459.
[352] AA, BB, 45.
[353] Frey, 302.
[354] Ibid.

at war with each other,"[355] they note, and they suggest that James confuses competing ideologies.

James' ultimate characterization of how to stay sober is as one based, then, on personal reliance and radical autonomy, in strict opposition to the humility and surrender (deflation of the ego) that AA advocates. His awakening is an awakening not to the glory of God, but to his own individual efficacy to control his behavior. "I have a decision to make," he says. "It is a simple decision. It has nothing to do with God or Twelve of anything other than twelve beats of my heart. Yes or no. It is a simple decision. Yes or no."[356] It seems that prior to hospitalization and enforced sobriety, James centered his identity outside himself; but following a period of physical sobriety, he was spontaneously able to regain the sense of selfhood and self-reliance which allowed him to "look into [him]self" and "like what [he saw]", to be "comfortable," "fixed and focused."[357] He tells himself sternly, staring down a glass of whiskey at the crisis of the narrative, "You are mine and you will always be mine. From this day forward I own you, I control you and you will do what I tell you to do. From this day forward, I make the fucking decisions. You are mine and you will always be mine. You are mine, Motherfucker."[358]

This ability to consciously resist the addiction which formerly consumed him stems from James' having been "filled" by his experiences with Lilly, his personal journey, and his reading of the *Tao te Ching.* When he first arrives at the Treatment Centre, there is an episode in the cafeteria wherein he binges on every type of food

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[355] Peele & McCarley, 459.
[356] Ibid, 429.
[357] Ibid.
[358] Ibid.

available, thinking, "I don't care what it is or what it tastes like. It doesn't matter. What matters is that I have something and I'm going to take as much as I can as fast as I can. Get something. Fill me."[359] When he finds the *Tao,* its wisdom touches him and provides the sustenance which no outer source of gratification has been able to provide:

> This little book feeds me. It feeds me food I didn't know existed, feeds me food that I wanted to taste, and have never tasted before, food that will nourish me and keep me full and keep me alive. I read it and it feeds me. It lets me see what my life is in simple terms, it simply is what it is, and I can deal with my life on those terms. It is not complicated unless I make it so. It is not difficult unless I allow it to be. A second is no more than a second, a minute no more than a minute, a day no more than a day. They pass. All things and all time will pass. Don't force or fear, don't control or lose control. Don't fight and don't stop fighting. Embrace and endure. If you embrace, you will endure.[360]

What are we to call this, if by James' own edict we cannot call it spirituality? James refers to it as "philosophy", but the difference is only semantic. William James defined religion as (to recall the above quote) "the feelings, acts, and experiences, of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine."[361] Aside from the word "divine" which might be objectionable to our narrator, this is precisely what James experiences when he reads the *Tao te Ching.* His meditations on its assertions of truth inform his personal philosophy of radical autonomy, and cause him to act in a behaviorally different way.

William James also noted that conversion happens when there is a shift in the habitual center of man's personal energies; having observed that James' former energies are centered on rage, self-hatred, and crack ("give me more please give me more I want need have to have more. I'll give my heart life soul money future everything please give me some more"[362]), the reader must notice that now James' energies center on himself.

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[359] Ibid, 87.
[360] Ibid, 371.
[361] James, 53.
[362] Frey, 219.

The quote from the *Tao te Ching* which most affects him describes his new personal philosophy:

> Thirty-three. Knowing other people is intelligence, knowing yourself is wisdom. Mastering other people is strength, mastering yourself is power. If you realize that what you have is enough, you are rich truly rich. Stay in the center and embrace peace, simplicity, patience and compassion. Embrace the possibility of death and you will endure. Embrace the possibility of life and you will endure.[363]

"Mastering yourself is power": in the ethos of this narrative, it can be said that this phrase exemplifies James' psychic change, the process by which his "self, hitherto divided, and consciously wrong, inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right, superior and happy". We cannot call this a conversion, per se, since James rejects all language of theology and spirituality – yet the composite result is the same. Instead of desiring a union with God, James desires a union with himself: "I want to look into the pale green of my eyes. I want to look into the self that lives beneath"[364], and in a sense the search for his own identity, his own self-reliance, becomes his religion. While it might not be the same sort of awakening from addiction that AA advocates, such a transformation is certainly consistent with American ideology of the "hero" who succeeds through radical autonomy.

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[363] Frey, 371.
[364] Frey, 79.

