

Down a Winding Street

(Thinking of Drinking)

The Saviour

Noah got drunk first.

At least, that is what the Book says. It says he grew grapevine on the slopes of the Ararat Mountain, started a vineyard, made wine, he was inoffensive, just, respected. Then he got drunk, his sons saw him naked, ridiculed him. They disgraced him because he disgraced himself. He disgraced himself before God. He disgraced himself before His Law and the sons used his weakness to humiliate him. The story of Noah, that wilful drunk and inadvertent sea fearer, shows a few things. It shows drinking is against the Law; intoxication is punishable; the drinker is weak; it gives the weaker ones the right to carry out punishment and be violent; that not even the incontrovertible Father can behave anyway he wants with his family, and that freedom is not just limited, but certain behaviour is inadmissible. Finally, that one should not drink with just anyone. One should not drink publicly, at ill time, and if that does happen, one should not cross the line. All of this happened to Noah, the man who saved the world from the Flood and even took his entire family with him. If he had not drunk, maybe something like that would not have crossed his mind. Repulsive he was, that Noah.

Instead of Chronology

We owe the term to Arabic: al-kohl; a fine powder of antimony, used for dyeing eye-brows, therefore for titivation, beauty. In the Arab world distillation was used on all types of substances and was associated with the idea that the essence of something, its elixir, is physically present in the substance and can be separated by way of a chemical process. Therefore, al-kohl denotes any fine powder or essence. Later on, Paracelsus got involved, without whom the

European alchemy would amount to nothing. Was alcohol invented by an alchemist who turned water into fire, and thus created a drink which does not quench thirst, but increases it; created a liquid which is food, drink and a drug. Legends are recalled, events are recalled, gods and kings are listed, joined by the mortals. Many things are mentioned, but the inventor is not named, there is not even an exact date. Drink was invented by nature herself. She let the fruit of the Earth ferment and become what it is, but is not. Nature gave us water and fire and "fire water". And every each one of them as a "good servant but bad master". I cannot help but think inebriation existed before drink.

London of my Youth

When was the first time it happened to me? A long time ago, but it seems as it is not. My mother told me it was two hundred years ago, maybe even more...Actually, that is not so. She told me about my ancestors, people from Lika, all army officers, whose escapades were subjects of many a story. My grandfather was one of them. Once, disheartened, he looked at the Lašva River: "Your gramps drank as much grappa as water had flowed through here". He was joined by Jack London. The Jack London who was first a drunk, and then a writer, London who read Darwin, Marx and Nietzsche, London who was a socialist, a fact I discovered much later, a fact which helped me realise the origin of my convictions. And then, Ferid, who managed to procure a bottle of rum. "Absent?" – the teacher would ask. "Čolić, Finci, Marjanović" – the prefect was ready, without having to look around the class. We did not skive because of ill health, nor because we lacked knowledge. Our teachers found us intelligent, lazy and irresponsible. We did not care for many of the school subjects, for discipline even less. Bobo cared for snow, skiing and girls, Ferid and I for long discussions on authors and topics our teachers had little understanding for, and the cinema, where heroes of the "lost generation" flickered on the screen, full of romantic aspiration and unfulfilled hope. Truancy was proof of our freedom. We ambled along the city streets, discussed Lermontov and Faulkner, deliberated films we saw separately or together, admired Louis Armstrong and Glen Miller, cited Adler

and Freud conceitedly, even more conceitedly refuted Marx ("The heart is more important than the stomach"), celebrated anarchism and, slightly tipsy on the cheap cooking rum and inspired by Jack London's life odyssey, dreamed of our future voyages. Then things took their own course...

The Story

Anyone who drinks has their own, unique story about the "worst one". Unique would, however, mean totally incomparable, which is not really the case here. It is unique in the domain of solitary experiences. All inebriations are alike insofar as they have intoxication in common. The worst inebriation would be the one not survived by the imbiber (or the best one, depending on the attitude to life). It would be the ultimate booze up – the drunk dying drinking. Many a story has been told of booze ups and the strange things that happened to the boozers. It is true, wondrous things happen. There is something unpredictable, unwelcome, impossible (and he's still alive!) in inebriation, all sorts of things happen, but why do I have to remember it all? I could do it again tonight, if I wanted to...In any case, all drinking stories are similar. Someone started drinking, got hooked on it (the pessimistic version) or quit (the optimistic version). There is nothing merrier than stories of booze ups, nothing more terrifying than stories of alcoholism. Drink is a merry demon. And, in drinking, a string of unconnected events, play of broken mirrors, a jumble of chaotic fragments that the mind desperately wants to link up and even name. I have become acquainted with all booze ups in just one and not reached the one in all of them.

The Atmosphere

Proust's madeleines, Rilke's leaves which seem to be falling from the gardens of Eden, locust trees of my childhood. A smell, a sound, a light breeze. What is it that inspires a certain thought, emotion, what makes us love, want? To

what extent do our senses define us? The more unaware of them we are, the more they do. I have always liked *Summertime*, but when I heard it then, on an August afternoon, down south...Were Khayyam, Baudelaire, Poe and other wine poets my alibi for drinking? for the hidden artist in me? for eccentricity? for self-destructiveness? Or for a man in me, a man I am not and would not want to be? My mother once asked me, as if in passing, why did I hate myself. "You wouldn't hurt another person" – she said – "but yourself...". She was looking into the distance as she said it, then paused, and I had a feeling she could have said a lot more, but did not.

