

The Golden Age of Drinking and the Fall into Addiction

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This article surveys the discursive turns of a conventional historical trope: the change in the valence of alcohol (and drugs) from happy to miserable. This change is commonly told as the story of a golden age of drinking and a fall into addiction (although there is a confused relationship in many of the stories between a condition called medical alcoholism and the social behavior of drunkenness). This fall is variously dated from the fifteenth to the late nineteenth centuries (both the conceptualization and the fact of alcoholism). Is this real historical change or only nominal change? Was alcoholism unknown in previous ages or has it always been around? Certain material factors (supply, absence of alternative drinks) may have impeded the visibility of alcoholism. The theory of nominal change is involved with factors like conspiratorial behavior, the conditions of scientific knowledge (i.e., the structure of investigation itself), the baffles of categorization (heavy drinking was hidden within gluttony for most of history). Real change involves various facets of modernity and industrial capitalism: individualism and privacy, temperance, respectability, and rigid class formation, etcetera. But this shift is also a movement across class lines, from middle to lower-class drinkers.

Now the ancients have all passed away.
So I wish only to drink my wine,
And not know the rest.
Look, the people in the Land of the Happy-drunk
Lived long before heaven and earth began.
Lin Hung, "Drinking Wine"

It is certain that antiquity did not strongly decry this vice. Indeed, the writings of several philosophers speak of it very mildly, and even among the Stoics there are some who recommend that we allow ourselves sometimes to drink our fill, and get drunk in order to relax the soul.

Montaigne, "Of Drunkenness"

Then you think there was a merrier world once? asked Kenyon.
Surely, Signore, said Tommaso.

Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun*

In his novel, *Septimius Felton*, Nathaniel Hawthorne has a doctor named Portsoaken drink brandy with a “merry company”: because that was “a day when man had not learned to fear the glass, the doctor found them all in a state of hilarious chat” (13.183). The novel was written in the mid-nineteenth century but set in Revolutionary America. Would that company, at the later date, have sat in debased silence, like Edgar Degas’ absinthe drinker: or, closer to home, like the grave revelers in Washington Irving’s “Rip Van Winkle”? Would the emergent Temperance Movement have chased them from their pleasure and taught them to fear that which they so recently loved?

In many readings of European social history, the valence of drinking alcohol changes from merry to grim at a particular historical moment. If not in fact, there were decisive changes in attitude or power structure that led to the twined concepts of addiction and temperance. There is a critical moment when drinking becomes abusive or alcoholic, when a criminal excess suddenly appears to mark what had hitherto been a festive regime—when intoxication gives way to addiction.

Émile Zola plays with such a historical watershed in *L’Assommoir* (1876), the foundation text of modern alcoholism. The novel is set in one of the cheap liquor sections of Paris near the city limits, but the neighborhood still retains its old name, “The Drop of Gold,” a name with “appealing ironic connotations, evoking a rural past when the area was a vineyard and produced prize-winning, health-giving wines” (Baguley 10). In a 1981 dissertation, D. M. Thomas explores the shift in literary representation of drunkards from the comic souses of Charles Dickens to the sodden and abject drinkers of Thomas Hardy. John Peck finds a similar division in the work of William Makepeace Thackeray: in *Vanity Fair*, 1847-1848, drinking is free of any air of moral condemnation, but in *The Newcomes*, of 1853-1855, drink is both a social and an individual problem (14-15).

Virginia Berridge and Griffith Edwards carefully explore a parallel change in their study *Opium and the People* (1981):

How did a drug like opium, on open sale in Britain in the early nineteenth century . . . come to be seen as a problem? In the 1850s, opium could be bought in any grocer’s or druggist’s shop; by the end of the century, opium products . . . were only to be found in pharmacist’s shops. Regular opium users, “opium-eaters,” were acceptable in their communities and rarely the subject of medical attention at the beginning of the century; at its end they were classified as “sick,” diseased

and deviant in some way and fit subjects for professional treatment (xxvii).¹

This shift is also figured through inversion to indicate how remarkable it was, like the world turned inside out:

At the goblet's brink,
 Let us pause and think,
 How they do in Japan.
 First the man takes a drink,
 Then the drink takes a drink,
 Then the drink takes the man (Chase 181).²

This crossover is conventionally narrated as the story of a golden age of drinking and a fall into addiction. Once upon a time drinking was a happy experience; its effects were either ecstatic or comic. And if there was a price to pay it was an extremely limited one. Certainly there was a second story: some people drank excessively and for them drinking was presumably painful; terms like *drunkard*, *sot*, *souse* keep turning up in older literature but without speculation about why they drank so much. They were not seen as problems requiring explanations or even as deviations from a norm, since people weren't defined in terms of secular norms like well-being or mental health. Drunkenness took its place with other vanities or sins, all of which attracted divine punishment equally or were themselves signs of divine punishment.

