IN A NEW VEIN: THEORIZING ADDICTION AND IDENTITY IN THOMAS DE QUINCEY, SYLVIA PLATH, AND TUPAC SHAKUR

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the development and limitations of the existing definitions of the concepts addict and addiction and offers a new theory of addiction and identity. The definition that this study proposes is informed by analysis of Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, Sylvia Plath's letters and journals, and Tupac Shakur's lyrics, as well as by present psychological, psychiatric, neuroscientific and cultural analyses of the phenomenon. I argue that a need for a less identity-conferring, deterministic, and reductive definition of addiction exists and that analysis of the work of the three above-mentioned figures leads to such an understanding and theory of addiction.

By identifying the paradoxes of Thomas De Quincey's innovative *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821), Chapter One unveils three key traits essential to a revised theory of addiction. De Quincey at once sets the groundwork for traditional theories of addiction while also revising these theories. The three traits that De Quincey introduces include: the distinction between repetition and return, the complexities of hierarchizing the object of addiction over the addict, and the dangers of viewing "addict" as an identity-conferring and totalizing term.

Moving from De Quincey's text, Chapter Two focuses on the analysis of patterns of addiction as they occur in Sylvia Plath's journals and letters. Plath's writing highlights her meta-obsession with why she struggles without success to shift her attention from her incapacity to stop these patterns of addiction. The chapter also addresses the significance for Plath of the following: the role of

repetition; the concept of a fluid self; the prominence of patterns of addictive language; and the impact of external pressures on her internalization of perfectionism.

Finally, Chapter Three reads Tupac Shakur's lyrics and interviews for evidence that Shakur was aware of the cultural beliefs that made addiction and despair so common in the impoverished, urban, violent and drug-ridden communities in which he lived. Moreover, Shakur, as a rapper and activist commits himself to addressing and helping resolve these problems. Unlike De Quincey and Plath, Shakur understands the political and cultural machinations driving addiction and aims to disable them.

To Steve

My love, my mentor, my best friend.

You keep this see-saw world in perfect balance.

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Introduction

Revising Addiction and the Real World

In the U.S. in 2011, we live in a culture of commercialism and consumption driven in part by illness and medicalization. The discrepant ways our culture interprets and responds to different ailments reveal the politics behind the decisions regarding how various diagnoses are depicted, made and treated. Advertisements for pharmaceutical treatments for depression and erectile dysfunction run constantly on television and fill the pages of magazines. Regardless of the growing rate of addiction, similar ads for its treatment do not exist. The ads for addiction treatments do not run on prime-time network television or appear in glossy magazines. Why? Addiction treatment advertisements lack the pharma-funding that subsidizes the high-end ads for Cymbalta and Cialis. In January of 2010, addiction finally gained medical parity with other illnesses. It would seem that now that insurance covers the treatment of addiction, we would have begun to see the same kind of ads for its treatment as we do for depression and erectile dysfunction. We have not.

Addiction and addicts occupy a paradoxical place in the minds and pocketbooks of consumers, doctors, and both pharmaceutical and branding companies. As memoirs written by addicts and their family members appear ever more frequently on bookstore shelves and best-seller lists, it would seem that a growing interest in addiction exists among the consumers who help place these books on best-seller lists. While that may be the case, it is important to point out that the majority of these memoirs are written by young white addicts many of

whom had previous connections to the publishing world. While the interest in such memoirs as well as their production grows, where are the stories of minority addicts? These stories appear in newspaper articles relying on "hard numbers" that reduce the personal to the statistical. And aside from appearing on the news in reports of "drug busts" accompanied by video of young Latino men, hands cuffed behind their backs, led by police officers into squad cars, the stories of minority addiction have few outlets. They are relegated to exploitative television shows such as A&E's *Intervention*; a show that reifies the "distastefulness" and otherness of the addicts whose "lives" it depicts. While the memoirs intend to, and often do, evoke sympathy and empathy for their subject and leave their readers with a sense of the possibility of beating addiction, *Intervention* objectifies its subjects through racist, sexist, and classist stereotypes about addicts and their failure to recover despite the free treatment offered them at the end of every show.

In this lack of addiction memoirs and addiction fiction by people of color we find more evidence supporting the common contradictory view of addiction and people with additions held in the U.S. today. We cannot decide whether to adopt the disease model or to respond punitively. Actually, we have decided; we do both. We dole out harsh punishments to certain groups of people who have addictions to specific unpopular demonized objects. In contrast, long-term holistic recovery centers with treatment options including psychoanalytic therapy, spirituality work, exercise programs, art-therapy, psycho-drama, yoga, massage-therapy pop up in warm secluded locations from Santa Fe to Malibu for those who

have avoided court and/or can afford the sometimes $40,000+ cost per month. When the courts send a small-time African American crack dealer to a maximum security prison for decades and allow a strung-out white, wealthy cocaine addict to move into a beautiful "full-service" treatment center with the amenities listed above to work toward his recovery and sobriety, are we addressing two different conditions? Unfortunately, we are not. To say that our laws and attitudes regarding which addicts receive which response are arbitrary would be false and deceptive.

Both the punitive model that awards the small-time marijuana dealer with an overly long prison sentence and the disease model that provides the affluent cocaine addict with a secluded spa-like treatment center present over-reactions to people with addictions. Should such excessively harsh sentencing and such excessively outfitted treatment resorts come as a surprise today? Not at all. If we look at the speed with which and the excessive degree to which our desires must be met, our wants excessively filled and over-filled, it becomes clear that our society is based on an addictively consumptive way of life. Why would responses to addiction or excess come in anything but the form of excess?

This dissertation offers an empathic and humanizing revision of addiction that encourages us to look at all addicts as individuals whose identities consist of more than just their addictions. The othering of addicts as well as the determinism so often applied to their selves secure the cultural stereotypes that in turn make it too easy for our culture to dismiss them as lost causes, driven by animalistic instincts, deserving of no empathy or help. We need to learn that

addicts have mutable identities and recognize that throughout their lives they have the capacity to contribute to the world and the lives of others in meaningful and substantive ways. By examining addicts and their lives holistically, we begin to see them as complex individuals who, like non-addicts, occupy a variety of identities. Through this revision of addicts, people begin to relate to those with addictions in more humane and validating ways.

So how to shift from the othering and identity-limiting view of addicts to a more empathic one? The first place I begin is with an examination of the figuring of addiction in Thomas De Quincey's iconic text *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821). De Quincey's work, while restricted by a vocabulary that did not yet include the words "addict" and "addiction," introduces a view of himself as an opium addict that is preceded by a lengthy and detailed description of the years of his life prior to his becoming an opium-eater or addict. As he explains, he dedicates such an extensive portion of the work to his pre-opium life with the aim of instilling sympathy for him in the reader. Here, he recognizes that despite opium use not being looked down on, he must secure his reader's sympathy and empathy for himself by depicting his "innocent" time as a youth as well as his precocious mastery of the academic subjects he studied. De Quincey's text makes clear that addicts are more than just addicts and in doing so encourages his audience to respect and sympathize with his later "pains of addiction."

While De Quincey understands and rhetorically relies on the importance of a fluid identity, his focus on the object of one's addiction, in his case opium, over the addicted subject promotes a disempowering view of addicts. De Quincey

at once claims opium as the true hero of his tale, while he simultaneously and paradoxically continues to draw attention back to his self. In claiming to privilege opium over his self, De Quincey encourages us to look not at the patterns of addiction that he and other addicts exhibit, but instead at the unique qualities he wants to link with opium. One problem accompanying emphasizing the drug over the person is that it emphasizes the drug over the person.

In hierarchizing opium over his self, De Quincey writes against his understanding that the pre-addiction life must be written to produce sympathy in his reader toward the addict. In addition to garnering the sympathy of his audience, by including an account of his pre-opium days in his *Confessions* he reveals to the reader other important patterns of addiction that exist in his writing and throughout his life. Moreover, he leaves open the misconception that these patterns are insignificant and that we should really just pay attention to opium or the object of addiction. Focusing on the object of an addiction over the person who is addicted to it supports a divisive and regressive understanding of addiction. It also encourages arbitrary laws and stereotypes, and ignores those addicts who struggle with addictions to "innocuous" and legal objects.

Sylvia Plath, in addition to recognizing the fluidity of a person's identity, understood the importance of prioritizing the person over the object of his or her addiction. At the same time, she found herself unable to shift her attention away from her preoccupation with her perfectionism. Not only was the pattern of perfectionism similarly repetitive to behavioral patterns of addiction, moreover, these shared patterns of repetition appeared as patterns in her writing.

Reading Plath as addicted to her need for perfectionism explains in part why she has not been viewed through the stigmatizing stereotypes that people often associate with drug addicts. Striving to publish and valuing one's publications do not for many qualify as potentially dangerous goals or aspirations. Yet, for Plath these achievements never satisfy; throughout her journals, she repeatedly expresses deep concern with the insatiable quality of her ruminations over her requirements of publication and other seemingly "safe" objects of her addiction. Clearly her concern with her own pre-occupation with achieving her goal of publication indicates an awareness of a pattern of behavior and thinking over which she felt the need to make efforts to control or eliminate.

Plath "benefited" from the view of the "harmlessness" of the objects of her addiction. She also "benefited" from the focus placed on the object of an addict's addiction. These "benefits" did not however help her to diminish her pre-occupation with the unachievable demand for perfectionism that acted in her life the way alcohol acts in the life of an alcoholic. Understanding that what is harmless to one may be toxic to another reminds us that the pattern of repetition governs addictive behavior and thus *the individual* must gain priority over the object of one's behavior.

Finally, while Plath reaped the "benefits" of her "innocuous" objects of repetition and addiction, Tupac Shakur endured the opposite reception from critics who were not even concerned with his addictions. Moreover, not only does he openly reveal his sophisticated and complex understanding of his painful sensitivity, his depression, and his resultant self-medication, he actually asks his

audience to help him deal with these issues. While Shakur's lyrics honestly express the depth of his level of despair and the self-medication that this pain has driven him to, they also critically invoke the listener's aid in addressing and resolving these issues. De Quincey and Plath describe their pains and depression, but as they do, there remains a pointed and personal focus on their level of artistry and intellect that gets in the way of the immediacy of an overt cry for help. Shakur's writing reaches the same level of artistry, and yet he does not stop there. Unlike De Quincey and Plath, Shakur appears confident of his artistry, and this confidence allows him to include a level of practicality and politics in his writing. Shakur understands that rap can serve as a means to deliver a critique and understanding of the causes of addiction. It also teaches us how to respect and help those with addictions.

For Shakur, the line between art and politics has dissolved, if it ever existed. Further, not only is this divide nonexistent, but the line between the personal and the political is also meaningless for Shakur. Shakur's explicit and repeated acknowledgements of his own abuse of alcohol and marijuana as ways he self-medicated his major depression supports this reading of him as aware of the myth of the distinction between art and politics. As a person who suffers from dual-diagnosis, or one who has an addiction and bears an affective diagnosis (major depression or bipolar disorder), Shakur atypically and publicly ascribes himself with such a diagnosis. Critical to the dual-diagnosis is the occurrence of unceasing substance abuse or addiction as a way of self-medicating one's psychic pain. Shakur understands the reasons behind his drug and alcohol abuse, and his

lyrics and poetry clearly address his understanding of this pattern. Unlike Plath, Shakur appears to have a clear personal and political understanding of why no one responded to his self-destructive and depressive lyrics and requests for help. Politically, his poverty, race, criminal actions, and gangsta lifestyle in conjunction with the primary medium through which he expressed his desire for help, rap, indicate that he knew that art and politics cannot be disengaged from one another---especially regarding an outward assumption of his "irresponsible" and "stereotypical" acts and values. Plath's status in society, a white educated young woman, nationally successful poet by the age of 17 combined with her achievements in academia and her later high level of success in writing reveal why her less politically driven and more individually focused writing garnered more of a response of concern for her mental health than did Shakur's.

Shakur's palpable and astute understanding and expression of the complexities and causes of his personal despair, his emotional cries of pain and for help throughout his songs and poetry, and his political consciousness did little to cause many to see him as more than a gun-slinging, drug-dealing African American gangsta rapper. As he raps, he makes clear that both he and his audience view his identity as molded and restricted by "a young black male, cursed since my birth." Even though many see infants born in the U.S. as innocent and want to believe that they have the potential to pursue and meet their goals and dreams, the above lyric highlights Shakur's understanding that politically, culturally and societally constructed myths or "truths" have "cursed" this "young black man since birth."

For Shakur contributed to his own romanticization. And like Plath, after his death he lost control of that romanticization. The gangsta rapper lifestyle that Shakur took part in was both and simultaneously a performative act that he learned to follow and from which he would carve out an important aspect of his identity, and it was a real lifestyle that eventually caused his murder. There is at once the sense of gang life as a re-writing of "cowboys and Indians" play, but Shakur's death reifies the impossibility of the separation of art and life. For both Plath and Shakur have been appropriated as signs of the cultures surrounding them. Plath's perfectionism, her obsession with her addictive attitude toward that perfectionism, her depression, and Shakur's repeated confessions of his self-medication represent critical factors in their posthumous romanticizations. Romanticizations of addictions that draw a positive connection between a successful artist's addictions and the quality of their work are misguided and dangerous.

Ironically, Shakur's participation in the gangsta rapper drug-dealing lifestyle is precisely what allowed him to be so honest about his depression and the resulting self-medication. Surveys reveal again and again that men in general are far less likely than women to seek help for, or even discuss with a friend, partner, or spouse, a depressive episode. Moreover, African Americans of both genders are even less likely to turn to a professional for help with depression than whites are. So how does this "thug life," "street smart" young African American man wind up rapping to millions about his depression and self-medication? It makes sense that the tough image of Shakur secured his masculinity, and it also

makes sense that he honestly and openly recounted his despair and substance abuse to an audience of his peers and millions of others. As many African Americans have done in the past, Shakur turned to his community, one that had first-person experience with the trials of his life, instead of an individual from outside of his community, for help. It is also important that Shakur asked for and *promised* help. By recognizing his ability to offer something, he knows that he will maintain his credibility as a success; by turning to others in his community for help, he maintains his credibility without hierarchizing his authority over those he helps. In the end, Shakur did what De Quincey and Plath could not. He urged people to acknowledge their addictions, consider the contributing factors to these addictions, and start to change the way we value people with addictions as resources in overcoming them. Shakur teaches us that it is only by addressing the myriad problems that define the communities in which he lived that society can begin to understand and resolve the political and cultural attitudes that maintain racist and regressive laws and attitudes toward addicts and addiction.

Chapter One

A Revision of Addiction: Reading the Paradoxes of Agency and Addiction in Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*

> So blended and intertwisted in this life are occasions of laughter and of tears.
>
> Thomas De Quincey
> *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*

> Sometimes I ran perilously close to my perihelion; sometimes I became frightened, and wheeled off into a vast cometary aphelion, where for six months 'opium' was a word unknown.... Nervous irritation forced me, at times, upon frightful excesses; but terror from anomalous symptoms sooner or later forced me back.
>
> Thomas De Quincey
> *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*

This chapter investigates the importance of the distinction between repetition and return and discusses the complexities and paradoxes that emerge when the term "addict" is viewed as an identity-conferring one and when the object of an addiction bears priority over the subject. Thomas De Quincey in his *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* and *Suspiria De Profundis*, his unfinished sequel to the *Confessions*, thoroughly introduces the concept and characteristics of addiction to the 19th century English public.[1] The following analysis of De Quincey's groundbreaking work highlights three features central to his conflicting claims about his addiction to opium.[2] A reading of De Quincey's *Confessions* exposes ways the paradoxical key traits that De Quincey incorporates into his discussion of his experience and understanding of addiction align with traits that many reductive definitions of addiction have ignored. First, De Quincey

illuminates the distinction between repetition and return, second, the significance of prioritizing the object, in this case opium, over the subject, and third the paradoxes and complexities involved in viewing "addict" as an identity-conferring term. Paying particular attention to these three concepts in De Quincey's *Confessions* underscores the ways in which these traits influence not just what De Quincey says, but also the patterns through which he says it.

Both eerily prescient of the tendency to reduce a drug addict's identity to that of nothing more than "addict," and partly responsible for the common clinical disregard of the complexity, multiplicity and fluidity of identity, De Quincey sets a starting point from which we have made little progress. William Cope Moyers confirms this failure to advance past addict-as-identity in *Broken*, his 2006 memoir of alcoholism, crack addiction and recovery.[3] He describes his understanding of his identity as an addict as he remarks on the incurable nature of addiction:

> This disease would kill me if I wasn't careful, but no matter how vigilant I was, it was incurable---I would never get rid of it, it would always be with me, the label would always define me. Addict. Alcoholic. (*Broken* 133)

Here we see how very present the identity-conferring power of the term "addict" remains in 2006. Moyers at once depicts the disease of addiction as incurable and omnipresent. However, at first, when he notes, "*I* would never get rid of *it*," he distinguishes between himself and his addiction; "*I*" exists in contrast to "*it*"

(*Broken* 133, emphasis mine). But in the end, with the words, "the label would always define me. Addict. Alcoholic," he reifies the identity-conferring power of addiction with even more certainty than does De Quincey in 1821.

De Quincey, however, introduces opium-eater-as-identity when drawing a distinction between "a man who is inebriated, or tending to inebriation" and "the opium-eater" (74-5). De Quincey cannot call a person who is drunk on alcohol or has a tendency towards getting drunk on alcohol an alcoholic because the word was not widely in use until 1890. However, more interestingly, he does employ the term "wine-drinker" in his text, but this term does not connote the addictive and abusive relationship with alcohol that he describes in his relationship with opium through the term "opium-eater," despite their parallel constructions (*Confessions* 74-5). In concretizing a distinction between alcohol abusers and opium-eaters, De Quincey illustrates how essential, in his mind, the object of one's addiction is; for him, the very object is a necessary yet not sufficient indicator of addiction. Following this formulation, not only does the reader's tendency to identify, without question, De Quincey as an addict seem an accurate one, but also, De Quincey simultaneously and contradictorily reveals the places within the definition of the term "addict" that are ripe for revision. De Quincey subtly identifies how his reader might arrive at a theory of addiction. In other words, not only does De Quincey's narrative encourage a discussion of what it means to use opium, in part, through descriptions of *his* experiences on the drug, but the text also sets up the very terms of what it means to be an addict.[4]

Not only does De Quincey outline these terms, but, in fact, while his

writing anticipates characteristics of addiction, and especially the totalizing tendency to want to read "addict" as an identity-conferring term, he also pushes his reader toward a revised conception of addiction. Such a conception is broad enough to include both behavioral and physiological addictions, and restrictive enough to maintain the discursive power of the term addict.[5] So, De Quincey not only establishes the groundwork necessary for a traditionally identity-conferring conception of addiction that relies on the primacy of the object of the addiction in constructing the addict, but he also suggests areas of this more traditional conception that stand out as in need of revamping. De Quincey complicates one factor that is essential in most traditional definitions of addiction; he recognizes and illuminates the distinction between placing primacy on the object of addiction, here opium, versus prioritizing the subjectivity of the person who becomes addicted. Sanjay Krishnan concurs:

> How could we read this work not as an autobiography but as a story of the ''marvelous agency'' (**C**, 72) of opium? To this end, we might say that the opium-eater's life ought to be viewed as the lens or medium that brings into peculiar focus the narcotic's effects. We might also add that the singularity of de Quincey's experience and personality is in no way vitiated by this approach. There is no question that *this* opium-eater is a necessary condition of the tale as it unfolds; he is simply not its subject. (204)

While De Quincey is surely aware of this dichotomy, his writing reveals that he does not see his identity as limited to one informed only by his addiction

to opium; his insistence on ensuring the reader's understanding of his "natural" intelligence and breadth and depth of scholarship exposes his desire not to be reduced merely to an opium-eater. Finally, while he seems to be pushing against the concept of "addict-as-identity," he does prioritize the specificity of the drug over the user and in so doing, may seem to reduce the possibility of a complex and fluid identity that goes beyond an "I am what I take" mind-set. Paradoxically, while claiming to focus attention on the object of addiction or opium, he cannot help but include his life pre-opium; he thus values the subject of addiction or his self more than he thus values addict. However, he fails to address the harms of conferring opium with autonomy while removing agency and subjectivity from the addict or his self.

Paradoxical* Confessions *from an Intellectual, Racist Addict

Considerations of Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* often, and without question, take De Quincey's identification as "an English opium-eater" as equivalent to, and indicative of his status as an addict. While maintaining a general distinction between a substance abuser and an addict bears merit, doing so does not require contesting the notion of De Quincey as an addict. Instead, this reading considers the genesis of this tendency towards a slippage from "opium-eater" to addict.[6] Why are readers so quick to make the leap from De Quincey's terms to our own? Revealingly, a large portion of De Quincey's *Confessions* describes the time that precedes his opium use. Further, in his *Confessions* De Quincey allows his reader only a glimpse into the day-to-day experiences during his time of opium addiction, yet he titles his text *Confessions*

of an English Opium Eater. The significance of his choice to identify the account as one of an "English opium eater" while including within the text a detailed account of his life prior to his use of and eventual addiction to opium, confirms the traditional and totalizing view that once an opium-eater always an opium-eater. While he includes his pre-opium and childhood days, he does so in terms of their relationship to his opium use and as a writer who views his identity as that of an opium-eater. Here, De Quincey formulates an important distinction between a user/abuser and addict. For De Quincey clearly terms a person whom we might identify as an "addict" an "opium-eater," and in doing so he seemingly makes "opium-eater" into an identity-conferring term.

Confessions of an English Opium Eater paradoxically lays out a traditional view of addiction that harmfully prioritizes the object of an individual's addiction, as well as a more productive holistic view of addiction that recognizes the dangers of viewing "addict" as an identity-conferring and limiting term. He at once spends much of his text arguing for the unique qualities of opium use and abuse over say alcohol use and abuse, while he also dedicates a significant portion of *Confessions* to describing the time in his life *prior* to trying and later becoming dependent upon opium. Of Whitman's novel *Franklin Evans; or, The Inebriate* Michael Warner goes even further, writing explicitly "Whitman's treatment of alcohol is to show how unimportant alcohol itself is ... very little follows directly from alcohol in the plot" (278). De Quincey's repeated claims about the importance of opium at first seem to contrast Warner's reading of the role of alcohol in Whitman's novel. But, if, as De Quincey writes, "opium is the true

hero of this tale," then why dedicate so much of the text to his experiences during his pre-addiction period? He claims to do so to build "sympathy" for him in the reader.[7] Daniel O'Quinn confirms De Quincey's intent, writing, "The opening pages of the *Confessions* are committed to emphasizing the Opium-eater**'**s humanity and restoring his dignity following a struggle from subordination, in large part to make the Opium-eater available as an exemplary figure" (264). As discussed later in the chapter, De Quincey's attempt to gain sympathy from the reader once again illustrates how specious his argument is; he likens his relation to opium to that of a "voluntary slave" (most likely and often an oxymoron) and assumes that readers will sympathize with his position of slave.[8] Much of his audience, however, lacked sympathy for slaves and in fact found them unsympathetic and other.

In arguing for the distinct qualities of opium, De Quincey emphasizes the drug over the entire and complex, multifaceted and shifting life and identity of the individual; the elimination of the individual parallels the way he depicts an addict as a slave who is objectified and reduced to a subhuman level. By focusing on these subhuman aspects of "the addict," it becomes too easy to conceptualize an addict as other and as nothing more than his relationship with the drug of addiction. In De Quincey's title, he reduces himself to an *English Opium Eater* and seems to falsely suggest that his *Confessions* all relate to his time as an addict. Since scientists agree that once a brain has been addicted it will always show indications of past addiction, De Quincey is in fact accurate in his titling of his *Confessions*; he writes of his childhood and the years before his opium addiction

with a brain that has been permanently altered by being addicted. He cannot describe his childhood as he would have as a child or before his time as an addict; however, he goes to great lengths to include detailed aspects of and experiences from his youth. Following the title, we recognize the contradictions inherent in De Quincey's views on opium, addiction, and identity. His traditionally regressive prioritizing of the drug over the individual appears paradoxical due to his inclusion of a discussion of his life before he first tried opium. He at once wants to devalue the individual and give primacy to the drug; however, he devotes thirty-two pages to his "Preliminary Confessions," twenty-six pages to "The Pleasures of Opium," and a meager twenty pages to "The Pains of Opium."

As all of these paradoxes begin to emerge, they clarify De Quincey's internal conflict. He at once recognizes the danger of binary thinking that leads to the view of addict as other and nothing more than addict. Yet his inclusion of his time before his use of opium, as well as his constant emphasis on his exceptional breadth of academic knowledge throughout his life reveal his need to be seen as more than an addict. He at once lionizes opium as the hero, distinguishes it from alcohol, yet he writes that:

> If a man "whose talk is of oxen", (sic) should become an opium-eater, the probability is, that (if he is not too dull to dream at all) – he will dream about oxen: whereas, in the case before him, the reader will find that the opium-eater boasteth himself to be a philosopher; and accordingly, that the phantasmagoria of his dreams (waking or sleeping, day-dreams, or night-dreams) is suitable to one who in that character,

Humani nihil `a se alienum putat.

[he deems nothing that is human foreign to him]. (33)

Clearly, De Quincey lays significant weight on the experiences and knowledge of the subject who takes opium. While he at other points in the text prioritizes opium over the user, here he contradicts the assertion that the opium is the hero or possesses unique properties that reduce the importance of the person using the drug. He writes disdainfully of the "dull" opium-induced dreams of a man "whose talk is of oxen" (33). He states that his own dreams as a philosopher "to whom nothing human is foreign" (33) and "who has such a constitution of the *moral* faculties," "shall give him an inner eye and power of intuition for the vision and the mysteries of our human nature" (34). De Quincey credits more than just "celestial opium" (71) with the phantasmagoria of his dreams. According to De Quincey, as a philosopher and highly educated and intelligent man he brings more to his dreams than does a man whose knowledge is limited to that of oxen. In asserting that his dreams are more creative and interesting than those of the man "whose talk is of oxen," he contradicts his claims that opium deserves our attention rather than the opium-eater. Here, he admits that the subject of the drug matters and not only the object, opium. While he may claim that opium is the hero and that we should focus on the object of his drug addiction, repeatedly he distinguishes himself from other users, and in doing so contradicts his statements regarding the insignificance of the life, individuality and complex identity of the opium-eater.

Not only does he contradict his prioritizing of the object over the subject, he once again highlights the intellectual link between his opium use and the lack of intelligence of Turkish or Chinese opium-eaters. Further, as he does with his title, in creating for his English readers the difference between English and Turkish or Chinese opium-eaters, he introduces the very possibility of an English opium-eater. In his attempt to refute the misconceptions surrounding opium use and its negative effects, De Quincey asserts, "With respect to the torpor supposed to follow, or rather (if we were to credit the numerous pictures of Turkish opium-eaters) to accompany the practice of opium-eating, I deny that also" (77). He continues to further degrade Turkish opium-eaters commenting "Turkish opium-eaters, it seems are absurd enough to sit, like so many equestrian statues, on logs of wood as stupid as themselves" (77). To distinguish him and potential English opium-eaters from these depictions of Turkish opium eaters he first describes his experience of taking opium and going to the opera, and then connects English intellect with enhancing the experience, writing:

> I question whether any Turk, of all that ever entered the paradise of opium-eaters, can have had half the pleasure I had. But indeed, I honour the Barbarians too much by supposing them capable of any pleasures approaching to the intellectual ones of an Englishman. For music is an intellectual or sensual pleasure, according to the temperament of him who hears it. (78)

John Barrell astutely points out that De Quincey's degradation of Turks and Asians is in fact a "fear of the oriental, which at times will appear as a

displacement of some primal and private terror, is also what it appears to be: a fear of the 'modes of life', 'the manners', of a vaguely differentiated but universally abhorrent Asia" (20-1). Barrell provides two additional readings behind De Quincey's fear and disdain for Asian imagery and people. First, he explains:

> In De Quincey's writings the guilt of childhood is made over to a troop of wild animals and assassins who are especially terrifying because they are oriental; and that the peoples of the Orient—the Kandyans, the Hindus, the Chinese, the Maylays—become especially objects of terror to De Quincey, just because they are used to represent the bogeymen and bogeywomen of his earliest years. (21)

Here, Barrell shows how even as a child, De Quincey was indoctrinated by the racism of English empire and colonialism. Simply because "the peoples of the Orient" equaled "bogeymen" De Quincey almost "innately" fears them. The obvious point regarding De Quincey's childhood "bogeymen" lies in the racism that develops when a bogeyman is based on existing people and their cultures.

This difference between a bogeyman under the bed and the oriental bogeymen develops further as Barrell links his second explanation of De Quincey's fears of Asia/ns to the previous one. He allows that:

> It is equally possible, however, to conceive of the guilt which finds expression in the narratives of De Quincey's childhood as a fully social guilt, a guilt at his own participation in the imperialist

> fantasies that become so all-pervasive in the national imagination from the 1820s and 1830s, and which, because it cannot be avowed, can find a voice and can be rationalized only by being displaced. It seems best, indeed, to think of the relation between childhood and the oriental in De Quincey's writings as a relation between two forms of guilt, personal and political, in which each can be a displaced version of the other, and in which each aggravates the other in an ascending spiral of fear and violence. (21)

Edward Said focuses on the political side of Orientalism that Barrell sees in De Quincey as also personal. Said writes, "my contention is that Orientalism is fundamentally a political doctrine willed over the Orient because the Orient was weaker than the West" (204). He addresses the prevalency of the kind of racism De Quincey exhibits, commenting, "for any European during the nineteenth century ... Orientalism was such a system of truths ... it is therefore correct that every European, in what he could say about the Orient, was consequently a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric" (203-4). Said's presentation of the ubuiquity and political nature of the racism of the Orientialism of the society and time in which De Quincey lived is confirmed in De Quincey's "The Pains of Opium" portion of the *Confessions.*

In "The Pains of Opium" section of the *Confessions*, De Quincey tends to generalize his fear and disgust with Asia as normative and logical, or political. He explains, "I have often thought that if I were compelled to forego England, and

to live in China, and among Chinese manners and modes of life and scenery, I should go mad. The causes of my horror lie deep; and some of them must be common to others" (108). While he blames "Chinese manners and modes of life and scenery" as causing his theoretical "madness" were he to live in China, he suggests that these are the reasons he assumes that others would find horror in China; here he generalizes and judges Chinese ways of life in a politically charged way. For if it were only personal reasons behind his fear and hatred of China, he could not assume others felt the same way about China as he. Once again paradoxically, he also notes that the "causes of [his] horror lie deep," implying that he has unique and personal reasons for his fear and hatred of China.