A Light Motif

Chante la vie, pense l'amour

Passion

Hegel, in his *Philosophy of History*, claimed that nothing great was done without passion. Human will and desire are expressed through passion. They want to reveal themselves, they want to realize themselves. Passion stimulates élan and active optimism. And, this note on ecstatic states – all the more difficult to describe to a person "acquainted" with them, since familiarity with an experience eliminates the possibility of distancing oneself from the experience – carries the idea of possibility of human exaltation. It is a moment of brilliance, a moment poles apart from everyday routine. It is a colossal moment. It is colossal in each type of intoxication, where exhilaration makes an event resemble a dream, a dream that allows for both pleasure and delirium. Then yesterday ceases to exist, there is no tomorrow; everything is in the "now", in the "instant", everything is in the moment in which "everything" is supposed to happen. This intoxication can just as much alter a person and help discovery of innate life forces, as it can lead to confrontation with hidden turmoil and baleful oblivion. Intoxication can expose the illusion of daytime sensibilities; however, abandonment to that state can cause my "life" to take me away from myself. Man is never as close to loosing as when on the brink of hope. Still, nothing can

hold back a person roused by the uniqueness of his exhilaration. The law of the heart becomes the core of active will. Such a state bears a promise of happiness, of fulfilment that sanctions complete realisation of one's potential, achieved through love, intoxication, chance or some other passion. These induced states of the human mind can, in psychological terms, be described as compensation. The theory of compensation, however, somewhat unfoundedly, advocates the view that a large number of human activities are mere replacements for the unrealizable. Just about anything can be found on the list of disguised failures, from the attachment to one's own birth to artistic creation. The pinnacle of the compensation theory would be attempting to prove that everything is a replacement for that basic flaw – the flaw of man being what he is, the flaw of being human. Man, however, most often does things because he wants and desires to, not to disguise some profound flaw. He loves children for themselves, he creates for the sake of creating, and drinks because he wants to. And only once he starts completely enjoying what he does can a man grasp that which surpasses his work/pleasure. He is then able to reach the threshold of transcendency. It does not matter that the moment is closer to the illusionary than to reality; those who had felt its power know that it holds more real life than all "reality", because in the state of exaltation man is, in a unique way, both alone with himself and completely without himself.

Such exaltation can be felt in inebriation as well. The inebriation celebrated by romanticism, the one that speaks of Baudelaire and is, like a Dionysian revelry, extolled by Nietzsche. But also the one that presents itself in a boozier at the end of the night. A man who has never drunk had missed out on an entire world; a man who has drunk too much had missed an entire life. When one's own hollowness urges one to drink, than even those who were full of promise can stray into empty merrymaking to end up being human wrecks washed ashore by the sea of life on to the reefs of ravaged, lost creatures. Every small town is full of those. Admittedly, life in a small town can often be the downfall of a talented man, and definitely the ruin of an exceptional man; however, those who use all sorts of superficial reasons as an alibi for their own inability to face life's demands are far more numerous everywhere. For those everything is going wrong because of drink, and they drink because everything is going wrong. A man of wits, on the contrary, bears his drink, since, in him, it is often twofold;

even when he is intoxicated with wine, he remains intoxicated with his own spirituality. Such a man knows that there is much to lose and little to gain in habitual drinking. It is true that at times of passionate inebriation ("sell the horse, sell it, just to keep dancing"¹) a moment of elation can be reached. It is true that a type of kinship, realized as "midnight communism", can be felt, where everyone is happy, satisfied and equal, since everyone is usually so drunk they can hardly tell the difference between each other. At such a moment no price is too high: in life, many things that bring merriment have to be paid for, if not with one's life, then with one's health. Such merrymaking is always hazy. And it dissipates. The darkness sinks, the light of day is visible – it's late, so late! – and the wisdom of the night wrecks with the meaningless morning chatter. The peony of the night sprouts from the world of the shadows into fibres of daytime deception, which shatters all illusions; the brighter the morning, the grimmer the night. And only then some realise that drink really takes away, and just seems to give; only then do they realise that the drink offers deception, and takes away reality, which the sober have to suffer constantly.

I am not trying to claim that spending one's life at a bar is recommendable, however, I am not sure that drunkenness as a metaphor is more interesting than the actual state. In any case, they are often alike, and soberings are similar too. And that is true of all intoxication: the one of love and the one of imagination; in inebriation that is a natural need for stupefaction; the desire to be absent and escape everyday life; in seeking solace (and if it can be found in drink, the grief is not yet complete); in expressing increasing joy; in a bacchanal that is a celebration and a ritual; in various ways of masking weaknesses ("I'm not a weak character, it's just that my weaknesses are formidable" – my friend E. used to say); in suicidal self-destruction; in intoxication that is longing for freedom and the unattainable world of ideals...In many of those states there is something of a general exhilaration with life itself, of hope that, at least for a moment, the "divine inebriation" will be reached, will be felt, that one can be like the gods in fancy and, through fancy, grasp what life is in its entirety. In such a moment I can be everything I am and want to be.

¹ A traditional song from the Balkans (trans. note)

Sometimes, through such passion, for a moment, but only for a moment, the mystic experience which the elders called "divine ecstasy" can be felt. Even simplified – and thus banalized and made worthless – such ecstasy still remains one of the rare moments of exceptionalness in which man can feel the exceptionalness of life. And, at least for a moment, be at the verge of one's own boundlessness. The unrealizable can be realized in drinking. The night when everything we feel and desire will come true, everything we dream about and expect... Or, on the contrary, fear will never happen, never...