Contemporary accounts of mass drinking or alcoholism tend to accept this narrative background, but they offer explanations for the dual phenomena like the effects of industrialization or the increased density in cities; or like, in the neat opium catalogue of Paul Youngquist, "the effect of a multiplicity of forces, including a rising medical profession, a growing antipathy toward things 'oriental,' a militant Quaker moralism, and the introduction of the syringe" (906).

There may be no historical basis for a golden age of happy communal drinking, but myths and legends of a series of ideal drinking places abound throughout the centuries: the river of wine in Lucian's *True Story*; the medieval myth of *schlaraffenland* [the glutton's paradise]; Cockaigne; the Big Rock Candy Mountain.³ Even Charles Baudelaire's denunciatory phrase for the state of intoxication, "artificial paradise," speaks to this myth-drink and

drugs return us to paradise. Opium, Thomas De Quincey claimed, restores us to “primeval or antediluvian health” and results in a “healthy restoration to that state” which harmonizes with “the impulses of a heart originally just and good” (Cooke 63).

Once upon a time, we could drink till dawn with no ill effects, but then the human race, like the individual heavy drinker, lost its tolerance. Giants walked the earth in those days, gigantic drinkers named Socrates, Gargantua or Falstaff. “Ah, wizened wretches that we are!” Théophile Gautier lamented in 1846, “Wretched drunkards, miserable debauchées, paltry lovers, mean writers, contemptible duellists,—we who roll under the table at our fourth bottle, who turn pale after three or four wakeful nights . . . Oh how greatly have men degenerated since the days of Homerus the rhapsode!” (2.89).⁴

The golden age can also occur as carnival, holiday and the tavern, enclosures that sustain paradisaic or oceanic feelings.⁵ This is how happy drinking lives on in the fallen world. Speaking of his special days, the Saturnalia, Lucian’s Saturn declares “During them I resume my authority, that men may remember what life was like . . . when wine flowed in rivers, and there were fountains of milk and honey; all men were good and all men were gold” (4.111). Wolfgang Schivelbusch describes the saloon as a “*preserve*, in which archaic behavior patterns that have all but vanished from other spheres of life are kept alive,” specifically, the *potlatch* or gift exchange. Alcohol “washes away the newer, ‘civilized’ levels of consciousness, exposing the archaic level where intoxication, fraternity, and competition merge as spontaneously as they might have in a drinking bout five hundred, a thousand, or three thousand years ago” (173-177).

Why did this change occur (if it did), and when did it happen? In this article I see myself shuffling and arranging versions of this narrative.⁶ I have no neat story to tell like Jean-Charles Sournia in his excellent *History of Alcoholism*, which creates a privileged medical space for alcoholism that is as far as possible from drunkenness as a public spectacle and social scandal. Alcoholism and drunkenness, the alcoholic and the drunkard, are always running into one another (and running interference for one another), and I want to let them stay in contention.

In London the years 1720 to 1751 saw the “gin craze,” a period of widespread drunkenness in a large and helpless population. Yet the period is not taken to mark the emergence of modern alcoholism nor did any concept of addiction come out of it. The notion of alcoholism arises only as a discrete excess among an otherwise consistent drinking population.

Only when a small percentage of drinkers display abject behaviors does alcoholism come into play.

This is quite confusing, but it is a confusion that rules social history. In his study of Victorian drinking, Brian Harrison claims that the Victorians failed to distinguish between drunkenness and alcoholism: “The alcoholic exists in all societies, whereas the occasional drunkard who—unlike the alcoholic—can choose when he wants to drink, abounds only in a specific historical and cultural context” (21). I’m not sure we have figured that one out yet.

Dating of the fall ranges from the fifteenth to the late nineteenth century; Fernand Braudel claimed that there was a continuous rise of alcoholism in Europe between the fifteenth and the eighteenth centuries (Unwin 234). But of course the rise of alcoholism is very different from the conceptualization of alcoholism. Jessica Warner, among others, challenges George Levine’s contention that the concept of alcoholism as a progressive disease developed in the late 1700s. She claims that “what we identify as the ‘modern conception of alcohol addiction’ dates not from the late eighteenth but from the early seventeenth at the very least” in the pulpit literature of the time (Warner 1997:232). Émile Legouis dates the shift at the same time, using the plays of Shakespeare as evidence: before the Jacobean period, “Falstaff personifies the bacchanalian creed of the Renaissance, its belief in the genial virtues of wine” (123).

In the mid-eighteenth century, Thomas Jefferson had a particularly modern awareness of the evils of drink:

Whiskey kills one third of our citizens and ruins their families. Were I to commence my administration again, the first question I would ask every candidate should be, Is he addicted to the use of ardent spirit. The drunkard, as much as the maniac, requires restrictive measures to save him from the fatal infatuation under which he is destroying his health, his morals, his family (Tek Chand 139).

