

# Introduction

In 1913 Jack London published *John Barleycorn: Alcoholic Memoirs*,<sup>1</sup> the author's autobiography presented in the form of a drinker's life. It was a potentially risky venture since by this time London was an established, world-famous writer, with a reputation partly built on a strong masculine image, and his audience could easily have taken his book to be a confession that London was a weak man, nothing more than a slave to the bottle, a type long familiar to the public.<sup>2</sup> Since the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries heavy drinkers had been regarded as morally and sometimes mentally deficient, but London declared that he was not like them, he was not a 'fall-in-the-gutter' drunk, and in a genre-defining book he ushered in a new type of drinker, one who celebrates drinking in complicated, often agonised and paradoxical ways. Certainly, some elements of this celebration can be found in previous literature: London's insistence on a kind of truth-seeking self-transcendence is identifiable in the Romantics, and the use of drugs for expanding mental horizons and the limits of the self is evident in the work of Thomas De Quincey;<sup>3</sup> Charles Lamb had written 'Confessions of a Drunkard', an early first-person narrative engaged with drink as a kind of addiction that could transform the self to the point where 'The drinking man is never less himself than during his sober intervals'.<sup>4</sup> Nor was the idea of using drink as a gateway to soul-searching especially novel, since many Victorian temperance narratives had graphically recounted the depths of drunken despair even if they invariably ended in redemptive sobriety or salutary death.<sup>5</sup> The difference with *John Barleycorn* was that London showed how individual, philosophical, and emotional commitment to drink could be at the heart of self-consciousness, self-definition, creativity, and self-determined meaning.

This intertwining of the self as an ongoing project in the name of authenticity, rejecting received ideas about how a person should comport themselves, and the centrality of drink as a means of engaging with self

and world, is the foundation of the figure discussed in this book, a figure I will call 'the Existential drinker'. The focus of the book is therefore quite straightforward: it looks at individuals who confront what it is to exist by making a commitment to drink large amounts of alcohol. There have always been people whose lives have been dominated by drink, but that is not the same as consciously engaging with drink as a tool for orientating the self in relation to the world and others, with the avowed intention of 'making', 'being', or 'becoming' one's self in this way. If such people existed prior to the nineteenth century – and there is an argument that such a notion of 'the self' is a relatively recent development<sup>6</sup> – they were not visible or represented in any number until the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> Before that time such drinkers were typecast as criminals, comic turns, drains on the nation's economy, immoral, irreligious, at best harmless merry fellows, depending on who was talking about them. In addition, there has also often been the figure of the pint-pot philosopher, the drunk who delivers rambling insights into the workings of the world and the universe to anyone in earshot, but such types fared no better than any other drunkard or tolerated fool. Even the Bible on one occasion describes what could be an Existential-drinker prototype – 'I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life'<sup>8</sup> – but the idea has not been championed by many religions in the following 2,000 years. We could even go back to Classical Greece and the 'symposium', a gathering of philosophers inspired to deeper thought through wine, but again, their endeavours were not to do with forging the self and self-determined meaning in the way that Jack London, and those who come after him, have pursued.

### *Existentialism*

One of the arguments of the book, hinted at above, is that the figure of the Existential drinker emerges in the nineteenth century, and that this is because a new way of understanding what humans 'are' is forged in that period. The combination of this kind of drinking along with the further development of ideas around 'existence' coalesces more visibly into the figure of the Existential drinker in the twentieth century. By introducing this term I do not intend to suggest that there was (or is) a set of drinkers proclaiming to the world that they and their drinking are Existential, but rather that the best way to understand such drinkers is to regard them as viewing life and the world in a manner which is predominantly 'Existential' in outline. My contention is that there are

drinking protagonists configured in literature and elsewhere whose central concerns are similar to those enlarged upon in Existential thought. Some of these configurations might draw directly from ideas inherent in its philosophy, or from writers regarded as part of the Existential tradition. Jack London, for example, refers directly to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche when he talks about the truths that humanity refuses to countenance, and which for London can subsequently be accessed and confronted through drink; alternatively, these representations might simply exhibit assimilated Existential ideas, because throughout much of the twentieth century such ideas were current and popular. In Charles Jackson's *The Lost Weekend* (1944), a novel central to the Existential-drinker canon, its protagonist Don Birnam at one point thinks of himself as 'the Student Raskolnikov',<sup>9</sup> thus invoking Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1866),<sup>10</sup> an early novel with identifiably Existential themes – Raskolnikov contemplates the idea that if there is no God then he is free to do anything, including commit murder – and thus bringing to the reader's attention the question of free will, but Jackson does not explicitly engage with Dostoevsky or *Crime and Punishment* beyond this. Whether the Existential drinker exists outside these artistic representations is not a topic explicitly covered in the book, although it should be noted that *John Barleycorn* is London's account of himself, and many of the novels examined here have significant autobiographical elements which point the reader in the direction of lives lived beyond the page. Similarly, while it is outside the scope of the book to make sociological, medical or anthropological claims, it does claim repercussions for the way we might think about drinking and self, philosophical in nature, but also with possible wider disciplinary applications.

### *Existential philosophy*

Existentialism is a philosophy established in the twentieth century, with immediate roots in the nineteenth in the work of Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche. It is a philosophy most commonly associated with the works of Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus, and Martin Heidegger, with ideas advanced in novels and plays as well as philosophical treatises. Although there are significant differences between some of these writers in terms of lines of argument, and disputes remain as to who and what should be included under the heading 'Existentialism',<sup>11</sup> the writers nevertheless have in common a belief that what a person is, or can be, is wholly the responsibility of that individual.<sup>12</sup> For Existentialism the pressure placed on individuals to conform to society's expectations – to become, for example, 'the good citizen' – is

a threat to the integrity of the self. According to Existentialism, all rules on how to behave in the world, what counts as ‘true’ and ‘good,’ ‘false’ and ‘evil’, are convenient fictions invented by society, serving to obstruct the fact that the world has no intrinsic universal meanings or values. Existentialists argue that we find ourselves ‘thrown’ into the world at birth without rhyme or reason. There is no God (or, for the Christian Existentialist, at least no God who overrides our free will), so there are no universal truths on which to base our actions and beliefs; that we are fundamentally ‘free’ to decide how to go about our lives is a basic condition of our existence. In order to ensure that individuals do not lose themselves in the crowd and social constructions, the Existentialists argue that we should question accepted morality, and in doing so we should insist on our own individual values and code of behaviour. This sense of self-determination is what is commonly called ‘authenticity’ and is perhaps the most prized feature of Existentialism.<sup>13</sup> Only the individual can determine what his or her life should be. Other people, sometimes lumped together simply as ‘the Other’, are arguably a threat to authenticity. As Heidegger puts it, ‘the Self of everydayness is the “they”’,<sup>14</sup> that is, when we trundle along with the rest of the world we are part of an undifferentiated mass; it is only when we take hold of our existence that we live authentically.

Seen in this way it becomes clear how Existential thought dovetails with the idea of ‘the Existential drinker’. Most cultures legitimise one drug or another, with a mixture of formal regulations and cultural practice determining when drugs can and cannot be used. As a matter of law the state fixes when and where I can buy and consume alcohol; regardless of what the law says, I am still nevertheless reluctant to pour gin on my cornflakes in the morning, because I’m sure that society, family, and friends will disapprove, although equally, and without fear of censure, I could look forward to a champagne breakfast with those very same people. Binge drinking – short periods involving rapid consumption of alcohol – is socially acceptable under certain circumstances in many drinking cultures, usually at annual festivities, rites of passage or in a weekly release from work, but what is undoubtedly regarded as problematic is frequent, continual drinking, because of its effects on the body, mind, personal relationships, and citizenship. Yet from the perspective of Existentialism, if we extend its logic, such a manner of drinking is entirely the individual’s choice, so if people want to drink themselves to death, that’s their affair. From the Existential drinker’s perspective, it is part of the self’s struggle towards authenticity to choose to drink, not as a hedonistic act or an escape from self,<sup>15</sup> but as a way of being in the world that is determined from within by that individual: this is their experience

of the world, it is their way of being which has meaning for them, and it is the life which they have a passion for. These elements of experience, meaning, and passion are at the heart of Existential thought. In the Existential worldview it is not for anybody else to point an accusing finger at the committed drinker, be they close relatives, friends, medics, psychologists, the World Health Organization, the state, or latter-day puritans. The choice to commit to drinking is absolutely central to the Existential drinker's way of being, and one measure of success is the extent to which the individual can fend off the voices of others in his or her ongoing struggle for authenticity, to what extent the individual can continue to drink in the way he or she wholeheartedly believes in and commits to, for whatever self-defined ends, when there is pressure from all quarters to fall in line with acceptable ways and levels of drinking, or pressure to abstain altogether.

At the end of *Being and Nothingness* (1943), Sartre makes precisely this point, arguing that those who hope to find meaning in something external to themselves – ‘values as transcendent givens independent of human subjectivity’<sup>16</sup> – are ‘condemned to despair’.<sup>17</sup> ‘Thus it amounts to the same thing whether one gets drunk alone or is a leader of nations’, he continues, because implicitly both the leader and the drunk may have succumbed to external value systems, or inauthentic modes of being. However, and with deliberate provocation, Sartre goes on to argue that we should judge the drunkard as more authentic than the leader because ‘the quietism of the solitary drunkard’ has a higher degree of consciousness over his ‘ideal goal’, and thus ‘will take precedence over the vain agitation of the leader of nations’.<sup>18</sup> Sartre dares us to grant the inward-looking, socially useless solitary drunkard precedence over somebody who is responsible for the fate of a nation. It may seem an unacceptable conclusion, one motivated in part by an anti-establishment stance,<sup>19</sup> but the main point holds and is certainly in keeping with the logic of Existential thought: the meaning of one's life has to come from within, has to be subjective – ‘*the being by whom values exist*’<sup>20</sup> – and on these grounds Sartre's solitary drunkard can be, has to be, deemed a success.

### Self

There is no current consensus as to what a self is, or even if such a thing exists, or at least exists in a manner which can be usefully and cogently discussed. For example, Galen Strawson writes: ‘In the end, my brief for the self leads me to conclude that there are many short-lived or transient selves, if there are any at all’, and he is aware that such an argument may appear to do away with the (idea of) self even

as he attempts to make a defence of his model of the 'Transience View of Self'.<sup>21</sup> John Lyons argues that the very term 'self' is an invention of the mid-eighteenth century, and that no such conception of self existed or could have existed before this time, that is, individuals did not think of themselves 'as selves'.<sup>22</sup> Existentialism does not share these concerns about a coherent self, at least, not in these terms. During the period from the mid-nineteenth century to the present with which we are concerned, we see that the writers and artists involved assume or assert the idea of a coherent self, even if it is one that is always in process, striving to make sense of self and world. Existentialism thus assumes (or argues) that a self is coherent, or, more accurately, can and should make itself coherent. The Existential drinker in seeking to attenuate the self does so precisely because he or she has an awareness of self that persists through time,<sup>23</sup> even while recognising in the Existential manner that the self is a 'willed' project for which there can be no pre-existing life-script. Mostly, the 'self' is an individual's self-conscious experience of his or her existence through time, gathered together in an ongoing personal narrative (an autobiographical sense of self), constantly seeking to ensure an authentic self. While Existentialism's idea of the self is not wholly consistent, either across the philosophy or even within the work of single writers,<sup>24</sup> we can nevertheless fix on a crucial aspect which most of the Existentialists would agree with: the self, rather than an entity designated and determined by God, nature, Fate, or society, describes a dynamic process in which an individual consciously wrestles with the possibility of what they are and what they can be; as Kierkegaard wrote: 'All decision, all essential decision, is rooted in subjectivity'.<sup>25</sup> It is accepted that any individual is always 'situated' – that is, there are circumstances in which they find themselves not of their own making, for example, class, family, nation, era, gender, race, physical ability – but how individuals respond to the facticity – the brute facts – of their situation is entirely up to them. Sartre's view was that as an entity with consciousness, any individual is orientated in a manner which is 'for-itself' (*pour-soi*), in the sense that it is free to choose itself (its self), free to choose its way of being. However, according to Sartre and Existentialists in general, most people would prefer an unthinking (unselfconscious) state which does not have to deal with this choice, what Sartre calls the 'in-itself' (*en-soi*), an animal-like or stone-like existence, where the cow or the pebble just 'is', and cannot be otherwise, similar to Heidegger's notion of the 'everyday Self', as mentioned above. Since we are conscious beings who can make ourselves (our selves), it is dishonest, 'inauthentic' or 'bad faith' to renege on our freedom and to settle for the unselfconscious life since we are always free to be otherwise. Within this context,

part of the interest for writers and artists dealing with self and drinking is precisely this issue of how an individual can insist on an authentic self.