Interestingly, De Quincey combines his tendency toward repetition with an almost verbatim discussion of his fears and hatred of China later in the paragraph. He goes on to reiterate:

> In China, over and above what it has in common with the rest of Southern Asia, I am terrified by the modes of life, by the manners, and the barrier of utter abhorrence, and want of sympathy, placed between us by feelings deeper than I can analyze. I could sooner live with lunatics, or brute animals. (109)

All of this discussion comes in "The Pains of Opium" pages of the text, as De Quincey wants to illustrate for his readers the horror of his "dreams of Oriental imagery" (109). As he goes on to describe the details of these dreams, De Quincey's paradoxical role in relation to opium appears once again. He paints

images of himself occupying roles of subject and object; he is both slave and agent, terrified and terrifying. He describes:

> Under the connecting feeling of tropical heat and vertical sun-lights, I brought together all creatures, birds, beasts, reptiles, all trees and plants, usages and appearances that are found in all tropical regions, and assembled them together in China or Indostan. From kindred feelings, I soon brought Egypt and all her gods under the same law. (109)

Even in the horrific dreams whose details he is about to reveal, De Quincey has agency. He has the power to bring together "all creatures ... found in all tropical regions," and assemble "them together in China or Indostan" (109). He depicts himself as god-like in his ability to bring together "all creatures" as well as bring "Egypt and all her gods under the same law" (109). His ability to bring all creatures together recalls the biblical gathering of pairs of animals and Noah's ark; while Noah is not God, God's words direct his actions. De Quincey possesses the agency to establish law and assemble together impossibly distant deities, beings and creatures under this law.

His paradoxical role as object versus subject becomes even more vivid as he describes his experiences in his Oriental dreams:

> I was stared at, hooted at, grinned at, chattered at, by monkeys, by paroquets (sic), by cockatoos. I ran into pagodas: and was fixed, for centuries, at the summit, or in secret rooms; I was the idol; I was the priest; I was worshipped; I was sacrificed. (109)

Even in his horrible opium induced dreams, De Quincey occupies seemingly incompatible positions of power and servility. He is, at once, the subject of the animals' hooting and chattering, the priest who was worshipped, and the object of sacrifice. The power he exercises in assembling together animals and gods from different times and places indicates he was not merely or always the *subject* of the opium dreams; it resonates with Foucault's theories on "the polymorphous techniques of power" (*The History of Sexuality* 11). For Foucault power is at once a site of "refusal, blockage and invalidation," as well as a site of "incitement and intensification" (11). As Donald E. Hall summarizes, for Foucault "any exercise of power must be understood as generative and oppressive" (168). De Quincey's paradoxical roles of priest and of sacrificed in his Oriental opium dreams mirror Foucault's view on power as well as parallel De Quincey's own relationship with opium. Said applies Foucault's understanding of power to his own theory of Orientalism, as he writes, "my whole point is to say that we can better understand the persistence and the durability of saturating hegemonic systems like culture when we realize that their internal constraints ... were *productive*, not unilaterally inhibiting" (14). For while De Quincey claims opium as the hero and agent of his text, clearly De Quincey's role as subject and opium's role as the agent of power are inverted throughout the text.

Paradoxes of Agency: Opium and/or Addict?

The importance to De Quincey of the powers of the drug and the focus that should be placed on opium is clear throughout the *Confessions*, yet never as strongly as near its end. In his last pages of the 1821 version of *Confessions*, De Quincey asserts his

argument on prioritizing the object of an individual's addiction over the subject; he avoids addressing the significance of the multifaceted shifting identity of the individual. He explains the intent of his book, writing:

> The interest of the judicious reader will not attach itself chiefly to the subject of the fascinating spells, but to the fascinating power. Not the opium-eater, but the opium, is the true hero of the tale: and the legitimate centre on which the interest revolves. The object was to display the marvelous agency of opium, whether for pleasure or for pain; if that is done, the action of the piece has closed. (114)

Here, De Quincey allows for the pleasures and pains of opium, while still referring to the "marvelous agency of opium." He states his goal as displaying this "marvelous agency of opium," yet includes in the *Confessions* opium's distressing agency over him and his life. In *Writing on Drugs* Sadie Plant confirms that "De Quincey felt increasingly possessed by opium, used and abused by what had once been medicine, a puppet of the characters it placed inside his head" (16). In the section of the *Confessions* titled "The Pains of Opium," De Quincey illustrates the fluidity of identity he experiences in his dreams and the blurring of his waking life with his dream state.

V.A. De Luca asserts that in De Quincey's *Confessions* opium allows De Quincey to avoid feeling the loss of community and love. As other critics such as Grevel Lindop and Barrell have noted, the loss of his sister and of Kate Wordsworth, are represented in De Quincey's *Confessions* through De Quincey's despair at losing contact with a prostitute named Ann.[9] Because of the weight De

Quincey placed on his own education, combined with his decision to stealthily leave school and maintain little contact with his remaining family, it is easy to see the extent the loss of a structured academic environment as well as of his family would have on him. De Luca concludes that:

> Opium may provide physical relief and raptures of vision, but it cannot restore the community of human love, the hallmark of the innocent state. In the second half of the *Confessions* the focus shifts away from depictions of human encounters and responsive gestures and towards depictions of the autonomous mental states, whether beatific or terrifying, of an isolated individual. (20)

De Luca's language in describing De Quincey's "autonomous mental states" as reflected in his opium dreams further supports the contradictions of De Quincey's tendency to focus on the object of his addiction at the cost of recognizing the significance and the fluidity of the subject or addict. Also, De Luca points out, De Quincey's mental states are paradoxically "beatific and terrifying" (20).

De Luca continues to illustrate how opium can be read as highlighting the multiplicity and wide variety of identities that De Quincey possesses. De Luca explains:

> Although De Quincey may often speak as if opium were his divinity and his beloved, the drug is neither, for it offers no salvation from the isolation of the self, but merely mirrors back in more intense form the range of potentialities inherent in the situation of a subject who has departed from the early world of a

> loving community. From this point of view opium serves, like the author's unremitting succession of ill-defined but excruciating ailments, to externalize a history of the spirit, deceiving some readers in to regarding the book as a medical case-history, and perhaps deceiving De Quincey himself, who continually yields to this exterior influence the sole credit for effects which are in fact self-created and self-directed. (20)

Opium offers no help, and significantly "merely mirrors back in more intense form the range of potentialities inherent in the situation of a subject who has departed from the early world of a loving community" (20). Here, opium forces De Quincey to see the missed possibilities of his life and his self. He, according to De Luca, writes the text in such a way to locate opium as the agent or in other words, he "continually yields to this *exterior influence* the sole credit for efforts which are in fact self-created and self-directed" (20, emphasis mine). De Luca supports my reading of De Quincey's emphasis on the "exterior influence," opium, and his denial of the power of his self to create and direct his role as agent in relation to opium. In addition, De Luca astutely suggests that De Quincey himself may not be consciously aware of rejecting "efforts" as "self-created and self-directed" (20). As De Quincey at once writes and directs the reader's attention to opium as the object of his addiction and away from himself, he leaves his text open to readings such as De Luca's and mine that recognize the paradoxical focus he simultaneously places on his life and personhood separate from opium.

De Quincey and Opium: Honeymoon Days and School Days

While highlighting such a distinction, De Quincey seems to want to have it both ways. As previously mentioned, De Quincey emphasizes the differences between someone who chronically abuses alcohol and someone who is an opium-eater. In such a comparison, he asserts, the difference lies in the object of abuse (73-5). Opium, throughout significant sections of the *Confessions*, is either absent or viewed in a highly positive light. Although it occurs many years before he writes the *Confessions*, he remembers the precise season, Fall, and year, 1804, when he first took opium; this fact, he notes, attests to the power and pleasure of his first experience using opium. He recalls not just the specific moment but also "the man ... that first laid open to me the Paradise of Opium-eaters" (70). This man is a druggist; De Quincey suffers from "excruciating rheumatic pains of the head and face" for twenty days, and a "college acquaintance" suggests trying opium (70). As Plant points out, De Quincey quickly acquires opium or a tincture of it because "opium was cheap, plentiful, and without prejudice: the perfect quick fix of its day" (7-8). Virginia Berridge supports Plant's comment on the ease of obtaining opium, writing, "Going to the grocer's for opium was often a child's errand" (31). In describing his first time taking the drug De Quincey enthuses:

> ... what an apocalypse of the world within me! That my pains had vanished, was now a trifle in my eyes: --- this negative effect was swallowed up in the immensity of those positive effects which had opened before me---in the abyss of divine enjoyment suddenly revealed. Here was a panacea … for all human woes: here was the

> secret of happiness, about which philosophers had disputed for so many ages, at once discovered: happiness might now be bought for a penny. (71-2)

His hyperbolic language illuminates, in part, the answer to why he becomes an opium-eater; this experience reveals to him the long sought key to happiness. Simultaneously, his language hints at the consistently paradoxical quality of his logic. In describing "the abyss of divine enjoyment" that he experiences the first time he takes opium, his choice to link "abyss" with "divine enjoyment" draws attention to the contrasting meanings of "abyss." An abyss may be a chasm, an endless space, or a terrible situation, or hell. An endless ongoing chasm of "divine enjoyment" certainly sounds consistent with the positive description De Quincey provides of trying opium. De Quincey also underscores the meaning of "abyss" as hell by using it with the religious phrase "*divine* enjoyment." His recollection of his first taste of opium has religious connotations as well as paradoxical intonations. Further, even years after having suffered the "pains of opium" De Quincey is able to reproduce for the reader the purely positive response he had to opium the very first time he tries it. He presents his memory as clear and not clouded by the suffering he has already faced as an opium-eater, and instead he provides a description appropriate to a first-time user.

De Quincey also imbues this experience with intellectual significance. It is important to De Quincey that the *Confessions* introduce and reiterate his academic and intellectual prowess, skills and sophistication. Even in distinguishing between the effects of drinking wine and eating opium, and arguing

for the benefits of the latter, each drug's impact on the user's intellect represents, for De Quincey, the critical difference. He writes:

> But the main distinction lies in this, that whereas wine disorders the mental faculties, opium, on the contrary (if taken in the proper manner), introduces amongst them the most exquisite order, legislation, and harmony. Wine robs a man of his self-possession: opium greatly invigorates it. (73)

In differentiating opium's "most exquisite" ordering capacities of "the mental faculties" from wine's disordering of those faculties as the "the main distinction" between alcohol and opium, De Quincey recapitulates the import that he places on his intellectual achievements throughout the *Confessions*. In addition, De Quincey awards opium with the power of "greatly invigorat[ing]" the user's "self-possession" (73). In contrast, he states that wine "robs a man of his self-possession" (73). Taking "self-possession" as meaning in control of one's emotions or reactions especially when under stress or having presence of mind or composure reinforces the intellectual benefits that opium has on one's mind. It is difficult to think logically, theoretically or reflectively without control of one's emotions or reactions as well as lacking presence of mind or composure. In addition, in the above quotation De Quincey reveals an attitude apropos of his time. According to Berridge, in England by 1850, alcohol abuse and withdrawal were treated with opium (33). She comments that, "opium was generally accepted as a medical remedy for the treatment of delirium tremens … it was popularly used to counteract the effect of too much drink" (33). De Quincey's

hierarchizing of opium over alcohol mirrors his society's view of opium as a curative for the dangerous and commonly disparaged alcohol.

While placing opium above and in contrast to alcohol aligns with the view of De Quincey's society, De Quincey does so to reinforce his depiction of himself as unusually intelligent and academically gifted. His facility with and mastery of Latin and Greek and classical scholarship and philosophy, his choice of words and reliance on Greek and Latin phrases and references to and from literary and philosophical works, reinscribe his status as widely read, well-informed and intelligent. This focus on his intellect appears early in the *Confessions* as he describes his studies and successes as a young student. Early in the first pages of the section "Preliminary Confessions," De Quincey describes that at the age of seven, after his father died:

> I was sent to various schools, great and small; and was very early distinguished for my classical attainments, especially for my knowledge of Greek. At thirteen, I wrote Greek with ease; and at fifteen my command of that language was so great, that I not only composed Greek verses in lyric metres, but could converse in Greek fluently, and without embarrassment—an accomplishment which I have not since met with in any scholar of my time, and which, in my case, was owing to the practice of daily reading off(sic) the newspapers into the best Greek I could furnish *extempore*. (35)

The detail and recounting of the ages at which he mastered each accomplishment in his mastery of Greek emphasize how important these impressive achievements remain to De Quincey in 1821 when writing the *Confessions*. He boasts about never meeting a scholar in his lifetime who could speak Greek as fluently as he could. As no one knows how to speak ancient Greek, De Quincey's pride in his claimed but impossible "fluency" acts as a figure for his intellectual prowess and for the importance that this prowess still holds for De Quincey. To show the reader that he still retains academic skills, he ends the passage with the Latin "*extempore*" which works in two ways to impress his contemporary audience. The definition for the Latin is without preparation or off the cuff. Not only does De Quincey insert Latin into a discussion of his incomparable mastery of Greek and "subtly" demonstrate his facility with another classical language, he also impresses through the meaning the Latin adds to the sentence. It is telling that he claims that he can "converse in Greek" because of his practice of translating English newspapers into Greek every day. Translating written English into written Greek is not the same as his being able to speak ancient Greek.

He continues to inform the reader of his academic prowess, but he begins to do so at the expense of other scholars and with a competitive edge. First, De Quincey includes a quotation from one of his teachers attesting to his mastery of Greek. He writes, "'That boy,' said one of my masters, pointing the attention of a stranger to me, 'that boy could harangue an Athenian mob, better than you or I could address an English one'" (35). Next, we learn that this praise is particularly meaningful to De Quincey because, "He who honoured me with this eulogy was a

scholar, ‘and a ripe and good one’: and, of all my tutors, was the only one whom I loved or reverenced” (35). Here he includes the tutor’s praise of him and reifies this praise by contrasting this tutor with all of the other tutors; for this teacher represents the only one De Quincey respects and loves. In this way, De Quincey amplifies the value of the praise this tutor bestows on him. He continues on, and elaborates on the poor tutor who followed this one, stating, “Unfortunately for me (and afterward I learned, to this worthy man’s great indignation), I was transferred to the care, first of a blockhead, who was in a perpetual panic, lest I should expose his ignorance” (35-6). De Quincey presents his new tutor as threatened by him academically and as unworthy of De Quincey as a student; he even derides him by referring to him as a “blockhead.” Certainly, De Quincey’s skills and knowledge were unusually precocious and remarkable, yet the ineptitude, insecurity and ignorance that he assigns to this tutor read as hyperbolic or part of the fantasy of the adult De Quincey who did not make use of the intellectual mastery of his younger days. Finally, De Quincy moves on to work with another scholar. Of this tutor he writes:

> This man had been appointed to his situation by -------- College, Oxford; and was a sound, well-built scholar, but (like most men, whom I have known from that college) coarse, clumsy, and inelegant. A miserable contrast he presented, in my eyes, to the Etonian brilliancy of my favourite master: and, besides, he could not disguise from my hourly notice, the poverty and meagerness of his understanding. It is a bad thing for a boy to be, and to know

> himself, far beyond his tutors, whether in knowledge or power of mind. (36)

In this passage, De Quincey not only degrades the scholar, but also Oxford and the scholars that Oxford produces. His idolization of the tutor who boasted of De Quincey's Greek skills makes any other tutor fail by comparison. When De Quincey ends the passage by implying that he was and at the time believed himself to be both more learned and more natively gifted of mind than his tutor from Oxford, it grows clear how he reveled in recognitions of his exceptional intellect and how important his intellect and its recognition remain as he writes his *Confessions*.

As the writer of his *Confessions*, De Quincey needs to establish early in his reader that he was an exceptionally promising and accomplished scholar before and in addition to being "simply" an opium-eater. Through the discussion of the previous quotations, De Quincey reads as recognizing and wanting the reader to recognize that an individual consists of more than one identity. The pejorative qualities that many readers will associate with an addict such as De Quincey, seem to develop in De Quincey regarding his identity as an opium-eater. He needs his reader to see him as more than just an opium-eater. However, unlike the stigmatizing and othering of addicts that did not yet exist for De Quincey's readers, it is through his experience as an opium-eater and the suffering and horrific dreams that fill his days and nights in the section "The Pains of Opium" that motivate him to present himself as more than just an opium-eater.

Because his suffering at the hands of opium grows overwhelming, it makes sense that his discussion of his scholarly aptitude does not end when his formal studies do. He incorporates evidence of his learned and still acute mind throughout the text and even into depictions of his experiences on opium. De Quincey's erudition is as much essential to his illustration of his identity as is his status as an opium-eater. While ambivalent in the end about the benefits and costs of long-term opium eating, his emphasis on his erudition is certain and unceasing. In "De Quincey's Crazy Body," Paul Youngquist explains the connection De Quincey draws between opium and cognition, further securing De Quincey's value of his cognitive skills and abilities. Youngquist writes that for De Quincey:

> If transcendental philosophy is a destroyer, opium is an agent of reconstruction-described in terms not merely cognitive but also radically, irreducibly physiological. When representation cedes to eating as the means of evaluating health, the body becomes the material ground of the various operations Kant called cognition. With the apocalypse of the world within, De Quincey suspends the old opposition of body and mind. Cognition occurs materially for him, the effect as much of incorporation as of sensation. (351)

According to Youngquist, De Quincey's ingestion of opium works to collapse a divide between mind and body. In this way, De Quincey's claim that opium provides "the mental faculties" with "the most exquisite order, legislation, and harmony" (73) gains credence.

De Quincey claims to have originally tried opium to cure a rheumatic head cold. He asserts that at first his later dependence on opium results from the ongoing stomach pains he developed as a young man after he left school. During this time, when he is seventeen years old, as he lives on the streets and in abandoned houses in London he suffers from stomach pains due to hunger; yet when he tries to eat he cannot. Later, as an opium-eater he draws a connection between the deprivation and the physiological pains starvation caused and his use of opium as a panacea. Youngquist reads the hunger that caused the pains that require opium as "this gnawing hunger bespeaks neither simple physical privation nor existential malaise but a mode of agency that evaluates life by incorporation … Opium affirms life materially, corporeally, and hence has a 'marvelous agency'" (100). Youngquist elaborates on opium as agent, commenting that "opium eating does not so much satisfy hunger as revalue it, put it to work" (351-2). Youngquist depicts opium as a master or director and modifier of De Quincey's hunger. Opium alters the worth of hunger allowing it to transform from something in need of satiating, into something with value that can and must work. In other words, hunger changes from a need to a provider as it is "put to work" by opium. What was once a lack or deficiency now becomes a producer. Through opium's agency, it delivers agency to hunger; paradoxically it is the pains of hunger that play an active role, a role of agency, in initiating De Quincey's daily use of and addiction to large quantities of opium. Youngquist asserts De Quincey's "preternatural hunger requires something other than food to

assuage it, some direct physical stimulus to concentrate its agency" (352). Opium serves to concentrate hunger's agency.

Finally, Youngquist explains that "forced by hunger to ponder the fate of eating, De Quincey becomes the first philosopher of bad digestion. His daily diet of opium arises as much out of its material agency as its psychotropic effects, not merely to assuage but also to turn productive" his ongoing and extraordinary stomach pains (352). Opium not only allays but also finds a use for De Quincey's stomach pains. Something negative, stomach pains, requires the use of opium to alleviate the pain that necessitated the opium in the first place. Further, the pains gain agency through opium, and opium theoretically is no longer necessary. This period, however, is transitory; the opium's efficacy will wane and as it does the stomach pains will return. As the stomach pain revives, so does the need for opium. The repetition inherent in addiction becomes clear as De Quincey reaches the point when "from [1813] the reader is to consider me as a regular and confirmed opium-eater, of whom to ask whether on any particular day he had or had not taken opium, would be to ask whether his lungs had performed respiration, or the heart fulfilled its functions" (88).

The repetition of De Quincey's addiction as paralleled to an act as blandly but necessary a part of life as breathing illustrates the mundane attitude that surrounded opium during De Quincey's life in nineteenth century England. But how did something so loaded with connection to the East manage to be so unthreatening? In understanding the views of De Quincey's society on opium, it is useful to consider the history of the development of these views as well as the

history of the use of opium in England. According to Martin Booth in *Opium: A History*, opium "has been used by man since prehistoric times and was arguably the first drug to be discovered" (Booth 15). In 3400 B.C., opium was farmed and harvested in lower Mesopotamia (Booth 15). While the Sumerians intentionally grew poppies, Booth points out that since poppies appear without human processing, opium use "almost certainly predates the discovery of alcohol which requires a knowledge of fermentation" (Booth 15). In Europe, opium use precedes and continues through the Middle Ages and gains popularity in Britain in the eighteenth century. At this time, doctors begin to approach opium scientifically. Booth explains:

> George Young, in his *Treatise on Opium* published in the 1750s, and Dr Samuel Crumpe, in his *Inquiry into the Nature and Properties of Opium* in 1793, indicated the main features of addiction and touched upon the problems of withdrawal, but neither showed any sense of moral condemnation for either medicinal or recreational use. Crumpe went so far as to admit he had taken opium frequently and experienced its euphoria: there was no suggestion he took it to treat an ailment. (33)

By the mid 1800s in England this attitude had begun to change. According to Berridge:

> In a large family, a harassed mother would send the eldest child ... out shopping [for opium]. With such a system, there was often an instinctive bond between vendor and purchaser. The small corner

> shops, even pharmacist's and druggist's businesses in areas where most sales were in pennyworths, did not see themselves as a group separate from their customers. There was a relationship of mutual dependence, which often resulted in a barrier of evasiveness presented to an outsider. Several told the *Morning Chronicle* reporter investigating Manchester conditions in 1849 that they knew nothing of the drug while "several of them had their windows covered with announcements of different forms of the medicine which they were cool enough to declare they did not deal in." Many accepted that some, at least, of their customers would be dependent on opium. If a large quantity was asked for, it was the custom to ask if the purchaser was in the habit of taking the drug and was accustomed to it. (31)

The bond that developed between these opium sellers and their customers and that excluded people from outside of the community parallels the methods and attitudes of drug dealers in the U.S. in 2011. Today, while certain drugs are thought to be easily attainable through small-time dealers, it is not uncommon for dealers to refuse to sell their product to unknown buyers. Dealers like doctors, rely on referrals or "connections." Many dealers will not sell to people who come to them without a connection; the risk of selling to an unknown buyer is too great. Police officers posing as customers and buyers without connections cannot be trusted not to pass along the dealer's contact information without permission. Further, dealers are often loath to sell to those outside of their communities

because they have developed the relationship of "mutual dependence" Berridge describes above.

Also, in contrast to Booth's discussion of how Crumpe never mentioned taking opium medicinally, Berridge points out how, one hundred years after Crumpe, "working people were relying on opiates purchased in this way to deal with a whole range of ailments. They were a remedy for the 'fatigue and depression' unavoidable in working-class life at the time" (31). By bringing in the issue of class and medicine, Berridge reminds the reader of De Quincey's first time using opium and that it was recommended to him as a quickly obtainable and inexpensive cure for rheumatic pains. Berridge continues to link medicinal use of opium with the working class, as she comments, the opiates:

> acted as a cure-all for complaints, some trivial, some serious, for which other attention was not available. Medical herbalists and botanists, untrained midwives and self-trained doctors were used by the poor. For the most part, ailments were dealt with on the basis of community knowledge; and there was often positive opposition to the encroachment of trained doctors. It was in this situation where opium came into its own. It was, for instance, widely used for sleeplessness. Many working-class consumers appear to have followed this advice. (31)

While De Quincey developed his addiction to opium as a member of the upper educated class, his stomach pains that result from his period of living impoverished and starving on the streets of London, recur as an adult and serve as

the catalyst for his later addiction. It is interesting to note the linkage between the physical suffering that his poverty caused and De Quincey's later repeated experience of those stomach pains as a member of the upper class.[10] As a member of the upper class, despite his access to food and doctors, De Quincey blames these recurring stomach pains for his addiction to opium. In a convoluted way, De Quincey links his addiction to opium to poverty; despite his present-day comfortable life, he draws a map back to his days of starvation as the cause for his dependence on opium. While opium was not yet considered a negative and only lower class habit, De Quincey highlights poverty as the impetus for his opium addiction.

Coming Back To What? Repetition, Not Return

In arguing that De Quincey anticipates a more traditional vision of addiction and that through this very anticipation he offers a new and surprisingly humanizing vision, it is necessary first to explain some of the differences between the more conventional definition of addiction and the innovative one drawn, in part, from the subtext of De Quincey's narrative. Offering a definition of addiction informed by both present psychological, psychiatric and neuroscientific analyses of the phenomenon as well as by narratives of, memoirs on, and literature about addiction is critical to this study. Such definitional work depends upon and reiterates a disparity between the normative definition and the one I glean from beneath the surface of De Quincey's narrative. Critical to this definition is a reconception of the pattern of return that has consistently been

associated with addiction. Changing the view of the pattern from one of returning or "coming back" to viewing this pattern as one of repetition, underscores the impossibility of there being a stable "original" to which one may return. Repetition requires committing an action again and again. It does not assume that in committing the same act over and over again the experience or result will remain the same. And it is through an articulation of this quality of repetition and an eventual understanding of this fact that addicts can learn to recognize that no original exists to which they might return or "come back."

The slippage that occurs in repetition is therefore acknowledged; we cannot expect the same results if we repeat one action. If we forget both to do the laundry and to take out the garbage one day, these actions, or inactions, will not produce any major repercussions. However, if we repeat that behavior every day for six months, we will face serious repercussions; perhaps, we will be evicted, have our children taken away, lose friends, face jail time or forced psychiatric hospitalization, and lose our jobs. Through repetition, acts add up and this is understood. In returning or "coming back," there is a presumed "back" to which one imagines returning. But the past does not stay the same, and the belief in an everlasting sameness is misguided and potentially harmful to addicts. When Alcoholics Anonymous states, "keep coming back" it hierarchizes the place or situation to which one returns; and in doing so implicitly constructs an original that will be the same whenever one returns to it. Such a set-up promises

something that AA cannot deliver. It promises a sameness and standardization that repetition does pretend to offer; this sameness is not about the alcoholic who returns to AA, it is about AA. Repetition is about the person's pattern of repetition and their committing the same act, and not simply about the act. For even the most innocuous acts can become harmful and potentially fatal when repeated *ad nauseam*.

Many addicts recall with nostalgia the first time they used a drug. Addiction quickly proves that no matter how they may repeat the details of that experience, one can never achieve that first feeling; the "original" no longer exists as a viable option and never did. On the repeating model then, the person experiences differences in response to unchanging behavior patterns, and by focusing on people's patterns of repetition we prioritize the *person* over the specific act. In contrast, the idea of return or AA's slogan to "keep coming back" promises an unchanging, positive experience that will match up with an addict's first time at AA every time thereafter. The stability that AA promises in return for the addict's return clearly proves impossible to provide. While the meetings may follow a set structure, the participants and their relationships with sobriety and addiction constantly shift. People who are in recovery in AA may achieve years of sobriety, and come back to the next meeting high or drunk. Because of AA's contention of the fragile nature of sobriety, a person who returns to AA may find that from one meeting to the next, his sponsor has gotten drunk and ended a

five or ten year period of sobriety. This AA is not the same AA that the addict first attended. Because AA emphasizes the labile nature of addiction and the necessity of constant and on-going working of the program, it produces a community led by and consisting of recovering addicts that is particularly erratic.

It is also necessary to consider the possibility that no original high exists. Further, even if there was an original high, it may be impossible to repeat or reach that high again. If no authentic original exists, then repetitive attempts to achieve it are doomed to reinforce an addiction because the addict cannot regain an experience for which there is no true or unique first high. De Quincey's clarity in recalling the first time he tried opium may simply be fantasy. He has been an addict repeating the same patterns of abuse of opium and perhaps his recollection consists of the best aspects, feelings and dreams that he experiences throughout all of his years of using opium. According to Curtis Perry's "Piranesi's Prison: Thomas De Quincey and the Failure of Autobiography," "the problem is one of agency. If the narrator's mind is possessed by some extra-conscious agent (opium or an unconscious), then one can never trust the constructions of his voice: it is always possible that they are merely the projections of an agency beyond their author's conscious control" (810). Perry too questions whether the reader can trust De Quincey's narrative because, in part, of the agency he associates with opium. Here, Perry appears to at once question De Quincey's authority and reliability as a writer, and paradoxically accept without question the agency that

De Quincey ascribes to opium. For if Perry and the reader cannot trust De Quincey because of the agency opium has over De Quincey, Perry is actually buying into De Quincey's repeated claim that opium is the hero and agent of his *Confessions*. Has De Quincey written the script for addiction memoirs to come? And, in so doing, has he introduced the problem of locating agency with the object of the addiction at the cost of removing any agency from the addict? Further, following this pattern, the addict, lacking agency and attention, clearly is reduced to addict-as-identity, as the object-as-agent erases or precludes the possibility of a multiplicitous, complex and fluid identity that consists of more than its relationship with the drug.

More significantly, however, has De Quincey written the narrative of addiction that introduces the script and the role that addicts are to perform? Because of the lack of authenticity that Perry identifies and the lack of the possibility of an original high, does De Quincey require of himself and of addicts who follow, the repetition of attempts to repeat the first high? Because of the slippage involved in performative attempts to reproduce, in this case, to reproduce the first high, repetition instead of return represents a constitutive aspect of addiction. Addicts repeat behaviors in order to perform the role of addict as De Quincey writes it. It is in these performances that necessarily cannot repeat identically that the slippage or ambivalence reveals the inauthenticity of the original because the original comes from either, as Perry asserts, an unreliable

narrator or because the original comes from a narrative that is still only one of many depictions of addiction. The value of viewing the performative repetition of addiction is that it highlights the difference in playing a role or appropriating a role in order to subvert and present a new version of the role versus performing a role to reify a pattern or habit that has been required of the role. A performative repetition of the role "addict" that subverts some of the limiting and harmful qualities viewed as "natural" to addicts can powerfully appropriate and exaggerate the negative and dangerous qualities associated with addicts in order to reveal the socially constructed nature of these "truths" of addicts, and finally to deconstruct and eliminate these "truths."