Roy Porter finds that the eighteenth-century “is seminal for both the perception, and the actuality, of addiction . . . the perils of addiction and obsession dominated the Georgian pathological imagination” (217 and 62). He locates it in the habits of self-medication growing up at that time.

The nineteenth century, however, is the favored locale. Alain Corbin states that “Between 1860 and 1880 biological anxiety, previously diffused,

began to focus on the three social plagues of alcoholism, tuberculosis and venereal disease” (ix). Marianna Adler dates the fall as specifically as 1830: before then, she claims, “the shared practice of daily drinking was a primary symbolic vehicle for the generation and affirmation of the social relations of community that formed the basis of English preindustrial society” (381). Anya Taylor devotes her valuable study on writers and drink, *Bacchus in Romantic England*, to the period 1780 to 1830 and suggests that “during these years, for a short time, the pleasures and pains of drinking are held in a vivacious balance” (1).⁷ Taylor also links this change with the appearance of the first alcoholics, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Charles Lamb: distinctive addict profiles emerge in the nineteenth century.⁸

An obvious question arises: is this actual historical change or change in name only? Have certain patterns of drinking just begun or, like incest and other unwelcome social facts, have they just begun to be reported? Does the alcoholic, like the homosexual, need a scandal to render him visible? If so, De Quincey’s *Confessions of an Opium Eater* might have functioned like the trial of Oscar Wilde. Do alcoholics and alcoholism come into being or simply come into visibility and cognition only after a critical discursive threshold has been crossed? Or is some social threshold—industrialization, say—constitutive? History, we must remember, pays only selective attention to the clamor of potential evidence, and it is driven by a sense of who speaks for history.

Agreeable to the narrative of a distinct moment in time, many social historians deny alcoholism to the earlier world, so that William Slater will casually say that “alcoholism as a condition is effectively unknown to the ancient world” (85), or Youngquist will declare: “However tempting it may be to describe Coleridge as an opium *addict*, historical accuracy requires some other terms: opium eater, laudanum habitué, and so forth” (906).

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick denies the nominal-realist distinction, declaring this historical change to be paradigm-wrenching, an epistemic shift so real that nothing was ever the same:

Under the taxonomic pressure of the newly ramified and pervasive medical-judicial authority of the late nineteenth century, and in the context of changing class and imperial relations, what had been a question of acts crystallized into a question of identities . . . [His addiction] was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions, because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle (130-131).

At the other extreme of historical continuity, Wolfgang Schivelbusch warns us against accepting this glib melodrama: “It would be a mistake to idealize the past by suggesting that before industrialization peasants drank solely out of *joie de vivre*, while later workers ‘drowned their sorrows’ in drink. Both motives have always been a part of drinking” (149).

If the images this propaganda literature created were to be taken as literal truth, one would have to assume that sixteenth-century central Europe saw a sudden explosion of wanton drunkenness and gluttony. Such descriptions reflect not so much historical reality as opinion passed off as reality—which is to say that what changed in the sixteenth century was not actually a consumption (which was already so huge that an increase was scarcely possible), but rather the attitude toward drinking. This new attitude developed during the Reformation (Schivelbusch 31).

Despite abundant evidence of heavy drinking going back to antiquity, the historical generalizations have always denied contemporary awareness of a problem: a line that follows Michael de Montaigne’s contention that “It is certain that antiquity did not strongly decry this vice” (246). In fact, one hears two contrary litanies: that everyone complained of the ubiquity or increase in drunkenness and, two, that complaints were sporadic and isolated and hence, could never amount to any kind of a social brake—that no sense of a problem took its place in the consciousness of society.

G. R. Owst notes: “the prevailing vice of drunkenness was a staple of the ‘language of complaint’ of medieval English preachers, who gave the impression that craftsmen got drunk ‘at least once a week’” (Bernard 338). The record is ample but, for some reason, the statistics *don’t take hold*: “Since church synods, individual clergy, and pamphleteers all spoke out against the abuse of wine, there was obviously much awareness, but no awareness that lay down an historical trace, since “ecclesiastical history has complaints about everything and no expectation of remedy” (Sournia 13). Antiquity had many notorious heavy drinkers and problem drinkers, like Alcibiades, Alexander the Great, and Marc Antony. Montaigne tells us that Lucius Piso, confidant of the Emperor Augustus, and Cossus, confidant to Tiberius, were “so subject to wine that they often had to be carried drunk out of the Senate” (245). And Burgo Partridge reports: “Dionysius of Sicily is reputed to have . . . once been sozzled for ninety consecutive days. Diotimus of Athens earned himself the nickname of ‘funnel’ for ‘he would insert a

funnel in his mouth and drink unceasingly while the wine poured in' . . . Suetonius says that Tiberius was a great boozier," and Claudius, Caligula's confessor "frequently drank enormous quantities of undiluted wine [at his banquets] until he passed out, flat on his back, snoring loudly" (Partridge 36, 69 and 73).¹⁰