The Existential idea of self, and how *The Existential drinker* conceives of the self in relation to a commitment to drinking, can be put into sharper relief by comparing it with the model of self as assumed by Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). The AA idea of selfhood is probably the most culturally dominant model in regard to persistent heavy drinking and to other ‘addictive’ behaviours.<sup>26</sup> Even though the idea that a person might be diagnosed as ‘an alcoholic’ has largely been dropped by the medical profession, along with leading bodies such as the World Health Organization,<sup>27</sup> its underlying assumptions remain prevalent.<sup>28</sup> The AA model of self is instantly observable when a person is expected to introduce him- or herself at an AA meeting using the standard formula ‘My name is X. I’m an alcoholic’. Here is an establishing, explicit declaration that X’s identity is fixed by his or her behaviour of excessive, repeat drinking. Therefore, at that moment of introduction X accepts that all along his or her self has been, is, and will continue to be, that of an ‘alcoholic’. X as an individual is thus subsumed into the AA narrative of what an alcoholic is, and for which there can be no other way of being. X is told (and accepts) that he or she is the same as all other people who drink heavily because he or she has the disease ‘alcoholism’, which cannot be cured, only managed. In declaring ‘I am an alcoholic’ there is an implicit assertion that X’s ‘self’ is not of his or her own creation, rather, it is a ‘type’; there is no possibility in the AA model of self that X drinks alcohol as a matter of free will, since in accepting AA’s twelve-step programme for recovery X will at some point have to accept as part of step 1 that he or she is ‘powerless over alcohol’. For X to assert anything else – for example, that he or she positively commits to drinking – would draw the accusation that he or she is ‘in denial’. In its guide *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, AA seems to explicitly warn against an attitude which is something like an Americanised version of Existentialism:

We are certain that our intelligence, backed by willpower, can rightly control our inner lives and guarantee us success in the world we live in. This brave philosophy, wherein each man plays God, sounds good in the speaking, but it still has to meet the acid test: how well does it actually work? One good look in the mirror ought to be answer enough for any alcoholic.<sup>29</sup>

In AA’s influential model of drink and self, dominant throughout much of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, the idea that someone is ‘an alcoholic’ must needs destroy any apprehension of the self as

self-creating and self-determining; being identified as ‘an alcoholic’ imposes a generic narrative (of disease) upon the person, a narrative which must place any notion of an individuating self into a position which is subservient to the dictates of the disease. Further, the aim of AA and many comparable models is for ‘the alcoholic’ to integrate back into society, to be the good worker, the good husband, wife, partner, mother, father, citizen, patient, with a secondary implication that the purpose of the self is to fulfil social functions and needs, and behave appropriately according to prevailing social norms.<sup>30</sup>

The idea of the Existential drinker is thus anathema to the AA model and other related models of the self. These ‘addiction’ and ‘disease’ models of self automatically cast a repeatedly drunken ‘self’ as one that will inevitably conform to those behaviour patterns predicted by medical, social, and cultural understandings of substance-dependence. In contrast to this, Existential drinkers do not accept that they are obliged to act within one or more of these prescriptive understandings, but are instead resolute in their ability to determine the self, and to be wholly responsible for experience of self and world. An example of such a figure is evident in Malcolm Lowry’s novel *Under the Volcano* (1947), when Dr Guzman refuses to treat the British Consul Geoffrey Firmin for his heavy drinking.<sup>31</sup> Guzman says there is absolutely nothing wrong with Firmin, it is just that he refuses to stop drinking, that is, Firmin’s relationship with drink is recognised by Guzman as a fully conscious, voluntary commitment. The doctor believes that the idea of a cure for Firmin’s drinking is nonsensical because such drinking is intrinsic to the way Firmin orientates himself, that is, it is essential to Geoffrey Firmin’s authenticity; for Guzman, therefore, Firmin’s commitment to drinking cannot be considered as if it is a disease. The Existential drinker’s self is thus willed into existence at the same time as it seeks to repel all traces of an ‘ordinary’, socially defined self. The very idea of the stable (social) self that the temperance-modelled alcoholic must reconnect with is antithetical to the Existential idea of the self existing on its own terms and striving for authenticity.

### *Happiness, hedonism, and illness*

It might be objected that the introduction of philosophy in support of excessive drinking is really just a cover for the obvious: these people are hedonists, or they are ill, physically and mentally, and thus in denial, deluded about their drinking behaviour. I will deal with these objections here and leave other objections, particularly concerning questions of ethics, for later in the chapter.

*Hedonism*

Many people enjoy getting drunk because it makes them happy, and 'excessive' is a relative term, so who knows what should count as too much drinking? In the context of this book people who *unselfconsciously* binge all the time are the fall-in-the-gutter types that Jack London summarily dismisses.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, what of the people who happily and *self-consciously* drink to excess? Are they not Existential drinkers? Does the figure of the Existential drinker mask what is in essence an argument for libertarianism and hedonism?<sup>33</sup>

A popular image of Existentialism, deriving mainly from the manner in which the philosophy was appropriated by popular culture after the Second World War, is that it says people are free to do whatever they want. This indeed does sound like a hedonist's charter, the 1960s' countercultural 'turn on, tune in, drop out'. The element that is missing in this version of freedom, however, is Existentialism's emphasis on responsibility for the self, such that simply following sensual urges with no concern for anything or anybody else cannot be deemed to indicate a self wholly engaged with existence. Hedonism is not a goal of Existentialism, even if it might be part of a larger project involving the self, and neither is happiness an endpoint for the philosophy. Authenticity is the guiding principle, not happiness, and since authenticity is a process rather than an achievable state, a sense of struggle is often a component of Existentialism and, by extension, of the Existential drinker. It is not that the Existential drinker has to be unhappy to be authentic, for that would in itself be inauthentic, but rather that 'happiness' cannot be taken as a measure of authenticity. Sartre gives the gloomiest view of this when he says 'Human reality ... is by nature an unhappy consciousness with no possibility of surpassing its unhappy state', precisely because it is constantly striving to become something it is not and can never achieve.<sup>34</sup> Camus, on the other hand, presents a stoical view in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) of the individual faced with meaninglessness, with a more insouciant inflection in his novel *The Outsider* (1942).<sup>35</sup> We could also take Simone de Beauvoir's view in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947), her response to *Being and Nothingness*, that man's 'passion is not inflicted upon him from without. He chooses it. It is his very being and, as such, does not imply the idea of unhappiness'.<sup>36</sup> So while it is certainly not the case that all Existentialists necessarily take the view that life is a species of suffering, it is important to stress that notions of 'self-fulfilment' have more to do with popular psychology and culture than Existentialism, and little to do with authenticity.<sup>37</sup>

*Illness*

At the other end of the scale is the objection that drinking in this way is a sign of 'illness'. It is certainly quite often the case with the Existential drinker that at some point the drinking leads to a degraded physical existence alongside, or preceded by, an agonised mental one. Here it can seem that the drinker is ill, not in the sense that he or she has the disease alcoholism (as discussed above), but in the sense that there is some underlying mental instability which leads to, or is compounded by, 'alcohol abuse'. A blanket judgement that all the drinkers discussed in the following chapters have a mental health problem would undermine the argument that these drinkers exercise a 'will to drink' since their capacity to make a decision is impaired to such an extent that their drinking cannot be deemed to be a matter of choice.<sup>38</sup> It will have to be up to the reader to decide with respect to the following material if this is the case in any of the examples I give. The view most hostile to this book's argument would be that anybody who wants to drink suicidally must, by definition, be ill in some way, as a consequence of physiology or mental imbalance; their perspective or capacity for rational thought is so impaired that they act against their best interests. In Hans Fallada's *The Drinker* (1950),<sup>39</sup> for instance, the narrator and protagonist, Erwin Sommer, ends up in the mental wing of a prison after a sequence of events in which he drinks heavily and behaves erratically; in Frederick Exley's *A Fan's Notes* (1968)<sup>40</sup> the heavy-drinking central character at various times in his life is committed to a mental asylum, often to his own relief. Yet, as will be argued, these characters, always, and with complete self-awareness, choose to drink. Even if the reader interprets their behaviour as unusual and therefore evidence of mental instability, the characters are presented as selves who operate knowingly within an environment where such drinking may lead to their incarceration in a mental or criminal institution.

Such incarceration is perhaps inevitable since some of these works do by their often anti-social nature challenge ideas about what is normal behaviour and what is 'deviant'. In doing so they often explicitly reproduce popular concerns circulating in the twentieth century, such as who is to say who is mad, and by what authority? The events in Venedikt Yerofeev's *Moscow-Petushki* (1970, *samizdat*)<sup>41</sup> take place in a Russia where language and meaning have been so debased it is not possible to identify what is 'normal'; *Under the Volcano* senses a world sliding towards the insanity of the Second World War, and in such a world getting drunk for days on end might seem a perfectly reasonable way to exist. These drinkers are aware that society views them pathologically,

as if their drinking must be the visible symptom of some deeper physiological or psychological problem, and they are themselves often familiar with the terminology which attempts to scientifically capture and cure their 'condition'. In *The Lost Weekend*, Don Birnam expands on the psychoanalytical approach to his drinking typical of the first half of the twentieth century; Fred Ex in *A Fan's Notes* has to undergo different forms of psychological therapy and psychiatric treatment typical of post-Second World War rehabilitation regimes; Erwin Sommer in *The Drinker* is put under observation when in prison for evidence of psychological disorder. So at the same time as there are many loving, lyrical, hedonistic descriptions of drinks, drinking, and drunkenness in these works – Hannah Luckraft in A. L. Kennedy's *Paradise* (2004)<sup>42</sup> for example, but pretty much all the novels covered can be quite seductive around the pleasures of drinking – these are always juxtaposed with the bigger picture of the cost of an early death, a cost philosophically accepted by the protagonists and making perfect sense to them, if not to the medical community and society, which finds that very same behaviour puzzling. The drinkers know that medicine, friends, and family, as well as the law if they cross certain lines, have them under surveillance, but as much as they measure themselves against these perceptions the drinkers remain subjectively involved with something else outside of these frameworks, something that is unique to their subjectivity, something that is, in Heidegger's phrase, 'ownmost'.

### *Will and consciousness*

It might appear that the argument so far avoids another obvious point, which is that free will is the central philosophical issue around heavy drinking, either regarding the extent to which humans can be said to have free will, or the capacity committed drinkers have for exercising it. But, for me, this is to come at it from the wrong point of view, and is one of the reasons why this book uses Existential ideas for thinking through the self and drink. Free will is a basic tenet of Existential thought: the world is brought into being through our consciousness, and through that consciousness we are capable of changing how we are and what we are. Free will and consciousness are all linked together in the Existentialist idea of what it means to be human. Further, 'what it means to be human' cannot be a settled thing because for Existentialism the term 'human' is better understood as an open-ended question, precisely because it is ontologically underwritten by freedom, asking the question 'what can human be?', rather than understanding 'the human' to be a fixed entity.

