

**Two Drunk Ladies: The Modernist Drunk Narrative and the Female
Alcoholic in the Fiction of Jean Rhys and Jane Bowles**

by

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Abstract

This thesis takes as its starting point the culturally potent figure of the alcoholic modernist, who, heroically facing existential despair, is predominantly gendered as male. Pointing to the absence of the female alcoholic as writer and subject in critical accounts of modernism, I argue that a “drunk narrative,” written by and about women, exists alongside the prototypical male narrative, and call for a re-examination of the modernist writer’s relationship to alcohol. Exploring the historical and cultural contexts that have contributed to the gendering of alcoholism and drinking practices in general, as well as the gendering of the modernist artist in particular, I then consider how writers Jean Rhys and Jane Bowles articulate their vision of the drinking woman. Rhys’s 1939 novel *Good Morning, Midnight* sees protagonist Sasha Jansen employing the discursive category of female drunk as a tool of resistance in Paris’ patriarchal and capitalist urban economy. I situate her as tactically capitalizing, in a de Certeauan fashion, on her abjection and visibility. Bowles’s 1943 novel *Two Serious Ladies* extends Sasha’s individual drunkenness to an overarching, abstracted drunkenness that reflects the worldview of the text. I trace how drunkenness functions thematically and linguistically in the two female protagonists’ existential quests. While identifying existing gaps in the scholarship, I also hope to gesture to rich areas of potential research and model a reading practice that explores female interventions in the male modernist drunk narrative.

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*To my parents for being
wonderful, always*

1 Introduction

“Ah, a woman could not know the perils, the complications, yes, the *importance* of a drunkard’s life”

—Malcolm Lowry, *Under the Volcano*

In Ernest Hemingway’s short story “Hills like White Elephants,” an American man and his female companion, Jig, are sitting at a bar in a train station in Spain. They order beer, look at the scenery, and then order more drinks, skirting around the issue of Jig’s potential abortion. Indeed, in their evasive, halting dialogue, alcohol serves to displace talk of the pregnancy. When Jig tries a new drink, she concludes that it “tastes of licorice,” as “[e]verything” does (212). “Especially,” she adds, “all the things you’ve waited so long for, like absinthe” (212). Absinthe is clearly an inadequate surrogate for that which Jig has “waited so long for,” yet a desire for it, however sarcastic, can be safely uttered aloud. Jig’s desire to keep the baby, on the other hand, is expressed in vague, ambivalent terms that are easily dismissed by the man, eager to convince her not to do so.

That the story is superficially “about” drinking is significant: the couple’s drinking, their attention to different kinds of drinks and the rituals they entail, signifies their claim to modernity. To drink suggests fashionability and cosmopolitanism, especially for an American in Europe during the era of Prohibition.¹ Yet it also connotes the emptiness and sense of ennui born of a culture of consumption, with Jig saying, “That’s all we do, isn’t it—look at things and try new drinks?” (212). Jig’s alignment of the acts of looking and drinking is telling as both come to be associated with modernism. If, as cultural theorist Liz Conor argues, “the signifiatory scene of

¹ James Nicholls explains how Prohibition ultimately led to alcohol consumption’s being viewed as “deviant” and “glamorous”: “For the exiled writers and artists living in Paris in the 1920s, drinking was not only a public rejection of the powerful puritanical forces back in America, it was a means of engaging with the radical rejection of established order that European modernism represented” (“Introduction” 18-19).

the twentieth-century West privileges the visual” (6), then drinking emerges as a visible, public means of asserting a modern, fashionable identity. To look and to drink is to be a consumer, but also to conceive of oneself as such—as a looking and drinking subject. Published in 1927, Hemingway’s story reflects this codification of alcohol consumption as a thoroughly modern practice, but it also points to alcohol’s increasing presence in the modernist text. In these texts, drinking is not simply employed descriptively, as something that people do, but *thematically*; in Hemingway’s story, Jig and the American’s underlying argument—that which is not said—is set in relief by their drinking. Their adherence to a lifestyle of travel, consumption, and fashion, which is placed in opposition to “hav[ing] everything” (213), to having a baby, is communicated in large part by their drinking.

I open with Hemingway’s story for several reasons. First, it is emblematic of a type of modernist fiction that thematizes alcohol consumption, employing it in order to speak to the modern moment in all its complexity. As James Nicholls, a scholar of the history of alcohol and society, phrases it, “In a world reeling under the massive conceptual shifts which Wyndham Lewis described as ‘the everyday drunkenness of the normal real,’” writers employed alcohol “as a fundamental structure in their narrative schemes, [as] the optic through which a complex network of representations [is] brought to light” (“Introduction” 19). Second, its author, arguably one of the most prominent practitioners of this type of writing, has himself become emblematic of the modernist writer as alcoholic. And third and most importantly, Hemingway tells a story not unlike the one I intend to tell here—of the way in which the woman Jig’s narrative (and the narratives of her real-life and fictional contemporaries), her point of view, is silenced. I will return to this final point later, and will now consider the relationship between the modernist writer and alcoholism in greater detail.

Alcohol consumption and addiction are made textual, visible, just as modernist writers are themselves proclaimed to be alcoholic. As Americanist scholar John W. Crowley writes:

Within an emergent culture of conspicuous consumption, addiction would become, in effect, the sign of modernity itself. “Alcoholism” and literary “modernism” emerged together in a dialectical relationship that produced, in the drunk narrative, both a portrait of the modernist as an alcoholic and a portrait of the alcoholic as a modernist. (*White* 18)

While determining the exact reasons why so many modernist writers, mostly American, were alcoholics is outside my purview, the discursive construction of them as such is of great interest here. In accordance with Baudelaire’s famous dictum to “always be drunk” (149), writers and artists have long used alcohol and other intoxicants in ways that have significantly shaped their cultural reception. Psychiatrist Donald W. Goodwin blames Edgar Allan Poe for ushering into America the romantic tradition in which “writers and poets were expected to be tragic, lonely, and doomed” (183). Indeed, alcohol consumption not only served as an identity marker of the modernist artist, but was also associated with an artist’s generative potential. If Poe was the portrait of the artist as a tragic, lonely alcoholic, William Faulkner, according to literary critic Tom Dardis, is the portrait of the alcoholic as modernist: Faulkner “drank alcoholically for nearly fifty years,” he observes, “and remained confident to the end that his extraordinary powers derived, at least in part, from alcohol. When Faulkner remarked that ‘civilization begins with distillation,’ he was not joking but stating what he believed to be self-evident: a writer requires the liberating infusion of whiskey in order to reveal the nature of the world around him” (7).²

² The connection between drinking and achieving an alternative perspective (“the liberating infusion of whiskey”) in modernist literature has also been noted by Thomas B. Gilmore. “If two of the leading characteristics of modernism are a radical dissatisfaction with commonplace reality and a consequent attempt to undermine conventional reality

Thus, the drinking writer has been understood as one who responds to existential despair with a raised glass, who transgresses the bounds of propriety and stuffy conservatism, who courts disaster as a reprieve from his consuming genius, who channels his libidinal energies into drink. In a post-war climate characterized by disillusionment, trauma, and chaos, in the wake of “a sacrifice for which there is no recompense” (Armstrong 18), the modernist writer’s only suitable response is to drink himself out of sobriety. And as these examples indicate and the next section will demonstrate, the drunk modernist writer is almost always “*himself*.” The figure of the drinking modernist writer engenders many discursive formulations, but significantly, they are almost exclusively gendered as male. The alcoholic female modernist, when she is acknowledged to exist at all, has generally been excluded from the discourse—her voice silenced, ignored, like Jig’s is, appropriately, in Hemingway’s “drunk narrative.”

Critical Contexts

If this exclusion wasn’t evident in the excerpts from Goodwin and Dardis above, we can also see it in the work of other scholars who explicitly explore the figure of the writer as alcoholic, such as Thomas B. Gilmore, Edmund B. O’Reilly, and Matts G. Djos. Gilmore mentions Dorothy Parker’s story “Big Blonde” in passing and regrets not being able to discuss Brian Moore’s novel *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne*, “a masterful study of the shifts and evasions of a woman alcoholic trying to deny her problem” (16); otherwise, female alcoholics receive no treatment. Goodwin, in making the case for an American “epidemic” of alcoholic writers, offers this in his 1988 study:

by greatly altering traditional states of consciousness,” he suggests, “the fundamental challenge to and ruptures of these states offered by heavy drinking may seem desirable from a modernist viewpoint” (170).

In the case of American writers who have won the Nobel Prize in literature, the alcoholism rate is over 70 percent. First there was Sinclair Lewis—very alcoholic. Then came Eugene O’Neill—very alcoholic. Next was Pearl Buck, who hardly drank. (Women are less often alcoholic than men—protected, so to speak—and Buck was raised by missionary parents in China; hence, very protected.) Then followed William Faulkner—very alcoholic. Then Ernest Hemingway—alcoholic. (“Drinking is a way of ending the day”). John Steinbeck comes next—a “two-fisted” drinker by some accounts, alcoholic by others.³ (2-3)

Goodwin never clarifies what he means by “protection” or explains how this protection from alcoholism is conferred upon women. In a long list of alcoholic American writers, Goodwin does name Parker, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Jean Stafford, but they receive no further notice. Similarly, Dardis lists Millay, Stafford, Carson McCullers, and Djuna Barnes, but concludes that “[w]ith few exceptions, American women writers have not been alcoholic” (6). He briefly discusses Zelda Fitzgerald’s drinking in a chapter devoted to her husband, but does so primarily in order to illustrate the difficulties she posed for him. When drinking, Zelda’s “naturally high spirits, which many men took to be sexually provocative” (103), coupled with her “madness” (102), caused problems for Fitzgerald as both a husband and a writer. While Zelda is not one of Dardis’s subjects, her portrayal as an alcoholic is intimately tied to her mental illness and perceived sexual impropriety.⁴ O’Reilly, discussing twelve-step programs such as AA, calls for

³ Goodwin continues by discounting T.S. Eliot, “who spent most of his life in England [and] became a naturalized English citizen” (3), then dismisses Saul Bellow from the list of alcoholics on account of his being Jewish. He writes: “Jews, like women, are ‘protected’ against alcoholism, regardless of occupation, for reasons one can only guess at. Bellow drinks moderately” (3). Later he writes, “Polish writer Isaac Bashevis Singer won the award and lives in America, but writes in Yiddish—clear grounds for exclusion” (3).

⁴ Dardis does acknowledge how Fitzgerald privately justified “his drinking on the grounds that he was married to a madwoman. This placed the responsibility for his continued drinking squarely on Zelda” (118). He continues by quoting Fitzgerald, in a meeting with Dr. Rennie in May of 1933, as saying of his wife, “The first time I met her I saw she was a drunkard” (118). While Dardis neglects to comment on the gendered dynamics at work here, his

“usable new patterns of female narrative—narratives that embody and respond to the actual conditions of women’s lives” (14-15), yet in his own analyses he examines only male-authored texts. Djos, for his part, includes an entry on Millay in the appendix of his work and briefly considers the themes of her poetry, beginning with this rather perplexing statement: “Edna St. Vincent Millay was a good deal more sentimental than [John] Berryman—as one might expect” (81). Of the studies discussed above, frequently cited as pioneers in the study of writers and alcoholism, only Crowley’s *The White Logic: Alcoholism and Gender in American Modernist Fiction* devotes significant space to a discussion of a female writer. To his analyses of the role of alcohol in the life and work of six male writers, Crowley adds an insightful chapter on Djuna Barnes, exploring how *Nightwood*’s Robin Vote, bisexual and alcoholic, complicates the “heterosexist assumptions” of “the modernist culture of drinking” (*White* 129-130). Writers Alfred Kazin and Gore Vidal have taken up similar surveys from their respective positions as participants in the literary scene. Written for a popular audience—Kazin’s article appearing in *Commentary*, Vidal’s in *The New York Review of Books*—these overviews echo those conducted in the academy, with a few of the women writers listed above given but the most cursory treatment.

Another work that finds frequent mention in this field of study is novelist Donald Newlove’s *Those Drinking Days: Myself and Other Writers*, which is partly an account of famous writers’ alcoholism and partly a memoir where he recounts his own addiction to alcohol and subsequent recovery. Newlove, addressing female alcoholism, writes that “[i]f you read Anne Sexton you’ll think lady drunks have special problems of moods and ego, and a painful sensitivity and suffering only they can know. I don’t think alcohol really cares” (126). He

inclusion of these biographical anecdotes points to some of the ways in which the female alcoholic has been discursively defined: as mad, shameful, and transgressive.

follows this by asserting that “[a]lcohol is a great leveller of the sexes, it’s the same walking death: I can’t handle it, pour me another” (127). Newlove’s claim might accurately speak to the alcoholic’s bodily experience of alcoholism, an experience that can be universalized in so far as it manifests itself in a “walking death.” Yet his remarks—besides dismissing female experience and describing women’s complaints as illegitimate—neglect to consider the societal factors that may produce or enable the production of an alcoholic subject differently according to gender and other identity markers. Furthermore, the social reality of being a female alcoholic, of being a female drunk in a world in which that is resoundingly unacceptable, is elided here in favour of a homogenizing, male-oriented narrative about the drinker’s experience.

The works considered above are marked by a glaring lack of discussion addressing women as both writers and alcoholics. This is not for lack of space, as most perform as overviews offering broad surveys of literary scenes and their many participants; the works that do focus on specific authors offer a contextual framework in the introduction that establishes a who’s who of alcoholic writers. Taken together, these studies point to an impressive and varied list of writers, including Malcolm Lowry, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Tennessee Williams, Hart Crane, Robert Lowell, Eugene O’Neill, John Cheever, Kingsley Amis, John Berryman, George Orwell, William Faulkner, John Steinbeck, Edmund Wilson, Allen Ginsberg, Theodore Roethke, Ernest Hemingway, Edward Arlington Robinson, James Joyce, Evelyn Waugh, James Thurber, John O’Hara, Charles Jackson, Jack London, Dylan Thomas, Ring Lardner, Jack Kerouac, Truman Capote, and Thomas Wolfe. While the argument can be made that there were (and are) fewer alcoholic women than men and that of these even fewer have become canonical writers, the list above features lesser known writers along with the more celebrated ones.⁵ Would it be untenable

⁵ Historically, there have been fewer female alcoholics—and female drinkers in general—than male ones in Western societies. Mark Lender and James Martin write that “[n]ineteenth- and early-twentieth century estimates suggest that

for a writer such as Dorothy Parker, for example, to be included in such company? The scant attention directed towards alcoholic female writers, while speaking to the subordinate position of women writers in the cultural and academic lexicon, reveals the ways in which the alcoholic writer—indeed, the very figure of the alcoholic—is conventionally represented as male. In these surveys, there is little interest in considering the situation of female alcoholics, particularly in a way that might grant them status as important literary figures.

