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**EDUCATING DESIRE: AUTO/BIO/GRAPHICAL IMPRESSIONS OF ADDICTION
IN/AND ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS (AA)**

by

PETER WALDMAN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Urban Education
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
The City University of New York
2015

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Urban Education in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

EDUCATING DESIRE: AUTO/BIO/GRAPHICAL IMPRESSIONS OF ADDICTION IN/AND
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by

Peter Waldman

Adviser: Professor Ken Tobin

This dissertation is an attempt to connect the personal with the socio-historical—addiction with Addiction, respectively. It is also an attempt to demonstrate that knowledge production can be generated through radically non-traditional means.

What follows is an interpretive, impressionistic, exploratory narrative about addiction in/and Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). It is also a narrative about Narrative. I ‘tell’ a semi-fictional auto/bio/graphical tale of one ‘open’ AA meeting in order to disclose what it’s like to be an addict and a newcomer in AA. In the ‘notes’ sections after all but one of the chapters the sober researcher takes over. These ‘made-up’ aspects of the narrative—the multi-tracked narrator’s voice, shifts in point-of-view, playing with time, and the semi and sometimes totally imagined “characters” I encounter at the meeting and elsewhere—are all part of the fiction I’ve made of my personal history as an addict and newcomer in AA. This complicates the relation between knower and known while enriching and enlivening the narrative, which is the rationale of the methodology: to draw the reader in. Full disclosure: While I’ve never been an AA member, I’ve attended at least twenty meetings in earnest in attempts to (re)mediate a serious addiction to prescription painkillers.

The standards of my impressionistic auto/bio/graphical tale are literary, not disciplinary. Like the novel, autobiographical writing allows for the psychological and the phenomenological, i.e., for description alongside glimpses into the processes of consciousness, the author/researcher taking the part of the student, and the narrative as a whole leaving the impression of something having

been learned. The idea that AA is a formal institution of education in its own right was the birth of the meeting narrator's skeptical pupillary voice.

The study's design is emergent and contingent as the framework and methodology changed radically during its several iterations. I came to rely on already existing data including: (1) audio files of an AA circuit speaker downloaded from the Internet, (2) autobiography, biography, fiction, poetry, and films on drugs and alcohol and on addiction/alcoholism (simply 'addiction' for this study), (3) current academic literature on addiction and AA (and AA's own literature), and (4) autobiographical memory of the lived experience of addiction and of being a newcomer in AA. In the 'notes' sections some of the history, literature, and philosophy of AA and of addiction are related, e.g., both addiction's socio-historical construction and its literary deconstruction. Two impressionistic bio/graphical tales—of Bill Wilson, cofounder of AA, and of Bob D., an AA circuit speaker—are used to disclose other lived experiences of addiction and of AA besides my own, to explore the notion that we are also *not* the stories we tell others and ourselves about ourselves, and to reveal Bob D's 'primary purpose' ethics as a productive analog toward understanding the ethics of alterity (otherness). In a third person autobiographical epilogue, AA's philosophy of spiritual transformation is pitted against the hegemonic bioscientific logic of total medicalization.

I make no claims for generalizability except at the level of theory and methodology, i.e., the storied nature of reflected upon lived experience, or an interpretive narrative phenomenology; and of the role of institutions like AA in grafting onto lived experience new narrative structures, or, new ways of guarding time; and in so doing, helping members to structure and maintain, through time, sober bodies and positively valenced notions of self and identity that emerge and are recursively disclosed in AA's unique form of narrativity.

Part 1/Chapter 1 and all of Part 3 are in various stages of publication as book chapters.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not and could not have been written were it not for the open-minded/heartedness of Professor Ken Tobin. Thank you, Ken, for allowing me the freedom to try for new forms in narrative research, and for nurturing in me the courage to write autobiographically while also blurring the lines. You've been a steady hand and a calm, guiding presence through a quite difficult and sometimes painful process. You're a true mentor.

Thanks to Professors Phil Anderson and Mark Zuss for sitting on my committee. You were both instrumental in my intellectual development. Your respective influences are on every page.

Thanks to my squad-mates and colleagues in the Urban Education department at the GC: Mitch Bleier, Olga Calderon, Karim al-Ganji, Hiro Komatsubara, Andre Poole, Malgorzata Powietrzynska, Rafael Rosado, Corinna Zapata, and others I'm sure I'm forgetting. To Gene Fellner and Helen Kwah, thank you for your inspiration and approbation. To Christine Saieh, thank you for your kindness, compassion, and honesty.

Thanks to my family and friends for never giving up on me. Thanks to my father, Stuart, for his love and support, for his editorial advice, for proving definitively that people can change, and for telling me I've proven the same. To my mother Bonnie, whose unconditional love has been my foundation. To my prodigious brother, Lucas, for his urgent inspiration. And to my stepmother, Liv, for the big and little picture edits, the 'brutally frank' perplexity, and the genuine enthusiasm.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Alcoholics Anonymous for the things I learned there and for the people I met who helped to create the memories I draw upon in narrating these tales.

Dedicated in loving memory to my brother, Josh Waldman, 1966-2000.

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PROLOGUE: AN INTRODUCTION TO AN INTRODUCTION

Why then have I been arranged with such desires? (Dostoyevsky, 1864/1993, p. 30)

As a kid, I assumed introductions, forewords, and prologues were written before the book itself, as their prefixes seemed to indicate. But like most of these often useless appendages, mine was written at the tail end of a years-long process of research and rewriting. This prologue, which is a conclusion chronologically, will trace a path toward an imagined place in an imagined time, which is where and when this dissertation properly begins: just before the beginning of an AA meeting. This prologue, then, which would mock my epilogue as a preface, is an introduction to an introduction...to AA, to addiction, and to narrative.

The dissertation itself is a narrative—a sequence of events arranged according to temporal logics (a plot)—about the lived experience of addiction in AA from a ‘newcomer’s’ point of view, i.e., ‘I/me/Peter/he.’ Similar to theory, however, narratives shine a light on one or several aspects of lived experience while leaving the rest of the landscape dark or obscured. Here, and in the epilogue, I aim to shine a light on those aspects of the study that might be invisible to a “faithful” reading of the story (Josselson, 2004).

Consider the story of a life, which is a story that involves continuity and change as well as ‘truth’ and artifice. This is “narrative identity” according to Ricoeur (1992): a twin dialectical relation between sameness (*idem*) and selfhood (*ipse*), and between history and fiction. In the first pages

of the first volume of *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur (1984) writes: “[...] time becomes human to the extent that it is organized after a narrative; narrative, in turn, becomes meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of [human] temporal experience” (p. 3). In the conclusion to Volume 3 (1988) of the same title he writes of narrative as a “guardian of time, in so far as there can be no thought of time without narrated time” (p. 241). Narrative is a “guardian of time” and of memory (the raw data of personal history) in relation to one’s social interactions with others in the lifeworld, and to the quality of those interactions, which determines “character” in Ricoeur’s ethics of narrativity (Ricoeur, 1992; Reagan, 2002). That memory (history) is in a dialectical relation with fiction is an important point for Ricoeur and for the purposes of this study.

Consider the relation between fiction and history in the character of Odysseus in Homer’s (2002) *Odyssey*, the first work of historical fiction, and in Sophocles’ (2013) drama *Philoctetes*.

Homer’s Odysseus is not the Odysseus of Sophocles. Same mythic hero, different narrative identities, transformed by time (history), between four to eight hundred years, the scholars aren’t sure, and perception. Homer’s Odysseus is cunning and wily but honorable. In the *Philoctetes*, Sophocles’ Odysseus is cunning, wily, and dishonorable—totally unrelenting in his lack of what we now would call a moral sense, which is set in opposition to the honor of Neoptolemus, son of Achilles, in securing for the Argives both Philoctetes and his famous bow without injury to either and without which the Greeks would have lost the war (Beye, 1970). In reading the two texts side by side, it’s as if cunning lost its cache over the centuries, and honor became the prime virtue. Did the audience at the Festival Dionysus notice the shift in perspective? Or was it invisible like ideology? Of the two heroes whose names lend themselves to the twin Homeric

epics, Achilles and Odysseus, the latter's "narrative identity" in Fifth Century Athens is negatively valenced in comparison with the former. Point being, I thought, if a figure out of mythology can so fall from favor how am I to compete against the sinister forces shaping my story? That was my passive voice. No agency only structure.

Now consider how a metaphor can speak across millennia.

Whatever the Lotus Eaters and Sirens meant to Homer's audience, to me the former means acquiescing to the sensual temptations of the flesh, i.e., an overindulgence, misuse, and abuse of this or that substance or 'process,' and a total forgetting of self, others and world, while the latter represents an 'irrational' craving for that forgetfulness. And Odysseus welcomes the temptation! His crew ties him to the mast, his ears left purposefully unplugged. Without those flimsy knots are we to assume that Odysseus would have left off with the singing spirits as he did with the Lotus Eaters? And would he have the strength to resist and return before "addiction" set in and he was lost forever, never to return home? And why do these unanswerable questions get my juices flowing? Why should imagining a three thousand year old mythological hero as a slave to the same passions and desires as a 21st Century me—Lotus Flower, Siren Song, fill in the blank—why should this get me so amped up?

A full description of "narrative identity" in literature and in the lifeworld must therefore include not only "who" but "when," i.e., history in a dialectical relation with fiction, the telephone game of personal narrative. The stories of our lives change as we change, as do the way we tell our stories, i.e., their structures. That I am also *not* my story—that I am not the 'I/me/Peter/he'

(re)presented in this narrative dissertation, and that AA cofounder Bill Wilson was also not his story; that is, the one presented to ‘newcomers’—is a notion the full exegesis of which I’m saving for the body of this work.

Just as Odysseus' cunning and wiliness take on different meanings according to history, so too does the concept of addiction:

Once upon a time, the story goes, back in the old country, some people sometimes took opium. For many of these people, opium functioned as a form of control: it brought into realistic conformity with the material exactions of their lives their levels of concentration, their temporality or their alertness to stimuli such as pain. For some it may have been a source of pleasure—if a vice, then a commonplace one. For all of these people, it was a behavior among other behaviors [...] Then [...] something changed (Kosofsky Sedgwick 1992, p. 582)

What changed was the beginning of the socio-historical construction of addiction, which included, according to Kosofsky Sedgwick (1992), the "taxonomic pressure of the newly ramified and pervasive medical-judicial authority of the late nineteenth century" birthing new categories within which "what had been a question of acts crystallized into a question of identities" (p. 582). This is the Foucauldian critique of knowledge/power and of disciplining and self-disciplining subjects/bodies. Kosofsky Sedgwick compares the invention of the addict to Foucault's invention of the homosexual of the same period.

In "The Discovery of Addiction," Harry G. Levine (1978) pins the beginnings of alcoholism in the US to the late 18th and early 19th centuries when "a new paradigm was created." Citing

Foucault as Kosofsky Sedgwick (1992) would fourteen years later, Levine (1978) argues:

[...] in Foucault's terms, the 'gaze' of the observer shifted then to a new configuration—a new gestalt. This new paradigm or model defined addiction as a central problem in drug use and diagnosed it as a disease, or disease-like. The idea that alcoholism is a progressive disease—the chief symptom of which is loss of control over drinking behavior, and whose only remedy is abstinence from all alcoholic beverages—is now about 175 or 200 years old, but no older (p. 493).

Mariana Valverde (1998) reminds us of the historical construction of the criminal addict (e.g., Acker, 2002) in which, “Drugs were linked to crime and drug issues were kept separate from questions arising from the consumption of legal substances [...] It bears reiterating that this was not because of new pharmacological knowledge, but simply because illicit drugs were governed through a different set of institutions than either legal drugs or alcohol” (Valverde, 1998, p. 5). For the purposes of this dissertation, then, I am collapsing the important historical distinctions between alcohol and alcoholism vs. drugs and addiction, as well as the divergence in their respective treatments, because I am interested in the phenomenology of “addiction,” i.e., in disclosing through narrative phenomenological description the mental and emotional processes of the consciousness of addiction, which is a consciousness of unconsciousness.

Etymologically, “addict” is a Latin verb meaning “to bind to the service of” (O.E.D.), i.e., to be a slave to a creditor. In the domain of addiction, the creditor is the master of the exploitative relation that undergirds the structure—the relation between dealer/doctor and client/patient for example—as well as the substance itself. I’m not thinking of the Marxian critique in tracing the

substance back to the social relations that produced it as a fetishized commodity, which indeed it is, the demand built in to its very molecules. My interest in it as a material thing involves me as a material thing where its molecules interact with mine to form a synthesis of progressive destruction disguised as ‘euphoria.’ The Lotus Eaters and the Sirens are, like addiction and craving, a total forfeiting of life, self, identity, and world for the poisonous possibilities of a dark, barely visible horizon.

AA is a return to the memory of a former self as well as to an ‘actual’ sober one. That the self-transformational rhetoric of AA (Swora, 2004) is achieved partly through storytelling is not as remarkable as it might seem given AA’s roots with the 19th century Christian lay movement, the Washingtonians, and with Frank Buchman’s 20th century Oxford Group, also explicitly Christian. Both groups relied on the confession, as AA later would, as the discursive genre within which personal and institutional memory and history are nested and structured (Wilson, 1988; White, 1998).

Bill Wilson would have something to say about the Washingtonians later in his life. He would speculate as to why AA lasted while the former had gone the way of the Dodo (AACOA; Wilson, 1988). According to White (1998), the Washingtonians were defeated by, among other things, inter-group conflict (between religious and other Temperance groups), “weak organizational structure,” a lack in leadership and of a viable program of recovery, and credibility problems owing to charges of hyperbole and “sensationalism” in the confessional narratives of reformed ‘drunkards’ “who competed to outdo one another in describing the depths to which alcoholism had taken them” (p. 13). (In AA, these are called ‘war stories.’) But a young

Abe Lincoln stopped by to congratulate them in 1841, and their organization was the first of its kind in the US, founded and run by laypeople. No clergy allowed thank you very much. The Washingtonians were a spectacular affair, with large, outdoor, parade-like revivals featuring drama and music, and even a children's Temperance league called the Cold Water Army (Gusfield, 1986).

In Bill Wilson's (1988), *The Language of the Heart*, a collection of his contributions to the AA periodical *Grapevine*, the author assured his readers that AA's anonymity had kept it humble, out of the spotlight, and away from the temptations of money and "big-shotism" (loc. 4313). He writes: "As we surveyed the wreck of that movement [the Washingtonians] we resolved to keep our society out of public controversy" (AACOA, p. 125). The function of anonymity in AA was not only to protect members from stigma, but to protect AA from harming itself, to protect it from becoming the spectacle the Washingtonians became. According to the Eleventh Tradition, AA attracts, it does not promote (12 & 12, p. 180).

So much for the social construction of addiction. For the deconstructionist Avital Ronell (1992) the phenomenon we call 'addiction' has actually been with us in other guises and known under different names in the multitude of forms that untrammelled desire has taken beginning with Eve and the birth of "Ev(e)il." It takes the form of Flaubert's (1965) Emma Bovary and her "destructive *jouissance*" for the vapid fallacy of the Romantic (Ronell, 1992), which is finally quelled by a fatal dose of arsenic stolen from the pharmacy, "the mastery of drugs" (p. 93). On the page and on the stage Hamlet's dark obsessions form a tangle of crisscrossing desires, poisons too, resulting in the death of everyone except Horatio whose job it is now to tell

Hamlet's side of the story: "Oh God, Horatio, what a / damaged reputation I'm leaving behind me [...] If you ever loved me, then please / postpone the sweet relief of death awhile, and stay in / this harsh world long enough to tell my story" (V, ii). A corrective to his "antic disposition," perhaps, and a narrative for the world that is, presumably, the same as the drama we've been witness to. Horatio's tale would be the play itself, a 'True' subjective history.

At the macro scale, narrative forms are grafted onto national, ethnic, religious, and ideological divides, and are therefore both "structure[s] of power" (Taieb et al., 2008) and of resistance, ideological weapons used not only to construct claims to knowledge, identity and community, but also to debase others' similar claims. Narrative is a prism for social and cultural information as well as a tool for domination and resistance.

So what about this narrative? What is it a tool for?

In phenomenological terms I hope to use it to disclose the Being of addiction with the Being of being a newcomer to AA, but at the everyday level of the ontic, i.e., at the level of subjective lived experience, narratively formed.

I had an idea that an AA meeting was like a classroom and the Program was an education. Lave and Wenger (1991) were describing an educational relation, or, to be more precise, a pedagogical relation in the apprenticeship model they set up between AA's "peripherally-participating newcomers" and its "fully participating old-timers." (I wanted to reveal AA's pedagogical structures as unspoken emotional information to be felt by the reader rather than rationally

apprehended.) Of course there is a power relation between newcomer and old-timer that goes unaddressed in Lave and Wenger as their unit of analysis is the "community of practice" of AA, i.e., the ways in which the various parts of the system form an inter-related and imbricated whole structured toward learning at the level of the social. Power theory and analysis is not their forte. I thought I wanted to write about power and Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977), especially his notion of "pastoral power," which I thought a neat analog to AA's narrative/confessional beliefs and practices, but I didn't really. I didn't want to write about power except as I experienced it, which, again, would be revealed in the "threefold present" of the narrative and in the interactions between "characters" that is the basis of Aristotelian "emplotment" (plot) (Ricoeur, 1984). Just as the novel works on several levels, some of which obviate elaboration or exegesis, impressionist tales function to draw a reader into a world, and not necessarily to keep him or her fully informed. Impressionist tales are glimpses into subjective consciousness in the lifeworld, which, for Van Maanen (1988), require "standards [that] are not disciplinary but literary ones, the main obligation of the impressionist is to keep the audience alert and interested" (p. 106).

In September 2011, the first draft of the proposal to my adviser went something like the following; it was to be ethnography on "the pedagogy of addiction" in AA:

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) is a formal educational institution and I am to treat it as such, using the language and categories of educational research, which leads to questions like:

1. What is the pedagogy of AA?
2. How do AA members make sense of AA's pedagogy?
3. What is AA's curriculum?

4. How is it made sense of by individuals?
5. How is it made sense of by the group?
6. What counts for knowledge in AA (epistemology)?
7. What is the “creed” of AA, i.e., what are its beliefs?
8. What are AA’s tools and/or resources and how are they used?
9. Describe AA’s values (description of “axiology”).
10. What are AA’s rituals and practices?
11. What are the texts of AA? (How are they used at the individual and group level?)

All of which would have made for a tidy study in the 1980s. This sort of AA ethnography has been done before and done well, only using the nomenclature of symbolic interactionism rather than education (see Denzin, 1987). I felt I wouldn’t be adding anything new to the many conversations surrounding addiction and Alcoholics Anonymous.

Were there other ways of getting into an AA meeting besides the nondescript front door?

I showed Ken, my adviser, a story I’d written about a septuagenarian alcoholic, sort of ‘raging against the dying of the light’ and with a lot of silly plot twists. He told me he liked it very much. Then I sent him something that was basically a conversation between a drug and alcohol counselor and his patient. Not a lot of scenery, just barebones dialogue. I remember walking into his office and being told and asked at once: “So you’re a storyteller, mate. Is that it?”

I wrote more stories, which I came to call “impressionist tales” but which were in fact quite different from Van Maanen’s (1988) ethnographic impressionist tales. For my purposes, impressionist tales became “auto/bio/graphical impressions” of addiction in and around an AA meeting, with flashbacks and flash-forwards, shifting points-of-view, and even a short play in the

middle. The epistemology of the impressionist tale, what James Clifford calls, “the poetic dimension of ethnography” (in Van Maanen, 1988, p. 101), is to “braid the knower with the known” (p. 102). While my tales are ‘based on a true story’ as they say in films, were I pressed I would swear these tales are fictions more than anything else.

For data about AA meetings I relied on memories of my own lived experiences, as well as on the organization’s voluminous literature, in order to create a composite meeting from the twenty or so I attended in earnest when I struggled with a nasty addiction to prescription painkillers. The “characters” at the meeting are also impressionistic composites of some of the people I met, but I have fictionalized them to such an extent that none would recognize themselves in this text.

Then there is Bill Wilson, the cofounder of AA, one of the two biographical components of the study. The data for Bill were taken primarily from AA literature including the 4th edition of *Alcoholics Anonymous* (Anon., 2001), known colloquially and henceforth as the Big Book (especially pp. 1-16, the autobiographical “Bill’s Story”), *Twelve Traditions and Twelve Steps* (Anon., 1952), known colloquially and henceforth as the 12 & 12, *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* (1957), known henceforth as AACOA, and Bill's officially authored writings in the AA periodical *Grapevine* collected in book form in *The Language of the Heart* (Wilson, 1988). I also read several biographies of Bill including Susan Cheever's (2004), Francis Hartigan's (2000), and Robert Thomsen's (1975). I do not attempt to bring Bill to life or to represent him in any realistic sense. (These are impressionist tales.) In the narrative, I approach him as any newcomer would— from the vantage point of the page, specifically page one of the Big Book where his official story begins.

My impressionist tales started coming together as ‘one meeting in the life of...’ and I was liking it. I was enjoying writing, which was a first, but felt I needed a ‘human subject’ in order for my research to be legitimate (in the eyes of who, I really couldn’t say). I found a participant through a neighbor. She was a sober AA member of long-standing. I drafted a letter of informed consent. I laid out the risks and what I would do in cases of emergency. We conducted the interview and a follow-up. I transcribed the data and wrote an impressionist tale about the interview and the narratives related there. Then I ran head first into an ethical conundrum. I hadn’t received the proper IRB clearance for conducting the interviews, and if I applied for it now, I’d be requesting clearance for something I’d already done. I had an idea. Using Snyder and Mitchell’s (2006) rationale against human subject research in disability studies because of the potentially exploitative relation between knower and known in that domain, and viewing addiction as a complex and quite problematic form of disability, I thought, why not use already existing ‘human subject’ data on AA, e.g., data found on the Internet? When my research participant was genuinely relieved upon hearing that her story would not be included in the study, I understood Snyder and Mitchell’s position a little too well. Stigma still looms large (Goffman, 1963).