For a moment I am. (For a moment, elation. The rest of life: just the rest). No one can boast of having had an entirely rich and meaningful life, on the other hand, no one can say that he has not, at some moment, felt the beauty of life. Everyone has, at least for a moment, felt as a complete being. Such a moment is not measured in time, but in intensity of the experience/event. How long is the "second" in which we die? Key moments in life are the ones in which the entire quivering human being is expressed. Holy ecstasy? (Or is it just the euphoria for which D. A. Mandelsohn in his *The Dictionary of Drink and Drinking* says is a way of escaping sobriety through alcohol?) Have I thus said that it is a matter of exaggeration, for which there is little place in a world so organised that it is only sympathetic to rationalised existence? In such a world, isn't any type of arousal outside of the work place scandalous or, at least, an unnecessary waste of energy and assets? Much of what the romantics celebrated does not have a place even in leisure any more. It is not that man does not have an inclination towards it, or does not miss it occasionally, but the organisation of one's life acts as a restraint. Dionysian intoxication has been reduced to a Friday drink, eroticism to "safe sex", risk to playing the national lottery. Now is, definitely, not an age of gestures full of pathos and great individual deeds, but, can a trace of true adventurism be found in these surrogates of the exultations of old? It is not my intention to lament for the times past, not just because such nostalgia is pathetic and trite, but because it is often completely unfounded. Those who pine for an age long gone most often see themselves as having been privileged – in earlier incarnations they were all princes and princesses, never frogs! – and in yearning for the past they are deploring their own mortality. My question follows a different lead: is it possible to grasp the full meaning of one's own existence at any one time? Or, at least, the intensity of challenges of existence? To reach

such a state a person has to have enthusiasm and the passion that is a prerequisite to the ecstasy which unites the awareness of our own transience and the idea of eternity. To reach eternity for a moment – that is the aim of each exultation. Admittedly, only if such an event does not take me from myself, only if I do not cross over to nothingness. And, maybe only then, maybe only when I am who I think I am not, only then does my passion take me away from myself, maybe only then am I on the verge of what is and on the path towards that which surpasses me...

Artists, a Shameful Bunch

Il faut être toujours ivre.

This famous Baudelaire's remark, according to which one should always be drunk, became the motto of romantic elation. It was extolled by those who cared for some "higher reality", it was abused by those who wanted to justify inebriation. Wine is a metaphor in poetry, a beautiful metaphor of elation. Problems arise once we begin wishing to live the metaphor. Baudelaire himself, that too great a poet fascinated by freedom and death, aspired to immortality and searched for the road towards the unknown through intoxication. In the course of his spiritual ventures he also entered into the territories of "artificial paradise". Artificial, since it was induced by intoxicants. However, in the moments of elation – as well as in toxicomania – illusion is not artificial, but becomes real: illusion, then, is reality. Illusion is real in the illusionary. To be drunk... *Mais de quoi? Du vin, de poésie ou de vertu, à votre guise. Mais enivrez-vous.*

In any discussion about alcohol the moral, social, poetic (symbolic), psychological, commercial (which raises "sin taxes" that make cheap drinks expensive) and "natural" aspects of drinking are entwined, conflicted and mutually exclusive. Is wine as a social phenomenon, when taken out of the context of poetic mythology and moral blasphemy, only a matter of convention (integration), a refuge to those escaping work or political pressures, or is it, on the contrary, a "thing in itself", simply as described in medicine, finally just a

substance and a commercial item? In the latter case, wine is not part of the ritual. Drink is to one that which his experience of drink is. Everyone talks of their own, everyone acts in accordance with it. Poets have celebrated wine. The rest were aware of its external manifestation; the poets illuminated it from the inside. They completely understood the ritual character of intoxication. They were the first to differentiate between ordinary inebriation and spiritual intoxication. Even Khayyam, in his time, celebrated life through wine. He celebrated its transience ("While you live Drink, For, once dead, you never shall return") and mysteriousness ("There was the Veil passed which I could not see: some little talk awhile of ME and THEE, there was and then no more of THEE and ME"). He celebrated the wine he drank, felt, lived. Khayyam's wine embodied sensuality, which transcends the intellect; sensuality is a metaphor for the spirit and the herald of the mysterious. The subsequent ambition of Modernism can be sensed in that: to discover reality through the senses; to physically feel poetry. Passage to a different reality is achieved through imagination. It does not resemble (The black, black/ Black man/ Sits by me on the bed all night), but is: illusion is real in the illusionary. Or, as Benjamin remarked on a different occasion, drug intoxication effectuates inner intensification, sharpening of the senses, change of perception and, in a way, attainment of the happiness that is, at least in prose, the happiness of all productiveness (Walter Benjamin, *Hashish in Marseille*, in: *Reflections*, 1986).

The intoxicating quality of wine does not just represent itself, but something else too. The idea of metaphorical expression tells us that we never talk about just what we are talking about, but something else as well. There are no separate and distinct objects/realities. That which impelled the creators/artists was more intoxicating than any drink, very often drinking without drink. But, as it happens, it is possible that, because of their ardour, the artists have been labelled such incorrigible drunks, searching for "inspiration" in drink. The "ordinary" drunks are far more numerous than artists; however, "public figures" have a reputation, and often are "socially suspect" as well, because of their unconventionality and criticism, which includes the disturbing "scandal of freedom". Artists are marginalists in the centre of attention, impotent gods, representative outcasts. They do not belong to the "fine society", they can drink. In the best case they are accused of being drunks, and if they were not, they

would have accomplished even more... And if they had no other pressures? And why would someone continually be creating, why would not he be living a carefree life sometimes? The best of them – Thomas Mann, Proust, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky – were above drink. What did that Kafka drink? Milena says the world would have fallen apart if he had got drunk even once. He did not drink anything, "that Kafka". But he must have done. Everything is delirious in his work. Besides, it is said that actors who do not drink play drunks better. The weaker ones, the more unstable ones, only manage to overcome stiffness and quell dissatisfaction with the help of narcotics. They only see the unquestionable value of their work when tipsy. At other times there is doubt and unsteady faith. If they had had enough, it would have intoxicated them. They are at peace with themselves only when dazed. And then, again, the Other Side of the unachievable perfection starts to taunt... Drink reduces neurosis. Like glorified laziness it liberates one from compulsive writing, sometimes encourages originality (*lucida intervalla*), helps one free himself from inhibitions, encourages (the resolve of the drunk), until, again, it rises doubt and causes nausea, until it intensifies what it was taken for in the first place: anxiety and pain.