Literary critic and biographer Brett C. Millier's work on American women poets and alcohol consumption addresses this critical gap by examining the work of seven American women poets and their relationship with alcohol. She begins, however, by discussing a reviewer's objection to her describing Elizabeth Bishop, in a biography of the poet, as an alcoholic:

To me, Bishop's alcoholism was a fact, and Anthony Hecht's refusal to acknowledge it was puzzling. He could name with ease those men who drank loudly and obviously and who wrote about drinking; but he could not recognize the same condition in Elizabeth Bishop. Did he (and others of her friends) not realize that Bishop struggled so desperately with alcohol? Or did he object to her being "exposed" as an alcoholic, in a way he did not with the male poets of her

between one out of ten to one out of three problem drinkers were women" (117). They qualify this by suggesting that fewer women sought treatment than men because of the social stigma imposed on female alcoholics, which "led to the now familiar 'hidden alcoholism' among women" (118). A 2002 article from the *Harvard Review of Psychiatry* explains this "now familiar" phenomenon: "In studies of treatment-seeking alcohol-dependent men and women, women have often been underrepresented because fewer of them seek treatment in alcohol-specific treatment facilities" (Greenfield 76).

As for the smaller number of canonical female writers, perhaps this is simply a reflection of the fact that fewer women writers were acknowledged at the time these critics were writing. Moreover, Crowley suggests that "women writers have been largely excluded from [the modernist] canon because the formative literary-historical narratives center on the Great War, of which women had only peripheral experience" (88).

generation? It was clear that, either way, he was thinking about her drinking very differently than that of Berryman or Dylan Thomas. (xii)

Millier attributes this reaction to the gendered implications tied to drinking: culturally and critically, female drinkers do not occupy the same discursive territory as their male counterparts.

That “the modernists—the white males especially—were a decidedly drunken lot” (Crowley *White x*) has become a truism of contemporary culture; indeed the archetype of the drinking writer largely originates with this group. Historian Jack S. Blocker, Jr., explains how “rebellious youth—mainly middle-class students in colleges or universities—began to use alcohol as a badge of modern, cosmopolitan tastes,” finding “[t]heir models [...] in the writings of the ‘Lost Generation’ of American intellectuals and on the movie screens of the 1920s” (232-233). The formation of the writer as alcoholic coincides with the rise of an American celebrity culture, in which the writer’s lifestyle and behaviour becomes inseparable from the aesthetic and cultural cachet of his work. Speaking to this emerging culture of celebrity, modernism scholar Jonathan Goldman writes that “[m]odernism generates a figure of the author as a unique, larger-than-life personality, a choreographer of disparate discourses and repository of encoded meaning, though one that can only be read as such after it has been turned into a kind of object” (2). Goldman and literary scholar Timothy W. Galow, among others, consider how celebrity culture has influenced the reception, dissemination, and interpretation of modernist texts; however, neither explicitly examines how alcohol—as consumed and thematized—contributes to the formation of the modernist writer as celebrity. I contend that one way in which modernist writers are made into objects, into commodities, is through their status as heavy drinkers.

Modernist writers, “by producing a literature that idealized intoxication as iconoclasm and lionized the drunk as an anti-‘Puritan’ rebel” (Crowley “Alcoholism” 174), effectively made

drinking a cultural requirement for any writer who aimed for fame and success, who desired the literary lineage of a Hemingway or a Fitzgerald. The association of writing with alcohol consumption has been a discursively potent one, so much so that Newlove writes:

Before I got sober, I feared that public knowledge that I was a recovering alcoholic would dim my chances as a writer, perhaps even lend me a leprous cast among my writing peers, the scarlet label SOBER stamped on my brow. “You mean he doesn’t drink ever? That must have an awful effect on his writing, don’t you think?” (112)

Newlove is expressing two concerns here: that his sobriety might alienate him from a literary culture in which alcohol consumption plays a prominent role and that the writing he produces would suffer (or be perceived to suffer) without the aid of drink. Newlove continues, writing: “My greatest difficulty was entertaining some thought of a Higher Power I might speak to in my heart. All my saints were dead drunks” (106).

The cultural mystique that has attached itself to male modernists’ drinking practices is pervasive; as is the case with the studies cited above, it is paradoxically propagated by those seeking to interrogate it. Dardis blames alcoholism for the “sad and premature loss of creativity” (6) that plagues his subjects, while Vidal contends that “[h]eavy drinking stopped Hemingway from writing anything of value in his later years; killed Fitzgerald at forty-four; turned the William Faulkner of *As I Lay Dying* into a fable” (276). Kazin, discussing Faulkner, writes:

Some of the side experiences were alcoholic exhaustion, DT’s, whiskey ulcers, electroshock therapy, the many nicks and gashes in his head, broken ribs, falling downstairs, falls from horses, broken vertebrae, sweats, shakes, organic damage, fibrillation, blackouts. (47)

Many of the authors of these studies appear to wish to counter romantic portrayals of drinking writers, but their manner of critique is ultimately little more than a perfunctory condemnation of the ravages of alcoholism, a sombre acknowledgment that addiction has had serious and mostly deleterious effects on the writers they study. Instead of interrogating the discourse that frames the writer as alcoholic or of complicating our received ideas of the drinking writer by including those who are not white and male, these scholars and writers ultimately reinforce the reductive and gendered construction of the drinking modernist; moreover, their reluctance to engage the myth serves to reify it. Even when alcoholism is labelled as negative and harmful, it is done so in gendered terms. Faulkner's broken ribs, Berryman's suicide, Fitzgerald's emotional collapse—all speak to the myth of the artist heroically and destructively confronting his demons and sacrificing himself to the muse of inebriation; similar events featuring female writers—Millay's accidental fall down the stairs after a night of writing and drinking comes to mind—rarely retain the heroic part of the formulation.

This failure to question many of the assumptions surrounding the drinking writer is par for the course with many addiction studies texts. Literary critic Sue Vice gives a brief account of the field's history in her article "Intemperate Climate: Drinking, Sobriety, and the American Literary Myth." She writes:

Addiction studies have followed a path more or less parallel to that of feminist criticism, which began by identifying images of women in texts, then concentrated on lost female novelists, and has latterly moved toward a concern with writing itself as gendered and gender as performative. Spotting images and biographies of alcoholics and addicts has, in addiction studies, been replaced by the scrupulous

efforts [...] to reconstruct a past temper and draw into the picture as many discourses as possible, however conflicting these may be. (709)

Vice's last point is directed to the field's interdisciplinary ambitions, with literary analysis, historical context, and medical and psychological paradigms of addiction often all appearing within the same text. While I generally agree with Vice's assessment, I would add that critical works identifying alcoholics and alcoholic texts, such as Goodwin's study, have been followed by studies concerned with articulating the relationship between a writer's addiction and his or her work. Gilmore's work, written in 1987, falls into this category, where he laments that "[o]ne might hope that full-dress biographies of drinking writers would deal more satisfactorily with a writer's complexities, including his drinking problem and its relationship with his work" (5). This critical move has recently been followed by works such as Crowley's that interrogate the assumptions and frameworks that make up addiction studies and its subjects. By engaging in literary analysis inflected by biographical research, my thesis aims to participate in this latest approach by calling attention to the discursive practices at work in the gendering of alcoholism and modernist writing.

Historical Contexts

The gendering of alcoholism and drinking practices in general has a long and complex history; for our purposes here, I will briefly examine Victorian attitudes about alcohol and gender held in the United States and Great Britain in order to situate twentieth-century discursive constructions of the female alcoholic. I focus on the United States and Great Britain for two reasons. First, my claims about the gendering of alcoholism speak, in particular, to Anglo-American modernism. Second, Jean Rhys and Jane Bowles, the authors of the texts considered in chapters two and three, wrote their works while living in England and the United States,

respectively. Although the picture is complicated by Rhys's colonial and émigré status—she was born and raised in the West Indies—and the fact that Bowles spent much of her life abroad, both writers worked and lived within an Anglo-American cultural context (among others). While Rhys's novel is set in Paris, the responses to the drunk female protagonist, Sasha, are identical to those she encounters in her home country of England. Thus, while Rhys and Bowles cannot be understood as strictly English or American, their writing certainly reflects and addresses the cultures of drink outlined in this chapter. Moreover, I situate them within these geographical and national boundaries not as a way of limiting them or their work, but in order to question their exclusion from addiction studies and other discourses related to modernism and alcoholism.

In America, temperance movements took root in the late 1830s, with “temperance” at first signifying the moderate consumption of beer and wine and a total abstention from distilled liquors (Murdock 11). While the word “temperance” eventually came to mean total abstention from alcoholic beverages, it would be nearly a century before the ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment in 1919 federally instituted the prohibition of alcohol.⁶ The temperance movement arose out of a religious climate in which intemperance was viewed as a mortal sin.⁷ Reverend Mark Matthews, the pastor of Seattle’s First Presbyterian Church, attested to this view when he declared that “[t]he saloon is the most fiendish, corrupt, hell-soaked institution that ever crawled out of the slime of the eternal pit...It takes your sweet innocent daughter, robs her of her virtue, and transforms her into a brazen, wanton harlot” (qtd in Behr 22). Matthews’s remarks reflect

⁶ The Eighteenth Amendment was ratified on January 16th, 1919; the law took effect a year later on January 17th, 1920 and was repealed on December 5th, 1933. Although alcohol consumption itself was never illegal, the manufacturing and selling of alcohol were. The Volstead Act, passed in October 1919, clarified the Amendment’s vague legislation, dictating that “[n]o person shall manufacture, sell, barter, transport, import, export, deliver, furnish or possess any intoxicating liquor except as authorized in this act” (Behr 78). See Behr 78-79 on the Act’s famed exceptions.

⁷ It is also “no historical accident,” writes historian Lilian Lewis Shiman, that the temperance movements in both America and England occurred in the nineteenth century since that was an era particularly marked by social reform (1).

the cultural attitude of his time, the assumption that alcohol presented a dangerous threat to women (and by extension, their fathers and husbands) because women under the influence transgress their designated social roles and in turn become degraded, sexually deviant threats to society. In another sense—an idea taken up with zeal by the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU)—alcohol threatens women in so far as it intoxicates their husbands and fathers on whom they are entirely dependent. Significantly, here and elsewhere, the sinfulness of alcohol consumption is made tangible as it relates to women: Matthews, making a general case for the sinfulness of alcohol, must turn from the colourful descriptions of the hellish saloon in order to make the sin concrete in the figure of the drinking woman. These two Victorian conceptions of the woman's encounter with alcohol—one that codes her as a threat, the other as a victim—would make lasting impressions on societal attitudes toward the female drinker well into the twentieth century.

The nineteenth century viewed women as society's pious, moral arbiters, as the innocents sacrificed to their husbands' and fathers' drunken binges. As Crowley writes, "the cult of 'True Womanhood' made female abstemiousness a sign of gentility. The ideology of the temperance movement, moreover, deemed drunkenness to be almost exclusively a male problem" (*White* 117). Historian Catherine Gilbert Murdock adds: "Barred by law or custom from divorcing inebriate husbands, unable to earn a living wage themselves, isolated in a society with few mechanisms to reform drinkers or aid their families, drunkards' wives faced brutality, poverty, and abandonment" (16). Beginning with the Woman's Crusade of the 1870s, when throngs of women invaded saloons, singing hymns and praying for the souls of the owners and drinking customers, women as a group came to constitute alcohol's principal enemy in the public imagination. Later, the WCTU and other women's organizations were perceived as the driving

force behind Prohibition, with the Brewers Association actively working to fight women's suffrage (Behr 47). Murdock argues that the fight for Prohibition effectively granted women a political identity, writing, "As an issue, alcohol, more than slavery or suffrage or any other single cause, effected American women's politicization" (9). In many ways, women advocated for temperance because they had not yet been enfranchised: having no financial or legal recourse to abusive husbands made the issue a particularly pressing one. Yet in fighting for an issue that elicited such passion, an issue that was felt to intimately affect the lives of many women across the country, women were introduced into the public sphere and, once introduced, many were reluctant to let it go. While it's certainly true that the picture is a complex one—not all women were temperance advocates, not all Prohibitionists were pro-suffrage, not all "wets" (the term for those opposing Prohibition) were against women's politicization, etcetera—Prohibition and suffrage were strongly aligned, with women achieving suffrage in the USA around the same time that Prohibition came to pass. More important for my discussion, however, is that women were *seen* as waging a war on alcohol, on men's homosocial territory; women, at least respectable women, were only associated with alcohol through their opposition to it.

This, of course, made conceiving of the female drinker, let alone the female alcoholic, a difficult proposition. Murdock outlines how the "[d]iscussion of women's drinking and alcohol abuse was [...] rendered most problematic by the fact that drinking was, for the most part, a public, male activity conducted in public, male spaces." Not only did "[w]omen drinkers [threaten] this gender division," she adds, women's drinking was also "general[ly] associat[ed] with sexual depravity and with prostitution—a profession connected to public spaces and particularly to male saloons," thus "reinforc[ing the] horror over [a woman's] public drunkenness" (43). Literary scholar Nicholas O. Warner, too, observes that "[f]or middle-class

Americans the ‘ideal woman’ was a ‘paragon of social virtue and a guardian of the home,’ while the ‘alcoholic’ embodied all that threatened the ideal woman. Thus a drunken woman became a particularly heinous, almost *unthinkable* phenomenon” (300; my emphasis), while Crowley adds:

The female drunkard became nearly *unimaginable* except in the stereotype of the drunken harlot, who was almost invariably represented in temperance literature as an immigrant and/or working-class woman whose inebriation signified her defective racial stock and overall moral degeneracy.⁸ (*White* 117; my emphasis)

These critics, employing words like “unthinkable” and “unimaginable,” point to the female alcoholic as a nineteenth- and early twentieth-century taboo. The male alcoholic, while often vilified and seen as sinful, could retain his social rank as well as his claim to a normative masculine identity. The male alcoholic existed in public, in novels, in language. The female alcoholic, on the other hand, could only be invoked in extreme rhetorical manoeuvres (such as Matthews’s above), as a caricature, a symbol of debauchery.