There’s a YouTube channel called “Odomtology 12 Step Recovery Media” where there are dozens of AA ‘circuit speaker’ audios including one titled “Surrender.” The speaker’s name is Bob D. I found the same audio of Bob D. (“Surrender”) on a different site: www.xa-speakers.org where I was able to download and transcribe it using ExpressScribe software for Mac. While I portray Bob’s talk as a more or less typical AA life story ‘qualification,’ it actually has more in

common with a speech. I used other audio files of “Bob D.” on both sites to fill in the gaps of his life story, but not much. And the rest I made up.

Which brings us back to where we began: an introduction to an introduction of AA.

What was I thinking before I entered that first meeting? I have absolutely no idea. And that’s because I didn’t graft a story onto it. If only thought, memory and consciousness worked in such a linear fashion, recording faithfully and in sequence. Again, narrative identity is not history so much as it is historical fiction, a term that is, from my point of view and for the purposes of this study, redundant. What we can’t or refuse to remember is jettisoned or else substituted, like a cloze exercise. And we are continually re-editing, revising, re-organizing, or completely rewriting our stories. Finally, the sameness (*idem*) of death being the common end to all our stories is reconciled by the selfhood (*ipse*) of agency, i.e., right and ethical action in the lifeworld, which AA espouses in its Twelfth ‘Suggested’ Step (for individuals to carry the AA message to suffering alcoholics and to practice its principles in all affairs), which is a productive analog toward understanding Emmanuel Levinas’s (1969) ethics of alterity.

PART 1

WELCOME TO AA

I here present you, courteous reader, with the record of a remarkable period in my life: according to my application of it, I trust that it will prove not merely an interesting record, but in a considerable degree useful and instructive. In *that* hope it is that I have drawn it up; and *that* must be my apology for breaking through that delicate and honourable reserve which, for the most part, restrains us from the public exposure of our own errors and infirmities.

Thomas De Quincey (1822/1949, p. v)

De Quincey is essentially digressive.

–Charles Baudelaire, *Artificial Paradise* (1971, p. 87)

To be as such is, from the first, to be preoccupied with being, as if some relaxation were already necessary, some “tranquilizer,” in order to remain—while being—unconcerned about being.

–Emmanuel Levinas (1998, p. xii).

But really he was working on the First Step—that is to say, hallucinating.

–John Berryman, *Recovery*, (1973, p. 23).

CHAPTER 1: THE TWELVE ‘SUGGESTED’ STEPS

The icy branches of a plane tree form a crystal palace awning over the concrete court within which the church is recessed. The tree is a question mark, bending over and leaning into the sacrosanct building, like a teacher, expectant. I move in closer as if straining to hear.

I duck into the church basement feeling like a cliché. A mere diversion I tell myself, an excursus on a minor point. I can leave anytime. Not really. This is the logical progression of one of the colossal personal blunders of the pharmaceutical age: Getting hooked.

It’s my third day of sobriety. I’ve quit on my own, cold turkey, no detox. Please don’t misunderstand: I’m no hero, no *Junky*-reading-Burroughs-paperback-stabbing-at-my-back-pocket-wannabe-Beat-Grunge-square. No, no, no, no, no, and no. I’m neither a cut-up nor an adventurer. I’m no Coleridge penning “Kubla Khan” with the narcotized hand of God, that’s for sure. The truth as I see it? I’m weak and quite stupid, a momma’s boy: white, middle-class, Jewish (so called), and privileged—consider my privilege in simply writing this dissertation—and life was sort of fine until one day it wasn’t. But I’m not certain of that. It’s part of a story I tell myself.

In AA they recommend the alcoholic continue drinking until medical treatment, i.e., Librium, becomes available. Otherwise *you can die*. Not so with opiate withdrawal. You can get very sick, like the worst flu you can imagine, but you won’t die.

The drug is gone from my body, flushed from my system via involuntary excretion processes of which I'm totally ignorant and unaware, but I'm not experiencing any withdrawal. No stomach cramps, no nausea, no headache, no vomiting. I imagine a gang of opioid molecules clinging to the desperate receptors of my oozy, cross-wired brain...and letting go. Still, my mouth is dry. My palms are like wet sponges. My heart is banging in my ears. I can't eat. I slept the first night, but last night I got two hours, tops. I feel like a raw nerve the world is scraping against.

A small foyer leads to a large, rectangular room with metal folding chairs arranged in columns and rows, four by six on either side with a narrow aisle running down the middle. The black linoleum floor is spotless. The chairs slowly fill with talking, animated bodies. Tobacco-scent lingers momentarily as the room settles. Nicotine is a tolerated addiction in AA.

Six bare light bulbs bulge from a high ceiling, fixtureless. Framed messages hang against fake wood-paneled walls the color of mud: "One Day at a Time," "Keep It Simple," "Easy Does It." (1) These phrases might as well be in Cyrillic for all they mean to me.

I'm in the back row closest to the door with my coat on. Two rows in front of me a woman whispers in a man's ear and he laughs out loud like it's the funniest thing he's ever heard.

I begin to perspire for no reason except for the effort of fixating upon my own emotional discomfort and obsessive mental processes, the result being a paralyzing self-consciousness. This is par for the course. The flood begins at my scalp along the hairline and pours into my eyes and

down the back of my neck from behind my ears. I'm drenched in seconds. I stand to find the bathroom, leaving my coat hanging over the chair.

My damp shirt chills my skin and my glasses fog up in the cold air of the foyer. I repeat to myself: *idiot, idiot, idiot, idiot, idiot*. To my left at the end of a long hall stands a plywood door that says, 'Toilet.' I race to it and jerk it shut behind me, jamming the hook through the eye in one blind motion. No paper towels, only toilet paper, but the cheap kind that crumbles when it gets wet. I pull a knot off and tamp it against my forehead. The sink spits scalding water. No mirror. I sit on the toilet to organize myself, swabbing my glasses with a shirtsleeve and picking bits of toilet paper off my forehead.

I walk back to my seat pretending to be at ease, but I'm fooling no one. The coat hanging over my empty chair is the perfect metaphor. I am nobody. I am nothing. An empty frame, a negative presence, I produce nothing, I merely consume.

A woman with braided brown hair and kind, curious eyes approaches and introduces herself as Evelyn. She offers me a laminated sheet of white paper, a list, and says, "Are you a newcomer? Would you mind reading this when I ask you to?" To my grinning, sweaty silence she nods her head approvingly and wanders off.

Wait a minute.

Doesn't she know? People are less afraid of dying than they are of public speaking. I grab my coat sleeve planning for a jailbreak when a fit of stabbing cramps seizes my guts. Withdrawal? I swallow hard waiting for the bitter creep of nausea. I forget how to breathe. I count to ten. I resign myself to passivity.

Screaming across the top of the page are the capitalized words, "THE TWELVE TRADITIONS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS (SHORT FORM)." Then, numbered one through twelve are the (shortened) Traditions:

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on AA unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but servants; they do not govern. (2)

Evelyn's measured voice interrupts my perplexity at the God language. She sits in front of the group at a small blue desk upon which one daisy staggers from a thin glass vase. She's about to read from a laminated sheet that looks just like mine.

"Hi, my name is Evelyn," she says, "and I'm an alcoholic." In unison the room greets her: "Hi Evelyn!" Collapsing into my seat I barely whisper it under my breath but my mouth moves dutifully. (3)

She continues, mostly off-book: “Welcome to the _____ group of Alcoholics Anonymous. This is an ‘open’ meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous. We are glad you are all here, especially newcomers.” (4)

I smile, then cover my mouth embarrassed for having smiled, then smile embarrassed for having covered my mouth. Extraordinarily self-conscious, I am not in the world. I am a being for whom Being is an issue for itself...a big issue. I’m a being with issues. (5) No contemplation going on, nothing Greek. I am where desire goes haywire. Action without thought. Thought without thought. Life without life.

Evelyn says, “In keeping with our singleness of purpose, and our Third Tradition which states, ‘The only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking.’ We ask that all who participate confine their discussion to their problems with alcohol.” (6)

I’ve always thought of addiction as a grab bag of vice. Stick your hand in and take your pick. One’s predilection for this or that substance—booze or barbiturates, codeine or cocaine—is less important than the phenomenon itself.

I tried a few NA meetings last year (Narcotics Anonymous), and felt completely out of place. All the talk was of chasing dragons, freebasing, skin-popping, and shooting up. I felt like a kid with my clean white pills manufactured in government-approved laboratories. But I was no different than any of them, really. I could match anybody out there in my total lack of renunciation. (7)

Evelyn's voice strolls along. She reads from the "AA Preamble":

Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for AA membership; we are self supporting through our own contributions. AA is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy, neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety. (8)

Aside from the words 'alcoholics' and 'alcoholism,' which will require some mental substitution, I feel I could get with all that. Sharing 'experience, strength, and hope'; of course I'm feeling short on strength and hope. I'll concentrate on experience. That's a start. Still, my experience has yet to be transformed. That's what AA does, it transforms you. (9)

Evelyn nods in the direction of a longhaired man with a greying ponytail and mustache who also holds a laminated text. He's sitting next to a large orange bear of a man with an orange wildfire beard. They're both smiling as if they've heard a joke; in fact they look high, and they're obviously friends. There's a comfort between them that's palpable in their body language. They lean into each other like conspiring kids, the way that flowers bend toward the sun. I take an instant liking to them.

The guy with the ponytail says, "Hey, I'm Jeff and I'm an alcoholic and addict."

“Hi Jeff!”

Okay. An alcoholic *and* addict. Maybe we’re not so rare after all.

Jeff is possessed of a velvety baritone like an anchorman. He says, “I’m going to read the fifth chapter in the Big Book called, ‘How It Works,’ or part of it anyway.” (10) His friend is really listening, eyes closed and nodding his head here and there as Jeff reads his part. And unlike me, he has to have heard this stuff a thousand times before. They seem like old-timers, the pair of them, even though they’re barely in middle age; they look like they belong. Jeff’s unnamed friend is wearing a maroon and gold vertically striped soccer jersey that matches his overall solar effect, and he’s listening, and he seems very, very happy...or content, or whatever you want to call it. He seems like a man satisfied *in* and not merely *with* life. He must be a Buddhist. AA doesn’t make you glow.

I remember Jack Klugman’s black-clad, furrow-browed worrywart Jim Hungerford in *The Days of Wine and Roses*, the complete opposite of this guy, hounding poor Jack Lemmon, the impressionable Joe Clay, at every dry-out tank he wound up in. (11) I must admit this particular AA stereotype makes me uncomfortable: the Brylcreemed hair, the narrow suits and skinny ties, the Cold War black-and-white world. But that’s not the way it is now, Jeff’s Day-Glo friend a case in point. And maybe I’m the jerk. After all, Klugman’s Twelfth Stepper was doing a good thing, he was working his Program, doing his service work, which is the ultimate object of AA besides one’s own sobriety, and one’s own sobriety is maintained only by giving back to AA. In

helping others stay sober, one helps oneself stay sober ‘one day at a time.’ AA is a collectivist ethics of care with an individualist rationale.

Jeff reads from his laminated card:

Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path. Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program, usually men and women who are constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves. There are such unfortunates. They are not at fault; they seem to have been born that way. They are naturally incapable of grasping and developing a manner of living which demands rigorous honesty (Big Book, p. 58).

Jeff takes a breath and so do I. Born that way? Constitutionally incapable of being honest with myself? What pessimism! What determinism! Rigorous honesty? About what? About drugs? Addiction? Every aspect of my waking life? I’m honest enough. I’m the Underground Man, repulsive and sick. I’m Gregor Samsa, an enormous insect.

Jeff continues: “Our stories disclose in a general way what we used to be like, what happened, and what we are like now. If you have decided you want what we have and are willing to go to any length to get it—then you are ready to take certain steps. (12)

“Without help it is too much for us. But there is One who has all power-that One is God. May you find Him now!”

I knew this was coming, but I was told that God could be anything: the group itself, the ideals of honesty, compassion, and forgiveness, the Buddha, Shakespeare. But the explicitly religious sense that the word “God” evokes in me is unpleasant. (13)

The actor’s oomph that Jeff puts into that last evangelical line, “May you find Him now!” (cued by the exclamation point) is probably replayed thousands of times in thousands of meetings every day of the year, but for Jeff and his buddy it’s being spoken and heard for the first time. I wonder if, like me, the God language ever leaves them perplexed, or unconvinced, or if they are disoriented at His ubiquitous masculine gender assignment. Maybe they take what they need and discard the rest, which Bill Wilson himself suggests we do in *The Twelve Steps to Sobriety*. (14)

Jeff continues: “Half measures availed us nothing. We stood at the turning point. We asked His protection and care with complete abandon. Here are the steps we took which are suggested as a program of a recovery (emphases in original):

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs” (Big Book, pp. 59-60). (15)

The Deity mentioned six times! Including capitalized masculine pronouns and twice “as we understand Him.” What if I don’t understand Him? At all? Meaning, I have no concept of Him, Her, or It whatsoever? From the back row I wonder exactly what AA practice is without the shared balm of belief.

PART 1/CHAPTER 1 NOTES

1. See Valverde and White-Mair (1999) on AA slogans and the “everyday” (good) habits and ethical practices of AA.
2. The short form of the Twelve Traditions can be found @ aa.org. The longer version is in the 12 & 12, the foreword of which reads: “AA’s Twelve Traditions apply to the life of the Fellowship [the membership] itself. They outline the means by which AA maintains its unity and relates itself to the world about it, the way it lives and grows” (12 & 12, p. 15).
3. Most of Evelyn’s ‘lines’ are taken from an undated ‘Suggested Open Meeting Format’ PDF file retrieved from San Diego’s AA website, www.aasandiego.org.
4. There are several types of AA meetings each with different formats and texts including meetings for Beginners, Open and Closed Discussion meetings, Step meetings, Big Book meetings, Tradition meetings, and Open meetings like the one (re)presented in this narrative (Inter-Group Association of AA, 2010, p. 1).
5. Martin Heidegger’s (1962) concept of *Dasein*, or being-there, effectively took the place of the Cartesian subject in Continental philosophy and the representational relation that proceeds from the observing subject to the objects of the external world. *Dasein* is not the *cogito*. It is its inverse: *I am therefore I think*. For Heidegger, being and time are not only relationally imbricated: Being is constituted *in* time ‘itself.’ *Dasein* is the embodiment of time therefore

Dasein is, ultimately, i.e., temporally, being-towards-death. However, *Dasein* is not a good theoretical fit for AA. In its ethics of alterity (Levinas, 1969), and in its return to subjectivity from the fragments of addiction, AA requires a subject.

6. The Third Tradition states, “The only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop *drinking*” (12 & 12, p. 139, emphasis mine). There are AA meetings where it’s ‘prohibited’ to talk about anything but booze, but I’ve seen that rule broken in such a setting with no reprimands or consequences whatsoever. Of course, Bill Wilson (1988) felt that AA was no place for a drug addict.

7. The deconstructionist Avital Ronell (1992) argues, “the addict is a non-renouncer par excellence [...] yet, however haunted or hounded, the addict nonetheless establishes a partial separation from an invading presence” (p. 9). What the addict craves is *no* separation from an invading presence: a state of sense pleasure without thought in so far as thought is a return to being and to a state of being—a mood—that longs to escape being (see Levinas, 1982, on an admittedly non-narcotized phenomenology of pleasure that is finally an evasion of Being, which, for Levinas, is an evasion of one’s ethical responsibility to alterity).

8. The AA Preamble can be found on aa.org. The preamble serves many purposes: it delineates the sole criterion for AA membership; it substantiates AA’s freedom from outside financial obligations; it establishes AA’s non-denominational stance; it clarifies AA’s neutrality in all political matters and causes; and, most important, it establishes AA’s reason for being: “Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics achieve sobriety.”

9. Swora (2004) proposes an anthropology and a hermeneutics of AA utilizing the conceptual models of religious healing in place of the hegemonic medical (clinical) model for understanding it. She argues that AA's discourse is "transformational" as outlined in the Twelve Steps, which "moves the alcoholic from drinking to sobriety by means of a rhetoric of predisposition, of empowerment, and of transformation" (p. 187). It is important to Swora that AA be understood viz. a rhetoric of religious healing with "no end result" except for a constant and recursive reworking—"a continuous and lifelong project." AA is circular not linear. While there are hints of a *telos* at work in the grand narrative style of some of the "qualifications," as exemplified by Bill Wilson's story in the Big Book (Anon., 2001, pp. 1-16), Valverde and White-Mair's (1999) everyday ethical practices seem to trump anything (or anybody) overly or overtly ambitious about AA.

10. "How It Works" begins on page 58 of the Big Book.

11. *The Days of Wine and Roses* is a film produced by Martin Manulis and directed by Blake Edwards, released in 1962 by Warner Brothers. See Robin Room (1989) for a fascinating gendered analysis of drinking, alcoholism and AA in Hollywood films from *The Lost Weekend* (Charles Brackett and Billy Wilder, 1945) to *The Days of Wine and Roses*.

12. "Our stories disclose in a general way what we used to be like, what happened, and what we are like now" (Big Book, p. 58) is the narrative template for the AA life story qualification. It's also a narrative template for any transformative experience: before, during, and after, beginning, middle, and end. In Ricoeur's (1984) use of Aristotle, especially in the notion of emplotment (*Muthos*, or plot, a sequence of events arranged according to a temporal logic), one's personal

identity becomes one's narrative identity in the memories of lived experience with others in the lifeworld, in the quality of those interactions, and in how a story is told over time, which is part of the individuating notion of selfhood (*ipse*) (Reagan, 2002; Ricoeur, 1993). Also, re: "If you have decided you want what we have..." is less an abstract collective yearning than a practical matter of one AA member's recognition of, or identification with, an 'other' based upon the contents of his or her individual story, usually as it is told publicly (but anonymously) at meetings, and according to the temporal specifications listed above. I would also learn that AA traffics in stories. Life stories, or "qualifications" as they're described at meetings, are the currency of Twelve Step groups; they are the means of social exchange at the group level. But only "appropriate" stories are acceptable, stories whose temporal structures and substantive contents both generalize—"our stories disclose in a general way"—and result in sustained sobriety through 'working the Steps' or 'working one's Program,' which is the third and final part of AA's storied temporal logic, "what we are like now." My AA story is quite "inappropriate" by these standards. In fact, at the time of the meeting my story is stuck in the past of "what we used to be like," i.e., addicted (see Carole Cain (1991) on "appropriate" and "inappropriate" stories in AA).

In AA's early days, members described the middle portion of the qualification, or, "what happened" (that we found ourselves in AA) as a 'hot flash' experience, or a moment of spiritual/religious enlightenment. In later editions of the Big Book, spiritual experiences of the "educative type" are described, in which, according to William James, spirituality develops and adheres in one slowly over time (Big Book, p. 567). Under the care of "AA's medical saint," Dr. Duncan Silkworth, AA cofounder Bill Wilson's spirituality 'developed,' it seems, all at once:

Suddenly the room lit up with a great white light. I was caught up into an ecstasy which there are no words to describe. It seemed to me, in the mind's eye, that I was on a mountain and that a wind not of air but of spirit was blowing. And then it burst upon me that I was a free man. Slowly the ecstasy subsided. I lay on the bed, but now for a time I was in another world, a new world of consciousness. All about me and through me there was a wonderful feeling of Presence, and I thought to myself, "So this is the God of the preachers!" A great peace stole over me and I thought, "No matter how wrong things seem to be, they are all right. Things are all right with God and His world" (AACOA, p. 63).

Quite a difficult act to follow. And this is discounting the other (Twelfth Step) "spiritual awakening," the one that happens "as the result of [working] these Steps." Any spiritual experience I have will be "educative" by definition and will pale in comparison because this kind of thing doesn't happen to me.

The third and final portion of the appropriate AA narrative, or "what we are like now," describes the ongoing process of recovery which involves working one's Program, a process that is both unique and uniform (selfhood and same), the common activities of which include attending meetings, working the Steps, sponsoring and other Twelfth Step work. "What we used to be like, what happened, and what we are like now" are the temporal markers in a narrative reconstruction project that leads from addiction/ignorance to sobriety/knowledge, first, at the level of epistemology, before ontological and axiological commitments take root, then, through the structured and deeply personal practice of a shared cultural and institutional form, the AA qualification, applied to what we might call the three-act life arc of the sober alcoholic in AA. Carole Cain (1991) was the first, I believe, to posit the "appropriate" narrative qualification in AA to be a tool or a working resource for identity construction. The qualification demonstrates how one learns to be a "non-drinking alcoholic" in AA. "The self-understanding of the

individuals joining AA must come to reflect and incorporate the knowledge organized by the AA system of beliefs; cultural knowledge must become self-knowledge” (p. 211). The qualification is both personally and institutionally inscribed.

13. Klaus Mäkelä and colleagues (1996) contend, “most AA members resolutely deny” AA to be a religious institution or organization, preferring the label “spiritual” as more descriptive of their endeavor. But the authors also argue that this “ambiguity is an essential feature of AA [...] an ideology in which the religious and its denial exist in a state of dynamic tension” (p. 10).

14. Remember, Bill writes, “the common saying that holds well in meetings [...] ‘Find the similarities and discard the rest’” (*Twelve Steps to Sobriety*, Anon., 1973/2013, p. 25). I assume the similarities refer to recognition of and identification with the stories and storytellers of AA. Which leaves me with a nagging question: what does AA do with difference?