One way that earlier societies organized the problem of drunkenness was by projecting it upon other peoples. According to Athenaeus, the "inhabitants of Colophon had . . . never seen the sunset or sunrise in their lives, since when the sun rose they were still drunk, and when it set they were drunk again" (Partridge 14). In the first books of *The Laws*, unlike the Spartans, Northern and Eastern nations like the Celts, Iberians, Thracians, Scythians and Persians "take their wine neat, and let it run down over their garments, and count this a laudable and glorious practice" (Harrison 1975:446).

Earlier centuries were not merely populated by heavy drinkers, however, but also by addicts. Convincing cases have been made for the addiction of Alexander the Great by John M. O'Brien and St. Augustine by John M. Bowers. So perhaps there was also always alcoholism or always the fall into alcoholism. Here is the Jewish philosopher Philo writing in the first century:

The modern way of taking strong drink is not the same as the ancient way. For nowadays men go on till body and soul are unstrung, drinking huge draughts without stopping, open-mouthed for more, and ordering the servants to replenish the cups they have just filled and shewing arrogance if they delay, because all such delay cools what they are pleased to call the "heat" of the carousal (2.295).

The rhythms of an eternal return and fall are built into our week, into our Saturday nights and Sunday mornings.

Material factors may also have impeded the visibility of alcoholic drinking; first, an intermittent supply of alcohol prior to the eighteenth century, which produced feast-or-famine patterns of consumption (carried over into the individual binge drinking of the alcoholic period). Obviously, abuse is a function of opportunity.¹¹ Second, until the appearance of potable drinking water (or, earlier, coffee and tea), all drinking was alcoholic. Why bother to measure alcoholic intake in a society where even porridge is fermented (Tannahill 293)? Finally, alcohol and opium had been indispensable elements of *materia medica*: perhaps the substances in question could not be seen as

harmful until they have been replaced by some other medicines.

Addiction may have been invisible for reasons such as these, but it may also have been invisible for the reasons that kept it socially invisible into the 1970s and 1980s. Addiction theory posits great resistance in the society at large. Until very recently the alcoholism of artists, for example, was deliberately suppressed in the public record—until the mid-1980s, according to Richard Davenport-Hines in his *Times Literary Supplement* review of the *Dictionary of National Biography*: “the new taboo is alcohol. Many of the subjects in this volume had lives dominated or ruined by drink, but it is exceptional for this to be even hinted” (quoted in Dardis ix).¹²

About the problematic shift in the valence of opium in the nineteenth century, Berridge and Edwards explain that event as an ideological fold in history, a problem deliberately manufactured by a professional power group which “was in the process of legitimizing its own status and authority” (xx-viii-xxix). The problem Berridge and Edwards set out to investigate was thus created by doctors in the first place. They may be referring to self-serving conspiratorial behavior or the conditions of knowledge, for, as Dr. E. W. Adams pointed out in 1937, the history of addiction “necessarily begins, not with the first addicts, but with the first physicians who were able to recognize addiction” (Siskin 21).

The emergence of alcoholism may simply be the audibility effect of a consolidated scientific voice. The simple fact of investigating the social body and narrativizing or quantifying the results—a stream of narrative in medical journals and governmental commissions of enquiry into social and medical conditions—either made problems visible or led to the invention of new categories and hypothetical relationships.¹³ Indeed the medical and social quantification of drinking is precisely what conservative voices bewail, like Ortega y Gasset:

our solution is symptomatic of the dullness of our age, its administrative hypertrophy, its morbidly cautious preoccupation with today’s trivia and tomorrow’s problems, its total lack of the heroic spirit. Who has now a gaze penetrating enough to see beyond alcoholism—a mountain of printed papers loaded with statistics—to the simple image of twining vine-tendrils and broad clusters of grapes pierced by the golden arrows of the sun . . . Once, long before wine became an administrative problem, Bacchus was a god, wine was divine (15).