This lack of visibility and representation finds reflection in the cultural vocabulary as well. Crowley explains how the very label “alcoholic” was reserved exclusively for men:

⁸ Prohibition, as much as it can “be viewed as a mandate against men’s drinking and against the common conflation of drink with masculinity” (Rotskoff 30), had racial and class-based motivations. An “increasingly anti-German mood” (Behr 60) surrounding World War I made people suspicious of and hostile to German-owned breweries, while a xenophobic distaste of “whiskey-drinking Irish Catholics [...] and wine-drinking Italians” (Behr 52), among other ethnic immigrant groups, made temperance seem a desirable option for many Americans. Historian Kathleen Drowne identifies how Prohibition became for many a “highly racialized issue”:

Many whites saw Prohibition as a vehicle by which they could control the behavior of intemperate blacks—a stereotype greatly strengthened by prohibition advocate D. W. Griffith’s influential 1915 film *The Birth of a Nation*. Griffith’s film about the redemption of the Reconstruction South, which was ultimately viewed by more than fifty million Americans, portrayed black people as drunken animals and sexual beasts whose alcoholic sprees threatened to upset the social order of the entire nation. (20)

In addition, temperance advocates in Great Britain and America saw drinking as “an anti-social vice” leading to “absenteeism and instability among the working classes” (Shiman 2). Drowne adds: “Feeling threatened by the flood of immigrant populations and the ‘Great Migration’ of black southerners to northern industrial centers, [American] industrialists such as Henry Ford enthusiastically embraced Prohibition as a much-needed measure to control the intemperate behavior of the working classes and, at the same time, perpetuate their own white middle-class values of sobriety, economy, and thrift” (18).

“‘alcoholic’ in its adjectival form (as a synonym for ‘drunken’) might be applied to women, but as a noun it still referred only to men” (*White* 117). It is worth noting that Crowley’s observations situate us in the first half of the twentieth century: while more women were drinking in public and at home after the first World War and especially during Prohibition, the female alcoholic was still largely unnamed, existing in greater numbers and yet escaping cultural acknowledgement. Cultural historian Lori Rotskoff attributes this to the fact that

over the course of U.S. history citizens have perceived excessive drinking primarily as a masculine indulgence. One continuity from the turn of the century through the 1950s rested in the perception that most heavy drinkers, and hence most alcoholics, were men. This assumption influenced the alcoholism paradigm in the 1940s and 1950s, when the term ‘alcoholic’ usually meant ‘male alcoholic.’ (4)

Even in the medical field, where alcoholism would eventually be seen as a disease rather than a moral failing, and alcoholics as individuals to be helped rather than reviled, the female alcoholic was still eclipsed by her male counterpart. To use Rotskoff’s telling example, “in formulating his classic statement of the disease model [of alcoholism], prominent Yale scientist E. M. Jellinek assumed the alcoholic to be a man and did not employ data on women alcoholics.” Thus, even “empirical data [...] corroborated long-standing perceptions of drinking as a manly indulgence” (67).

This codification of “heavy drinking” finds its source, according to Crowley, in the “post-Victorian reformation of gender roles” that saw the “resurgence of a more aggressive model of ‘masculinity’”: “[T]he consumption of alcohol,” he argues, “was integral to the rugged ideal of manliness that arose in reaction to the perceived enervation and ‘feminization’ of American life” (28). Murdock, speaking of the late nineteenth century, confirms this: “The association of

masculinity with alcohol consumption, including abusive consumption, was well recognized in the era” (15). Thus, to be a female alcoholic was to have one’s femininity, heterosexuality, and respectability called into question and destabilized, to be either sexually promiscuous or homosexual. Unlike the male alcoholic, the female alcoholic received no benefit from her relationship with alcohol; rather, she was rendered abject by it. “Indeed,” as historians Mark Lender and James Martin write, “many Americans were unprepared to see women with drinking problems as ‘real women’: the ideal woman was virtuous and pure; alcoholics were degraded. Women defended the home; alcoholics imperiled it” (117-118). Yet Rotskoff explains that “[w]hile the [alcoholism-as-]disease paradigm was gendered with masculine accents” (69), female alcoholics were not entirely ignored. The problem lay in the fact that drinking was seen “as a manly activity” and that alcoholism was often used by psychiatrists as a means of diagnosing issues of gender identity (Rotskoff 69). She continues:

When psychiatrists did consider female alcoholics, they applied the same rhetoric of pathology to women as they did to men. As a result they considered woman alcoholics to be especially sick: first, because they engaged in deviant behavior and, second, because that behavior was seen as a masculine neurosis. (69)

Well into the twentieth century, to identify as a female alcoholic—even to medical professionals—was to admit to more than one’s shameful disrespectability; it was to acknowledge one’s unstable sexual identity, one’s deviance from the socially designated norms.

If female alcoholics in the twentieth century were still largely inscribed by an older set of beliefs, women’s drinking practices on the whole registered a great shift. The Women’s Organization for National Prohibition Reform (WONPR), led by the politically- and socially-connected Pauline Sabin, “pointedly and permanently dismantled the association between

women and Prohibition” (Murdock 134). The WONPR rhetorically attacked the WCTU’s characterization of women as pious moral leaders and presented repeal as the modern, fashionable woman’s response to Prohibition. Prohibition itself had an unintended effect: the decrease of men’s public drunkenness changed how people related to and thought about alcohol consumption and “allow[ed] for the glamorization of more restrained drinking among middle-class folk who considered themselves respectable” (Rotskoff 39). The figure of the flapper—whether or not she was as ubiquitous as retrospectives about the 20s often suggest—certainly contributed to the codification of alcohol consumption as daringly modern and appealing. Rotskoff articulates how the flapper participated in overthrowing the nineteenth century’s articulation of femininity: “The image of a fashionable lady drinking with men flagrantly opposed reformers’ depictions of a dry American womanhood victimized by drink” (39). Murdock also credits the cocktail party with altering attitudes towards women and drink, as “[a]ssociated with conviviality, artistry, and a wealth of drink-related objects, cocktails legitimized as no other beverage could alcohol consumption within the home” (105). While the speakeasy provided an exciting and illicit place where men and women could mingle, it was the home cocktail party that ultimately “domesticated” alcohol, reclaiming it from the male-dominated tavern and introducing it into heterosocial company.

In Great Britain, the temperance movement tells a slightly different story when it comes to alcohol consumption and gender. Shiman explains that while women were admitted to temperance societies from the late 1860s onward, their participation still constituted “the exception rather than the rule” (182). In 1876 the British Women’s Temperance Association was formed, owing in large part to the influence of American women’s temperance work. However, despite the fact that British “women teetotallers continued to be active in all areas of the local

and national anti-drink campaigns, the women's organisations never became really important in the nineteenth-century temperance movement" (Shiman 187). If British women's involvement in the temperance cause did provide them with a political voice, it didn't quite match that of female temperance advocates working in the US (Plant and Plant 14).

In other ways, however, American and British women's experiences in relation to alcohol consumption were strikingly similar. Victorian conceptions of True Womanhood that construed woman as the passive but virtuous angel of the home were dominant in both Britain and the USA: women were either the victims of male drunkenness or wanton, predatory transgressors. Female drinkers on both sides of the Atlantic risked the same opprobrium. However, as literary scholar Jane Nardin points out, "in the United States and on the Continent, alcoholism tended to be gendered as male, while in Britain, problem drinking was often gendered female" (49). She continues:

Fears of alcohol-induced degeneracy resulted in the passage of the 1898 Habitual Inebriates Act, under which drunkards convicted of indictable offenses could be committed to inebriate reformatories for terms as long as three years. Although this provision was theoretically gender blind, in practice, eighty per cent of those committed under it were women charged with child-neglect. The others were mostly attempted suicides. Violent or neglectful fathers were never prosecuted under the act. (49)

Despite the inclination to view alcoholism in Britain as primarily a woman's issue—as opposed to a man's in America—both countries coded the drunk woman as monstrous, the most heinous possible result of drinking.

Many of the concerns tied to women's drinking in Britain date back to the eighteenth century's "gin epidemic," famously illustrated by William Hogarth's 1751 prints *Beer Street* and *Gin Lane*. Beer, associated with wholesomeness and conviviality, is juxtaposed with gin, deemed a dangerous intoxicant—dangerous mainly on account of the lower classes' consumption of it. In Hogarth's prints, "drink and drunkenness reflect both the utopian conception of the city as the convivial hub of social and commercial life, and the dystopian conception of the city as the irrational site of swarming humanity at its most excessive and degraded" (Nicholls "Gin" 134). This degradation was best articulated—as Hogarth well knew—by the image of the drunk, neglectful mother. Daniel Defoe warns that women, "by drinking [gin], spoil their milk, and by giving it to young children, as they foolishly do, spoil the stomach, and hinder digestion; so that in less than an age, we may expect a fine spindle-shanked generation" (qtd. in Austin 300). According to rhetoric such as Defoe's, women's degenerate behaviour threatened not only the welfare of their children, but the continuation of the nation. "Maid-Servants and the lower Class of Women," wrote one critic of the gin trade, "[who] learn the first rudiments of Gin Drinking [...] load themselves with Diseases, their Families with Poverty and their Posterity with Want and Infamy" (qtd. in Austin 314). Women, granted an increasingly participatory role in Britain's emerging consumer society, were nonetheless judged the most harshly for engaging in what were seen as its less savoury aspects.

This outraged response to the female drinker continues well into the twentieth century as evidenced by Admiral Sir Edward Evans's 1943 letter to the Home Office: "Drunken women out on the street, propositioning everyone in sight, misbehaving themselves all over the shop, throwing themselves at blokes. Leicester Square at night is the resort of the worst type of women and girls consorting with men of the British and American forces" (Plant and Plant 20). The

Admiral's account treads familiar ground as once again a woman's drinking becomes emblematic of her sexual depravity and lack of femininity. Indeed, what accounts like Evans's make clear is the mutual exclusivity of femaleness and alcoholism in the cultural perspective: to drink is effectively to be, or to become, that which is *not* woman.

The Modernist Drunk Narrative

In these historical and discursive contexts, then, it is perhaps unsurprising that the studies of writers and alcohol cited above—with the earliest appearing in the late 70s and the latest in 2010—focus almost exclusively on male subjects; the gendering of alcoholism in both fiction and scholarship evidently persists today. The mythos of the male modernist writer, then, is discursively bound to alcoholism as a solely masculine mode of being. Yet if alcoholism inscribes the writer in this way, how does it function in the writer's work? Crowley's use of the term "drunk narrative" designates texts that thematize and romanticize alcohol use. He writes that Malcolm Lowry believed that "the true originality of [*Under the Volcano*] consisted in his use of an alcoholic as a representative man, a symbol of the tragic modern condition" (135). The protagonist of Lowry's novel, the alcoholic Consul, "[feels] himself being shattered by the very forces of the universe" (145); his struggle to exist in the world is as epic as it is hopeless. Nardin defines this "drunk narrative" as "the story of a sensitive, artistic male who heroically and freely chooses alcohol for its power both to affirm his cosmic despair and to render it bearable" (46). My question, then, is this: in what ways does a female-authored "drunk narrative" conform to and depart from this vision?

In Jean Rhys's novel *Good Morning, Midnight*, narrator Sasha Jansen thinks to herself:

[I]t's when I am quite sane like this, when I have had a couple of extra drinks and am quite sane, that I realize how lucky I am. [...] [H]ere I am, sane and dry, with

my place to hide in. What more do I want?...I'm a bit of an automaton, but sane, surely—dry, cold, and sane. Now I had forgotten about dark streets, dark rivers, the pain, the struggle and the drowning... (348)

What is perhaps most striking about the passage above is Sasha's inversion of sobriety and drunkenness as a way of speaking about sanity: typically, to be sane, to see and think clearly, is to be sober. Yet in Rhys's novel to be sane as a woman is to be drunk. Paradoxically, drinking allows her to conform to the patriarchal order by appearing passive and docile, while enabling her to forget about the rules and obligations that necessitate her passivity, to forget "the pain, the struggle and the drowning." The "extra drinks" produce Sasha both as automaton and as sane, resistant subject.

This passage provides a useful point of entry as it foregrounds the female whose drinking functions as a means of knowing the world, of being sane within it. This thesis will argue that Jean Rhys, in *Good Morning, Midnight*, and Jane Bowles, in her novel *Two Serious Ladies*, both employ the figure of the drunk woman in order to articulate a female epistemology. Rhys writes Sasha as consciously and tactically performing her role as drunk woman as a means of resistance and survival. Through this role, Sasha is granted a much desired invisibility even as she becomes exceedingly visible in the form of spectacle. Moreover, drunkenness affords Sasha a penetrative vision, one that cuts through the superficialities of language and appearances to reveal the hidden, the abject, and the in-between.

Bowles writes a "drunk narrative" that extends to the level of narrative itself; *Two Serious Ladies* is an intoxicated text primarily for the way in which it represents its two female protagonists. While Miss Goering and Mrs. Copperfield each embark on very different quests, they do so thinking of themselves as subjects, as the heroes of their own stories, and remain

oblivious to patriarchal structures that would view them as other. Yet the novel is most radical—and arguably, the most drunken—in its depiction of Miss Goering, who plays the (typically male) role of philosophical adventurer. In a text where nearly all the characters narrate their stories and philosophies, Miss Goering stands apart as one who refuses the narrative impulse, and by doing so, acknowledges the difficulties of both knowing and speaking. For most of the novel’s characters, the search for meaning, the desire for purpose and identity, finds expression in narrative, which functions as a kind of closure or release. Miss Goering, in contrast, articulates—by effectively refusing to articulate—a means of inhabiting the unknown and ever-changing. By placing two women—with two very distinct ways of operating—at the centre of a novel preoccupied with themes of subjectivity and truth, Bowles makes a claim for female epistemologies, a claim which derives its power not by designating women as the privileged or sole seekers of the truth, but by simply investing them with the capacity to seek it. The drunken landscape of *Two Serious Ladies* re-imagines a world in which women are tasked with facing existential questions, with seeking out universal truths.

Authors and Texts under Consideration

Rhys scholarship has tended to read her work as autobiographical. As Carole Angier, in the introductory note to her biography of Rhys, writes, “the more I learned the more I realised that [Rhys’s] work was even more about her life, and her life even more about her work, than we already knew” (*Life* xi). Angier’s biography relies on Rhys’s fiction as a means of supporting and illustrating details from her life; indeed, her life and work are treated as mutually dependent articulations of each other. Thomas Staley places a discussion of Rhys’s life “in the foreground of [his] entire study rather than treat it as background to her work” (1); Sanford Sternlicht writes that “Jean Rhys seemingly created a significant body of fiction out of her own flesh and blood”

(x); Peter Wolfe attests that, “Disguised and rearranged, the materials of her life pulse through her novels” (18). Other critics look to specific incidents in Rhys’s life as keys to her literary practice: Maren Linett reads Rhys’s protagonists as suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, which she links to Rhys’s own sexual assault as an adolescent, while Mary Lou Emery examines Rhys’s geocultural pilgrimage from the West Indies to Europe as a means of accessing her colonial identity. Moreover, in a more general sense, Heather Ingman voices the commonly expressed view that there “is a quality of interchangeability between Rhys’s heroines which invites us to deal with her novels as a continuum rather than treating them as separate works; indeed it can be argued that Rhys’s heroines represent different stages in the life of the same woman” (108). This “woman,” Ingman later implies, can easily be read as Rhys herself since these narratives are ultimately “her own story” (121).