As far as I can tell, this view of free will is one that is partly accepted even by those who see frequent, persistent drinking as problematic, for free will must enter into the equation here as well, otherwise it would not be possible to contemplate ‘an outcome’ where such drinkers could abstain from, or moderate, their drinking. The whole idea of ‘recovery’ depends upon the belief that people can change their behaviour (or self). The amount of help that may be required from external sources varies between rehabilitation programmes – aversion medication, therapy, support networks – but the premise is always there that it is down to individuals to seek or accept help, to express a desire to give up alcohol, and to follow through on the advice they are given, all of which depend upon the exercise of free will. Even in the disease model of heavy drinking, where ‘alcoholics’ are not regarded as responsible for their disease, they do nevertheless remain responsible for managing their condition, which again must be a question of will. Whether the reader accepts or rejects the idea of a certain drinking behaviour as ‘alcoholic’ or ‘addictive’ or ‘substance-dependent’, we always come back to the notion that individuals are constituted by freedom, a central tenet of Existential thought.<sup>43</sup> Caroline Knapp’s recovery memoir *Drinking: A Love Story* (1996), a deeply personal account of a drinking life from a position that completely accepts AA’s disease model of alcoholism, nevertheless repeatedly makes the point that it is a question of choice for the drinker: ‘The elevator metaphor is common in AA: the alcoholic’s elevator only goes in one direction – straight down. The good news is you can get off any time you want ... it’s a choice you make’; ‘Not drinking is a choice one makes every day, sometimes many times a day. The immediate decision is clear: either you pick up the glass or you don’t’.<sup>44</sup> To state that it is a disease with neurological and genetic components,<sup>45</sup> as Knapp does, while at the same time also claiming it is a question of choice, is to my mind contradictory.<sup>46</sup> With respect to this *The Existential drinker* argues that the figures discussed here choose to drink and commit to drinking, even if some of these same characters themselves appear to be caught up, usually knowingly, in a similar struggle to reconcile their suicidal drinking and the knowledge that they are entities with free will. Sartre’s example of a reformed gambler faced with a roulette table illustrates the point that we are not defined by forces beyond our control, be they external social pressures such as family and the possibility of financial ruin, or internal, such as personal history and present urges. In the scenario Sartre argues that the gambler’s prior intention not to play the tables cannot now simply be relied upon as a fact of self – this is what I have decided I am, my identity is secured as a non-gambler – but the gambler must face the condition of his ontological freedom, for he knows that he

remains absolutely free to gamble or not to gamble: ‘The not-gambling is only one of my possibilities, as the fact of gambling is another of them, neither more nor less. ... I am alone and naked before temptation as I was the day before’.<sup>47</sup>

A related question to the issue of free will is ‘why do people drink?’ The implication in the question is that drinking is a problem for which we need to find the cause. This book cannot answer the question, or, rather, it will show that there are many answers, not in the sense that people are unhappy in many different ways and so may turn to the bottle to self-medicate, but in the sense that the question of authenticity and freely chosen projects is determined by the individual: the Existential drinker has a metaphysical reason for drinking.

### *The Existential drinker*

#### *The narrative and lyric self*

One of the differences within Existential thought is how the self as a dynamic, self-determining project is conceived. Heidegger’s approach tends to be impersonal, arguably more to do with an abstract notion of ‘being’ than any individual’s personal existence. Sartre, Camus, and de Beauvoir, however, often view the issue of self on a more fundamentally personal and relatable level. Heidegger’s view of self is also one which emphasises a kind of ‘here-and-now’ ‘astonishment’ at existence. Nevertheless, although Heidegger acknowledges that at any given moment we are projecting ourselves into the future and into the past, these projections are tied to the present moment: ‘Dasein traverses the span of time granted to it between the two boundaries [of birth and death], and it does so in such a way that, in each case, it is “actual” only in the “now”, and hops, as it were, through the sequence of “nows” of its own “time”’.<sup>48</sup> In literary terms, this is quite similar to the lyric mode, and Heidegger’s attraction to poetry and poetics accords with this. Sartre, however, seems to prefer what might be called the ‘narrative view of self’, the sense that our striving to be authentic is a process of making our lives a coherent autobiography, or judging it against such a self-narrating consciousness. This, in turn, is of a piece with his production of novels, short stories, and plays which deal with Existential themes through the use of narrative. His novel *Nausea* (1938), about a man seeking to write a biography, explicitly explores questions of self, existence, and narrative.<sup>49</sup>

Although *The Existential drinker* is predominantly concerned with novels, thus making the narrativising approach to an authentic self the

more common one, the fact that many of the novels have to make a structural decision as to how to deal with the potentially dull(ing) nature of repetitive drinking leads to solutions with some qualities of the lyric form. The problem of repetition is not encountered in representations of the more typical (literary) Existential protagonists such as Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov, Camus's Meursault, or Sartre's Roquentin.<sup>50</sup> When Raskolnikov and Meursault commit murder, these are 'new' events that bring in train an awakening to the world and self. The problem for the Existential-drinker narrative is that the drinker's very existence is circumscribed by drinking to the point of drunkenness on repeat occasions, a moribund behaviour which could be said to work against any dynamic notion of self,<sup>51</sup> and hence against the idea of self as an always-engaged, narrativising process. Viewed in this way, the Existential drinker is in a kind of auto/biographical stasis. This is initially perhaps borne out when thinking of the structure of *The Lost Weekend*, *Under the Volcano*, and John O'Brien's *Leaving Las Vegas* (1990).<sup>52</sup> These three texts, for instance, confine the action to short time periods, a single day for *Under the Volcano*, a few days for *The Lost Weekend* and *Leaving Las Vegas*, no doubt because all that is required to show the drinker's mode of orientation to world and self is a single representative period of drunkenness.<sup>53</sup> Structurally then this does not afford movement forward in a life, as we might usually expect in novels with a biographical spine, and as such the exemplary drunken bouts necessary to the narrative structure run counter to an idea of autobiography as representing the onward movement of a life over time.<sup>54</sup> It is also evident here that *Under the Volcano* and *Leaving Las Vegas* choose the final drunken episode of their protagonists' lives to round off the narratives, as do many of the other novels discussed, such as Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939),<sup>55</sup> Kennedy's *Paradise*, Yerofeev's *Moscow–Petushki*, and William Kennedy's *Ironweed* (1983).<sup>56</sup> For each central character, the final drunken episode is essentially the culmination of the myriad drunken episodes that have gone before.

In this sense the novels do have an element of the lyric about them. The compression of a life into a single drunken episode presents the self as an object for contemplation in the manner of a philosophical meditation or spiritual confession. The drinking present offers a still point from which to view the self as truly 'existing'. For the Existential drinker, this still point is a foregrounding of certain Existential concerns such as 'meaninglessness', 'authenticity', and 'finitude'. With respect to 'meaninglessness', there is usually an acceptance that this way of existing – repeating the experience of drunkenness – is for both self and for society ostensibly 'useless', although such a mode of existence also re-enforces

the understanding that life itself is intrinsically meaningless, and that to pretend otherwise is a self-deception. Rather than being a flight from meaninglessness, it places it at the centre of concern. The protagonist's subjective creation of meaning is simultaneously foregrounded in this commitment to drinking, an 'ownmost' creation not directly communicable to others, not translatable. Related to this is 'authenticity', where the pressure to conform to society's normative precepts is self-evidently and formally resisted by the Existential drinker in this process: a rational society (modernity) requires citizens who are sober for most of the time, and thus the Existential drinker is potentially by default 'authentic' or, more precisely, in the process of striving for authenticity.

Existential drinkers are also self-evidently faced with finitude since they know that the outcome of committed drinking is likely to be an early death, bringing its ultimate facticity into ever-sharper focus; hence Lowry's novel situates Firmin's drinking demise during the Mexican 'Day of the Dead' festival, and *Leaving Las Vegas* is structured around one final death binge. Both *The Lost Weekend* and *Under the Volcano* suggest a narrative structure analogous to the image of the ouroboros, the mythological snake, tail in mouth, eating itself. The protagonist in such a state thus confronts the question 'what is it that makes life worth living?', the very question that Camus asks at the start of *The Myth of Sisyphus*.<sup>57</sup> The strand of Existentialism present in the Existential drinker is one that suggests 'meaning' cannot be found in the conventional world (or 'real' world, depending on point of view), but, paradoxically, *can* be found in what the Existential drinker's consciousness provides, both drunk and sober, in its intense and intensified subjective focus on the individual's being-in-the-world and dance with death, such as Jack London initially describes.

Whereas the typical view of the heavy drinker is somebody who is addicted to, or dependent upon, drink, from the Existential point of view this person is a 'committed drinker' since each repeated episode of drinking is a confirmation of a commitment to this project. In the Existential view, it cannot be the case that the individual chooses a project once and for all and then forgets about it having made that choice, as we have seen with Sartre's example of the 'reformed' gambler. Instead, because the individual is always free to act otherwise and to be otherwise, the individual must always be 'choosing' this way of being in the world in order to be authentic. The Existential drinker is always free to leave off drinking at any moment, so self-consciously returning to drink not only continues to reconfirm the commitment, but also restates the freedom the individual always has. It also means the continual reacquaintance with finitude, since

these drinkers know that their mode of drinking is a form of suicide. For the Existential drinker, the act of repeated drunkenness, or the act of being in a drunken state repeatedly, does represent a stasis. However, rather than taking this negatively in the sense of ‘stagnation’, it creates a present in which death is continually faced: it gives the drunken moment or episode a metaphysical caste. The repetition of the drunken moment ensures ‘being and nothingness’, since the drinker contemplates memory and death, and often with the implication of past life flashing before the eyes of the dying person in these narratives; there can be no future in this metaphysics because the only future *is* death, so here is the acknowledgment and acceptance of life’s meaninglessness. This is not to deny that the situation is paradoxical: why should it be the drunken moment that illuminates life’s meaninglessness, rather than a sober epiphany? But that is not really the issue. The engagement with mortality is experientially foregrounded in repeated drunkenness *and* periods of sobriety in a way that cannot be replicated in a life that forecloses on drinking. Not all of the novels have this particular pattern of repetition, where a final drunken episode provides the gateway to Existential contemplation. Some, such as Hans Fallada’s *The Drinker* and Brian Moore’s *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* (1955)<sup>58</sup> offer more straightforward linear narration, but the circularities of the Existential-drinker narrative as an analogue for the protagonist’s self-reckoning and self-determination are prominent.

### *The writer-drinker*

It is a feature of many of these pieces of literature that they are strongly tied to the lives of the authors. John Crowley calls Jack London’s *John Barleycorn* ‘A generically indeterminate narrative on the border between fictional autobiography and autobiographical fiction’,<sup>59</sup> and it is common to the pattern of depictions of the Existential drinker that we are invited to read doubly, with one eye on the work of art and the other on the life of the artist. The artist is working from ‘within’ a commitment to drinking, so there is an implicit if unstable relationship between writer, work, and audience: elements of Rhys’s *Good Morning, Midnight* and *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (1930),<sup>60</sup> for example, might push the reader to consider their autobiographical connection, and in this sense they read both as ‘memoirs of an alcoholic’ and ‘alcoholic memoirs’. Kent Russell expresses sentiments which many of these writers might agree with: ‘I know it’s not the substance [bourbon] that’s addictive. The substance

is just another tool'; 'Alcohol is a tool, and so is writing' – 'When doing either of these things, I am – for the time being, at least – *free*. A worm on sunny ground, giving zero shits about a bird. When doing neither of these things ... I sort of want to die'.<sup>61</sup>

It could be argued that the Existential drinker is mainly a fictional creation with no parallel in the real world, but this cannot be wholly accurate, because the characters who drink are quite often variants of the writer: London, Rhys, Jackson, Lowry, Fallada, Exley, O'Brien. Of course, the fictionalisation could be a form of fantasising on the writer's part, a wish-fulfilment even, and the works of art certainly mould and structure events and characteristics according to demands which are not necessarily documentary, and of necessity as artistic forms do not have the unbounded messiness of 'real life', but it does not seem plausible that these are so far removed from the authors' drinking worlds that the novels are a realm all to themselves. Nobody would deny that there are elements of egotistical self-dramatisation and glorification in the writer-drinker fictions, but that assessment can apply to many works of art and their creators. Nor can it be said that the writers listed here all have the same relationship to their works centred on drinker-protagonists. According to David Falk, *Under the Volcano* 'represents Lowry's supreme effort to achieve self-mastery through art',<sup>62</sup> whereas we see that Charles Jackson was not able to reconcile himself to his creation Don Birnam, nor to the role of this work of art to his own life. Exley short-circuits the problem by brazenly giving the protagonist of the fictional *A Fan's Notes* his own name; *A Fan's Notes* is something of a tease in any case since the novel is subtitled 'a fictional memoir'.<sup>63</sup> This paradoxical generic category encapsulates the contract between author, reader, and prose work: some of it is true, some of it is made up, and some of it is indeterminate between the two poles, with the suspicion that across these works the authors themselves may not always be sure. It is possible to read the novels both as self-contained, autotelic artefacts, and as a species of autobiography. The approach I've taken in this book is predominantly one that interprets the novels on their own terms as works of art. Where I do consider the author's life it is to broaden out the understanding of that art in relation to the themes of this book, but there is certainly no concerted attempt to correlate events in novels to events in authors' lives, or to treat the authors as 'Existential drinkers' in their own right.