Perhaps alcoholism couldn't be seen because it was hidden behind other deviant categories. When maps of sin or severe moral failings were drawn prior to the nineteenth century, the heavy drinker and the addict were usually not displayed. Perhaps the simplest example of such a cover-up is the way heavy drinking or alcoholism was hidden within gluttony. The most obvious early taxonomy for bad behavior was the Seven Deadly Sins, in which gluttony marked the place of sins of consumption, but it was uniformly associated with food not drink. According to *the Oxford English Dictionary* the primary definitions of glutton, gluttonous, and gluttony are "One who eats to excess," "Given to excess in eating," and "The vice of excessive eating"; no parallel formulation for drink is found in any of the definitions. Mikhail Bakhtin didn't believe that gluttony covered alcoholic excess: "Let us again stress in conclusion that banquet images in the popular-festive tradition (and in Rabelais) differ sharply from the images of private eating or private gluttony and drunkenness in early bourgeois literature" (301). On the other hand, the O.E.D.'s examples display drink and drunkenness quite freely: Trevisa from 1387 ("etynge and drynkyng glotouns"), Chaucer's *Boece* of 1374 ("Ne seke thow nat, with a glotonous hond to stryne and presse the stalkes of the vyne"), or Flaubert's *Salammbô* in 1886 ("They swallowed, in gluttonish mouthfuls, all the Greek wine").¹⁴

Further, early modern woodcuts representing gluttony refer only to drink: Jacques Callot's Gluttony carries a flagon and a glass (although there is a boar crouched behind her with his snout sticking out) (Russell 173). In a German woodcut from about 1740, "The Devil and the Seven Deadly Sins," Gluttony holds a pitcher in her hand and rides on the pig" (Kunzle 13).¹⁵ Frederick Jonassen states that in Chaucer's "Pardoner's Tale," the Pardoner "excoriates drunkenness and gluttony," but it is very clear in the opening of the tale that "glotonye" and "dronkenesse" are synonymous (Jonassen 534-35 and Chaucer 150).

The movement from intoxication to addiction has been more commonly treated as real than nominal, identified, for example, with the new technology of distillation, which entered the daily life of Western Europe at the end of the sixteenth century. In the case of drug addiction the equivalent technology would be that of the hypodermic needle. Both are technologies of speed and intensity. According to David Courtwright,

The mass production of spirits and the fortification of wines exacerbated

drunkenness and alcoholism in both European and non-European societies . . . The question is why . . . “It changed profoundly the economic and social role of alcoholic drinks,” writes the historian David Christian, “for distilled drinks were to fermented drinks what guns were to bows and arrows: instruments of a potency unimaginable in most traditional societies” (13-14).¹⁶

The French poet Jean Richepin was ardent in his praise of wine: “Blessed is the French wine that we need, wine of faith, wine of love, wine of hope, wine of life. And drink it without fear, people, and drink it without remorse, but don’t drink water of gold, water of fire, water of death!”; and Jefferson wrote in a letter: “No nation is drunken where wine is cheap, and none sober where the dearness of wine substitutes ardent spirits as the common beverage” (Conrad 125 and McNutt 108). In Hogarth’s contrasting pair of etchings, “Beer Street” and “Gin Lane,” beer,

. . . happy Produce of our Isle
Can sinewy Strength impart,
And wearied with Fatigue and Toil
Can cheer each manly Heart.

Genius of Health, thy greatest Taste
Rivals the Cup of Jove,
And warms each English generous Breast
With Liberty and Love;
while gin
. . . cursed Fiend, with Fury fraught,
Makes human race a Prey;
It enters by a deadly Draught,
And steals our Life away.

Damn’d Cup! that on the Vitals preys,
That liquid Fire contains
Which Madness to the Heart conveys,
And rolls it thro’ the Veins (Paulson 146-147).

This apparently obvious distinction, however, was proved to be imaginary when the practice of physical examination, instituted for the First World

War, showed that “alcoholic damage to organs was as prevalent in those who drank” the one as the other (Sournia 71).¹⁷

The fall into addiction that I am considering has often been absorbed into a more universal fall into modernity, particularly its economic engine, industrial capitalism. Addiction here would simply be the logic of the real situation: response to the shock and dislocation of deep social change.¹⁸ The diseases of capitalism were twofold, neurasthenia and degeneration, which were both offered as explanations for alcoholism. In the first, the pace and intensity of city life overstimulated the human sensorium; in the second, that same pace caused regression back along the scale of human evolution.¹⁹ The eighteenth-century physician Thomas Trotter “claimed that high-stress city life weakened the nerves; the constitution then needed the artificial support of drugs and stimulants . . . Proof of this process lay in the fact that coffee, tea, tobacco, etc., had once been used as medicines, but had become reduced to ‘necessities’” (Porter 220).

Anya Taylor identifies the moment of pathology with a fall into individualism, an “increased self-awareness and introspection, a shift that many readers associate with Romanticism,” and she associates this self-awareness in turn with a “larger interest in fractures within the person” in the philosophical and psychological writing of the eighteenth century, specifically, of David Hume (1999:61). In this reading, the addict is simply the new bourgeois subject of romanticism. Similarly, Norman Clark’s interpretation of the American temperance movement hinges on his concept of “the anxiety of the bourgeois interior.” Joan Hedrick explains:

Clark argues that the new development of a private self separate from the public persona created, for the first time in history, the perception of a radically isolated self. He associates this development with an increase in binge drinking and antisocial, psychopathic behavior as the private self, cut off from community identity, drowns in a private despair. In this scenario . . . Emersonian individualism leads to the bottle (208).