It may be said that a "good drop" influenced the style of those who were partial to it. It certainly influenced Utrillo's anxiety, Toulouse – Lautrec's caricature of his surroundings, Modiglian's stylization of the human form, Francis Bacon's drastic expressiveness or Pollock's *all-over style* and gazing into nothingness, but also the exaggerated sentimentality of Yesenin and the inconsistency of *Šveik*, largely caused by Hašek's drinking habit, but also by the fact that Hašek wrote for a newspaper and published his work in sequels, which made *Šveik*, published as a whole, undisciplined and laden with digressions. Maybe even the idea of repetition (in Thomas Woolf's work, as well as in Kierkegaard's) is an idea of the "intoxicated mind". (By the way: that which is repeated is continually unique in inebriations, because it enters the world of illusions in a different fashion each time, because it slips away, because it is unrepeatable). In Laury's novel – confession *Under the Volcano*, the reader is led through the eruptive course of the protagonist's life and the lava of his drunken consciousness. Joyce drank too. With drunks it is always the issue of the "stream of consciousness". Such presentation can be found in automated poetry too. The answer to the question of how does uncontrolled consciousness function is the

answer to the question what is consciousness itself. It is a completely spontaneous, liberated consciousness. Thomas de Quincey, in his *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, says that he started taking drugs to alleviate pain, therefore for physical reasons, and then discovered its stimulative affect on imagination, elation and liberation from mental anguish, discovered subconscious flow of dreams, "the inner eye and power of intuition for visions and mysteries of human nature", for everything that existed in de Quincey, the "philosopher", much before he had had any contact with narcotics. Drugs do not create; they, sometimes, only help unrestrained liberation of the inner self, help the author break emotional blockades, help him open up to himself and the world. It is similar with drink.

The celebrated wine is beautiful. In philosophy, on the contrary, there is not much good to be said about drinking, especially since it is opposed to the jurisdiction of reason. In the spirit of Aristotle, it could be said that composure, the presence of mind lies between sobriety and inebriation. Aristotle bade for moderation (As opposed to the drunken, he says in *Problematai* (III, 2), the sober have the "power of judgement"), Thomas Aquinas saw loss of reason in inebriations, Montaigne was suspicious of too great a love of wine as well, Kant was in favour of enlightenment, and, in enlightenment, passion is the absence of reason, and the ethical needs to curb impulses. Barthes took wine to be a subcultural phenomenon, and Foucault was one of the few who, in his search for a possibility to change himself, was sympathetic towards all sorts of intoxication. Jacques Derrida's remark, according to which "not religion as an opiate for the people, but drugs as the religion of atheist poets – and some others, more or less atheists, more or less poets" (*Points...*, 1995, p. 240) concurs with Foucault's point of view. It is true, for an infidel, the true and final reality is the illusion of nothingness. The last frontier is the frontier of existence and its negation. But, it is not one of the earthly ones. Or is it the one aspired to in excess? Mind you, Kierkegaard and Hegel and Nietzsche drank, but in their early, "poetic" phases, all in their "aesthetic stages of life". Philosophers who drink are partial to the aesthetic, and aesthetics as a discipline. Even Plato drank, but did not approve of drunkenness. The nectar encouraged the spontaneity of discussion about ideas. Ever since Plato's time, the evening hours were the time for the conversation among the intellectual, poetry readings, theatrical plays, revelry...(Are our ideas

and sensibilities such that we have to cloak them in darkness?) In his works people went to feasts (Symposium is a bacchanal!), they drank, but no one got sick from drink, and the ones who had too much, like Alcibiades, spoke meaningfully. On the best of them, Socrates, drink did not have an effect. Plato has the most to say about drinking – and not by chance – in *Laws*. He advocates moderation. Philosophy is in the domain of the rational. In a state one should adhere to the law and moral norms; one should be able to reach rational decisions and opinions; see reality as it is; be a citizen of the State. Plato accuses the drunks of being child-like, “softer and younger”, and with “least control over themselves”, because “they become like children for the second time” (*Laws*, II, 671, I, 646, 654). Such immaturity is undesirable in a philosopher, because it is a sign of infantile stupidity, and it is only later in poetry (e. g. Goethe) that the rediscovery of the inner child gains a status of purity (the “innocence of the newborn” inherited from religion) and authentic human emotion. Plato, however, above all cherished the principle of wisdom, which is a characteristic of an adult. In *Symposium* (217), though, he says that “drunks and children tell the truth”, but this is rather the case of uncontrollable honesty than of the truth of the mind, since children do not yet know, and drunks cannot discern the truth. “When a man drinks wine he begins to be better pleased with himself, and the more he drinks the more he is filled full of brave hopes, and conceit of his power, and at last the string of his tongue is loosened, and fancying himself wise, he is brimming over with lawlessness, and has no more fear or respect, and is ready to do or say anything” (*Laws*, I, 649). Everything corrupt is present in drink: false hopes, and debauchery and stupidity and lawlessness. In many cases it is exactly so, and Plato himself was a witness to it. In his time, Greeks drank a lot, verbs “to breakfast” and “to drink” had become synonyms, so that the circumstances he wrote in determined the standpoint towards the portrayed. Plato, however, did not care for supplements and stimulants, but for dialogues among the wise, dialogues in which “their own voices are mediums” (*Protagoras*, 347). Not even at feasts do the wise have entertainment as an objective, but truth. And wisdom is in itself disciplined and an adversary of debauchery. Plato, admittedly, says that drinking should be restrained, that it is not for the young and that is only proper at “the festivals of the gods” (*Laws*, VI, 775), and never mentions that it should be abolished, or, like art, banished from the republic.