Perry addresses the repetition in De Quincey's *Confessions* that supports the importance of thinking about addiction and repetition in general. He points out how this is particularly evident, "in 'The Pains of Opium' when De Quincey compares his dreams to a series of engravings by Piranesi," and that "the pictures, as described by De Quincey, act as an obvious and elegant analogue for De Quincey's own art, for the 'Gothic Hall' depicted in the engravings replicates itself endlessly" (812). Here, Perry identifies a pattern of repetition in the content of De Quincey's work. The occurrence of repetitive images is endless. The same "Gothic Hall" replicates "*itself*" without stopping. Interestingly, Perry describes the replication as within the power of the image itself. The replication or repetition has agency, as does opium for De Quincey. However, De Quincey's

role as author/authority in including an image ceaselessly or repetitively cannot be ignored. While De Quincey provides opium with agency, the reader must recall that it is De Quincey who possesses the agency to choose where to place it. As an addict and author, he decides how to write the text and what he wants to bestow with this agency.[11]

Regarding the agency of the repetition, Perry continues and presents an at least tripling pattern of repetition. He notes:

> As J. Hillis Miller points out, this image of endless repetition--which he calls "the Piranesi effect"--is itself repeated time and again throughout De Quincey's autobiographical writings. Moreover, in De Quincey's account Piranesi himself is seen in the engravings, climbing a staircase within each of the eternally repeated structures. Again, the analogy between the Piranesi engravings and the *Confessions* is clear: each piece locates the artist within his own imaginative "architecture." These engravings, acting as analogues for De Quincey's own project, problematize the architectural metaphor with which the "preliminary confessions" began. Not only do they propose a structure of repetition in place of the simpler architectural model proposed by the narrator of the "preliminary confessions," they also call into question the distance established between that narrator and his tale. (812)

Perry identifies De Quincey's use of repetition at both the structural level and content level. Further, he suggests that the repetition model as a replacement at the structural level would encourage the reader to question the distance that Perry identifies between De Quincey and his "tale." Perry not only identifies this distance, but he also proposes that De Quincey intentionally starts the "Preliminary Confessions" with "narrative distance" to award himself with "textual mastery" (812). Perry argues that as we read further into the *Confessions* and the "Pleasures of Opium" section De Quincey loses any early "textual mastery" because of the status of "key" that he awards to opium (812-13). Perry explains:

> Opium itself patterns everything. The "key"-that which renders experience explicable-is no longer located within the limits of rational, textual control. Instead, it is presented here as the ordering principle for an extraconscious agency; rather than being discoverable within the autobiographical project, the "key" is now revealed to be just beyond the limits of conscious comprehension .... As in the case of the architectural metaphor, the narrative voice begins by claiming for itself a clinical distance from the experiences of the confessing subject only to find that distance compromised. (812-13)

While De Quincey may be read as losing "textual mastery" as opium becomes the "key" to his text, the fact that opium takes over the agency of the narrative supports his claims of opium as the "hero" of the tale and De Quincey as subject

to opium. Perry, in reading this shift in "textual mastery" from De Quincey to opium, in fact, supports the validity of my claims that despite De Quincey's placement of agency with the object of his addiction, he starts the *Confessions* in possession of its "textual mastery." Further, this concretizes the paradoxical and tension-filled nature of De Quincey's role as subject and agent as well as his relation with opium. For he at once asserts his power over the text, and by implication over the drug; he can write the tale as master and as author deflate his agency over the drug while retaining agency over the written text. This constant shifting in authority can be read as a pattern that De Quincey repeats throughout his tale, and that originates in the "Preliminary Confessions" portion of the work.

Repetitions of Shifting Agency

Building on his tendency to repeat the transfer of authority encourages an examination of the ways that identifying such a pattern of repetition in De Quincey's "Preliminary Confessions," reinvigorates a reading of his *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*. A reading that requires attention to the whole or the who of the individual over a whole life and not merely an individual's time as addicted is clearly in line with what De Quincey himself puts forth. As noted earlier, while he and the title of his work profess to recount his confessions as an English opium eater, much of the narrative, in fact, focuses on his life before using the drug. What is particularly striking about this move of De Quincey's is that his reiterated attempts to explain his motivation for including so much of his pre-opium-using-period indicate an anxiety about what it means to be an opium-eater. For De Quincey's repeated attempts to justify his inclusion of his pre-

opium-eating days suggest that De Quincey recognized that his decision to do so would be questioned. Moreover, he perpetuates this line of questions by drawing attention to his anxiety about including the "Preliminary Confessions." His anxiety regarding this earlier portion of the text in some ways seems warranted. Why delay, and arguably marginalize, the dirty details of his actual opium use? Presumably it is in these details that we will hear the promised *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*; moreover aren't these the very details that qualify De Quincey to call himself an opium-eater? This suggests a reading of De Quincey as at once revealing the tendency to confer onto him an identity solely based on his relationship with opium, while he was simultaneously contesting this identity-conferring power of addiction. In other words, De Quincey confirms the tendency towards essentialization based on addiction while he writes against such essentializing tendencies.[12]

It is also interesting to consider the importance of the title of De Quincey's text. In titling the work *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, De Quincey misrepresents his means of using opium. He is not an "Opium Eater" because he does not actually eat opium. Instead, like most English people who took the drug, he drinks laudanum, a combination of alcohol and opium. He informs the reader that his highest intake of opium per day is "eight thousand drops of laudanum" (89). By measuring his opium use through drops of laudanum, he becomes like any English opium user. By the time of his *Confessions*, 1821, the English commonly took laudanum for medicinal and recreational use. In contrast, the eating and smoking of opium was associated with Turkish and Asian users.

Despite taking opium in the European form of laudanum, De Quincey's opium-induced and horrifying "oriental dreams" involve his disgust with and fear of Turks and Asians and their ways of life. The terrifying imagery of De Quincey's oriental opium dreams originates in oriental images that he has been exposed to since his childhood. Yet, De Quincey, always something of an outsider or pariah chooses to distinguish himself from other English users of opium by claiming to eat opium like the "barbaric" and unintelligent Turks and Asians created out of his and his country's racism and imagination.[13]

Why ally himself with those he saw as uncivilized and frightening? Throughout the text, he repeatedly disparages the intellect, lifestyle and creatures of Asia and Turkey. He goes to pains to establish his intelligence and to contrast it with that of Turkish opium-eaters who sit "on logs of wood stupid as themselves" (77). As long as his manners, perspective and intellect remain intact or "English," he can afford to present himself as an "*English Opium Eater*" in his title. For he knows that by including "English" in his title, he maintains enough "Englishness" to present his method of ingesting opium as other or non-English. The title reveals how important being English is to De Quincey and his audience. He distinguishes himself from opium eaters across the world because he does not want readers to view him as more similar to an Asian opium eater than he is to an English laudanum drinker. De Quincey's confusing titling of himself as an "English Opium Eater" aligns himself with both England and the East. In doing so however, he winds up othering himself from the English, because they and he were not opium *eaters.* His terming of himself as English locates him in the

typically English position in which those who actually eat or smoke opium, meaning those from the Orient, are positioned as other. De Quincey, as Said states of nineteenth century Europeans cannot avoid participating in Orientalizing, but why does he distance himself from the English laudanum drinkers and connect himself to those very people that he others by inaccurately describing himself as an opium eater? Eva-Lynn Alicia Jagoe answers this question by asserting that it is "the insecurities, embarrassments, and failures that define De Quincey's own personal identity and, by extension, his sense of national identity as well" (24) that cause him to identify both against and as other.

Since even in the title of *Confessions* he depicts himself falsely, De Quincey puts his integrity as a confessor in jeopardy.[14] A confession implies the telling or revealing of something new; usually what is revealed has not previously been told. Confessing may also suggest the telling of the truth of an event or narrative once concealed. In this sense, confessions may afford opportunities to admit guilt. For De Quincey, including "*Confessions*" in his title suggests something new will be read. However, the title already misconstrues his relationship with opium and in doing so denies the "truth" of his situation. Ironically, throughout the text De Quincey works to convince the reader that he is not withholding anything significant; seemingly he willingly confesses his actions. As he cares about being perceived as English, he also cares greatly about maintaining his audience's sympathy for him and therefore, their interest in his text. He is willing to misrepresent how he takes opium and he stresses his need to be known as English—again he embraces a paradoxical construction of English

"propriety" and Asian "barbarity." Clearly the importance of De Quincey's nationality reads as a priority in the title as it redefines the concept of an opium eater. Berridge captures the response to the 1821 publication of De Quincey's *Confessions* when she writes, "the literary reaction was one of excitement" (53). She continues on and addresses the importance of nationhood in the text:

> The *Confessions* were the first detailed description of English opium eating ... the majority of descriptions available up to that time had presented the habit, along with opium smoking, as a particularly Eastern custom. De Quincey's eulogy of the drug proved the reality could be different, and that English opium eating was possible. (Berridge 53-4)

Viewing De Quincey's work as making "possible," an English opium eater shows at once the racism inherent in the title, as well as the importance of appropriating the figure of the opium-eater as one of England's own. Here we see the romanticization so common in responses to personal narratives of drug addiction even in De Quincey's time. He and Coleridge competed about who had taken more opium or whose tolerance for it was greater. Opium use was associated with British Romantic writing and was considered to imbue writing with imaginative imagery.[15] Through these responses to opium eating, the drug and the figure of the English opium eater are both eventually romanticized. The romanticization of English opium-eating causes such excitement to accompany a text detailing the miseries De Quincey suffered at the hands of opium. While he tells us of its "pleasures," in the end he warns, "the moral of this narrative is

addressed to the opium-eater ... if he is taught to fear and tremble, enough has been effected" (115).

Self-Representation and Personal Responsibility

Looking at an addict who at once confirms the identity conferring potential of the notion of addiction, while simultaneously undermining it, is especially interesting in De Quincey's case. As Alethea Hayter notes in her introduction to the text, "the very possibility of becoming addicted to [opium] was not generally recognized" (14).[16] So, if for De Quincey, the possibility of identifying as an addict was eliminated, then, in some sense, he again forces us to relinquish a distinction between addicts and non-addicts or active addicts and pre-addicts.[17] He writes so that we look at individuals as individuals and not as determined by one aspect or period of their identity. However, De Quincey goes even further in a blurring of the boundaries between addiction and sobriety.[18] For while "addiction" may not yet have been available to De Quincey, as Alina Clej points out, he also "avoided the term 'intoxication,' suggestive of the vulgar pleasure of wine drinking (i.e., 'inebriation'), and used instead terms with religious connotations, such as 'ecstasy' and 'divine enjoyment,' which had come to describe sensuous experience in Romantic poetry" (271). De Quincey goes out of his way to resist a vision of opium use that might easily slip into vulgarity or suggest that there is something inherently negative about opium addiction or his patterns of using it.

Turning to De Quincey's explicit explanation as to his motivation for including his patterns before using opium, we begin to see both his anxiety about doing so and the ways their inclusion points toward a definition of addiction that includes De Quincey's own non/pre-opium-using period. De Quincey's response to the hypothetically posed question as to why he begins his narrative before his opium use is threefold. His first answer is to gain the reader's sympathy; his second is to help the reader understand the significance of his opium dreams; and, his third is to make himself an interesting enough sober confessor to hold the reader's attention when he reaches the discussion of his opium use (33). He first responds by claiming that unless he answers the question "How came any reasonable being to subject himself to such a yoke of misery, voluntarily to incur a captivity so servile, and knowingly to fetter himself with such a sevenfold chain," his readers will not respond with sufficient sympathy (33). In this description of himself as subject to opium, in which he attempts to gain the sympathy of the reader, De Quincey simultaneously uses language laden with references to the physical and emotional state of slavery. The "*yoke* of misery" (emphasis mine) suggests the heavy wooden frame originally used to harness two working animals together to pull heavy weight or to plow a field; such yokes were also attached to enslaved individuals. For De Quincey, the yoke is heavy with negative emotion, but the yoke alone is by design physically heavy as well. As he elaborates on his situation as an opium addict, his language continues to evoke

images of slavery, we read as he must "voluntarily," seemingly another of his paradoxes, "incur a captivity so servile," and slavery is, in part, servile captivity. Finally, he confirms his status as a slave to opium with the image of himself "fetter[ed]" with "a sevenfold chain" (33). Here, De Quincey attempts to use pathos to arouse pity in the reader. Heavy chains were used to keep slaves from escaping and to highlight the fact that they were not seen as persons but as dangerous animals requiring heavy chains to control them. Ironically, his description of himself as subject to opium, is so evocative of the state of slaves that he actually risks losing the readers' sympathy or pity. At a time when most English supported imperialism and slavery, if he draws a picture of himself that too closely resembles that of a slave, whom many of his contemporaries saw as unsympathetic, he becomes an unsympathetic figure as well. De Quincey makes himself so slave-like that he becomes unsympathetic to readers who consider colonizing and slavery acceptable.

It is striking the way that De Quincey's description here anticipates the strict legal definition of addiction that Leon Wurmser provides, writing "*Addictus* is a legal term referring to somebody being given over, surrendered, awarded; '*addicere liberum corpus in servitem*' means to sentence somebody who is free of servitude because of indebtedness; '*addictus*' is one in bondage because of debts" (44). Clearly, De Quincey captures the dependence and seeming willingness to submit integral to this definition. Interestingly, Wurmser presents this as an antiquated definition that does not capture the more important patterns and

characteristics of addicts. It is in De Quincey's ventriloquism of his readers' concern that he anticipates the traditional theory of addiction and Wurmser's legal definition. For De Quincey's question is based on the premise that he is in fact a "reasonable being," and unless he were to provide evidence of his "reasonableness," or details of his pre-opium using period, his very ability to reason and perhaps his very being might be easily contested. He would become, at the very least, an unsympathetic figure, and, potentially, jeopardize his own subjectivity.

The straw-horse that De Quincey constructs in his first explanation of his "Preliminary Confessions" is at work in his second and third responses as well, and all three of his explanations distance De Quincey from the concern by implying that this move is a rhetorical strategy. In his first response, he complicates his authorial voice when he writes that if he did not respond to the question discussed above it would "interfere with that degree of sympathy which is necessary in any case to an author's purposes" (33). Not only is there a measured amount of sympathy, providing a very technical and formulaic tone, but this quantity is also consistent among authors; it is for an "author's" purposes, that De Quincey professes to address. He becomes, then, an opium-eater; describing his days of and before his opium use, who also plays out the anxiety of the opium-eater-writer by distancing himself from his role as author and implying that this is not De Quincey in his particularity. Rhetorically he continues to draw attention not simply to his own anxiety about his inclusion of the "Preliminary Confessions," but also to the text's own production. For in his second response

he states simply, "as furnishing a key to some parts of that tremendous scenery which afterwards peopled the dreams of the opium eater" (33). Here we see his use of logos as well as pathos—for he needs to explain the "real" sources of his visions or dreams when using. Again, the implication is that these earlier details serve a strategically rhetorical purpose; they work to insure or elicit the understanding and empathy or pathos of the reader. De Quincey concretizes his anxiety about his inclusion of the "Preliminary Confessions" in his final response. As this response begins, it seems that De Quincey continues his argument for the earlier text's rhetorical importance; he claims that he includes the earlier details in order to "[create] some previous interest of a personal sort in the confessing subject" (33). De Quincey recognizes the tendency of readers—or their ethos—to assume that once he begins using opium, his identity will no longer be of interest because it will already be assumed to be understood. He will be reduced to his status as "opium-eater." In order to secure that this tendency does not play itself out, De Quincey includes the "Preliminary Confessions" as an attempt to humanize the addict and/or complicate the notion of an addictive identity; again his concern is ethos. He knows that a holistic view of his identity requires including his life before opium use; if the reader sees De Quincey only during his years of opium use he or she will likely reduce De Quincey's identity to that of an addict.

Preliminary Repetitions and Addictions

Paradoxically, it is in his "Preliminary Confessions" and not during his

opium addiction that his status as addict is confirmed. Returning to the importance of "repetition" in a new definition of addiction, suggests that De Quincey gives himself away as an addict before he has even tried opium. Identifying De Quincey's patterns of repetition (both his linguistic repetitions and his narrative ones) present in his description of his pre-opium days solidifies De Quincey's status as addict (so in fact there was something addictive about him all along), precisely during the portion of the text that is supposedly included to complicate or combat an essentialized version of the addict. For De Quincey reads as at once conscious of and as writing against the identity-conferring potential of an opium-eater. At the same time, in fact, we can identify De Quincey's addiction before his opium use. So, while resisting conferring this essentializing power onto a definition of addiction, it is necessary to assert that De Quincey's addiction precedes his actual opium use.

First, it is critical to remember that at no point in the writing of the *Confessions* is De Quincey not an addict; he has already been addicted, thus his brain has been permanently altered. He cannot write from a period before he was an addict. So, in turn, evidence in the "Preliminary Confessions" that points to his status as addict does not in fact require or even suggest that De Quincey's addiction was with him since childhood. Rather, such evidence points to the ways that De Quincey the English opium-eater understands and constructs his addictive behavior as being present since childhood. Second, it is important to remember that De Quincey includes the "Preliminary Confessions" in order to secure the interest and sympathy of his readers. He at once wants to remind the reader of his

own particularity and resist the notion that the label "opium-eater" is self explanatory, while he also reiterates his own addictiveness through the earlier portion of the text. The distinction that can be drawn from this reading of De Quincey underscores the difference between claiming that he was an addict all along and claiming that because he was an addict all along we know all we need to know about him. In other words, De Quincey reminds us of the difference that can be drawn between arguing for a strain of stability in identity, which amounts to the reduction of all of those categories of commitments, roles, beliefs, actions and perhaps addictions that contribute to an ever-shifting identity.

Almost from the beginning, the "Preliminary Confessions" starts to make clear how De Quincey works to construct his addiction as existing before his opium use began. The language that De Quincey often employs to recount his period of supposed non-addiction, strikingly foreshadows contemporary metaphors of addiction. Very early on in the "Preliminary Confessions," we are told of De Quincey's guardian, that "[De Quincey's] unconditional submission was what he demanded" (37). Again, De Quincey must voluntarily submit to demands—just as he submits to the voluntary "yoke" of opium. Of his time at school he writes "that we never do any thing consciously for the last time (of things, that is, which we have long been in the *habit* of doing) without sadness of heart" (37, emphasis mine). His being at school is a "habit" and it is in part in response to his guardian's requirement of "unconditional submission" that he leaves school. Of the morning he departs school he captures the paradoxical quality of addiction as well as the need of a "medicine" to calm his nerves. He

writes, “to this agitation the deep peace of morning presented an affecting contrast, and in some degree a medicine” (38). He wakes with nervous agitation and contrasts the “peace of morning” to his agitation; moreover, like opium the “deep peace of morning” works as a “medicine” or drug. While he relies on the natural quiet morning to treat his agitation, the fact that De Quincey uses the word “medicine” to describe the calmness the morning bestows on his nerves, shows how De Quincey the author immediately turns to drugs as a remedy. Through language laden with metaphors of drugs and addiction, De Quincey begins to construct his schooling as the addiction that must be broken. However, in his 1856 revision of the *Confessions* it is no longer the addictiveness of school that instigates De Quincey’s departure, rather it is an inexplicable drive that reads strikingly like an addiction:

> In the United States the case is well known, and many times has been described by travellers, of that furious instinct which, under a secret call for saline variations of diet, drives all tribes of buffaloes for thousands of miles to the common centre of the ‘Salt-licks.’ Under such a compulsion does the locust, does the lemming, traverse its mysterious path. They are deaf to danger, deaf to the cry of battle, deaf to the trumpets of death. (167-68)

De Quincey goes on to claim that his decision to leave school was the result of this sort of blind and irresistible instinct. He writes, “Such an instinct it was, such a rapturous command—even so potent, and alas! even so blind—that, under the whirl of tumultuous indignation and of new-born hope suddenly transfigured my

whole being" (168). So no longer is school a habit to be broken, rather it has become this compelling instinct that requires De Quincey's departure. De Quincey's revision shifts the emphasis from the object of his addiction, school, to the drive within De Quincey behind the addiction.[19]

Again, however, De Quincey in replacing a previous explanation with his revised assessment that it was not the addiction of school that he was resisting, but rather a naturalized instinct that drove him to move on, complicates his conception of addiction. For a compelling force that makes one blind to death presumably is an internal and inexplicable one. On this reading, then, De Quincey seems to hearken back to traditional definitions of addiction that claim that addicts are defined solely by their addiction. This drive is so compelling that De Quincey admittedly puts his life at risk to meet it. However, at the same time, De Quincey does not want to imply that because this compulsion is so overwhelming, his own responsibility for his action is somehow mitigated. So, simply because he submits to his instinct to leave school does not mean that he does not bear responsibility for his own addiction.[20] It seems that this combination of being governed by instinct and taking personal responsibility for his addiction is precisely where the tension lies between De Quincey's vision of addiction as progressive versus traditional. Underlying conceptions of addiction that assume its identity-conferring nature, is the assumption that if we claim that addiction is a natural instinct for some individuals, we also claim that because it is

natural those individuals' responsibility for their actions as addicts is *amplified*.[21] De Quincey sets up a new paradigm of responsibility and addiction in which the tendency for addiction is both naturalized yet does not alleviate or expand the responsibility of the addict.

So in terms of De Quincey, then, it is important to bear in mind the way he contributes to new conceptions of the relationship between addiction and responsibility. While De Quincey constructs his drive to leave school as a natural instinct that he almost cannot resist, he does not imply that because the force of this drive is so compelling he somehow does not bear personal, moral or legal responsibility for his actions. In fact, because he places his decision to leave school as the catalyst for his opium use and he repeatedly reminds us that he bears the weight of his status as an opium-eater, De Quincey serves as an illustration or case of how re-visioning addicts as at once naturalized and responsible can in fact be empowering. Interestingly, De Quincey asserts his responsibility for his actions repeatedly; he does not want to be denied the power of the privilege of responsibility. Reading his repetitive reminders of his responsibility is indicative of the way De Quincey portrays his addiction as preceding his opium use. In other words, while he overtly claims his responsibility, this is, in part, a response to the notion that if the addiction does precede his opium use, then it is somehow not his fault. In the 1856 revision, he writes:

> I repeat again and again, that not the application of opium with, its

> deep tranquilising powers to the mitigation of evils, bequeathed by my London hardships, is what reasonably calls for sorrow, but that extravagance of childhood folly which precipitated me into scenes naturally producing such hardships. (147)

First, De Quincey acknowledges and produces his own repetition for the purpose of recuperating opium. De Quincey here admits to his own pattern of repetition in order to prove that he is in fact responsible for his own addiction. While his repetition works to assure that he not shirk his responsibilities, it at the same time produces him as an addict. Second, while De Quincey reiterates that it was "childhood folly" that holds the blame for his addiction and that thus he is responsible for his actions, his actual hardships arise "naturally." So, while he embraces his responsibility for his opium use and its pains, he simultaneously wants to reproduce the hardships as the natural or unavoidable result of his actions. De Quincey, here, really forces a sophisticated understanding of addiction. He combines an understanding of the naturalness or determinism of certain aspects of addiction with the crucial maintenance of his own autonomy.

It is this balance between the determinism of addiction and the necessity of maintaining one's own subjectivity that seems to be at the crux of De Quincey's work. While he can be seen as simply providing us with a standard language of addiction, to view him this way is a vast underestimation of his understanding of the paradoxes and complexities of the phenomenon. De

Quincey at once offers an understanding of the starting point of discussions of addiction while he highlights the limitations of such discussions and leads us to more productive or fertile ground. Isn't this how addictions work? It still remains unclear whether De Quincey first tried laudanum to cure physical pains or for the experience associated with the easily accessible and in De Quincey's words "celestial drug" of "divine enjoyment" (71). Doesn't he at once enter into intoxication in order to both hone his sights and simultaneously blur them? Further, don't experiences of intoxication also act as places of entrapment and liberation? Of escape and imprisonment? In these senses then discussions of De Quincey must take into account the convoluted and necessarily paradoxical experience of addiction and drug use itself. And to say then that De Quincey paradoxically constructs a new vision of addiction while he simultaneously lays the groundwork for the traditional vision of addiction accurately confirms the repetitive and unpredictable pattern of addiction. De Quincey sets up the modern or traditional view of addiction, but what is remarkable about De Quincey's contribution to the study and understanding of addiction is the way he revises the very view of addiction that he originates. De Quincey's paradoxes allow him to both invent a standard definition of addiction while refining important traits of this definition; in turn, his revision lets the reader follow the evolution of De Quincey's at first traditional or standard definition of addiction into the more humanizing definition of addiction to which De Quincey leads his reader in the

end.

Notes

[1] While De Quincey introduces the concept of modern day addiction in the 1800s, the *term* "addiction" is not introduced until 1906, in reference to opium. See Douglas Harper, "addict" 2001.
[2] It is interesting to note that his understanding of these issues of addiction can be read as revising some of the limitations in today's more dehumanizing views on addiction in the United States.
[3] In Michael Warner's "Whitman Drunk" in his *Publics and Counterpublics.* New York: Zone, 2002, he writes that Whitman understood and argued for the importance of viewing an addict as more than just an addict. Quoting Whitman Warner writes, "Whitman ... pleads by this logic for humanity: 'The drunkard, low as he is, is a *man*" p. 274.
[4] For more on the relationship between De Quincey and the public use of and writing about opium experiences see Alethea Hayter's *Opium and the Romantic Imagination.*
[5] The distinction between behavioral addictions and physiological addictions is made clear when Elias Aboujaoude points out in *Compulsive Acts* , behavioral addictions include "kleptomania, gambling, and Internet abuse,"(X) as well as trichotillomania, and compulsive sexuality (43). These behavioral addictions are often termed "impulse control disorders," and essential to them is "the overwhelming anxiety people feel before the behavior and the relief that comes with the behavior ... these behaviors are experienced as pleasurable, although the patient is also guilt-ridden and tortured by them and is usually well aware of their negative consequences and the long-term damage they cause" (Aboujaoude 43).
[6] The term "addict" is used as an adjective from 1529 meaning "delivered, devoted," from the Latin *Addicere* meaning "to deliver, yield devote," but also "adjudge, allot." The modern sense is really *self-addicted*, "to give over or award (oneself) to someone or some practice 1607. The noun is first recorded in 1909 in reference to morphine. *Addicted* in modern sense (to narcotics, etc.) is first attested in 1906, in reference to opium (there is an isolated instance from 1779, with regard to tobacco).
[7] See Daniel O'Quinn's interesting article "Who Owns What: Slavery, Property and Eschatological Compensation in Thomas De Quincey's Opium Writings" in *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* Vol. 25, No. 3, Fall 2003, U of Texas P. pp. 262-92.
[8] For more on the concept of a voluntary slave see St. Augustine's *Confessions.*
[9] For more on the role of the loss of Kate Wordsworth see Cecilia Hennel Hendricks' "Thomas De Quincey, Symptomatologist." *PMLA*, Vol. 60, No. 3 (Sep., 1945), pp 828-40.
[10] For a continued discussion on De Quincey's suffering during his time living on the streets and his later opium addiction see Julian North's "Leeches and Opium: De Quincey Replies to 'Resolution and Independence' in 'Confessions of an

English Opium-Eater'" *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 89, No. 3 (Jul., 1994), pp. 572-580. See pp. 572-3.

[11] E.S. Burt elaborates on De Quincey's presentation of his authority. He writes, "Instead, his I is dependent on the other for its emergence. This is true at the anecdotal, experiential level, as represented in the story, as well as in discursive, performative terms" (869). See his "Hospitality in Autobiography: Levinas Chez de Quincey," *ELH,* Vol.71, No. 4 (Winter, 2004) The Johns Hopkins UP. pp. 867-897.

[12] For more on this dynamic see Michael G. Cooke's "De Quincey, Coleridge, and the Formal Uses of Intoxication" *Yale French Studies*, No. 50, Intoxication and Literature, 1974. p.27.

[13] For more on the implications and causes of De Quincey's culturally accepted view of the East, see Edward Said's *Orientalism* especially his chapter "The Scope of Orientalism" pp. 29-110.

[14] For more on De Quincey's reasons for confessing see Barbara Hodgson's *In the Arms of Morpheus* p. 38. She comments "Confessing seemed to be aside effect of opium addiction" (38).

[15] In Chapter Three I discuss how marijuana use is similarly associated with hip hop and rap music today. Marijuana has become an almost inextricable aspect of hip hop and rap music and culture. In my discussion of Tupac Shakur I address how marijuana use is thought to endow rap lyrics with authenticity as well as how Shakur recognized the potential problems the abuse of marijuana causes.

[16]It is important to point out that the medical concept of addiction was not defined until later in the century. For more on this point see Berridge and Edward's *Opium and the People* especially pp. 150-70.

[17] While De Quincey does not and linguistically cannot identify as an addict, he does, however, feel the need to justify to the reader his motives for including an account of his pre-using life. In this way, he both maintains a distinction between a using addict and a "pre-addict," while also asserting that the period prior to addiction is necessary to an understanding of the period of active addiction.

[18] John Barrell identifies a similar tendency of De Quincey's in his desire to collapse the boundaries between classes. See Barrell's *The Infection of Thomas De Quincey*.

[19] In Chapter Two we see this focus on the drive behind the pattern of addiction again and again with Sylvia Plath. Interestingly, Plath's obsession with her addictive drive also comes out in relation to academic and intellectual demands.

[20] Regarding responsibility and addiction, J.R. Eisner points out in "Social Cognition and Comparative Substance Abuse" the shift from a naturalized view of addiction to one of illness is often behind the disempowerment of an addict or of the assumption that addicts take no responsibility for their actions p. 277.