In the main, however, capitalism led to the opposite: a middle-class withdrawal from drinking culture which lent moral and financial support to reform and the professional voices eager to articulate drinking as catastrophic. Still, these polite middle classes gave added visibility to alcoholic drinking and made absolute the divide between those who drank *that way* and those who didn’t.²⁰

The middle classes desired not merely to reduce the practices of pleasure but to privatize or interiorize them. Harrison stated that, “whereas at the beginning of the century different classes patronized the same pubs, by the 1860s the respectable classes were drinking at home or not drinking at all” (1973: 166). “Happiness,” argued William Howitt, “does not consist in booths and garlands, drums and horns, or in capering around a May-pole. Happiness is a fireside thing. It is a thing of grave and earnest tone; and the deeper and truer it is, the more is it removed from the riot of mere merriment” (Malcolmson 40).²¹ Within this context, alcoholism could have emerged as the negative of this newfound sensitivity to drunkenness. The now more aware middle class cast the proletariat-as-drunk as its Other: “the drunk thus became a class apart, almost another race” (Sournia 47). As the bourgeoisie attempted to think itself utterly apart from a working class, drunkenness may well have been among the most basic differences in class formation. As a consequence of this, drink could also be blamed for all the social evils of the day, taking the heat off capitalism.

Another way of understanding the shift from good to miserable drinking is to see it as a movement across class lines, from middle to lower-class. There had always been hordes of abject drinkers, but because members of the peasant or working classes were not treated as subjects (particularly not medical subjects), there was no basis for a pathology.

The medical and public health professionals who were charged with explaining alcoholism and drunkenness were dedicated intellectuals, but they were also members of a work force created by the middle class to define and defend its interests, so the explanations also come out of a deep class divide: they are statements by the middle about the working class, and they have something to do with the increased strength and proximity of the working class as well as with the acts of revolutionary terrorism committed in the name of the proletariat through the century.²² The classes are also made to represent a divide in human consciousness: middle-class drinking is contemporary, while working-class drinking is archaic.

The social dislocation theory mentioned earlier applies much more to a working class that is defenseless against the ravages of capitalism than to the middle class who are buttressed against them. In fact, the social dislocation theory is generally credited to Friedrich Engels. According to George Snow,

Engels established a direct causal relationship between alcoholism and

industrial capital. Given the pollution, crowding, poor ventilation, and bad food with which the working class had to contend, he concluded that one of the few pleasures remaining to its members was alcohol abuse. Moreover, he believed that all irregular behavior of the lower classes—fornication, prostitution, and vice—resulted largely from this universal solvent of social bonds, that they were all, in sum, so many attempts by the “degraded victims” of the bourgeois regime to find escape. In short, alcoholism was an epiphenomenon that would end when the social order based on capitalist exploitation ended (244).²³

One of the many bitter ironies of capitalism is that the men who built the system with their bodies had the right to drink at work taken from them. Along with the separation of the public and private spheres, the major social achievement of the nineteenth century, there was the only slightly less momentous separation of drink and work (Gusfield 418): “The battle against wasting time, now symbolized by the consumption of alcohol, was everywhere pursued” (Corbin 8). A worker in Thomas Hardy’s novel, *Far From the Madding Crowd*, tries to explain the harmonious relationship of drink and work: “A man’s twice the man afterwards. You feel so warm and glorious, and you whop and slap at your work without any trouble, and everything goes on like sticks a-breaking” (313).²⁴

Another reason why alcoholism theory doesn’t apply to working class drinking is that it may not be self-destructive. Under working class conditions in the nineteenth-century, the abuse of drink and drugs may have been a rational strategy. Despite its social applications, alcoholism is stubbornly middle-class in intention. As Berridge and Edwards state, the model of addiction “was formulated by a section of the middle class, and . . . peculiarly attuned to the characteristics of addicts of the same status For the middle-class morphine addict there was medical care and expensive in-patient treatment; working-class addiction was mostly a matter of curtailment of supply” (xxix-xxx and 159). If, instead of craving or the lack of control over drinking, we make the cardinal tenet of alcoholism self-destructiveness or the fatal discrepancy between behavior and belief, we can see how alcoholism could have been used to exempt the small percentage of unfortunate middle-class alcoholic drinkers from that modern drunkenness that was the universal condition of the working class.

Notes.