The relationship between writing and the author-drinker is of interest however in that the meaning of writing itself for such writers may have some connection with their investment in drinking, and vice versa, or

that in some instances writing is what replaces drinking. Fred Ex's early dream in *A Fan's Notes* is that he will one day be famous by writing 'The Big Book';<sup>64</sup> in *The Lost Weekend* Don Birnam attempts to pawn his typewriter to get money for drink; Jack London set himself a writing target for each day before he could start drinking. For some of the authors these books represent their single major work, reinforcing the idea perhaps that these are novels with the utmost personal, autobiographical concerns: *Under the Volcano*, *A Fan's Notes*, and *Moscow-Petushki* all fit this bill. Jean Rhys's pre-war novels can be viewed together as a single set, and O'Brien's *Leaving Las Vegas* is another candidate to stand as the author's main creative output.

But there is something more than just refusing to disentangle fact and fiction in these types of narrative. Kierkegaard often used pseudonyms for his literary-philosophical writings, and Alastair Hannay makes a connection between this and Kierkegaard's notion of 'indirect communication'. Although pseudonymity is sometimes regarded as providing a mask behind which the author can hide, Hannay argues in relation to Kierkegaard that it can be 'a way of fictionalizing fact that avoids the constraints and distracting implications of actual autobiography. In this light one can appreciate how the distance of pseudonymity might enable Kierkegaard actually to use himself as an example, but in a way that insulates his literary figures from the details of his own life'.<sup>65</sup> Hence, the form allows for a possible 'truer' or more honest self-accounting away from the factual constraints of straight autobiography. The novels in *The Existential drinker* do not have pseudonymous authors, but the alter-ego protagonists do appear to function in a similarly enabling way as that of 'indirect communication'. This allows writers to 'share' their subjectivity, that aspect which is 'eternal' (in Kierkegaard's Christian framework) and not related to those matters which can be readily communicated, such as the mundane and our everyday selves.<sup>66</sup> For those who come at the texts with the view that these are writings by alcoholics, the literature will tend to be judged according to how their 'truths' match AA and substance-dependent-model ways of understanding. A goal of this book is to counter this prevailing framework of interpretation and to view the writings as from within a Kierkegaardian legacy of an honest, 'indirect communication', even if Kierkegaard himself is hardly likely to have approved of the subject matter. A point of contention would be that Kierkegaard offers his creations as models to be judged, whereas the highly subjective and individual nature of the Existential-drinker narratives are meant as *sui generis* accounts, if also directed, like Kierkegaard, towards questions of an authentic self.

*Historical context*

I have noted that in Existential thought individuals are always ‘situated’, always born into a particular environment over which they have had no say. This is usually treated as a question of immediate surroundings and personal opportunities. But there is also a wider context which might be considered. I have already indicated that one of these is the way in which ‘the self’ becomes a category for attention around the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, becomes the entity we take for granted in our own times. Again, we can always discover antecedents, how St Augustine presents himself in the *Confessions* (AD 397–400) for instance, including his meditation on time in Book XI,<sup>67</sup> but arguably something happens in the last couple of centuries which produces an idea of people as selves, where ‘the self’ in the modern sense is understood primarily through the contents of phenomenological consciousness. Rather than trace the many tributaries that lead to this ‘modern’ self, I will just draw attention to a particularly striking feature which helps to put the figure of the Existential drinker in context, as well as position Existential philosophy in contemporary discussion – the theme of ‘alienation’. I choose to focus on this because it is a feature of modern existence that both Marx and Kierkegaard deal with, that is, they separately identify the same problem that individuals and mankind as a whole, are, at their time of writing, alienated, but approach it with quite different philosophical frameworks, and offer quite different solutions.<sup>68</sup> However, the materialist and spiritual conceptualisations they offer will recur repeatedly throughout the rest of the book, often in conflict, since ‘alienation’ would appear, as well as being central to Existential thought, to be a defining condition of the modern period into which the Existential drinker is born.

Both Marx and Kierkegaard see that there is something wrong with the modern world, and both identify that this wrongness is down to a new set of social and economic relations. Kierkegaard talks of the effect of ‘the public’ on an individual’s relationship with himself and God, the many pressures to be ‘inauthentic’ (to use more direct Existential terminology). Marx likewise sees that a new set of relationships has come into being through the emergence of industrial capitalism and that this entails alienation. Thus, there is a comparable identification between these two quite different thinkers in which industrialisation and its effects fundamentally characterise our experience of the world. In terms of a very broad situatedness this can be called ‘modernity’, that is, the general situation of people born into the industrialising and industrialised nations of the nineteenth century onwards is a world increasingly dominated by technology, science, bureaucracy, and political systems that heed the

rise of the masses. It can be argued that alienation has always been present throughout history, going under other names such as melancholy, accidie, anomie, all moods which may have indicated forms of alienation from self, world, God, others. David E. Cooper fixes on a related term when discussing the history of Existentialism: ‘In taking the issue of estrangement as a central one for philosophy to resolve, existentialists engage with one of the great themes of philosophy – one that ran through the history of the subject long before Hegel and Marx made it a topic of explicit attention’.<sup>69</sup> However, it is probably fair to say that it becomes foregrounded in our period, as when Steven Crowell notes in discussing Sartre and consciousness the way in which ‘this non-identification is the phenomenological basis for the familiar existential idea that human reality is fundamentally alienated’,<sup>70</sup> because consciousness *of* the world can never coincide *with* that world. This in itself suggests that throughout the history of mankind humans have always been alienated at some level, since if Sartre is correct it has always been the case that consciousness can never fully coincide with the world it is directed towards (or brings into being). My point would be, however, that it is in this period – let us say late eighteenth century to the present – that the question of ‘estrangement’, formulated as alienation in Marx and also in Existential writings, becomes acute. All of the central figures discussed in this book are alienated in relation to one or more characteristics of modernity, whether they live in France, Germany, the Soviet Union, America, Mexico, England, Scotland, or Ireland.<sup>71</sup> The theme of alienation is strong in the Victorian case studies covered in Chapter 1, for example in George Eliot’s ‘Janet’s Repentance’ and Zola’s *L’Assommoir*.

This brings us on to a second aspect when considering ‘situatedness’, that of Existential thought itself. Even if it was never particularly fashionable for philosophers and other adherents to self-identify as Existentialists, it is certainly the case that it has little traction as a contemporary philosophy or cultural phenomenon in the twenty-first century. The unpopularity of the category ‘alienation’ is a case in point. As Simon Skempton notes in *Alienation After Derrida*, the whole premise that individuals have some authentic being from which they are distanced has been discarded in philosophical and critical thought because of the poststructural criticism of ‘presence’, a view which denies the idea that ‘the self’ could be anything like a profoundly self-aware and self-constituting autonomous entity.<sup>72</sup> Elsewhere the broader socio-cultural picture beyond academic disciplines is dominated by questions of ‘identity’, not in the sense of authentic individuals as self-defining, but in the sense of group identities based upon such things as ethnicity,

socioeconomic status/class, physical and mental ability/capacity, gender, sexual orientation, consumerism, nationality. In the dominant conversation about ‘identity’, ‘alienation’, if utilised with respect to identity formation, can only refer to ways in which people as part of a *group* identity are ‘estranged’ or marginalised from mainstream, dominant identities such as ‘white’, ‘male’, ‘European’, ‘able-bodied’, ‘heterosexual’, etc. It will be evident that these group identities do have a part to play, with the novels representing situatedness to varying degrees: gender intersects with drink in all of the novels, and particularly Rhys’s creations; Catholicism features heavily in *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* and *Ironweed*, while the protagonists of both *Moscow–Petushki* and *A Fan’s Notes* pit themselves against the nation state. However, it is the alienation and authenticity of individuals which concern these writers, artists, and protagonists over and against these wider, shared, ‘situations’. The way in which this book uses Existentialism is to see the philosophy as being able to provide the best analysis of self and being-in-the-world-with-others, and so rather than treating Existentialism as falling mainly within the remit of history of philosophy, it regards it as not just chronologically coincidental with the novels covered here, but as a means with which to continue to understand the philosophical questions raised around drink and self.<sup>73</sup>

### Objections

It will be clear by now that this book is not a Public Health document. Nor is it aimed at Social Policy. If you are happy with that, and have no objections to its direction of travel, then please do skip this section and head to Chapter 1. If you believe the project to be unethical, perhaps because it romanticises and philosophically validates behaviours which are destructive to individuals and society, or have other objections, then I will attempt to guess what they are and address them here.

### Ethics?

It’s all well and good, so the argument goes, to glamorise ‘the outsider’ figure, but that can only be achieved in these novels by glossing over the misery caused to family and friends, either in their fictionalised worlds or by ignorance of how things work out in the real world. An epigraph Olivia Laing uses for *The Trip to Echo Spring: Why Writers Drink* comes from *The Handbook of Medical Psychiatry*, and it gives a good indication of the outlook within which she and others following this kind of argument write: ‘When alcoholics do drink, most eventually become

intoxicated, and it is this recurrent intoxication that eventually brings their lives down in ruins. Friends are lost, health deteriorates, marriages are broken, children are abused, and jobs terminated. Yet despite these consequences the alcoholic continues to drink'.<sup>74</sup> There are two parts in response to this significant objection: the first is to consider the place of ethics within Existential thought, and the second is to consider the issue from a more general, 'common humanity', point of view.

It remains a contested matter whether Existentialism entails any specific ethics or not. In the Conclusion to *Being and Nothingness* Sartre raises a series of questions about how we are to live, at the time of his writing, with the recognition of our fundamental freedom. In leading up to this he speaks of the individual as a moral agent.<sup>75</sup> However, he says that any answers to these questions are for a future work on ethics, and although we do now have Sartre's *Notebooks for an Ethics* (1992), it was a publication delayed until after Sartre's death, in accordance with the author's wishes.<sup>76</sup> David Pellaeur concludes in his 'Translator's Introduction' that 'any overall synthesis [of Sartre's ethics] is lacking and in the last analysis is unattainable'.<sup>77</sup> Sartre's commitment to Marxism soon after the publication of *Being and Nothingness* appears to have rendered redundant the necessity or urgency to publish a work which focussed on Existential ethical considerations, and, as Thomas C. Anderson notes, the once Existentially central idea of authenticity is abandoned from the 1950s onwards.<sup>78</sup> Place this absence from Sartre's *oeuvre* alongside Heidegger's avowal that 'authenticity' is not immanently a positive term and there does not appear much for an Existential ethics to hang on to.<sup>79</sup> In fact, when Heidegger attempts to distance himself from Sartre's 'humanism' (in 1947), establishing a 'turn' in his own way of thinking, he is also turning his back on 'subjectivity' in order to concentrate on a more abstract (or ontologically fundamental) account of Being,<sup>80</sup> and thus is also moving away from what is commonly taken to be central to Existential thought, the notion that the individual's phenomenological experience of the world is fundamentally salient to the self as a self. Camus in *The Myth of Sisyphus* emphatically warns against any attempt to sidestep the reality of meaninglessness through escape mechanisms which in turn provide a more positive philosophical outlook.<sup>81</sup> Sartre does suggest in *Existentialism and Humanism* that every time an individual makes a choice it is at the same time one that is made for humanity,<sup>82</sup> yet his insertion of this idea does not derive from Existential thought so much as Kant's 'categorical imperative'.<sup>83</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, also has an argument similar to the Kantian view that in choosing for one I choose for all.<sup>84</sup> De Beauvoir argues diligently

from within the parameters of *Being and Nothingness*, thus offering an ethical successor, but her argument still makes unwarranted leaps from the ontological to the ethical.<sup>85</sup> On the other hand it should not be forgotten of course that Existentialism has been instrumental in providing inspiration for practical and politically radical agendas, the feminism of de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*,<sup>86</sup> for instance, and the black activism and writings of Frantz Fanon and Richard Wright,<sup>87</sup> and it is worth reminding ourselves of just how powerfully liberatory the idea of Existential freedom has been in general, individually and politically. But, again, these are not logically necessary ethical consequences to follow on from the Existential ontologies of Sartre and Heidegger. It could be argued that 'authenticity' and 'freedom' are actually ethical positions since they are treated positively by both philosophers, but they are without 'content', if by ethics is meant a *vade mecum* for social behaviour. The figures ('being-in-itself', *Dasein*) posited by Sartre and Heidegger could be called 'moral agents' in that Existential ontology posits a responsibility for the self which accords with a fundamental freedom, but the autotelic nature of Existential authenticity and freedom means that these identifications cannot provide the basis for a general ethics, in the usual understanding of that category. That is, for Existential philosophy, individuals have their own self-defined 'rules' which are not destined for the public realm, as Sartre writes in his *Notebooks*: 'Ethics is an individual, subjective, and historical ["situated"] enterprise'.<sup>88</sup>

If we look at this state of affairs from the social rather than the individual's point of view, the charge of irresponsibility inevitably becomes a major objection. Following on, a further objection might be that in a world with so many problems, paying attention to selfish egotists intent on ruining their lives and those of others is time poorly spent. This I would counter with: any social theory which urges categorical imperatives will always fail as a philosophical enterprise, for there can be no 'ground' on which to establish a common morality. 'Freedom' is sometimes advanced as an innate social and political good, but this nevertheless always comes with caveats which surely undermine the idea of freedom: laws, ethics, and custom by their nature proscribe freedom according to prevailing cultural precepts, even if couched in a universalist language. The question at the heart of this for Existentialism is the relationship between the two categories of freedom that de Beauvoir seeks to entwine: ontological freedom and ethical freedom. We can then put the issue in these terms: if ontological freedom is a condition of existence, what are the ethical considerations that necessarily follow, in terms of responsibility to others?