It’s curious, then, that despite this autobiographical tendency in Rhys criticism, little critical attention has been paid to the role of alcohol consumption in her work, since her letters and biographies—not to mention her fiction itself—are replete with references to drink. Her letters are marked by casual references to drinking, an example of which has her noting to a friend that she spends “[o]ne day drunk, two days h[u]ngover regular as clockwork,” and later writing to that same friend that “[t]his has been written with the aid of whiskey as you doubtless guess” (*Letters* 159, 227). More striking, however, is when alcohol asserts itself in more overt ways, as when Rhys offers a rare account of her writing philosophy:

I don’t believe in the individual Writer so much as in Writing. It uses you and throws you away when you are not useful any longer. But it does not do this until you are useless and quite useless too. Meanwhile there is nothing to do but plod

along line upon line. Then there's a drink of course which is awfully handy. Or drinks. (*Letters* 103)

Rhys names drink as an obvious accompaniment to her writing life, seeing it as a “handy” tool that assists with her literary production as well as her day-to-day living; being “used” by writing is made easier by drinking. Drinking, here, is accorded with some importance; while not quite on par with “Writing,” it is nonetheless not far beneath it.

Rhys's relationship with alcohol is also made explicit in biographical accounts of her life. Poet and novelist Alexis Lykiard, in a memoir devoted to his friendship with Rhys, writes that “[d]rink was just something Jean was used to, something she needed” (140), while novelist David Plante suggests that Rhys “imagine[d] she survive[d] on drink” (154). Unlike the biographers and critics Dardis names in his study who harbour “a curious unwillingness [...] to deal openly with alcoholic writers” (6), Angier, for her part, never shies away from acknowledging Rhys's alcoholism, pronouncing that “the twin necessities of her [...] life” were “writing and drinking” (*Life* 236). Angier's biography chronicles, with considerable empathy, Rhys's addiction to alcohol, as well as the violence and despair facilitated by that addiction. Rhys battered her husbands, assaulted her neighbours on several occasions, and frequently gave in to uncontrollable rages, behaviour which perhaps accounts for the (relative) critical silence regarding this aspect of her life: in her novels, Rhys's protagonists, when drunk, are outwardly passive, weak, the victims—not the perpetrators—of cruelty. *Good Morning, Midnight's* Sasha comes closest to violence in her fantasy directed at a hostile cafe patron, “One day, quite suddenly, when you're not expecting it, I'll take a hammer from the folds of my dark cloak and crack your little skull like an egg-shell” (375). Yet the reality of Sasha's situation is that the fellow customer renders her passive and unable to speak. In *Quartet*, Marya Zelli, in a desperate

moment, threatens to kill her lover's wife, saying, "kill her, d'you see? Get my hands round her thick throat and squeeze" (198) and yet this threat soon devolves into her speaking in "a little voice like a child," "quivering and abject in [Heidler's] arms, like some unfortunate dog abasing itself before its master" (198, 199). The drinking woman in Rhys's fiction never attains the outward manifestation of violence that was occasionally exemplified in her own life.

Still, Rhys's literary work prominently features female protagonists who drink, and frequently and heavily at that. In reference to Rhys's interwar novels,⁹ addiction studies scholar George Wedge claims that "forty-two percent of their pages contain at least one reference to alcohol" (27 qtd. in Nardin 48). Her protagonists spend their days, in various European cities, idling in cafes, ordering drinks, and having drinks ordered for them. Yet alcohol consumption in Rhys's work remains largely unexamined in the criticism, with the exception of a few pioneering critical forays which inform my discussion.¹⁰

Critical accounts of Jane Bowles's work have similarly skewed toward the biographical. However, the biographical is generally employed differently when it comes to Bowles: while Rhys's life and work are frequently conflated—"the 'Rhys woman' is Jean Rhys"—Bowles's fiction appears to bear a more enigmatic relationship to her life. Biographer Millicent Dillon writes that "*Two Serious Ladies* is an autobiographical novel, but not in the confessional sense. [...] It is autobiographical, rather, in that in every moment of the novel Jane is present in each of her characters" (*Little* 99). Perhaps this level of autobiography is at work for most writers; suffice it to say that while Dillon points out biographical details that correspond to Bowles's

⁹These include *Quartet* (1928), under the title *Postures*; *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (1930); *Voyage in the Dark* (1934); and *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939). Rhys's last novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, appeared nearly three decades after *Midnight* in 1966.

¹⁰ See Jane Nardin's "'As Soon As I Sober Up I Start Again': Alcohol and the Will in Jean Rhys's Pre-War Novels" and James Nicholls's "Drink, Modernity and Modernism: Representations of Drinking and Intoxication in James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway and Jean Rhys."

work in her biography *A Little Original Sin*, there is no one character in Bowles's oeuvre that critics and readers have equated with her. Perhaps this owes to Bowles's markedly odd characters, which are not sketched according to the dictates of realism but follow instead the logic of the comically absurd.

When the biographical enters into Bowles scholarship, however, it is typically in order to address her legend. If some critics read Rhys's life according to the "information" offered by her texts, then there are also those who read Bowles's work through the lens of her life. Jennie Skerl characterizes Bowles as "a writer whose career follows a familiar trajectory for women experimentalists: a brilliant debut with a seminal work that garners the praise of other writers (her novel, *Two Serious Ladies*), a lack of continuing critical attention and understanding, a decline in productivity, a critical 'forgetting,' then a revival or series of revivals."¹¹ She writes that Bowles criticism tends to fixate on "three interrelated legends": "the bohemian legend of artistic genius, the legend of self-destruction, and the legend of the glamorous couple" ("Legend" 262). Bowles's heavy drinking might have been expected to elicit some critical attention in terms of these legends and consequently her work, yet this hasn't been the case.

Dillon's biography makes frequent mention of Bowles's drinking, noting that "[w]hen she wasn't working, she was drinking" (96). Her husband Paul's worrying about her drinking, his warnings to her—"You'll ruin your health [...] Nobody can drink that much" (80)—become a familiar refrain in the book. In a letter to her friend Miriam Levy, Bowles wrote, "I shall now go and drink myself to death for a few hours ..." (37). Drinking, Dillon's work suggests, was a large part of Bowles's life. One friend recounts that "Jane drank a lot but was never really an alcoholic. There was no drinking early in the day, but the cocktail hour was sacred. Whatever

¹¹ In many ways, this trajectory was Rhys's, too. Her rediscovery by Selma Vaz Dias and Francis Wyndham, however, led to the writing and publication of her most renowned work, *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

was cooked had to be something that could be kept indefinitely while the cocktail hour stretched on and on. Often Jane had so much to drink that she wasn't capable of eating at all" (115). Another says, "Yes, she drank a lot, but she wasn't a drunk. She would say, 'I sleep where I drink.' She would fall asleep on the couch after drinking" (125). These accounts, while ostensibly speaking to Bowles's *not* having a drinking problem, appear only to confirm the opposite. More interesting, however, is the apparent unease with which her friends speak about excessive drinking, categorically dismissing the words "alcoholic" and "drunk."

An example of an article that does mention alcoholism in Bowles's work is by writer Edouard Roditi, an acquaintance of hers. He writes: "Alcoholism appears [...] to be one of the weaknesses of Christina Goering and Mrs. Quill. Like Mrs. Copperfield, they both have recourse to great quantities of gin in moments of indecision or of stress, much as [Bowles] too had recourse to alcohol in real life" (188). What Roditi offers here, while accurate, is an observation that acknowledges Bowles's alcoholism, but does so as an aside, in a way that seems to close off any opportunity for further discussion.

By outlining the critical response (both literary and biographical) to Rhys and Bowles, my goal has been to identify existing gaps in the scholarship, while pointing to areas deserving of further research. Calling for an "*écriture alcoolique*" (709), Vice offers a playful variation on Hélène Cixous's "*écriture féminine*"; in echoing this call, I want to suggest that "*écriture alcoolique*," as a discourse, retain, in some capacity, the concerns of its namesake. In other words, while exploring the drunk narrative, let us also consider other, non-dominant, incarnations of that narrative, specifically those written by and about women.

2 “A Guileful Ruse”: Female Drunkenness as Masquerade in Jean Rhys’s *Good Morning, Midnight*

Good Morning, Midnight begins where it ends: in a hotel room in Paris. Sasha, an “Anglaise” in her forties, has arrived after years away in England where she had spent her days “trying to drink [her]self to death” (363). Her stay in Paris, made possible by a concerned friend, is where she hopes to make her “transformation act” (383), to become “une femme convenable” (411)—respectable, suitable, but above all, invisible. Accustomed to her outsider status, to internalizing the looks of others that call her “the stranger, the alien, the old one” (376), Sasha simply hopes to achieve in her appearance a neutrality, or normalcy, that will/can shield her from prying eyes. As Mary Lou Emery puts it, “Sasha attempts desperately to wear with success the masks that she believes others will perceive as respectable femininity” (4-5). Modernist scholar Christina Britzolakis echoes this assertion: “For Rhys’s women, the masquerade of femininity provides, via cosmetics and fashion, a form of protective/aggressive anonymity within a public space characterized by the hostile gaze of others” (462). The terms “mask” and “masquerade” are apt as Sasha self-consciously recognizes both her need for disguise as a means of survival and her ultimate remove from the kind of stable, homogeneous identity performed by these masks.

Yet the mask of femininity identified by Emery and Britzolakis is but one of Sasha’s masks. She wears it to fend off those who, by their glances or words, would reduce her, find her ridiculous, see her as spectacle. But as Sasha readily acknowledges throughout the novel, she often fails to wear this mask successfully, to ape the part of a contented, bourgeois woman who, if not marked by her beauty and youth, is not entirely lacking in them. When she says, “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” (369-370), she is gesturing to the mask of the woman trying to drink herself to death. And when she continues, by asking, “Or shall I place on it a tall hat with a green feather, hang a veil over the lot, and walk about the dark streets so merrily?” (370), she is speaking to her incarnation as the woman become spectacle. While recognizing that all Sasha’s poses are effectively born of desperation and defeat, I contend that Sasha’s failure to pose as “une femme convenable” gives way to yet another pose: that of the drunk woman. This pose, inevitably no more liberating than the last, is nonetheless employed tactically as a mode of survival and affords Sasha a certain measure of invisibility just as it cements her position as spectacle. To play the respectable woman is to live by certain rules and codes, to inhabit certain places, to stick to a regimented programme. To play the drunken woman is to transgress these rules and yet appear, as passive automaton, to be following them only too well.

That Sasha’s recovery narrative is predicated on rules—rules she associates with “la femme convenable” and bourgeois respectability—is apparent from the novel’s first page. Her vacation in Paris is enacted in terms very unlike a vacation, with her announcement of a strictly controlled plan to pass the time: “I have been here five days. I have decided on a place to eat in at midday, a place to eat in at night, a place to have my drink in after dinner. I have arranged my little life” (347). This assertion, however, is followed by the memory of the night before, when the plan failed and Sasha ended up crying in the bar’s washroom. Even with this plan, Sasha recognizes that her grasp on the character she aspires to play is a fragile one. Still, she persists in trying, as her programme for monotonous but safe living reappears again and again in the novel: “Planning it all out. Eating. A movie. Eating again. One drink. A long walk back to the hotel. Bed. Luminous. Sleep. Just sleep—no dreams” (351). This refrain in service of respectability effectively transforms Sasha’s leisure time into, as literary critic Rachel Bowlby puts it:

the form of the prescribed timetable of the office or factory worker going through a regular standardised sequence. Putting these two modes on the same plan or plane ruins the comfortable differentiation according to which the two are diametrically opposed, pleasure on one side and obligation on the other, time that is yours to spend and time that does not belong to you. Sasha's extreme case, abolishing the difference by treating leisure as time to be managed, transforms freedom into the terror of a loss of control or an unforeseen incursion from the outside. The plan is a defence and it is all there is. (40-41)

Sasha's stay in Paris—her patronage of bars, cafes, and shops—is carried out defensively. Her experience of the city stands in contrast to that typically held to be the expatriate's—an experience involving pleasure, discovery, consumption; Sasha's consumer practices simply function as ways of getting by.

Unlike the tourist for whom Sasha once worked as an American Express guide, who demands to be taken to “the place where they sell that German camera which can't be got anywhere else outside Germany” and “the place where she can buy a hat which will *épater* everybody she knows” (361), Sasha employs none of the usual phrases and markers of the tourist navigating Paris. While she occasionally names them, the restaurants, bars, and cafes Sasha frequents are stripped of their singularity. An exception to this rule is Sasha's naming of the Dôme cafe, which she marks as singular only insofar as it has negative connotations for her. As one of Montparnasse's most renowned cafes, with its large clientele of Anglo-American expatriates and its established role as a meeting place for artists and intellectuals, the Dôme presents a particularly daunting cafe experience for Sasha. One moment in the novel has Sasha feeling a rare desire for music and people, and she wonders where to go, saying, “Not the Dôme.

I'll avoid the damned Dôme. And, of course, it's the Dôme that I go to" (388). Nicholls reads Rhys's protagonists' exclusion as one specific to "the mythically idealised drinking culture of modernist Paris" (*Drink* 269). Unlike Marya in *Quartet*, ensnared by Heidler and Lois and their coterie of artists, Sasha's only exposure to such a milieu is through the painter Serge Rubin, who, as a Jewish foreigner, is himself an outsider. Still, Sasha's experience of the Left Bank is far removed from "the setting of an exciting literary revolution," and instead "represent[s] [the] exhausting and degrading efforts to provide the necessities of survival" (Benstock 449). Her pragmatic rendering of the city has her describing the "two cafés opposite each other in this street near my hotel" as "the one where the proprietor is hostile" and "the one where the proprietor is neutral" (371). Grounded as it is in the fear of being ridiculed and made spectacle, Sasha's mapping of the city follows a different logic than that of the (typically bourgeois, male) tourist.

This rewriting of the city in psychological and emotional terms finds Sasha designating cafes as safe or unsafe, marking restaurants for their "familiar" washrooms, their neutral staff. She explains:

My life, which seems so simple and monotonous, is really a complicated affair of cafés where they like me and cafés where they don't, streets that are friendly, streets that aren't, rooms where I might be happy, rooms where I never shall be, looking-glasses I look nice in, looking-glasses I don't, dresses that will be lucky, dresses that won't, and so on. (371)

Sasha's assessment appears to place the hostilities of others and the perceived unluckiness of a dress on the same plane, as if all her troubles were simply the products of a psychological quirk.