Is there, nevertheless, a bond between the sensory and the reflective?

Inebriation belongs to the sensory, and, therefore, is in the realm of the aesthetic (fancy). Pleasure and the desire (and, in the desire, a suspicion that not a single one will be fulfilled) to grasp that which can only be felt, and never fully expressed, are present in it. In such inebriation the soul is stretched to its limits, the senses are open to sundry sensations. In such inebriation the unspeakable can be felt. *"Au fond de l'inconnu pour trouver du nouveau"*. In it the mystical creates a space for inner faith. Such a state is not opposed to the rational, since it is a type of rationalisation, specifically, the inner rationalisation of that which reason cannot decide upon, and which, once uncovered, becomes obviously true. Preoccupation with the sensory, however, makes the process of reflection more difficult. In Hegelian terms: the poetic is still not wise. The sensory is true in artistic terms. A rough distinction would allow philosophy, as it is in the domain of the rational, to be characterised as sobriety, and the poetic as inebriation. One can claim, somewhat in line with Plato, that poetry counterfeits ideas; wine, on the other hand, has nothing to do with the world of ideas. But, when the work of the mind is reduced to tasks of the intellect, poetry needs to be added to obtain the entirety. It is true, the one who deals with dreams and narcotics does not belong to the world of the "first rationalist", Socrates, but that of the soothsayers, to whom, however, not even Socrates denied wisdom. The poetic is most beautiful within poetry (so is drunkenness at the time of drinking) and it should not, and could not be realised, but, when it becomes the alternate, and even the only truthful reality, then it also belongs to reality. What we call "reality" is only a part of life. And that which drunks see in their drunkenness and authors in their visions, belongs to this world. This world, which one cannot escape, a world which can be more terrifying than any horror of illusion. It is true, everyone has, in their own way, loved someone or something. Personally, I loved wine, poetry and girls. If I had had to choose, I used to say, I would have chosen a woman; because both wine and poetry are a part of her, because poetry of wine is in love, because both in wine and in poetry lives the longing for a Being. *Chante l'amour, pense la vie* – I used to say. I cannot remember whether I attributed this thought to my understanding of philosophy or of life itself. It does not matter. Elation opens the door to philosophy and to life.

Hop-Frog

"Drink, I say!" shouted the monster, "or by the fiends..."

Poe's Last Inebriation

At a long gone midnight he sweated copiously, shivered, saw phantoms sliding along the walls. "A great man" – the hospital staff were saying. His mother had been a successful actress. Father, a general's son, himself an actor, but quite bad at it, and, on top of that, mostly drunk, with huge debts. He disappeared one day. Neither Edgar Alan, nor anyone else, ever found out what had happened to him. Edgar Alan became attached to his brother Henry, in whom he saw his other Self, but he died young, of alcohol. I had loved *The Raven* for a long time before I found out about Poe's alcoholism. "I'm glad he also drank" – said a friend of mine, a drunk. And he straightened up with some kind of importance.

And Poe drank because everyone in his family drank, because his wife became ill, because he had no money (and for drink it could be always found), because he was depressed, because he was encountering emotional and creative crises, because... He used to say he suffered spiritual depression, he used to say that was why he had turned to drink, which only made him even more unreliable, he would not complete his work, was becoming increasingly self-destructive, he would speak more frequently of dying, while still begging his friends to convince him that there was sense in living. He would, sometimes, fight his habits. In a letter he wrote that he had given up drinking, after becoming "completely conscious of the unreasonable and humiliating direction he had thus followed". He was left penniless, but claimed that drinking had never been a habit, and – as is typical of those immersed in alcoholism – that he could stop drinking whenever he wanted to: and if he wanted to, it would have "taken a tiny bit of effort" (Quote from Kenneth Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe, Mournful and Never-ending Remembrance*, 1992, p. 132). Later he claimed that he had not drunk for years, and when his colleagues would bring him home from work drunk, that it was unusual and that he would do anything not to "let this happen again".

Nevermore. Everyone who has ever woken up with a hangover has uttered the refrain of *The Raven*. Poe claimed that other people forced him to drink, that he only needed the one to get drunk, which, maybe, was not true, but it was true that he could not stop after the one. Then he would

be funny and lucid

lose parts of his texts

get fired from work

court former lovers

forget to pay

insult his friends

be boring

make a fool of himself

forget where he was going

stumble around unshaven

without a tie

without a shoe

and then he would have to stay in bed for at least a day, sometimes longer, he would repent and apologise to everyone, he would promise that he would “never drink another drop” in his life. Nevermore. He would, once again, become civilised, an example of a gentleman, and then, suddenly, everything would change, and he would, again, be found lying in canals, be ridiculed in the press. So many times have people who loved him thought that he would never again, and so many times – probably happy for convincing them and himself – he set upon drink... His friends claimed he was overly sensitive and thus easily fell under the influence of alcohol, his enemies that he drank senselessly, but they did not know that he could not find a way of escaping the ever growing pain of losing

his wife without losing consciousness. Alcohol has destroyed so much of his life, yet he kept on returning to it. In Philadelphia he came across his old friends who urged him to drink "to the brink of insanity", which inflamed his paranoia, strengthened his conviction that they wanted to kill him and intensified his desire to commit suicide. No one knows what happened in the week prior to his death. Then they saw him in a Baltimore bar. Completely drunk, semiconscious. Was drink the source of his work, or did it, at least, influence its form, or was it his work – what he accomplished through it – that led him to drink? They transferred him to a hospital, but the doctor failed to free him from phantoms of delirium – shall be lifted, nevermore – or of the other ones, with whom he lived; those phantoms, today, we call the poetry of Edgar Allan Poe.

"Lord help my poor Soul".