I would say ‘none’. I would say that the many manoeuvres to somehow redeem Existentialism from its subjective ethical cul-de-sac by treating it as a version of ‘humanism’ only ever do so by eliding its fundamental ontology, and thus fall into the trap that Camus warns against, that is, of constructing systems of thought to give us more palatable happy philosophical endings. These all rely, if we take Existentialism at its founding word, on some ameliorating *deus ex machina* which we might just as well have started with: God, love, freedom (that is, freedom in the political understanding of freedom, rather than an ethically neutral ontological freedom), creativity. If what ‘human’ is remains a process, defined by a constant questioning of what existence is – something both Sartre and Heidegger agree upon, at least in their ‘Existential’ phases – rather than seeking some final definition, the logic of this is that such questioning remains open to all things, including those matters that are considered socially undesirable, anything, that is, on a spectrum from ‘unpleasant’ to ‘evil’. This might seem a despairing and unhelpful conclusion, and even worse for Existential thought if all that it amounts to is an ontology that describes how things ‘are’ with no consequent ethics with which to orientate ourselves. However, it seems to me that this is exactly the predicament that Existentialism does identify and which we do find ourselves in; or rather, it is exactly the question we are always asking, ‘What is it to truly exist?’ These various explorations of socially useless, largely socially destructive, committed drinkers are perfect examples of the difficulty. Consequently, no fundamental ethics will arise from the questions of self and existence that occur in the following chapters, nor will one be appealed to, from science, medicine, philanthropy, philosophy, anthropology, genetics, economics, gossip, nights of the soul. This should not be a surprise.<sup>89</sup> These figures explore selves embedded in social relations in ways which highlight the fault lines of such questionings as we encounter them in our current historical situation. To view these figures as ‘problem drinkers’ is to miss the point about radical freedom, or to nudge them in directions more amenable to social appropriation, but away from other insights about existence.

### *Bad faith?*

A criticism that could be made of the figure of the Existential drinker is that it is nothing other than a ‘type’, a role that is adopted by all of the protagonists and by some of the writer-drinkers, and is therefore an act of bad faith. In other words, choosing to drink in this way is no different from submerging the self, as a waiter does when enacting his *role* as waiter (Sartre’s example of bad faith<sup>90</sup>), and is thus an evasion of

self. The first thing to say in response is that many of the protagonists are aware of the possibility that taking on the role of a drunk or writer-drinker is just such an evasion. In that sense, then, the awareness of the possibility that 'being a drunk' is an inauthentic act is self-consciously addressed, and the protagonists and writers seek to avoid slipping into such an unselfconscious orientation. Some novels and non-fiction works do seriously and openly wrestle with the difficulty at length rather than simply dismissing it, and finally take the view that the whole idea that there can be creatively successful writer-drinkers, with (anti-)heroic fictional alter egos, is a cultural and personal delusion. In Ivan Gold's *Sams in a Dry Season* (1990), for instance, the author's fictionalised self (Jason Sams) looks back scathingly at the fact he ever bought into the whole romantic myth of the big-drinking writer; John Berryman's posthumously published *Recovery: A Novel* (1973), which even in its unfinished state is quite some account of being in a treatment centre, also has a protagonist (Dr Alan Severance) who is highly critical of his own previous belief in the desirability of being a big writer-drinker. These disillusionments are attacks on the myth of the writer-drinker, but they do not necessarily invalidate the purpose of these other works and writers who have not come to the same conclusion. The proof for Ivan Gold's and John Berryman's alter egos Jason Sams and Alan Severance is really the wisdom of AA retrospectively applied to their drinking and writing pasts. Other writerly disenchantments may stem from a sense of exhaustion with this specific sub-genre of writing and the navel-gazing drinker, as evident in O'Brien's *Leaving Las Vegas* and his posthumous novel *Better* (2009). The very fact that the story of the agonised writer-drinker morphs into an identifiable category, which by definition entails repeated characteristics, can mitigate against a sense of authenticity, and some of the later works do reference the fact that they are writing in the tradition of *The Lost Weekend* and *Under the Volcano*, and seek to either avoid the pitfall or accept that falling into it is unavoidable. This 'falling away' is discussed more fully in the final chapter.

### *Bourgeois individualism?*

Another criticism that could be levelled at these works is a criticism that can be levelled at Existentialism in its entirety, in that rather than being a radical philosophy it is really just another version of the bourgeois enterprise of 'the self-made man'. The main issue here lies with what we are to make of the categories 'individual' and 'individualism'. It is undeniable that Existentialism focuses on 'the individual', even though it should also be recognised that the Existential individual is always a

being-in-the-world-with-others and that the self is always regarded as intersubjectively instated, rather than a solipsistic hermit. The extent to which Existentialism can be regarded as promoting a version of the bourgeois individual probably depends upon which version of Existentialism is under scrutiny, but it is true that Existential talk of ‘the self’ can seem at one with a bourgeois or neo-liberal idea of ‘the individual’.<sup>91</sup> However, the difference, culturally speaking, is that ‘the individual’, either in the older bourgeois sense or in its more recent neo-liberal incarnation, is defined by a kind of economic relationship with society and others, that is, the terms of leeway individuals have with respect to what is required of them within society, to what extent they can ‘be individual’ within the bourgeois framework, is really a socioeconomic determination. In such frameworks the individual drinker is always modelled as a producer or consumer, of social and medical services, as well as of drink. The older bourgeois model would place drinkers at the wrong end of socioeconomic respectability, whereas within the consumerist model the binge drinker can at least be credited with rapid consumption, and thus on occasion be an asset to the economy, although in truth drinkers always were, given the large drink-related revenues countries such as Great Britain, Russia/USSR, and the United States have frequently relied upon. The Existential drinker, while situated within these sociohistorical contexts, is engaged in a different mode of orientation, since questions of authenticity are not related to socioeconomic modelling. The figure of the Existential drinker is certainly ‘individual’, but in essence this is not the individualism of bourgeois success or shopping for lifestyles. The conflict between these two versions of individualism is a theme of some of the novels, for example *A Fan’s Notes* and *Paradise*.

### *Where are Fitzgerald and Hemingway?*

Whenever ‘writing’ and ‘drink’ are brought together there can be an expectation that certain writers need to be included: Fitzgerald and Hemingway should be discussed, for instance, somewhere. Alfred Kazin’s 1976 article “‘The giant killer’: drink and the American writer’ was the first major recognition of the link between great twentieth-century American writers and drinking: ‘In fact, though no one ever talks about it very much, booze has played as big a role in the lives of modern American writers as talent, money, women, and the longing to be top dog’. He noted that the (then) three American Nobel Prize winners for literature were also alcoholics – Sinclair Lewis, Eugene O’Neill, and William Faulkner – and added in Ernest Hemingway, Jack London, John O’Hara, John Berryman, and John Steinbeck to the widening list

of well-known American writers who happened to be big drinkers.<sup>92</sup> Beyond this, we might include Charles Bukowski, Dorothy Parker, John Cheever, Robert Lowell, and from outside America we can add Dylan Thomas, Brendan Behan, Patrick Hamilton, and others.

The reason that the work of Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and others is not included in *The Existential drinker* is that, whether emanating from writer-drinkers or not, such representations are not especially concerned with drinkers and drinking in the Existential mode. Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night* (1934),<sup>93</sup> dealing with 'drinking problems', and Hemingway's *Fiesta* (a.k.a. *The Sun Also Rises*, 1926),<sup>94</sup> with its bouts of ex-pat heavy drinking in Europe, are both significant books in the history of drink-related novels, but they do not engage with self and drink Existentially. These writers and others may have plenty of drinkers or references to drinking, and there may even be Existential aspects to some of the writing (especially with Hemingway<sup>95</sup>), but I felt that such instances were not sufficient to warrant inclusion.

There are some drink-permeated short stories as well which might be attended to, such as Fitzgerald's 'May Day' (1920)<sup>96</sup> and 'An Alcoholic Case' (1937),<sup>97</sup> but they are not really involved in Existential themes,<sup>98</sup> while Hemingway's 'A Clean Well-Lighted Place' (1933),<sup>99</sup> with its 'despair', 'nada'/'nothingness', implicates the Existential, but is too tangential.<sup>100</sup> John Cheever's 'The Swimmer' (1964),<sup>101</sup> adapted into the 1968 film starring Burt Lancaster, and 'Akhnilo' by James Salter (1981)<sup>102</sup> perhaps have more to offer in this vein, with their haunting, walled-in male failures (probably) undone by drink; and perhaps also deserving of a closer look are John O'Hara's *Appointment in Samarra* (1934), with its suicidal drinker-protagonist Julian English, and some of O'Hara's excellent short stories.<sup>103</sup> Other drink-permeated novels would include Jane Bowles's wonderful *Two Serious Ladies* (1943),<sup>104</sup> which takes life at a hedonistic sidelong glance, Kerouac's novella *Satori in Paris* (1966), in which Kerouac is a self-confessed 'visiting drunkard alone in Paris' chasing down his family history and experiencing *Satori* ('enlightenment'), although he can't quite remember where,<sup>105</sup> Cyril Connolly's novel *The Rock Pool* (1936), where Edgar Naylor intends to observe ex-pats on the French Riviera, only to become one more bum himself, sucked into a self-enclosed milieu which clings to the pleasure-seeking 1920s while the 1930s happen elsewhere,<sup>106</sup> and David Ireland's grim and grimly funny vignettes from a Sydney pub, the Southern Cross, in *The Glass Canoe* (1976) – 'The Cross is a place where you cannot see your self'<sup>107</sup> – but again I felt that all these stories and novels would have been peripheral to the central arguments in the book. Joseph Roth's *The Legend of the Holy Drinker* (written in 1939) feels like it should be

on the list, but while certainly representing an anti-materialist drinking narrative and a quasi-spiritual allegory, it does not (to me) have the wider Existential credentials, even if, as the translator Michael Hofmann notes in his Introduction, ‘drink in the book is a philosophy’.<sup>108</sup>

### *This book*

Previous books which broach drinking in literature have tended to approach the subject by making the connection between the author’s drinking and the writing a central feature. Donald W. Goodwin’s *Alcohol and the Writer* (1988) is mainly devoted to drinking sketches of American writers – Poe, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Steinbeck, Faulkner, and O’Neill – to which he adds in the French Georges Simenon, ‘Learning to Drink American-Style’, and the English-born, Canada-resident Lowry.<sup>109</sup> The book ‘proposes ... that alcoholism among American writers has been of epidemic proportions’<sup>110</sup> and very much concerns itself with the lives rather than the literature. Tom Dardis’s book *The Thirsty Muse: Alcohol and the American Writer* (1989) is similar in outlook, although its accounts are more sustained and detailed in offering the drinking biographies of just four of the writers who appear in Goodwin: Faulkner, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and O’Neill.<sup>111</sup> Thomas B. Gilmore’s *Equivocal Spirits: Alcoholism and Drinking in Twentieth-Century Literature* (1987) sets out to deal with both the literature and the authors’ drinking lives, and how these are mutually reflective and informing, although not all the writers are necessarily ‘alcoholics’, for example Saul Bellow and Evelyn Waugh.<sup>112</sup> He emphasises the interdisciplinary nature of his book, ‘joining literary analysis with scientific knowledge of alcoholism’.<sup>113</sup> Like the Dardis and Gilmore books, however, the commentary is made firmly from within the perspective of alcoholism, so that the literature is sometimes judged accordingly: ‘A basic fault of *Brideshead Revisited* as an investigation of alcoholism is that the more Waugh focuses attention on Sebastian’s holiness and special destiny, the less interest there is in his alcoholism’.<sup>114</sup> These books came out within three years of each other, and filled what they saw as a gap in serious discussion of the relationship between writers and drinking, mainly American, perhaps a result of the steer given by Kazin’s article. Gilmore’s book is important in that it does offer some literary analysis of heavy-drinking protagonists in novels, as well as some interesting work on Berryman’s poetry.