15. The Twelve ‘Suggested’ Steps, which can be found in the Big Book on pp. 59-60, are defined in the 12 & 12 as, “a group of principles, spiritual in their nature, which, if practiced as a way of life, can expel the obsession to drink and enable the sufferer to become happily and usefully whole” (p. 16). In the research literature the Twelve Step process has been described in a pragmatic vein by Mäkelä and colleagues (1996) as, “a series of tasks and problems to be solved” and not “a code of conduct to be interpreted” (p. 118). Similarly, and using the metaphor of the pre-capitalist guild, the cultural sociologists Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) liken AA to a “community of practice,” and specifically, to a community of masters, or fully participating old-timers, and apprentices, or peripherally participating newcomers. And again, Swora’s (2004) definition of the Steps as a “rhetoric of transformation” is important because it implies the centrality to the AA endeavor of a Jamesian (1958) notion of spiritual “conversion”

that involves “self-surrender”—a key aspect of Steps One, Two, and Three. In Part 3, the AA speaker Bob D. will have a great deal to say about the importance of “surrender” and especially of “surrendering judgment.”

CHAPTER 2: CONFESSIONS

Evelyn asks if there are any newcomers or people with thirty days or less.

Of what?

Two hands go up.

“I’m Mike, I’m an alcoholic, I got twenty-seven days back today,” says a head of thick salt and pepper hair in the front row.

The room explodes with applause. Then from the fourth row:

“Tessa, alcoholic, twelfth day back.”

Back? More applause. I close my eyes and it sounds like rain.

“Thank you, Mike, thank you, Tessa,” Evelyn says.

Tessa is beaming in profile. I imagine Mike is beaming, too, but I can only see the back of his head. Slips and relapses, it seems, are part of the AA program. (1)

Rhetorically, Evelyn petitions Tessa—indeed, all of us: “Cold out there, isn’t it?” (2) And she adds redundantly: “I know I don't have to say it because you both already know, but please stay after to get reacquainted with everyone and maybe even to meet some new people, OK?”

I’m praying for her not to call on me.

She asks, “Is anybody from out of town? Is it anybody’s first time here?”

Screw it! I’m not hiding anymore. Better to be executed by firing squad than drowned in a drainage ditch. I want my life to matter. I don’t want to die without having lived. My hand shoots up like a target student’s, but I’m too late. One row down and to the right a middle-aged man with curly blonde hair and an impish, curly grin has Evelyn’s attention.

“Hello everybody, I’m Paul, I’m an alcoholic. I’m from Glasgow, in Scotland.”

As opposed to *Eritrea*? I rebuke myself. Enough with the one-liners and the cynicism. It’s transparent. You’re frightened. Sarcasm is the basest form of humor and the best defense. Let your guard down. Open up. Let it in. Breathe.

“I’m really happy to be here,” Paul says. “The Rooms are my family, my life, and I think of all the Rooms in the world like One Big Room, if you get my meaning. (3) One big family.” *Wun beeg fam-ee-lay...*

There's a singsong joy to a Scots accent that gets me giddy. You can be the biggest jerk in the world and say the most awful things to the nicest people, but roll a few R's, elongate the /i/ sound to its breaking point and you've got a friend in me for life. (4)

"I don't want to take up too much time," Paul continues, seems to incant. "I just want to thank everybody for being here. I've got sixteen years come March 5th." (Resounding round of applause.) "But I wouldn't have sixteen minutes if it weren't for all of you." *Al o'ye*. "Because you're never alone if you've got the Rooms." (Nods of assent, yeahs, yeses, and yeps.) "I'm feeling very grateful right now, grateful for my sobriety, and I just wanted to share that, to say hello, and to just give thanks. So, thank you."

"Thank you, Paul," Evelyn says, and "thank you for sharing."

"Thank you," says Paul.

The gratitude is so thick you can smell it.

"Is there anyone else? Any newcomers?"

She is seeking out my hand, but it's balled up in a fist in my lap. Then, as if unconsciously, like an invisible string being pulled, I raise the offending appendage limply. "Hi," I say, but in a volume and pitch reserved for nocturnal rodents. What am I doing here? I should be in bed. I

should be in rehab or in detox at the very least because I am not well, and everybody here would probably agree with me. (5)

“Hi, I’m Peter,” I say, finding my voice somewhere in the hollows of my shame. No more cowering, no more lies. Honesty is key.

I say the words dutifully, as I’m expected to, as if the meeting were a performance and this was my part to play along with everyone else, provided I stick to the script.

“My name is Peter and I’m an addict.”

PART 1/CHAPTER 2 NOTES

1. Norman Denzin (1993) offers a “situational theory” of slips and relapses, or “the return to controlled and uncontrolled drinking” (p. 275), arguing, “[...] alcoholics slip when the transformation of self that [has] occurred in the early stages of recovery [has] not been complete” (p. 286). AA’s theory posits slips and relapses as “slips in thinking,” or as “slipping away from the AA program.” This “interpretive theory of slips conceptualizes the return to drinking as an attempt on the part of the alcoholic to once again take control over his or her life” (p. 282), the product of an *active* and not a *surrendered* will. In Carl E. Thune’s (1977) terms, a slipping or relapsing alcoholic has not accepted alcoholism’s phenomenological status as a mode of being and clings instead to a temporal notion of it, i.e., an alcoholism cured by time.

2. Darin Weinberg (2000) terms the use of spatial metaphors such as “out there” the “ecology of addiction in drug abuse treatment discourse.” Such metaphors refer to sites of “degradation, dirtiness, solitude, and savagery,” danger zones of addiction where a thin and wavering line separates life from chaos and death. The only ‘cure’ is a return back to the fold, as it were, as “addictions can be controlled through ongoing participation in a communal project of mutual-help” (p. 606).

3. For Sean O’Halloran (2006), “the Rooms” is a “virtual synonym” and a “metonym” for the Program itself and the fellowship, i.e., the process *and* the people of AA, respectively, as well as a “structural metaphor” that “frequently collates with terms like *safe* and *home*.” (pp. 82-83).

4. AA is indeed international in scope. According to information obtained from its website www.aa.org, as of January 2013, over two million AA members were reported in over 170 countries, with just under 115,000 individual groups (Service Material, 2013). Mäkelä and colleagues (1996) describe an AA meeting as “a unique speech event defined by a specific combination of rules of talk” with “room for cultural variation” (p. 149). Their analysis of AA meetings in ‘eight societies’ reveals a great deal of variability in meetings across cultures—in attitudes towards positive vs. negative politeness, for example, in ritual elaboration, in openness and social visibility of meetings, and in equality of membership viz. newcomers and old-timers. Spiritual beliefs, or the belief in a ‘Higher Power of our understanding’ also differs across cultures. The authors find AA members professing Christianity as their Higher Power to be directly related to the corresponding strength of Christian belief in their respective regions (13% in Sweden vs. 56% in Poland, for example). Some AA members profess a belief in God *and* in the AA fellowship as their Higher Power. But “only a tiny minority openly acknowledge that the ‘power greater than ourselves’ means nothing to them personally” (p. 157).

5. Of course, many will continue to describe alcoholism and/or addiction as a weakness of will. Perhaps the religious zeal will have faded from such a condemnation in comparison with America’s early Temperance days when men of the cloth like Lyman Beecher described any use of alcohol as sinful. In fact, Levine (1993) argues that AA shares its roots with Temperance. Beecher’s “The Nature and Occasions of Intemperance,” taken from his *Six Sermons on Intemperance* (1828), possesses the exuberant certitude of some of AA’s rhetoric:

No sin has fewer apologies than intemperance. The suffrage of the world is against it; and yet there is no sin so naked in its character, and whose commencement and progress is indicated by so many signs, concerning which there is among mankind such profound ignorance.

For Beecher, however, the will is free. While Bill Wilson and AA cofounder Dr. Robert ‘Bob’ Smith were heavily influenced by William James’s *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1958), their admiration did not extend to James’s notion of a free will. Might such a notion obfuscate the disease concept? Probably, but it wouldn’t matter much in the context of AA, the contradictions of which are not to be reconciled. Rather, it is the AA member who must reconcile him or herself to the program’s contradictions, the primary one being, AA’s acceptance of the medicalized terminology of Jellinek’s (1960) “disease concept of alcoholism” without its being “treated” as a disease, i.e., with anti-craving medications like antabuse (see AACOA, p. 26, for Bill’s prohibitive attitude toward antabuse).

CHAPTER 3: SEVENTH TRADITION STRETCH

I've just admitted 'the truth' to a roomful of strangers:

My name is Peter and I'm an addict.

In spite of the 'truthfulness' of the statement, or my belief its truthfulness in the moment, it is a "suspicious attestation" (Reagan, 2002); there is, again, something performance-like and therefore implausible to my declaration.

I am an addict.

I repeat it to myself: 'My name is Peter and I'm an addict.' What exactly does *being* an addict mean? (1)

There is a lull in the action with a practiced transition to the next item of business, which happens to be business.

Evelyn says, "The 7th Tradition states: 'Every AA group ought to be fully self-supporting declining outside contributions.' (2) Usually people give a buck or two but it's completely voluntary and up to you. Remember, though, that we are self-supporting. We have rent to make, we have coffee to make (and buy!), we have to buy cleaning products and all kinds of other stuff that you wouldn't dream of like bug spray and Drano...Okay, I'll stop now."

The baskets get passed around. There is a break in the action. The 7th Tradition Stretch, I've come to call it. Digging into pockets and pocketbooks, the sound of coins clinking and paper money crinkling. A distraction. I consider making a run for it.

But I stay, paralyzed. I feel like I'm in school waiting for the bell to ring.

I place a dollar in one of the baskets dutifully, guiltily.

Over the habituated clamor Evelyn asks, "Any AA-related news to announce?"

A man in the front row raises his hand.

"Phil?"

"Thanks Evelyn," he says turning to face the group.

Jeff nudges his friend who snickers. And just like that I despise them both. Phil is a fine enough specimen as people go: bespectacled and cherub-faced, neatly attired in a beige sweater and a crisp white shirt, earnestness emanating from him like a magnetic field. But it's high school, again. The cool kids and the nerds. Time was when the Phils of the world predominated in AA, like Bill and Dr. Bob, like Klugman in *The Days of Wine and Roses*. The 1939 foreword to the

first edition of the Big Book states that the majority of AA's members were "business or professional folk." (p. xiii)

"Phil, alcoholic," he says, clipped, to the point, practiced.

"Hi Phil!"

Even I say it this time, but I say it at Jeff and his buddy like a curse: *Hi Phil!* They don't even know I exist. I am in high school. I grow weary and depressed.

Phil says: "I'd just like to reiterate what Evelyn said about the 7th Tradition." His voice is wedged in his throat, a high alto and his accent suggests northern Minnesota, thick with Canada's good cheer: "It's really important, especially nowadays with rents going through the roof, so please, please, please just give anything you can, oh, and, smokers, please be mindful that we have neighbors, and they've asked that we smoke across the street in front of the restaurant instead. That's it, thanks."

"Thanks, Phil," Evelyn says. "It's true, we can't say this stuff enough. The 7th Tradition is what AA's all about. It's like the Twelfth Step, you can disagree of course. Giving back and getting back in return, and giving and getting and getting and giving...." Evelyn laughs at, what? The simplicity of it? The truth of it? Her embarrassment at having even to say it? Shouldn't AAs know better?

Another wicker basket comes my way, about twenty bucks in singles and fives, and I pass it along.

Evelyn says she's been saving a surprise for us. I think she's a good 'chair.' She keeps the meeting moving along with charm, ease, and grace, and she seems to be a genuinely kind person, a person for whom the social graces are not a chore, but an easy way of being in the world. Is such a disposition the offspring of recovery? I've met others with such dispositions. They were all either AA or Buddhist. About a year ago I sought help at an outpatient clinic. There was a counselor there named Tony Barney who was such a person as this. Although I failed in my attempt at sobriety there, Tony was a man who "had what I wanted." He suggested I read the first chapter of the Big Book, "Bill's Story" (pp. 1-16).

Evelyn says: "It is with great pleasure that I introduce tonight's speaker."

PART 1/CHAPTER 3 NOTES

1. Addiction and alcoholism (and addicts and alcoholics) have been defined in as many ways as there are eras within which they have been social categories. But the nascent medical category of “alcoholism,” which was a notion of *distilled* alcohol abuse, as beer, wine and hard ciders were imperative for the bodies of a young republic without steady access to fresh drinking water, can be traced to Benjamin Rush’s 1819 publication of *An Inquiry into the Effects of Ardent Spirits Upon the Human Body and Mind*. Since then the debate has gathered around a loosely defined notion of free will and biological determinism, the latter being the “disease concept of alcoholism” (Jellinek, 1960), which AA and indeed many in the Western world abide by, the concept having become hegemonic. Does doing something make you something? Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1992) citing Foucault (1977) and Berridge and Edwards’s (1987) *Opium and the People*, finds actions becoming affixed to identities to be an historical phenomenon of the “medical-juridical authority of the late nineteenth century, and in the context of changing class and imperial relations, what had been a question of *acts* crystallized into a question of identities” (Kosofsky Sedgwick, 1992, p. 582). Again, while it is historically imperative to draw distinctions between the respective histories and politics of “alcoholism” and “drug addiction” (and thus between alcohol and other drugs), this dissertation, which is neither a history nor a political tract, will collapse both categories into one and take addiction to mean the “process addictions” such as gambling, sex, overeating and under-eating (anorexia), which Kosofsky Sedgwick problematizes so well, as well as addictions to drugs and/or alcohol. I am more interested in the phenomenology of addiction as a mode of (un)consciousness than I am in what individuates

addicts. I wouldn't have sought AA's help if it were otherwise. Does this make my indignity at feeling different and othered in AA unwarranted?

2. The Seventh Tradition (12 & 12, pp. 160-165) states: "Every AA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions" (p. 160). The reason is self-evident: "This principle is telling evidence of the profound change that AA has wrought in all of us. Everybody knows that active alcoholics scream that they have no troubles money can't cure. Always, we've had our hands out. Time out of mind we've been dependent on somebody, usually money-wise. When a society composed entirely of alcoholics says it's going to pay its bills, that's really news" (p. 160).

PART 2: MR. BARNEY'S NEIGHBORHOOD

Any crewman who ate the lotus, the honey-sweet fruit,
lost all desire to send a message back, much less return,
their only wish to linger there with the Lotus-eaters.
grazing on lotus, all memory of the journey home
dissolved forever.

–Homer, *The Odyssey* (2002)

He tore the flower gravely from its pinhold smelt its almost no smell and placed it in his heart pocket. Language of flowers. They like it because no-one can hear. Or a poison bouquet to strike him down.

–James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1986, p. 64)

Give us long rest or death, dark death, or dreamful ease.

–Alfred Lord Tennyson, “The Lotos-Eaters” (1832/1980)

To gain access to the question of “Being-on-drugs” we have had to go the way of literature.

–Avital Ronell (1992, p. 13)

CHAPTER 1: NON-DRUG INDUCED, i.e., LITERARY FLASHBACK...

No, I was not Evelyn's surprise speaker—that would be the extraordinary Bob D—but I would speak later in the meeting, somehow, impossibly, and I will leave more confused than when I arrived.

At the time of the meeting AA wasn't entirely new to me. I also did a shortened stint at an outpatient clinic the previous winter, which was Twelve Steps 24/7, or whenever I happened to get there, which was late or never. Just a few days after detox I told my counselor that I was quitting the program, that I couldn't hack it, that I was jonesing all the time, that I didn't know what to do with my time, that I didn't know how to be myself with others, that I didn't even know how to be myself with myself, that I was like Odysseus tied to the mast...and finally, that the subway ride was way too long. I told him I didn't believe in the disease concept.

“What about the *dis*-ease concept, then?”

“What's that mean?” I said. “More language games?”

I was growing impatient with some of the linguistic technologies of AA, which struck me as sophomoric: a quasi-logical semantic ethics. (1)

“No, well, yes, it is a bit of a language game, but that doesn’t mean there’s no truth to it,” Tony said. “Anyway, I didn’t think of it.”

“Who did?”

“It probably started as an AA-ism, but the sociologist Norm Denzin (1987) borrowed it to describe alcoholism (and addiction I would say) as a *dis-ease*, or an uneasiness with time, with others, with oneself, and with being in the world, in general, which is what you just described, basically.” (2)

With a sociologist’s name attached to it, I’ll admit I found the concept intriguing.

“Have you read ‘Bill’s Story’ yet?”

I admitted to having not.

“Do yourself a favor,” he said. “Pages one through sixteen.”

We shared an uncomfortable silence, uncomfortable for me. Tony was the picture of casual cool in his semi-expensive manager’s chair, blue cardigan, and sneakered feet crossed at the ankles. Tony’s was as gentle a spirit as I’d ever come across which was apparent in his two too-blue eyes. And yet he had a strong and defensible point of view (defensible, that is, from his point of

view, and his point of view was AA all the way). To me Tony's worldview was as honed as any teleological ideology tempered in the flames of radical struggle and cooled in the waters of revolutionary rebirth. 'AA is Marxism for the soul,' I thought, pleased with myself. That's how I imagined Tony's medico-spiritual sense of recovery, Romantic and Scientific, a sense that was visible to me (again) in the crystal clarity of his bright blue eyes.

"Why'd you come here in the first place?" he asked me, but not in an accusatory way, just a simple question, two addicts shooting the breeze.

"I told you yesterday," I said. "I came because I'm a pill-popping pessimist."

Missing or ignoring the sarcasm, he said: "You didn't tell me that you were a pessimist. Most addicts are. That's unfortunate. Unfortunate, but entirely mutable, and most likely a by-product of your disease, like bile. (3)

"Sorry," he said, "I meant your *dis-ease*. Let's talk about that later, though, shall we? For now I think we should stick to the basic reason of why you came here; then we can figure out why you're leaving."

I silently scoffed at Tony's addiction to causality.

"I'm sorry, Tony," I said. "I really am and I really like you as a person, but I'm done. It's over. I can't deal with it anymore. And I'm tired of explaining myself."

“So you’ll just go back to using.”

“No,” I said. “Not necessarily. I’ve already got five days sober.”

Tony laughed: “You’ll forgive me, Peter,” he said still chuckling, “five days is nothing. Five days, if you’ll pardon me, is baloney.”

If I’ll pardon him, *baloney*? Is he kidding? There’s that folksy, Norman Rockwell-like quality to some of these white male old-timers that drives me up a fucking wall.

I quizzed him facetiously about the sloganeering: “What about ‘one day at a time’? I’m doing that. You can’t say I’m not doing that.”

He responded in earnest: “So you came here for a gold star? For a job well done? Okay Peter, you did a great job! Here’s your star.” He tossed his yellow legal pad onto my lap. “Now go back to stuffing your face with pills. Does that make any sense?”

I rifled through several of his neatly penned pages, black fountain pen ink, like blood on a chicken, before he grabbed it back from me. “I said I wasn’t going to use, you aren’t listening to me.”

“But I am listening to you. You’re not listening to yourself. Or you’re listening to the wrong part of yourself.”

I looked out at the small trimmed lawn beyond Tony’s office window and longed for escape, but a real escape, not these mini-vacations at the Manson Ranch. I wanted to get fucked up.

“Peter, I’m not your enemy,” Tony said. And he wasn’t, and I knew that. He was the kindest man in the world, and that thought made me cry, and very unexpectedly. Then I couldn’t stop. Crying. I wished Tony Barney were my father all of a sudden.

“Perfectly normal,” he said patiently, “perfectly normal to be labile in a situation like this.”

“What situation?” I blubbered. I was too embarrassed to ask what ‘labile’ meant, and since the context within which my comprehension might have found footing was my own emotional state, the definition was lost on me.

“A situation where you feel you have no control,” he said calmly, “or power. But you see, Peter, you haven’t had control over your body, and by your body, I mean your mind, and when I say your mind, I also mean your body...You haven’t had control over anything since you popped that first pill and it made you feel better than good.”

“Actually it was a shot in the arm by an ER nurse.”

“Admitting powerlessness over substances, believing in a Power greater than yourself, and deciding to turn your will and your life over to that Power as you understand that Power.... well, that’s heavy stuff, and that’s just the first Three Steps. In my opinion, though not everyone agrees with me on this, the first three are the hardest simply because they’re at the beginning. I call it, ‘fear of birth.’”

I wouldn’t give him the satisfaction of a response.

“Your group counselor told me that you’re very vocal in group, and that’s wonderful and I for one think you’re doing just fine, here, Peter, if you’d just give it a chance.”

I mused upon my garrulousness. I should really put a sock in it. Always trying to prove how smart I am.

“So you want me to go to Twelve Step meetings every day?”

“Two times a day, actually,” he said. “Except for the weekends when it’s just one.”

The morning light had moved on and was gone from Tony’s window. Can’t count on anything. The single bulb of his desk lamp lit the scene, as, outside, a long, bare maple branch shivered in a cold gust of wind.

“Why don’t you try another meeting, Peter? There’s one in twelve minutes and...thirty-two seconds,” he said tapping his enormous diver’s watch and smiling at his calculations.

But I was empty. Done. I’d tried and I’d failed. And I really thought I wanted to do it. That is, *not* to do it, to put it all down and live like everyone else. I really thought I wanted to quit. But apparently I didn’t want to quit. That’s what Tony told me anyway.

“I want to be here, okay? It’s just that I can’t deal with it. I can’t deal with the craving.”

I actually knew a little bit about Tony. You can pick up a lot in five days of bullshitting with fellow dopers and alcoholics. Three decades clean, he had, and a respectable job, a respectable house, a loving wife, and without any substances to soften life’s blows. All the counselors at _____ were AA through and through, and if they weren’t always laughing Buddhas, they seemed pretty damn happy to me.

“Perhaps you came here because you wanted to escape?” Tony said, finally letting me in on his interpretation of events. I looked at him like he was crazy.

“Escape what?”

“A temporary respite, a few days clean. Save a few bucks. Get your tolerance down. It will feel like the first time again. Don’t tell me you hadn’t thought of that?”

Well, I hadn't. Not in any way I was aware of. If it was true that meant not only was I out of control viz. drugs, I was also totally blind to my own motivations. I was living a dream life, going wherever my unconscious lead me. Last week it lead me here.

What a goddamned life! What a pitiful excuse for a life!

I shrugged my shoulders and said, "I guess you're right, Tony. Yeah, maybe you're right."

