Beyond Philology No. 14/2, 2017
ISSN 1732-1220, eISSN 2451-1498

"From jubilation to despair": Representations of drink in British and Irish literature

WOJCIECH KLEPUSZEWSKI

Received 5.12.2016,
received in revised form 23.11.2017,
accepted 30.11.2017.

Abstract

The theme of drink in literature has been the focus of scholarly interest for a few decades, though much of it tends to concentrate on the writers' lives more than literature per se, particularly in the studies concerning American literature. Criticism concerning British and Irish literature mostly discusses selected periods, the works of individual writers, or concentrates on regional literature, in this last case usually in the form of annotated anthologies. This article proposes a perspective whose focal point is the paradigm shift in the literary representation of drink, from the conviviality prevalent in pre-twentieth-century literature to the harrowing depictions of alcoholism in contemporary works.

Keywords

Britain, drink, fiction, Ireland, poetry

„Od świętowania do rozpaczy": przedstawienia alkoholu w literaturze brytyjskiej i irlandzkiej

Abstrakt

Motyw alkoholu w literaturze od kilku już dekad znajduje się w kręgu zainteresowania badaczy, choć w dużej mierze koncentrują się oni na pisarzach, a nie literaturze jako takiej, szczególnie w opracowaniach dotyczących literatury amerykańskiej. W publikacjach dotyczących literatury brytyjskiej i irlandzkiej na ogół znajdziemy opracowania dotyczące wybranych okresów literackich, twórczości poszczególnych pisarzy, a nawet literatury regionalnej, często w formie antologii zawierających komentarz krytyczny. Prezentowany artykuł proponuje spojrzenie na zmieniający się paradygmat obrazowania alkoholu w literaturze, od poprzedzających literaturę dwudziestowieczną motywów radosnego upojenia do wstrząsających obrazów alkoholizmu w literaturze współczesnej.

Słowa kluczowe

alkohol, Irlandia, poezja, powieść, Wielka Brytania

Drink as a literary theme is probably as old as literature itself, which provides plentiful examples of how the products of fermentation and distillation become a source of jubilation to some, while a curse to others. Literary representations of drink are legion in all genres and in different literary periods, and reflect attitudes prevalent in various cultural contexts. The critical interest in what might be labelled as drink literature has been growing for a few decades, partly focusing on literature only, and partly discussing literary works within the interdisciplinary field of drinking studies, comprising areas such as culture, history, or sociology.

Criticism examining the drink–literature intersection is obviously not homogenous, but two different approaches are distinctly apparent. The first one is author- rather than literature-oriented, and, as it is more biographical, it concentrates

on the writers' drinking problems, less so on literature *per se*. This is characteristic of studies concerning the American literary scene with its numerous alcoholic writers,[1] such as Charles Bukowski or Francis Scott Fitzgerald. The second approach, employed in this article, focalises drink as a theme in literature, largely or completely ignoring the correlation between the writers' alcoholism and their literary output. This tendency is dominant in the critical discussion of literature in Britain and Ireland,[2] a case in point being *Shakespeare and Alcohol* by Buckner Trawick (1978), in which its author emphasises "the significance of Shakespeare's references to alcoholic beverages" (1978: 7), or David Daiches's annotated anthology, *A Wee Dram: Drinking Scenes from Scottish Literature* (1990), comprising a variety of texts featuring whisky, the Scottish *uisge-beatha* ('water of life').

With its long history, literature of the British Isles is abundant in drink-related themes, which can be examined from numerous perspectives. One such possibility is a more regional angle, as in Daiches' anthology mentioned above, or, to provide another example, in a collection devoted exclusively to Irish literature, *Bottle, Draught and Keg: An Irish Drinking Anthology* (1995), edited by Laurence Flanagan. A more specific and critical, rather than anthological, is Trawick's study on the Shakespearean plays. Optionally, such a narrow perspective can extend beyond the literary matters. This is what Edward Hewett and William Axton do in *Convivial Dickens: The Drinks of Dickens and His Times* (1983), not entirely focused on literature, but also discussing the drinks and drinking customs of the Victorian era. Obviously, the potential problem areas to explore are plentiful, but the available criticism offers only

[1] See, for instance, *The Thirsty Muse: Alcohol and the American Writer* by Tom Dardis (1989).