John W. Crowley’s *The White Logic: Alcoholism and Gender in American Modernist Fiction*, published a little later, in 1994, significantly adds in London’s *John Barleycorn*, and focuses attention on writing mode and the largely masculine context for writing and

drinking (the one female author included is Djuna Barnes and her novel *Nightwood*). The book draws on Goodwin, Dardis, and Gilmore in noting the connection between American writers in the first half of the twentieth century and the ‘veritable epidemic of alcoholism’,<sup>115</sup> but significantly begins to draw away from a default acceptance of the disease concept of alcoholism. Instead, Crowley conceptualises ‘the drunk narrative: a mode of fiction that expresses the conjunction of modernism and alcoholism in a pervasive ideology of despair’<sup>116</sup> and situates the work in a broadly cultural understanding of drunkenness. Another significant impetus in the focus on literature and drink from this seminal period was the founding of the journal *Dionysos: The Literature and Intoxication Triquarterly* (1989–1994; 1996–2001),<sup>117</sup> which includes articles from some of these writers (Crowley and Gilmore) and others important to developing work in this area, for example Roger Forseth (founding editor) and George Wedge. The Editorial to the first issue places itself within the field of intoxication studies, which has, it notes, ‘essentially served the medical and social sciences’. Its aim was to bring intoxication studies to bear on literature: ‘Yet one taboo remains: the serious analysis of drink, drunkenness, addiction, and intoxication, an area best left, one gathers, to social workers, politicians, and comedians. But this will no longer do’.<sup>118</sup>

This research and commentary, and much work since, has largely addressed the literature in relation to addiction and alcoholism. What *The Existential drinker* does in contrast is to construct a putative canon of twentieth- and twenty-first-century novels where the protagonists are committed drinkers and in which Existential themes are prominent. While attentive to issues around alcoholism, since this has been a dominant context for the period, the perspective is one which views a set of novels from a comprehensively philosophical point of view. There has been some work which touches on drink and philosophies of self, for example Anya Taylor’s *Bacchus in Romantic England* notes Kant’s trouble with the ‘I’ when an individual is drunk, suggesting as it does, in Taylor’s words, the ‘frightening notion’ of a ‘dissipating’ person,<sup>119</sup> and Annette Federico is perhaps the first to identify the emergence of an Existential-type drinker in nineteenth-century literature in her 1990 *Dionysos* article.<sup>120</sup> There are a number of the works discussed in *The Existential drinker* which have sometimes been addressed by other critics in their Existential aspects, for example *Ironweed*<sup>121</sup> and *Moscow–Petushki*,<sup>122</sup> but to my knowledge there is no grouping of these and other works into anything approaching an Existential-drinker canon. *The Existential drinker* is thus the first book to seek to place these novels and their interest in characters who orientate themselves in the world

through drink within the arena of Existential thought, and in doing so to argue that there is a demonstrable canon of such works.

The book begins by looking at the emergence of such drinkers and drinking in the nineteenth century. The first chapter offers a number of case studies highlighting different aspects that contribute to the formation of this figure. It includes George Eliot's long tale, 'Janet's Repentance' (1857),<sup>123</sup> possibly the first piece of literature to take the female drinker seriously,<sup>124</sup> and important here as well for its placing of drink within a profoundly religious context, and Zola's novel, *L'Assommoir* (1877),<sup>125</sup> a supreme description of the impact of drink on a slum in Paris, and which like these other works records aspects of the relationship between drink and self which appear as new to the period within the context of industrialisation and the rapid expansion of cities. These aspects begin to dominate in the twentieth century, and it is attention to these later manifestations which forms the bulk of *The Existential drinker*, chapters devoted to analysis of key works in the provisional Existential-drinker canon. They begin with London's *John Barleycorn*, after which the novels are roughly per decade. Jean Rhys's four interwar novels have female characters wedded to self-destructive drinking. While they offer a counterweight to the 'heroic' drinking of Jack London, they are also notable for the ways in which their apprehension of the world, modernity, and self are achieved through a modernist self-consciousness. Two novels published in the forties, Charles Jackson's *The Lost Weekend* and Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano*, are the century's chronological and artistic pivots for the book. They appeared in close succession – Jackson's before Lowry's, much to Lowry's consternation<sup>126</sup> – and helped bring drinker protagonists to the forefront, substantially aided by Billy Wilder's film version of Jackson's novel starring Ray Milland (1945). Hans Fallada's *Der Trinker*, although published 1950, was written in 1944, while *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* gives us Ireland in the 1950s, with a quiet heroine at its centre, not the hard-drinking male such a scenario might suggest. Frederick Exley's *A Fan's Notes* has been called 'one of the finest of all sports novels',<sup>127</sup> and I would say it is also one of the best drinker novels published. Yerofeev's *Moscow–Petushki*, my other favourite novel here (alongside Rhys's drinker novels), although coming out in 1970, is also really a sixties novel, and both of them seem very engaged with the kind of situatedness discussed earlier with respect to modernity and nation states. The last three novels with single chapters, *Ironweed*, *Leaving Las Vegas*, and *Paradise*, while still part of this putative Existential-drinker canon, also show where that figure, for different reasons, is on the wane. The Conclusion covers some other works from this later period (1990s–present) which more thoroughly dispose of the

Existential drinker: Ivan Gold's *Sams in a Dry Season*, Patrick deWitt's *Ablutions* (2009),<sup>128</sup> and John O'Brien's *Better*, published posthumously (2009).

It is not the purpose of *The Existential drinker* to read these books for how they correspond to people's experience of real-life drinking, including how they might be first-person recollections. These are dramatisations of ideas around self and drink. It does not turn to scientific, political, or sociological accounts in order to 'trump' the view from the inside. These are not alcoholic cases which are to be slotted into the patterns provided by statistical, epidemiological, psychological, sociological, or scientific explanations. I am going to take the line offered by Jack London, that the commitment to alcohol for these figures provides truths which are not everyday truths. Not 'constructive' or 'destructive' drinking either, since this is the individual's quest for truth and meaning. 'Constructive' and 'destructive' are terms which implicitly place the individual within conventional society and could only be brought within the purview of 'authenticity' and 'freedom' at the Existential drinker's behest. Most current and previous discussion of these works characterises the kind of drinking outlined here as problematic, whereas in *The Existential drinker* they represent nothing other than a commitment to authentic existence.

### Notes

- 1 Jack London, *John Barleycorn* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
- 2 For example, from John B. Gough's popular *An Autobiography*: 'I was now the slave of a habit which had become completely my master, and which fastened its remorseless fangs in my very vitals' (Boston, MA: John B. Gough, 1845), p. 94.
- 3 Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). Alina Clej's *A Genealogy of the Modern Self: Thomas De Quincey and the Intoxication of Writing* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995) gives a thorough analysis of 'intoxication', mainly through opium's hallucinogenic effects, in relation to De Quincey, self, and writing, using 'intoxication' in its figural as well as literal sense.
- 4 'Confessions of a Drunkard', in *The Works of Charles Lamb*, vol. 3 (New York: W. J. Widdleton, 1871), p. 422.
- 5 David S. Reynolds provides a full picture of American temperance narratives in 'Black cats and delirium tremens: temperance and the American renaissance', in David S. Reynolds and Debra J. Rosenthal (eds), *The Serpent in the Cup: Temperance in American Literature* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997). He breaks temperance narratives into four

- main types; ‘dark temperance’ tales could be regarded as the most relevant predecessors to the work discussed here. There is also extensive coverage in Matthew Osborn’s *Rum Maniacs: Alcoholic Insanity in the Early American Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), especially chapter 6, ‘The drunkard’s demons’, and the Epilogue, ‘Alcoholics and pink elephants’.
- 6 For which see John O. Lyons, *The Invention of the Self: The Hinge of Consciousness in the Eighteenth Century* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), arguing that the idea of ‘the self’ is largely an eighteenth-century invention. Before then, according to Lyons: ‘An inner life did not exist, or if it did it followed patterns that were so universal as to be tedious’, p. 44.
  - 7 See Annette Federico, “‘I must have drink’: addiction, angst and Victorian realism’, *Dionysos* 2:2 (1990), 11–25, which frames the issues within an addiction model. As will become clear, *The Existential drinker* does not use the concept of ‘addiction’ to understand the issues at play here, and instead emphasises the idea of a coherent ‘self’ which freely chooses to drink, motivated by the desire for authenticity. Some of these aspects can be seen in the eighteenth century, and then, depending upon definitions, taken back further. See in particular James Nicholls’s chapter ‘A fascinating poison: early medical writing on drink’, in his *The Politics of Alcohol* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009). However, the drunkard’s inner world is not of interest until the end of the eighteenth/beginning nineteenth century, as Nicholls notes: ‘in turning away from the convivial and the light-hearted, Romantic writers were able to mine the interiority of the (refined) drinker to an extent not previously attempted’ (p. 78). For a full treatment of the Romantics and drink, see Anya Taylor, *Bacchus in Romantic England* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999).
  - 8 Ecclesiastes 2:3 (King James Version).
  - 9 Charles Jackson, *The Lost Weekend* (London: Black Spring Press, 1998), p. 29.
  - 10 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1980).
  - 11 The most significant fault lines are: the role of phenomenology in Existentialism (although, according to Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall this is no longer ‘moot’ and the two should be thought together: Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall, ‘A brief introduction to phenomenology and existentialism’, in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (eds), *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 5); how strictly demarcated Existentialism can be as a philosophy separate from its wider cultural manifestations; which writers are properly Existential, with questions over the inclusion of Nietzsche most prominent, and in literature, whether Camus’s writings can be considered Existential rather than a modern stoicism.
  - 12 For example: ‘Only the particular Dasein decides its existence, whether it does so by taking hold or by neglecting. The question of existence never gets

straightened out except through existing itself'. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 32.