"Well, good. It's good to know why we do things, although the Big Book says self-knowledge is not the answer. It's part of the answer, though, I think." (4)

I asked him: "Well, why do you do what you do?"

I was pissed at being unmasked and at being here in this desperation tank, explaining myself, yet again, to another expert...and Tony knew it. It's just that he didn't take the bait. It sort of sucks when somebody figures out your life for you in less than five minutes.

"I do this because I love to do it," he said.

"That's it?"

"Isn't that enough?"

He laughs at the obviousness of the answer to my sarcastic question.

“But to be totally honest, I happen to be very fortunate. I’m a very, very lucky man, Peter.”

“How so?”

“First of all because I’m alive. It’s a miracle actually that I’m alive. One day when we have some time I’ll tell you all about it, but I assure you it is a tale whose lightest word would harrow up thy soul, that I can promise...”

“*Hamlet*,” I said. Tony smiled. I despised myself for pleasing him. Where had my anger gone?

“I love doing what I do, and I even get to make a comfortable living doing it. I have a wonderful marriage. I honestly can’t ask for anything more out of life. And the only reason I was able get all of these things—and I don’t mean things, Peter, but I think you know what I mean—the only way was through sobriety.”

He waited for me to respond, but I didn’t.

“Do you believe in a Power greater than yourself, Peter?”

“Nope.”

“Never have?”

“No.”

“So then why are you here?”

“Not again!”

“No, I mean how do you explain your existence?”

“It was an accident, and not a funny one.”

“How do you account for the fact that the planets whirl around the sun and never crash into each other?”

And with that one question, I lost all intellectual respect for Tony Barney. Was he kidding? What kept the planets from crashing into each other? There was that wide-eyed adolescent innocence of AA, the high school kid looking up at the sky: “...we found ourselves thinking, when enchanted by a starlit night, ‘Who, then, made all this?’” (Big Book, p. 46) The naïve enthusiasm was embarrassing. Or, were my defenses simply impenetrable? Of course I’ve wondered at the stars, but what does that have to do with the price of codeine?

“Gravity?” I said.

“Maybe I’m not being clear.”

“No, Tony, you are.”

“Try one more meeting, Peter.”

So I did. For about ten minutes. I listened to the beginning of an AA story, which was always my favorite part. How can you not glamorize shooting speedballs all night into an infected vein? And a DUI is so sexy and devil may care. To me, anyway, even the deepest miseries of addiction had that familiar ring of truth to them, unlike the rest of the AA story which is all about seeing the light and toeing the line for the rest of your miserable life. I was meant for better things than AA mediocrity. I refuse to be a cliché! That’s it, I thought, I refuse to be a goddamned cliché for self help in America! (5)

Tony gave me a Big Book as a going away present, and, *honestly*, wished me all the luck in the world.

PART 2/CHAPTER 1 NOTES

1. For example, Ernest Kurtz (2007) the preeminent historian of AA posits in too Whorfian a tone: "...the sense of shame itself is a good thing—something to be cherished and valued. If this claim that shame is 'good' seems strange, reflect for a moment on shame's opposite: indeed, think about the opposites of both guilt and shame. 'Guiltless' is clearly a term of praise: to be guiltless, free from guilt, is to be innocent, blameless. 'Shameless' on the other hand is an epithet of condemnation and opprobrium. To be shameless is to be insensitive to one's self. One who lacks shame is impudent, brazen, without decency" (p. 7, loc. 226).

2. In David Foster Wallace's cinder block of a novel, *Infinite Jest* (1996), the character Geoffrey Day, a too-smart-for-his-own-good academically-inclined addict, like me, critiques the "dis-ease concept" thusly: "...changing *DISEASE* to *DIS-EASE* reduces a definition and explanation down to a simple description of a feeling, and a rather whiny insipid one at that" (p. 203). Denzin's (1987) expanded notion of "dis-ease," however, is substantially more than a description of a feeling. It marks "an uneasiness, or disorder in health, body, or manner of living. Alcoholism is a dis-ease of conduct in the world, involving an uneasiness with self, time, emotions, and relations with others" (p. 134).

3. According to the deconstructionist Avital Ronell (1992), Flaubert (1965) endured bouts of nausea and vomiting as he committed Emma Bovary, the first “junky” heroin(e) in literature, to suicide by cyanide, a three-day grotesquerie that included nausea and vomiting, and which began with “the frightful taste of ink” (Flaubert, 1965 p. 230). Ronell (1992) contends literature—indeed any substance—can function as a drug for the individual and the social, i.e., Emma’s ‘addiction’ to moments of Romantic distinction in a world of ordinariness, and the accusations and trial on charges of blasphemy and immorality that preceded the book’s publication, respectively. (Upon its publication the novel itself was, as an object, a kind of drug that a desirous public consumed *en masse*. *Madame Bovary* was a sensation.) Unlike Ronell, the social constructionists (e.g., Harry Levine, 1978) argue that ‘addiction’ is a European and American social, political, and historical construct of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, borne of grain surpluses, urbanization, the mass production of distilled spirits and opium-based pharmaceutical products, and the increasingly medicalized discourse surrounding their use and overuse. For Ronell (1992) addiction has always been with us. Drugs and alcohol are merely the most recent vehicles for its circulation and dissemination. Similarly, both Kosofsky-Sedgwick (1992) and Helen Keane (2004) find “addiction” being applied to all manner of desirous “disorders.”

4. Regarding “self-knowledge” the Big Book says, “[...] the actual or potential alcoholic, with hardly an exception, will be *absolutely unable to stop drinking on the basis of self-knowledge*. This is a point we wish to emphasize and re-emphasize, to smash home upon our alcoholic readers as it has been revealed to us out of bitter experience” (p. 39, emphasis in original). And what an emphasis! The suspicious hermeneutist (Josselson, 2004) might be curious as to what lurks beneath such a rich construction. By negating “self-knowledge” as instrumental towards

sobriety and recovery, the implicit prescription is the social cure, and the implicit framework is the Judeo-Christian (as opposed to the Hellenic). Whatever happens in AA happens together, in the (so called) spaces between AAs, their sponsors, chairs, speakers, etc. AA members have no time for self-reflection except when they are explicitly instructed to do so in the Steps, i.e., Step Four's "Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves," Step Eight's "made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all," and Step Ten's "continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it."

5. Makela and colleagues (1996) argue for AA to be understood as a "mutual-help movement" rather than a "self-help movement," which is where the movement literature places them (Makela et al, 1996, p. 10). The authors argue for this distinction for two reasons: because "mutual-help" is a more specific subcategory in the "self-help movement" literature that is more descriptive of AA's collectivist endeavor (as opposed to the individualism of self-help), and because "mutual-help" is a term that excludes advocacy groups, groups that are lead by professionals and/or by people who do not share the group's "defining affliction [...] a mutual-help movement is an association or aggregate of groups whose members meet on an egalitarian basis to counteract through mutual interaction a common affliction or problem in their lives" (p. 13).

CHAPTER 2: “BILL’S STORY”

But can someone truly be the intellectual master of a power to which he himself is enslaved? Can he liberate if he himself is not free? [...] Instead of being intellectually enriched and morally strengthened by his experience, may he not perhaps find this knowledge of the disease becomes clouded and confused? He no longer stares down the illness with a hostile eye; he is a biased and hardly unequivocal foe. With all due respect, one must ask whether someone who is part of the world of illness can indeed be interested in curing or even nursing others in the same way a healthy person can.

–Thomas Mann (1995, p. 130) (1)

It was freezing cold on the elevated platform, and empty, and I was already mourning the loss of Tony Barney in my life.

Two o’clock on a Wednesday afternoon. Everybody’s at work, as should I be.

I pulled the pocket-sized Big Book from the down pouch inside my winter coat. I fixed my wool hat tightly around my ears, knotted my muffler, and skimmed the table of contents, clutching the small black covers in my ungloved hands.

The Big Book resembles a mini-Bible, but without any gold-embossed lettering or other fancy design tricks. In fact there's nothing printed on either side of it, but for the small ISBN number on the back. Instead, imprinted across the top of the black matte surface of the cover are the capitalized words, 'ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS,' the former piled on the latter like a stone fortress. Nobody can see what you're reading unless they have remarkable depth-of-field vision. (You'd have to be a fighter pilot to see the title.) But, due to its small size, it is an unmistakably 'religious looking' book. And all bets are off if somebody's reading over your shoulder as 'ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS' is printed across the top of every other page. Stigma. (2)

The contents reads: "Preface, Foreword to First Edition, Foreword to Second Edition, Foreword to Third Edition, Foreword to Fourth Edition, The Doctor's Opinion"—that would be AA's 'medical saint,' Dr. William Duncan Silkworth, under whose care Bill experienced his "hot flash."

The doctor's theory that we have an allergy to alcohol interests us. As laymen, our opinion as to its soundness may, of course, mean little. But as ex-problem drinkers, we can say that his explanation makes good sense. It explains many things for which we otherwise cannot account (p. xxvi).

Pragmatism. It doesn't matter if a proposition is objectively (positively) 'true' or not because the truth is what works. What matters is that it works. The disease model works because it helps sober alcoholics in AA to make sense of and to transform their lives. The disease concept also helps to lessen the guilt, shame, and stigma of addiction/alcoholism. This does not mean, however, that such emotions are not dealt with in AA. They are, and rigorously. (3)

When people say, “working the Program,” I think the list of activities in the Steps is part of what they mean. It certainly looks like work. It’s almost a curriculum.

“Bill’s Story” begins on page 1. Chapter 1, page 1. Everything else has been prologue. The train blasts into the station and I board it gratefully, unknitting my scarf and settling into the warmth of the empty car.

I marvel at how AA members tell stories, reconfiguring... no, completely reconstituting their lives according to new knowledges, new beliefs, new values, new practices, and finally, new life stories and narrative identities. (4) And AA meetings can be joyous affairs: blasts of laughter, common feelings, intersubjectivity. I rummage back to the beginning:

War fever ran high in the New England town to which we new, young officers from Plattsburg were assigned, and we were flattered when the first citizens took us to their homes, making us feel heroic. Here was love, applause, war; moments sublime with hilarious intervals. I was part of life at last, and in the midst of the excitement I discovered liquor. I forgot the strong warnings and the prejudices of my people concerning drink. In time we sailed for "Over There." I was very lonely and again turned to alcohol (p. 1).

What a fantastic opener: New England Yankees divided on Prohibition, a changing world and this son of New England making history with his deployment in the Great War, helping to birth the US upon the world stage in a global bloodbath. It must be 1917, two years before the Volstead Act. Bill writes that he turns to alcohol *again*, but he doesn’t say anything about what that ‘before’ might have been. He omits an entire portion of “what we used to be like.”

The train rumbles through neighborhood after neighborhood, stopping for a few cold souls at each elevated station.

I continue reading, Bill's liquor consumption reaching untenable levels. He writes: "Liquor ceased to be a luxury, it became a necessity. 'Bathtub gin,' two bottles a day, and often three, got to be routine" (p. 5). Perhaps this is where Bill's story of "what happened" begins. Ever worsening hangovers figure prominently:

The remorse, horror and hopelessness of the next morning are unforgettable. The courage to do battle was not there. My brain raced uncontrollably and there was a terrible sense of impending calamity. I hardly dared cross the street, lest I collapse and be run down by an early morning truck...

The morning dose is the most important one, and the best one, the one that feels the most new: "the illusion of the first time." (5) If, for an addict or alcoholic, waking up is like the pain of being born, the morning dose is that first blissful moment of maternal care—and the high feels as natural as that, as if the drug were an extension of oneself.

But it's not, and the separation is traumatic. Unlike the child who leaves the bliss of unconditional care for, one hopes, a world of possibilities, some addicts and alcoholics upon abstaining feel a world shifting beneath their feet. (6)

An elderly man boards the train bringing with him a rush of cold air. The doors slide shut as he sits and folds one thin leg over the other, taking from his jacket pocket a pint of copper-colored

liquor. He catches me staring. Raising his bottle in the air he says: “Here’s to that most famous and fabulous fabulist, Scheherazade: fabulous, female, Farsi, fabler.” He gulps down a finger or two. Quickly I turn my eyes from him and weigh the option of switching cars. But he’s harmless enough. To me, that is. To himself he’s a mortal danger. I’m less frightened of him than I am, I suppose, of what he represents—one possible path—the deterministic one. Never coming to grips. Same old shit fifty years later, sixty years later.

I will not start using again. I will not. It is within my power. I do have power. I do have will. I’m going to call Tony Barney in six months and say, “Hey, Tony Barney, I’m still sober! I told you you’d eat your hat!”

He will shake his head and laugh off the insult, grinning in a way that would be cocksure and arrogant if it weren’t Tony. And those baby blues of course. CAVU eyes: Ceiling and visibility unlimited. That’s Tony. And I just left him for this subway car.

Bill writes:

The wars which had been fought, the burnings and chicanery that religious dispute had facilitated, made me sick. I honestly doubted whether, on balance, the religions of mankind had done any good. Judging from what I had seen in Europe [in WWI] and since, the power of God in human affairs was negligible, the Brotherhood of Man a grim jest. If there was a Devil, he seemed the Boss Universal, and he certainly had me (p. 11).

The utter dread of this paragraph gets me excited, but it’s merely a straw man. Just a year or so prior to that first fortuitous meeting between Bill and Dr. Bob in Akron in 1935, a formerly hopeless “drunkard” named Ebby Thatcher appeared before an inebriated Bill in a completely

sober state, “fresh-skinned and glowing” (p. 9). It seems this old friend of Bill’s had “got religion” in Frank Buchman’s Oxford Group, the immediate precursor to AA. He’d been sober two months. Bill couldn’t believe his eyes. Ebby had been even more hopeless than him: “I saw that my friend was much more than inwardly reorganized. He was on a different footing. His roots grasped a new soil” (pp. 11-12).

Without a new footing like AA the addict slips on the shifting sands of sobriety without recovery.

Ebby was doing what came to be called Twelfth Step work in AA. He was “passing his experience” along to Bill, if Bill “cared to have it” (pp. 9-10). Childhood memories flooded Bill’s brain:

I could almost hear the sound of the preacher’s voice as I sat, on still Sundays, way over there on the hillside; there was that proffered temperance pledge I never signed; my grandfather’s good natured contempt of some church folk and their doings; his insistence that the spheres really had their music; but his denial of the preacher’s right to tell him how he must listen; his fearlessness as he spoke of these things just before he died; these recollections welled up from the past. They made me swallow hard.

Me too. I thought of my father and me and of his anti-authoritarian streak, and the fecund reek of his pot. He laughed at religion and at anything grand in scope—he laughed at anything, really, that had the whiff of pretense to it, though he did love his Whitman. Of course I laughed with him, but before I knew what I might be missing:

I had always believed in a power greater than myself. I had often pondered these things. I was not an atheist. Few people really are, for that means blind faith in the strange proposition that this universe originated in a cipher, and aimlessly rushes nowhere (p. 14).

Bill is an expert if not transparent rhetorician using the term *blind faith* to describe atheism instead of religiosity, but I'm no fool. And, isn't the universe aimlessly rushing nowhere? I thought that was the consensus, and I thought that might even be the point if there is one. And so what? Bill explains:

[...] my friend [Ebby] sat before me, and he made the point-blank declaration that God had done for him what he could not do for himself. His human will had failed. Doctors had pronounced him incurable. Society was about to lock him up. Like myself, he had admitted complete defeat. Then he had, in effect, been raised from the dead, suddenly taken from the scrap heap to a level of life better than the best he had ever known! (p. 14)

This paragraph is so rich that I pause over it and reread it several times. It seems that for 'normal' people free will produces freedom of action, which produces meaningful notions of self and identity. For addicts and alcoholics free will produces addiction and alcoholism; and recovery is won only through a submission of one's will to a Higher Power of one's understanding. Then, like Lazarus, or like Christ Himself, you will be reborn. You will experience a spiritual awakening.

Ebby's conversion, though short-lived, was transformative for Bill. The straw man of agnosticism lay bleeding in the corner:

It began to look as though religious people were right after all. Here was something at work in a human heart which had done the impossible. My ideas about miracles were drastically revised right then. Never mind the musty past; here sat a miracle directly across the kitchen table [...] Thus was I convinced that God is concerned with us humans, when we want Him enough. At long last I saw, I felt, I believed. Scales of pride and prejudice fell from my eyes. A new world came into view [...] I humbly offered myself to God, as I then understood Him, to do with me as He would. I placed myself unreservedly under His care and direction. I admitted for the first time that of myself I was nothing; that without Him I was lost. I ruthlessly faced my sins and became willing to have my new-found Friend take them away, root and branch (p. 15).

Why am I left cold at this? Where is my empathy? Am I so offended by religious ideas that I demonize those who have them? And isn't such demonization a narratological strategy of religiosity? How can I be resistant to something so internalized and externalized that language is structured by it? Why am I not convinced?

The elderly gent with the pint bottle lifts his wispy frame from the blue plastic bench and crabwalks toward the sliding doors and toward me. He's wearing a loosened wide tie and an old fedora, scuffed brown shoes and a black overcoat. His face is pockmarked like the surface of the moon.

"Howdy do," he says to me tipping his hat.

"Hello," I say.

The train rumbles through a ghost station. I imagine a group of commuters from the 1930s leaning over the platform, straining to see when the train will come, all of that Freud on their minds. I wonder how a nascent AA negotiated those common sense strains of thought, which have since been radically usurped and surpassed by an ascendant (and more invasive) common sense of bioscience. AA has weathered many ideological storms.

“What are you reading, young man?” he asks me. The stink of whisky is strong on his breath and he notices how I’ve withdrawn to the corner of the bench. He covers his mouth with his palm and says, “I don’t mean to disturb you, but I’m always curious when I see young people reading since so few people, and especially young people, bother to anymore.”

To be honest, I was pissed. I was pissed that “Bill’s Story” hadn’t moved me as Tony said, or implied, it would. What’s wrong with me? When will I be ready? Will I ever be ready?

I hold the black cover of the book up for him to inspect, but, obviously, he can’t make out a thing with the imprint and without his glasses, which he fumbles for futilely.

“*Alcoholics Anonymous*,” I say. “The Big Book.”

He abandons his glasses for the bottle, which he yanks from his pocket and offers me, almost violently. I decline politely.

“On the wagon,” he says taunting.

“Yes, well, not exactly, no, I’m not an alcoholic, I mean.”

Why am I explaining myself to this stranger? He looks at me like Tony Barney would, like I’m in total and complete denial.

“No, I mean, I’m not an alcoholic, I’m an addict, but I didn’t like NA so I tried AA, but I didn’t like that, either.”

“I’m no addict,” he says, sipping from his bottle. “Drugs are bad.”

“I agree. Thanks.”

“You shouldn’t read that stuff,” he says. “Bad for a developing brain, like pornography.”

The train slams to a stop and the doors slide open. The conductor shouts something incomprehensible over the loudspeaker.

“That must be me,” he says, disembarking. The doors slam shut.

So euphoric was Bill at his sobriety and his newfound religious/spiritual fervor that he questioned his sanity. He called Dr. Silkworth who said, "Something has happened to you I don't understand. But you had better hang on to it. Anything is better than the way you were." And, of

course, you can't argue with that. I'd rather be alive and a Twelve Stepper than a dead (or living) junky. So why can't I do it?

Bill described the birth of the Twelfth Step thusly:

My friend [Ebby] had emphasized the absolute necessity of my demonstrating these principles in all my affairs. Particularly was it imperative to work with others, as he had worked with me. Faith without works was dead, he said. And how appallingly true for the alcoholic! For if an alcoholic failed to perfect and enlarge his spiritual life through work and self sacrifice for others, he could not survive the certain trials and low spots ahead. If he did not work, he would surely drink again, and if he drank, he would surely die.

Bill and Phil had their wives, Lois and Anne, respectively, comb the New Testament, especially the Pauline Epistles and the Epistle of James to find the words that would inspire others to be "doers of the word, and not hearers only" (1:22) because faith without works is dead. The addict/alcoholic is selfish by nature; therefore essential to his or her recovery is working with others. (7)

Finally, Bill describes, "what we are like now," the happy, if vigilant ending of Cain's (1991) "appropriate" AA story:

We commenced to make many fast friends and a fellowship has grown up among us of which it is a wonderful thing to feel a part. The joy of living we really have, even under pressure and difficulty. I have seen one hundred families set their feet in the path that really goes somewhere; I have seen the most impossible domestic situations righted; feuds and bitterness of all sorts wiped out. I have seen men come out of asylums and resume a vital place in the lives of their families and communities. Business and professional men have regained their standing. There is scarcely any form of trouble and misery which has not been overcome

among us [...] Most of us feel we need look no further for Utopia, nor even for Heaven. We have it with us right here and now. Each day that simple talk in my kitchen multiplies itself in a widening circle of peace on earth and good will to men (Big Book, p. 16).

“Our stories disclose in a general way what we used to be like, what happened, and what we are like now.” (p. 58).

I close the book. I don't want to read anymore AA stories. They're too neat, too tidy. (8) My story lay in shards, a broken mirror cracked dangerously in pieces across the floor, each reflection a different and entirely possible addiction trajectory. (9) It's really anybody's guess. Of course it's my face I see in each of the shards, and each from a different aspect. I've been keeping everyone at bay, never allowing any force of life to pierce the shroud of my stupefied soul. There are my eyes, or the reflection of them, looking back at me. Where is the Chorus? Where are the actors? This is what I'm thinking. The train rumbles forward but time is extended in the past, like that great line at the end of *Gatsby*.

PART 2/CHAPTER 2 NOTES

1. Bill Wilson is *not* Herr Doktor Hofrat Behrens who, in Thomas Mann's novel, is compared to Rhadamanthus, a son of Zeus lording over the dead. Behrens is a quack and his sanatorium is indeed a land of the living dead. AA is no such thing. The quote is used to point to AA's layperson's cure in the individual of Bill Wilson, and to the questions that emerge in a social world where 'expertise' is hegemonic.