¹ See also Marcus Boon: “Many of the problems that our society has with drugs are held securely in place by allegiance to this myth of origins in which De Quincey is implicated, which posits a pre-1800 utopia in which either there were no drugs, or drugs were found only in primitive societies, or drugs were simply ‘no problem’” (14).

² “By a singular transposition of ideas or mental play upon words,” Charles Baudelaire wrote in his “Poem of Hashish,” “you will feel that you yourself are evaporating, and that your pipe (in which you are huddled and pressed down like the tobacco), has the strange *power to smoke you*” (97).

³ Mythology and folklore abound in “drinking paradises” where drinking goes on forever with no hangover. An English poet of the tenth or eleventh century wrote that he “should like to have a great ale-feast for the King of Kings; I should like the heavenly host to be drinking it for all eternity” (Jackson 284). In the Nordic Walhalla, the Irish deity of the sea, Manannan mac Lir, “was believed to dwell on an elysian isle, where old age was unknown and where his company of immortals banqueted without stint and without end” (Loomis 55). There is also reference in early Irish literature to an “inexhaustible cauldron of mead in the Other World.” In the *Rigveda*, the Persian Rima sits with the gods under a tree, entertained with songs and other music, drinking Soma, which is brought from heaven by an eagle. The Christian *Sibylline Oracles* stated that God would send the righteous souls to “light and life exempt from care,” in a land where there is abundant fruit and “fountains three, of honey, wine and milk” (Patch 12 and 85).

⁴ A writer for *Punch* declared in 1859, “In those remote times gentlemen saw nothing derogatory in comfortably cracking a bottle of port at a chop house, after disposing with equal cheerfulness of a quart of stout, and then going back to business. There were giants in the land in those days” (Watson 114). A common litany after the fall was to remember a time when drinking was widespread but no one was ever seen drunk. A Highland lady remembered, “The very poorest cottages could offer whiskey; all the men engaged in the wood manufacture drank it in goblets three times a day, yet except at a merry-making we never saw any one tipsy” (Daiches 23).

⁵ The figure of the tavern is actually split between intoxication and addiction, between golden age drinking and working-class hell.

⁶ To a strict constructionist, the fall into drinking should take place at the time of the expulsion from Eden, and this is a fiction indulged in by both

sober Milton and alcoholic Coleridge. Coleridge planned to write the following fiction:

With the Fall Dionysus loses his role of unifying force in man and nature and sinks into a mere drunken god split between artificial excitement and inevitable disappointment, embodied in the Gnome. The Fall is thus a diminishment of the human experience of bliss. After the Fall bliss is attained only momentarily as a release from “interspersed vacancies.” It is then punished with remorse and pain in a circle of self-generated alterations of consciousness . . . At the moment of Adam’s willed transgressive nature also falls, beginning the process of decay that we now deem “natural.” Grapes immediately start to ferment, as man, too, starts both to desire and to die (Taylor 1994:234).

⁷ “Historians and literary critics,” she later notes, “have ignored the shift occurring at this time in the reality and perception of drunkenness . . . Dating the moment of change is difficult, but the contrast between Johnson (who willed himself to stop drinking) and Boswell (who tried and could not) points the way: inward struggle, powerlessness and guilty awareness subtly deepen the problem of drunkenness” (Taylor 1999:11 and 61).

⁸ And, as argued by Tom Gilmore, in the eighteenth with James Boswell.

⁹ Yet there was no acknowledgment of a problem: “With this widespread use of opium, addiction was known, but quite rarely discussed and generally calmly accepted” (Berridge xxiv). “As we go back two, three, four, five hundred years we find an occasional protest from some dietitian who had noted the results of excess, but of any organized effort to check the evils of drink there is no trace, and although the Church included gluttony and drunkenness among the Seven Deadly Sins, the average man appears to have paid little heed to clerical interference with his food and drink” (Mead 123).

It seems likely that the numbers of heavy drinkers grew in line with total consumption, but little attention was given to this subject in the Middle Ages. Members of the aristocracy drank heavily themselves and saw no harm in such conduct; indeed Dante, who was quick to describe the torments reserved for sinners of all kinds, makes no mention of drinkers in the *Inferno* . . . Being drunk is humorous, but the damaging effects of prolonged drinking are ignored . . . Warnings were voiced, but these went unheeded (Sournia 15).

¹⁰ Emperor Michael III (842-67) was justifiably nicknamed the drunkard; when speaking out in public, he stammered to such an extent that the people would cry out, “You’ve had too much to drink again” (Sournia 11).

¹¹ Paul Strohm's review of Herman Pleij's *Dreaming of Cockaigne* makes the case well, in the area of food:

when harvests were good, or stores became available, or a court or monastery had a temporary surplus, overeating was the result. Eating, and the fantasies surrounding food, tended constantly towards extremes of austerity and hyperindulgence. The Church calendar acknowledged and to some extent regularized this situation, by organizing the liturgical year around a cycle of feasts and fasts (17).