[21] I see the amplification of addicts' responsibility in the ways the legal system treats behavior associated with drugs. According to the official Massachusetts Department of Transportation Registry of Motor vehicles website, http://www.mass.gov/rmv/suspend/chap94c.htm, being caught with a syringe and needle, it does not specify whether the paraphernalia is clean or not, results in a

one year revocation of one's driver's license. This kind of punishment seems overly harsh and a rather indiscriminate way of making drug "related" offenders take responsibility for their actions.

Chapter Two

Wanting Everything and Nothing: Analyzing Patterns of Addiction in the Journals and Letters of Sylvia Plath

> Perhaps when we find ourselves wanting everything, it is because we are dangerously close to wanting nothing.
>
> Sylvia Plath

> Perfection is terrible, it cannot have children.
>
> Sylvia Plath
> "The Munich Mannequins"

> Why is telling her of a success so unsatisfying: because one success is never enough: when you love, you have an indefinite lease of it. When you approve, you only approve single acts.
>
> Sylvia Plath
> *The Journals of Sylvia Plath*

Unlike Thomas De Quincey, Sylvia Plath never wrote a work in which she overtly "confessed" to a life of addiction. De Quincey's inclusion of the details of his youth and life prior to his use of opium as a means of explaining the reasons for his eventual addiction to opium serve as the foundation of his *Confessions*. As we have seen, in his text De Quincey delays recounting his days as an opium addict and for much of the text focuses on his exceptional intellectual and academic prowess. He links the demands placed on him to perform extraordinarily well academically to his eventual decision to abandon his formal studies and to live a life of starvation and stomach pains on the streets, with his later addiction to opium. Whether Plath suffered from an addiction as De Quincey did is not what is at stake in this study. The focus of this chapter lies in the interpretation and analysis of the patterns of addiction that occur in Plath's journals and letters.[1] Such analysis aims to contribute a substantive new interpretation of these writings to the field of Plath studies. Some of these

patterns of addictive language are touched upon in the previous chapter and some are introduced in this chapter. For example, despite Plath's missing identification as an addict, she shares with De Quincey the parental and self-imposed demands of exceptional academic achievement. Plath alerts her reader to her response to these demands by writing repeatedly about her internalization of the need for perfectionism that De Quincey does not; for Plath it is never enough to meet, or even surpass exceedingly high academic, social and intellectual expectations.

Moreover, Plath's journal and letter writing includes ongoing discussions in which Plath ruminates over why she cannot stop feeling ruled by her escalating perfectionism. Significantly, Plath writes of her interest in the patterns that govern her sometimes disabling and often frustratingly unattainable requirements of herself. Therefore, what stands out in Plath's journal and letter writing about her perfectionism is not simply her need to be perfect, but Plath's struggle to understand *why* she feels this need as well as how or whether she can rein it in. Her writing highlights her preoccupation with her inability to break the patterns that secure her ongoing and increasingly exigent goals. In addition to securing the connection between this perfectionist demand and the language of addiction she uses to describe it, the chapter includes a discussion of the following areas in which Plath relies on language imbued with patterns of addiction: self-destructive incessant patterns of repetition; the constant need to up the ante; the primacy of her concerns expressed through patterns of addictive language; and, her insistence on the idea that the self is fluid, not static. This chapter will not deal with Plath's poetry, but instead through a reading of Plath's journals and letters it provides a

different view of Plath's language that sheds light on the patterns of addiction in her personal writing.

Sylvia Plath has long been considered a troubled figure. The labeling of her poetry as "confessional," the publicizing of the details of her marriage to and separation from British poet Ted Hughes, the censoring of her work, and her episodes of depression and eventual suicide have only contributed to her status as troubled, in numerous senses of the word. Plath scholars have encountered problems negotiating her biographical details and ways to address her body of work, as well as a crisis regarding what it means to need to examine her biography when examining her writing.[2] Susan Van Dyne addresses the biographers' damaging desire to ignore "Plath's agency as woman and artist" and points out, "biography underestimates Plath's habits of conscious reinvention and lucid artistic control of her poetry" (5). Van Dyne suggests "rather than assume that Plath is an unusually autobiographical writer, we need to understand that she experienced her life in unusually textual ways" (5). Van Dyne's distinction holds merit; Plath's writing has been viewed as lending itself to autobiographical interpretations in ways the words of other writers have not. As we will see, ongoing complications have arisen when writing about Plath's life and work on various levels.

Because early writers on Plath including M.L. Rosenthal and A. Alvarez deemed her poetry "confessional,"[3] biographers and literary critics alike have often conflated Plath the author with the subject of her poetry and fiction. Indeed confessional poetry, according to Rosenthal, who first coined the term, consists of

poems in which "the private life of the poet himself, especially under stress of psychological crisis, becomes a major theme" (15). Deborah Nelson contends that, "labeling Plath a confessional poet intensified her remoteness from the events and struggles of her day" (27). Nelson implies that in terming Plath a confessional poet, undue attention was placed on the details of her personal life while inadequate attention was given to her politics. Other studies of Plath, including those by Ted Hughes, Marjorie G. Perloff, and M.D. Uroff, have both questioned and rejected Plath as a confessional poet. In part quoting Lowell, Perloff writes, "'There's a good deal of tinkering with fact,' Robert Lowell said of *Life Studies* in a *Paris Review* interview, but of course 'the reader was to believe he was getting the real Robert Lowell'" (Perloff 47). In contrast to Lowell's intent to produce the "real" Lowell in his poetry, according to Uroff, Plath, using parody and hyperbole, "stands outside and judges her characters, drawing caricatures not only of madness but of its counterpart, hysterical sanity ... she began to let the characters speak for themselves" (107). The critical distance between poet and character that Plath strives for and achieves sets her poetry at odds with the confessional mode. The desire of many critics to read Plath's poetry as autobiographical is understandable because of the closeness of the details she includes in her poems to the details of her life. While her poetry includes Rosenthal's "stress of psychological crisis" Plath employs literary devices to ensure that her characters remain distinct from herself.[4]

In addition to the problems posed by being categorized as a confessional poet, Anne Stevenson's infamous 1989 Plath biography *Bitter Fame* underscores

the difficulty of writing about Plath's life due to the censoring of her writing. Because Ted Hughes and his sister Olwyn Hughes possessed the rights to Plath's writings, they repeatedly censored and made limiting demands of Stevenson, and of the many other writers, including Jacqueline Rose, interested in writing about Plath and her work. Janet Malcolm reveals the damage Olwyn Hughes caused to Stevenson's biography, commenting, "the book became known and continues to be known in the Plath world as a 'bad' book" (10). Malcolm elaborates:

> The misdeed for which Stevenson could not be forgiven was to hesitate before the keyhole. "Any biography of Sylvia Plath written during the lifetimes of her family and friends must take their vulnerabilities into consideration, even if completeness suffers from it," she wrote in her preface. This is the most remarkable---in fact, a thoroughly subversive---statement for a biographer to make. (10)

Here, it first seems that in Malcolm's view, Olwyn Hughes's control of Plath's estate jeopardized the integrity of Stevenson's biography. Malcolm continues to express her disapproval of Stevenson's quote, of Stevenson's appeasement of Olwyn Hughes's censoring, and finally of Stevenson's willingness to work closely *with* Olwyn:

> To take vulnerability into consideration! To show compunction! To spare feelings! To not push as far as one can! What was the woman thinking of? The biographer's business like the journalist's, is to satisfy the reader's curiosity, not to place limits

> on it ... relatives are the biographer's natural enemies; they are like hostile tribes an explorer encounters and must ruthlessly subdue to claim his territory. (10-11)

However, after seemingly criticizing the Hughes's demands and Stevenson's text and work with them, Malcolm writes, "As the reader knows, I, too have taken a side—that of the Hugheses and Anne Stevenson—and I, too, draw on my sympathies and antipathies and experiences to support it" (177). While Malcolm and Rose, for example, take very different approaches to Plath's life, work, and responses to the Hughes's demands, both address not only the common need to examine Plath's biography when considering her literary work, but also the very usefulness and point of literary biographies in general.[5]

In "This Is Not a Biography," Rose describes the crux of Ted Hughes's chief complaint about her original and important text *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath*, commenting, "the issue sharpened into a dispute about biography and forms of interpretation, about how a poet can or should be read" ("Biography" 5). Ted Hughes as a poet may have understood the differences between poet and subject, poetry and reality, but as a husband and father he conflates the two. In support of this claim, Rose explains that Hughes's principal objections to her text focused on "the distinction, central to the book, between fantasy, or the realm of poetic exploration, and reality, or the lived experience of Sylvia Plath, a reality I claim to know little, if anything, about" ("Biography" 5). In the name of protecting his adult children, he attacks Rose's reading of Plath's poem "The Rabbit Catcher" because he claims that in her interpretation of the *poem* Rose

implies that *Plath* was a lesbian. Revealing his homophobia, his inability to distinguish Plath from the subject of her poem, and his literal mindset that disallows interpretation, Hughes writes, "Only when one of those students or readers [of Rose's book] meets Sylvia Plath's actual children will the connection be made: this is the son or daughter of that freaky woman who was like that" (qtd. in "Biography" 10).

In addition, Rose, Jo Gill and Suzanne Matson each identify a divide in critical approaches to Plath between pathologizing, diagnostic approaches and liberal feminist oriented ones.[6] In *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath,* Rose both confirms this divide, as well as elaborates on the problems of each of the two approaches. First, addressing the diagnostic, pathologizing camp she writes:

> There are those who pathologise Plath, freely diagnose her as schizophrenic or psychotic, read her writings as symptom or warning, something we should both admire and avoid. Diagnosis of Plath tends to make her culpable—guilt by association with the troubles of the unconscious mind. The spectre of psychic life rises up in her person as a monumental affront for which she is punished. (*Haunting* 3)

Rose's reading of psychologically diagnostic commentaries on Plath as necessarily making Plath "culpable" and subject to punishment may accurately reflect the attitudes of certain pathologizing approaches. As Matson corroborates:

> To contain the pathology within Plath is to make it safe, to allegorize her failures as a woman, and finally to blame her for her

> deep sensitivities and pain. The other interpretive extreme is to take literally the metaphors of victimization we find within her work and seek to name the victimizer—Otto Plath, Ted Hughes—in order to read monstrous sadism and torture into the behavior of the two men she undoubtedly loved the most. To do so is still to contain the pathology within the individuals of a particular family romance, and to stay firmly fixed on the binaries of guilt and innocence—thereby keeping ourselves as detached but titillated spectators of the Plath story. (32)

While both Matson and Rose understand pathology or diagnostic approaches as limited to construing Plath as blameworthy for her pain and psychic troubles, they ignore the possibility of reading Plath as incorporating patterns of addiction into her writing that provide a new way of looking at Plath's writing. This specific approach does not aim to neatly restrict Plath to a diagnosis of addict; instead, it searches out and analyzes the ways the patterns of addiction in her writing add to a new area of focus in Plath studies. In this way, Plath avoids being placed on Matson's "firmly fixed ... binaries of guilt and innocence" (32). Further, as with any reading of Plath that adopts a specific topic of analysis, one that reads for her language of addiction does not negate or replace all other readings of Plath.

Interpreting Plath's writing through descriptions of behavior and language of addiction highlights new interpretations of patterns in Plath's written life. Both Rose's and Matson's observations about the dangers of psychological diagnoses of Plath in fact *support* the stigmas attached to psychological illnesses. In reading

Plath's writing of patterns of addiction as illuminating points in popular definitions of addiction that need to change, one does not have to link the stigmas too often associated with addiction to Plath. The patterns exist in her writing and in her *descriptions* of her addictive behaviors. Taking a new approach to Plath's writing through a reading of patterns of addiction in her journals and letters introduces a different approach for literary critics to learn from and such an approach does not add up to pathology. One goal of interpreting the recurring descriptions of addictive acts and addictive patterns of language that she creates in her journals and letters is to illustrate the ways in which focusing on a "pathological" pattern of language, the pattern of addiction, highlights the power of using a "pathological" term in a non-identity defining way.

It is interesting to include Rose's defense of her own approach in which she reads Plath as a fantasy. In her introduction she explains:

> This book starts with the assumption that Plath is a fantasy. But, rather than seeing this as a problem, it asks what her writing, and responses to it, might reveal about fantasy as such. Far from being an obstacle, fantasy will appear in what follows as one of the key terms through which Plath's writing, and responses to her writing can be thought. (*Haunting* 5)

What happens if we replace the word "fantasy" with "addiction"? In reading Plath as writing through and of patterns of addiction, this study rejects the idea of diagnostic or pathological language as necessarily restrictive or problematic, and instead it looks at what Plath's language of addiction tells us about addiction and

about Plath's writing. Rose defends her reading of Plath as a fantasy as not an obstacle but rather that "fantasy will appear in what follows as one of the key terms through which Plath's writing ... can be thought" (5). Likewise, addiction appears in my study as "*one* of the key terms through which Plath's writing ... can be thought" (5, emphasis mine). The changes to ideas and language used about addiction that my study proposes allow addiction to work as a new "key term" that opens the door to a different way of reading Plath's writing. Like Rose's "fantasy," "addiction" is not intended to eradicate other terms that prove key to reading Plath's work; it aims to introduce another critical approach to the varied and vast field of Plath studies.

As Rose goes on to explain that the pathologizing approach has produced the second of the two "antagonistic camps" in Plath criticism, a feminist approach, ironically she implies that a clinical or pathologizing approach *is* productive. A feminist view of Plath *results from* the pathologizing views of Plath. She clarifies the relationship between pathologizing critical approaches and feminist ones, writing:

> Feminism has rightly responded to [pathologizing] forms of criticism by stressing the representative nature of Plath's inner drama, the extent to which it focuses the inequities (the pathology) of a patriarchal world. But in so doing, it has tended to inherit the framework of the critical language it seeks to reject. Plath becomes innocent---man and patriarchy are to blame. More important, psychic life is stripped of its own logic; it becomes the pure effect

> of social injustice, wholly subservient to the outside world which it unfailingly reflects. Anything negative or violent in her writing is then read as a stage in a myth of self-emergence, something which Plath achieved in her poetry, if not her life --- an allegory of selfhood which settles the unconscious and ideally leaves its troubles behind. (*Haunting* 3-4)

Rose identifies the limitations of feminist approaches to Plath in their tendency to locate Plath's "troubles" as caused by patriarchy and "social injustice" and as dependent upon patriarchal critical techniques and vocabularies. Rose asserts here that looking toward outside sources "strips" Plath's "psychic life" "of its own logic" (*Haunting* 4). Interestingly, she also conflates "the inequities of a patriarchal world" with "pathology," making a reader question the distinction she first draws between pathologizing approaches to Plath and feminist approaches (*Haunting* 3). In doing so, however, Rose leaves open the possibility that like the "inequalities of a patriarchal world," problems or complications of pathologizing approaches can at least be addressed with the goal of remedying them.

Further, Rose identifies herself as a feminist in a response to Ted Hughes and comments on the problems of:

> too rigid assumptions about what men and women are (that men for example are the sole source of violence) or about the relationship between reality and fantasy (that if something appears in a fantasy it implies that that is what is inevitably going on).

> This is not unrelated to Hughes's own critique of overliteral interpretations of Plath's poetry. ("Biography" 8)

Rose's feminism and its resistance to the "too rigid assumptions" can be easily applied to the assumption of the rigidity of diagnostic or pathologizing interpretations. As renowned Plath scholar Helen Vendler comments in her most recent book, "Plath sees a possibility of a style that is not a present-tense outburst resembling a jet from a living wound but a style that is more *diagnostic*" (60, emphasis mine). According to Vendler, "Plath has, then, found in her late style two manners of taking the 'last look': the blood-jet cry of the 'I' and the posttraumatic analysis by the eye" (61). Plath's ability to incorporate a "diagnostic" style as well as an exuberant and less "rigid" style of "outburst resembling a jet" of blood within one poem, "Berck-Plage," supports the claim that diagnostic approaches do not preclude multiple or dynamic readings. Vendler also makes clear that she is looking at a "diagnostic *style*" in Plath's writing. Analyzing Plath's writing for patterns of addiction may easily and accurately be reconceived of as analyzing moments of Plath's writing that follow a "style of addiction."

While linking changes in traditional definitions of addiction to Plath's written patterns and descriptions of addiction, it is critical to resist the universalizing tendency of many diagnostic examinations or gestures. In line with this approach is Van Dyne's description of Plath's awareness of the mutability of her identity that writing affords her, "in her letters and journals as much as in her fiction and poetry, Plath's habits of self-representation suggest that she regarded

her life as a text she could invent and rewrite" (5). As critics, we can follow Plath's view and writing of her life and identity as a text to be rewritten and reread. To identify one self, pattern or moment against, above and at the expense of all others is not the goal of this work and is at odds with the fluidity of Plath's written and lived self.

In her "Forward" to *Ariel: The Restored Edition* Plath's daughter Frieda Hughes expresses her disgust with the way Plath's poems have been "dissected over and over, the moment that my mother wrote them being applied to her whole life, to her whole person, as if they were the total sum of her experience" (xvii). Through her disgust with such a dissection of her mother's work, Frieda Hughes elucidates precisely the goal of this study. As addicts too often face the tendency of having their identities reduced to their addictions, Hughes here illustrates the same trend in critics' treatment of Plath through their analysis of her poetry. The U.S. has been struggling with its view of addiction as either a choice deserving of punishment, often coming in the form of long prison terms, or as fitting a disease-based model in which certain addicts gain medical and psychological attention.[7] This disjunction reveals the benefits of a medical perspective. In viewing addiction as a disease, those who meet some of the characteristics of addiction and whose lives it disrupts should receive the same clinical help as people with other medical conditions. The evolving and recent changes in the medical assessment of addiction inform a more nuanced application of the revised traits of addiction that can be culled from Plath's written patterns of addiction. As addiction has just recently, in January 2010, gained medical parity in the U.S., the

risks of a disease perspective of addiction appear minor compared to the potential empowerment an addict experiences when recognized as equally blameless and shameless as a person with brain cancer; such a balancing viewpoint results from understanding addiction as an illness.

This kind of medicalizing discourse that resists the tendency to universalize, instead provides relief which leads to emancipatory power or potential; the addict finds him or her self liberated from the blame and shame that accompanies the logic that responds punitively to patterns of addictive behavior. An addict, when viewed clinically, like a cancer patient, gains the ability to recognize, as Plath does, that his or her identity consists of many more selves than simply that of "addict." In the past, the tendency toward universalizing through medicalization has been twofold. To argue that Plath's writing includes descriptions of addictive behavior as well as follows linguistic patterns of addiction that meet some of the criteria of an addiction is not to say that all addicts are alike or to claim that Plath's entire and shifting identity could or should be reduced to that of "addict." It is necessary to my study of addiction and writing that patterns of a language of addiction can at once provide a lens that bears potent interpretive power, while simultaneously the label of "addict" illuminates only one aspect of an individual's identity and agency.

Writing the Fluid Self

Viewing responsibility and moral and personal agency as empowering to any individual sheds a different light on an addict's relationship with and desire

for responsibility and agency. Certainly, in examining how Sylvia Plath writes herself in her journals and letters as addicted to her need for perfectionism, and dependent on her despair, one would not make the claim that she was not responsible for her writing. The writing results in part from her unceasing and frustrated pondering of her requirement of perfectionism and from her dependence on her despair as a subject about which to write; these needs contribute to one subjectivity from which she wrote and through which she wrote herself into being. It is, however, essential to recognize that this reading of Plath's writing of herself as addicted is just one interpretation of Plath's writing of herself. As Gill points out regarding Ted and Frieda Hughes's concerns about interpretations of Plath's writing:

> There is an anxiety in both of these cases about reading—about the power of other people's reading to yield unexpected, proliferating and uncontrollable meaning. Interpretation is experienced (or interpreted) as an attack on the hermetic body of the text, on the singular truth which is presumed to hide there. What I wish to argue here is that the text—Plath's poetry, any writing—cannot exist outside of such interpretative processes; it does not "mean" alone. To suggest that it does is, arguably, to deny the complexity and richness of the writing, to reduce it to singularity. (xv)

The beauty of Plath's poetry and fiction as well as her written versions of her selves that appear in her journals and letters is that they reflect Plath's

understanding of and frustration with the idea of having to play one role or find her "true" voice.

In her personal journal Plath writes, "Next year I will not be the self of this year now. And that is why I laugh at the transient, the ephemeral; laugh while clutching, holding, tenderly, like a fool his toy, cracked glass, water through fingers.... Delude yourself about printed islands of permanence" (*Journals* 130). At nineteen years old, Plath, in this entry from the summer of 1952, illustrates her awareness of the fluidity of identity and mocks those who believe that writing, or "printed islands," can achieve permanence in meaning. Her words make clear that not only does she believe that *writing* is prime for numerous interpretations that resist a desire for singularity, but moreover so is "reality." In another journal entry from 1952 she writes:

> Each person, banging into the facts, neutral, impersonal in themselves (like the Death of someone)—interprets, alters, becomes obsessed with personal biases or attitudes, transmuting the objective reality into something quite personal.... Hence, "Thinking makes it so." We all live in our dream-worlds and make and re-make our own personal realities with tender and loving care. And my dream-world—how much more valid, how much nearer to the truth is it than that of these people? (*Journals* 121)

"These people" are Christian Scientists, and Plath continues on to distinguish her reality from theirs, commenting:

> If they believe in life-after-death in a heavenly spiritual realm, what a pleasant solace it is for them—and what individual strength it can give. Why quibble ... For *me* it isn't so.... But for them it *is* so, absolutely so. And thus individuals construct absolutely real dream Kingdoms—paradoxically all "true" although mutually exclusive at the same time. My dream-bubble of reality exists side by side with theirs, without breaking fragmentarily asunder. (*Journals* 121)

By arguing for the coexistence of contradictory "truths" and "realities," Plath goes so far as to validate the importance of "truths" with which she disagrees. Hence, she allows for the various interpretations of not only her writing but also of the "reality" of her *life* as she writes it.

Plath's awareness is clearly in line with this study which aims to highlight the ways that a broader yet refined perspective on addiction is potentially liberating and empathic, while also calling attention to the limitations of viewing an individual as consisting of merely one steadfast and easily categorized identity and living one "real" or "true" life. For instance, analyzing Plath's writing for patterns of addiction, sheds light on her textually formed individuality, the complexities and multiplicities of such an identity, and her perception of herself as her own creator as a writer. Despite the contribution such an outlook makes to Plath studies, such a reading resists any claim that this particular lens ought be privileged over others or viewed in a totalizing way. Considering Plath's use of patterns of addiction in her writing, augments but does not discredit or invalidate

existing studies of and perspectives on Plath's work. For part of this study is in fact to assert that while a certain pattern of behaviors and traits in line with my reading of addiction exist in Plath's written work and in her written descriptions of her life, these patterns and traits represent just one part of, just one interpretation of, and just one of Plath's tropes and approaches to her writing. In other words, to view Plath as depicting patterns of an addict in her writing and in her descriptions of her behavior, or to view any addict, as merely an addict or a collection of some of the traditionally definitive characteristics of an addict, is not simply reductive and harmfully identity-conferring, but, more important, a misrepresentation of that individual. It is imperative to take Plath's use of addictive patterns in her descriptions of herself as one of many roles she wrote and played and not as more or less weighty than the others.

In discussing Plath through my reading of addiction, I offer a re-visioning of key points in traditional theories of addiction that is informed by present psychological and neuro-scientific analysis of the phenomenon. Critical to this perspective is reconceiving the pattern of *return* that has consistently been associated with addiction as a pattern of *repetition*. Attending to additional definitional work, I address the complexities of medicalization and put forth an argument for addiction's prime status as a term that is particularly ripe for clarification, and turn to reading Plath's writing through this lens. I focus on three strands of her writing of her life, all of which underscore her obsessive and addictive language and the addictive patterns of behavior that she used this language to describe: her writing of her awareness of her unceasingly repetitive

desire for intellectual and aesthetic perfectionism and its public recognition; her self destructive written responses to and her addictive relation to her depression; and her writing about her quest to meet the demands of compulsory heterosexuality. An analysis of these three strands of her life shows how to rupture identity-conferring definitions of addiction and, in turn, forces us to consider the ways that re-visioning Plath's writing as portraying Plath as aware of these patterns of addictive behavior and language add to both the field of Plath studies, and to the lives of today's addicts. Debates over diagnostic approaches to Plath run rampant through Plath studies; in contrast to Rose's groundbreaking text opposing pathologizing Plath is David Holbrook's 1976 text in which he diagnoses Plath as having a schizoid personality. I argue that clinical or diagnostic approaches do not have to be totalizing; this is one reading of one pattern of language that Plath uses and while it aims to contribute a different focus on and interpretation of her writing, it resists the idea that there is one "correct" interpretation of Plath's work.[8]

Perfectionism as Addiction

One of the strongest patterns of Plath's addictive language that describes her predilection towards addictive behavior and one that exists in so many written descriptions of her life that it qualifies her shifting written self to be read as relying on patterns of addiction, is her self-imposed and life-long requirement of academic, intellectual, social, aesthetic and personal perfectionism. In studying interviews with and biographies of Plath, as well as her journals and letters, her

writing of her excessive drive to reach an impossible level of intellectual, aesthetic and personal "success" and achievement (measurable for Plath through public and/or literary recognition) represents one characteristic of her written self that is present from a very young age until her suicide. It is as if through the process of the publication of her writing she would develop a "respectable" or "meaningful" identity; here we see the patterns of addiction in her language. Clearly, she was also motivated by her need for her writing to earn professional and pronounced respect and praise.

Interestingly, the excessive weight placed on her to publish and the role of writing in her desire for perfectionism has been commented on by not only a wide range of critics and biographers, including Paul Alexander and Connie Ann Kirk, but also by Plath herself. At age sixteen, she despairs, "Never, never, never will I reach the perfection I long for with all my soul—my paintings, my poems, my stories—all poor, poor reflections" (*Letters Home* 40). Immediately the repetition of her language here stands out: "never, never, never" and "poor, poor" emphasize the repetition central to addictive patterns.[9] She also recognizes, as she writes it into her identity, the impossibility of her present self to find satisfaction in meeting the goals of her younger self, noting that "Five years ago, if I could have seen myself now ... with seven acceptances from Seventeen & one from Mlle.... That is all I could ever ask!... And there is the fallacy of human existence: The idea that one would be happy forever and aye with a given situation or series of accomplishments" (*Journals* 151). Here, Plath generalizes her dissatisfaction with meeting and perhaps exceeding her previous goals and ascribes it to "human

existence"; everyone, according to Plath, suffers from the impossibility of feeling happiness upon achieving one's goals. Plath's need to generalize her behavior makes sense; she does not want to make herself out to be aberrant or deviant, as addicts are too often considered. Further, her constant upping of the ante perspective parallels an addict's increasing need for greater amounts of the object of his or her addiction. As a heroin addict's tolerance grows so does the amount of heroin needed to ward off the sickness of withdrawal.

Likewise, as Plath writes, as she attains one level of success it no longer satisfies, and she wonders, in the words immediately following the quotation above, "Why did Virginia Woolf commit suicide? Or Sarah Teasdale – or the other brilliant women – neurotic?...If only I knew. If only I knew how high I could set my goals, my requirements for my life!" (*Journals* 151). Clearly the frustration of surpassing the goals she set for herself five years ago and not feeling satisfaction penetrates deeply into Plath's mind, mood, being and language. Again her writing includes addiction-like repetition—"If only I knew. If only I knew" (151). Her need to know why "brilliant women" commit suicide indicates both the urgency and pain of her inability to find satisfaction, as well as her view of herself as connected to a writer as exceedingly prolific, iconic, innovative and talented as Virginia Woolf. In writing about her interest in "brilliant women" writers who have committed suicide and her need to know why they did, Plath clearly lays the scaffolding for her building of herself as both brilliant and destined to die by her own hand. There is also something jarringly romanticizing about her discussion of the concurrence of brilliance and suicide in creative

women. Similar to an addict who believes he is at his most creative or artistic when intoxicated or high, Plath links suicide with accomplished women writers in an at least neutral or perhaps even positive way; she needs to know why they committed suicide. She cares about the connection between "brilliant women" writers and suicide and in asking about such a connection, she, in turn, constructs and reifies a connection. Her suggestion that such suicides result from the writers being "neurotic" resonates with meaning, as Plath, in the same journal entry, writes of her future, wondering, "will I submerge my embarrassing desires & aspirations, refuse to face myself, and go either mad or become *neurotic*?" (*Journals* 151, emphasis mine). Her worry that by hiding her "embarrassing desires" she will become mad or neurotic indicates that she identifies herself as a potential Virginia Woolf.

Plath's language depicts her as at once grandiose and naïve in her need to know why these women writers commit suicide and also in her need to know "how high" she "could set [her] goals ... for [her] life!" Her need to know the highest point at which she can set her goals contradicts her earlier conclusion on the "fallacy of human existence," meaning "the idea that one would be happy forever and aye with a given situation or series of accomplishments" (151). In addition, needing to know the highest point at which she can set her goals provides an example of how addictive patterns emerge in her writing; for we recognize that it is impossible for a highest point to exist. Her dissatisfaction with achievements that she once believed would bring her satisfaction dissolves as she meets those achievements. She first declares that human existence is defined by

the impossibility of happiness after meeting one's goals. Yet she continues on to express her belief that if she could just know where to set her goals she would be satisfied upon meeting them. Again, the contradiction parallels the words of addicts who believe that if they could have just one more hit of the object of their addiction, they could then "get clean" on their own terms. But for Plath and many addicts, there is no amount of the object of their addiction or height at which to set her goals that will end in satisfaction or end the dependency on the object of addiction.[10]

She confirms both her belief that one's self is constantly shifting and her tendency to set her goals at impossible heights as she urges:

> Stretch to others even though it hurts and strains and would be more comfortable to snuggle back in the comforting cotton-wool of blissful ignorance! Hurl yourself at goals above your head and bear the lacerations that come when you slip and make a fool of yourself. Try always, as long as you have breath in your body, to take the hard way, the Spartan way – and, work, work, work to build yourself into a rich continually evolving entity!
>
> (*Journals* 47)

Here, Plath encourages *one* (note that she does not, even in a journal entry, write in the first person) to set goals that are just out of reach and acknowledges the pain and scars that one accumulates as one fails to meet such goals. Despite her awareness of the "comforting cotton-wool of blissful ignorance," Plath advises taking the difficult path. Interestingly, her word choice of "the comforting cotton-

wool of blissful ignorance" evokes both a warm bed with cotton and wool bedding into which one could "snuggle back," as well as a drugged brain intentionally blurred by a "cotton-wool" or cottony-headed haze of "blissful ignorance." While she directs her reader but not herself to avoid the comfort of ignorance and to, note the repetition, "work, work, work to build yourself into a rich continually evolving entity," she allows that giving in to a desire to avoid others and to avoid challenges will lead one to a life of stasis. As is the case with many addicts, Plath has periods of clarity in which she knows the benefits of the less self-destructive path, but also like many addicts Plath writes of her frustration with periods when she cannot take her own advice or when she can only follow an exaggerated, repetitious and scarring version of her advice. For wouldn't it be enough to suggest taking a challenging yet not necessarily Spartan route and to work instead of having to repetitiously "work, work, work"? Again, Plath's overly ambitious demands read as indicative of her lifelong language of patterns of excessive or addictive, repetitive and self-injurious behavior.