2. "Stigma" goes right to the heart of the free will/determinism debate as those who view addiction as a disease would be less quick to stigmatize the addict than those who consider it a matter of choice. Erving Goffman (1963) defines stigma as a relational structure between those with a "shameful difference," i.e., a not always immutable, discrediting and "discreditable attribute," and "normals" who regard the stigmatized as "not quite human" or *other*. "Types" of stigma are categorized by Goffman as "abominations of the body," "blemishes of individual character," which is where addiction is situated, and/or "tribal stigmas of race, nation, and religion," which is emblematic of stigma's arbitrariness and its moral relativity (and bankruptcy).

3. Ernest Kurtz (2007) argues Steps 4,5, 8, and 9 help the now sober alcoholic in AA to make sense of the shame and guilt associated with alcoholism through processes of moral inventory, recognition, and amends:

Step Four: Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves; Step Five: Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs [...]; Step Eight: Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all; Step Nine: Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others” (Big Book, p. 59).

4. A narrative is written or told for a certain audience; it is an order of happenings with a beginning, middle and end, “the symbolic presentation of a sequence of events connected by subject matter and related by time” (Scholes, 1981, p. 205). For Hayden White (1980), narrative transcends culture: “Far from being one code among many that a culture may utilize for endowing experience with meaning, narrative is a metacode, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted” (p. 6). A grand narrative of narrative. Similarly, Fisher (1985) rechristens our species *homo narrans*, contending narrative to be a *natural* phenomenon in that it seems to spring from us unbidden. We are born narrators.

It seems that beginning with Carole Cain’s (1991) seminal essay, “Personal Stories: Identity Acquisition and Self-Understanding in Alcoholics Anonymous” and its reprint in Holland, Lachiotte, Skinner and Cain’s (2001) influential *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds*, “storytelling in AA” has become almost a cottage industry among sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists and literary scholars interested in addiction and its cultural and institutional formations (e.g., O’Reilly, 1997; Jensen, 2000). This is no such study. Rather, it’s a reflexive

offshoot of narrative studies of addiction in that it addresses the researcher's addiction first and foremost. It is not autoethnography because no *ethnographic* research was undertaken; no ethnographic data were gathered and interpreted. My data were the memories of my lived experience as an addict/newcomer in AA: the face-to-group and face-to-face encounters I experienced there, and a great deal of AA literature and academic literature on addiction and AA as well.

The method and the methodology of the dissertation is John Van Maanen's (1988) "impressionist tale," the epistemology of which is to "braid the knower with the known" (p. 102):

[...] standards [for the impressionist tale] are not disciplinary but literary ones, the main obligation of the impressionist is to keep the audience alert and interested. Unusual phrasings, fresh allusions, rich language, cognitive and emotional stimulation, puns, and quick jolts to the imagination are all characteristic of the good tale (p. 106).

These criteria are quite different from Carolyn Ellis's (1999) notion of 'verisimilitude' in autoethnography, or the appearance of being 'real', i.e. William Gillette's "illusion of the first time" (see n. 5), which Ellis likens to 'validity' in more positivist-inclined social science research. But I'm with Yvonna Lincoln who, still seeming to want it both ways, argues, "the silliest issues in such research [life history and narrative] would be traditional ideas of internal and external validity, replicability, and objectivity. It's not that these issues don't get done well in this form of research; they are simply not in the same universe" (in J. Amos Hatch and Richard Wisniewski, 1995, p. 120). It is not the aim of the impressionist for a 'realistic' interpretation of the lifeworld—that's the job of the "realist" who "push[es] most firmly for the

authenticity of the cultural representations conveyed by the text” (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 45). The impressionist tries for a subjective and interpretive phenomenology of a particular mode of being in a particular field. I’m not doing empirical work and I’m only seeking generalizability at the theoretical and methodological levels, and that would have more to do with the storied aspect of self and identity than with anything involving AA, addiction, or alcoholism.

Finally, as a theoretical backdrop for all of this fussing I chose Paul Ricoeur, who, both in his three-volume opus *Time and Narrative* (1984, 1985, 1988), as well as in the deeply challenging *Oneself as Another* (1992), has defined “narrative” and “narrative identity” viz. the hermeneutic phenomenology of texts both graphical and social for generations to come. The following, quoted *in extenso*, is a footnote for Ricoeur (p. 114fn), but it explains my theoretical framework (interpretive narrative phenomenology) precisely. Again, narrative identity can be understood as the dialectical relation between selfhood (*ipse*) and sameness (*idem*) and between history and fiction:

I asked whether there existed a structure of experience capable of integrating the two great classes of narratives [history and fiction]. I then formed the hypothesis according to which narrative identity, either that of a person or a community, would be the sought-after place of this chasm between history and fiction. Following the intuitive preunderstanding we have of these things, do we not consider human lives to be more readable when they have been interpreted in terms of the stories that people tell about them? And are not these life stories in turn made more intelligible when the narrative model of plots—borrowed from history or from fiction (drama or novel)—are applied to them? It therefore seems plausible to take the following chain of assertions as valid: self-understanding is an interpretation; interpretation of the self, in turn, finds in the narrative, among other signs and symbols, a privileged form of mediation; the latter borrows from history as well as from fiction, making a life story a

fictional story or, if one prefers, a historical fiction, interweaving the historiographical style of biographies with the novelistic style of imaginary autobiographies.

Holstein and Gubrium (2000) echo Ricoeur's (1992) notion of narrative identity as a dialectic of selfhood and sameness in time, and describe a fluid sense of identity and selfhood according to arrangements of space: "a new storyline that takes account of the self both as a familiar beacon everyday life and as alight that is itself differently illuminated as it moves from place to place in a socially variegated environment" (p 4). "Narrative identity is not a stable and seamless identity," Ricoeur reminds us (1988, p. 248). "It is always possible to weave different, even opposed, plots about our lives [...] Narrative identity thus becomes the name of a problem at least as much as it is that of a solution. A systematic investigation of autobiography and self-portraiture would no doubt verify this instability in principle of narrative identity" (pp. 248-249).

A theory of self and identity in narrative must by definition be in flux because human selves and identities are continually in flux. In this sense, the study of narrative precedes Aristotle's (1982) *Poetics*—it precedes Socrates—in Heraclitus' theory of change.

5. The American actor/playwright William Gillette (1915) in a monograph entitled *The Illusion of the First Time in Acting* contends (viz. the drama): "Each successive audience must feel—not think or reason about, but *feel*—that it is witnessing, not one of a thousand weary repetitions, but a Life Episode that is being lived just across the magic barrier of the footlights" (p. 42)

6. In his short story, "The Death of Justina," John Cheever (1978) writes:

On Saturday the doctor told me to stop smoking and drinking and I did. I won't go into the commonplace symptoms of withdrawal but I would like to point out that, standing at my window in the evening, watching the brilliant afterlight and the spread of darkness, I felt, through the lack of these humble stimulants, the force of some primitive memory in which the coming of night with its stars and its moon was apocalyptic (p. 549).

I wonder what is the 'primitive memory' that 'these humble stimulants' keep us from, the apocalyptic 'coming of night with its stars and its moon.' The memory of birth? The memory of *death*? An atavistic memory of the animal chaos from which we emerged, disguised by the illusions of language and historical meaning and bludgeoned by these "humble stimulants"? What horribleness am I trying to sidestep by swallowing these pills? The exquisitely banal picture Cheever paints of the desolation of withdrawal is "beyond despair"—worse than despair. The second meaning, the transformative meaning in which one has transcended despair, is the third part of the AA story, "what we are like now." On the other side of it. That's where AA is supposed to take you. Beyond despair.

7. Cf. Kurtz (1975) on AA cofounders Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith tasking their wives to quote chapter and verse from the Pauline Epistles and the Gospel of James viz. the blessings and blessedness of "the doers of the world."

8. Turns out, however, that Bill's story is neither neat nor tidy. Ossified in the 1939 first edition of the Big Book, in some ways Bill Wilson is *not* his story. See Part 3.

9. See Raikhel and Garriott (2013): *Addiction Trajectories*.

CHAPTER 3: FLASH-FORWARD—MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE MEETING...

Peter listens to Bob D's story with keen interest. He speaks of the burn of obsession, the forever looping thoughts of more, and the prison of a mind not heedful of itself, and of a self not heedful.

(1)

But Peter's not feeling it. Not yet anyway. In AA they say, 'Fake it till you make it,' and he wonders what the hell they mean by that. You can't fake belief.

Even years later he simply could not recall the details of how he wound up sitting at that blue desk with the wilting—now that he can see it—daisy, stretched over the lip of the glass vase like a dead soldier over a gun turret.

He remembers his hand going up—but for what?—and the applause and approbation, a roomful of strangers coaxing him forward. He could've said no. He did say no. He thought he said no, but he didn't say no. He was molested! He wasn't molested. He was persuaded by appeals to his vanity. He felt like a star! It was the first time anyone had clapped for him since Little League.

Hi. Again, my name is Peter, and I'm an addict. (Hi Peter!) Hi, and thank you. And thank you, Bob. That was wonderful. Really. I really mean it. Really. I kinda sorta don't really know what I'm doing up here. Uh, like I said I'm an addict, I'm not an alcoholic. Never have been. I mean I've had my drunken experiences, but I kind of stopped once I became legal. There's a little insight for you into my character. (*Laughs to himself.*) But I've never, ever craved a

drink. Ever. (*As if they hadn't heard him.*) I don't know. Uh, both my parents smoked pot. War babies, they were hippies with jobs. They did it in front of us, me and my brother. But my brother, he never liked pot. I liked pot, but he never did. It gave him panic attacks. One time, he smoked a little with some stoner acquaintances in high school and he freaked out. He forgot who he was. Really: he forgot who he was. I remember not understanding that when it was explained to me several years later. I get it now. This was the day before my bar mitzvah, if anyone's interested. On that day the door was closed on me. Nobody told me what was going on. I saw him mainly as a bully and a sadist because he seemed to enjoy beating on me. So he has panic disorder, so they say, and something called dissociative disorder and he's on all kinds of meds in addition to what is now a major problem with heroin. Right. I forgot to mention that. I should have said that first, right? He started with painkillers like me, but now he's moved on. He called me last summer to tell me that he was shooting it in his veins, but that I wasn't to tell anyone.

As he speaks he picks at a small chip on the surface of the desk with his thumbnail revealing a beautiful dark wood the blotchy blue paint is obscuring. He fiddles with the small vase and with the soft green stem of the daisy that Bob D. had temporarily revived with his care.

Of course I told. How could I not? And now there's all this... And I'm a hypocrite because I condemn him for shooting dope while I pop these pills, which are just as dangerous, really. He's right. I am a hypocrite. So now I lie. Well, not now: I've been clean for two days (*vague and noncommittal smattering of applause*). But I told him I quit using, I told everybody, but I'm really full of shit, aren't I?

Nobody seems to disagree. Grim unreadable faces staring at him, waiting for him, waiting (literally) on his every word. What power! What potential power. What potential catastrophe. What a fucking catastrophe! He stops speaking. He bows his head in shame. He wonders what

Jeff and his buddy think of him, and Evelyn who sits right beside him but who feels a million miles away. He tries for a quick mea culpa:

I shudder to think of the harm I've caused, of the harm I'm causing, that my brother's causing, but he's suffering too. Isn't he? And I'm suffering. Doesn't that count for something?

It sounded better in his head. But he doesn't know what else to say. Should he go deeper into his history? What about his interests? Movies? Sports? No. Because really, who gives a shit? These people have nothing to learn from him, of that he's sure. He stands from behind the desk and quickly finds his seat in the back. Nobody claps. Dead silence. An oil painting. He puts his coat on and ties his scarf around his neck. Fuck these people, he thinks, but the sentiment is aimed squarely at himself.

Evelyn thanks him, and asks the group to form a circle for the Serenity Prayer. Peter puts his gloves on because he knows from experience that it's handholding time and his palms are drenched in sweat. The group forms a neat circle around the perimeter of the chairs. Evelyn begins with the word, "God," before everybody else joins in:

Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,

The courage to change the things I can,

And the wisdom to know the difference.

Then the group begins a handholding, downward-thrusting power fist gesture in rhythmic unison, accenting the first and fourth syllables of the following tongue twister:

“Keep coming back cause it works if you work it so work it you’re worth it and live!”

“Yeah! Yes! Great meeting! Coffee in ten? See you out front? Let me smoke a cigarette.”

Intermittent clapping and laughter. Hugs and kisses, love and support.

Peter walks into the foyer and leans against a collapsible table upon which is strewn an assortment of AA pamphlets. He picks one up titled, “Do you think you’re different?” (2) He skips to page 7 where in boldface print across the top is the sentence, “Many of us thought we were special.” Beneath that it reads:

‘A.A. won’t work for me. I’m too far gone.’ ‘It’s nice for those people, but I’m president of the P.T.A.’ I’m too old. Too young. Not religious enough. I’m gay. Or Jewish. A professional person. A member of the clergy. Too smart. Or too uneducated.

He’s growing tired of straw-man arguments, but he makes a beeline for “My name is Ed, and I’m an alcoholic (atheist),” which is listed in the contents along with twelve other stories about people who thought they were different including, “My name is Gloria and I’m an alcoholic (black),” “My name is Mary and I’m an alcoholic (lesbian),” and “My name is George, and I’m an alcoholic (Jewish).” The ostensibly Jewish narrator of this silly tale realizes that alcoholics can be Jews too and vice versa when he spies the famous Levy’s Jewish Rye ad in the New York City subway of all places, the one with the jolly Irish cop munching on a pastrami sandwich. This bit of nonsense, which borders on caricature, contains two other significations for George:

that Irish cops, besides enjoying pastrami sandwiches just like Jews, are also a metonym for total alcoholism *en masse*. That Jews can be cops, too, never occurs to George. AA doesn't know what to do with difference.¹

Of course, he expects Ed the Atheist to echo Chapter 4 of the Big Book, "We Agnostics," which to Peter is nothing more than a *former* agnostic describing the bliss that awaits one who finally sees the light "...for deep down in every man, woman, and child, is the fundamental idea of God" (p. 55). He'd never met an agnostic that talked like that. They tended not to generalize so much, the ones he knew.

He checks the copyright date of the pamphlet—1976—and compares it to the 1939 publication of the Big Book.

I am addressing this to alcoholics who have had trouble with the religious overtones in the A.A. program. To those who do not accept the idea of a supernatural being, let me assert that it is always people who have strengthened me when I needed help (AA World Services, 1976, p. 15).

He thinks, without irony, now this is something—maybe!—I can understand.

I admit that I need more strength than I alone possess to overcome the compulsion to drink. I receive this strength from the power for good generated in A.A. I have interpreted the frequent mention of "God" in the Twelve Steps and elsewhere as power that comes from other people (p. 15)

¹ That Peter's experience in AA is almost exclusively white and male will not occur to him for years. And he won't know what to do about it except to note it.

People start exiting the meeting, talking in pairs or in threes. He pockets the pamphlet and waits.

Nobody bothers to stop and say hello. And he thought newcomers were welcomed. Talk about a slap in the face. Was his story that bad? He bared his soul up there. Nobody gives a shit. Nobody cares. Oh, the delicious self-pity.

He feels cheated.

He yanks the pamphlet from his pocket and continues reading Ed the Atheist's story, which carries on with a semi-skeptical tone: a defense of morality that pits "decent action" against "evil impulses"—he doesn't like the word 'evil,' though—resulting in a higher power that is the sum total of all "good actions"; a description of personal misfortunes as "ironic," i.e., coincidental rather than part of God's plan; a defense of an undefined and naïve rationalism, and a call for more "rationalists" to join AA. Ed writes: "I was not able to accept A.A. or the very real help it could give until I made a rationalistic interpretation of the program."

A rationalistic interpretation of AA? I drink therefore I am?

Ed the Atheist provides nothing in the way of an exegesis on rationalism in AA. But isn't rationalistic interpretation something of an oxymoron to begin with? Taken in context, Ed's rationalism is an answer to the problem of the Higher Power. For Ed, God, as he understands 'Him,' is not an omnipotent being that has no beginning and no end, is all powerful, etc., but a simple problem of arithmetic applied to a vague notion of an ethical life of "decent action."

Peter can't get out of his own way.

Jeff and his buddy are coming towards him, now, laughing and talking, their thick, down jackets hanging stuffily over elbow-bent arms.

PART 2/CHAPTER 3 NOTES

1. Bob D. (see Part 3) delineates a spiritual and embodied space of ‘surrendering judgment’ as the Step before the Steps, a place that is pre-theoretical and precognitive, a “first philosophy” of passive learning, or the passivity that is required before learning in AA can begin.

AA is a humanism and as such assumes there is such a thing as a true and unified self: the Enlightenment subject of the *Cogito*. The program is conservative to the extent that it is a return to a true (sober) self from a fragmented, addicted one. But what if there is no such thing as a true self, and that the decentering of such a notion is crucial for making sense of the post-postmodern, hyper-urbanized, digitally wired world we find ourselves living in?

Such questions do not in any way help the suffering addict or alcoholic to recover. Foundations must be made of strong stuff, immovable and immutable and rooted in the bedrock of shared beliefs, values, history, and practices. There is no room for moral relativity or decentering, although Bob speaks of a certain decentering of self as *the* ethical move in AA. In any case AA is not an intellectualist endeavor, which is why the program’s internal contradictions don’t matter, e.g., alcoholism being a disease for which one must refuse medication and make amends. AA is a “language of the heart” (Wilson, 1988), and a quasi-Romantic movement that is irrational to the extent that the program cannot be deduced logically, only felt phenomenologically.

2. A treasure trove of literature including this 1976 pamphlet, “Do You Think You’re Different?” can be found @ aa.org.

CHAPTER 4: WAITING FOR BOB, OR, PHILOCTETES IN AA: A PLAY IN ONE SCENE

Characters

JEFF, a fortyish man with a greying ponytail, a beard, glasses, a dark tee shirt, jeans, and tennis shoes.

BUD, a thirtyish man with a mane of fiery red hair, a maroon and gold striped soccer jersey, white cargo pants, and red sneakers.

PETER, a twentyish man with short, thinning brown hair, glasses, dark collar shirt, dark khakis, and running shoes.

AA MEMBERS, seven or eight 'extras' in various degrees and styles of winter dress.

The action takes place in the foyer of a church basement directly after an AA meeting.

Scene

[PETER *leans against a collapsible table reading an AA pamphlet titled, "Do You Think You're Different?" Several small (8"x12") framed AA slogans hang from the fake wood paneled wall behind him: 'First Things First,' 'Let Go and Let God,' 'Act As If,' 'AA=Altered Attitudes,' 'Look for similarities rather than differences,' 'Let go of old ideas,' 'To keep it, you have to give it away,' etc. PETER seems pleased, but wary of what he's reading in the pamphlet, smiling out of one side of his mouth. Enter JEFF and BUD conversing cheerfully, but inaudibly. As the scene progresses and the meeting empties out, the AA MEMBERS will rotate in and out of the scene, changing costume to assume new characters and improvising with the cast, exchanging greetings, silent or otherwise, including gestures of care—hugging, shaking hands, hands on*

shoulders, etc., as they exit the basement for the cold of the street. BUD's line: 'Exactly. You've done it' will end this rotation. After that, the characters are waiting only for Bob, who, Godot-like, never appears. PETER looks up from his reading, stuffs the pamphlet into his jacket pocket, and folds his arms, he hopes, casually. As the scene progresses each character slowly adds layers to their clothing—sweaters, scarves, hats, gloves—in preparation for the bracing winter weather outside.]

BUD: As I live and breathe! Peter, old friend!

JEFF: Hey, Peter, how's it going?

PETER: [*Glad for the attention.*] Hi.

JEFF: I'm Jeff, how you doing? [*PETER and JEFF shake hands.*]

BUD: [*Overlapping.*] More important, I'm Bud.

[Shaking his left hand, BUD laughs kindly at PETER's lack of ambidexterity and at the friendly confusion that social rituals can cause.]

PETER: Okay.

JEFF: Don't mind him.

BUD: Are you kidding? Mind me, mind me! [*Beat. Pause.*] So what'd you think of it in there?

Bob's a heavy dude, no?

PETER: Bob is a heavy dude.

BUD: 'Other-centeredness.' I love it! 'Surrendering judgment.' Bob's got a lot going on, a lot of knowledge to draw from. But Primary Purpose People are like that, the ones I know.

JEFF: Really? Bob's one of a kind to me.

BUD: Well, yeah, of course he's one of a kind, but he's also a type, no?

JEFF: Can we not get into a debate, please?

PETER: What's a Primary Purpose Person?

BUD: Fifth Tradition in the 12 & 12: 'Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers' (p. 150). Radical Twelfth Steppers. First century Christians, Oxford Group shit, very heavy: 'Other-centered,' like I...like *Bob* was saying. Some say we stay sober by helping others stay sober. Some, like Bob, say we help others because that's what we do. (1)

JEFF: You got to get a sponsor, man. (2)

PETER: What?

JEFF: You got to get a sponsor.

BUD: [*To JEFF.*] Jeff. [*Pause. To PETER.*] I've known Bob for ages; we go way back. In fact he was my second sponsor.

PETER: What happened to your first one?

JEFF: [*Overlapping.*] Do you have a sponsor?

BUD: [*Overlapping.*] H.R. Haldeman was my first sponsor.

PETER: What?!

JEFF: He's kidding.

PETER: Funny.

JEFF: Do you have a sponsor? Cause I'm telling you, you really got to get a sponsor.

BUD: [*To JEFF.*] Jeff. Turn it off for a sec. [*Beat. Long pause. Pointedly, to PETER.*] You know Peter in a way Jeff is right.

JEFF: Course I'm right.

BUD: You do need a sponsor.

JEFF: [*Overlapping.*] Don't sweet talk him Bud. You need a sponsor now! Or else you're going to pick up. How many days you got again?

PETER: Two, well, this is my third day.

JEFF: You got to get a sponsor, man. Didn't you hear what Bob said?