- 13 Heidegger denied that *Being and Time* privileged 'authenticity' over 'inauthenticity', but few commentators find this persuasive – the whole thesis makes 'authenticity' and related terms such as 'mineness' more attractive and necessary than being part of 'the they'.
- 14 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 296.
- 15 Caroline Knapp refers to 'the very real – and, to alcoholics, enormously seductive – phenomenon of taking psychic flight, ingesting a simple substance and leaving yourself behind'. Caroline Knapp, *Drinking: A Love Story* (New York: Dial Press, 1996), p. 62.
- 16 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 626.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 627.
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 I would suggest that the example is loaded in favour of the drunk. A more telling example would perhaps be one which compared the drunk with a committed aid worker.
- 20 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 627 (italics in original).
- 21 Galen Strawson, *Selves: An Essay in Revisionary Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 9ff.; 'there's a fundamental sense in which human selves can't be supposed to have long-term diachronic continuity, so that there are many transient selves in the case of an individual human being if there are any at all', p. 12.
- 22 Lyons argues that 'the self' 'was a fiction in the first place', *The Invention of the Self*, p. 19. Jerome Buckley in *The Turning Key: Autobiography and the Subjective Impulse since 1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984) discusses the idea in detail, noting how 'self' has replaced 'soul' as religious authority has declined, for example, p. 15.
- 23 Strawson argues that there are endurantists (diachronic) and impermanentists (episodic), and that there are 'Narrative and non-Narrative forms of life' (life as a story or not), and this colours the view of what the self is, *Selves*, pp. 14–15. While Existential thinkers are likely to see future selves and past selves as projections, they emanate from the self that exists now rather than being the discrete, ontologically disconnected selves that 'impermanism' would suggest, and so conform to a diachronic, narrative model.
- 24 For example, Charles Guignon notes that Heidegger presents two ideas of self in *Being and Time*. The first is one which has become central to Existential thought, the idea of an 'authentic self'; the second idea is one which sees the self as an event unfolding, enmeshed in a life-world, and with much less insistence on a notion of an individuated self. Charles Guignon, 'Becoming a self: the role of authenticity in *Being and Time*', in Charles Guignon (ed.), *The Existentialists: Critical Essays on Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004).

Nietzsche, always included as part of Existential thought as something of an outlier, also seems to advance two contrasting ideas of self: like Heidegger

he proposes an idea of an authentic self that we now think of as quintessentially 'Existential', but he also regards exceptional selves not as individuals but as forming a group at the vanguard of humanity (see Richard Schacht, 'Nietzsche after the death of God', in Steven Crowell (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Existentialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 129–30). In *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche goes so far as to deny altogether that there is such a thing as a self; see Alexandar Nehemas, 'How one becomes what one is', in Guignon (ed.), *The Existentialists*.

- 25 Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to 'Philosophical Fragments'*, vol. 1 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 33.
- 26 Lance Dodes and Zachary Dodes calculate that there are over 300 organisations in the United States using the AA template for their programmes aimed at different issues: 'smoking, shoplifting, social phobia, debt, recovery from incest, even vulgarity'. Lance Dodes and Zachary Dodes, *The Sober Truth: Debunking the Bad Science behind 12-Step Programs and the Rehab Industry* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2014), p. 1. For an excellent 'anthropological' study of AA, with particular focus on the meanings of the word 'alcoholism' for the group, see Paul Antze, 'Symbolic action in Alcoholics Anonymous', in Mary Douglas (ed.), *Constructive Drinking: Perspectives on Drink from Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). Nan Robertson's *Getting Better: Inside Alcoholics Anonymous* gives a sympathetic history of the organisation, along with recovery narratives (New York: William Morrow, 1988); for an alcoholic's behavioural analysis and social science view of AA see Danny Wilcox's *Alcoholic Thinking: Language, Culture, and Belief in Alcoholics Anonymous* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998). Matts G. Djos offers a judgemental, AA disease-model analysis of some alcoholic-infused literature in *Writing Under the Influence: Alcoholism and the Alcoholic Perception from Hemingway to Berryman* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), although even he reluctantly concedes the success of the writing and the role of alcohol may be interdependent: 'I hesitate to suggest that their work might have been better without their addiction. Alcohol is integral with the very heart and content of much of their work. It expresses in deeply human terms the issues and frustrations, the difficulties of adjustment, and the overwhelming emotional pain that are common precursors to the kind of creativity that is evident in the poems and stories that we have read', p. 116. For a sustained attack on the 'disease concept' of alcoholism, see Herbert Fingarette, *Heavy Drinking: The Myth of Alcoholism as a Disease* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988). Fingarette views the prevalent 'disease concept' as a hindrance to more appropriate treatments. For a positive, polemical appreciation of altered states, see Stuart Walton's *Out of It: A Cultural History of Intoxication* (London: Penguin, 2002).
- 27 The World Health Organization replaced the term 'alcoholism' with 'alcohol dependence syndrome' in the ninth edition of its *International Classification of Diseases* (1977); see WHO, *Problems Related to Alcohol*

*Consumption: Report of a WHO Expert Committee* (Geneva: WHO, 1980), Annex 2, 'Alcohol Dependence Syndrome'. At the time of writing (2017), its 'Lexicon of Alcohol and Drug Terms' subsumes 'alcohol dependence syndrome' under the broader 'dependence syndrome', [www.who.int/substance\\_abuse/terminology/who\\_lexicon/en/](http://www.who.int/substance_abuse/terminology/who_lexicon/en/).

- 28 Health professionals and those involved in social policy tend not to use the term. For example, in the comprehensive collection of views gathered in Peter Boyle *et al.* (eds), *Alcohol: Science, Policy, and Public Health* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) the preferred terms are 'heavy drinking', 'problem drinkers', 'alcohol abuse', or 'inappropriate alcohol consumption'. However, it should be noted that all of the words which serve as markers for undesirable behaviour – 'heavy', 'problem', 'abuse', 'inappropriate' – hide a moral dissatisfaction which continues to implicitly posit the model citizen – one who drinks 'appropriately', in 'moderation' – and somebody who is not, therefore 'a problem' who 'abuses'.
- 29 Alcoholics Anonymous, *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* (2005), p. 37, [www.portlandeyeopener.com/AA-12-Steps-12-Traditions.pdf](http://www.portlandeyeopener.com/AA-12-Steps-12-Traditions.pdf). This is perhaps close to Ayn Rand's brand of Nietzschean-style individualism as expressed in her neo-liberally popular novel *The Fountainhead*.
- 30 For example, step 8 for the alcoholic is to make 'a list of all persons ... harmed' and 'make amends to them all'.
- 31 Malcolm Lowry, *Under the Volcano* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1972), p. 121.
- 32 For those interested in getting the view from a 'fall-in-the-gutter' drunk, see John Healy's autobiography *The Grass Arena*, an unsentimental portrait of 'a fucked-up wino' (London: Faber, 1990 [1988]), p. 108. This does not go in for extended self-analysis or philosophy, offering instead a bleak description of a group of London street drinkers over a number of years, characterised by begging, thieving, sleeping rough, violence, prison, and numerous deaths: 'I'm still here drinking and smoking, doing my little bits of nick. It seems such an idle boast. I'm neither proud nor ashamed of it. It just is', p. 164.
- 33 Lawrence Osborne's travelogue *The Wet and the Dry: A Drinker's Journey* is a good example of the hedonist's enjoyment of drinking (London: Harvill Secker, 2013), while Charles Bukowski's novel *Post Office* (1971) has a hedonist protagonist whose twin interests are drinking and sex (London: Virgin Books, 2009).
- 34 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 90.
- 35 Albert Camus, *The Outsider* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1981).
- 36 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (New York: Citadel Press, 1996), p. 11. De Beauvoir goes on to make the point that man can joyfully accept his lot because living in ambiguity (confronted by ambiguity) allows for 'disclosure' of being, p. 13.
- 37 See Taylor Carman, 'The concept of authenticity', in Dreyfus and Wrathall (eds), *Companion*, with comments on 'self-fulfilment', pp. 229–30. In

contrast to de Beauvoir's view in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, the character H el ene in her novel *The Blood of Others* argues for unhappiness in this exchange with her lover, Blomart:

'You have said to me so often that you respect other people's liberty. And you make decisions for me and treat me like a thing'.

'I didn't want you to be unhappy'.

'And if I prefer to be unhappy? It's for me to choose'. (Simone de Beauvoir, *The Blood of Others* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1976), p. 102)

Compare this to: 'But actually it is not a question of giving men time and happiness, it is not a question of stopping the movement of life: it is a question of fulfilling it', de Beauvoir, *Ethics*, p. 80.

David E. Cooper offers a more positive take on Existential authenticity and happiness: 'So forbidding is the authentic life sometimes made to sound that one wonders if anyone could want to seek it. But we should recall here a distinction that Heidegger makes between an initial mood of *Angst*, where disturbing feelings like "uncanniness" dominate, and a more mature mood which is one of sober but "unshakable joy" in reclaiming one's "individualized potentiality-for-Being". Authenticity has, after all, its own rewards'. David E. Cooper, 'Existentialism as a philosophical movement', in Crowell (ed.), *Companion*, p. 43. Heidegger does not explain why joy must be sober.

- 38 I am indebted to Simon Mullins for discussions around psychiatry, individual 'capacity' for decision-making, and current treatments for mental health issues.
- 39 Hans Fallada, *The Drinker* (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House Publishing, 2009).
- 40 Frederick Exley, *A Fan's Notes* (London: Yellow Jersey Press, 1999).
- 41 Venedict Yerofeev, *Moscow Stations. A Poem*, trans. Stephen Mulrine (London: Faber, 1997).
- 42 A. L. Kennedy, *Paradise* (London: Vintage Books, 2005).
- 43 For example, Heidegger: 'Being-in-the-world is ... nothing other than freedom, freedom no longer understood as spontaneity but as defined by the formulation of Dasein's metaphysical essence', quoted by Craig Delancey, 'Action, the scientific worldview, and being-in-the-world', in Dreyfus and Wrathall (eds), *Companion*, p. 363.
- 44 Knapp, *Drinking*, pp. 193–4 and p. 238.
- 45 She approvingly quotes another drinker who likens alcoholism to diarrhoea: 'try controlling *that*' (*ibid.*, p. 54); and writes that 'alcoholism runs in families ... most alcoholics probably have a genetic predisposition to it as well'; and 'Addiction to alcohol is also a neurological phenomenon' (*ibid.*, both p. 115). At the same time the book also has a very strong attraction to the idea of an authentic self, to which heavy drinking/alcoholism is antithetical.
- 46 Knapp is not alone in lumping together all the possible causes, even if the whole then becomes a contradictory bundle. John Berryman, for instance,

refers to his drinking problem as a 'biopscho-socio-spiritual disease', *Recovery: A Novel* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973), p. 212. For a piece of fiction wholly opposed to granting 'the alcoholic' any sympathy or insight see Akhil Sharma's short story 'You Are Happy?', in which the drinking mother is lured from her home in New York back to India in order to attend a funeral; while there she is murdered, with the husband's tacit approval, in order to preserve the family's honour and to solve his marital difficulties. Akhil Sharma, 'You Are Happy?', *The New Yorker*, 17 April 2017, [www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/04/17/you-are-happy](http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/04/17/you-are-happy).

47 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 33.

48 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 425

49 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1979).

50 Raskolnikov is, as already mentioned, the central figure in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and Meursault is the main character in Camus's *The Outsider*; Roquentin is the main character in *Nausea*.

51 'World is essentially revealed and so constituted through Dasein's comportments. These comportments arise because of the temporal nature of Dasein: Dasein cannot, as it were, sit still, but must interact', Delancey, 'Action', p. 363.

52 John O'Brien, *Leaving Las Vegas* (London: Pan, 1996).

53 The compressed time period is not specific to Existential-drinker narratives, but it is aesthetically convenient. The single-day structure of *Under the Volcano* is no doubt inspired by James Joyce's single-day novel *Ulysses*. Other drinker novels with short time frames include another of John O'Brien's novels, *Better*, over a single day (New York: Akashic Books, 2009), and Ivan Gold's *Sams in a Dry Season* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992), set over a weekend. Short time frames are a staple of drama, of course, staying close to an Aristotelian unity of time, place, and action, and such a structure when imported into the novel form does help intensify the feeling that in the last binge everything is being brought to a head, rather than spreading the narrative out over months and years. Two notable plays where drink is central and with short time frames are Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1956, written 1941–1942 (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972)), a single day, and Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962 (London: Penguin, 1965)), where events take place over an evening. The time span for Christopher Reid's narrative poem *The Song of Lunch* (2009 (London: Faber, 2010)) is given in the title – although the narrator is in a drunken slumber on the roof of the restaurant for about an hour of it, 'out to lunch at your own lunch', as his old flame puts it, p. 53.