The repetition of words represents one of Plath's uses of addictive patterns of language. Patricia Hampl identifies the following occasions of Plath's repetition of words in selections from three poems. Hampl writes:

> Without the saving metaphor of the journey, which does not explain anguish but rather gives it location and renders it potentially useful as metaphor, the road of the pilgrim soul is an exhausting conveyor belt, leading nowhere but back to a repetition of wished-for embarkations. Even that stylistic habit of Plath's, the

> triple beat of the verb or of central nouns, seems, in this light, not so much an insistence as an impotent stutter: "It can talk, talk, talk.... Will you marry it, marry it, marry it." –"The Applicant" ... "These are the isolate, slow faults That kill, that kill, that kill." – "Elm" "Now I am milkweed silk, the bees will not notice. They will not smell my fear, my fear, my fear" –"The Bee Meeting."" (25)

Hampl illustrates Plath's reliance on a "the triple beat of the verb or of central nouns" and reads it as indicative of a problem expressing oneself through language instead of as a means of emphasis. The impotency that Hampl links to these quotations exemplifies the powerlessness of Plath to write without relying on the pattern of repetition so critical to addiction.

According to Alexander and Linda Wagner-Martin, among other Plath scholars, early in Plath's life her parents focused on the primacy of academic and aesthetic achievements. Further, the rigidly defined and time-limited relationship forced on Plath and her brother Warren with their sick father Otto in conjunction with his unexpected death focused her attention from a very young age on the Plaths' requirement of exceptional intellectual and overall performance. Wagner-Martin describes what was expected of Plath and Warren during the minimal time allotted them to spend with their father:

> Perhaps for twenty minutes in the evening, [their father] would be strong enough to see the children. Then Sylvia and Warren would show off. They discussed what they had learned that day, recited

> poems, made up stories, performed. Hardly a normal interchange, this kind of session created the image of father as critic, judge, someone to be pleased. It robbed the children of the chance to know their father in the way they knew Grampy Schober or to see him as a loving and supportive parent. (26)

This description sets Otto Plath as a critic and judge; yet, their mother Aurelia contributes to her daughter's drive to exceed the high expectations her father had held. Since Otto died when Plath was so young, the impossibility of satisfying his expectations works in tandem with Aurelia's ongoing pressuring of Plath to publish precociously.[11]

In addition, her inability to find satisfaction in attaining her goals mirrors the impossibility of satisfying her dead father's desires; she could only imagine what he might have required and therefore Plath had the freedom to keep raising the bar out of her reach each time she neared or met its height. Connie Ann Kirk describes:

> Unusual for one so young, Sylvia began sending out her poems to newspapers and magazines (probably with Aurelia's urging and help). On August 11, 1941, nine months after her father's death, young Sylvia Plath had her first publication. She was eight years old. It was a poem called "Poem," published in the children's section of the *Boston Herald*. (47)

What stands out about Kirk's quotation is the fact that at age eight Sylvia was aware of the "value" that publication bestowed on her writing, at least in her and

her mother's eyes. As Kirk suggests, Aurelia must have helped eight-year old Plath with the practical details of submitting her writing to newspapers and magazines, and even simply in helping Plath with these aspects of publication, Aurelia sent the message to Plath that even at age eight, publication was a realistic and significant goal and substantive marker of success.

Aurelia and Plath continued to focus on Plath's academic and social prowess throughout the next ten years; Plath kept track of her submissions, rejections and publications and succeeded at all levels and aspects of school. She won numerous awards in various realms of school-life; in 1950, she graduated first in her high school class in Wellesley, and won scholarships at Wellesley and Smith Colleges (the only colleges to which she applied). At this time, according to Wagner-Martin's biography, "the most noticeable trait of Sylvia's personality in 1950, as she entered college, was the relentless demand she made on herself" (60). Hampl also points out the pressure Plath places on herself as she analyzes a quote from Plath:

> It is hard to think of a poet, certainly any woman poet, who has documented an ambition as ferocious as Sylvia Plath's. Her relationship with *The New Yorker,* faithfully logged in her journal, was positively operatic ... "My baby 'The Matisse Chapel,' which I have been spending the imaginary money from and discussing with modest egoism, was rejected by *The New Yorker* this morning with not so much as a pencil scratch on the black-and-white doom of the printed rejection. I hid it under a pile of papers like a stillborn

> illegitimate baby....” She entered contests, sent off poems and stories dutifully in her SASE's. She raged and wept and castigated herself over rejections, then rose again to stuff fresh envelopes for other magazines, other contests. As everyone knows, she sometimes prevailed. (2)

Hampl recalls that in college her personal ambition to be a writer mirrored Plath’s, commenting, “I want to be a writer, and I bring more urgency to this desire than to anything I actually want to write about” (1). As is the pattern with Plath, the issue is not the need to write about a particular issue or to write a particular poem; rather, for both Hampl and Plath the ambition is to become a *published* writer.

Jo Brans, in a review of Plath’s *Letters Home*, adds analytical insight to the continuation of this pattern through Plath’s life, she comments:

> Sylvia Plath was martyred, ironically enough, by the American success saga that she lived, from all-A student to Fulbright fellow to financially independent poet at twenty-five or so. Such success is created by and carries with it a continuing and obsessive drive for perfection. (58)

While still a student at Smith College, Plath herself corroborates not only the phenomenon that these writers identify, but also employs similar language in her discussion of her desire for publication. She asks in a journal entry, “Why am I obsessed with the idea that I can justify myself by getting manuscripts published?” (*Journals* 33). As Hampl writes of the same quotation, “Even her

stunning discipline troubles her; it is not a good habit, but an addiction" (3). These depictions of Plath's need for perfection indicate a kind of movement, and the identification of perfection with publication, that suggests that *the internal force* behind her "obsessive drive for perfection" was, in fact, more important to her than *the external object* of the obsession itself. For Plath does not ask, "Why am I obsessed with getting published?" Instead, she makes clear that what is of interest to her is her obsessive belief that publication equals self worth or justification. While setting up a standard of perfectionism based on the recognition accompanying publication, she in turn creates a situation in which any failure to meet this impossible standard can easily be construed as a monumental failure; it is significant that Plath herself is more obsessed with what is at work *behind* the general obsession. The movement that exists through the above consists of three stages. First, the quotation begins by locating the trait as this "relentless demand" that Plath imposed upon herself. Next, it shifts towards Brans's contention that any sort of perfectionism will result in grand failure. Finally, the focus returns to the general question that Plath articulates: why does this *idea* (that publication brings self-worth) become an obsession?

Here, Plath's concern echoes the voices of numerous addicts. She does not focus on what these critics associate with her propensity towards setting herself up for failure by requiring of herself a level of perfection that remains impossible to reach. Rather, her concern is with how something that in and of itself should not be harmful becomes harmful once it is in her hands or mind or words. It is not the object of her addiction, or in other words, the desire for

publication, that is inherently harmful. In contrast, it is the addictive pattern of thinking and writing about her obsession regarding the object that stands out. Plath develops a critical distance between herself and her own written patterns of obsessive and addictive behavior and thinking. When one's self worth rests in achieving a goal that one cannot stop chasing, then one's language follows addictive and repetitious patterns. In Plath's writing of this incessant chasing throughout her life, it becomes clear that her interest lies in the pattern itself and in the damaging results of the pattern, but not in the object on which the pattern is focused.

Likewise, her interest in this kind of pattern proves vivid in my reading of Plath's often-cited diary entry, in which she writes, "I think I would like to call myself 'The girl who wanted to be God'" (*Letters Home* 40). Commonly, critics read this quotation as evidence of Plath's obsession with perfection; simply, she wishes she were omnipotent and perfect or like God. However, Plath carefully constructs the phrase in an at least doubly distancing way so that it is easy to read the *desire* to call herself God as the real subject of the sentence. In the sentence, Plath first distances herself with the words: "I think." In reading the sentence as securing Plath's drive for perfection, critics ignore the immediate tentativeness of "I think" and focus instead on what seems like the more obvious message. Plath continues to reinforce her own uncertainty while making what seems like an overtly certain statement as she employs the subjunctive mood with her conditional structuring of "would like."

Plath is careful here; not only does she recognize that a fulfillment of her

"likes" is something that is only hypothetical, but she concretizes her own distance from her desire by her claim not to want to *be* God, but rather, to be *called* God. Moreover, she does not request that anyone *else* even *call* her God; Plath *herself* is the person whom she maybe, perhaps wants to have *call*, but not accept as or view Plath as God. Finally, the title that she wants to call herself is "The girl who wanted to be God." It is significant not only that she sets the phrase as a title in quotation marks, again underscoring that this would fulfill a desire while simultaneously distancing the desire, but also that she uses the past tense. It is not so much Plath's interest regarding what might fulfill her desire (for she only "thinks" she "would like" to call herself this), but rather her concern for ensuring that the desire be met. The pattern that emerges, then, is simply not one of a desire for perfection, but rather a desire to have assuaged a desire—to have called herself God.

Perfectionism and Desire

It is this kind of meta-perfectionism, in conjunction with her repetition of a need to understand, fulfill or meet her desires for intellectual, aesthetic and personal perfection that supports a reading of Plath's writing as inclusive of patterns of addiction. On this reading, the object of the addiction loses significance. So, it is not simply the claim that Plath wants to be like God that makes the above quotation so intriguing and often quoted. Rather, it is that Plath's pattern of distancing herself from the very particulars of her stated desires repeats itself in such a way that she can be read as interested in her own insatiable *desiring* in a more generalized way. Plath's choice of words reveals that she is

not merely obsessed with being a straight-A student or having the power and strength of being God, she is more interestingly concerned with her own patterns of repetition and the cravings that produce them.

Likewise, it is this concern for her patterns of repetition that further solidifies this reading of Plath's language as following patterns of addiction. Leon Wurmser, a psychiatrist who has published extensively on addiction accurately poses the problem:

> What is this compelling force from within that creates such enormously destructive bondage to something on the outside? The question is not so much, "What is veiled by the curtain woven by drug effects and noisy social deviance?" Rather it is, "What is the power of self-deception that weaves its own thick curtain?" ("Compulsiveness" 44)

In Wurmser's theory of addiction, he awards the subject or addict with priority and agency. This aspect of his theory provides an essential component in arguing for a reading of Plath as writing herself in a way in which her writing relies on addictive patterns. For to deny Plath's own power as "weaver" of her own veiling curtain is to severely underestimate Plath. While Plath may be viewed as distancing herself from her immediate cravings or desires in order to stand back and assess an overall pattern of desire, this is not to say that she is not implicated in or responsible for repeating these patterns. Plath, like Wurmser, is not interested simply in what is at work behind her weaving of the curtain, or in speculating on what is the cause of the demand she places on herself, but rather

her real focus lies in her own power and what impels her to compulsively reproduce her patterns of repetition in her quest for perfection.

In turning to Plath's letters, the pressure she describes and her awareness of her perfectionistic tendencies appear clearly in her self-imposed busyness and her language of demands. In a letter to her mother dated, September 23, 1957, and written during the time Plath taught at Smith, Plath notes that she is "working on a rather devil-may-care attitude which seems best for me, as I am so overconscientious. I will never be anything less than conscientious at least" (*Letters* 326). In the same letter, she continues on to comment that she is required to conference individually with each of her 65 students "as often as possible, which I see now will take much of my time, but I want to be very conscientious about this, too ..." (326). In the same paragraph in which she writes that she is working to become more "devil-may-care," as opposed to being "so overconscientious" and admits that she will always be conscientious, she concludes by expressing her "want" to be "very conscientious."

Her language reads like that of an alcoholic expressing, first, the desire to quit drinking, or for Plath the desire to change to one who is "devil-may-care." And who, second, acknowledges his overuse of alcohol, or for Plath her being "so overconscientious." Third, she reads like an alcoholic who states that as an alcoholic the best he can imagine is his becoming a socially acceptable user of alcohol, and for Plath this goal equals her claim that she will always be "at least ... conscientious." Finally, Plath concludes the paragraph with a statement of an exception to her new rule not to be too conscientious. She allows that it is

acceptable for her "to be very conscientious about" the exception or specific act of conferencing with her students; her words bring to mind an alcoholic promising himself that "at *this* party I will make an exception and allow myself to drink." Her language and proposed actions betray the impossibility of achieving her original goal of adopting a carefree attitude; she knows she is incapable of doing so, yet she sounds very much like an addict in denial as she flippantly writes of becoming "devil-may-care."

Ironically, in the letter she goes on to describe all of her obligations and at the same time "How [she] long[s] to be busy!" (326). She notes:

> This brooding and isolation is something I must avoid. As soon as I am busy, with a hundred things to do, read, forms to fill out, I function very happily and efficiently. I am sure that as soon as I get into a daily routine, I'll find that I don't have to spend all my time on class preparation and correcting papers, and it will be a relief to know we are discussing only two stories for tomorrow, say, instead of feeling, as I do now, the abstract simultaneous pressure of the term challenging me all at once. (326)

She wants to be busy, but she needs an organized daily routine to follow to make her overly busy schedule comforting. She craves busyness, but she also depends upon the repetition of routine to satisfy this craving. In *The Addict*, Michael Stein, a professor of medicine and community health at Brown University comments:

> Addicts often refer to their drug use as a "habit." But the word *habit* suggested something routine and easy, which drug dependence never is. Most habits became drudgery, but this particular drudgery is relieved by diminished consciousness. Numbness is adaptive. (171)

As Stein describes, Plath's routine will not be easy. She finds teaching at odds with the writer in her and eventually dismisses her ideas about earning her Ph.D. and becoming an academic. Even after arranging the demands of teaching and academia into a routine, Plath feels as if her creativity has been stifled by this routine, writing to her mother, "[I] am overflowing with ideas and inspirations, as if I've been bottling up a geyser for a year" (*Letters* 336).

Addiction and/to Despair

Plath's comment about her quality of being "so overconscientious" as a characteristic of herself that she would like to change conflicts with her belief that an organized routine of busyness will free her from her "brooding and isolation" that she "must avoid." Plath similar to the addicts Stein describes wants something to help her avoid her hyperconsciousness of feeling. As Stein's addicts use drugs to escape the drudgery of addiction by however briefly achieving "diminished consciousness" and "adaptive numbness," Plath too reads as someone who is aware of her need to stop thinking too much and stop working toward the impossible goal of perfection. Moreover, like many addicts who abuse substances to avoid ruminating, Plath sees ongoing organized busyness as a way

to avoid "brooding." While the link between depression and addiction is explored in detail in the next chapter, the evidence supporting Plath's meeting the criteria of Dual Diagnosis (or having a psychiatric illness and an addiction), is striking. Plath uses an organized routine that aims to satisfy her perfectionism and overly-conscientiousness to escape her feelings of depression.[12] Like addicts who start using drugs to self-medicate the pain of a psychiatric diagnosis and then become addicted, Plath first becomes overly busy to avoid despair and depression that result in part from the impossibility of achieving the perfectionism she requires of herself. As she writes that she "must avoid" "brooding and isolation" (two symptoms and dangers of clinical depression), note her use of the term "must." She knows how dangerous these tendencies become in her; she has already made one extremely serious and well-planned attempt at suicide. And she reveals, even in her self-preserving language, her desire for perfection; in order to ensure that her avoidance of people and her ruminations do not bring her to the depth of depression that led to her previous suicide attempt, Plath employs a language that relies on the absolutism of "musts."

Absolutism and perfectionism, taken together, conspire to make life an all or nothing kind of game; it is win or go home. Similar to addicts whose repeated attempts at recovery fail, Plath sets her self up to lose. The binary thinking of a system in which you and others "must" succeed in certain arenas or complete specific acts, amplifies any failure to satisfy those "musts." Plath adopts this absolutism in times of emotional and psychological crisis, as well as in conjunction with her need for academic and aesthetic success. In a journal entry

written when she was twenty-three years old, she describes:

> I am physically exhausted, and this [letter] comes, breaking my neat schedule of reading so I cannot go to bed. Unless I cut all my classes tomorrow. And Redpath, which my mind is not ready for. And yet I feel that sleep somehow now comes before all else: there is much to bear, and I *must* be strong and rested to be brave enough. (*Journals* 223, emphasis mine)

This response is to a letter of which she writes, "I found out today that I am deeply and for-god-knows-how-long in love with a boy who will not let me come to him out of a ferocious cold scrupulosity" (223). Further, regarding her despair about feeling left alone by her lover, she wonders "If I were a man, I could write a novel about this; being a woman, why *must* I *only* cry and freeze, cry and freeze?" (223, emphasis mine). She must be strong; she "must" "only," a doubly absolute phrase, as a woman, respond with tears, and "freeze." [13]

Her musts limit her but direct her. She shows her understanding of the different options men and women had in the 1950s, but does not or perhaps cannot, at this moment foresee "writing a novel" and breaking out of the restrictions of the sexist conventions she feels and faces. Like an addict who uses drugs to escape, Plath here "feel[s] that sleep now comes before all else" because she "must be strong and rested to be brave enough." So in order to justify her going to sleep in response to the despair she feels, she constructs the sentence in a way in which she does not directly write "I must sleep." Instead, she links the "must" with being strong and brave. It would for Plath, represent a sign of

weakness if she "must sleep"; she would show her avoidance and addict-like desire to escape through, in Stein's words "diminished consciousness," coming in her case in the form of sleep. Like an addict who rationalizes needing one more hit in order to avoid sickness and supposedly appear sober, Plath rationalizes sleeping because she *must* be strong and brave. Both the addict and Plath attempt to justify the use of drugs or sleep as indicative of their concern about appearing or being the opposite of what they know, at that moment, they are.

Plath's usage of "must" appears again in her journal when she weighs the pros and cons of taking a summer school class at Harvard. This seemingly simple decision, again involving academic progress, becomes monumental to Plath. Her perfectionism, here she terms it "idealism," also accompanies her absolutist thinking and language. She commands herself:

> I *must* make choices clearly, honestly, without getting sick so I can't eat, which is in itself a defense mechanism that wants to revert to childhood tactics to get sympathy and avoid responsibility ... at home, I *must* not be dreaming up *idealistic* pictures of summerschool(sic). (*Journals* 545, emphasis mine)

Determination to make choices clearly comes in part from not wanting to be seen as childish, as attempting to gain sympathy or as shirking responsibility. Her belief that she "must" make a decision results from her concern with avoiding being labeled in many of the ways society labels addicts. For contemporary U.S. society commonly labels addicts as acting in self-destructive ways in order to gain attention (as Plath views her inability to eat), as childish, as avoidant of

responsibility, and as "dreaming up" unrealistic plans. Here Plath's "musts" and her awareness of her tendency to set herself up for failure through idealization or perfectionism work together to indicate again what she does not want to do and what she requires of herself.

Plath's literal demonization of her need to be perfect reveals her periods of clarity in which she recognizes the danger of her ongoing and repetitive attempts at achieving perfectionism in numerous aspects of her life. We see how this "demon" corroborates her belief in a dichotomy of perfection or failure, as she writes:

> I have this demon who wants me to run away screaming if I am going to be flawed, fallible. It wants me to think I'm so good I must be perfect. Or nothing. I am, on the contrary, something: a being who gets tired, has shyness to fight, has more trouble than most facing people easily. If I get through this year, kicking my demon down when it comes up ... I'll be able ... to face the field of life, instead of running from it the minute it hurts. (*Journals* 619)

Here, Plath admits the gravity of the threats her demon forces on her. Not only does the demon coerce her into a binary mindset that supports her addictive perfectionism, further, unless Plath "kick[s] [her] demon down when it comes up" she will not survive the year, or "face the field of life, instead of running from it" (619). She employs the language of addicts who commonly refer to "kicking" their habit when they mean quitting using drugs or achieving sobriety. Plath too must "kick" this demon addiction of perfectionistic demands in order to survive to

live in the world. As Plath and many addicts know, addictions allow them to run from and sometimes avoid facing the difficulties of life. Addiction has often been termed a slow method of suicide; another way of "escaping" the struggles of life. Plath's awareness of her need to eliminate or kick her habit of perfectionism in order to survive, is literal; she knows she cannot live for long without ridding herself of her addiction to setting up and attempting to meet impossible standards of perfection.

By labeling her destructive and necessarily impossible cravings for perfection as a "demon," she also illustrates her understanding that this "demon" is something that at once controls her and something that she must fight to resist. She simultaneously refers to the demon as "my demon" indicating its personal hold on her—it is not the objectively demonic opium that represents a danger to anyone who takes it—while she asserts "I'll try to fight it, as something other than my essential self, which I am fighting to save" (*Journals* 620). As Plath allows for the existence of an essential self, her essential self *must* be fought for and indicates the frailty of her essential self, in particular, and of the dangers of essentializing one's identity in general.

In her "Letter to a demon" written October 1st, 1957, Plath struggles with the difficulty that this demon, that brings her deep despair as it causes her to require perfection of herself, is both a part of her identity and a part of her identity of which she wishes to free herself. She describes this dynamic as she writes:

> I cannot ignore this murderous self: it is there. I smell it and feel it.... I shall shame it. When it says: you shall not sleep, you cannot

> teach, I shall go on anyway, knocking its nose in. It's biggest weapon is and has been the image of myself as a perfect success: in writing, in teaching, in living. As soon as I sniff non-success in the form of rejections, puzzled faces in class when I am blurring a point, or a cold horror in personal relationships, I accuse myself of being a hypocrite, posing as better than I am, and being, at bottom lousy. (*Journals* 618)

Here, Plath solidifies the view of her perfectionism as a "murderous self" that she smells and feels and aims to shame. It contributes to who she is, and while she knows how horribly it hurts her and jeopardizes her quality of life and even her desire to live, she states that when it does so, she will "go on anyway, knocking its nose in" (618). Interestingly, here, she does not write of being free of the demon, instead, she asserts that it will be present and that when it is she will fight against it and learn to live her life with the feelings it brings.

Her need to see herself as perfect is what she views as the demon's most damaging power over her. In the letter, she goes on to state, "I am middling good. And I can live being middling good ... I *must* face this image of myself as good for myself" and not become depressed by comparing herself unfavorably to others (618-19, emphasis mine). Moving quickly from stating that she will both experience and fight against her lifelong mind-set of perfectionism to proclaiming that "[she] can live being middling good," Plath yet again illustrates the repetition of her pattern of perfectionism. Moreover, she follows up her claim that she can "live being middling good" with the absolutism of the phrase "I must face this

image of myself as good [as opposed to perfect]" (619). Even while writing about eliminating the perfectionism that she repeatedly requires of herself, Plath underscores the pattern of addiction that exists at the heart of this perfectionism. Despite changing her demands of herself, it is *the pattern*, of her *compelling need* to adopt these new, and supposedly, healthier and milder perspectives that she espouses, which lives on as her "demon" or addiction. In other words, since she "must" change the way she sees herself, it does not really matter that the new image of herself that she will try but in the end find impossible to accept is not one of perfection.

The addiction to perfectionism and absolutism exist in her approach to change; the pattern of addiction is there, and the object, linguistically and literally, remains irrelevant. Plath's addiction to perfectionism requires that she be perfectly successful even at being "middling good." Certainly, Plath's work and work ethic as a professor and writer qualify her as being more than "middling good." Nonetheless, the measuring point for Plath that would allow her to be satisfied with being middling good is mired in her addiction to perfection that bound her to view herself as always having fallen short of her personal goals.

This pattern of Plath's life and writing that I re-conceive of as an addiction is what has traditionally been identified as the depression that plagued her and killed her. Plath's depression became an object of her addiction. Her addictive patterns of behavior also contribute to her depression. It is therefore important to look toward newer studies of addiction that tend not to want to isolate addictions from each other and that also willingly consider the ways addiction can be related

to other psychic processes. As Leon Wurmser argues:

> There is no such thing as 'alcoholism as a disease,' in the meaning of a unitary entity with clear and singular cause, course, and treatment. There is no such thing as an 'addictive personality' with clear and common dynamics and one preferable treatment approach for all ... there is no sharp line between specific addictions and addictive behavior in general, except for the contingencies of the physical aspects induced by specific drugs; *but there* also is no sharp line between addictive behavior and the neurotic process. (43-4, emphasis mine)

Wurmser goes on to argue that we can view addiction as a "special form of [narcissistic and borderline] severe neuroses" (44). So, for Wurmser, isolating "addiction" is neither beneficial nor accurate. One way to think about the relationship between addiction and depression that captures some of the essence of both illnesses, is to construct addicts as those who take drugs or repeat behaviors in order to bring about relief from overwhelming feelings. Depression's status as a medical illness has been much more strongly established and for a much longer time than has addiction's. Viewing an addict as sharing similarly overwhelming feelings as someone with depression encourages the public to treat an addict with the empathy they feel for someone suffering from a "real" illness like depression. So how do we consider Plath's depression in terms of an overlying addictive way of living or writing her life? One step is to claim that overwhelming feelings or what we typically refer to as her depression serve

as a catalyst for her addiction. Another approach is to claim that the perfectionism that made living so painful for Plath served as the pattern to which she was addicted to repeat. Neuroscientists, psychologists and psychiatrists today have begun to consider whether there might be in some people the propensity toward addiction. But the difficulties faced by these researchers who claim that either depression or perfectionism served as a catalyst for someone like Plath's addiction send us in a downward spiral of chicken and egg type thinking. In the following chapter on Tupac Shakur, I propose instead a dialectical relationship between his depression and his addiction; such a dynamic might also capture the connection between Plath's depression, perfectionism and addiction.

What interests me and what is at stake in complicating Plath's status as depressed woman writer to addicted and depressed woman writer are the ways in which the term addiction, medicalized terms in general, and studies of Plath in particular, all benefit from this complication. For when we refuse to view addiction as conferring one's entire identity then we can at once speak of Plath as meeting the criteria of addiction that I revise and emphasize in a disease-model of addiction without merely pathologizing her.

Addiction and Compulsory Heterosexuality

Plath's concern regarding and awareness of her own processes of addictive thinking and behavior appear not only in her setting for herself impossibly perfectionistic goals. A discussion of Plath's obsessive methodologies of documenting her relationships with boys and men reifies this addictive pattern. As Wagner-Martin illustrates, Plath, in her high school diary documented her

dealings with boys numerically:

> She mentioned a dozen different boys in her diary under the heading: '1948-49---Boys Gone Out With.'
>
> She even tallied everything:
>
> 'Boys asked by me 4
>
> Dates requested 19 (7 turned down)
>
> Dates gone on in all 12+4=16.'
>
> (Qtd. in Wagner-Martin, 48)

What is striking about Plath's self-imposed requirement of dating is not so much her overwhelming wish to date boys and have them view her as desirable, but rather her emphasis on the careful documentation of her social "progress." For during the 1940s and 50s when Plath was a school age girl, her desire to date numerous boys and pay attention to their class and upbringing, was, in fact, in line with the general requirements placed on white, educated, middle-class girls and women.

However, Aurelia, Plath's mother recalls that she and her husband Otto followed a less rigid approach than their contemporaries in caring for young Sylvia and Warren. She comments:

> My husband ... believed in the natural unfolding of an infant's development ... he constantly voiced his recollections of his mother's type of childcare (he was the oldest of six children). I quietly followed the "demand feeding" accepted as modern today [1975] and labeled as old-fashioned in the 1930's, though I would

> never confess it in front of my contemporaries, who followed the typed instructions of their children's pediatricians. Both my babies were rocked, cuddled, sung to, recited to, and picked up when they cried. (*Letters Home* 10-12)

It is interesting that not only did Plath's parents adopt an approach to raising their children that was more focused on meeting the needs of the individual child and building a warm and nurturing atmosphere for the children, but also that Aurelia is aware, at the time, that her peers would disapprove of her approach. Also, in contrast to many women who grew up in the late 1940s, and 50s, Plath was encouraged by her parents and after her father died when she was eight, by her mother, to achieve academically in and out of school. As Wini Breines points out in *Young, White, and Miserable* it was common for parents to not only encourage boys to succeed academically, moreover it was just as common for parents to discourage girls to succeed academically (68). Girls deemed too intellectual were sometimes considered romantically undesirable, and Aurelia confirms Plath's awareness of this dynamic. She recounts, "Sylvia was conscious of the prejudice boys built up among themselves about 'brainy' girls" (*Letters Home* 38).

As a student at Smith, Plath faced some barriers in dating, "I remember laughing as he said he had been wary of asking me down because of my 'popularity'" (*Journals* 52). But she also dated regularly enough to conclude, "What is more tedious than boy-girl episodes? Nothing; yet there is no tedium that will be recorded so eternally. Eve baited Adam back in the dark ages, but it is the tragedy of man to die and be born again, and with each new birth the cycle

begins all over again. Variations on a theme" (*Journals* 52). Plath addresses the monotony of "boy-girl episodes" and concludes that the dull dynamic extends back to Adam and Eve and will continue with little change; it is all "variations on a theme." Her focus on dating shifts into her awareness and wariness of the pressure and inevitability of marriage. She concludes, "after a while I suppose I'll get used to the idea of marriage and children. If only it doesn't swallow up my desires to express myself in a smug sensuous haze" (*Journals* 21). Here, her word choice of "a sensuous haze" to describe the threat that marriage and children would pose to her ability to write evokes a romantic post-coital bedroom scene. On the first reading, it is the shared romantic daze that is the threat as both an act that might produce the children that would threaten her writing and a description of how her writing might suffer. But again, it is the "*idea* of marriage and children" which Plath supposes she will get "used to." Not only does Plath express her discomfort with marrying and having children, even the *idea* of doing so requires time for her to grow comfortable with it.