BUD: Jeff.

JEFF: I'm trying to help him.

BUD: I know you are. So am I. [*To PETER.*] How're you feeling?

JEFF: Come on....

PETER: [*Puzzled. Wary.*] Okay, I guess. Anxious.

BUD: No withdrawal? Dizziness, cramps, diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, sweating, fever, chills, aches and pains?

PETER: I guess...

BUD: You guess? [*Pause.*] Suicidal ideation?

PETER: What else is there to do?

BUD: You should be in a hospital, you know that, don't you? In detox?

JEFF: You should be in detox, dude.

PETER: [*Annoyed, but trying to keep his voice down.*] I know, I know...

BUD: We're worried for your health is all. But it also makes sense, doesn't it? In a cart before the horse sense? Do you have anywhere to go?

PETER: [*Puzzled.*] Where?

BUD: Detox! St. Luke's Roosevelt is okay. Payne-Whitney's a little fancier, of course.

JEFF: St. Vincent's.

BUD: Oh my God no!

PETER: I'm not going to detox again.

BUD: Have you ever experienced withdrawal?

PETER: Not yet, not really. Have you?

BUD: 'Not really?' Believe me you'll know. It comes on all at once like a freight train or like Jeff.

JEFF: Very funny.

BUD: When was your last dose?

PETER: I told you, two days ago.

BUD: Usually symptoms come on within 24 hours, especially with a short acting compound like hydrocodone, that's what you said, right? So you're probably safe. Sounds like you dodged a bullet. Cold turkey is no fun at all. [*Pause.*] Would you like to join us for coffee?

JEFF: Freight train? Look who's talking. Give the guy some room.

PETER [*Pause.*] Um. Maybe another time?

BUD: You sure? You can't do this alone. You know that, don't you? You really can't.

JEFF: [*To BUD.*] I wonder where Bob is, did you see him? Did you see him leave?

PETER: [*Overlapping.*] I know I can't....whatever, do it alone, but I'm having a hard time doing it with people, too. You know, the famous Sartre quote.

BUD: [*Overlapping, to JEFF.*] No, I don't think so. [*To PETER.*] No, I don't think so.

JEFF: [*Nodding to BUD. Overlapping, to PETER.*] Have you even been in rehab? You didn't mention any.

PETER: Just some outpatient bullshit that I fucked up. That's where I was in detox.

BUD: Do you need a sponsor, Peter? Do you want a sponsor?

JEFF: You've got to get a sponsor, man.

PETER: Of course I don't want a sponsor! Why would I want a sponsor? I don't understand any of this.

JEFF: You want a sponsor in order that you save your life.

BUD: He's not exaggerating.

PETER: [*To JEFF.*] I know he's not. [*To BUD.*] I know you're not. You're not the first one to tell me.

BUD: But you haven't listened.

PETER: No.

BUD: And why is that?

PETER [*Pause.*] Because I can't *stop*. I can't do it. The cravings are too much, the temptation is always there. I can't control myself.

BUD: Exactly. You've done it. The First Step. Right there. Well, half of it. You've admitted that you can't control it, that you're powerless over it.

PETER: But I can't accept that!

BUD: Why not?

PETER: [*Pause.*] Because I read, okay?

JEFF: [*Overlapping.*] Oh, Jeez...

PETER: [*Overlapping.*] I believe in free will. I believe in agency. (3)

JEFF: [*Overlapping.*] And how's that working out for you?

BUD: [*Overlapping.*] Just what is it you think we do in there?

PETER: [*Overlapping.*] And in gathering my resources and bringing them to bear.

JEFF: And how's that going?

BUD: [*To JEFF.*] Jeff.

PETER: [*Pause.*] Listen, I envy you people, okay?

JEFF: [*Laughing.*] You people?

PETER: I mean no disrespect. [*Pause.*] And I like William James and Carl Jung (4) and the rich history you guys have, and I wish I could get with this. I really do. I love the camaraderie, and the shared laughter, but I just don't get it. It doesn't make any sense. The Higher Power...

BUD: You're thinking too far ahead, Peter. One day at a time.

PETER: [*Overlapping with the end of BUD's last line.*] 'One day at a time,' I know, and 'fake it till you make it,' and 'easy does it,' and 'keep it simple,' but I simply don't *believe*.

BUD: [*Overlapping.*] That's the Second Step. One day...and one Step at a time.

PETER: [*Overlapping.*] I don't think I'm insane. I'm addicted.

BUD: That's right and the only way to get free of it is by letting go and surrendering.

PETER: [*Overlapping.*] Bob said to surrender judgment. He didn't say to *surrender*.

JEFF: [*Overlapping.*] Where *is* Bob?

BUD: [*To JEFF.*] He's around.

[JEFF *exits to look for Bob.*]

PETER: [*Pause.*] You don't understand. I don't get along with people. I wasn't raised like that.

BUD: With people?

PETER: I wasn't raised in church. It was every man, woman and child for him or herself in my house. My bar mitzvah was a get-rich-quick scheme.

BUD: Sounds like my family, only I took communion. [*Pause.*] You don't have to like people. You're not here for other people. You're here for yourself.

PETER: That's not what Bob said.

[JEFF *re-enters.*]

BUD: [*To PETER.*] Well you're not Bob; everybody does things their own way. That's *his* program. You won't know what yours is until you start.

JEFF: Bob is hardcore Primary Purpose. (5)

BUD: Everyone works their own program. No rules. Where is he?

JEFF: No idea.

PETER: No rules? Are you kidding?

BUD: That's right. No rules.

PETER: Are you kidding? I felt like I was in school.

BUD: Right. A willful child. And it is your will that is your undoing.

JEFF: Keep it simple, Peter.

PETER: [*Annoyed.*] For crying out loud.

BUD: In any case you're in no condition to make decisions right now. You do realize that? Coming here was a good idea, I think, but, again, you've got to get yourself into physical shape before you can approach this with any seriousness. If you are serious about getting better, about saving your life, because that's what this is about.

PETER: [*Pause.*] Maybe I'm not serious.

BUD: Maybe you aren't. I just pray that you get serious before it's too late because you are on the road to self-annihilation. Your brother's graduated to shooting smack? Isn't that what you said? Is that going to be part of your story, too?

PETER: No.

BUD: But it will be. This is a progressive disease, Peter.

PETER: It's not a disease. (6)

BUD: Whatever it is, it keeps going and going and it will not stop until you are either in jail, dead, or in the hospital clinging to life. That's the simple truth. It's like the fucking Terminator, addiction. It's like the Terminator meets the Energizer Bunny.

JEFF: That would be a great film.

BUD: [*To PETER.*] You've seen the movie.

PETER: *The Terminator?* Yes, I've seen it.

BUD: This thing—whatever it is, a disease, a voice of doom, faulty wiring, I don't care!—it wants you dead, plain and simple. It hates your guts and it wants you dead.

PETER: Perhaps.

BUD: No. Definitely.

JEFF: He's right. You've got to get a sponsor, dude.

PETER: [*Pause.*] The desire to *not* use. To me that doesn't make sense. How can one desire a negative?

BUD: [*Pause.*] Will you stop thinking for a second?

PETER: See, I'm starting to annoy you.

BUD: [*Pause.*] Would you mind if I gave you a word of advice?

PETER: That's all you've been doing.

BUD: I guess that's probably true. [*Pause.*] But here it is anyway: Never tell a roomful of AA's you're not an alcoholic.

PETER: [*Sarcastically.*] Anything else?

BUD: Your story could use some work.

PETER: I didn't ask to go up there.

BUD: But you went. And everybody understands, believe me, even if they aren't hugging you and saying, 'I understand.' You have to live your story before you can tell it, and you have to live it here with us. If you do that the story takes care of itself, the story becomes you, it *is* you, and it changes as you change. The constants are experience, strength, and hope. And progress, for God's sake. Your story isn't an AA story yet.

PETER: What is it then?

JEFF: A Bukowski story.

BUD: Jeff.

PETER: No, he's right.

BUD: Well, you don't want to go up there and read a eulogy. I think that's what you were sensing tonight, people's discomfort at your breach. (7)

PETER: My breach?

JEFF: You can't deny that that talk of yours was a bit of a downer.

BUD: But that's okay. Leave it be where it is, but take it as a lesson.

PETER: You make it sound way too easy. I just bared my soul up there and was completely rejected.

JEFF: It happens. I've seen it happen. And then somebody nice like me or somebody like Bud comes up to you after the meeting like we're doing right now and clues you in. That's the way it works, you learn it by doing it, not by staying home and white-knuckling it.

PETER: Listen, I'm not saying I didn't learn anything in there. In fact I learned quite a lot.

BUD: Like what?

JEFF: Yeah like what?

PETER: Well I don't really know.

JEFF: But you just said you learned 'quite a lot.'

PETER: [*Interrupting him mid-sentence.*] Yet. I don't know yet. I have to think about it. I have to do some more research, you know?

BUD: Get out of your head for God's sake!

JEFF: Really, man, it's so obvious how thick your denial is.

PETER: I'm not in denial.

JEFF: He denied.

BUD: Jeff.

JEFF: What? The guy doesn't believe. I'm not here to talk anybody into believing.

BUD: He doesn't have to believe.

JEFF: Oh c'mon would you?

BUD: Well I don't think he does.

JEFF: Your interpretation of the Big Book is a little liberal in my opinion.

PETER: Guys, I'm over here.

BUD: [*To PETER.*] Listen, different people believe different things and it's all well and good here. If you don't believe in a Higher Power you will come to believe in a Higher Power even if you don't call it that and it's got nothing to do with God. That's how I see it anyway, and I hope

you'll come back, if not to this meeting then to another. Just keep trying, man. Don't give up.
And be careful. Please be careful.

PETER: [*Pause. Beat.*] You guys have to go?

JEFF: We have a few people waiting on us. Care to join?

PETER: No, I don't think so.

BUD: C'mon you'll laugh it all off. You'll see. We're nice people. Good eggs. I promise you'll learn to love us. Maybe not Jeff, but us.

JEFF: Up yours, Pal. Listen, Pete, good luck. Really.

PETER [*Pause.*] I appreciate it.

JEFF: Come out with us.

PETER: Thanks, but I can't.

[*BUD is genuinely saddened at PETER's refusal. JEFF probably is too, but if he is he shows it only by rocking on his feet and nodding his head a few times.*]

BUD: [*Pause.*] Okay, Pete. No problem. We'll catch you next time. [*Pause.*] Are you leaving now?

PETER [*Pause.*] No, I think I'm going to stay for a minute, collect myself, maybe read a few more pamphlets and...wait for Bob?

JEFF: [*Laughs.*] Bob must have gone.

BUD: You can't miss Bob for God's sake, he's big as a mountain.

JEFF: Well I didn't see him.

BUD: Did you Peter?

PETER: No.

BUD: A genuine mystery.

JEFF: Not really.

PETER: I'll keep a look out for him.

BUD: Would you? Thanks.

JEFF: Yeah thanks.

BUD: And if you see him tell him that we're at the coffee shop on _____ and _____.

PETER: [*Overlapping.*] On _____ and _____. I'll tell him.

BUD: And you'll come with him.

PETER: [*Laughing, apologetically.*] Right, I mean, no, sorry.

[BUD and JEFF exit.]

[PETER leafs through a few pamphlets and reads a few wall slogans as he finishes dressing himself knotting a scarf tightly around his neck and donning a wool ski mask with holes only for his eyes. He looks out at the audience but, because of the mask, when the following lines are heard, one isn't sure if he's breached the 'fourth wall' and is addressing the audience directly, if he's talking to himself, or if it's a prerecording of a disembodied voice that doesn't belong to him at all.]

VOICEOVER: I'll hang myself tomorrow unless Bob comes. [*Pause, as if answering a question.*] If he comes I'll be saved. [*Pause, as if asking a question.*] "Well? Shall we go?" [*Pause, as if asking a question.*] "Well? Shall we go?" [*Pause, as if in answer.*] "Yes, let's go."

He does not move.

Curtain (8)

PART 2/CHAPTER 4 NOTES

1. See Emmanuel Levinas (1969) on the ethics of alterity, which is neither deontological (Kant's *a priori*) nor consequentialist (i.e., Mills's utilitarianism), but a first philosophy that precedes Being. See Part 3.

2. The initial and founding impulse of Alcoholics Anonymous was "sponsorship." However, AA's "Sponsorship" pamphlet notwithstanding (AA World Services, 1976), the mutually sponsoring relation that developed between AA's cofounders Bill Wilson and Dr. Robert Smith was, it seems to me, the first and only of its kind:

Alcoholics Anonymous began with sponsorship. When Bill W., only a few months sober, was stricken with a powerful urge to drink, this thought came to him: 'You need another alcoholic to talk to. You need another alcoholic just as much as he needs you!'" (AA World Services, 1976, p. 7).

The alcoholic Bill wound up talking to (and *with*) was Dr. Robert Smith. The rest, as they say in bad books, is history.

A sponsor is not necessarily an "old-timer" but s/he must have enough knowledge of the program to guide the "newcomer" through the Twelve Steps. The "Sponsorship" pamphlet, however, does not acknowledge the power inherent in the structural relation of "old-timer" to "newcomer." The authors of "Sponsorship" frame *all* AA sponsorship in the egalitarian terms within which Bill and Bob's relationship developed and was narratively framed:

In AA, sponsor and sponsored meet as equals, just as Bill and Dr. Bob did. Essentially, the process of sponsorship is this: An alcoholic who has made some progress in the recovery program shares that experience on a continuous, individual basis with another alcoholic (p. 7).

See Foucault (1977) on disciplining (and self-disciplining) power relations, e.g. “pastoral power” and the historical demarcation between “normal” and “abnormal.” See Lave and Wenger (1991) for a nuanced look at the sponsorship relation, which, again, they liken to the relation between master and apprentice.

In my opinion sponsorship is the most important—because of the potential for abuse— and least understood aspect of AA. Sponsorship is a set of mostly ungoverned relations that are not public in the way a meeting is.

3. Since free will and determinism have different definitions in religion, biology and ethics, I will be referring to William Sewell’s (2005) socio-historical notion of the structure/agency dialectic in the social world, which is emblematic of how an individual like Bud, or any “successful” AA member (Cain, 1991), finds agency (free will) within the structure (determinism) of AA. For Sewell there is no agency external to structure: “Structures, in short, empower agents differently, which also implies that they embody the desires, intentions, and knowledge of agents differently as well” (p. 145). Obviously, AA’s structures “embody the desires,” etc. of Bud and Jeff more than they do me.

4. According to Kurtz’s (1975) exhaustive history, William James and Carl Jung both contributed intellectually to the founding of AA: “Dr. Jung, for example, had spoken explicitly

of ‘religious or spiritual experience’ and ‘conversion,’ yet the *term* ‘deflation at depth’ [an ego deflation that precedes religious conversion] was drawn more from him than from William James. The James contribution was to reinforce and to clarify the *necessity* of spiritual experience/conversion, and especially to teach that its routes—and its roots—could be various” (p. 34), which is a reference to James’s (1958) *Varieties of Religious Experience*.

5. “Tradition Five” (12 & 12): “Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers” (p. 150). Bob D. is a “Primary Purpose” AA. Even before his sobriety comes the sobriety of others. Of course, this still fits with AA’s collectivist ethos/individualist rationale because in helping others one helps oneself, but there is no such motive explicitly stated. Again, in Part 3, I compare Bob D’s ethics to Emmanuel Levinas’s ethics of alterity (1969), which is neither deontological nor utilitarian, but precedes Being.

6. In the Big Book alcoholism is referred to as an “allergy,” which is how AA’s “medical saint” Dr. Silkworth described it: “The doctor’s theory that we have an *allergy* to alcohol interests us. As laymen, our opinion as to its soundness may, of course, mean little. But as ex-problem drinkers, we can say that his explanation makes good sense. It explains many things for which we cannot otherwise account” (Big Book, p. xxvi). Pragmatism.

7. Garfinkel’s (1967) ethnomethodological theory of the social order states that only by disrupting or breaching a social system do you reveal its structure. By disrupting an AA meeting with an “inappropriate” story I inadvertently and implicitly revealed what an “appropriate” story might look like (Cain, 1991).

8. Kurtz (2007), in a Nietzschean mood, compares the shame an alcoholic experiences as the result of his or her condition to the human condition in which “[...] to be human is to be caught in a contradictory tension between the pull to the unlimited, the more-than-human, and the drag of the merely limited, the less-than-human” (p. 8). Samuel Beckett’s (1993) tragicomedy *Waiting for Godot* dramatizes the human condition without “the pull to the unlimited,” but with only the “drag of the merely limited,” and an endless paralyzed waiting for nothing. To say that I experience something like the predicament of Vladimir and Estragon when at an AA meeting is less melodramatic, I think, than it is “tragicomic,” as Beckett would have it. In any case, the feelings each evoke in me, the feelings that come with being an audience member at a *Godot* performance and a newcomer/outsider at an AA meeting, are approximately comparable.

PART 3: FLASHBACK—BOB D. AND THE ETHICS OF ALTERITY

Looking back to when I began drinking, I can see that I was no different from those others who say they drank to make themselves agreeable, lovable, clever. We drank to spawn new selves, to be reborn in Possibility, more charming, more persuasive, more resolute, more high-spirited—until at last our new selves swam away and lost themselves in the darkness and silence of the bottom.

—“Elpenor” (1986) (1)

[...] metaphysics is enacted where the social relation is enacted—in our relations with men.

There can be no "knowledge" of God separated from the relationship with men. The Other is the very locus of metaphysical truth, and is indispensable for my relation with God.

—Emmanuel Levinas (1969, p. 78).

It's not about me.

—Bob D., Copenhagen, Denmark, May 4th, 2007, from “Surrender,” retrieved June 2014:

www.xa-speakers.org

CHAPTER 1: “WHAT WE USED TO BE LIKE”: AN INSATIABLE HUNGER

A rather large, middle-aged man, white, in jeans and a grey dress shirt thanks Evelyn as he settles into the folding seat behind the tiny blue desk, which shrinks even further under his hulking presence. He could be a castaway Gulliver in Lilliput or an elephantine Alice after a drink and a bite to eat.

Upon the desk’s splintered corner the daisy dangles from the lip of the parched vase. He lifts the flower, holding the delicate stem between an enormous thumb and forefinger and smells its dead aroma. He fills the vase halfway with a plastic cup of clear water brought from the fountain by the restroom and drops the daisy in.

In my vulnerable state, I am humbled by this simple gesture of care, however futile. I half expect the dead thing to bloom again, like in *E.T.*, dove-feather petals spontaneously blossoming and brilliant saffron eye ablaze, but no such luck. As in all AA meetings, the object is talk, discourse. An AA meeting is a “speech event” contends Klaus Makela and colleagues (1996). There are miracles, or so it is said, but there is no magic.

The large man calls out from behind the desk: “My name is Bob and I’m an alcoholic.”

The group responds in unison: “Hi Bob!”

Bob’s boulder-like knees hug the blue desk.

“I didn’t come from an alcoholic home,” he explains. “My parents weren’t addicts or alcoholics.”

The room murmurs understanding.

“Yet ever since I can remember,” Bob says, “I’ve had an alcoholic’s insatiable hunger. A kind of desperate yearning, a feeling of chronic incompleteness. I cannot recall a thought or feeling during childhood of being a part of, of being integrated with others and with the world. I was ‘restless irritable and discontent’ for as far back as I can remember.” (2)

That’s a self-assessment that rings true for this self, too. As a pre-teen I collected garbage compulsively, sorting and classifying it according to phylum and class. I checked the gas knobs and the door locks, always in patterns of three, a lonely, distracted and never-ending waltz. My parents paid 65 bucks an hour for a psychoanalyst to theorize that I was *trying to hold onto things*. This was five years before Prozac and the new hegemony of psychotropics.

“No matter what I did,” Bob says, “I didn’t measure up. And nothing I could do brought me to a place where I felt like my friends felt, or how they seemed to me to feel by looking at them.”

I imagine Bob’s friends as he describes them: leather jackets and switchblades, greasy ducktails, antiquated rockers, Hell’s Angels wannabes with Hondas instead of Harleys. As Bob’s story

unfolds, a delicious mixture of identification, *schadenfreude*, rubbernecking, and something like the emotional equivalent of pleasure/pain, roils my innards.

Bob explains: “We broke into somebody’s house and we stole some bottles of whiskey. Now I’d never seen my parents *drink* let alone drunk. But when you’re coming from behind and you’re a pretend human being you watch people. And I’m seeing the bigger hit you take off the Seagram’s bottle the more attention you get from the guys. I mean I would’ve drunk anything, I would have been in for anything because I wanted their approval.

“It felt like my insides were on fire,” he says. “At first it was awful. But then after a couple of minutes the burning stopped and something happened to me that would change the course of my life.”

Yep.

“I started to feel so good and so a part of and so integrated with those kids for the first time. For the first time I could come out and play. For the first time I could just relax.”

Bob exhales the word ‘relax’ as if everything that preceded its utterance was strangled and blue in the face.

“From then on the effect of alcohol was the thing I yearned for. It was the thing that I shoplifted for. It was the thing I acted tough for. It was the thing I smoked cigarettes for. It awoke

something in my spirit and it transformed my being root and branch. It enabled me to fit in with you.”

I can recognize my lived experience in Bob's. Not the specifics, but his perspective on the wonders of intoxication, what Avital Ronell calls “destructive *jouissance*.” (1992, p. 60). I think it would be a breach of AA culture if he'd related these interpretations in ‘war-story’ fashion, which is a tone, I think, more than anything formal or substantive. There is a self-awareness about Bob that I find...intoxicating. I creep toward the edge of my seat, my fingers massaging my chin like the stereotypical thinker. Still, I keep a guard up for any bullshit that might float my way. Bob will describe this as my judgment, my opinion, my will, and, rather grandly, as my self. If I'd just suspend these mental structures and processes for the rest of my miserable life then I should be in good stead for a rewarding and fulfilling existence. Not necessarily a happy existence—“because,” says Bob, “we didn't get well by the grace of God to be happy; we got well to help other suffering alcoholics”—but an existence that's productive and worthwhile and gratifying and rarified in the heady air of spiritual reward and delight.