Dream of the Ultimate

One who has never drunk should not speak against drink. Only drunks know how wonderful it is not to drink. Only they know how good it feels to wake up to a bright and clear morning. And can find solace in the fact that they would feel better once they stop drinking. Authors writing about alcohol advise moderation. Poisons can sometimes cure. In small doses. Those who drank with moderation – claim medical experts – were healthier than teetotalers, which, of course, does not mean that those who drank copiously were very healthy. Drunks, who regularly boast that their "liver's as good as new", have been happy to accept these scientific findings. Some others they would not for the life of them, but these they have. Basically, they are justifying the drinking; such as, it's not that bad if it's under control; besides, it's healthy, it can be done in moderation; besides... (One should drink slowly, one should not mix drinks, avoid drinking on an empty stomach... I could list many a piece of useful advice. I would have fared better had I heeded them. Or, maybe, I only have one in mind: drink is not for those whom it harms, in any way. The case of person whom it benefits is reverse). Many attempts at rationalising the problem have been

made. More precisely: justifying. It is most often much simpler. Drunks drink to get drunk. They have countless motives. Each one is good. It is good, because it is just the one: inebriation.

Drunks are brothers in drink. Their carelessness is often based on the conviction that life has no value, on complete relativisation of everything that is. There's drink, nothing's amiss. Everything is just right. Some of it is also in the wantonness, when the boozer recklessly squanders (words, drink, life...) everything he owns. Only by distancing oneself from this parallel world and its inhabitants, the drunken fraternity, for whom bars "were a home", does it become clear that excessive drinking is destructive, an escape from loneliness, and emptiness too, that it is spoiltness, lazy narcissism, despondency, escape from oneself. In such postponement of life (a life-row inmate has escaped!) the feelings of insecurity, fear and inferiority gain on each other, which results in seclusion from society and retreat into depressive or aggressive isolationism, spurred by that "socially acceptable drug".

But then, every culture – with the exception of the cold, Eskimo one, grows its own narcotics. In Christian countries, especially in France, wine had primarily ritual and gastronomic, and only later, medicinal (*aqua vitae*) and psychological roles. Wine was a drink of the Mediterranean, the church later gave it the status of the sacral (wine = blood), and the Germanic people were barbarians who drank beer (remnants of this "political" view are still present). On a wider social scale, drink became dangerous when it was democratised, when it became easily available and thus posed a threat of an alcoholism epidemic, like the gin epidemic in the early 19th Century England, which was accompanied by poverty, prostitution and premature mortality. Probably the best illustration of the difference between pleasure and contagion of drinking are two W. Hogarth paintings; the one depicting rich people enjoying a drink and the one depicting impoverished drunks splayed around.

What lays behind drink, behind its appearance? It is only its dark side that illuminates it completely. Everyday moralism considers the sober and the drunken to be as different as good and evil. Fear of wine is fear of "drunken Barbarians". Behind the words "it's a disgrace, he drinks" lays the fear of wastrels, squanderers, idlers, yobs, looting soldiers, ruffians. A spirit from a

bottle is an evil spirit also. Fear of drink is also fear of the unchained human animal. It is interesting that many do not blame the drink, but the drunken man. In any case, drink is neither good nor bad in itself, but in the manner of its use. This actually means that nature is not to blame, but human nature. Or: that which is of God, is good; that which is of man, is not good. Moralists, however, claim that it is not man, an intrinsically "good" being, that is bad, but alcohol. When it is said that someone can take his drink, basically it means that the person, in such a state, can function and control himself, that he has not released his potentially threatening "nature". Alcohol is devil's ally, Evil incarnate, a night of unstable sensuality from which the day-time stability of reason has been ousted, Mystery of Darkness. So what? He who rebels against life as it is, actually desires to be seduced by destruction. So what if a man wants to kill himself drinking? Why should he apologise for his freedom? Nature – human, too human – can bring one down. It tires, and, in the end, threatens to destroy the spiritual. But, is not a being sometimes built through destructiveness, and would it not ruin itself if it eliminated its need for "deconstruction"?

The need for drink is a desire for the extraordinary, and a resistance towards the commonplace and the rule of reason, an area of conflict between Censor and Herostratos. As opposed to elation, in which being wants to surpass itself, to be outside itself, in such forgetfulness (are the moments we cannot remember moments in which we did not exist?) a being is either without itself or it becomes something that is not. In assuming a certain role – and that happens in inebriation – the false Self is active. How does one deal with himself? The rest is easy. It would be good to know just how many terrible things a sober man hides from himself. A more profound discontentment exists there – discontentment with who we are; a desire for what we are not. Forbearance does not really help here, because something is always amiss in forbearance. When drunk, man abstains from real realisation, but reaches a state of ecstatic openness, which can, sometimes, be openness towards the Other and life itself. It is not by chance that hedonists are mostly tolerant, that ascetics are frequently dogmatists.