However, this would be to ignore the complex socio-economic and gendered conditions that underlie Sasha's "complicated affair" of a life. This is nicely illustrated by Sasha's account of a kitten she once encountered in London—thin and sickly—that she shooed from her flat, only to hear later that it had been run over. Sasha describes the kitten as having had "an inferiority complex and persecution mania and *nostalgie de la boue* and all the rest" (377), but it soon becomes clear that she is also, perhaps predominantly, describing herself. The kitten is targeted by the male cats of the neighbourhood, develops a sore on her neck, is called "disgusting" by her owners, and is eventually run over by what Sasha calls a "merciful taxi" (377). Like the kitten, Sasha possesses an unhealthy "persecution mania" *and* inhabits a world in which she is routinely persecuted and othered. Bowlby writes of the difficulty in deciding whether Rhys's "heroines' troubles are supposed to be caused by this or by that, by men, or madness, or the commodification of women in modern capitalism" (34). I would suggest that this causal indeterminacy is Rhys's way of speaking to the complex negotiations of oppression, her way of recognizing that "capitalist and patriarchal values are inseparable, [with] each supporting the other in a parasitical economy" (Benstock 440). Moreover, by refusing to provide a clear-cut reason why Sasha is the way she is, Rhys depicts the modern subject as inextricably implicated in the networks that oppress her. As Emery writes, it is the play of Sasha's many disguises, "rather than a discovery of authentic selfhood, [that] shapes the narrative" (11). In other words, rather than search for an autonomous self that precedes or transcends Sasha's place "on the extreme edge of multiple axes of exclusion" (Linett 437-438), we might consider instead how she responds to being situated there.

Tactics

Sasha's particular mode of navigating Paris can be understood in terms of Michel de Certeau's theory of tactics and consumer "ways of operating," which "constitute the innumerable practices by means of which users reappropriate the space organized by techniques of sociocultural production" (xiv-xv). Interested in "the clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical, and makeshift creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the nets of 'discipline,'" de Certeau focuses on the consumer as everyman, granting him or her a certain measure of agency in the face of Foucauldian systems of surveillance, discipline, and organization. He differentiates between "strategies" and "tactics," defining the former as such:

I call a "strategy" the calculus of force—relationships which become possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an "environment." A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as *proper (propre)* and thus serves as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it (competitors, adversaries, "clientèles," "targets," or "objects" of research). Political, economic, and scientific rationality has been construed on this strategic model. (xix)

Strategies, deployed systematically, are the province of the powerful. *Good Morning, Midnight*, set against the backdrop of the 1937 *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques* with its competing Nazi and Communist pavilions, gestures to a world dominated by competing power relations. On a smaller scale, Sasha's quotidian existence is mediated by the strategic operations of those more powerful than her, from the *patron* of the hotel who demands to see her passport, to the hostile cafe proprietors, to the frightening "commis voyageur" next door.

If strategies are the operations of “technocratic structures” (xiv-xv), of authority figures, then tactics, on the other hand, consist of “an art of the weak” (de Certeau 37):

The space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power. It does not have the means to *keep to itself*, at a distance, in a position of withdrawal, foresight, and self-collection: it is a manoeuvre “within the enemy’s field of vision,” as von Bülow put it, and within enemy territory. It does not, therefore, have the options of planning general strategy and viewing the adversary as a whole within a distinct, visible, and objectifiable space. It operates in isolated actions, blow by blow.

(de Certeau 37)

In de Certeau’s formulation, tactics provide the consumer with a way of living under “the law of a foreign power,” in a manner that “establishes [...] a degree of *plurality* and creativity” (30; original emphasis). Tactical “ways of using” are made visible in the sense that they occur “within the enemy’s field of vision,” yet inherent to that visibility is the possibility that what is being seen is a false show, a masquerade, a ruse. The tactic “must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. It poaches in them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected. It is a guileful ruse” (37). In a novel that “thematically stresses the importance of exhibitions and appearances, of looking and displaying,” Sasha “is constantly anxious and aware of being seen as an outsider, a foreigner, an old woman, a rich woman” (Camarasana 63). She fears being looked at, yet finds herself the object of other people’s stares throughout the novel. How, then, does she live under these scopic conditions? How and in what forms does she articulate her “art of the weak”? With these questions I turn to the next section.

Sasha as Spectacle

In discussing *Quartet*, literary scholar Richard E. Zeikowitz argues that Rhys “does not merely ‘translate’ Marya’s internalized experience of Paris; rather, she articulates the process by which Marya *constructs* her own Paris—one at odds with the ordered, stable, masculine city that oppresses her” (1). Zeikowitz’s work, also drawing on de Certeau in his essay “Walking in the City,” outlines how Marya enacts a spatial rewriting of Paris. My reading of *Good Morning, Midnight* shares an affinity with this line of inquiry but focuses on the female flâneur, not as walker, but as spectacle. Of course, the terms “flâneur” and “spectacle” are discursively gendered and nearly oxymoronic when joined together. As cultural historian Deborah L. Parsons writes, “The urban observer, as both a social phenomenon and a metaphor for the modernist artist, has been regarded as an exclusively male figure” (4). Critical theorist Susan Buck-Morss adds that “[p]rostitution was indeed the female version of flânerie” (119). While both Parsons and Buck-Morss are writing of a historically situated flâneur—one deriving from Walter Benjamin’s study of nineteenth-century Paris—the term has largely retained these connotations of bourgeois masculinity well into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In recent years, however, the term has undergone discursive shifts that register the flâneur as “an increasingly expansive figure who represents a variety of ‘wanderings,’ in terms of ambulation, nationality, gender, race, class, and sexuality” (Parsons 4). My discussion relies on the older formulation of the flâneur only because, within the context of *Good Morning, Midnight*, Sasha decidedly cannot be called a flâneuse: she walks the urban landscape and yet derives little pleasure from it; she inhabits the role of outsider too fully to claim ownership of the street; and she is observed more than she observes. This last point is because “[w]omen were excluded from the privileged

standing of spectator, with its attendant visual pleasures and uncurtailed mobility, along the gendered divide of scopic relations, namely that men look and women appear” (Conor 18).

Part of Sasha’s history of “appearing” includes her being seen or mistaken for the other figure in the street: the prostitute. Buck-Morss continues: “The flaneur was simply the name of a man who loitered; but all women who loitered risked being seen as whores” (119). Rhys’s earlier novels all feature protagonists who maintain ambiguous relationships to the commodification of their sexuality; Sasha’s flashbacks to her past place her in this category as well. However, she is now, or imagines herself to be, perceived as “la vieille” (378), a woman long past the age of sexual desirability. Yet if the ageing Sasha no longer occupies her former position as sexual commodity when walking in the street, she is also not granted the role of sexual appraiser. Interestingly, despite Sasha’s attempts to look respectable and neither old nor rich, she attracts the attentions of a gigolo named René. She thinks to herself, “Oh Lord, is that what I look like? Do I really look like a wealthy dame trotting round Montparnasse in the hope of --? After all the trouble I’ve gone to, is that what I look like? I suppose I do” (389). For the first time, she records not caring “what the man thinks of me” and notices he “isn’t trying to size me up, as they usually do—he is exhibiting himself, his own person” (389). Yet as the ending of the novel makes clear, Sasha’s age and gifted fur coat do not enable a shift in her sexual agency, as even in the company of a gigolo her desires are ignored. René tells her, “I knew you wanted me to come up—yes. That was easy to see” (455), and proceeds to nearly rape her. Ultimately, Sasha’s sexuality makes her a spectacle, with René saying, “I want to see this comedy” (455). The comedy for René lies in the idea of Sasha’s trying to throw him out, yelling “[a]u secours, au secours” (455) and making a scene, but also, it is implied, in the show or spectacle of the older woman’s sexuality. A spectacle, typically gendered as female, involves “a kind of inadvertency and loss of

boundaries” (Russo 54). René accuses Sasha of “playing a comedy” (455), of acting in opposition to her sexual desires, but the very existence of those desires makes her appear ridiculous and grotesque, a comedy that is watched by the male spectator. René wants to “*see* this comedy” (my emphasis).

Sasha’s attempts to adhere to her programme—“Eat. Drink. Walk. March.” (433)—are carried out in the name of surviving the city’s visual scene, of escaping the looks of others by *appearing* respectable. Sasha, no longer “wish[ing] to be loved, beautiful, happy or successful,” simply wishes “to be left alone” (369). She tactically chooses which restaurant or cafe to go to; “I don’t see why I shouldn’t revisit [the Pig and Lily],” she says at one point, “I have never made scenes there, collapsed, cried—so far as I know I have a perfectly clean slate” (367). That “clean slate,” we are made to understand, is not exactly common with Sasha. “The thing is to have a programme,” she reiterates, “not to leave anything to chance—no gaps. [...] Above all, no crying in public, no crying at all if I can help it” (351). Yet what happens when Sasha cries, when she makes a scene? When she fails in her ultimate goal of appearing respectable? Sasha gives in to her pose as a drunk. Paradoxically, she achieves the invisibility she is after by becoming super-visible, a spectacle, a drunk woman.

This transition from “femme convenable” to drunk is made legible when Sasha visits a *tabac* on her own. Immediately, she registers the hostility of others and the way she is being looked at, thinking, “The woman at the bar gives me one of those looks: What do you want here, you? We don’t cater for tourists here, not our clientèle...Well, dear madame, to tell you the truth, what I want here is a drink—I rather think two, perhaps three” (408). Sasha interprets the woman’s look—a look that codes her as undesirable, if respectable—and responds aggressively (and internally) with her unrespectable intention to drink. “Never mind,” Sasha says to herself,

“here I am and here I’m going to stay” (409). Yet she soon feels the need to justify her behaviour and presence to the wait staff, as she often does in the establishments she frequents. Nicholls characterizes Rhys’s depiction of the bar as “a space in which surveillance, observation and regulation are inscribed in both the physical structure and the hierarchical networks of specularly which are at work within it” (*Drink* 264). The mirrors lining the bar and cafe walls work to reproduce the stares of the customers and wait staff, as well as reflect Sasha’s sense of herself as visual oddity; able to see what they see, she is more convinced of her status as other. In the tabac, Sasha pays the waiter and asks him “the way to the nearest cinema.” She explains: “This, of course, arises from a cringing desire to explain my presence in the place. I only came in here to inquire the way to the nearest cinema. I am a respectable woman, une femme convenable, on her way to the nearest cinema” (409). Having successfully convinced the waiter she is the “respectable woman” of her refrain, Sasha orders another Pernod; with that action, however, she signals that she has ceased to be that woman:

Now the feeling of the room is different. They all know what I am. I’m a woman come in here to get drunk. That happens sometimes. They have a drink, these women, and then they have another and then they start crying silently. And then they go into the lavabo and then they come out—powdered, but with hollow eyes—and, head down, slink into the street. [...] That’s it, chère madame, I’m drunk. I have drunk. There’s nothing to be done about it now. I have drunk. But otherwise quiet, fearful, tamed, prepared to give big tips. (I’ll give a big tip if you’ll leave me alone.) Bon, bien, bien, bon... (410)

Her addiction exposed, her respectability shown to be but a mask, Sasha acknowledges her breach of socially acceptable behaviour. “I have drunk,” she says, as if to say, “I have sinned.”

With only one extra drink, Sasha becomes one of “these women,” a type with recognizable patterns of operating, with a recognizable look. Significantly, the designation and classification of this type—at least for the bartender and waiter—occur along purely visual lines: there is no need to access Sasha’s interiority, or ascribe her motives that go beyond wanting to drink and drink more.

In *The Spectacular Modern Woman*, Conor argues that the early twentieth century’s “visually intensified scene provided new conditions for the feminine subject” (7). In Conor’s discussion, a woman’s becoming spectacle is a potentially empowering means of articulating her subjectivity. She writes:

To appear within [this visual scene] was to literally make a spectacle of oneself, to configure oneself as spectacle, to apprehend oneself and be apprehended as image. [...] ‘Appearing’ describes how the changed conditions of feminine visibility in modernity invited a practice of the self which was centered on one’s visual status and effects. (7)

Conor sees “types” such as the “City Girl, Office Girl, Business Girl, Factory Girl, and the more morally dubious Flapper and Amateur” as achieving an articulation of self through visual means. Yet her use of “spectacle” carries with it none of the negatively gendered connotations usually associated with the word and she thus ignores the other “types” of women existing in the visual scene: the hag, the prostitute, the drunk woman. Rhys’s short story “Mannequin” includes a taxonomy of women similar to Conor’s, listing off “the *gamine*,” “the *femme fatale*,” and “the *garçonne*” (*Collected* 22-23) as types of feminine appearing. However, Rhys’s description of the models emphasizes the performative nature of playing to type: “Each of the twelve was a distinct and separate type: each of the twelve knew her type and kept to it, practising rigidly in clothing,

manner, voice and conversation” (22). For Rhys, even the privileged members of the visual scene, the young and beautiful, are performing in ways that are “rigid” and constraining. Still, Conor’s and Rhys’s projects aren’t completely at odds: if Conor is writing against the view that women are completely limited by their cultural constitution as image and object, then Rhys is similarly invested in exploring her protagonist’s moments of agency and instances of retaliation.

Instead of arguing for the agency of the “young, slender, attractive, and white” (30) group of women that populate Conor’s discussion, however, Rhys asks what it means to perform the grotesque, the irrevocably othered. She extends the complexities of female performance to roles not generally seen as performance: the drunk, for example, is assumed to be in a powerless position that offers little room for empowerment or tactical decision-making. Furthermore, the drunk is defined by her addiction, her degradation, in ways that preclude her from performing at all: unlike the *gamine* of Rhys’s story who plays to her type, the drunk is typically held to *be* her addiction. She is framed in ways that deny her the ability to see outside of her culturally constructed role as drunk. Rhys’s depiction of Sasha counters this view: her portrait of Sasha is of a woman who reflexively recognizes her role and is able to manipulate and work within its discursive constraints. This is not to say that Sasha isn’t an alcoholic, or that she’s merely playing a role in getting drunk, but it is to explore what Sasha does with the role of drunk woman and to ask what it affords her in terms of her scopic survival in the city.