Still, the first time is a thing to remember, like your first kiss or your first romance it's a genuine love story (see Carolyn Knapp's (1996) *Drinking: A Love Story*). Craving keeps you coming back: a goose chase, it's been said, for that first high which is, as Bob explains, the first time you felt connected and integrated with yourself, with others, and with the world. The subject/object duality is finally collapsed, if only for a moment and without your knowing it, and you're a kid again, without malice, hungry with desire but egoless somehow.

A memory of the first time:

“Seventy-five milligrams, Demerol,” the ER nurse says officiously before sticking the meaty flesh just below my left shoulder. (3)

How exactly does this stuff work? Warm floods of feeling gush to the surface of my skin bubbling with blood-pulsing life. The world spins in a scrim of milky light. The crumbling yellow paint is suddenly flecked with gold. Everything shimmers; shouts become whispers, which become soft echoes; voices slow to gentle murmurs. A fish tank, gurgling water. Everything passes. The slow gurneys rolling into X-ray, the attendants mopping slop from the linoleum. The image of my humerus bone on the light board, like a twig snapped in two. How interesting. How. Interesting. (4)

Even the attending physician is impressed with the x-ray: “How the hell did you do that?” he says.

“Softball,” I mutter. My voice sloshes around in my head like jelly.

I’m snuggling up against a warm, furry beast, a bug-eyed monster whose shark’s teeth and tiger claws scratch at my belly benignly, which is what I’m doing with the dirt-hinged nails of my one good hand: The Junky Scratch. This stuff was made for me. (5)

Then they send you home, prescriptions coming out of your shirt sleeves, and you're kind of just hanging out swallowing one every two hours or three every two hours or four every three hours. Then dependence kicks in and you're watching the sunset from the surface of the moon. You're craving more and more, not only to dull the phantom pain, nor to feel that original warmth and light, although that's the common enough line, but merely to endure the darkness and cold of what you've become. You'd be shocked if you weren't so sedated.

Bob continues: "So I'm in jail waiting to see the judge and this guy named Woody brings in an AA meeting. And Woody.... Well, I don't really like Woody."

This breaks the room up.

"Woody is one of those guys that got sober, and he's got the big house and the brand new car and the wife and the kids and the great job. He's so happy and he's grateful for everything and he just can't help but rub it in my face."

This bit of gentility is what passes for irony in an AA meeting.

I survey the room. Tessa is hiccupping guffaws in profile, as is Paul, the corner of his curly-cue grin an apostrophe. Evelyn is delighted and has her hands clasped over her mouth in almost exalted anticipation. All I can see of Mike are the snowy crests of his mountainous hair (God bless him) but I'm certain he's laughing, too. Or at least smiling.

The old Sesame Street song occurs to me: “One of these things is not like the others/One of these things just doesn’t belong.” (6)

But I’m like Bob. I feel very definitely *not* a part of this thing even though I’m ‘clean and sober.’

“Woody was creepy to me,” he says. “Woody was something and somebody I didn’t understand: an inexplicable phenomenon. You see, Woody was happy and sober...at the same time for God’s sakes! And I don’t get that. Because I stopped drinking and abstinence feels like I’m doing time.”

I know what he means. I think I know what he means! But I want him to say more. (7)

“So here comes Woody with his minions—into jail—to try and fix us. I don’t need to be fixed. I need somebody to get me out on bail. So I go to Woody and I ask him if he’ll help me out.

“That’s why I’m here, kid,” Bob says acting out Woody’s part, “I’m here to help.”

“I told him I needed him to put his house up.”

“Woody laughs,” Bob says, “but knowing I’m in deadly earnest he says to me, ‘I’ll tell you what, kid, I’ll help you with the Steps.’ And he gives me a Big Book, too. I decide that Woody should screw himself.”

I find myself rooting for Bob.

“I don’t need your help,” he says to Woody in absentia. “I’m going to beat this.”

I know he can!

“Woody’s smiling at me. He’s not taunting me but it’s like he’s heard it all before. So I reiterate: ‘I’m going to get out of here and I’m going to get in a good recovery house not like this shithole.’ Remember, I’m in jail. I tell him: ‘I’m going to get some money from the government. I might go to school. I might be a doctor, or maybe a lawyer.’

“Woody’s looking at me and he’s shaking his head and he’s laughing and he says, ‘Kid who are you kidding? You’re not going to do any of that. You’re not even going to stay sober. You’re probably going to die of alcoholism because you haven’t hit bottom and you haven’t surrendered.’

“And I thought to myself: *How dare you say that? That’s the most negative thing I’ve ever heard. Where is the AA love I’ve been hearing about?*”

More irony. From the back I wonder why the late writer David Foster Wallace (1996) labeled AA an “irony-free zone.” Perhaps he meant the unbridled, terroristic kind you see on TV and the Internet.

The room rocks with laughter and I imagine a red balloon, because red signifies guilt, shame and embarrassment as in blushing but also anger and rage as in ‘seeing red’, and the air is slowly seeping out of it. And all the shame and rage, all the humiliation, and all the guilt and all the anger is seeping out of it, and you hear that squeaky, flatulent sound, and all the self-annihilating feelings at past transgressions are metabolized and excreted like a funny fart in the wind.

“I mean, I don’t need this negativity, man,” Bob says, “I need positive reinforcement here. Haven’t surrendered?! Surrender what? There’s nothing left of me!”

Bob says, “Woody says, ‘there’s only one thing that stands before you and all the abundance of the world...’”

The group waits in suspense for Woody to scribble his prescription across the face of the evening.

“You have to surrender your judgment,” Bob says. “You see, I can’t identify with you because I can’t stop picking you apart. And those of you who have lived with these defense mechanisms, you know that it really makes you feel even more separate and apart.”

I’m certain Bob’s talking directly to me, at me, and a wave of paranoia rumbles through my guts. How does he know me? When did we meet? Who is this guy anyway? From identification and recognition to fear in five seconds flat. He senses me picking him apart. He *sees* me doing it. He knows I feel totally alone in this godless world.

Surrender my judgment? Absolutely impossible.

PART 3/CHAPTER 1 NOTES

1. Taken from Books X and XI of Homer's *Odyssey*, Elpenor is the first character in Western literature to die an accidental death due to alcohol intoxication. He serves under Odysseus though he is "none too brave in battle, none too sound in mind." At the end of Book X, "sodden with wine he'd bedded down [...] But roused by the shouts and tread of marching men [...] leapt up with a start at dawn but still so dazed/he forgot to climb back down again by the long ladder—/headfirst from the roof he plunged, his neck snapped/ from the backbone, his soul flew to Death" (Book X, lines 608-615). The ghost of Elpenor visits Odysseus at the beginning of Book XI because "he'd not been buried under the wide ways of earth/[...] we'd left his body in Circe's house/unwept, unburied." The spirit requests of Odysseus to "[...] burn me in full armor, all my harness/heap my mound by the churning gray surf—/a man whose luck ran out—/so even men to come will learn my story" (Book XI, lines 58-85). Not exactly the first AA story, perhaps it was a cautionary tale for those ancient Greeks who couldn't hold their wine.

2. Restlessness, irritability, and discontentedness are descriptors for emotions that, in "The Doctor's Opinion" (Big Book, pp. xxv-xxxii), will continue to surface unless "the sense of ease and comfort which comes at once by taking a few drinks" is replaced by "psychic change," i.e., a spiritual awakening or conversion; then "the very same person who seemed doomed, who had so many problems he despaired of ever solving them, suddenly finds himself easily able to control his desire for alcohol, the only effort necessary being that required to follow a few simple rules" (pp. xxix).

3. And my arm was pricked. The drug ran through my veins. I felt the colour come into my cheeks, and instinctively I knew that a feverish sparkle was in my eyes. I had been haggard and my face drawn and bloodless, now a warmth and brilliance came to me, and the pain died, and then came sleep. Now answer me my question. Did my responsibility begin then? (Pryce, *An Evil Spirit*, 1887, 2: 71-72, quoted in Zieger, 2005, p. 127).

To be 'true to life' I would add another question to the preceding internal monologue: How can I get more? Also, unlike Pryce's 'morphinomaniac' heroine, I'm not concerned with responsibility. In 1887 when *An Evil Spirit* was written, the disease concept (e.g., Jellinek, 1960) was not yet ascendant, and addiction/alcoholism was primarily dealt with in the Christian provinces of sin and salvation. Though the disease concept goes at least as far back as Benjamin Rush's (1819) publication of *An Inquiry into the Effects of Ardent Spirits*, its widespread acceptance can be attributed to the mainstream popularity and acceptance of AA (White, 1998). Of course, a great stigma was lifted off the shoulders of addicts and alcoholics by this paradigmatic shift, but the shift to hyper-medicalization that we're experiencing now poses its own problems.

4. That description is not quite right, though: less external observation more internal elation. Avital Ronell (1992), implicitly commenting on Emmanuel Levinas's (1969) notion of exteriority and one's ethical responsibility for alterity writes: "Drugs, it turns out, are not so much about seeking an exterior, transcendental dimension—a fourth or fifth dimension—rather, they explore *fractal interiorities*" (p. 15). Drugs generate a "supplementary interiority" (p. 33), which I imagine as a warm cocooning, a totalizing well being, a slowing down of time, ebullient and cozy, euphoric and soporific.

5. Levinas (in Nealon, 2003) argues that addiction prevents the subject from any direct encounter with the *il y a*, or the *there is* of human being, which is akin to Sartre's (1964) existential 'nausea' and Heidegger's (1962) 'angst': "the Being which we become aware of when the world disappears..." (Nealon, 2003, p. 176). For Levinas's (1969) ethics of alterity, which is similar to Bob D's "primary purpose" ethics, the way out of the *there is* is only through the crucible of the face-to-face encounter with the needful other. "Intoxication is a wallowing in the terrifying materiality of the *il y a*'s 'impersonal being,' a state where the call or face of the other counts for nothing" (Nealon, 2003, p. 180). To recover in AA it seems, is to transcend the *il y a* once "subjectivity is torn away from the anonymity of the *there is* by a responding to the other..." (p. 178). The Big Book says the root problem of alcoholism is not alcohol but self-centeredness (p. 62).

6. AA culture seems to be one of thick coherence or gross similarities, which is a play on William Sewell's (2005) notion of the "thin coherence" of cultural systems. Again, Bill Wilson himself said to "find the similarities and discard the rest" (Anon., 1973/2013, p.).

7. Is he alluding to craving, or to the depressive pall—the *il y a*, the nausea and the angst—that subsumes you when the substance leaves your system, and you're left with only your facial expressions and your acumen with small talk to counter the world? I will come to realize that Bob abides by the Tenth Tradition (12 & 12) in the strict sense, but that he very definitely has opinions on outside issues and he brings them to bear in meetings (however subtly) where he attests to a set of beliefs and values from a deep fund of eclectic knowledge and intuition. Since,

for some, sobriety doesn't always feel so wonderful at first, you might have to find other ways of knowing and doing in order to make AA work for you.

CHAPTER 2: “WHAT HAPPENED”: BOB’S BOTTOM

Bob describes “what happened” that he found himself in AA: the middle portion of the qualification.

He was brought before a judge who cut him a break. Instead of two years in the state pen he’s sentenced to treatment. But he can’t stay sober in there either. He’s got ‘friends’ on the outside bringing bottles in. He’s on the run now. The cops are chasing him. He’s living on the streets. Imagine that. A nice boy like him with good, sober parents who loved him very much.

It’s a small bridge but it’s big enough. Any bridge will do, really. A self-identified economy drinker, Bob drinks cheap wine only. Even his last drink would be way below bottom shelf. Wine that’s never been within a hundred miles of a grape. Pure grain alcohol with food coloring. No viticulture whatsoever.

Cheap wine and bridges only mix well under suicidal conditions. He’s trying to summon the courage to jump because he’s in a trap and there’s no way out but the blue-black water below.

But he can’t do it. He thinks himself a coward.

Ten days later he wakes up in a hospital bed.

He was so sick, poor Bob, he hadn't anything to eat in days and his face was covered with sores from exposure.

They sobered him up physically. Got him on his feet so he could attend meetings.

He must've surrendered, or hit bottom, or whatever Woody said had to happen because something had changed inside him, and he realized it when he walked into that first AA meeting which was by no means his first AA meeting. He didn't understand what had happened to him, but it didn't matter. The voice inside his head that ran the critique of everything had gone away. A miracle. He was present in the moment.

For the first time in his life he identified with the members of Alcoholics Anonymous.

"I could finally hear you!" he says exuberantly. "And all it took was surrendering my judgment."

This is "what happened" to Bob. This is how he found himself in AA.

CHAPTER 3: “WHAT WE ARE LIKE NOW”: SURRENDERING JUDGMENT AND THE ETHICS OF ALTERITY

I’m not quite convinced. In fact, I can’t really make much sense of it all.

I wonder what Bob mean by surrendering judgment. (1)

He launches into a story. It’s a Buddhist story, he says. In point of fact it is Taoist.

‘The Horse That Ran Away’

Once there was a farmer whose horse ran away. His neighbor came by to express his sympathies only to be told in return: ‘Who knows what is good or bad?’

It was true. The next day the horse returned, bringing with it eleven wild horses.

The neighbor came over again, this time to congratulate the farmer on his good fortune only to be told again: ‘Who knows what is good or bad?’

True this time too. The next day the farmer's son tried to tame one of the wild horses and he fell off, breaking his leg.

His neighbor came by to commiserate but for the third time all the farmer said was: ‘Who knows what is good or bad?’

And once again the farmer was correct, for this time, the king had started a war and the following day soldiers came to draft young men into the army. Because of his injury the farmer’s son was not taken.

His neighbor returned to celebrate the farmer's luck, but was met once again with the now common rejoinder: 'Who knows what is good or bad?' (2)

By relating this story Bob is implying that to surrender judgment is to live in the moment. What he doesn't say is that to live in the moment, comfortable in the knowledge of not knowing, is to live mindfully, an observer of experience rather than an arbitrator of it. (3)

But Bob is a member of AA. Why am I sitting here waiting for the gentle, almost watery sound of temple bells? Why do I imagine the monk's chanted song in my leapfrogging mind? And why am I more willing to sense these phenomena than I am to heed the message as Bill and Bob intended it? (4)

"I'm not the guy that's at odds with religion anymore," Bob says. "As a matter of fact every religion from Buddhism to Hinduism to Islam, I can look at their literature and I can see pieces of my own spiritual experience in those ways of life. (5)

"But still, it's always one step forward and two steps back, my judgment re-metastasizing like a cancer. It wasn't until I had four or five years of sobriety that I was able to approach the issue of judgment non-judgmentally. (6)

"You live a lot of your life up here in this unsundered control center," he says, pointing to his finely shorn silvery head, "trying to run the whole damn universe from up here in this three pound gob of flesh.

“Now if you’re simmering said flesh in a nice vodka and Percocet sauce then it’s not so bad, but if you’re living stark raving sober you’ve got a problem. I’m trying to surrender my *will* and my life to the care of God [Step Three] but I’m retaining my will because I haven’t done the work to dismantle this judgment machine which is my will. (7)

“Could I get off my throne of judgment and get humble and honest with myself?” Bob asks himself rhetorically: “Other-centered rather than self-centered? (8)

“Can I see myself in that person, in the other? Can I know that they just might be sick, just like me? Can I be kind and loving toward that person?”

The Big Book says to be kind and loving toward all.

Bob asks: “Can I be a kind and loving toward all?”

* * *

Bob tells great stories. And he tells stories greatly. I’ve identified. I’ve recognized and been recognized even if Bob doesn’t know it. Of course I’ll blow it in a few minutes when I’m asked to share, but I’m blissfully unaware of that now and so is everybody else here in this place and in this moment. Perhaps there is a sub-strait of compassion in the world that is pre-ontological, as Levinas (1969) argues. Or at least in AA. Ethics as base, prior even to Being.

Bob narrates: “When I was brand new in sobriety this guy Joe came up to me after a meeting and said I needed to take Step Three.”

I looked at this guy and I looked at Step Three on the wall and I said, “Joe I can’t take Step Three.”

“And why is that?”

I said, “Well, I don’t understand *God*, Joe. I don’t even know if I believe in God. I mean I’m praying, but I don’t really *know*.”

He says to me, “You don’t have to believe in God to take Step Three.”

First I said, “Joe, I have no idea what you’re talking about.” Then I pointed to the wall. “Look, it says, ‘We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.’”

Joe said, “Listen kid, in your case if you turn your will and your life over to this chair”—and he points to this chair—he says, “I guarantee you an instant miracle.”

Middling chuckles ripple through the room.

I said, “Okay, Joe, I turn my will and my life over to the care of this chair, now what’s the miracle?”

He says, “Well, the miracle would be that your life is no longer in the hands of an idiot.”

The punchline releases a torrent of laughter. People are crying it’s so funny.

“And I’m not arguing with him or anything,” Bob says. “I’m just thinking, yeah, that’s about right.”

Care can be hilarious even when it’s deprecating.

Then there’s the one about Don.

“Don Williams had long-term sobriety,” Bob says. “And he was a wonderful man. He died several years ago.

“I was at a meeting one time, and the meeting was on Step Ten: ‘We continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it,’ and everybody’s sharing their different approaches to Step Ten.

“But Don had a way of cutting through all the bull.

“He said: ‘you know this is all well and good, but I don’t really need to do a lot of writing or a lot of other stuff. I simply have to look around me, where I work, out in public, in AA, and with my family. If I look around me and I see a lot of people that are struggling with a lot of the same stuff I’m struggling with: the insecurities and the fears and the frustrations of life, and I see myself in them, you can bet that I’m in good spiritual stead. But if I look around me and I see a lot of idiots that need straightening out you can bet that I’m spiritually sick.’”

This one humbles me to pieces. Some AA members are fantastic writers. They cull out of lived experience such sublime and subtle parables. To perceive with compassion is to perceive mindfully.

Bob says, “I have to have a spiritual solution. My *being* must become different and I can’t do that on my own. My only hope is to get enough of me out of the way so that some Power that’s behind the curtain of the universe will come into my life and change the things in me that I cannot change, that no human power can change.”

A small rustling of papers, a cigarette cough, the frictional sound of bodies shifting in place, seeking comfort.

“And I know because I’ve tried. I’ve tried everything there is to try. And all that so I can get up one more day and realize it’s not about me.”

PART 3/CHAPTER 3 NOTES

1. William James (1958) described “self-surrender” as synonymous with “conversion,” i.e., religious self-transformation that “[...] has been and always must be regarded as the vital turning-point of the religious life...” (p. 172). If self-surrender is also a “spiritual awakening” then it is the “vital turning-point of life” in AA.

2. A Taoist tale adapted from: <http://cals.conlang.org/translation/story-about-the-farmer-whose-horse-ran-away/language/temarp/xroox/> Retrieved August 21, 2014.

3. Paul Grossman and Nicholas T. Van Dam (2011) find consensus neither among Western and Buddhist scholars nor between natural and social scientists “both separately and communally” for such an ancient and elusive notion as “mindfulness.” Darcel Reyes (2012), however, sees in mindfulness “a balanced frame of mind that avoids over-identification with the state of suffering or pleasure [which] allows detachment from negative emotional states and the realization of the impermanence of all emotions” (p. 83). Ken Tobin (2015, forthcoming), adapting Davidson and Begley’s (2012) work on emotional styles, brings mindfulness to life with descriptors like resilience, curiosity, right speech, attentiveness and concentration to one who is practicing mindfulness in the lifeworld. And Jon Kabat-Zinn (2003) defines mindfulness as “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment” (p. 45). According to my count, several of the Twelve Steps could potentially involve certain aspects of mindfulness. In fact, some of the Steps are prescriptions for a meta-awareness of powerlessness, moral defection and restitution,

and ethical action. But Bob turns any potential deficit perspective on its head. For example, instead of ‘defects of character,’ (Step Six), which have been described to me as paralleling the Seven Deadly Sins. Bob says ‘defense mechanisms,’ which, besides bringing the term up to psychoanalytic date, implies ‘normal’ (albeit medicalized and scientific) mental processes in place of the Christian ethics of the Seven Deadly Sins.

4. One hears a lot about how Bill and Bob intended it (e.g., Ernest Kurtz, 2005). Conservative hermeneutists with no ill will whatever. Still there is sadness, if not rage, in several of the voices I’ve heard bemoaning what AA has become: psychoanalysis, group therapy. ‘The Program is simple,’ I’ve heard. ‘Read pages 1 through 164 in the Big Book. That’s the Program.’

5. There is an abundance of research on spirituality in AA (e.g., Forcehimes, 2004; Galanter, 2007), but little of it addresses mindfulness or mindfulness-based practices specifically. Kabat-Zinn (2003), perhaps echoing Norman Denzin’s (1987) description of addiction/alcoholism as a “dis-ease” with self, time, others and the world, argues that mindfulness is a medicine for the ‘dis-ease of the three poisons’: greed, hatred, and unawareness (in Jane Warren, 2012), who describes mindfulness viz. recovery from addiction as “an invitation to be where one already is and to know the inner and outer landscape of the direct experience in each moment” (p. 14). Citing Tarrant (2004), and melding Buddhist and Heideggerean perspectives she likens the understanding mind of acceptance as “analogous to being let out to a large and open meadow where there are no walls, no structural protections, only light, space, and openness, which provide no answers” (Warren, 2012, p. 15).

6. Bill Wilson was five years sober and had just helped to publish the Big Book when “the joyous energy he had come to think of as his birthright reclaimed had begun to wane” (Hartigan, 2000, p. 2). His ‘restless’ seeking for respite from his crippling depressions through experimentation with other modes of treatment and experience would lead to denouncement from some quarters in AA (Hartigan, 2000). In many ways Bill Wilson is not his story—at least not the one presented in the Big Book (pp. 1-16), the penultimate lines of which read: “Most of us feel we need look no further for Utopia. We have it with us right here and now.”