Despite the differences in the parenting and academic expectations of Aurelia and Otto, clearly they expected Plath like most girls in her high school and college, to marry "the right kind of man." The intensity and efficiency with which she set out fulfilling this task while at the same time expressing feelings and desires that clashed with the prescribed 1950's role of young white females, bear more significance than the fact that she attempted to fulfill this role. As Joyce Nelson argues in *The Perfect Machine,* during the fifties, efficiency came to be valued more highly and in more arenas than in previous decades in the U.S.

By keeping a log of Plath's dating experience that omits the names of the boys and instead relies on the hard numbers to ascertain her position on a scale of feminine sexual prowess, Plath objectifies the boys in such a way that the boys can become the objects of her addiction. In that she ignores the boys in their particularity in favor of a more cutthroat analysis of what really mattered to her, one recognizes that for Plath the numbers were more significant than what they represented. Her measuring of her desirability through dating parallels her equating perfectionism with publication.

Of course this is not to suggest that Plath was not at some level invested in the 1950s ideal for a young woman of her background, and which often consisted of a happy marriage, and raising children in a "comfortable" racially and economically segregated suburb. Plath is at once overly occupied with how to negotiate her desires for intellectual perfection with her need to have and please a man. Throughout her *Journals,* Plath explicitly mentions the frustrations she faces being an intellectually driven woman in the 1950s and her difficulty in finding a way to satisfy her own needs. She writes:

> I am obligated in a way to my family and to society (damn society anyway) to follow certain absurd and traditional customs--for my own security, they tell me. I must therefore confine the major part of my life to one human being of the opposite sex. (36)

In order to further construct Plath's understanding of the necessity of being involved in a monogamous heterosexual coupling as a sign of her addiction, it is essential to note the sharp irony and detached tone of this passage. While Plath at

once submits to and even surpasses the expectations placed on girls to secure a husband, she undermines the very norms at work behind these expectations. She wants to damn society, yet some part of her feels obligated to play out the role of the "good girl" of the 1950s.[14] It is in the repetition of the acting out of this role, in conjunction with the above discussion of her perfectionism and binary thinking, that we can identify the addiction in her writing. For she has no genuine interest in what she wants to achieve anyway. She is more interested in *playing* the game *perfectly*, than she is in the prize she would receive for winning the game. While some might argue that what she desires is marriage, she desires rather the repetition of perfecting the means to accessing the role. Especially taken in the context of her writing that mocks and scorns the seriousness of the role for which she competes so perfectly, the driving force behind her desire for male partnership exists as a need to repeat and perfect a pattern.

All of this is not to say that we should be wary when examining illness or addiction in particular as having the potential to present a totalizing reading. Every attempt at reappropriation is at risk to be undermined and to merely reproduce what it intends to subvert. However, just because a risk exists we cannot stand by and allow ugly stigma and stereotypes to continue to prevail in our beliefs about individuals with addictions. Likewise, pathologizations of women have typically been viewed as always and only negative and limiting. Today, in 2011, we continue to live in what many have termed a "victim state" in which an overabundance of people claim to have been victimized by someone or something; some of these people unjustly want to benefit by false claims of

victimization. While this attitude of "everyone is a victim" has brought with it an increasing sort of competitive embracing of disempowerment, there have also been great benefits to woman whose genuine stories of victimization have been heard and acted upon legally. The concept of loosening up a too restrictive definition of addiction can at once work to point us in new directions in terms of the ways a clinical discourse or one of medicalization, that in this case, is newly derived from Plath's written patterns of addiction, does in fact, work in an empowering way. For to claim that it is dangerous to read Plath's writing as containing linguistic components of a new view of addiction is, in fact, to give in to the old discourse of medicalization that states that to be sick is to be irresponsible and disempowered.

Notes

[1] For more on Plath's letters and journals see Tracy Brain's "Sylvia Plath's letters and Journals" in *The Cambridge Companion to Sylvia Plath*, Ed. Jo Gill, New York: Cambridge UP, 2006, pp.139-55. Brain comments, "Anyone who is interested in Plath's own story will find her letters and journals a fascinating source of information, though not necessarily more 'true' or reliable than the multitude of literary biographies about her" (140).

[2] While I too have found myself turning not only to Plath's journals, but also to biographies of her, I am generally reticent of studies of women authors that somehow always need to examine and display the biographical and its assumed relationship with the woman's writing. Plath's case is more vexing in this way than that of other writers because much of her poetry is confessional and therefore seems to require or foster an understanding of Plath's life.

[3] See M. L. Rosenthal's *The New Poets* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 25-89. Al Alvarez's 1967 "Beyond the Fiddle" identifies Plath's work as confessional, and his 1972 *The Savage God* secures this status and in detailing the events of and leading up to her suicide, conflates her biography with the subjects of her literary work.

[4] Regardless of Plath's use of literary devices to help highlight the literariness of her poetry and other writing and to avoid having her writing read as autobiographical, because of her use of events and characters that can be read as similar to events and people in her 'real' life, the struggle to maintain readings of Plath's work as not autobiographical remains a challenge.

[5] See in particular Malcolm's 1994 text *The Silent Woman,* and Rose's 1991 *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath* as well as her 2002 article published in the *London Review of Books* titled "This is not a biography."

[6] Rose introduces this divide in *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath* starting on page 3. In *The Cambridge Companion to Sylvia Plath*, editor Jo Gill introduces this division in her "Preface" on pages xii-xiii.

[7] The race, class and gender politics that contribute to the decisions of which addicts go to prison and which do not will be discussed in the following chapter. Also see Elias Aboujaoude's *Compulsive Acts: A Psychiatrist's Tales of Ritual and Obsession* regarding the "kleptomania defense" which lawyers use to "soften the punishment and divert the case from the penal system to the psychiatric arena" p. 81. He goes on to point out the gender and class implications on the success of this strategy, "this argument is more likely to win over a jury and judge if the defendant is a woman ... another bias is worth noting. The likelihood of the 'kleptomania defense' succeeding increase with higher socioeconomic status, and the punishment seems inversely related" (81).

[8] Likewise, the view of addiction that I put forth recognizes that addicts also should not be viewed in one "correct," identity-conferring and -totalizing way.

[9] Patricia Hampl identifies Plath's repetition of words in her poetry. See Hampl's "The Smile of Accomplishment: Sylvia Plath's Ambition" p. 25.

[10] Moreover, addicts often replace one addiction with another. As Jerry Stahl writes in *Absolute Midnight*, ""At any minute one of us could relapse, one of us could succumb ... Instead of denying my craving, I embraced it. I replaced it with her" p. 303.

[11] For more on the role of master/father associated with Otto Plath see Rose's astute and original reading of Plath's famous poem "Daddy" in *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath*, Chapter 6 "Daddy, " pp. 205-38.

[12]Regarding rituals or repetition in Plath's poetry, in "Sylvia Plath and Confessional Poetry: A Reconsideration," M.D. Uroff writes: "From her earliest madwomen and hysterical virgins to the late suicides and father-killers, Plath portrays characters whose stagey performances are subversions of the creative act. Absorbed in their *rituals*, they confess nothing. They are not anxious to make a breakthrough back into life. In fact, their energies are engaged in erecting a barricade against self-revelation. Plath's fascination with this parody image of the creative artist stems from a deep knowledge of the machinations of the mind. If she reveals herself in these poems, she does so in the grotesque mirror of parody. If these poems come out of her own emotional experiences, as she said they did, they are not uninformed cries from the heart. Rather, she chose to deal with her experience by creating characters who could not deal with theirs and through their *rituals* demonstrate their failure" (115).

[13] Later in the chapter I address the particular pressures Plath felt as a white educated woman living in the 1950s.

[14] The "good girl" of the 1950s stands in contrast to the "bad girls" who dated either "greaser" boys with motorcycles, dark leather jackets, white T-shirts and jeans, and hair greased back in D.A.s or boys who joined the beat movement.

Chapter Three

The Honesty, Contradictions and Addictions of Tupac Shakur: A Self-Medicating Man 'Cursed Since [His] Birth'

> I'm 23 years old. I might just be my mother's child, but in all reality, I'm everybody's child. Nobody raised me; I was raised in this society.
>
> Tupac Shakur

> When you do rap albums, you got to train yourself. You got to constantly be in character.
>
> Tupac Shakur

So, what do an apolitical British writer of the 1800s, a Fulbright-winning white woman poet who committed suicide at age 31 in 1963, and a sensitive gangsta rapper murdered in 1996 at the age of 25 have in common? Not just their addictions. Like De Quincey and Plath, Shakur found himself born into overwhelming parental and familial expectations. Also, like De Quincey and Plath, for Shakur these expectations included exceptional academic and aesthetic achievement. Unlike Plath and De Quincey, Shakur also bore the responsibility to carry on and redefine the Black Panther black power movement of which his mother Afeni Shakur and many of his early influences were members.

In part due to his mother's exposing Shakur to the power of the arts as well as emphasizing his role in empowering and revitalizing the impoverished black communities in which he was raised, Shakur's life followed a simultaneously unique and sadly familiar trajectory. His early rap focused on resolving the problems he witnessed, and he grew, for a time, into a politically astute and sensitive rapper. However, after numerous highly publicized conflicts with the law that eventually led to him spending nearly a year in prison, he

abandoned the reputation he had achieved as a sensitive and politically engaged rapper, and publicly embraced the ostentatious, brazen and violent "gangsta" role in which Death Row Records cast him. While performing this role secured his release from prison,[1] his authenticity as a rapper who was "keeping it real" and a prominent position next to Snoop Dogg in Suge Knight's Death Row family, Shakur still worried, according to Tricia Rose, about "the power to negatively influence his fans. Tupac still wanted to speak to those kids who were already caught up in the system because he felt they were herded there and discarded" (*Hip Hop Wars* 142-3).

Despite these apparent differences from De Quincey and Plath's lives, like Shakur, De Quincey and Plath each experienced their own periods of despair and pain, heightened personal reflection, and isolation. Tupac Shakur's discursive production regarding the meaning of addiction in his rap and in his life according to interviews with him and with his friends links him to De Quincey and Plath in meaningful ways. The writing and actions of De Quincey, Plath and Shakur in conjunction with their respective historical and cultural contexts have made each of them iconic figures. However, due in part to the ways Shakur's life, including his class, race, level of formal education, and his location within society and determined by society stand in stark contrast to those of these two literary figures, he understood his complex and paradoxical role of sensitive activist icon and violent, misogynistic, unapologetic gangsta icon in ways Plath and De Quincey never faced.[2] From 1991 through and even after his murder in 1996, the media frenzy surrounding Shakur's successes, detractors, skirmishes with the law and

every day activity was incessant and depicted Shakur as one of the most recognized and seemingly powerful hip hop figures in the U.S. For Plath and De Quincey, there was no equivalent to the media machine and its vast international audience that had made Shakur into a living legend as well as a posthumous one.[3]

Shakur's understanding of his subject position in relation to his status as a popular and powerful young black male rapper demonstrates his awareness that he contributed to the discourses about the groups that defined, restricted and authenticated him. Shakur's recognition of the productive and oppressive intersection of power, knowledge and language is critical.[4] He demonstrates it through his care with words. It underlies his comprehension of the urgency of his message to his communities and the world. It enabled him to recognize that at points he lost his agency over his own identity and that throughout his life and his death the lines of art and life blurred for him. He was aware of the limiting regulations of power and aware of the empowering methods of drawing attention to these same regulations and the ways they are used to silence impoverished and addicted African Americans.[5]

So, while critics identify Plath's poetry as "confessional" and De Quincey situates his addiction to opium in his *Confessions*, Shakur's lyrics and poetry, his letters and interviews, surpass the confessional range of both Plath's and De Quincey's work. Not only does he openly reveal his depression, like Plath, his painful, almost overwhelming sensitivity, like both De Quincey and Plath, his response of self-medicating with marijuana and alcohol, and his resulting addiction to these drugs, but he does, in addition, show a sense of social

responsibility to his community that Plath and De Quincey never address or even seem to consider. This focus on community change can be traced in part to Shakur's experiences growing up as the son of Afeni Shakur, a Black Panther, and surrounded by other members of the Black Panther Party. From early in his life Shakur felt the expectations of the Black Panthers to both carry on and adapt its message to reach members of Shakur's and future generations.[6] Moreover, his knowledge of the need to address the many problems facing his communities contributes to Shakur's recognition that his self-medicating is a response to a sense of despair that he links to growing up surrounded by violence, extreme poverty, drug abuse, racism, death, police brutality, and an indifferent misguided and under-funded educational system.[7] In distinguishing Shakur from gangsta rapper Snoop Dogg, Eithne Quinn describes Shakur as "the emotionally expressive soul man of civil rights, troubled and angry, Tupac resonated with the departed soul brother of Black Power" (174). Attesting to Shakur's awareness of the need to address these social problems, Marcus Reeves describes the tracks "Trapped" and "Brenda's Got a Baby" on Shakur's debut album *2pacalypse Now* as "songs of protest lashing out against poverty, racism, and crooked cops" (157), and terms the rapper's connected and outspoken despair the "passionate disclosure of the inner-city blues" (159).[8] In short, Shakur knows he self-medicates, he knows why he self-medicates, but this self-awareness does not satisfy him. Instead, he commits himself to exposing and alleviating the problems that lead to his despair, thereby confirming a distinguishing part of his rapper-as-activist identity.

Shakur's consciousness of his depression and his self-medicating behavior provide a concrete example of his sophisticated self-awareness. It also demonstrates his insight that he is not simply an addict but also meets the basic criteria of a person with a "dual diagnosis."[9] In "Parallels and Paradigms," H.J. Richards, a clinical psychologist, first, outlines a basic definition of dual diagnosis, and, second, asserts and details an alternative view of the syndrome and its treatment based on dialectical reasoning and an assessment of the degree of "reciprocal causality" of the two diagnoses (458, 484-6). Richards' simple definition of a dual diagnosis states that to meet the criteria of the dual diagnosis a person has "two [Axis I or primary] diagnoses: a psychiatric disorder and a substance abuse disorder" (458), like Shakur's depression and addiction. In arguing for the practicality and success of a dialectical approach to dual diagnosis, Richards proposes that clinicians make a "concerted effort to determine the degree of interaction or reciprocal causality of the two pathological processes, the points of reciprocal origin and reciprocal current effects of the processes, as well as the relative extremity of the two processes" and that in this way "the two disordering processes are both untangled and resolved simultaneously" (486). The lyrics of numerous songs on Shakur's most critically acclaimed album, 1995's *Me Against the World*, show that Shakur understood the reciprocal causality of his depression and his addiction.

Quinn points out that repeatedly the songs on Shakur's album *Me Against the World* "begin with the consumption of alcohol and weed, which function ... to alleviate mental suffering" (176-7). What is significant about the relation of drug

use and suffering on the album is not merely the correlation, but instead that Shakur overtly comments on, in Richards' terms, the "points of reciprocal origin." In "Lord Knows," track eight on the disc, he provides a sophisticated analysis of the shared origin of his depression and his self-medicating behavior that led to his addiction. His critique of a society in which he repeatedly witnesses the extreme violence accompanying the murder of many close friends locates the cause of his depression and the self-medicating response to that depression. In other words, the point of origin for both diagnoses is the same. He writes:

> Done lost too many niggaz to this gangbangin'
> Homies died in my arms, with his brains hangin', fucked up
> I had to tell him it was alright and that's a lie
> And he knew it when he shook and died, my God
> Even though I know I'm wrong man
> Hennessey make a nigga think he strong, man
> I can't sleep, so I stay up, don't wanna fuck them bitches
> Try to calm me down, I ain't givin' up
> I'm getting lost in the weed, man, gettin' high
> Livin' everyday, like I'm gon' die
> I smoke a blunt to take the pain out
> And if I wasn't high I'd probably try to blow my brains out,
> lord knows.
> (*Me Against The World,* "Lord Knows")

Here, Shakur vividly describes a character holding a dying friend, one of "too many" lost friends, and identifies the pain of his loss as the cause of his need to smoke marijuana to "take the pain out" or relieve him of his suicidal despair. Moreover, it is in this line and the last two lines that he highlights what seems to be his uncanny consciousness of Richards' reciprocal point origin of depression and drug abuse; he raps "I smoke a blunt to take the pain out/And if I wasn't high I'd probably try to blow my brains out, lord knows."

In these lyrics, Shakur unknowingly addresses Richards' three primary foci in diagnosing and treating a person with dual diagnosis. Richards' first concern, as quoted above, requires the "concerted effort to determine the degree of interaction or reciprocal causality of the two pathological processes" (486). Shakur comments on a society that causes him to lose too many friends to gang violence, and simultaneously accompanies his description with accounts of self-medicating the pain these losses cause. He makes clear the degree of interaction of the drug abuse and the depression. The reciprocal causality of despair or depression and drug or alcohol abuse reads as simultaneous or at least as blurred as the result of the ongoing pain he feels and the ongoing abuse of drugs with which he attempts to treat that pain. Interestingly, in the first four lines of the above lyrics, we see the blurring of the response to the loss of a friend with the general loss of too many friends as Shakur shifts from a broader critique using the plural to a recounting of the loss of an individual friend as he shifts to the singular. In the first line, he writes in the plural of losing numerous "niggaz"(sic). While in the second line he actually shifts from the plural to the singular rapping,

"*Homies* died in my arms, with *his* brains hangin', fucked up!" (Emphasis mine). The experience is at once both a symptom of a "fucked up," as Shakur deems it, pattern of violence in his community, but also an individualized description of a painful and personal memory. Shakur, as the writer, rapper and implied subject, builds on the personal side of this event, and draws in the element of his audience looking for a socially aware and sensitive rapper, as he sticks with the singular in the next two lines, "I had to tell him it was alright, and that's a lie / and he knew it when he shook and died, my God" (*Me Against the World* "Lord Knows"). Here we see the rapper, the blurring of his role as autobiographer and thus character, and the dying-friend character's awareness of general conventions of compassion and of acceptable and expected lies. As Tricia Rose notes, this kind of blending of rapper and subject is not unique to Shakur:

> Rap music is a black cultural expression that prioritizes black voices from the margins of urban America. Rap music is a form of rhymed storytelling accompanied by highly rhythmic, electronically based music. ... From the outset, rap music has articulated the pleasures and problems of black urban life in contemporary America.... Rappers speak with the voice of personal experience, taking on the identity of the observer or narrator.... Rappers tell long, involved, and sometimes abstract stories with catchy and memorable phrases and beats that lend themselves to black sound bite packaging, storing critical fragments in fast-paced electrified rhythms. Rap tales are told in elaborate and ever-

> changing black slang and refer to black cultural figures and rituals, mainstream film, video and television characters, and little-known black heroes. (*Black Noise* 2-3)

Further, Shakur's unscripted-sounding interjection "my God" makes the description seem more "real" and autobiographical. Such authenticity or "keeping it real" is a very important point of pride for many hip-hop rappers as Renford Reese, Jeffrey Ogbar, Marcus Reeves, Michael Eric Dyson and others argue.[10] While "keepin' it real" or presenting oneself as authentic in hip hop bestows positive status on rappers, it also raises questions and concerns among rappers and scholars about identity, authenticity, stereotypes and race. In *The Hip Hop Wars*, Rose points out the positive aim of rappers' presentations of "rhymed autobiographies" and keeping it real:

> Part of this "keeping it real" ethos is a laudable effort to continue to identify with many of their fans, who don't see their style or life experiences represented anywhere else, from their own points of view; part of it is the result of conformity to the genre's conventions. It makes rappers more accessible, more reflective of some of the lived experiences and conditions that shape the lives of some of their fans. And it gives fans a sense that they themselves have the potential to reach celebrity status, to gain social value and prestige while remaining "true" to street life and culture, turning what traps them into an imagined gateway to success. (*The Hip Hop Wars* 38)

Further, she develops the dangerous repercussions of rappers who claim the "truth" of centuries old racist stereotypes, "But this hyper-investment in the fiction of full-time autobiography in hip hop, especially for those artists who have adopted gangsta personas, has been exaggerated and distorted by a powerful history of racial images of black men as 'naturally' violent and criminal" (*The Hip Hop Wars* 38). Finally, she explains that:

> On the one hand, I am saying that rappers are not the autobiographers they are often believed to be and that seeing them that way has contributed to the attacks they specifically face. But, on the other hand, I am also saying that much of what listeners hear in hip hop stories of violence is reflective of larger real-life social conditions. (*The Hip Hop Wars* 41)

Rose provides an astute and balanced explanation of the problems that accompany often well meaningly "real" or autobiographically presented and framed raps. She even writes, "Rapper Tupac, for example, claimed he was hoping to reveal the conditions in a powerful way to incite change: 'I'm gonna show the most graphic details about what I see in my community and hopefully they'll stop. Quick'" (*The Hip Hop Wars* 42). M.K. Asante reveals Shakur's frustration with rappers' stereotyping and progress-stunting need to play out of images of "real" gangstas. He writes, "Tupac once told us, 'Stop being cowards and let's have a revolution, but we don't wanna do that. Dudes just wanna live a caricature, they wanna be cartoons, but if they really wanted to do something, if they was that tough, all right, let's start a revolution'" (Asante 32).

The lyrics discussed above from "Lord Knows," like many others, illustrate how important it is to Shakur that the experiences he raps about sound autobiographical. While authenticity matters particularly to rappers, De Quincey's choice to write an autobiography and Plath's inaccurate labeling as a "confessional" poet show how issues of distinguishing reality from performance accompany the study of each of these figures' relations to their writing. From early on in his public life, Shakur's intense focus on being perceived as "real" makes him appealing to some and reprehensible to others,[11] but, more significantly, causes the rapper to feel conflict and a contradictory sense of bearing the responsibility of a role model while attempting to fit in as a "real" West coast gangsta. Shakur's ambivalence is played out in the character of the narrator of "Lord Knows," especially when he raps, "Even though I know I'm wrong man/ Hennessey make a nigga think he strong, man" (*Me Against the World* "Lord Knows"). These lines show the narrator's understanding that using alcohol to make him feel strong is "wrong" or an instance of alcohol abuse, and again blur the identity of the subject and narrator of the rap. For the narrator knows "*I'm* wrong" (Emphasis mine), yet the alcohol "make *a nigga* think *he* strong" (Emphasis mine).[12] Shakur contrasts his (as the implied narrator) knowledge of the problem of alcohol abuse with a general character who thinks that abusing alcohol will make him feel better. This slippage from individual to general regarding self-medicating with alcohol again shows a high degree of Richards' reciprocal causality of drug abuse and depression, as in the lyrics discussed above. The extent of interaction ranks highly because the two

pathologies are intertwined, especially because of the ambiguity regarding the singular and the plural.

Moreover, as the lyrics continue, they serve to identify Richards' second area of focus, or "the points of reciprocal origin and reciprocal current effects of the processes" (486). Shakur raps:

> I can't sleep, so I stay up, don't wanna fuck them bitches
> Try to calm me down, I ain't givin' up
> I'm getting lost in the weed, man, gettin' high.
> Livin everyday, like I'm gon' die (gon' die, gon' die)
> I smoke a blunt to take the pain out, and if I wasn't high
> I'd probably try to blow my brains out
> Lord knows.
> (*Me Against the World* "Lord Knows")

The narrator again illustrates what critics like Armond White and Dyson have identified as the contradictory nature that defined Shakur. When he raps, "I can't sleep, so I stay up, don't wanna' fuck them bitches / Try to calm me down, I ain't givin' up" he presents a character whose insomnia makes him restless, yet despite viewing having sex as a remedy to his restlessness and inability to sleep, he "don't wanna fuck them bitches." The language he uses, "fuck them bitches," to describe what the character will not resort to, maintains his typically gangsta misogyny and "realness." At the same time, his decision to calm down and not give up his goals and morals ("I ain't givin up") by "gettin' high" instead of "fucking" a "bitch" illustrates the character's ambivalence toward the gangsta

lifestyle and his use of marijuana as a remedy to his agitated insomnia.

The potency of the final lines "I smoke a blunt to take the pain out, and if I wasn't high / I'd probably try to blow my brains out / Lord knows" brings the rap away from the broader social problems and focuses on the more personal problem of the narrator's suicidal depression.[13] With these words, Shakur blatantly identifies his character's self-medicating use of marijuana. According to Paul Butler and in contrast to Shakur's narrator who turns to marijuana to alleviate his depression, "hip-hop culture suggests that recreational drugs like marijuana and Ecstasy enhance the quality of life and that they are fun" (140). Butler elaborates, "marijuana, especially, is the hip-hop nation's intoxicant of choice. In a classic song, Snoop Dogg raps about the pleasure of riding through his neighborhood sipping alcohol and smoking weed" (141). Clearly, Shakur's character uses marijuana to survive and not to have "fun" or induce "pleasure." Although the character claims he "ain't givin up," his description of his abuse of marijuana in conjunction with his depression makes one question whether he has the capacity to maintain his commitment to changing the problems his sees in the world. When he writes about the narrator's becoming lost due to abusing marijuana and living daily with a self-destructive attitude ("Livin everyday, like I'm gon' die") and concludes that without relying on marijuana he would commit suicide, it becomes clear that the effects of his depression and his drug abuse occur reciprocally and concurrently. Richards' points of reciprocal origin appear inextricable; Shakur's narrator's self-medicating is an addiction that in these lyrics needs the same degree of attention as his depression.

Richards' third point regarding the treatment of dual diagnosis involves an assessment of the "relative extremity" of, in Shakur's characters' case, the abuse of and addiction to alcohol and marijuana, compared to the extremity of his depression. On this issue, a telling interview turns out to be more revealing than the song lyrics. In April 1995, while in prison for sexual assault charges, Shakur asked hip-hop writer Kevin Powell to come interview him because according to Shakur, "this is my last interview. If I get killed, I want people to get every drop. I want them to have the real story" (45). Powell, who interviewed Shakur numerous times remarks on Shakur's appearance and affect:

> Tupac strutted into the room without a limp, in spite of having recently been wounded in the leg---among other places. Dressed in a white Adidas sweatshirt and oversized blue jeans, he seemed more alert than he had been in all our interviews and encounters. He looked me in the eyes as we spoke and smoked one Newport after another. "I'm kinda nervous," he admitted at one point. (45)

Powell's comment on both Shakur's clear-headedness and admission of anxiety are significant in terms of the relative extent of the imprisoned star's addiction and depression. In response to Powell's opening general how-do-you-feel question, Shakur responds that being in prison "I had to go through what life is like when you've been smoking weed for as long as I have and then you stop. Emotionally ... I didn't know myself ... I was sitting in a room, like there was two people in the room, good and evil.... After that, the weed was out of me" (45).

Shakur proudly elaborates on his experience after his withdrawal from

marijuana by enumerating the books he read per day, the extent of time he spent writing each day and his daily exercise regimen, and confesses that these changes were "putting me in a peace of mind. Then I started seeing my situation and what got me here. Even though I'm innocent of the charge they gave me, I'm not innocent in terms of the way I was acting" (Powell 45). Next, he explains his understanding of his being guilty of both sins of omission and commission, "I'm just as guilty for not doing things as I am for doing things.... I had a job to do and I never showed up" (Powell 45). Shakur returns to the effect of his excessive abuse of alcohol and marijuana to explain why he did not live up to the extra responsibility he saw himself as having, "My brain was half dead from smoking so much weed. I'd be in my hotel room, smoking too much, drinking, going to clubs, just being numb. That was being in jail to me. I wasn't happy at all on the streets. Nobody could say they saw me happy" (Powell 46). With these words, Shakur depicts himself living the high life; unlike the poverty-struck, violent, gang-filled setting of "Lord Knows," Shakur sets his *own* addiction and depression in hotel rooms and clubs.

Despite the comfortable conditions Shakur became accustomed to, his depression and addiction seem to grow rather than dissipate when he no longer lived in the impoverished, crack-ridden dangerous neighborhoods in which he grew up. Dyson quotes rapper and actor Mos Def concurring with Shakur's self-assessment regarding his unhappiness and taking it a step further stating:

> Pac was one of the most valuable Americans of his generation ... but he was one of the most flawed and conflicted and really

> unhappy persons as well. Pac was unhappy here. I think we all sensed that. We didn't listen to him [when he said,] "I'm not happy." He wasn't happy here; he was given a rough time.... I cry a lot thinking about him, because I felt like we couldn't help him. He was begging for it. (212-15)

His depression and addiction follow him; they appear enmeshed and in Richards' terms equally extreme. Moreover, Mos Def's sadness comes from the fact that, in effect, Shakur's premature death made it impossible to apply Richards' method of making the three assessments regarding the reciprocity of the two diagnoses, the point of origin and the extremity of the diagnoses so that "the two disordering processes are both untangled and resolved simultaneously" (486). What Shakur was begging for, according to Mos Def, was a level of understanding that acknowledged the full complexity and interconnectivity of his sufferings.