54 Compare this to temperance narratives, where the destruction wrought by drink has to be shown over a long period. Douglas Jerrold's *Fifteen Years of a Drunkard's Life* (London: Samuel French, n.d. [1828]), one of the first temperance dramas, frames it in this manner and sets the temporal frame for later works; T. S. Arthur's popular novel *Ten Nights in a Bar-Room and What I Saw There* (Philadelphia: J. W. Bradley, 1861 [1854]) is spread out over ten years, not ten consecutive nights. The use of an autobiographical

- format for either fictional or confessional temperance narratives obviously demands the time period of a whole life.
- 55 Jean Rhys, *Good Morning, Midnight* (London: Penguin, 2000).
- 56 William Kennedy, *Ironweed* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2013).
- 57 'There is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy', Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 11.
- 58 Brian Moore, *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* (London: Harper Perennial, 2007).
- 59 John W. Crowley, *The White Logic: Alcoholism and Gender in American Modernist Fiction* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), p. 19.
- 60 Jean Rhys, *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (London: Penguin, 2000).
- 61 Kent Russell, *I Am Sorry to Think I Have Raised a Timid Son* (London: Corsair, 2015, Kindle edn, ch. 8).
- 62 David Falk, 'Lowry and the aesthetics of salvation', in Sherrill E. Grace (ed.), *Swinging the Maelstrom: New Perspectives on Malcolm Lowry* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), p. 53.
- 63 Both John Berryman's *Recovery* and Charles Bukowski's *Post Office* are subtitled 'A Novel' and thus also signify some play on the boundaries between fiction, memoir, and autobiography.
- 64 Exley, *A Fan's Notes*, p. 35.
- 65 Alastair Hannay, 'Kierkegaard's single individual and the point of indirect communication', in Crowell (ed.), *Companion*, p. 78.
- 66 *Ibid.*, p. 79. Philippe Lejeune argues against 'the widespread theory according to which the novel is truer (more profound, more authentic) than the autobiography'. Philippe Lejeune, 'The autobiographical pact', in *On Autobiography* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), pp. 26ff., but of course (as Lejeune is aware) this does then open up the problem of those very terms 'truer', 'more profound', 'more authentic'. I would not see 'indirect communication' as falling within Lejeune's analytical scope.
- 67 Augustine, *Confessions* (London: Everyman, 2001). For example, Husserl: 'The first person who sensed profoundly the enormous difficulties inherent in this analysis, and who struggled with it almost to despair, was Augustine. Even today, anyone occupied with the problem of time must still study... the *Confessions* thoroughly', quoted in Joseph Rivera, 'Figuring the porous self: St. Augustine and the phenomenology of temporality', *Modern Theology* 29:1 (2012), 83–103; see also Ryan Coyne, *Heidegger's Confessions: The Remains of Saint Augustine in 'Being and Time' and Beyond* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).
- 68 For a detailed discussion of Marx in relation to this see István Mészáros's *Marx's Theory of Alienation* (London: The Merlin Press, 5th edn, 2005). Mészáros identifies four elements: alienation from nature, from self (as active in the world/producing), from 'species-being' (the human race), and from other men, p. 14.

- 69 Cooper, 'Existentialism', p. 33.
- 70 Steven Crowell, 'Sartre's existentialism and the nature of consciousness', in Crowell (ed.), *Companion*, p. 207.
- 71 It is outside the scope of the book to determine just how global a phenomenon the Existential drinker might be.
- 72 'The concept of alienation initially appears to encapsulate what "post-modern" and deconstructive thought claims to have laid to rest', Simon Skempton, *Alienation After Derrida* (London: Continuum, 2010), p. 1. Skempton attempts to rescue the concept by arguing that the metaphysics of presence is not intrinsic to alienation.
- 73 David Cooper makes the argument for the relevance of Existentialism as a whole: 'Inspired by the issue of estrangement, existentialist thought moves in a coherent direction, from conceptions of the world and human existence to a doctrine of radical human freedom that leads into an ethics of authenticity and reciprocal freedom', 'Existentialism', pp. 47–8.
- 74 Olivia Laing, *The Trip to Echo Spring: Why Writers Drink* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2013), p. vii.
- 75 *Ibid.*, p. 607.
- 76 Arlette Elaim-Sartre, 'Foreword', in Jean-Paul Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. xxiii.
- 77 *Ibid.*, p. viii.
- 78 Thomas C. Anderson, 'Beyond Sartre's ethics of authenticity', *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 33 (2002), 138–54. For a view sympathetic to the idea of a Sartrean ethics, see Linda A. Bell, *Sartre's Ethics of Authenticity* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1989).
- 79 For a discussion of what might count as 'ethics' in Heidegger's work, see Sacha Golob, 'Martin Heidegger: freedom, ethics, ontology', in Sacha Golob and Jens Timmerman (eds), *The Cambridge History of Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), online preview at [www.academia.edu/10112989/Heideggers\\_Ethics\\_Forthcoming\\_in\\_the\\_Cambridge\\_History\\_of\\_Moral\\_Philosophy\\_](http://www.academia.edu/10112989/Heideggers_Ethics_Forthcoming_in_the_Cambridge_History_of_Moral_Philosophy_). With respect to *Being and Time*, establishing an ontology for existence is the primary aim, and in this Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* also follows suit.
- 80 For example, as Kristina Arp writes: 'In his "Letter on Humanism", published in 1947, Heidegger strongly criticized what he saw as the underlying metaphysical assumptions of de Beauvoir's and Sartre's existentialism. Existentialist humanism, he says, enthrones the "subject" as a "tyrant of being" who deigns "to release the beingness of being into an all too loudly bruted "objectivity"'. Kristina Arp, 'Simone de Beauvoir's existentialism', in Crowell (ed.), *Companion*, p. 256.
- 81 Camus, *Myth of Sisyphus*, pp. 35ff. He discusses Kierkegaard, Chestov, and Jaspers as such 'existential philosophers', pointing out how each makes an unwarranted escape from life's absurd truth. Camus then sets himself the task of asking 'if it is possible to live *without appeal*', p. 53.
- 82 'When we say that man chooses himself, we do mean that every one of us must choose himself; but by that we also mean that in choosing for himself

- he chooses for all men', Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1973), p. 29; de Beauvoir, *Ethics*, pp. 60–1.
- 83 'Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law', and, 'I ought never to conduct myself except so that I could also will that my maxim become a universal law', Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. and trans. Allen W. Wood (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 37 and p. 18, respectively.
- 84 For example: 'To will oneself free is also to will others free', *Ethics*, p. 73. A similar bonded sentiment is expressed in *The Blood of Others*: 'One day I read, "Each of us is responsible for everything and to every human being". It seemed so true to me', p. 122 (Blomart speaking). The quotation is from Dostoevsky and also provides the novel's epigraph.
- 85 For example: 'To will oneself free is to effect the transition from nature to morality by establishing a genuine freedom on the original upsurge of our existence'. De Beauvoir, *Ethics*, p. 25. De Beauvoir allows herself latitude by introducing the idea 'to will oneself free', whereas, ontologically speaking, the individual is free regardless of any 'willing'.
- 86 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (London: Vintage, 1997).
- 87 See Lewis R. Gordon, 'Introduction', in his *Existence in Black: An Anthology of Black Existential Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1997).
- 88 Sartre, *Notebooks*, p. 7.
- 89 As Jacob Golomb writes: 'To conclude is to reach an end together, but the authentic posture, as understood by the philosophers of authenticity, forbids me from presuming to conclude for *you* or for *us*. Each individual has to come to her *own* conclusions about authenticity'. Jacob Golomb, *In Search of Authenticity: From Kierkegaard to Camus* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 200. For criticism of Existential authenticity, see Theodor Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity* (London: Routledge, 1986).
- 90 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 59–60.
- 91 The traditional bourgeois model and the neo-liberal model may not be quite as synonymous as I suggest here. Neo-liberalism is covered in the book's final chapters.
- 92 Alfred Kazin, "'The giant killer": drink and the American writer', *Commentary* (March 1976), 44–50, p. 44.
- 93 F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1985).
- 94 Ernest Hemingway, *Fiesta/The Sun Also Rises* (London: Arrow Books, 1993).
- 95 For instance 'death' and 'nothingness' do become themes in relation to the bull-fighting in *Fiesta*, but not in relation to drink. A good account of the Existential influence on American literature, including on Hemingway, is Richard Lehan's *A Dangerous Crossing: French Literary Existentialism and the Modern American Novel* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973).
- 96 F. Scott Fitzgerald, 'May Day', in *Short Stories*. The Bodley Head Scott Fitzgerald 5 (London: The Bodley Head, 1975).

- 97 F. Scott Fitzgerald, 'An Alcoholic Case', in *Short Stories*. The Bodley Head Scott Fitzgerald 6 (London: The Bodley Head, 1975).
- 98 'An Alcoholic Case' is seen through the perspective of a nurse who has taken it upon herself to care for an alcoholic. It ends with her resigned to the idea that it is pointless looking out for them: 'It's just that you can't really help them and it's so discouraging – it's all for nothing', *ibid.*, p. 322.
- 99 Ernest Hemingway, 'A Clean Well-Lighted Place', *Scribners* (March 1933), pp. 149–50.
- 100 For difficulties over interpretation, see David Kerner's 'The ambiguity of "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place"', *Studies in Short Fiction* 29:4 (1992), 561–74.
- 101 First published in *The New Yorker*, 18 July 1964. Collected in *The Stories of John Cheever* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1978).
- 102 James Salter, 'Akhnilo', *Grand Street* 1:1 (1981), 124–30. I am not including Salter as one of the writer-drinkers, but rather the claim the story might have for recognition in this grouping.
- 103 John O'Hara, *Appointment in Samarra* (London: Vintage, 2008), and *Selected Stories* (London: Vintage, 2011).
- 104 Jane Bowles, *Two Serious Ladies* (London: Sort of Books, 2010).
- 105 Jack Kerouac, *Satori in Paris* (London: Penguin, 2012); the quotation is at p. 35.
- 106 Cyril Connolly, *The Rock Pool* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).
- 107 David Ireland, *The Glass Canoe* (Victoria, Australia: Penguin, 1982), p. 129.
- 108 Joseph Roth, *The Legend of the Holy Drinker* (London: Granta, 2013), p. 3.
- 109 Donald W. Goodwin, *Alcohol and the Writer* (New York: Penguin, 1988).
- 110 *Ibid.*, p. 1.
- 111 Tom Dardis, *The Thirsty Muse: Alcohol and the American Writer* (London: Sphere Books, 1990).
- 112 Thomas B. Gilmore, *Equivocal Spirits: Alcoholism and Drinking in Twentieth-Century Literature* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987).
- 113 *Ibid.*, pp. 7–8.
- 114 *Ibid.*, p. 46.
- 115 Crowley, *The White Logic*, p. x.
- 116 *Ibid.*
- 117 All issues are available at <http://teaching.shu.ac.uk/ds/sle/Dionysos.htm>. Jim Harbaugh was editor for the journal 1996–2001.
- 118 Editorial, *Dionysos* 1:1 (1989), p. 1.
- 119 Taylor, *Bacchus*, pp. 66–7, p. 66.
- 120 Federico, "I must have drink".
- 121 For example Christian Michener in chapter 4, 'Existential struggles in an eschatological world: the myth of Francis Phelan', of his *From Then*

- into Now: William Kennedy's Albany Novels* (Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press, 1998), although 'Existential' is used rather loosely.
- 122 For example, Konstantin Kustanovich, 'Venichka Erofeev's grief and solitude: existential motifs in the *Poema*', in Karen L. Ryan-Hayes (ed.), *Venedikt Erofeev's 'Moscow-Petushki': Critical Perspectives* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997).
- 123 George Eliot, 'Janet's Repentance', in *Scenes of Clerical Life* (London: Penguin, 1998).
- 124 See Sheila Shaw, 'The female alcoholic in Victorian fiction: George Eliot's unpoetic heroine', in Rhoda B. Nathan (ed.), *Nineteenth-Century Women Writers of the English-Speaking World* (London: Greenwood Press, 1986).
- 125 Émile Zola, *L'Assommoir* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- 126 Lowry's long letter to Jonathan Cape (January 1946) in response to a negative reader's report is obliged to explain how it is different from *The Lost Weekend*. The letter is reprinted in full in Malcolm Lowry, *The Voyage that Never Ends: Fictions, Poems, Fragments, Letters*, ed. Michael Hofmann (New York: NYRB, 2007). He begins his defence: 'This brings me to the unhappy (for me) subject of *The Lost Weekend*', p. 392.
- 127 Michael Oriard, *Dreaming of Heroes: American Sports Fiction, 1868-1980* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1982), p. 204.
- 128 Patrick deWitt, *Ablutions* (London: Granta, 2009).