In terms of an individual, drinking releases the uncontrolled Self, discloses subdued frenzy, all the while threatening to enslave (through alcohol) the being in that liberation (from inhibitions). Anyone can deem his life the measure of all others, anyone can conceit himself to be the moral legislator and the undisputed master of own being. Only once the rights of the Other are fully understood does it become clear that each of us can live as he desires as long as he does not compromise the rights of the Other. And they can be compromised in every attack on personal integrity, either by pestering or endangering lives of others by drink-driving. Man does not live only for himself. If he destroys his life, it is his own business only if no one else needs his life. Unless he is at disposal only to himself, the ones close to him have the right to protect him from himself. It only appears to one that he loves that which he depends on. Dependency is a state in which that which is outside of me becomes more powerful than I, a state in which the external becomes internal. "Every form of addiction is harmful, be it alcohol or morphine or idealism" – said C. G. Jung (*Erinnerung, Traume, Gedanke*, 1962, Ch 12). Every addiction is a sign of inadequacy and deprivation, a desire for fulfilment of wishes and a search for that which is missing. But, every addiction is accompanied by the feeling of shame. The addict does not think well of himself. He is ashamed of what he was. He is ashamed of being, while drunk, what he is not. Thinks he is not. He is ashamed because, maybe, he is like that. Shame is a warning. Drink is good when it serves, bad when one is its servant. He who enjoys drink is not addicted to it. That which you are addicted to oppresses, enslaves. Every addiction is a matter of exposing hidden desires, until pleasure becomes terror, until consummation becomes illness, and pleasure in illness a perversion. Every desire that annihilates the being is in opposition to the being. That is why, maybe, one should not ask what, but whom does drink liberate? Evasion of problems is disregard for life, search for deeper reasons – search for deeper excuses, concealment of one's own weaknesses behind the certain destiny, because, much of what I call destiny is only my veiled subconsciousness, which, in uncontrolled states, reveals to me the unfamiliar self. And maybe that liberated person is only a phantom, maybe he only exists in the illusion of a moment...The metaphor of inebriation is a metaphor of elation and passion, but also of lack of control and reason. It can be a sign of both beauty and demise; it speaks of what happens on the other side of reason.

Alcohol governs a being in such a way that it offers all kinds of freedom, including freedom to destroy myself, where It will decide, not I.

It is the uncontrolled I. Let it be so – says the one who does not want to be just one, who wants to be led by dark destiny (our choice is always within the realm of destiny containing all our possibilities) like the light it is searching for, destiny which is being itself; which is life as it is, life which also entails excess prompted by the desire that wants to be realised, to reveal the concealed, the darkness of being, that which is but is not aware, that which - once realised – annihilated the being...To cross the boundary for once, to break the barrier. By pushing the boundary I set the path to hopelessness, I see the immeasurable death. Then drinking becomes the anticipation of death in stupor. Rationalism sees being only in terms of activity and functionality. On the other side of the boundary is a world we do not govern, in which we are not masters, in which we can find the wild and the dark, something that should be colonised and enslaved, that should be enlightened and brought to reason. Adventure is on the other side. I would like to find out what is “behind”, what is really on the other side, what is the nothingness by which we define the negative, because we do not know its nature. The impossible is also the possibility of the real. On the other side is the Same in a different way. On the other side is the freedom we cannot govern, freedom that cannot be monitored or controlled by the liberated. Real freedom is always an offence of sorts. Seen in that way, inebriations is not an idea either, but an experience of freedom, the lack of control which confirms that man does not own himself, that he cannot “have” himself, but can only be, and such – vulnerable and unprotected – cannot escape himself and is forced to follow his path, until he crosses the boundary and cannot return, because the abyss he collapsed into is where he wants to be, and, thus, does not resist his own destruction. What is beyond that which I can grasp rationally, and why do I, sometimes, recklessly rush into situations I do not govern, but am led by an unknown force to which I belong and which belongs to me? Exploration of ultimate boundaries leads to the knowledge that on the other side is Me, in the dark mirror of myself, on a dark path towards the inexpressible and the nameless. But, even when thoughts of death take hold, man has to be aware that what is innermost in him – such as That and death – can be the enemy of aliveness, and should not be avoided, because, unless he masters it he will not

understand what life is. In inebriation that which is muffled gains a voice, that which is hidden reveals itself. Control is a way of inhibiting one's own nature, spontaneity – a manner of organised chaos that serves as free-style orderliness, where everyone is free to attempt to realise one's own. But, only those not dependant on realism can fully accomplish it, be it rich Tolstoy, Broch or Cézanne, elated Van Gogh or crazed Pound. To the others it only appears in moments of actual or metaphorical intoxication, but only for a moment. It is only without any coercion that Nietzsche's request for man to "become what he is", to always be with himself, can be realised. If it is possible to discern the natural need for intoxication ontically, then, existentially, it is within the domain of choice, which advocates that inebriation be replaced with intoxication. In such intoxication the being can free itself from coercion – and from drink, if that is it – , rid itself of narcissism and illusions, grasp the One and the Difference, see the reality without surrogates, become free from self. If it is not the heaviest inebriation.

Talk Show

"Do you know alcohol kills slowly?"

"Who's in a hurry?"

And Tomorrow?

Veiled eyes, dry mouth, sticky hands, winish acidity biting, bed sinking, chandelier spinning – "What's the time? –, slipper escaping. No pleasure in coffee, cigarettes, food...No pleasure in life. It happened. What? Something. When? Probably last night. Where? Somewhere. A thought? Not a thought. Some image? A string of split images. Life? No life. Only disgust, depression, desire for the end. And fear, stronger than any feeling. And then, slowly, peace returns. Everything will come to order, everything will be clear again, everything large and beautiful again. Walk. Hopefully it was not anything terrible, hopefully it was

only drunkenness, it will pass. It will not. But, there is no more crying. Tears, however, escape without a reason. It is so deep that it has hidden itself.

“You should write something about it...”

“I’m just finishing”.

A Light Motif, Again

Chante la vie, pense la mort.

Dionysus

“Shall we drink something...?”

Night is nearing. And it’s Friday. The ritual drinking begins, the doors to the parallel reality are opening. Wine is flowing, everything is changing. There comes an unexpected gesture, a sudden act, too loud a word, unwarranted laughter, excessive sorrow...Asceticism of work ethics yields to the spirit of (un)controlled relaxation. Drinks are being poured everywhere: getting drunk is not indecent. If you get drunk on Friday, you will function better on Monday. Back then, mother used to tell me it was hell. In the beginning it was. Then I got used to it. Got to love the bars. We loiter along, slightly sober, we amble between greasy spoons and fancy restaurants (either – or), the ordinary ones, full of pathetic conventionality – we avoid. We talk about everything, but never linger for long, because we both know that a bar is the only shop where those who buy the most are not the most appreciated. At the heart of Soho’s splendour, we call upon Dionysus, to hide behind his dissoluteness, to grasp the lost order of things in the night-time throng.