While in the interview he professes to feel better in jail and off of marijuana and alcohol, many people who were close to him and even Shakur see his prison-time as what destroyed Shakur's belief in the possibility of his contributing to affecting positive change. It is critical to remember that Powell's interview took place at Riker's Island, and only six weeks into Shakur's eleven months in prison most of which he served at Clinton Correctional in upstate New York. Even in Powell's interview, Powell reminds Shakur, "When we spoke a year ago, you said that if you ended up in jail, your spirit would die. You sound like you're saying the opposite now" (46). Shakur responds:

> That was the addict speaking. The addict knew if I went to jail,

> then it couldn't live. The addict in Tupac is dead. The excuse maker in Tupac is dead. The vengeful Tupac is dead. The Tupac that would stand by and let dishonorable things happen is dead. God let me live for me to do something extremely extraordinary, and that's what I have to do. Even if they give me the maximum sentence, that's still my job. (Powell 46)

In his response, Shakur draws a distinction between his past identity as an addict and his current sober identity. Significantly, the addict exists *in* him but does not equal him, or at least not all there is to him. Shakur clearly resists the conception that "addict" is identity-conferring or instilled with the power of providing a comprehensive view of one's identity. His language, as he states, "the *addict* knew if *I* went to jail, then *it* couldn't live" (Emphasis mine), shows a sober Shakur's dissociation from his life as an addict. Not only is "the addict" different from the "I" of the presently sober Shakur, but the addict does not even register as a person as he shifts to terming the addict in him "it." Further, "the addict in Tupac" bears the charge of being also "the excuse maker in Tupac," "the vengeful Tupac," and "the Tupac that would stand by and let dishonorable things happen." All of these "Tupacs" die with his newly responsible and sober self.

As he refers to these aspects of the addict in him, he distances himself from their negative behaviors by referring to himself in the third person. Interestingly, he starts with the addict speaking, then equaling an "it" and not him or a person, moves on to calling this reprehensible person "Tupac," and finally, when he speaks of the new sober "Tupac" he changes to employing the first

person repeatedly. In the last two sentences of his response, he uses "me" three times, and "I" and "my" once each. This shift in identifying through the first person accompanies the shift toward positive behavior that the clean Tupac promises. By distinguishing the "sober Tupac" from the "addict Tupac," he fights against the "once an addict only and always an addict" mentality. His description of his responsibility reads as at once hyperbolic and simultaneously mundane, as he states, "God let me live for me to do something extremely extraordinary, and that's what I have to do. Even if they give me the maximum sentence, that's still my job" (Powell 46). It is critical to note Shakur's understanding that an addict whose "brain was half dead from smoking too much weed" as Shakur describes himself, has the potential and responsibility of doing "something extremely extraordinary" as simply "[his] job" (Powell 46). Here, Shakur refuses to accept much of society's dismissal of the possibility of the potentially empowering and important contributions that former addicts can and do make to the world. If he sees his "job," an ordinary and everyday action, even while he is in prison, as going beyond the extraordinary, then he recognizes the fluidity and complexity of identity. His view of his job underscores his recognition that he was not only and is never solely an addict, and that never was that label representative of the multiplicity of his identity or of any limitations many associate with addiction.

In contrast to the sophisticated and forgiving view that Shakur presents of a former addict's potential to make worthwhile contributions to the world, his attitude regarding his mother's crack addiction was much more ambivalent. Dyson describes how Shakur "burned [Afeni's] hopes" on her one year

anniversary of sobriety (43). He quotes and paraphrases her description of Shakur's response:

> "After I had been in recovery for a year, I was very proud of myself," Afeni recalls. She felt that her remarkable progress would wipe out her children's painful memories of her addictions. Her daughter, Sekyiwa, embraced her with open arms. Tupac, in contrast, wrote Afeni a nine-page letter on a plane ride and handed it to her when he landed. "In that nine pages, he explained as honestly as my son could do how he hoped that I really was going to stay clean'" ... but he admonished her that "'you cannot erase every single thing that you've done. You cannot expect me to believe that you can change simply because you said so.'" (Dyson 43)

Shakur wrote this letter in 1990, at nineteen years of age, and his more savvy and forgiving discussion of the jail-enforced end of his own addiction came five years later. Nonetheless, his understanding of the political processes behind the destruction that addiction—particularly crack addiction—caused in poverty-struck black neighborhoods is documented in the lyrics of numerous tracks on his first album, 1991's *2pacalypse Now*. On "Words of Wisdom," he offers the following commentary:

> Say no to drugs but the governments keep it
> Running through our community, killing the unity
> The war on drugs is a war on you and me

And yet they say this is the Home of The Free

But if you ask me it's all about hypocrisy,...

So get up, its time to start nation building

I'm fed up, we gotta start teaching children

That they can be all that they wanna to be

There's much more to life than just poverty.

(*2pacalypse Now* "Words of Wisdom")

He understands the problems the "War on Drugs" of the 1980s and 1990s created for poor, African American young people (especially men). As Bakari Kitwana points out the "drug war," in conjunction with lengthy mandatory minimum sentencing practices and the Three Strikes Law conspired to create a prison system in which "approximately 50 percent of federal and state prisoners are African American ... [and] approximately one-third of all Black males age 20-29 are incarcerated, or on probation, or on parole" (53). Kitwana cites the devastating yet familiar statistics: "Blacks make up only 13 percent of monthly illegal drug users" and "whites constitute 74 percent of monthly illegal drug users," yet in 1995, "74 percent of those sentenced to prison for drug possession were Black" (53).[14] In 1991, Shakur indentified the wreckage the drugs and the justice system wrought on his friends and the neighborhoods in which he lived. However, at that time he could not forgive his mother for her drug addiction or unconditionally support her celebration of her year of sobriety. What Shakur could not yet accomplish in his private life he soon would accomplish in his art.

Shakur fails to show a sophisticated understanding of the complexity of

the conditions that lead to his mother's addiction that would have allowed him to praise her sobriety. Such an understanding of the machinations of a political system that produced troubled and tragic figures, perhaps like his mother had been, combined with the sensitivity necessary to tell the personal side of such individuals' lives in a purposefully moving way is precisely what his album achieves. Reeves comments that in *2pacalypse Now*, Shakur presents "a mindful expression of pain from living in the inner city. He didn't just rap about the problems of the ghetto or decry the conditions; he took listeners in to the lives and souls of the people affected by the environment" (160). In "Brenda's Got a Baby" which Reeves terms Shakur's "most heartbreaking example" of his ability to reveal to his audience the inside life of a tragic figure, Shakur at once shows the understanding that his mother at first wanted in his response to her news, and simultaneously appears to blame Brenda's parents in addition to societal injustices.

At twelve years old, Brenda becomes pregnant by a cousin, has the baby on the floor of a bathroom alone, throws away the baby because "she didn't know, what to throw away and what to keep," tries to sell crack and is robbed, and then sells her body and is murdered. While Shakur constructs the song as instructional "Well let me show you how [Brenda's pregnancy and ignorance] affects the whole community," he at first seems to place a lot of the blame on her parents (*2pacalypse Now* "Brenda's Got a Baby). He raps:

> I hear Brenda's got a baby
>
> But, Brenda's barely got a brain

A damn shame

The girl can hardly spell her name

(That's not our problem, that's up to Brenda's family)

Well let me show you how it affects the whole community

Now Brenda really never knew her moms

And her dad was a junky putting death into his arms, it's sad

Cause I bet Brenda doesn't even know

Just cause you're in the ghetto doesn't mean you can't grow.

(*2pacalypse Now* "Brenda's Got a Baby")

Seemingly, her parents, an addict father and an absentee mother, should have educated her; they failed her and, in turn, they failed "the whole community." By placing the line that locates the responsibility for Brenda's ignorance and illiteracy with her parents, in parentheses, "(That's not our problem, that's up to Brenda's family)" Shakur sets the line off from the rest of the song. Moreover, when listening to the song, the voice of the artist who raps the parenthetical line stands out in contrast to Shakur's. Having another rapper sing this line, sets the rap up as a didactic opportunity for Shakur who clearly raps the line that follows the parenthetical one: "Well let me show you how it affects the whole community" (*2pacalypse Now* "Brenda's Got a Baby"). We hear Shakur's narrator structure his concern with improving the community as both personal and distracting from the narrative as he continues, "Just because you're in the ghetto doesn't mean you can't grow / But oh, that's a thought, my own revelation / Do whatever it takes to resist the temptation" (*2pacalypse Now* "Brenda's Got a

Baby"). The formal features of this song—the different voices, the parenthetical line, and the break in narrative from just relating a story—all work to achieve Shakur's goal: the song is touching, informative, intelligent, tragic, inspiring and morally directive without being preachy or corny.

Despite occurring during his first weeks in prison, in the April 1995 *Vibe* interview with Powell, Shakur sounds surprisingly optimistic and focused on helping the youth escape the impoverished, gang-ruled, drug-filled and violent communities in which he lived. He tells Powell that when he leaves prison he is "going to start an organization called Us First. I'm going to save these young niggas, because nobody else want to save them" and that "I want niggas to be educated ... because through school you can get a job" (Powell 51). Nearing the end of the interview, Shakur comments on his view of being in jail and on his goals:

> It's a gift---straight up. This is God's will.... Because I'm 23 years old. And I might just be my mother's child, but in reality, I'm everybody's child.... Nobody raised me; I was raised in this society. But I'm not going to use that as an excuse no more. I'm going to pull myself up by my bootstraps, and I'm going to make a change. And my change is going to make a change through the community. And through that, they gonna see what type of person I truly was. Where my heart was. (Powell 51)

While Shakur proposes changing the community and building programs for kids like he was, he also reveals his concern with how others view him. This

preoccupation occurs in his last words of the interview, when he promises, "I'm going to show people my true intentions, and my true heart. I'm going to show them the man that my mother raised. I'm going to make them all proud" (Powell 51). While he sounds to some extent like he has a chip on his shoulder, his desire to change and improve the people's lives still resonates.

This commitment to improving the lives of others existed in Shakur from a young age. After moving around Harlem and the Bronx, Afeni Shakur moved her family to the violent, drug-infested, poverty of Baltimore in 1986. Shakur's love of acting as a means of escape and his talent on stage and in writing flourished at the Baltimore School for the Arts (Dyson 74). The teen's precocious critique of the problems destroying the communities in which he lived developed as well. After moving to Marin City, California in 1988 after his junior year in high school, Shakur was interviewed on film and spoke knowledgably about the devastating conditions of Baltimore and his response to these conditions:

> Baltimore has the highest rate of teenage pregnancy, the highest rate of AIDS within the black community, the highest rate of teens killing teens, the highest rate of teenage suicide, and the highest rate of blacks killing blacks.... So as soon as I got there---being the person I am---I said 'No, no. I'm changing this.' So I started a stop-the-killing campaign and safe sex campaign and AIDS prevention campaign ... I felt like I did a lot of good. (qtd. in Dyson 84)

Despite the high schooler's best efforts, after two weeks in California he "got a call and two of my friends were shot dead in the head ... and it's just like, why try? Because this is what happens.... But I still try, you know" (qtd. in Dyson 84). His perseverance in the face of the unfolding tragedies surrounding him rings evident throughout his interview with Powell at Riker's Island.

The move to California proved devastating to Shakur. He dropped out of school because he did not fit in and disagreed with what and how he was taught, he learned that his mother was addicted to crack, he moved out of her house, he briefly and unsuccessfully tried selling crack, and he lost the support and empowerment he gained at the Baltimore School for the Arts (Reeves 158). However, according to Reeves, after learning of his mother's crack addiction in 1990, "Tupac recast his focus back to a future in the arts, a career, he thought, of creating within his generation's loudest and most profound expression: rap" (158). The timing of Shakur's decision was fitting because at the time "the socially righteous anger of Public Enemy and N.W.A. ruled hip-hop music, and so who to better speak the soul of his peers than a child literally birthed from the black power era" (Reeves 158). In turning toward the arts, specifically rap and acting, as vehicles of his own and others' change, the still teenaged Shakur shows the same kind of belief in his power to help others as he expresses both in the Riker's Island interview with Powell and in the video-taped interview of him as a high school student in Marin City, California. In the California high school interview, Shakur describes his efforts to improve conditions in Baltimore, and despite learning of the murders of two friends, says he will continue his efforts.

Similarly, when learning of his mother's crack addiction he remains focused on his acting and rap career believing that through his work, he will improve people's lives.

While numerous friends, colleagues, family members, and others who knew Shakur concur that his goal of changing people's lives for the better by improving conditions in neglected and impoverished communities was long-standing and sincere, many of those closest to Shakur recognize and comment on the way his addictions and depression detracted from his sense of purpose and success in implementing the changes he saw as essential to reaching this goal. The optimistic and sober Shakur interviewed by Powell, stands in stark contrast to the Shakur visitors to the Clinton Correctional Facility report meeting in the later stages of his time in prison. As Angela Ardis writes about her visits with Shakur in Clinton Correctional "he was high, I realized as I reached my chair" (228), and she recalls thinking "*What did he smoke?*" (230). When she visits him the following day she comments that "he looked a lot higher than he had the day before" (233).

Ardis writes as a fan of Shakur who bet friends she could "reach" the artist while he was in prison. Her book documents her epistolary and telephone contact with Shakur and culminates with her two brief visits, over the course of two days, to Shakur while he was incarcerated at Clinton Correctional. Because of her status as a star-struck fan who is impressed with her ability to win the bet and believes she and Shakur share a deep connection, her perspective is uncritical. The book includes "original poems and letters by Tupac Shakur" written

"exclusively" for Ardis and her responses; both Shakur's letters and poems and Ardis's responses in letters and poetry, as well as her fantasies that she does not share with Shakur, border on pornography. The sexual content of her text combined with her naïveté and almost silly fantasies add to the missing critique that much of the more scholarly work on Shakur prioritizes. However, it is interesting to note that unlike much of the more critically sophisticated work, Ardis's does include her reading of Shakur as actively using drugs. She spends no time analyzing how or why he was high in prison; it is almost as if because the focus of the book is on telling her story, it frees her from having to consider or analyze the content of her tale.

Ironically, the more academic writing on Shakur, in general, is loath to mention what he and those close to him term his addictions. Today, Shakur is in/famous for the contradictions that define(d) him and for the polarizing views on his impact on the communities from which he came. Scholars commonly defend and vividly describe his actions that resulted in the sexual assault conviction. These same critics openly discuss his interactions with the police and his depression and hopelessness. While Shakur was alive, magazines, newspapers and tabloids made mention of his drug use. However, the more respected and scholarly writing on Shakur avoids acknowledging or analyzing his addictions. In Quinn's theoretically astute and compelling article significantly titled "'All Eyez on Me': The Paranoid Style of Tupac Shakur," she explores Shakur's paranoia as evidenced in his lyrics and as a result of "a complex an contradictory interrogation of the operations of cultural power" (178). Quinn's investigation

into Shakur's paranoid persona offers an informed analysis of his lyrics and his role in a culture of publicity that he could not control; yet, it fails to mention Shakur's addiction to marijuana and alcohol, even though numerous studies agree that chronic daily abuse of marijuana often leads to paranoid thinking. In the interview with Powell, which significantly was originally published in *Vibe,* a popular non-academic magazine, Shakur acknowledges that he used this drug to this extent for years. Any discussion of Shakur as paranoid seems obligated to investigate and comment on his long-term daily use of weed.

In his scholarly *Holler if You Hear Me: Searching for Tupac Shakur* Dyson devotes pages to Shakur's addictions. Yet, even as Dyson includes a brief discussion of Shakur's addiction and marijuana and alcohol abuse, he relies heavily on the words of others in this discussion. It is almost as if labeling Shakur an addict would be an insult; again, by letting those who knew Shakur speak about his addictions directly, Dyson confirms the negative connotations associated with addiction. Dyson, and the scholarly writers who do not even mention Shakur's status as an addict, like Marcus Reeves and Renford Reese,[15] imply that being an addict is so bad that identifying him in that way would dishonor his memory and add fodder to the numerous writers who view Shakur as solely a negative and dangerous figure and influence. When Dyson comments on the lack of discussion of Shakur's addiction, he quotes actor Jada Pinkett Smith, Shakur's close friend ever since they attended the Baltimore School of the Arts together. He writes:

> Tupac's dear friend Jada Pinkett Smith was one of the few to peer through the haze. "People don't like to talk about [the fact that] Pac was an addict," she says. "He wasn't clear about too much of anything. He was really in his own world. You know, he was an alcoholic, and he was high. He was high all the time, drunk, whatever. His mind was never clear." (Dyson 240)

In confirming Tupac's abuse of marijuana, Dyson goes on to quote Karen Lee, a publicist of Shakur, as saying "The boy could smoke some weed" (240). Even though Shakur tells Powell of his new prison-enforced sobriety in his 1995 Riker's Island interview, Ardis's assessment of Shakur as "high" later in his time in prison corresponds with another quote from Smith regarding Shakur's lack of sobriety in prison. According to Smith, "'He was even getting high [in prison]. Whatever you need is there. I remember somebody was in there making some alcohol, and he would get his little buzz on in there one way or another'" (qtd. in Dyson 241). Smith also believes that Shakur's active addictions in prison caused him to ask her to marry him. Dyson quotes Smith quoting her mother's response to Shakur's request for Smith's hand in marriage from prison:

> Smith says that her mother was gentle but firm. "And my mother, [who's] known Pac for a long time [says], 'Pac, I love you. You guys have a very special relationship. But you can't expect me to be happy when you're asking for my daughter's hand in marriage.... And you're an addict. When are you going to get clean?'" (241)

Smith concludes, "His whole thing was, like, 'I know I need to clean up.' But I think he also knew he had too much to take on to [be able] to cope without the alcohol and drugs" (Dyson 241). Sources that identify Shakur as an addict or as abusing drugs and alcohol typically fall into the category of magazines, newspapers, or tabloids which may include interviews with Shakur, his friends, colleagues and relatives.[16] These sources often err on the opposite side of the more scholarly works on Shakur that want to highlight his positive contributions to the world, and instead focus sometimes even blandly on his run-ins with the law.

Lacking analysis, critique, and an author, the brief article "Tupac Shakur Confined to Cell for 23 Hours Daily After Smoking Marijuana in Prison" appeared in *Jet* magazine's July 3rd, 1995 edition. The article confirms Smith's and Ardis's assertions that Shakur was high while in prison. While the title tells most of the story, the evidence and repercussions included support the credibility and theoretical significance of the piece:

> Corrections Department spokesman James Falteau said that Shakur failed a urine test May 25 after a guard smelled marijuana around his cell. Shakur was given 60 days of constant confinement but for one hour a day and lost two months of good time and such privilege as use of the commissary. (*Jet* 63)

Moreover, the seriousness of the penalties Shakur accrues as the result of this one failed urine test attest to the attitude of the penal system regarding drug use. Considering that Shakur's sentence was from one and a half to four and a half

years in prison, losing sixty days of good behavior in addition to having to spend sixty days in cell confinement represent significant punishments. While the writing reads as factual and unbiased, the decision to run the piece with an accompanying photograph of Shakur in *Jet's* "Celebrities" section, reveals the magazine's contribution to the mass of media documentation that exists surrounding Shakur's transgressions. His open use of marijuana in prison, as proven by the fact that he was drug-tested only *after* a guard smelled smoke coming from Shakur's cell, strongly suggests that he was addicted to the drug. Shakur and many writers comment on the unusually high bail, harsh sentencing, and strict treatment in prison that the rapper faced. In spite of his complaints about the treatment he received, and in spite of his earlier proud proclamation to Powell of having become sober in prison, he cannot maintain his sobriety.

In a much different mode of discourse than that of the *Jet* article, Dyson finally acknowledges Shakur's addiction without the need to ventriloquize the words of others. In his text, Dyson, this time quoting no one, boldly asserts:

> The bottle, however, and the joint, too, were never to be slighted in Tupac's taxonomy of addictive escapes. From the time his mother abused alcohol and crack to the time he attempted to become a low-level drug dealer ... up until the moment he drank his last drink and smoked his last joint, undoubtedly the night he was shot in Vegas, Tupac understood the seductions and magic (as well as the destructive, demonic consequences) of mind-altering, body-changing substances. (238-9)

Dyson's knowledge of the role drugs and alcohol played in Shakur's life is undeniably clear. However, after making this important connection, Dyson moves away from Shakur in particular, and discusses the dangers of romanticizing drug use in rap and hip-hop (240). He follows this general analysis of the "hard truth ... that thousands of poor black youth are trapped in a haze of smoke," with the quotations addressed above from Smith, her mother, and Lee who identify Shakur as an addict (240-1). Dyson should be applauded for addressing Shakur's addiction; he stands out in contrast to the many respected hip-hop and Shakur scholars who fail to seriously address, let alone mention, the rapper's addictions.

The shared silence regarding Shakur as an addict among these scholars speaks to the powerful presence of the negative and identity-conferring view of an addict even among the highly regarded scholars of hip-hop. For to see Shakur as an addict, some believe, degrades his legacy and the integrity of the subject of Shakur studies. This kind of mind-set serves as the catalyst for my re-visioning theory of addiction. If we do not discuss Shakur as an addict, we fail to discuss an important aspect of his identity. For Shakur's understanding of the significance of his addiction more often than not, surpasses in sophistication and nuance the attitudes of those who avoid or evade discussion of the fact of his addiction. Any thorough work on Shakur must address his addictions; to fail to do so supports antiquated but prevalent notions of addiction that view addicts as morally corrupt, deserving of punishment instead of psychological and rehabilitating treatments, and unworthy of serious discussion. Because Shakur wrote honestly in his poetry and rap about being addicted to drugs, drama,

violence, and the urge to die, because Shakur spoke openly in interviews about these addictions, and because he publically abused drugs and alcohol, to omit a discussion about what it meant to him to be an addict disrespects Shakur's comprehensive and complex view of his identity and his belief that he could improve the world and contribute artistically to it, in meaningful and uplifting, if un-sparing, ways *despite* his addictions.

The silence regarding Shakur as an addict is particularly dangerous considering the position he occupied in society as a young black man who grew up in poverty, was raised by his "crack fiend" "black queen" mother, and whose success came through his insightful, sensitive, angry, and on-target gangsta rap. Do so many respected writers shy away from discussing Shakur's addictions for fear of perpetuating stereotypes about young black men as addicts? If so, such writers contribute to supporting rather than deconstructing or dismantling a contrived and ongoing catch-22. Moreover, many of the writers who choose not to mention Shakur's drug addiction, ironically call attention to the potentially negative influence his lyrics about drug *dealing* might have on young members of his audience and community.[17] Shakur's week-long failed attempt at selling crack, his mother's crack addiction, and his openness in interviews about his addictions, his lyrics about his narrators' addiction and despair have received opposite and disproportionate media and academic attention. If fear of contributing to stereotypes about young black men as addicts fuels the lack of critical discussion of Shakur's addiction, then why doesn't the same logic govern the almost excessive discussion of drug dealing and Shakur? Why do so many

texts that discuss Shakur reference his *mother's* crack addiction, yet omit any discussion of *his* ongoing addictions?[18] If we ignore Shakur's addictions because we believe the only ways to mention them will contribute to a stereotype, then we buy into that very stereotype that states young black rappers are negative role models or disappointments to their communities because some of them are addicts. We must change the ways we think about addicts and then we will write about addicts as more than just addicts. Afeni Shakur, as a former crack addict and Black Panther, may best capture the need to change the way we think, when she comments on the solely negative view many hold of members the hip-hop generation. She states:

> I've heard enough of [our youth] to know that we ought to be holding them up and sharing with them what we know instead of standing on top of them telling them what they're not doing right. They're doing a lot right and some things wrong. We continue to fail these brilliant, very talented, very courageous young people because they're not saying what our message was. But for Christ's sake ... we're about to enter the 21st century. Something should be different. And they may be right about some things. (qtd. in Kitwana 3)

Making some mistakes does not invalidate the successes one achieves; as a mother of a famous son who made some extremely public and publicized mistakes and who was murdered at the age of twenty-five, as a former addict who regrets the ways her addiction hurt herself and those she loved, and as a former

Black Panther whose philosophy on black power evolved, Afeni understood that it is impossible and undesirable to live a mistake-free or pain-free or regret-free or evolution-free life. These are three apt examples of the myriad complexities that contribute to Afeni Shakur's constantly shifting identity. Her words regarding the generational dismissal and conscious abandonment of the youth due to their doing "some things wrong," and "not saying what our message was" capture the necessity of seeing beyond the "once an addict, always and only an addict" mentality that eliminates productive and positive discussions of what it means that Shakur openly identified as an addict.

His mother's words capture the importance of understanding and respecting the concept that we "shouldn't throw out the baby with the bathwater," that identity is not static and that one aspect of one's identity should not define the "totality" of that individual. Shakur's embracing of many contradictions in the development or construction of his identity corroborates Mark Anthony Neal's contention that, "a crisis of black masculinity exists not only in the scapegoated, so-called hip-hop generation, but in the legions of well-adjusted, educated, heterosexual black men" (3). If we have arrived at a mentality of "The Hip-Hop Thug versus the New Talented Tenth" (3), as Neal argues, then Shakur's consistent contradictions highlight his understanding of this limiting and dangerous dichotomy. Throughout his life, Shakur's honesty about his addictions, about his personal despair and psychic pain, about his anger and frustration regarding societal injustices, remains, but his changing ways of addressing these issues indicate the challenges he faced in presenting an identity

that was at once sensitive, informed and politically driven, as well as hard, violent, and arrogant.

An example of Neal's dichotomy of hip-hop "as a world best described as having a 'bitch/queen' complex"(129), at work in Shakur, involves his at times binary view of black women.[19] In "Dear Mama" an homage to his mother, Shakur raps:

> One day
> Running from tha Police, that's right
> Momma catch me--put a whoop'en to my backside
> And even as a crack fiend mama,
> Ya always was a black queen mama
> I finally understand for a woman
> It ain't easy--trying ta raise a man
> Ya always wuz committed, a poor single mother on welfare,
> Tell me how ya did it
> There's no way I can pay ya back
> But the plan is ta show ya that I understand.
> You are appreciated.....
> Laaaaady, don't cha know we luv ya
> Sweeeet Laaaady, place no one above ya
> Sweeeet Laaaady, don't cha know we luv ya.
> (*Me Against the World* "Dear Mama")

With this song, Shakur sets his mother on a pedestal, while still acknowledging the fact of her addiction and her role as a stern authority figure. Her time as a "crack fiend" does not limit her; she is both "crack fiend" and "black queen." She can do no wrong and what she has done, in his words, earns his love, appreciation, understanding and status above all others. Neal asserts, "Tupac is just the most well-known case of a seeming schizophrenia that articulates a real fear and distrust of black femininity ... and a real passion for those Black women who adhere to traditional notions of femininity that allow for unfettered visions of black masculinity" (130). In "Dear Mama," we see Shakur's positive depiction of a black woman who at once meets and strays from Neal's "traditional notions of femininity" (130).

In "Temptations" also on "*Me Against the World,"* Shakur's "sensitive" album, he reveals a modified version of some of his negative depictions of black women. He raps:

> Ain't no time for commitment, I gotta' go
> Can't be wit' you every minute, miss another show
> And even though I'm known for my one night stands
> I wanna be an honest man, but temptations got me.
> (*Me Against the World* "Temptations")

In these lines, Shakur draws a portrait of a man whose desire to be "honest" and stop having "one night stands" is immediately mitigated in the first line, since he has "no time for commitment." This figure offers the woman the most he can; he is a man who wants to be faithful, but is ruled by "temptations" and his

commitment to performances (he can't "miss another show"). While the woman is not directly depicted negatively, the behavior of the man degrades her because he cannot change the dismissive and meaningless way he views her. Neal acknowledges that Shakur's positive and negative depictions of black women stem from the complexities of the pressures of having to at once disprove and prove stereotypes of what it means to represent or "be" an "authentic" or "real" young black man gangsta rapper raised surrounded by poverty, violence, drugs, death and despair.

In contrast, Shakur also grew up surrounded by the teachings and nurturing of his Black Panther mother and extended family, and in an environment that encouraged his appreciation of and participation in theatre, the arts, reading, ballet, and writing poetry. Renford Reese beginning with his very title, *American Paradox: Young Black Men*, captures the same double-bind in which Shakur lived:

> Tupac was well-read in political philosophy and feminist literature. He was very intelligent and gifted. As a high school student he danced, acted, and enjoyed writing poetry. At some point, however, he realized that being intelligent and gifted was not enough to get him where he ultimately wanted to be-so he created his "Thug Life" image. He got multiple tattoos all over his body.... He must have realized that not even this was enough to be considered a "real" black man. At the height of his rapping and acting career, he began to engage in gangsta behavior.... In an

> extraordinary effort to become accepted as an "authentic" black man, Tupac initiated a series of crimes and embraced a way of life that was foreign to him ... Tupac went overboard in trying to prove his black manhood. (49)

Reese continues and asserts that Shakur's eventual murder results from his choice to become an "authentic" gangsta, arguing "this lifestyle ultimately led to his murder in 1996" (49).

It is interesting to note that Reese identifies Shakur's early actions in his attempt to become a "'real' black man" as, first, developing his "'Thug Life' image," and, second, getting various tattoos inscribed on his body (49). While on-target in associating the Shakur's concept of "THUG LIFE" with his tattoos, Reese misses the essential point when he comments, "The words 'Thug Life' were boldly tattooed in calligraphy on his chest" (49). Unwittingly, Reese here captures both Shakur's consciousness of the need to "authenticate" his gangsta image as well as evidence of his intact social conscience in the *very simple lettering* of the "THUG LIFE" tattoo that stretched across Shakur's *abdomen*. In misidentifying the tattoo as consisting of "the words Thug Life" written in calligraphy instead of the simple capital letters "THUG LIFE," a distinction that Shakur repeatedly emphasized is lost. For Shakur, "THUG LIFE" was an acronym: The Hate U Gave Lil Infants: Fucks Everybody. According to Powell's "THIS THUG'S LIFE," "'Thug Life' is what Tupac calls his mission for the black community---a support group, a rap act, and a philosophy" (Feb. 1994, 29). Moreover, in an interview in the documentary *Tupac: Resurrection* Shakur

elaborates on his definition of an individual who is a "thug," saying that "a thug is an underdog. Not someone who goes against the law. Someone who has nothing, but holds his head high" (*Resurrection* 2003). Many have traced a change in Shakur's priorities from his earlier work and recordings to his work after joining Death Row, and say he lost his political message and became a gangsta rapper and thug interested primarily in material gains. However, his view of a thug as an underdog and his ongoing identification as a thug underscore his attempt to retain the perspective some say he lost when signing on with Suge Knight. Investing the phrase and the tattoo with his own counterintuitive meaning, Shakur underscores the attempt he makes to negotiate embracing the negative stereotypes accompanying the construction of being "an authentic black man," while reconciling his socially aware and responsible conscience.