[2] Although one can easily enumerate the names of British and Irish writers with a serious alcoholic problem, such as Patrick Hamilton, Malcolm Lowry, Brendan Behan, or Dylan Thomas, there have been no critical studies focusing on their work through the prism of their drink problems.

a handful of studies, most of them being general surveys.[3] The perspective this article focuses on is the paradigm shift in the literary representation of drink, reflecting the changing perception of drink consumption, from the conviviality generally permeating pre-twentieth-century literature to those voices which, particularly in contemporary fiction,"register stupefaction, incomprehension, [and] inarticulacy" (Kennedy 2015: 121).

As far as the literature of the British Isles is concerned, the image of drink as a key element of celebration can be found as early as Old English poetry, in which the thanes celebrate victory and hail the fame of the lord while drinking mead. However, as Hugh Magennis argues in his *Anglo-Saxon Appetites* (1998), the connotation of drink in Old English poetry is much more figurative, the importance being attached to "the *idea* of drinking, not to its physical reality" (1998: 12). Thus the festive element has a symbolic meaning, as opposed to the corporeal one in medieval literary renditions, particularly the excellent portraits of the joyous drunkards in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, whose pilgrims recount stories including scenes of drunken debauchery. In fact, drink not only appears in the pilgrims' narratives, but also heavily affects their performance. The Miller, for instance, warns the audience that his advanced state of inebriation might impair his oratorical skills: "And therfore, if that I mysspeke or seye, / Wyte it the ale of Southwerk, I you preye" (1974: 78). Conviviality is also characteristic of the drink imagery in the works of William Shakespeare, which offer a well-stocked repository of characters celebrating drink. Shakespeare's plays are thronged with merry imbibers: Christopher Sly in the *Taming of the Shrew* falls victim to a joke only because he is heavily under the influence; much in the vein of *Richard the Third*'s desperate need for a horse, another of Shakespeare's characters, Boy in *Henry the Fifth*, declares: "I would give all my fame for a pot of ale" (Act

[3] Trawick's book, for instance, is partly a guide, defining the variety of drinks appearing in the plays of the famous Stradfordian, such as the spiced mead called *Metheglin* (cf. 1978: 30).

III, Scene II); and Caliban in *The Tempest* yields to the power of the "celestial liquor" offered by Trinculo and Stephano (Act II, Scene II).

However, nowhere are the joys of drinking more expounded than in poetry and songs,[4] poetry being, after all, a convenient literary form to employ the drink theme, not only because it is usually concise, but, more importantly, because in its nature it is often celebratory. A rich collection of these is, for instance, Theodore Maynard's 1919 anthology *A Tankard of Ale*, which includes examples from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, some anonymous, but most authored by distinguished poets. The collection includes some of the Romantic poets who praise drink in their verse, such as John Keats's in "Lines on the Mermaid Tavern", in which Canary wine is hailed as "beverage divine" (1919: 70), and Lord Byron, who, in "Fill the Goblet Again" advocates drinking wine: "Let us drink – who would not?" (1919: 67). Byron, in fact, is one of those poets who offer numerous jovial examples, probably following the conviction expounded in *Don Juan*: "Man, being reasonable, must get drunk; / The best of life is but intoxication" (Byron 1858: 103).

Discussing literature of the years 1780–1830, Anya Taylor observes that the period is prolific in "songs of celebration, narrative poems, [but also] elegies for those who drank too much, [and] confessions of inebriation" (1999: 5). What this implies is that with the nineteenth century approaching, there are more and more literary representations of drink which slowly depart from pure conviviality and become a springboard for serious ruminations on intemperance. George Crabbe, for instance, in his satirical poem "Inebriety" (1775) writes about the pitfalls of drink abuse, and expounds on the types of drinkers[5] as well as the various effects excessive consumption of drink has on them:

---

[4] Numerous examples are quoted and discussed in Klepuszewski (2017).