Sasha’s transformation into a drunk woman in the *tabac* is done consciously. When the tenuous pose of respectability is undone by the ordering of her second Pernod, she has no choice but to inhabit the pose of a drunk; this posing is her “art of the weak.” De Certeau identifies deception and disguise as two of the advantages of the weak since

[t]he more a power grows, the less it can allow itself to mobilize part of its means in the service of deception: it is dangerous to deploy large forces for the sake of appearances [...] One deploys his forces, one does not take chances with feints. Power is bound by its very visibility. In contrast, trickery is possible for the weak, and often it is his only possibility, as a “last resort”... (37)

Sasha’s masquerade is necessitated by desperate circumstances: when she relinquishes the mask of respectability, she wears the mask of drunkenness as a “last resort.” Her transformation takes place in public, out in the open, in enemy territory. Her pose lies not in her being drunk—she is or will be soon—but in the way she inhabits the discursive category of drunk woman. That category carries with it an excess of connotations, of which Sasha is aware, that characterize her as passive, sexually promiscuous, hysterical, degraded, and mad. Yet just as she becomes a spectacle in this role—marring the visual scene of bourgeois cafe culture with her drunkenness, her sadness and hollow eyes—she paradoxically becomes invisible; she is seen, but only insofar as sight becomes a means of dismissal. The social response to the drunk woman is revulsion and disgust, but this response trades in abstractions rather than specifics: the drunk woman repels because she represents a challenge to or disruption of ideals of femininity and middle-class propriety. Sasha as individual is eclipsed by Sasha as drunk woman; eliciting the stares and judgment of others, she is at the same time rendered invisible.

Sasha engages in “trickery” in two ways: the first lies in her pose as a drunk woman, and the second lies in the very act of her posing. In terms of the former, Sasha appears as the “compliant female automaton” (Felski 20) of patriarchal fantasy: rendered silent, mute, she assumes an outward passivity. Psychoanalyst Joan Riviere’s 1929 essay “Womanliness as Masquerade” contains a useful analogy here, as she reads woman as performing her femininity

“both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it” (94). One of Riviere’s case studies is of a professional woman, adept in her field, who must flirt with her male audience members at the end of her talk in order to delegitimize the claims to masculine authority presented by it. Similarly, when Sasha assumes the role of drunk woman, she is relying on appearing passive in order to hide the radical resistance offered by her narrative. The label of passive drunk woman is a guise that allows for Sasha’s active, narrative inhabitation of the role. Dolls, mannequins, and machines are recurring images in *Good Morning, Midnight*, gesturing, perhaps, to patriarchally licensed forms of feminine appearing. Thinking back to her job in a dress shop, Sasha says, “I would feel as if I were drugged, sitting there, watching those damned dolls, thinking what a success they would have made of their lives if they had been women. Satin skin, silk hair, velvet eyes, sawdust heart—all complete” (353). The dolls would make “successful” women not only on account of their idealized physical features, but also, principally, for being dolls—silent, unthinking, and unfeeling. Sasha admits that she’s “a bit of an automaton” (348) who’s been “made very passive” (349), yet her recognition of this signals that she has not entirely succumbed to her oppression, not yet “succeeded” as the dolls have. Nardin, taking up “the claim of recent feminists that women’s addictions can be seen as symptoms of patriarchal oppression or as protests against it” (46), views Rhys’s depictions of alcoholic women as “a proto-feminist alternative” to Crowley’s formulation of the modernist drunk narrative. She writes that the “novels suggest that women drinkers might choose addiction and refuse a recovery that would only return them to the predicament against which they were protesting in the first place” (46).¹² Sasha’s getting drunk

¹² Film scholar Melissa Pearl Friedling cautions against approaches in this vein that valorize women’s “addictions as liberatory rhetorics” since “[p]roblematically, this strategy insists on female suffering as the prerequisite for feminist agency and is complicit with the patriarchal ideals of the docile, submissive, and accommodating woman” (3-4).

offers an alternative to the (sober) role she is expected to play, even if by doing so she appears all the more passive.

This “appearing,” however, is simply an element of Sasha’s disguise. Her trickery lies in presenting a doll-like passivity to the world, a passivity that plays into the patriarchal desire for female subordination, while actively rebelling against the forces oppressing her through her fiercely ironic narrative mode. Literary critic Sylvie Maurel discusses Sasha’s practice of quoting “rather than speak[ing] a language which is felt as a strange and coercive system from which the female speaking subject is alienated,” which results in her distance from the words she borrows and employs. Maurel suggests that

[w]ere it not for the various sequences in which Sasha, contrary to [Rhys’s] earlier heroines, proves to be an expert speaker, this distancing might have posited Sasha as a defective one. Instead, it converts language into an object of inquiry ironically scrutinized by a knowledgeable heroine. (109)

By talking back to her oppressors—even if internally—Sasha resists being reduced to the passive alcoholic she appears to be. As readers, we see both sides of her drunken act: that which she presents to the waiters and patrons of the bar, and that which constitutes a strikingly different inner world.

By turning away from “the predicament” of patriarchal and capitalist culture, Sasha turns to alcohol. Cultural theorist Avital Ronell, writing about “*Madame Bovary*, Heidegger, and the structure of Being as addiction” (Culler 2) in her study *Crack Wars: Literature, Addiction, Mania*, explores how Emma Bovary, as addict, is in a perpetual state of craving that troubles and complicates her desire to live, to be actively engaged in the world. Emma, in Ronell’s

Responses such as Friedling’s, however, fail to take into account the often complex negotiations of agency and oppression.

formulation, is doubly transgressive for being a woman as well as an addict. “A woman,” she writes, “is the mark of a fissure in active living, a thing of the side-lines, beside the point and attracted actively to a substitute for active living” (101-102). “[A] thing of the side-lines,” perhaps, because in the patriarchal economy that names men as subjects of their own narratives, women are figured as secondary. (Emma becomes such a subject only by subsuming herself within the narratives of the romance novel.) Ronell writes that “Freud has characterized the addict as evoking the charm of cats and birds of prey with their inaccessibility, their apparent libidinal autonomy,” which is “not very far from his description, in another context, of women” (53-54). In Ronell’s reading of Freud, both addicts and women subscribe to a kind of “[n]arcissistic withdrawal [that] introduces a scandalous figure into the society of humans by removing the addicted [and/or female] subject from the sphere of human connectibility” (53-54). In this formulation, addicts, women, and perhaps especially, addicted women are threatening to the social order insofar as they don’t rely on it. In thrall to his or her addiction, the addict has no need for anyone or anything else. Similarly, women, relegated to the “side-lines” and as such seen as mysteriously inaccessible by their male observers (such as Freud), find alternative ways of being. Discussing Emma and her “addiction” to novels, Ronell declares that “a woman finds a substitute” (101) for “active living,” for community engagement. Sasha’s announcement that “[she] want[s] one thing and one thing only—to be left alone” is followed by her “substitute”: “Now whisky, rum, gin, sherry, vermouth, wine with the bottles labelled ‘Dum vivimus, vivamus...’” (369). The addicted woman is a transgressive figure in that she wilfully chooses a destructive substitute over “human connectibility” and the socially acceptable roles available to her.

The Abject

Sasha's role as drunk woman, then, involves elements of deception and disguise that allow her to articulate her own form of resistance. I now want to consider how Sasha's act of masquerading—her quick shift from "femme convenable" to drunk—makes her a figure of deception aligned with Julia Kristeva's conception of the abject. By embodying in one figure that which is both respectable and repulsive, by "passing" as one and then, with one drink, becoming the other, Sasha invokes the abject "with a clean, false face" where the "horror is hidden, not behind the surface of the body as some internal growth may be, but behind a benevolent disguise" (Goodnow 37). Significantly, this abject position provides Sasha with a way of seeing born of doubleness and unstable boundaries. It allows for a mode of sight predicated on, as Kristeva writes, "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (4). In a flashback to her life with Enno, the husband who left her, Sasha recalls looking at herself in the mirror and thinking, "I look thin—too thin—and dirty and haggard, with that expression that you get in your eyes when you are very tired and everything is like a dream and you are starting to know what things are like underneath what people say they are" (418). Sasha's drunk narrative, bereft of transcendence and heroism, ultimately allows her to penetrate through false surfaces to "what things are like underneath."

Like the kitten with its "nostalgie de la boue" in the story she tells, Sasha, too, is drawn to what is crude and degrading, if only because she is able to see it when others cannot. She is quick to point out people's hypocrisy, their posturing and fraudulence, their saying one thing and doing another. She routinely undermines the euphemistic language used to describe hotel rooms; in one passage, she overhears a man asking about a room, while she notes, in a matter-of-fact

way, “I watch cockroaches crawling from underneath the carpet and crawling back again” (363). The first room in which she stays in Paris with Enno, having long anticipated the pleasures of the city, is described as pleasant, but “that night we woke up scratching, and the wall was covered with bugs, crawling slowly” (420). She mimics the standard descriptions, saying, “A room. A nice room. A beautiful room. A beautiful room with bath. A very beautiful room with bath. A bedroom and sitting-room with bath. Up to the dizzy heights of the suite,” only to add, “But, alas! the waiter has a louse on his collar” (363). Sasha, inhabiting a borderland herself, sees the unspoken underside of things. Speaking of England, she says, “We have our ration of rose-leaves, but only because rose-leaves are a gentle laxative” (440). Even the description of a smell—something known immediately, viscerally—relies on the hidden and repugnant, with Sasha saying:

This morning the hall smells like a very cheap Turkish bath in London—the sort of place that is got up to look respectable and clean outside, the passage very antiseptic and the woman who meets you a cross between a prison-wardress and a deaconess, and everybody speaking in whispering voices with lowered eyes: “Foam or Turkish, madam?” And then you go down into the Turkish bath itself and into a fog of stale sweat—ten, twenty years old. (364)

Does Sasha’s hallway smell antiseptic or like stale sweat? Does she locate in the clean smell the revolting one? The passage is ambiguous, yet clearly illustrates how the duplicitous abject informs Sasha’s perspective. Significantly, it is not only Sasha’s quick shift from the clean-faced respectable woman to the repulsive drunk that performs her abjection, but also her narrative: her descriptions of the “respectable and clean” often go on for a sentence or two, sometimes longer, without the reader suspecting anything until she undermines that impression of cleanliness with a

revelatory, revolting “punch line,” of sorts. Sasha reproduces for the reader the shock and horror that results in an encounter with the abject; her narrative doesn’t simply describe the abject, but is constituted by it in a fundamental way. Similarly, the abject is also constituted by narrative: the cockroaches in the hotel bathroom, the louse on the waiter’s collar, the confusing odour of the hallway—all achieve their status as abject through Sasha’s narrative framing. Even her disturbing switch from respectable woman to drunk is primarily enacted through narrative means, as she identifies the nearly imperceptible shift in how she is perceived, noting, “[n]ow the feeling of the room is different.”

Sasha, as a female alcoholic, is of course transgressive in her rejection of codes of feminine behaviour and middle-class propriety, but she is doubly so in her performances of “femme convenable” and drunk woman, particularly as one role transitions, almost imperceptibly, into the next. *Good Morning, Midnight* is a text anchored in the in-between, the liminal realm between disguises, the space in which things and people are exposed for what they are—often dirty and cruel, respectively. Britzolakis contends that the novel “insists [...] on waste and the issue of waste disposal,” pointing to Sasha’s “proximity with other abjected urban marginals such as the homeless destitute sleeping in a café, and the impoverished woman whose job is washing dishes in a restaurant” (468). The story Serge tells about the woman from Martinique offers another compelling example of the breakdown of categories; after finding her lying on the floor outside his room in London, drunk, he describes her as having “been crying so much that it was impossible to tell whether she was pretty or ugly or young or old” (403). Sasha immediately identifies with her, particularly because Serge relates that she asked for a drink as Sasha has just done. The Martinique woman occupies an ambiguous position; without identifying physical markers, Serge cannot tell if she is desirable or grotesque. Yet her drunken

crying situates her as the latter, as Serge continues by saying, “But it was difficult to speak to her reasonably, because I had all the time this feeling that I was talking to something that was no longer quite human, no longer quite alive” (403). The woman—drunk, poor, of mixed-race—is disturbing for the multiple ways in which she exists as other and resists categorization. Her position as someone existing in the in-between leaves Serge to also question her being alive and human.

The novel thus presents minor characters who echo Sasha’s own abjection, while informing her way of operating in the world. Hers is a perspective that has done away with illusions: her world is dirty and deconsecrated; her sight is made clearer and keener the lower she sinks. The novel’s shocking ending—when Sasha embraces the man who has terrified her throughout the novel, saying, “Yes—yes—yes...”—is a final recognition of her position as abject. The “*commis voyageur*,” described as a “ghost,” as “thin as a skeleton” (350), as giving Sasha a “nightmare feeling,” also wears a “beautiful dressing-gown, immaculately white” (364). Emery characterizes critical responses to the last scene as reading it as either Sasha’s “welcome to death” or her “rebirth through transcendence of the self in union with another human being” (145, 146). My reading situates Sasha as finally conceding to her vision—a vision that relies on the skewed perception of a drunk, a vision born of the masquerade. Sasha recognizes the *commis* for what he is: a nightmare cloaked in a clean, white gown. She seeks in his arms not the warmth of human companionship, nor the easy escape of death, but an acknowledgment of abjection, an encounter with it, an embrace of it. At one point, Sasha says, “You imagine the carefully-pruned, shaped thing that is presented to you is truth. That is just what it isn’t. The truth is improbable, the truth is fantastic; it’s in what you think is a distorting mirror that you see the truth” (390). Sasha’s narrative is the distorting mirror—disturbing, in-between, out of bounds, intoxicated—in

which the truth is made visible. Her embrace of the commis, neither a “yes” to life nor to death, is a grim negotiation of the two.

3 “I Talk One Way”: Narrating over Gin (and Wine) in Jane Bowles’s *Two Serious Ladies*

Discussions of Jane Bowles’s novel *Two Serious Ladies* typically begin with critics attempting to account for its disorienting—one might say intoxicating—effect on the reader, which usually results in a listing of the text’s formal oddities; in this respect, mine will be no different. However, the articulation of this disorientation often stops there, as if describing the novel’s style gets it “over with,” so to speak, and makes room for a weightier and separate discussion of thematic meaning. This is to treat Bowles’s style, her use of dialogue, her plotting of character, as novelty for its own sake, comic devices that aim for nothing more than a laugh or a surprised reaction. It is to conclude, as Edith Walton did in her 1943 *New York Times* book review, that the novel “strains too hard to startle and to shock” and “all too often is just merely silly” (B4 14). Other critics, however, recognize Bowles’s style as key to her literary practice, as when Ellen G. Friedman writes, “the inconsistency, randomness, and contradiction contribute to the narrative’s seductive and liberating strangeness” (246); when Alan Tinkler assesses the “disorientation” of the novel as “intentional, as Jane Bowles wants the reader to (re)orient to a new literature” (67); or when Kraft concludes that “[h]er style expresses her theme more clearly than the retelling of any narrative could do” (275). However, none of these critics provides a satisfying elaboration on these pronouncements. In what ways, then, is the text disorienting?