The "THUG LIFE" acronym was not the first time Shakur reappropriated a word that previously or commonly held negative meaning. In the track "Words of Wisdom" on his 1991 *2pacalypse Now* album, Shakur asserts as Armond White explains "that 'Nigga' is not the nigga we're prone to fear but an acronym that means 'Not Ignorant Getting Goals Accomplished'" (61). White goes on to condemn Shakur for investing the word with new meaning, writing, "for a genuine politician this would be called devious, but in pop, it's just fatuous. Tupac means to reverse Black youth's value system---accepting the negative as a positive---but the goal he implies is brusque" (61). Scholars, including Judith Butler, Homi Bhabha, Kendall Thomas and many others, have studied the power and danger seemingly simultaneously inherent in reappropriations of language

and identity. When *2pacalypse Now* was released Shakur was only twenty years old. He was probably still a teenager when he penned "Words of Wisdom." As Butler points out, politically driven reappropriations are vulnerable to slippage because of the "ambivalence" that remains in the difference between the "original" and the newly invested and often opposite meaning.[20]

Should Shakur's attempt at altering the meaning of "nigga," a word possessing an unrivalled power of degradation and hatred, be written off as "fatuous," or stupid or pointless? Dyson quotes Mos Def's more understanding view of Shakur's attempt at reappropriating language. He writes "Mos Def sees Tupac's importance as taking 'something that was negative and associat[ing] it with us [young blacks] and trying to flip it ... I think it was really just a noble ambition of Pac's mind that he never really got to even fully expand on.... He died so young'" (Dyson 171). White lacks such empathy regarding Shakur's age or earnestness regarding *2pacalypse Now.* The album expresses a young Shakur's frustrations with the world in which he finds himself living daily; on "Words of Wisdom" he raps:

> No Malcolm X in my history text
>
> Why's that?
>
> Because he tried to educate and liberate all Blacks
>
> Why is Martin Luther King in my book each week ?
>
> Cuz he taught all Blacks to get slapped
>
> And turn the other cheek.
>
> (*2pacalypse Now* "Words of Wisdom")

White criticizes Shakur for these lines, claiming, "for a revolutionary's son to voice such a simplification suggests he was given a slanted political education" (62). The complaint stems in part from the fact that Shakur was the son of Black Panthers; here, we see how even posthumously the expectations placed on Shakur simply because his mother was a "revolutionary" were unremitting. Further, wouldn't one expect a revolutionary to bestow her child with a "slanted political education"? Shakur's critique of the education he received in school makes him seem more aware than White that all educations are "slanted."

It is interesting that White chooses to criticize Shakur for his "fatuous" acronym and for having internalized a "slanted" education. Many other people comment on Shakur's violence, open disrespect of women, prison time, trouble with the law and arrogant ways. It seems generally acceptable to discuss every word or deed of Shakur's that contributed to his "negative" influence except for one; his status as an addict. In the logic of the minds of those who openly condemned Shakur, ranging from C. Delores Tucker and Stanley Crouch, to Dan Quayle, Shakur's dependence and open use of and raps about marijuana and alcohol would seem to be, for figures like these, more "evidence" of the dangers Shakur represented to the children and the world. It is interesting to look again at his "sensitive" album *Me Against the World*, this time with an eye for the heavy presence of lyrics in which the narrator uses marijuana and/or alcohol to find ways of comforting himself. On "Death Around the Corner," Shakur describes a character, who like himself after being shot five times at an attack in New York City, claims "I no longer trust my homies, them phonies tried to do me / smoking

too much weed, got me paranoid, stressed" (*Me Against the World* "Death Around the Corner"). Here, the character smokes "too much weed" as a result of feeling that he cannot trust his friends, but knows that his overuse of weed brings with it the paranoia and stress that he smokes to avoid. In the first song on the album, "If I Die 2Nite," Shakur connects the narrator's present weed-smoking with his need to be saved from a "psychotic" world, and his needing to be saved to his lifelong addiction to trouble or "drama" and violence. He raps:

> I'm sick of psychotic society somebody save me
> Addicted to drama so even mama couldn't raise me
> Even the preacher and all my teachers couldn't reach me
> I run in the streets and puffin weed wit my peeps
> I'm duckin the cop, I hit the weed as I'm clutchin my glock.
> (*Me Against the World* "If I Die 2Nite")

In "So Many Tears," Shakur writes of the same kind of self-perpetuating problems of alcohol use that he does of weed, as discussed above, in "Death Around the Corner." He raps, "I'm trapped inside a maze / See this Tanqueray influenced me to gettin' crazy / Disillusioned lately, I've been really wantin' babies / So I could see a part of me that wasn't always shady / Don't trust my lady" (*Me Against the World* "So Many Tears"). Again, we hear of the feeling of the lack of trust, the lack of personal integrity (he is "always shady"), the lack of options (he is "trapped inside a maze"), the lack of sanity, and the way these lacks connect to the character's drinking Tanqueray. He drinks so he will not feel trapped, but it causes him to "get crazy" and feel "shady."

Shakur loads the track "It Ain't Easy" with references to weed and alcohol. It opens with the lines, "take a shot of Hennessey now I'm strong enough to face the madness / Nickel bag full of sess weed laced with hash," in which he again links drinking with the strength to face "the madness," and adds that the possession of some particularly potent weed-hash combination will help, if the liquor does not do the trick. Significantly, however, while the weed is of high quality, the fact that the character only has a nickel bag of it—just enough to get him and a couple of friends high—attests to his not being a dealer and highlights that the weed will be for his personal use in "facing the madness." He continues to link despair to drug use, as the song continues:

> It ain't easy, that's my motto
> Drinkin' Tanqueray straight out the bottle
> Everybody wanna' know if I'm insane
> My baby mama gotta' mind full of silly games
> And all the drama got me stressin' like I'm hopeless, I can't cope
> Me and the homies smokin' roaches, cause we broke
> Late night hangin' out til the sunrise gettin' high
> Watchin' the cops roll by
> It ain't easy... that's right.
> (*Me Against the World* "It Ain't Easy")

In this song, he combines his often-cited "hopelessness"[21] with a litany of alcoholic beverages and forms of marijuana (from high quality to left over "roaches"). In "It Ain't Easy," the insanity of the character is questioned and he

"can't cope" so he uses alcohol and weed to help him face the difficult world. With these prolific references to drug and alcohol abuse and suffering throughout the songs on his most popular album, it is puzzling why the pundits who linked hip-hop with so many other "problems" failed to mention drug abuse.

While Nancy Reagan told children to "Just say no," "several high-profile politicians, academics, journalists, and activists" according to Ogbar "have held hip-hop culpable for violent crime rates, sexual irresponsibility, poor academic performance, and general social dysfunction ... these pundits have offered little more than recycled fear of black youth as a social danger" (106). To Ogbar, it is almost as if the criticism hurled at hip-hop was so uncreative that in "reclycl[ing] fear of black youth" drug use was momentarily forgotten. Conspicuously missing from Ogbar's list is blaming hip-hop for glamorizing or encouraging drug use. So why have friends and foes kept relatively quiet about Shakur's addictions while openly condemning or mentioning his other illegal actions? Surely, it is not because society views addiction from an illness model and considers Shakur's addiction as something as blameless as cancer. The unfair penalties for crack possession versus those for cocaine possession and Shakur's harsh punishment for using marijuana in prison attest to the nation's view of addiction as criminal and blame-worthy. And this attitude has been particularly clear in the unsympathetic response to the ways crack devastated inner-city African American and Latino communities.

So why are Shakur's addictions so rarely mentioned by scholars and kept off the list of his other irredeemable actions by the abovementioned critics who

openly condemned his hip-hop ways? The answer to this question, finally, is that as a culture we are and have been, at a crossroads regarding an acceptable discourse about addicts and addiction. One point of this study is to provide us with a new and liberating way to think and talk about addicts and addiction. Scholars write *ad nauseaum* about Shakur's lifelong pain and despair. His "hopelessness" has been documented in his interviews and in the characters he creates who give life to his rap.

This silence regarding addiction is brought home when we contrast the huge presence of depression in the discourse of popular culture including advertising in all media with the absence of a similar discourse on addiction. Depression occupies a place in society ahead of addiction. Television advertisements for anti-depressants and mood-stabilizers to treat bipolar disorder run on all networks, during sports events, prime time dramas, national news broadcasts, midday, and on both weekends and weekdays. In other words, no one from the unemployed woman watching midday talk-shows to the man who arrives home after working a nine-to-five job, eats dinner and turns on the national news at 6:30PM, escapes being part of the psycho-pharmaceuticals' target audience for medication to treat mood disorders. These same ads dominate all kinds of magazines and the web. In all media, they are glossy, expensive, leisurely paced, understanding and serious in tone, and intentionally "normalizing." Different ages, races, genders, locations reinforce the message that "we all" suffer from or know someone who suffers from an affective disorder.

Where are the advertisements to help addicts? They are relegated to tiny

ads, 1 ½" by 1 ½", in dull black and gray print on the last pages of free local newspapers. These ads offer quick, cheap and generally unsuccessful detoxes. Once in a while, an actual treatment center will air a rushed, inexpensive, but palm-tree and beach-filled commercial during daytime weekday T.V. The A&E network, once home to some quality television shows, now airs episodes of the exploitative documentary-style, "real-life" *Intervention*. It consists of a voyeuristic hour that follows the life of an addict via interviews with him and his family and friends, and culminates with the unsuspecting addict going to what she thinks is her last interview only to face all of her family and friends gathered with an "expert" interventionist. At this point in the show, the addict must listen as the people gathered read letters expressing their love for and disgust with the addict, finally, offering an ultimatum that almost always succeeds in "convincing" the addict to take "the gift" of rehabilitation at some restful "top-of-the-line" center as long as she leaves immediately. During this show, quick ads with experts at warm, "palmy" treatment centers claiming high success rates run, as do promos for next week's *Intervention* or for the show it precedes. *Intervention* airs at nine at night on Mondays and is followed by the equally voyeuristic, othering and exploitative show *Hoarders*; this show highlights people whose homes are filled from floor to ceiling with garbage, "collections," rotten food, feces, dead animals, empty alcohol bottles, or a combination of the above.[22] Here, and during low-quality scripted talk shows, we relegate views of "real" addicts on television. We do not know what to do with them, for them, or to them.

The same confusion exists in our attitude toward Shakur's addiction.

While he is blamed for many things, and he is honored for others, no one knew what to do with his addiction. He raps and talks openly and repeatedly about his depression and his addictions, but most critics, scholars, writers, fans, and fellow rappers have chosen only to respond to his hopelessness. Often, people connect his depression and hopelessness with his desire to improve the lives of people who could relate to his despair. What some people do not seem to know how to address is Shakur's way of compounding his discussion of his despair with descriptions of his abuse of and addiction to marijuana and alcohol. Dyson, who, as outlined above, is one of a handful of critics who does devote space in his work on Shakur to a discussion of Shakur's addictions, confirms the repetitive nature of his "studied hopelessness ... he affirmed his depressive status by repeatedly declaring 'I'm hopeless'" (Dyson 123). Shakur's rap is replete with examples of his characters' identification as "hopeless" living a in a "hopeless" world:

> God forgive me cause it's wrong but I plan to die
> Either take me to heaven and understand I was a sheep
> Did the best I could, raised in insanity
> Or send me to hell cause I ain't beggin' for my life
> Ain't nothing worse than this cursed ass hopeless life
> Cause I'm troublesome.
> (*Greatest Hits* "Troublesome")

On *Me Against the World*, he raps simply, "I'm hopeless / They should've killed me as a baby / Now they got me trapped in the storm / I'm going crazy" (*Me Against the World* "Lord Knows"). In one of Shakur's most commercially

successful singles, “Dear Mama,” he returns to his refrain of hopelessness. He writes, “Pour out some liquor and I reminisce / ’Cause through the drama, I can always depend on my mama / And when it seems that I’m hopeless / You say the words that can get me back in focus” (*Me Against the World* “Dear Mama”). His repetitive use of the word hopeless as a catchall for his depression does not sound lazy or uncreative. Instead, he loads the word with varied images that imbue it with power and allow hopeless members of his listeners to relate to the experiences he connects to the term.

We see this pattern at work as Dyson later describes the power in Shakur’s refrain of hopelessness and in his depictions of the ubiquitous horrors and gruelingly pervasive struggle in the communities in which he grew up and of which he knew intimately. He writes, “His art changed people’s lives. His stirring raps made many people see suffering they had never before acknowledged. It helped many desperately unhappy young people reclaim a sense of hope and humanity” (Dyson 170). Quoting from “a young man who approached me after a lecture,” Dyson confirms the power of Shakur’s expression of his depression. He quotes, “Tupac saved my life. If I had been listening to so-called positive rappers, I would have been dead. When he said, ‘I’m hopeless,’ I could identify with that, and I didn’t kill myself like I had planned to do because I believed he understood how I felt” (170-1). While this young man was able to relate to Shakur’s words “I’m hopeless,” and while Dyson and others point out Shakur’s empowering descriptions of suffering, his desperate admissions and portrayals of his marijuana and alcohol abuse and addiction fail to get credit for

helping other addicts identify with Shakur and try to find help. Is it the case that addicts did not find inspiration or understanding in the recognition that they were not alone in their suffering, like the young "hopeless" man who had planned his suicide did? Why do we assume that addicts were unable to take in Shakur's connection of hopelessness and addiction and the whole notion that addiction was his self-medication for his hopelessness? The answer is: because we continue to underestimate addicts.

Looking at AA's or NA's meetings, in which participants tell stories of their lowest moments of drug and alcohol addiction and abuse, and an audience of recovering addicts finds connections by identifying with the situations people share, suggests that Shakur's repeated references to his and his characters' drug abuse could work for addicts as his admissions of depression did for the young man quoted above. Shakur's ability to bring such a level of rhetorical honesty lends a confessional aspect to his work. When Shakur shares his stories of lifelong depression and elaborates on his feelings of being a burden and change being a fantasy as he does so vividly in "Unconditional Love," he is credited with being a sensitive, empathic, intelligent, and politically committed rapper. He writes:

> Come listen to my truest thoughts, my truest feelings
> All my peers doing years beyond drug dealing
> How many caskets can we witness
> Before we see it's hard to live
> This life without God, so we must ask forgiveness

Ask mama why I got this urge to die

Witness the tears falling free from my eyes

Before she could reply

Though we were born without a silver spoon

My broken down TV, show cartoons in my living room

(hey)

One day I hope to make it

A player in this game

Mama don't cry, long as we try

Maybe things change

Perhaps it's just a fantasy

A life where we don't need no welfare

Shit with our whole family

Maybe it's me that caused it

The fighting and the hurting

In my room crying cause I didn't want to be a burden

Watch mama open up her arms to hug me

And I ain't worried bout a damn thing, with unconditional

love.

(*Greatest Hits* "Unconditional Love")

These autobiographical sounding lyrics epitomize the view of Shakur as depressed, but politically concerned; his character is both vulnerable in his need for his mother's hugs and astute in his self-assessment of the causes of his

depression. He or his character can "ask mama why I got this urge to die" at the same time that he documents the situational factors of this depression. Those fans and writers who view this honesty about the depths and causes of his depression as part of what makes Shakur stand out among other rappers tend to romanticize the myth linking artistic creation and depression or hypersensitivity.

Like AA and NA, many other addiction treatment modalities rely not only on the repetition of addicts sharing their highs and lows of drug abuse, but also on employing former or recovering addicts as counselors in treatment facilities. Recovered addicts who occupy positions of authority and positions in which they build close, sometimes one-on-one relationships with those in treatment, offer a level of authenticity since "they've been there" and a more formalized level of "success" in recovery than even AA and NA sponsors can provide. This trend in treatment discredits the idea that by rapping about depression Shakur saved depressed listeners, while his rapping about addictions and drug abuse did not work in the same way. When the scholars and academics most often choose not to focus on Shakur's honesty regarding his addictions, it becomes clear that the common view of addiction, even when Shakur openly addressed it and accurately connected it to depression and politicized it in relation to his surroundings, assesses it as something that should remain unspoken of, untreated, ignored. The fact that Shakur honestly discusses it certainly is not generally applauded; no one suggests that by delivering a story about addiction Shakur contributes something into the pubic realm to which addicts can relate and get help. The frightening implication behind the silence let alone lack of praise for his honesty regarding

his drug abuse is twofold. First, addicts cannot be saved the way the suicidal young man was. And, second, addicts are not worth saving. For to applaud Shakur's honesty about his drug addictions would "reduce" him to the level of addict, and it would require the kind of action in helping addicts en masse that has been dedicated to helping people with affective disorders. Shakur calls for this kind of action; if his mother can become addicted to crack, then anyone in the impoverished and hopeless environments in which they lived can also develop a crack addiction.

Afeni Shakur, a strong, educated, former Black Panther, raising two children on her own in some of the most violent, poor, crack-ridden communities does not avoid succumbing to a crack habit—but she overcomes the addiction. Why is this not inspiring to an addict even more than simply learning that someone you admire shares a diagnosable disorder? We do not know that it isn't. But we do not take the time to find out. In an interview in *Tupac: Resurrection*, Shakur identifies the devastating impact of crack in poor African American urban communities in the 1980s and 1990s as part of living in the post "B.C." ("before crack") era. In naming this period as defined in part by the influx of crack into poor African American and Latino urban areas, Shakur also condemns the unfair sentencing accompanying the drug, and finally asserts the need for an en masse system of treatment for addicts and the same kind of broad spectrum system of education as a deterrent.

Shakur's sense of responsibility for improving the communities which crack-linked violence and gangs tuned into virtual wastelands remained consistent

throughout his life despite his depression and addictions. According to Dyson, "Tupac as a young man often told Leila [Steinberg] that a prison stay, a staple of black male existence, would give him invaluable experience to draw on in writing his raps" (215). Ironically, after his time in prison, during which he boasted of his newfound sobriety yet later was punished for smoking marijuana in his cell, he wondered if he could still make a difference. After Shakur had served eleven months and had been released, Steinberg asked him, "Did it give you insight? Did it give you any more respect?" to which he responded, "Jail killed my spirit. It wore me out. I'm tired now. I don't know if I'm making any difference" (qtd. in Dyson, 215). The weight he felt to improve the world remained, but his arrogance about bearing a greater extent of responsibility changed to uncertainty and insecurity. Steinberg continues to comment on Shakur post-prison, "he wasn't happy anymore. That light and the wit, the way he would shine, it was so completely changed, dimmed after that experience. It was so sad to see the change in his spirit because of what happened. It was heartbreaking" (qtd. in Dyson 215). Others close to Shakur, including Jada Pinkett Smith and John Singleton, corroborated Steinberg's observations. Clearly, his depression and addictions precede his time in prison, perhaps it was not merely as Jada Pinkett Smith states, "And then he went to jail and turned into a totally different person" (qtd. in Dyson 216). Smith's further assessment that "I think a part of Pac just died right there, and then he just sold his soul" (qtd. in Dyson 216), may more accurately capture the reason for his change. Shakur received a lengthy punishment of 1 ½ to 4 ½ years and 1 1/2 million dollars bail (reduced from three

million dollars bail) for charges that usually carried with them much lesser punishment.

Reporting harsh treatment in prison, Shakur was desperate to leave. When Suge Knight came offering to pay his bail, "free" him and sign him to Death Row Records, Shakur agreed. Smith's comment that Shakur "sold his soul" indisputably refers to this "contract negotiation" with Knight. It is significant to note that Suge Knight had no interest in adding Shakur to his coterie of gangsta rappers while Shakur was deemed a sensitive and politically motivated rapper; he was too "soft" for Death Row. However, following Shakur's being shot five times, serving jail time for the sexual assault conviction, and his numerous other altercations with the law and violence, Shakur became a commodity that was "hard" and "real" enough for Knight's label.

After leaving jail and moving back to California, Shakur, who had spoken in prison of all the help he would provide to suffering communities once he was freed, began to play out the role of gangsta rapper that Knight assigned him. In his prison interview with Powell, Shakur had declared, "Thug Life to me is dead. If it's real, then let somebody else represent it, because I'm tired if it. I represented it too much" (51). Throughout Shakur's career, he had focused on the honesty of his rap. In the same prison interview he comments, "Most of my music [tells the truth].... I'm just trying to speak about things that affect me and about things that affect our community.... Sometimes I'm the watcher, and sometimes I'm the participant, and sometimes it's just allegories or fables that have an underlying theme" (qtd. in *Tupac: Resurrection*). Shakur's palpable

change post-prison seems a response to being forced to embrace a role he specifically wanted to reject. But like the critically acclaimed actor he was, he could not enter into a character halfway. He joined with Snoop and Suge and embraced the lifestyle of materialism and excess required of his role. His rap lost some of its concern for improving humanity and gained a boastful tone that only contributed to concretizing the existence/myth of the East Coast/West Coast rivalry. Since most East Coast hip-hop artists and many West Coast ones deny the feud, Shakur's obsession with promoting the reality of it seems parallel to his obsession with "becoming" the wildly violent and unpredictable character of Bishop in his early film *Juice.*

Referring to acting Shakur stated that he became the character on and off the set. In the end, it seems that Shakur's life became a set in which reality was blurred with the roles he was paid to adopt. His music suffered, his image suffered, and with his death, he, his family, friends, fans and the world suffered. For when he took on the role Suge assigned him, he lost control of his image and he *became* all of the gangstas who died in drivebys that he had rapped about or known. Reeves explains the commercial success yet lack of critical acclaim, accompanying Shakur's, Death Row produced, *All Eyez on Me*, album. He writes of rap's first double-album:

> Part of its appeal was the anticipation of hearing the latest rant from hip-hop's thug revolutionary, whose life and career were an open book. But what fans ultimately received was an MC trying to fit into his Death Row family, into its gangsta-as-lavish-lifestyle

> mold. Gone were the messages of resistance and painful urban blues, replaced by a postprison hedonism, materialism ... and an egotistical drive to commercially crush his rap competition. No longer the urban desperado, Tupac remade himself into a flashy rap icon totally representing the West Coast. (Reeves 173-4)

Reeves captures several essential aspects of Shakur's approach to life, rap and identity. In describing Shakur's life and career as "an open book," Reeves notes the honesty that Shakur held as critical to his rap and his life. Shakur's remaking of himself as "totally representing the West Coast" underscores the rapper's understanding of the chameleonic opportunities of identity. One year, 1995, he could release a nostalgic track like "Old School." In it he celebrates in vivid detail the early rappers of the 1980s in the five boroughs of New York City who "laid down the foundation" of hip-hop, and raps of his debt to these East coast architects of hip-hop, "I wouldn't be here today if the Old School didn't pave the way" (*Me Against the World* 1995). And in the next year, he could fuel the East/West feud, fully "representing" the West Coast. As he understood, life is a stage and actors are assigned and choose to play different roles. As Dyson so accurately phrases it:

> He was in part playing out the cards dealt to him, extending and experimenting with the scripts handed to him at birth. Some of his most brilliant raps are about those cards and that script---hunger, ghetto life, the narrow choices of black men, and the criminality that some seek as a refuge from a racist society. In falling prey to

> the temptation to *be* a gangster, Tupac lost his hold on the frustrating but powerful moral ambiguity that makes the rhetoric and representations of gangsta rappers effective. In fleeing from the art to the actual, from appearance to reality, from the studio to the streets, Tupac lost his life. He also lost the most devastating weapon he possessed to fight the problems he saw: his brilliant representations of the reality he confronted, and the powerful reality that his representations, like those of all great artists, helped to bring about. His art changed people's lives. (170)

Fans, journalists, scholars, friends, family and rappers speculate on what caused the change in Shakur. Some say he was raped in prison, a claim he vehemently denied; some say he just "sold out" to the overwhelming pressure of Suge Knight. Perhaps, when Suge Knight bought his freedom, and with it, his loyalty to an aspect of his identity he had admitted he no longer wanted to play out, Shakur lost his hold on the "frustrating but powerful moral ambiguity" that made him effective. A careful observer must realize that like one's identity, the answer to "What changed Tupac Shakur?" does not consist of one linear cause. Shakur knew that art and language possessed the power to help improve the lives of others. Even when he chose his own image and his message, like any artist or writer, he could not control what his audience made of it. As is clear with Plath, with the death of the author, his intentions were interpreted in contrasting ways and for competing means. Shakur was very much like one of his own reappropriations; in his mind, the new meaning he invested in the acronym

"nigga" was positive and detracted from the historical and common meaning of the word. However, he could not control the fact that many of his listeners and the majority of the U.S. were unaware of his attempt to change the meaning of the word. So, while he understood that he played a series of roles, it was not clear to the viewer and in the end to Shakur which were illusionary and which were real. Moreover, while art and reality blur, especially in this media driven time, one must wonder why or whether distinguishing one from the other is an important task. While De Quincey's *Confessions* consist of conflicting stories that at points make the "truth" of his autobiography impossible to discern, his work does not suffer in literary significance or as a historical catalyst for the start of the discourse of European addiction. For Plath and Shakur, their aesthetic demands of themselves guaranteed each would leave a legacy as a masterfully artistic writer who contributed creativity to the world. Their untimely and tragic deaths also guaranteed that not only would they become icons, they would also never reach their respective potentials.

But for Shakur, the most important task that almost always lay before him was finding a way to reveal his version of the suffering he witnessed and experienced and offer it to the public to help stop that suffering. Shakur's raps provide repeating images of violence, death, poverty, and most importantly for this study, depression and addictions. By emphasizing the simultaneity of his depression and addiction, he asks for and offers help. His life becomes an artistic representation that can help people confront the problems he represents in his words. To highlight his depression over his addictions does a disservice not only

to his goals and memory, but also to those who could relate to him through their shared addictions. Shakur did not want his addictions to be forgotten; if we forget the addict in his identity, we ignore not only an important aspect of who he at times was, but we also forget that every addict is more than an addict. Finally, we must consider each addict as possessing the potential to improve not only his or her life, but also as Shakur most certainly did and continues to do today to improve the lives of others in need.

Notes

[1] Tupac Shakur was vocal about his misery in prison. He lacked the funds to pay his way to an early release. Suge Knight offered to pay for Shakur's early release and in this way, Shakur joined the Death Row Records "family." Interestingly, Connie Bruck in "The Takedown of Tupac," published in the *New Yorker,* 7 July 1997, quotes an acquaintance of Suge Knight's as explaining that Knight had not shown interest in bringing the sensitive Shakur into Death Row Records as Knight was "not into the Tupac-artist thing. But then came [Tupac's] thug notoriety ... with his problems he became more attractive to Suge" p 57. Shakur played the violent gangsta role Knight expected of him; this was especially clear in Shakur's vocal alignment with the West coast in the East/West rappers' feud.

[2] Much has been made about Plath's posthumous success and its relation to her suicide. See Connie Ann Kirk's *Sylvia Plath: A Biography* in which she asserts that Plath's suicide like others' makes Plath into a "legend" p. 129. In Grevel Lindop's *The Opium-Eater: A Life of Thomas de Quincey*, he refers to De Quincey as "The Dark Idol" p. 97. Further, in Alethea Hayter's "Introduction" to De Quincey's *Confessions* she writes, "Everyone wanted to meet the Opium Eater, whose identity was not long a secret ... with every decade the influence of the book grew wider" p. 21.

[3] See Michael Eric Dyson's *Holler if You Hear Me* pp. 254-5 for more on Shakur's status as an idol in life and death.

[4] See Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*.

[5] For more on this definition of "discourse" see Michel Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language.*

[6] In *Nuthin' but a "g" thang* Eithne Quinn comments, "Tupac frequently referenced nostalgically the insurgency of the Black Power era, during which he was born into the politicized Shakur family" p. 175.

[7] For specific examples of Shakur drawing out these connections see his interview while he was high school student that appears in the 2003 film *Tupac: Resurrection.*

[8] A discussion of the album, including the lyrics of these songs and others on it, comes later in this chapter.

[9] While Shakur may not have been familiar with the term "dual diagnosis," he clearly recognized the fact that he suffered from both depression and addiction. Suffering from both a psychiatric illness and an addiction is the definition of "dual diagnosis."

[10] M.K. Asante, Jr. draws attention to the issue of authentic and inauthentic black experience in *It's Bigger than Hip Hop,* p. 27 for example. In *Hip Hop Wars,* Tricia Rose discusses the "illusion that the [hip hop] artists are not performing but 'keeping it real" (38).

[11] In *Between God and Gangsta Rap*, Michael Eric Tyson discusses the public figures including Bob Dole, C. Delores Tucker, and William Bennett among others who have attacked Tupac Shakur in particular for his misogynistic and violence-embracing lyrics pp.182-86. Tyson points out that "attacking figures like

Snoop Doggy Dogg or Tupac Shakur ... is an easy out. It allows scapegoating without sophisticated moral analysis and action" p. 186.

[12] In these lines, note the shift from first person to third person as in the lines in which the plural "homies" died shifts to the singular "his brains hangin."

[13] Paul Butler in *Let's Get Free: A Hip-Hop Theory of Justice* provides the more common assessment of marijuana use as "fun" in the eyes of hip-hop culture (140).

[14] For more on the impact of the drug war on young poor black males see William Julius Wilson's *More than Just Race*, and Paul Butler's *Let's Get Free*.

[15] See Reeve's *Somebody Scream* and Reese's *American Paradox: Young Black Men.*

[16] It is interesting to note the parallels between the discussion in my introduction about the lack of fiction and memoirs written by or about addicts of color and the lack of serious discourse on Shakur's addictions. Shakur's addictions like those of general people of color is relegated to newspapers, tabloids, television entertainment shows or MTV. It is rarely mentioned in more respected academic work.

[17] For example, see Rose's *The Hip Hop Wars,* Asante's *It's Bigger than Hip Hop,* and Quinn's *Nuthin' but a G Thang.*

[18] For texts that include discussion of his mother's addiction but not his addiction see for instance, Tayannah McQuillar and Fred L. Johnson's *Tupac Shakur*, and Reeves *Somebody Scream.*

[19] In *Holler if You Hear Me*, Dyson describes a similar pattern in hip-hop culture as "the simplistic division of women into angels and demons, both of which are problematic" (188-9).

[20] See in particular Butler's *Bodies that Matter.*

[21] A discussion of his "hopelessness" comes later in the chapter.

[22] It is worth pointing out that hoarding is a form of addiction.

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