“Everyone’s in his power tonight”

In the power of which Dionysus?

In antiquity, Dionysus was a god of the poor, who united with him through rituals. Such poverty has been eradicated in the modern times, but so has Dionysus. Or, at least, he has become very quiet. In a functional society much of what one desires can be realised. In an oppressed, poverty crazed one – very little. But, the very same society, the one that functions well, has done a great deal to suppress spontaneity, has greatly contributed to self-blame, to finding ourselves guilty of every incident. In such a situation many have adopted the strategy of depression: retreat (sometimes into a world of alcohol), keep quiet and believe it was meant to be just so. Dionysus does not offer that path. This, twice born, divine boy was a symbol of elation and amorous desires. Because of the noisiness of orgies he became known as the Loud and the Raving. He was the child of Zeus and Semele, whose mother was Harmonia. He was denied divinity, called a charlatan, declared the worst, but also the sweetest of gods. Dionysus is the god of violation of the forbidden and of taboos, as opposed to Apollonian security, god of liberation and luxuriance. He symbolises the end of prohibition, repression and suppression; Dionysus is a symbol of the powers of dissipation.

To Nietzsche, Dionysus is a god of elation, not inebriation. In Nietzsche's terms the Dionysian principle does not represent a social concept, but the principle of individualisation. Dionysian principle is a concept of thought, a metaphor which (as any other) should remain within the metaphorical, and not become a social programme. A realised metaphor is a shattered metaphor. We should not live, but think extremes. The Apollonian and the Dionysian are depictions of two extremes (peace and conflict; mind and instinct; beauty and power), two states in whose conflict and interaction lays the dialectic of being. I also experienced that Dionysus's vine runs between the wreath of laurels and the crown of thorns. Immoderation, excess and ecstasy are of poetic origin. I stuck to moderation myself. I drank little, moderately. I could not take more than that. I praised excess, opposed it to Aristotelian moderation. Made fun of the "middle ground" and said that those who walked down the middle of the road got run over. I did not reveal that wisdom was moderation which leads to "liberation" from one's own needs and the truth about oneself. I claimed that Aristotelian moderation was physical, and that immoderateness was spiritual yearning, yearning for the ultimate. Persuaded myself excess should be pursued, that human conditionality can be outgrown in ecstasy, that the sublime can be

reached. In excessiveness I want to cross over and thus negate myself. Why am I as I am, and not different? Moderation is responsibility towards oneself, the way to get to know oneself, to be with oneself, but lack of control is also a kind of control, organised abandonment to spontaneity, where every weakness has a place, especially in a fearful night, when one is escaping the night while rushing into it. Excess and lack of restraint are on the other side of rationalisation and, thus, lead towards mysticism (which is a way of internal rationalisation of the world) and imagination (which is the other side of reality itself). Only those who reach (experience) the ultimate can understand the power of the opposite, can completely feel and grasp the dual nature of human destiny. On the other side of moderation is danger: of ruin and salvation equally. I do not speak of excess which is today understood as immoderation and, consequently, as an idea of consumerism. I speak of passion which is not (only) corporeal, a desire which cannot be quenched in drink, I speak of eros that contains the will to transcend oneself, even surpass all conditionality of being. I speak of poetry of intoxication, of inebriation, which is being on the other side of oneself, of desire to reach transcendence without God, of the other side of worldliness, of crossing the boundaries to an unknown measure of things.

“Inebriation founds the realm of fancy”.

“And what if my perception of life is skewed, especially when I’m sober?”

People drink. They want to be happy. Statistics show that those who, like sailors and soldiers, are far from home, drink a lot. And when they are home, what are they far from? Our reality is so often the product of our ideas, so pathetically coated in fancy. Illusion and escapism and terror of power all belong in the reality we know, but true life only begins on the other side of fancy and fear, which should be described so that we could liberate ourselves from them; liberate ourselves by words from the internal, and by acts from the external pressure. Inebriation is the reality of illusion as opposed to illusion of reality, but true life is only possible behind the reality which creates fancy. Very well, both inebriations and writing can be aspects of escapism, but also a decision, stimulation of courage, confrontation with what being and its reverse really are.

In the constant coming back of the Same, but unrepeatable life, a man is what he is, and is awaited by what he is not. On the thin line that separates the being and the non-being lies that which we call life, life in which no one is just one, and in which everyone should recognise the Difference in himself and for himself. Not until I say what fancy is, can I know what is reality. It is true, the purpose of intoxication can be inebriation in which fancy is realised as its actual realisation. The reality of such an event proves the reality of fancy. In inebriation the truth of fancy can happen like a real event. And nothing else is needed in such a state. Inebriation – that other state of the Same – is a real state (and especially to the one who is really drunk). It is also a physical event. It is a bridge; a means of bridging the chasm between the real and the unreal, of avoiding the abyss that separates fact and fancy. In inebriation one first has dreams, and then nightmares. It is pure contradiction: drinking calms and aggravates; cheers and saddens; incites and tires; lifts and drops, gives and takes; drinking enriches and impoverishes, through forgiveness brings pleasure and beauty, through beauty fashions derision and misery...Inebriation is a compressed and condensed portrayal of dialectical human destiny, a portrayal of a possible life and the fancy that belongs to it. It is a fight against emptiness and the nameless, a desire for presence of the absent and the being of transcendence. Inebriation is an attitude towards the world and the nothingness which we conceal by work, love, power, intoxication, an attitude towards the nothingness that the fearful speak haltingly, and the brave keep quiet about. Those are my thoughts while I'm waiting for "one more for the road". Or, should I rather have a cappuccino?

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