The novel’s oddities include “[t]he non sequiturs of [the characters’] conversation, their paradoxical pronouncements, the eccentric movements through time and space”; sentences which “often occur in discrete, monadic units, not dependably connected to what precedes or follows” (Friedman “Contents” 244-245); and “weirdly styled dialogue and linguistically ‘off-centre’ depictions of outrageous improprieties in relationships as if both [...] were perfectly

normal” (Wheeler 169-170). The narrative moves in a jerky manner, with seemingly important developments treated in a sentence or two, as when Miss Gamelon moves in with Miss Goering after just making her acquaintance, or when Arnold and Miss Gamelon abruptly stop hating each other and become a couple. The novel enacts a constant shifting of terms, a perpetual display of relativity, as each character redefines what is held to be normal or strange. That much of the novel unfolds in locations where drinks are available and consumed—a cocktail party, Miss Goering’s family home, various bars in Panama and New York—is fitting since the characters operate *as if drunk*. They are comically quick to declare their love, especially when the situation merits no such declaration, and often act completely unaware of social conventions. They speak with a blunt honesty reminiscent of children (or the intoxicated). And, significantly, apart from Mrs. Copperfield’s “walk[ing] in a crooked path” (199) at the bar in the last scene, the characters remain markedly unchanged by their drinking, with their sober moments possessing the same off-kilter quality as their drunken ones. This is because in Bowles’s novel, drunkenness figures not as a temporary state brought on by drinking, but as a condition, or symptom, of being. Drunkenness functions as a metaphor for a world, recognizable in its outlines, and yet rendered uncanny, discordant, *off*. If the “drunk narrative” of *Good Morning, Midnight* can be said to centre on Sasha’s individual drinking practices, to reflect *her* perspective, then that of *Two Serious Ladies* resides at the level of narrative itself, belonging to no one character and yet reflecting the worldview of the text.

Bowles’s narrative can be characterized as intoxicated in two fundamental ways: first, because it represents a topsy-turvy world in which the two female protagonists pursue their quests for happiness, self-discovery, and salvation on their own terms, without recourse to a patriarchal framework that positions them as other; if Bowles places a woman as her questing

philosopher in the “permissible” world of the drunk narrative, then she is also asking why this cannot be the case in more sober situations. Second, the novel’s characters, with their primal, drunken need to narrate—or, in Miss Goering’s case, avoid narrating—ultimately call attention to the limitations of both narrative and human knowledge. In Bowles’s hands, the modernist drunk narrative allows for a radical reimagining of the questing, narrating hero, while simultaneously calling into question the very possibility of that narration.

In the previous chapter, my discussion of Sasha situates her as reacting, from a vulnerable, weakened position, to the oppressive forces that both constitute and extinguish her sense of self. Many critics have approached *Two Serious Ladies* in much the same manner, reading Miss Goering’s forays into the world and Miss Copperfield’s embrace of lesbian desire as opposing, even while being conditioned by, patriarchal systems of oppression. If feminism can be said to embody the tension between “the positivity of politics, or affirmative action [on] behalf of women as social subjects” and “the negativity inherent in the radical critique of patriarchal, bourgeois culture” (de Lauretis 25), then these critical responses fall largely in the second category. Andrew Lakritz writes that “[b]y following her characters as they transgress the boundaries between worlds, Bowles articulates the struggle of these two women to reveal the prohibitions and limits of patriarchal culture for what they are: hollow” (223). James Kraft writes that each serious lady “is seeking to be free of the formal confines of the world that hold the self in place,” which include “family love where there is no love, social conventions that do not apply, sexual attitudes that do not work, genteel manners and methods of speech that are meaningless” (275). Kathy Justice Gentile asserts that the narrative “highlights the seriousness and silliness of the difficulties each woman faces, and thus the obstacles any woman who chooses to be ‘original’ must overcome in a society where homogeneous standards for feminine

conduct are strongly encouraged” (55-56). These critical responses take as their starting point a world, constraining and patriarchal, against which Bowles’s female characters must “struggle,” which they must attempt to “overcome.” At work here is the assumption that a text featuring female protagonists who are, in some sense, “questing” must begin with their subordination in order to chronicle their eventual attainment of agency and freedom. There appears to be a critical desire to impose a certain kind of feminist narrative on Bowles’s characters, to read them as inhabiting situations not wholly suggested by the text.

The protagonists of *Two Serious Ladies* are indeed transgressive figures, but not for their attacks on an oppressive system; rather, in their very obliviousness to it. While Mrs. Copperfield must shirk her husband in order to give herself fully to the Panamanian prostitute Pacifica, she successfully does so without too much trouble. Her struggles to achieve happiness, to follow the paths of her desire, are her own; despite an earnest attempt to play the paternal authority figure, Mr. Copperfield ultimately remains peripheral. It is true that she “love[s] to be free” (42), and considers her marriage burdensome, but unlike most narratives of female liberation and self-discovery, which dramatize the moment of escape and treat it as central and climactic, Mrs. Copperfield’s break with her husband is carried out in an understated manner; their separation is achieved quickly and nearly wordlessly—its cause never overtly discussed—and the whole incident becomes almost a non-event in the greater scheme of Mrs. Copperfield’s journey. Miss Goering’s struggles are also self-authored. She enters into relationships with men, but only insofar as they further her quest, her need to “work out [her] own little idea of salvation” (28). When she sets out on her journey, she does so with a mentality as unencumbered by patriarchal restraints as any male epic hero’s. While the novel depicts men and women living within this patriarchal framework—Arthur’s mother remains unhappily tied to her house and family,

Pacifica is physically and sexually abused by Meyer, Arthur is ridiculed for being an unmanly “sissy” (23)—the narrative’s focus on Miss Goering and Mrs. Copperfield, its unflinching treatment of their quests, mirrors their own understanding of themselves as subjects. *Two Serious Ladies* can be called a drunk narrative primarily for the way in which it envisions two women who quest with impunity, who act outside of accepted feminine roles, who choose another way (without, perhaps, seeing it as an “other” way). The narrator registers the shock of the male characters when the protagonists act contrary to their expectations, yet doesn’t explain or justify this shock, appearing as blind to patriarchal desires as its “two serious ladies.”

This phenomenon is nicely illustrated by Miss Goering’s decision to leave Andy, which he responds to by threatening to shame her. “I really have no sense of shame,” she answers, adding, “and I think your own sense of shame is terribly exaggerated, besides being a terrific sap on your energies” (188). The narrative records Andy’s outrage and shock at this answer, his cries of “You’re crazy” and “Lunatic!” (188-189), but then abruptly shifts from this charged moment to a more subdued one in which “Miss Goering hurried out of the ice-cream parlor after having kissed Andy lightly on the head, because she realized that if she did not leave him very quickly she would miss her appointment” (188). The narration doesn’t offer a gloss on the encounter, nor does it include Miss Goering’s reaction to Andy’s accusations. Instead, that Miss Goering has no shame, an affect often characterized as feminine, as women’s “pervasive affective attunement to the social environment” (Bartky 85), is treated as nothing out of the ordinary. The narrative voice echoes Miss Goering’s behaviour, the way she selectively hears and responds to the desires of others, her narrow preoccupation with her own quest; the narrator discards Andy as a character just as quickly as Miss Goering takes leave of him as a lover.

“You Flop Around like a Little Baby”: Speech as Primitive State

This lack of narrative closure in the form of judgments or explanations is conspicuous in a novel that features characters who frequently speak, often in monologues, about their beliefs and patterns of behaviour. In this capacity, too, Bowles’s characters appear drunk: their feverish need to tell, to narrate who they are and what they believe often comes out of nowhere, unbidden by the conversation, requiring a listener and yet rendering that listener nearly inconsequential. Mrs. Quill, the proprietor of the Hotel de las Palmas in Panama, indulges in such a speech with Mrs. Copperfield when they first meet:

It’s balmy here and they [her clients] all enjoy themselves. They talk and they drink and they make love; they go on picnics; they go to the movies; they dance, sometimes all night long...I need never be lonely unless I want to...I can always go and dance with them if I feel like it. I have a fellow who takes me out to the dancing places whenever I want to go and I can always string along. I love it here. Wouldn’t go back home for a load of monkeys. It’s hot sometimes, but mostly balmy, and nobody’s in a hurry. Sex doesn’t interest me and I sleep like a baby. I am never bothered with dreams unless I eat something which sits on my stomach. You have to pay a price when you indulge yourself. I have a terrific yen for lobster à la Newburg, you see. I go to Bill Grey’s restaurant I should say about once every month with this fellow. (55-56)

Mrs. Quill’s speech takes the form of an outpouring of mundane facts that somehow, vaguely, tell her story. It’s excessive in that it gestures outward, drifting from the topic of Pacifica and her hotel customers to her “yen for lobster à la Newburg.” There’s a slack quality to her speech: digressive and associative, it denies Mrs. Copperfield her dialogic role; instead of speaking to

Pacifica's situation, which is what started the conversation in the first place, Mrs. Quill brings the talk around to herself, almost as if to explain herself. She does so through recourse to the primal, with her talk of sex, sleep, food, and cravings. Her desire to speak of herself, then, to narrate, emerges as a pressing need on par with the needs of her body, the act of speaking seemingly taking precedence over what is spoken about.

Significantly, this scene unfolds as Mrs. Quill and Mrs. Copperfield are drinking gin, and corresponds to other instances in the novel when the women drink. These instances are marked by the women's shared understanding of what it means to act "like a baby," to become drunk, to relinquish (verbal, physical, intellectual) control. As she enjoys her drink at the Hotel Washington with Toby, Mrs. Quill says, "I'm afraid I'm behaving just like a baby, but there's no one who likes the good things in this world better than me" (82). Mrs. Copperfield invokes the phrase as she drinks alone in her hotel room: "...now for a little spot of gin to chase my troubles away. There isn't any other way that's as good. At a certain point gin takes everything off your hands and you flop around like a little baby. Tonight I want to be a little baby" (71). To "be a little baby" is to subscribe to a slackened economy of being where "everything" is taken "off your hands," where it becomes permissible to "flop around" and indulge hedonistic desire. The association I'm attempting to establish here, taking a cue from Dina Al-Kassim's work, is how speech in Bowles's novel operates as a "primitive state" akin to "drunkenness or being a baby" (120). *Two Serious Ladies* features characters who demonstrate an almost primal need to narrate their stories, to speak to others about who they are.

There's an intimate openness in these speeches, as when Arnold, after just meeting Miss Goering and bringing her home, starts telling her about his family problems and thwarted artistic ambitions, concluding in a comically earnest manner with: "Even though I am thirty-nine years

old I still am hoping very seriously that I will be able to make a definite break with my family” (20). In the narrative Arnold constructs about himself, Bowles creates a parodic *Künstlerroman*, where the bumbling, thirty-nine year old real estate agent stands in for the young, struggling artist. Instead of an oppressive bourgeois culture, Arnold chafes at the demands of his elderly parents, with whom he still lives. He establishes his bohemianism not in terms of his artistic ambitions—which are made no more specific than “[s]omething [...] in the book line, or in the painting line”—but by asserting that his friends “think very little about earning money at all” (20). The trappings and attitudes associated with the artist’s life, the poverty and rebellion, come to displace what the artist actually does, namely, producing art. The discrepancy between what Arthur says, what he voices about himself, and the reality of his situation gestures to the limitations of narrative. His declaration to Miss Goering that “I am now interested in being an entirely new personality as different from my former self as A is from Z” (121) comes across as false and exaggerated, and yet this type of utterance is standard for Bowles’s characters. Their assertions, made perhaps in a bid to sound decisive or important, ultimately bear little relation to their lived realities. Arthur may declare himself an artist-in-waiting or propose a radical personality change, but his words say less about his actual intent and beliefs than his need to say them.

This is apparent when Arthur questions Miss Goering—whose plan for salvation takes a consistent if enigmatic form throughout the novel—about her methods:

‘I don’t know why you find it so interesting and intellectual to seek out a new city,’ said Arnold, cupping his chin in his hand and looking at her fixedly.

‘Because I believe the hardest thing for me to do is really move from one thing to another, partly,’ said Miss Goering.

‘Spiritually,’ said Arnold, trying to speak in a more sociable tone, ‘spiritually I’m constantly making little journeys and changing my entire nature every six months.’

‘I don’t believe it for a minute,’ said Miss Goering.

‘No, no, it is true. Also I can tell you that I think it is absolute nonsense to move physically from one place to another. All places are more or less alike.’

Miss Goering did not answer this. She pulled her shawl closer around her shoulders and of a sudden looked quite old and very sad indeed.

Arnold began to doubt the validity of what he had just said, and immediately resolved to make exactly the same excursion from which Miss Goering had just returned, on the following night. He squared his jaw and pulled out a notebook from his pocket.

‘Now, will you give me the particulars on how to reach the mainland?’ said Arnold.

‘The hours when the train leaves and so forth.’

‘Why do you ask?’ said Miss Goering.

‘Because I’m going to go there myself tomorrow night. I should have thought you would have guessed that by this time.’

‘No, judging by what you just finished saying to me, I would not have guessed it.’

‘Well, I talk one way,’ said Arnold, ‘but I’m really, underneath, the same kind of maniac that you are.’ (158-159)

This passage is emblematic of the way in which Bowles’s characters engage in a recurring game of conversational misfiring, where words routinely fail to hit their mark; instead of serving as a vehicle for communication, the characters’ conversation becomes a verbal record of the failure to communicate. Arthur’s absurd contention that his underlying motives, his decision to ape Miss

Goering's plan, would be obvious to her—despite what he has just said in so assertive a manner—points to a crisis of interpretation. Miss Goering both discredits his words (“I don’t believe it for a minute”) and validates them (“judging by what you just finished saying to me, I would not have guessed it”), so that locating Arthur’s meaning becomes a complicated task; meaning isn’t located wholly within language, in the words he speaks, nor is it entirely outside of it, residing in unspoken intentions. Humorously, in saying, “I talk one way,” Arthur treats his slippery use of language as commonplace, acknowledging that his speech is often disingenuous and purely rhetorical. Yet this doesn’t stop him from believing what he says, as if stating things aloud will make them true. Indeed, Miss Goering and Arthur’s conversation takes the form of a competition for spiritual dominance, in which deep-seated conviction stands in for the substance of that faith. Miss Goering’s plan for salvation is not explained here in anything but vague terms, and even then, her statement is tempered by the word “partly” that follows it. Still, Miss Goering doesn’t entirely entrust her plan to narrative: she answers Arnold’s question, then becomes silent and “very sad” upon being challenged. It is Arnold who pronounces definitive statement after statement, flaunting his conviction, until Miss Goering’s saddened response has the surprising effect of prompting Arnold’s philosophical turnaround. Here, speech functions as a stopgap for the more involved processes of knowing and believing; Arnold speaks before he knows, perhaps because knowing is, ultimately, out of reach.