7. For Bob, judgment, will, and self are one and the same phenomenon with one and the same purpose or function: the core of a precarious notion of who and what one is; a notion, and a function/relation of oneself to oneself that seeks only to destroy oneself in the literal sense. In AA it’s a time-honored axiom that addicts and alcoholics want themselves dead.

8. Unfortunately, Bob does not trace the route he took to get to this place of non-judgment. I assume it’s the Tenth Tradition again, and he’s keeping his opinions on outside issues to himself. Still, he admitted to identification with all the world’s religions and he told a Taoist story for God’s sake. And meditation is in the 11th Step! And there’s no prescription for it as there is for prayer (see Griffin (2004): *One Breath at a Time.*) Again, I’m reminded of Levinas (1969) transcending the *il y a* for the other, which is no mere suggestion. Words like duty, responsibility, and obligation lend metaphysical weight to Levinas’s texts (and to Bob’s utterances). Levinas’s ethics of alterity is a refutation not only of Nietzsche’s ethics, obviously, but also of Kant’s deontology, which focused on motive. And Levinas had little use ethically for

Heidegger's subjectless *Dasein*. Again, Levinas's ethics, like AA's, requires a subject and a return to subjectivity.

EPILOGUE: “ADDICTION TRAJECTORIES,” OR, A TERRIBLE AND MAGNIFICENT
LESSON

This *pharmakon* dulls the spirit and rather than aiding, it wastes the memory. Thus in the name of authentic, living memory and in the name of truth, power accuses this bad drug, writing, of being a drug that leads not only to forgetting, but also to irresponsibility. Writing is irresponsibility itself, the orphanage of a wandering and playing sign. Writing is not only a drug, it is a game, *paidia*, and a bad game if not guided by a concern for philosophical truth.

–Derrida (2003, p. 24)

In the preceding Derrida is speaking, ironically, for power. Have I been playing a ‘bad game,’ then, by playing fictional “games with time” (Ricoeur, 1985) and with other aspects of research that many hold dear? If I have it has certainly not been in the interest of ‘philosophical truth,’ i.e., generalizability, nor to posit a notion of addiction that might aid or hinder addicts, but (merely) to (re)present my imagined and lived experience in narrative form, i.e., the fictionalized and narrativized aspects of my lived experience in addiction and in AA. This epilogue, then, is the resolution of that tale. It resolves questions about the protagonist, i.e., ‘I/me/Peter/he.’ It is also a critically reflexive interrogation of the one intervention that ended my suffering under the pall of addiction, which is subject specific to me and to a nascent class of so called clean addicts utilizing a new biotechnology for opiate addiction (Hansen, 2013).

* * *

Peter's brother, Josh, did not come home that last night in May and their mother knew something was wrong. He'd been staying at her place for months in a blissful nod, heaving his guts out in withdrawal, or shooting dope into what Burroughs (1959) called "the fibrous grey wooden flesh of terminal addiction" (p. xli). She swears she remembers next to nothing about her ordeal with Josh, except this, a reference to the movies: On a downtown bus she was Joe Buck to Josh's Ratso Rizzo, heading south on Lexington Avenue to a methadone clinic, a pharmacy, a doctor's appointment, a score. Who knows? She was his unwitting accomplice. It was all so sad.

But it wasn't only the bus ride that reminded her of *Midnight Cowboy* (Hellman and Schlesinger, 1969), which in the movie ends in Florida and in Ratso's death. "He was limping," she said, "just like Ratso, and he was unwashed, unkempt. I think he had an infection from shooting himself in the foot." The literal and the metaphoric in perfect alignment, but it's lost on her whose pain must be unbearable, Everest-like, insurmountable.

Or, maybe not. Those closest to Josh admitted to ambiguous feelings of relief. Josh had been so sick for so long. But from his first Vicodin to the day of his death was really no longer than eight or nine years.

Peter first got sober through what the medical experts call 'spontaneous remission,' a fancy term for a lucky shot at cold turkey, once he found out Josh was shooting up. His sobriety extended until just a year or so after Josh's death. The image that haunted him—Josh's bloated corpse on a stainless steel table cross-zippered in thick morgue stitches—deserted him when he popped that first pill once again.

Strung out, Josh was a rabid dog, but Peter did not aim that kind of unflinching gaze at himself. He wouldn't allow it. Josh was ill, visibly ill, pasty white with chalky residue punctuating the corners of his pale mouth and a ghostly perspiring pallor.

Josh and Peter never shared anything like a mutually supportive relationship. On the contrary, their relations were marked by physical and emotional violence. The apartment suffered the bulk of the physical damage: large, cheaply framed prints covered the holes in the walls and doors that they batted through to get their hands on each other.

Once he started shooting dope, Josh's rages increased in intensity and duration. He would leave 'messages' on Peter's answering machine: recordings of thrash metal or death metal, fast, atonal, and out of control. His hatred was beyond words. He'd been abandoned, left for dead. Peter told himself that Josh was too far-gone for help, that he couldn't do anything for him; that he was preserving his own precarious sobriety by denying him his friendship, his brotherhood, and his support.

The parents met on the corner of 26th street and 3rd Avenue in front of the Abbey Tavern. They both had keys to his apartment but neither would go up alone. It was 5 PM on a perfect spring day. A few stray clouds, the trees dotting the concrete mass of the city in bloom, and green was like a new color in the world saturating the glyphic leaves.

The father unlocked the door.

The blinds were closed, or maybe there weren't blinds, just blackout curtains hanging over windows that hadn't filtered light for years. The Beatles' *Abbey Road* was in the CD player. Soon, their lyric, which I've since learned is a paraphrase of an Elizabethan lullaby, will be etched into a gravestone that the family will visit every year on his birthday in the midsummer heat: Golden slumbers fill your eyes. His ashes will be poured into a four-foot hole with a small army of roses and sealed up with dirt and the carved stone on top like a slate crown.

"He was cold," the father said of touching his eldest son's skin for the last time.

The lightless black box that was Josh's apartment was something out of Poe. His eight-foot boa, Percy, loose in the walls, will starve to death. A wrought iron spiral staircase wound down from the front door to the apartment proper. The mother stays upstairs by the door, the inverse of Josh's birth, when his father stayed away, tucked safely in the waiting room, pacing and smoking and sweating as mother and son were introduced for the first time. Now, father says goodbye for the last.

* * *

That Peter couldn't get with the Second 'suggested' Step should be evident by now: 'We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.' Again, there are the assumptions that, (a) such a 'Power' of his understanding can be made sense of, understood, felt,

(b) that addiction is a form of insanity² as Tony had explained to him, (c) that his elusive Higher Power can restore his sanity, and, (d) that he had time for all this. His ‘disease,’ as he’d been told repeatedly, was progressive and sometimes fatal. If slips and relapses are as much a part of the AA program as sobriety (e.g., Denzin, 1993), what do you do when a slip might mean death?

Maybe he was doomed from the start. In a *Grapevine* missive dated February 1958, Bill Wilson (1988) argues strenuously against the inclusion of drug addicts in the Fellowship: “[...] I see no way of making nonalcoholic addicts into AA members. Experience says loudly that we can admit no exceptions, even though drug users and alcoholics happen to be first cousins of a sort” (p. 223). Regardless, Peter counted himself amongst the following subgroup of people who tried AA and found it lacking, which, in AA signifies “a constitutional incapability of being honest with oneself” (Big Book, p. 58):

Some individuals find the philosophy and approach of the traditional 12-step programs, such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA), problematic. This often results in these individuals avoiding attending support group meetings and rejecting the help these groups have to offer. The disconnect between individuals and recovery approaches can have serious negative consequences for the prospects of long-term recovery for these people (Atkins and Hawdon, 2007, p. 321).

And he really did try. Well, he thought he tried. He tried ‘faking it until making it,’ adhering to William James’s dictum that certain spiritual experiences were of the “educative,” or tortoise-paced type (Big Book, p. 567), unlike the shock and awe of Bill’s Road to Damascus hot flash at Town’s Hospital. He simply couldn’t put more than a few days of sober time together. He was

² In AA, insanity means doing the same thing repeatedly, e.g., drinking to excess, in spite of harmful effects and adverse consequences.

utterly without will, but still he would not surrender it. He had to take charge. He had to act, to exert his will. If he couldn't stay sober with the help of the Twelve Steps he would have to try something else.

These days there are more options available to addicts and alcoholics besides AA and its derivatives, though the Twelve Steps remain the mainstream method and the method of choice both because of availability and because of a total lack of cost to the individual and the state. In spite of the fact that coerced Twelve Step treatment doesn't work (e.g., Shearer, 2000), individuals are routinely mandated to attend meetings in lieu of jail time, especially since the rise of the drug courts (Paik, 2011). This is certainly an improvement to jailing addicts, but it's definitely not a solution to the wholesale problems of addiction, or to the problems engendered by addiction. To date there have been fifteen cases at the state level ruling that coerced Twelve Step treatment is a violation of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, i.e., "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion..." (Mayer, 2014).

Other recovery options are usually self/mutual-help oriented and group-based, as AA is, but they avoid or sidestep some of the more controversial elements of that program like the disease concept and the notion of a Higher Power. Stanton Peele's secular Life Process approach is explicitly anti-AA in its stance, the title of his polemic from 2000, *Resisting 12-Step Coercion* a case in point. SMART Recovery is a secular "four-point program" founded on Albert Ellis's (1975) humanistic take on cognitive behavior therapy (CBT), which he rechristened rational emotive behavior therapy (REBT)(Atkins and Hawdon, 2007). Jack Trimpey's (1989) facetiously titled, *The Small Book* is the primary text of Rational Recovery (RR), which takes an

REBT approach, too (as SMART was an outgrowth of it), denying the religious/spiritual in favor of a “rational self-interest” and a “belief in an individual’s power of self-control” (White, 1998, p. 280), the opposite of AA’s ideology of surrender. Velten (1996), however, views programs like AA and REBT approaches through the same lens, positing that both ways of doing “emphasize a philosophical shift as a principal ingredient of change.” Both share “rational” and “spiritual” elements, though AA “attributes [...] change to spiritual experiences, whereas REBT and its derivatives attribute it to normal human efforts and talents” (p. 105).

Peter never attempted cognitive behavioral techniques to mediate his addiction. He liked to imagine he would have had not Suboxone come along. Just as Twelve Steppers must attend meetings or risk relapse, he must also remain eternally vigilant. Everyday, without fail, he must remember to slip a half-inch sliver of orange-colored film under his tongue and wait for it to melt.

Suboxone has an opiate in it—buprenorphine, which is the substitution element of Suboxone, but it also has an opiate blocker. An agonist and an antagonist. How Hegelian. The synthesis of these compounds in his body translates into the total absence of craving. The feeling simply disappears.

But he has no work to do. Discounting everything else, AA is hard. Extraordinarily difficult. He feels like a cheater.

His treatment doesn't concern itself directly with the issue of free will because it feels as if the drug negates his will, or simply bludgeons it. Gone are the endless rationalizations, the bargaining, the denial and the other Kubler-Ross grief-stages, running all over town with the same thoughtless thought looping in your head, *got to get it got to get it got to get it got to get it*. But now! That particular opioid switch in what must be the gangly spaghetti part of him, between the ears so to speak—unwittingly Cartesian here—has been flicked off. Sometimes he imagines a dull and sweaty criminal choosing between three color-coded wires to cut...and getting it right! His brain lights up. He knows this. It has regions and pathways and loop de loops, runnels of fleshy language and lipid-soaked semiotic soft drives, but the sudden absence of desire for a feeling produced by a substance—a substance and a feeling he'd been chasing for years as if it were a life goal—this was a humbling and confusing experience.

And it certainly didn't make for a good story. There's no redemption in it.

After the shock of the drug's success in his system, his first thought was defeat. He'd given in. He'd lost. He was weak. This was nothing more than glorified substitution therapy, Park Avenue methadone, and there is evidence of that (Hanson, 2013)—more on this later. His second thought was of how far he'd strayed from the AA line. And he understood, for the first time, why the conservative interpretation of AA utilizes an either/or rather than a Deweyan both/and approach when it comes to psychotropic medication (AACOA).

No matter how one defines addiction, the engine of it has been craving. That's what makes it go. It is the means of addiction's consumption. When a medication reduces or completely negates

craving, as Suboxone has in his case, then who needs AA? Such a question, he thinks, would be the rationale of a so-called dry drunk, wreaking havoc on the world one sober day at a time, like George W. Bush. Is that who he is? Is he still an addict in spite of the fact that he's stopped using? In AA, of course, the answer is always a resounding yes because one never stops being an addict no matter how many sober years one has. The disease is always there, lurking, waiting for a moment of weakness, waiting to murder you in your sleep or drive your car off the road. Attending meetings, sponsoring and being sponsored, and always *working your Program*, this is how you keep that potential actuality from potentially happening.

So, what happens, an AA might ask, when you stop taking your meds?

Helena Hansen (2013), in an extraordinary and cutting-edge collection of anthropological essays called *Addiction Trajectories* (Raikhel and Garriott, 2013), writes about the Drug Addiction Treatment Act of 2000 (DATA), which Reckitt Benckiser, the patent holder of Suboxone, successfully lobbied Congress to pass, lifting the nearly hundred-year ban against “generalist doctors” prescribing opiate maintenance medications from their offices. Surely a good thing. Progress. Between 1914 and the passage of the new law (86 years!) doctors were jailed and stripped of their licenses for helping addicts to keep from going into withdrawal. Of course, the new law further medicalizes addiction which exaggerates all the Foucauldian power relations and categories; and psychopharmacology involves a new and terrifying level of embodiment that involves dependence and addiction, but more than that, capitalist exploitation as a form of biopower that perhaps even Foucault could not have imagined.

Turns out there's also a raced and classed angle to the DATA law. Unfortunately, these so called generalist doctors are not seeing as many under-privileged black and brown bodies as they are privileged white ones like Peter's both because of the raced manner in which Suboxone is marketed and because it's difficult to find a Suboxone doctor without internet access (Hansen, 2013).

In a layered and complex narrative, Hansen tells how Benckiser refused to market the drug as a maintenance medication during the 1970s, describing it instead as a "minimally addictive opioid pain reliever" (loc. 2284). The company was both spooked by the stigma associated with opioid maintenance patients, and saw no profit in them as a consumer base. As a company Benckiser behaved as one of Goffman's (1963) "normals" would have, structuring and reproducing the stigma of a deeply discreditable attribute because of an uncompassionate belief about those who stereotypically engage in its practices. As Acker (2002) and Valverde (1998) have observed, it's not the drug so much as the population that's using it and the resulting institutions employed in its 'treatment' that determines its social acceptability.

So once white America came along in the 1990s and showed itself to be just as vulnerable to the dangers of narcotic drug addiction as black and brown America, Benckiser was there to rewrite the script, as it were. They really didn't have a choice. There was too much money to be made.

Reckitt Benckiser saw the opportunity to 'change the face of addiction' in the minds of Americans, in their words—to work against the stigma of addiction treatment that challenged stereotypes of addicts as unemployed and criminal. The public relations agenda fit neatly with what the company likely saw as a growing middle-class market for opiate-maintenance treatment (loc. 2295)

Hansen sees Benckiser's literal whitewashing of addiction as the logical market result of "middle-class" (read: white) overconsumption of cheap Latin American heroin in the early 1990s and, in the late 90s, the widespread abuse of powerful narcotic painkillers like Oxycontin, both of which lead to long-term opiate addiction in white middle-class America and in Peter's white middle class family.

Benckiser marketed to a moneyed, white clientele through a strategy of de-stigmatization by presenting the new addict in their advertisements as the opposite of "criminal, impoverished, and uneducated (and, implicitly, ethnic minority)," e.g., law-abiding, moneyed, educated, and white. This is the iatrogenic addict, the good addict, the white professional who unwittingly succumbed to the power of the poppy after a back injury. Or, like Peter, after a broken arm. In New York City, where Peter lives, Hansen,

found that buprenorphine users live in white neighborhoods, neighborhoods with the highest incomes and most college-educated residents. This was consistent with what New York City health officials described to me as an evolving two-tiered system, in which patients able to afford it receive buprenorphine from a private office, while others are directed to methadone maintenance programs with requirements for daily attendance, urine drug screens, surveillance, and control (loc. 2317).

Hansen describes most Suboxone patients as struggling to feel normal while being physically and psychologically dependent on a potent opioid medication, and "thus socially dependent on its manufacturers and prescribers" (loc. 2327). Now Peter is struggling to feel normal knowing a little too much about his treatment plan. Is this what Mills (1959/2000) means when he writes,

The first fruit of this [sociological] imagination—and the first lesson of the social science that embodies it—is the idea that the individual can understand his own experience and gauge his own fate only by locating himself within his period, that he can know his own chances in life only by becoming aware of all individuals in his circumstances. In many ways it is a terrible lesson; in many ways a magnificent one (p. 5).

He tells his dissertation adviser he's been crying of lot lately. Is this why? This terrible and magnificent lesson? Is this what Hansen (2013) calls his buprenorphine-dependent subjectivity—relying for his physical and emotional well being on Big Pharma, internet networks of professional poppy peddlers, and franchised, digitized and depersonalized drug dispensaries? Is it this highly individualized mode of possession, and his new “neuroceptor activation”? According to Hansen, he is “adapting to a post-Enlightenment, postindustrial struggle of individualism and locality within an unwieldy meshwork of global interdependence” (loc. 2463). Perhaps.

Addiction is the focal point for a number of issues that structure the social world, including the role of “bioscientific” knowledge in the shaping of subjectivity, identity, and self, and “the mediation of biological and psychological systems and social and political-economic ones by subjective and embodied meaning and experience” (Raikhel and Garriott, 2013, loc. 1462). This is the sociological imagination at work, which “enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society” (Mills, 1959/2000, p. 5), i.e., the private problem of addiction with the public issue of Addiction.

Peter struggles to narrate Suboxone. For some reason this worries him. He took the medicine. The medicine worked. The end.

The image that stays with him is Hansen's (2013) description of Suboxone maintenance as a "prosthetic device—a technology for achieving homeostasis" (loc. 2355). He remembers Mitchell and Snyder's (2001) concept of narrative prosthesis in disability studies, whereby visible disability is theorized as a canonical trope in literature and film, signifying an inherent otherness in the character's subjectivity to match the difference in the disabled figure's appearance. A late stage alcoholic or intravenous heroin addict would fit the bill—in the year before he died Josh would have—as would the stereotypical methadone addict: poor, primarily black and brown-skinned, selling and trading meds outside the clinic. Not so much those like Peter. The relative invisibility of the Suboxone prosthesis, and the privacy and dignity afforded to those with the symbolic (and real) capital to find and pay for such treatment are certainly the lucky ones. A terrible and magnificent lesson indeed.

* * *

Raikhel and Garriott's (2013) powerfully agentic notion of "addiction trajectories" "emphasize the directed (yet contingent) movement of people, substances, ideas, techniques, and institutions along spatial, temporal, social, and epistemic dimensions." (loc. 82). This dissertation has concerned itself with some of the epistemic and institutional aspects of addiction in my non-empirical angst-ridden interpretation of an AA meeting and several of the AA texts. I've also addressed "the experiential and experimental trajectories of lives constituted through the terrains

of addiction and subjectivity” (loc. 88). My life, specifically. My experiential experiments. My addiction trajectory. And yet I feel I’ve hardly begun: a cliché for a clichéd experience and for a feeling that I’ve somehow got it all wrong.

Rabinow (1992) contends, “addiction links both neurochemically maintained and spiritually maintained people together in an emerging biosociality” (in Hansen, 2013, loc. 2388). These connected populations “take part in major social movements to redefine previously addicted selves as biological or spiritual agents, armed with the self-disciplinary tools of molecular biology or of exorcism and communion” (loc. 2388). As a medicated addict, am I a “biological agent [...] armed with the self-disciplinary tools of molecular biology”? As a member of AA, is Bob D. a “spiritual agent [...] armed with the ... tools of exorcism and communion”?³ Are we in a “mediation of biological and psychological systems”? These questions are potent, but so is Suboxone, and so is AA.

AA is a worldview, or a standpoint. My treatment plan implies one, medicalization. But medicalization is hegemonic, and like all good ideologies, is all but invisible. Just like my addiction. What is the absence of craving, then? The absence of craving is not craving. It is nothing. How does one describe nothing? And if abstention is not a celebration, as it is in AA—if it doesn’t have a story attached to it then it’s merely a notation on a medical chart or a chapter of your life you’d rather not share (but must in order to end your story).

³ It’s important to note that Hansen’s (2013) ethnographic work was conducted in a Suboxone clinic in New York City and at an Evangelical addiction ministry in Puerto Rico—not AA.

Finally, there is the notion of “narrative identity” inherited from Ricoeur (1992). Has mine changed like Odysseus’ between Homer and Sophocles? Again, I am nothing of an adventurer. As for guile I plea guilty. Nothing would ever get in the way of me getting what I wanted when I wanted it. I don’t know what I thought I was doing, but I stopped before I got into trouble. Luck, or another aspect of white privilege that kept my “private trouble” private?

Actually it’s Philoctetes with whom I’ve identified, deeply wounded in body and spirit, self-pitying and abandoned. It took Heracles descending from the heavens to finally move him. I often wondered what it would take to finally move me. But in spite of my misgivings I feel I’ve returned home, or somewhere near it and familiar. That I still have ‘work’ to do is an embarrassing self-help maxim that I readily admit to.

There is a great deal of flexibility and fluidity to identity, narrative and otherwise, even to an addicted one, which is essentially a relation of sameness (*idem*) to the lifeworld. (Addiction is nothing if not the same, day in day out.) That there is selfhood (*ipse*), i.e., agency, for chronically addicted addicts is a notion that deserves attention, even if the bioscience of Suboxone and other substitution and anti-craving medications point to a discomforting determinism.

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