Conclusions

This paper has undertaken to examine the phenomenon of the spiritual awakening from addiction as it is expressed in the Literature of Addiction, with pertinent examples from the last two centuries in various literary periods and geographical regions. It was observed that addiction and alcoholism are terms laden with a complicated history of discourse, having moved in public understanding from pejorative expressions of degeneracy, moral failure madness in the eighteenth and nineteenth century to more lenient terms relating to illness and social circumstances. After Alcoholics Anonymous gained "dominion" in popular consciousness as arbiter of the discourse surrounding addiction, it became widely perceived that alcoholism and addiction were diseases requiring treatment; the term disease was thus reconfigured with regards to alcoholism as a hybrid medical-moral term, so as to simultaneously diffuse medical supremacy over alcoholism and utilize its recognized authority.

Literature of Addiction prior to AA's reorganization of terms tended to focus on the dissolution caused by misuse of substances; it was not common for addicted individuals to write about their own experiences, with the obvious exception of a text like *Memoirs of an English Opium Eater*, which was more of a curiosity than an expose of an addict's struggles. Most of the "literature" published about addiction in the nineteenth century in America tended to be pictorials and articles about the degeneracy caused by alcohol, or articles by psychologists (William James) and missionaries (the Salvation Army) who were interested in observing the effect of conversion and spiritual action on the alcoholic. In Russia, Dostoevsky published texts in the latter half of the nineteenth century which depicted alcoholism and gambling addiction, and evinced psychological

insight not yet seen in America. Alcoholism and addiction had yet to take on any of their current definitions as of the end of the Victorian era.

John Barleycorn was possibly the first "fictional autobiography" on alcoholism, although it was not written to unveil the private aspects of the alcoholic problems of its author, but to inspire Prohibition. Its effect was to popularize ideas about alcoholism, which circulated in the generational cohort of writers who came of age between 1920 and 1940 – after Prohibition had been repealed. The modernist preoccupation with alcoholism – both in literature and in life – has been noted as an effect of Prohibition and certainly the World Wars: modernist writers tended to write narratives of alcoholic dissolution where, ironically, the hero or heroine often promoted his or her individuality in the face of malaise *through* alcoholism. Malcolm Lowry, Eugene O'Neill, Ernest Hemingway, and F. Scott Fitzgerald, among others, were known to propagate this mythos of the "white logic". Jean Rhys' novel, *Good Morning, Midnight* was a dissection of one woman's refusal to accept help, spiritual or otherwise, for her alcoholism, and was prophetic for its time.

Groups like the Oxford Society existed to promote spiritual recovery among alcoholics in the early twentieth century, but it was the action of Bill Wilson, in combining the influential work of Carl Jung and William James, which started the movement which would change the face of addiction and all subsequent literature. His work, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, featured the Twelve Steps for recovery, and many vignette-like narratives about recovery from alcoholism. These narratives were part of AA's program for achieving a spiritual awakening, and thus overcoming alcoholism via a behavioral change. Bill Wilson's own "conversion" set the standard in these narratives

that "cure" for alcoholism was a spiritual one, and AA propagated the notion that alcoholism was a disease for which spirituality was the cure. Narrative was their primary means of conveying their message to other alcoholics and the public.

The effect of Alcoholics Anonymous on the Literature of Addiction was to change it profoundly: authors who before had focused on dissolution now began to focus on recovery. Memoirs of recovery began to appear with increasing frequency throughout the last thirty years. These memoirs reflect the magnitude of AA's influence, in that many written in the twenty-first century feature a set pattern of events and a prescribed recovery from the addictive problem. Memoirs of addiction continue to evolve, despite the controversy occasioned by the publication of one work, *A Million Little Pieces*, which not only challenged AA's hegemony over recovery but was proven to be factually inaccurate.

Today the Literature of Addiction holds the spiritual awakening, in one form or another, as the obvious consequence of seeking medical-moral "treatment" for addiction. Alcoholics Anonymous still functions as the primary purveyor of this psychic change for the addicted masses, although its original Protestant focus has become secularized. What is interesting about the influence of AA on Literature of Addiction which is not about recovery; a novel or film which is not about recovery, like *Leaving Las Vegas* or *Trainspotting*, must justify its stance, since the public largely believes that alcoholism and addiction are treatable, if not curable, illnesses.

One other interesting facet of the new Literature of Addiction which has gone unmentioned is the increasing looseness of the term "addiction." Where once addiction was meant to describe an illness with life-threatening consequences, the term is now

being applied to all manner of human activity (addiction to the internet, addiction to soap operas, addiction to shopping) without real consideration as to how dilution of the term might affect those who might have debilitating addictive disorders. It will be the task of the new Literature of Addiction to reset the boundaries and parameters which will define the spiritual awakening for the next generation of the readership, for both the addicts themselves and those who struggle alongside them.

Appendix 1

The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.

2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.

4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

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