This history can be traced in the art and drama of the battles between Carnival and Lent.

Barry Milligan argues a cunning version of the opposite truth—that a steady supply of opium obscured the signs of addiction because “the symptoms of dependence make their most pronounced appearance only during withdrawal from opium, a discomfort for which there was little occasion when the drug was so easy to get and readily administered by mouth” (22).

¹² Tom Dardis notes in connection with Ernest Hemingway that his earlier biographers “avoided the term ‘alcoholic’”: “Not so with the two most recent accounts. Jeffrey Meyers and Kenneth Lynn have no compunction about labeling Hemingway as an alcoholic” (158).

¹³ Commissions provide an ideal forum for such definition, for example the Royal Commission created by William Gladstone in 1893 to investigate opium-growing and opium-eating in India and to make recommendations on policy changes. The body sat for two years of interviews—“asked 29,000 questions of 723 witnesses and collected 2,500 pages of evidence”—and in the process fictions of opium addicts and alcoholics began to be sketched (Berridge 187). It brought opium and alcohol into open conflict, forcing the advocates of each to defend their drug of choice, condemn the other, and define a pathological type for each. The anti-drug faction stressed the immediacy of addiction. The anti-alcoholic faction stressed the violence that ensued from drinking but not drugs. Luckily for Great Britain it was decided that opium was not addictive. Had the decision gone the other way the British might have had to abandon their opium fields in India, which paid a large part of the cost of maintaining that colony.

¹⁴ Hans Sachs: “He has possessed you for a long time, this one! The fool of gluttony. He made you intemperate, voracious, given to drink” (Dusek 61).

¹⁵ In Cornelis Anthoniszoon Teunissen's “Allegory of Gluttony” (c. 1535), Gluttony is holding a flagon and his body is a barrel, but he is a pig bran-

dishing a sword, breathing fire, his hair garlanded with playing cards (Kunzle 261).

¹⁶ “Unlike beer or ale, which had for centuries been the traditional beverages of the poor, gin’s effects were instantaneous, leaving ‘a Man . . . no time to recollect or think, whether he has had enough or not’” (Warner 3).

¹⁷ The same kind of imaginary belief occupied the old border between drinking and smoking opium (Harding 32).

¹⁸ Is intoxication the logic of the process, the escape from the logic of the process, as Baudelaire suggests—“In order not to feel the horrible burden of Time which breaking your shoulders and bowing your head to the ground, one must be drunken without respite” (57)—or the logic of the process disguised as an illusion of escape?

¹⁹ Actually neurasthenia and neuralgia—one for the man, one for the woman. One could make a rough case for seeing neurasthenia and degeneration represented by H. G. Wells’ Eloi and Morlocks, the forked disasters of evolution in *The Time Machine*. We drink to excess because we’re over-refined or we drink to excess because we’re brutish.

²⁰ Their new maps of public space included an alternative to the tavern in the coffee house (Stallybrass and White).

²¹ The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe witnessed a middle-class offensive against popular or working-class forms of festivity which included behavior at theater, taverns, and sports, particularly blood sports. Ostensibly they wanted to deblood them, but the actual intent was to debooze them. Ironically, after this war was over the working class only had drink in the tavern left to it as a pastime.

²² “Aspects of medicine such as treatment of mental illness, alcoholism, homosexuality, and drug addiction are construable as means of controlling behavior rather than curing illness” (Gusfield 402). This is clearer in the U.S. where the drug user shifts from being a middle-class woman or war veteran to being a Mexican-American farm laborer or an African American living in the urban ghetto.

²³ It was even more than a minimally rational choice: Snow also quotes the author of an 1871 article to the effect that “inadequate wages, substandard living quarters, and poor food all led the physically exhausted worker to alcohol as a way of reviving his strength, as a stimulus to help him continue through prolonged periods of work, or as a physical means of putting him in a condition where he could ‘resolve the sharp contrasts of his otherwise ordinary life’” (245).

²⁴ “The *Mémoires* of Martin Nadaud,” according to Alain Corbin, “make plain that the working day of the Parisian building worker under the July Monarchy was still punctuated by trips to the wine seller and pauses to drink from the bottle held by an apprentice. The rhythm of work was easily adapted to a generous consumption of alcohol and tobacco” (5-6).

“The bourgeoisie labored to produce the economic as a separate domain, partitioned off from its intimate and manifold interconnectedness with the festive calendar . . . But although the bourgeois class were frequently frightened by the threat of political subversion and moral licence, they were perhaps more scandalized by the deep conceptual confusion entailed by the fair’s inmixing of work and pleasure, trade and play” (Stallybrass and White 30).

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