In a similar scenario, Arthur’s father, after deciding to return to his wife, writes an apology letter to her and asks Miss Goering to read it. The letter sets out an explanation for his behavior, the crux of which is “that there is, in every man’s life, a strong urge to leave his life behind him for a while and seek a new one” (181). He tells Miss Goering after she has finished reading, “It is simple [...] and it expresses what I felt.” She asks if this is truly so, and he

responds with “I believe so [...] *It must have been*” (my emphasis 181), an answer that comes across as uncertain at best. Here the impulse to narrate precedes the moment of understanding and self-recognition; narration, held as a means of legitimizing experience, works to obscure it instead. Arthur’s father writes his letter as a way of setting down a version of events he can believe in, of providing this phase of his life with narrative boundaries. At stake is not the truthfulness of his story so much as its capacity to offer something definitive and final: for many of Bowles’s characters, the impulse to narrate is born of the desire to have “everything” “tak[en] off [their] hands.” Arthur’s father doesn’t require a true understanding of his motivations, just a story that comes close enough, one that presents a believable approximation of the truth. The characters’ desire for narrative is a desire for narrative at its most general—as a means of speaking, being heard, and making contact of some kind.

While Rhys overtly addresses the taboos aimed at the drinking woman—her association with the prostitute, the way she transgressively shirks her social role—Bowles draws on this other, ontological, aspect of drunkenness in her phrase “being a baby.” In this capacity, the dangers of intoxication are universal, as the repressive forces of reason and morality give way to an infantilized, hedonistic mode of behaviour. To “be a little baby” is to tacitly reject the norms and codes of behaviour—legal, moral, and social—governing society. Just as Ronell frames both addict and woman as threatening for their “libidinal autonomy,” so Bowles reveals the quest for meaning, as articulated by the majority of her characters, to be a primal, irrational quest for pleasure and closure. The reified philosophical quest threatens to become nothing more than the narcissistic babbling of a drunk. With Miss Goering’s narrative mode, however, Bowles complicates this picture; if the philosophical quest devolves into drunken, incomprehensible

prattle, then this says more about the nature of existence than it does about the speakers trying to make sense of it.

“Giving an Account of Oneself”

In contrast to the other characters in the novel, Miss Goering doesn't subscribe to an excessive and infantile practice of speaking. Instead of declaring her beliefs, as Arnold or his father might, she prefers “to work out [her] own little idea of salvation,” and this idea remains something she grapples with for the entirety of the novel. Her plan is provisional, must be “work[ed] out,” and thus cannot be resolved instantaneously. Unlike Arnold, who “immediately resolve[s]” to follow a different course, Miss Goering's ideas are slow to be formulated and articulated. Indeed, the closest she comes to revealing her guiding principles is to say, “I really believe that it is necessary for me to live in some more tawdry place and particularly in some place where I was not born” (28). She adds to this by saying, “The idea [...] is to change first of our own volition and according to our own inner promptings before they impose completely arbitrary changes on us” (29), never, of course, clarifying who or what she means by “they” and “changes.” However, this reluctance to speak of her plan for salvation isn't secrecy, but rather an acknowledgment that her plan remains largely unknown. There are hints as to the nature of her spiritual enterprise—she must masochistically leave her comfortable home and seek out the tawdry and debased—but no overarching system is ever revealed. Miss Goering's “salvation” remains hazy and ill-defined, with her use of the term adding to the mystery. As Wheeler writes, themes of “spiritual development, religious feeling, and morality [...] are treated in hilariously grotesque, bizarre styles and narrative forms which seeks to turn conventional notions of the meaning of such themes on their heads” (172). The novel invokes Christian codes of morality, and yet it soon becomes clear that Miss Goering's beliefs are located outside of that particular

framework. The novel's opening scene illustrates this disjunction as the young Miss Goering performs bizarre rituals on her sister's friend in the name of God. Her improvised baptism of the girl in muddy water, her reassurances that "[i]f you let me do this, you won't go to hell" (7), suggests an engagement with the vocabulary and forms of religious observance if not a strict adherence to its contents.

As an adult, Miss Goering's search for meaning takes a shape no less amorphous than those of her childhood doctrines. To Arthur's invitation to stay the night, when they first meet, Miss Goering replies with: "I probably shall [...] although it is against my entire code, but then, I have never even begun to use my code, although I judge everything by it" (19). Her "code," while never explained for the reader, functions mainly as a marker of paradox. While the other characters of the novel engage in naming their beliefs and histories (however inaccurately), Miss Goering appears to favour the unresolved and unspeakable. At the beginning of the novel, she tells Mrs. Copperfield and Arthur a story involving a building that is about to be torn down, located across from her sister's home. She recounts how it started to rain, with water gradually soaking the wallpaper, creating "dark spots [...] which were growing larger" (17). Mrs. Copperfield responds to this last detail by saying, "How amusing [...] or perhaps it was depressing" (17), indicating the kind of critical ambivalence characteristic of Bowles's characters, as well as their need to speak despite this ambivalence. Mrs. Copperfield cannot decide if the rain-sodden wallpaper is amusing or depressing, but feels the necessity of interjecting a comment all the same. To speak is to lay claim to a truth, to an interpretive position, that holds at bay the terrifying consequences of not knowing. Mrs. Copperfield turns to speech as she does to drink, with the object of becoming a baby, of having the doubts and fears of existential questioning simply "taken off her hands." Miss Goering, in contrast, inhabits the

interstitial realm between knowing and speaking, embracing meaning as dynamic and ever-unfolding. Both approaches, however, gesture to the limitations and difficulties of narrating, of putting the complexities of experience into words.

Judith Butler writes of the difficulties of “giving an account of oneself” in an essay of the same name. She contends that because narrating posits an “I,” which “cannot tell the story of its own emergence, and the conditions of its own possibility without in some sense bearing witness to a state of affairs to which one could not have been present” (26), there’s a fictive quality at work that robs the narrating “I” of its claim to absolute authority. Butler writes:

Fictional narration requires no referent to work as narrative, and we might say that the irrecoverability of the referent, its foreclosure to us, is the very condition of possibility for an account of myself if that account is to take narrative form. It does not destroy narration but produces it precisely in a fictional direction. So to be more precise, I would have to say that I can tell the story of my origin and even tell it again and again, in several ways; but the story of my origin I tell is not one for which I am accountable, and it cannot establish my accountability. At least, let’s hope not, since, over wine usually, I tell it in various ways, and the accounts are not always consistent with one another. (26)

The difficulties inherent to narration are always present for the speaking (and writing) subject, but are even more obvious when it comes to narrating “over wine.” Indeed, in Butler’s playful addition of that detail is a fitting analogy for “giving an account of oneself”: narrating one’s life will inevitably be a drunken-like exercise lacking linearity and accuracy; ironically, only with recourse to the techniques of fiction can it pass as truthful. Of Bowles’s characters, those who subscribe to a slackened mode of narration, while perhaps believing in its legitimizing capacities,

ultimately attest to their stories' lack of accountability. Arthur may simply desire a system of belief to rival Miss Goering's, but by frequently switching positions he demonstrates the hollowness of his conviction. His father, too, writes his wife a letter explaining his actions in order to elicit forgiveness and attain some measure of narrative closure. Yet by remaining ignorant of his true motives for leaving her, he comes no closer to offering an authentic account of his feelings and beliefs. Similarly, Mrs. Copperfield's interjection of "how amusing" and then, "or perhaps it was depressing," during Miss Goering's story, points to her inability to gauge her own response to the story, as well as to discern Miss Goering's narrative intentions.

Butler formulates "giving an account of oneself" as the basis for an ethical relation between self and other: the encounter with the other is required in order to recognize one's own subjectivity, but that very encounter is also that which "dislocates" one's "first-person perspective" (23), which troubles one's sense of being an "I." Significantly, while Bowles's characters all rely on the presence of the other in articulating their philosophies, this reliance hardly translates into an ethical imperative. Instead, the characters' need for a listener, an observer, or, in Miss Goering's case, a companion, only emphasizes their insularity and narcissism. Shortly after demonstrating her obsession with Pacifica, Mrs. Copperfield tells Miss Goering that "although I love Pacifica very much, I think it is obvious that I am more important" (198). Pacifica, depicted throughout the novel as Mrs. Copperfield's sole passion, her reason for living, becomes little more than a vehicle for the latter's self-understanding. Miss Goering's male companions play a similar role in the structure of her quest. That Andy "was no longer thinking of himself as a bum [...] would have pleased [Miss Goering] greatly had she been interested in reforming her friends." "Unfortunately," the narrator continues, "she was only interested in the course that she was following in order to attain her own salvation" (172). The

other assumes a key role for Bowles's characters, but not in terms of Butler's theory of ethics and recognition; rather, the novel features characters who outwardly appeal to and court the other, while simultaneously silencing and excluding him or her. If Butler's narrating over wine produces several versions of her story, all addressed to an other, then the narration of Bowles's characters exhibits a degree of intoxication that invalidates the other entirely. What remains for these characters, besides the empty appeals for the other, is the primal, overwhelming need to narrate.

This narration, however, is for many of Bowles's characters an empty bid for authority and accountability: by engaging in narration, they undermine the very thing they hope to accomplish by it. I am echoing Al-Kassim here, who goes on to argue that "[l]osing [authority] does nothing to secure [Miss Goering and Mrs. Copperfield] as sovereign subjects of their speech" (120). Contending that the title characters engage in "failed speech act[s]" (120), she characterizes their attempts at speaking as pure loss. My reading differs from Al-Kassim's in several ways, mainly because Miss Goering's approach to narration—while decidedly no more lucid or complete than the other characters'—strikes me as quite different from theirs. Furthermore, that she doesn't narrate or explain her beliefs as the others do demonstrates less her inability to speak than her choosing not to do so. As the episode on the train with the red-faced woman illustrates, Miss Goering can be quite outspoken. The "failure to name" (Al-Kassim 120), then, is less a personal failing of Miss Goering's than a universal human condition bound up with the limitations of language and knowledge, of what can be expressed and known.

These limitations are dramatized by Bowles's characters in much the same way that Butler invokes wine: the attempt to translate the complexities of experience, of systems of belief, into words—themselves imperfect vessels—is akin to being drunk. Bowles extends Butler's

analogy by likening existence itself to drunkenness. That both Miss Goering and Mrs. Copperfield, with their dissimilar narrative modes, are effectively estranged from language illustrates this point. While Miss Goering's narrative restraint may not offer an illuminating account of her philosophy, it productively draws attention to the difficulties attending any quest for knowledge of the world and self. Bowles doesn't offer narratives of progress and fulfillment: the novel ends abruptly after a chaotic and discordant meeting between the two serious ladies, concluding, true to form, in an ambiguous manner. Miss Goering, abruptly abandoned by the menacing man she has attached herself to, thinks to herself: "Certainly I am nearer to becoming a saint [...] but is it possible that a part of me hidden from my sight is piling sin upon sin as fast as Mrs. Copperfield?" The narrator supplies the last, beguiling line of the novel: "This latter possibility Miss Goering thought to be of considerable interest but of no great importance" (201). The novel's frameworks don't allow for the epiphanic moment that might code "[t]his latter possibility" to be of "great importance." In a similarly inconclusive scenario, Mrs. Copperfield, desperately trailing after Pacifica, who intends to marry an American man, has finally become a baby by relinquishing control and giving herself entirely to her libidinal drives. When she sums up her situation, she does so drunkenly, in both a narrative and physical sense. She declares, "I *have* gone to pieces, which is a thing I've wanted to do for years" (197). Half celebratory declaration, half admission of failure, her words accurately reflect how the Bowlesian subject inhabits the world. The struggle to find meaning meets with the difficulties of naming it, and by doing so, charts the conditions of our unknowing.

4 Coda

“I like to alcoholize my texts, turn down the volume and let them murmur across endless boundaries and miniscule epiphanies”

—Avital Ronell, *Crack Wars: Literature, Addiction, Mania*

“Were one seeking a single word to sum up transformations in modernist literary scholarship over the past decade or two,” write modernist scholars Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, “one could do worse than light on *expansion*” (737). The term conveys the “temporal, spatial, and vertical directions” (737) in which the field has been moving, the first two of which speak to “the growing historical and geographical reach of modernist studies” (Friedman “Planetarity” 473), while the third is one “in which once quite sharp boundaries between high art and popular forms of culture have been reconsidered; in which canons have been critiqued and reconfigured; in which works by marginalized social groups have been encountered with fresh eyes and ears; and in which scholarly inquiry has increasingly extended to matters of production, dissemination, and reception” (Mao and Walkowitz 737-738). My project engages with this last category, challenging the academy’s gendered and often narrow constructions of the alcoholic modernist, while calling for analyses that reflexively employ and comment on these culturally pervasive constructions. My examination of the figure of the female alcoholic as writer and subject serves as a preliminary step in the rethinking of the modernist drunk narrative, and points to areas deserving of further research; I’m thinking specifically of areas that go beyond white, middle-class, heterosexual alcoholism. While I briefly addressed the critical reception to Rhys’s and Bowles’s lives and work in the introduction, it was chiefly in order to demonstrate the glaring lack of attention paid to both their alcoholism and their literary treatments of it; there is certainly a fruitful line of inquiry that considers, for example, how Rhys’s colonial status and Bowles’s homosexuality affect the discussion. The portraits I have

sketched here will necessarily be complicated and nuanced by factors of sexuality, class, and race. Furthermore, my thesis suggests ways of expanding current practices of modernist studies by proposing the field forges stronger connections with addiction studies, since, modernism—particularly its incarnations in North America and Europe—has been marked by alcohol consumption and abuse in much the same way as romanticism calls to mind opium addiction.

If, to return to Hemingway's story, Jig's desires remain unfulfilled and unexpressed in the end, repressed in favour of a continued life of drinks and travel, Rhys and Bowles offer an alternative vision of the modern woman who drinks. Rhys, writing against (and from within) the discursive construction of the female alcoholic, offers an epistemology grounded in abjection and disguise. Sasha arrives at her incisive and unromantic view of humanity by virtue of being drunk and female. In contrast to Rhys's overt exploration of the female alcoholic, Bowles employs drunkenness as an overarching metaphor for both narrating and existing. The novel's characters, speaking either enigmatically or excessively, all ultimately gesture to the difficulties involved in the search for and articulation of meaning. While two very different texts, *Good Morning, Midnight* and *Two Serious Ladies* both employ drunkenness as a way of attending to the "miniscule epiphanies" born of the human condition.

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