[5] A similar kind of typology had been undertaken much earlier in Thomas Nashe's satire, *Pierce Penilesse* (1592), in which he makes a list of different states of being drunk, such as "ape drunke" or "lion drunke", reflecting various behavioural patterns – lively, aggressive or even lecherous (cf. Bold 1982: 145-146).

This drinks and fights, another drinks and loves.
A bastard zeal, of different kinds it shows,
And now with rage, and now religion glows:
The frantic soul bright reason's path defies,
Now creeps on earth, now triumphs in the skies;
Swims in the seas of error, and explores,
Through midnight mists, the fluctuating shores;
From wave to wave in rocky channel glides;
In pride exalted, or by shame deprest,
An angel-devil, or a human-beast.
Some rage in all the strength of folly mad;
Some love stupidity, in silence clad,
Are never quarrelsome, are never gay,
But sleep, and groan, and drink the night away;
(Crabbe 1840: 303)

At the beginning of the next century, texts in the type of Charles Lamb's "Confessions of a Drunkard" (1813) herald a new approach to drinking, viewing it through the prism of moral principles. Such texts can be considered forerunners of the nineteenth century Temperance movement, whose main campaigner, Joseph Livesey, published the monthly *Preston Temperance Advocate* (1834-1837) to promote the ideas of the movement. One has to emphasise here that the period is quite a turning point in the social perception of drinking alcohol and that at the time, as Iain Gately observes, "[t]he concept that humanity might live without any kind of alcoholic drink was revolutionary in Western thought" (2009: 248). The oblique didacticism advocating moderation or even total abstinence is not only present in Livesey's monthly or some non-fictional works, such as *Improvement of the Working People: Drunkenness – Education* (1834) by the social reformer Francis Place, but also, to a very limited extent, in literature, whose quality is often eclipsed by temperance ideology. The most radical representative here was probably William McGonagall (1825-1902), devoted in his temperance mission, though unsuccessful literature-wise, whom McSmith ranks as "the worst poet in the history of the English language [who was] paid five shillings for

a public recital so that his mostly working-class audiences could jeer at his bad poetry or pelt him with rotten vegetables" (2008). As McSmith explains, McGonagall conveniently justified the lack of appreciation of his poetry by claiming that "alcohol was to blame for his audiences' failure to appreciate his work" (2008). A sample of McGonagall's crusade against drinking is his poem "The Demon Drink":

> Oh, thou demon Drink, thou fell destroyer;
> Thou curse of society, and its great annoyer.
> What has thou done to society, let me think?
> I answer thou hast caused the most of ills, thou demon Drink.
> (Laing 2014: 58)

However, all this is not to say that Victorian literature is short of texts in which drink is represented in a convivial and celebratory manner. With the appearance of the novel in the eighteenth century, literarisations of drink in poetry become less conspicuous because fiction gradually outnumbers other literary forms in volume and engages the theme in all kinds of settings. This is partly because of the numerous subgenres which allow fiction to exploit a far broader spectrum of contexts. A rich area of drink-focused study of literature is the nineteenth-century novel, a prime example being Charles Dickens, in whose novels various imbibers "reel through the pages" (Booth 1997: 213). On the whole, much of Dickens's fiction is full of what Pratt calls "scenes of intoxicated conviviality" (2015: 801), as there is a general ambience of relishing drink. Dickens's great-grandson, Cedric, in his 1980 *Drinking with Dickens*, points out that "there was much in his books concerning good cheer and plentiful libations" (1998: 12), taking place in a variety of drinking venues. This aspect of Dickensian fiction is discussed in detail in Steve Earnshaw's study *The Pub in Literature*, which, in the chapter titled "Dickens" lists almost fifty places, a "catalogue of hostelries" (2000: 189), such as taverns, alehouses or, in a more archaic version, tippling houses. However, with all the abundance of joyous drink-

ing scenes in such places, drink in Dickensian fiction can also be framed within the context of harsh Victorian reality, its function here far-removed from the merry revelries mentioned by Cedric Dickens. In *The Adventures of Oliver Twist*, for instance, Bill Sikes and his cronies force Oliver to drink wine in a symbolic act depriving him of his childhood naivety: "Down with it, innocence" (1866: 169). A much more agonising picture can be found in *Hard Times*, in which Stephen Blackpool's alcoholic wife epitomises his dire predicament:

> A disabled, drunken creature, barely able to preserve her sitting posture by steadying herself with one begrimed hand on the floor, while the other was so purposeless in trying to push away her tangled hair from her face, that it only blinded her the more with the dirt upon it. A creature so foul to look at, in her tatters, stains, and splashes, but so much fouler than that in her moral infamy, that it was a shameful thing even to see her. (Dickens 2008: 73)

Finally, let us mention the bleak depiction of alcoholic inferno in Dickens's short story "The Drunkard's Death", where alcoholism not only affects the protagonist, described here as a "confirmed and irreclaimable drunkard" (1854: 298), but his whole family.

The fatalistic mood of Dickens's story is reminiscent of the way drink functions in Thomas Hardy's novels, in which he portrays "characters whose failures are often precipitated or accelerated by their thirst" (Pratt 2015: 801). A good example of drink being inseparable from various characters' catastrophic fates is the opening passage of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. The drunk hay-trusser, Michael Henchard, selling his wife for five guineas, explains the rationale behind this act as follows: "For my part I don't see why men who have got wives and don't want 'em shouldn't get rid of 'em as these gipsy fellows do their old horses" (2004: 10). One should probably add here that drink in Hardy's fiction, as can be seen in *Jude the Obscure* (1895), can also symbolise the escape from misery: "What could he do of a lower kind than self-extermination;

what was there less noble, more in keeping with his degraded position? He could get drunk. Of course that was it; he had forgotten. Drinking was the regular, stereotyped resource of the despairing worthless" (1995: 58).

The range of literary representations of drink in nineteenth-century fiction is obviously much more extensive than the few examples pointed out above, but it is twentieth-century fiction that brings a whole spectrum of works in which drink functions as an important determinant, both in terms of the narrative and the shaping of characters, usually in contexts far-removed from conviviality. In general, one could say that twentieth-century drink literature is no longer synonymous with a joyous celebration, and the backgrounds are often sinister and disturbing. The new perspectives on the cultural and social significance of alcohol consumption (or abuse), manifested, for instance, in the emergence of Alcoholics Anonymous, the American aid fellowship set up in 1935, and the growing medical interest in the issue, undoubtedly influences much of the writings. This applies particularly to fiction, but can also be traced in other literary forms, though the range here is not particularly wide. As opposed to the immense popularity of poeticising drink in poems and songs mentioned earlier, there is little treatment of the theme available in contemporary poetry, and those rare voices are generally dissimilar in mood to the aura of conviviality and celebration. A good example is Tony Harrison's long poem *V.*, in which drink imagery symbolises aggravation of the skinhead who, "pissed on [cheap] beer" (2000: 9), desecrates graves with crude, four-letter word graffiti. Very much the same applies to contemporary drama. In his study on twentieth-century playwrights, DiGaetani discusses heavy drinking characters, such as Hirst, an upper-class alcoholic in Harold Pinter's *No Man's Land*. Apart from the focus on Pinter, DiGaetani devotes a much-telling chapter ("Alcoholism"; 2008: 78-93) to the function of drink in the works of various contemporary playwrights, including Simon Gray, Brian Friel and Martin McDonagh. Here again, as the very title of the chapter implies, drink is embedded in pathological contexts.

However, it is contemporary fiction which offers plentiful examples in the realm of drink literature, particularly focusing on the destructive force of alcohol in human life. A number of the writers who contributed great fictional works in this respect were themselves heavily dependent on alcohol. Patrick Hamilton, Malcolm Lowry or Jean Rhys, all belong to a special category of writers who transpose alcohol into literature, imbuing their writings with their own alcoholic experience, and for this reason should probably be treated separately.[6]

However, there is a great body of fiction which is not, at least not directly or evidently, inspired by the writers' own alcoholic struggles. Contemporary fiction in Britain and Ireland offers many compelling depictions of alcoholism, though not quite near the dissection of the type offered in the iconic American novel *The Lost Weekend* (1944) by Charles Jackson. Many of British and Irish novels are pervaded with alcohol, though they do not focus exclusively on alcoholism as a clinical case, but rather present the characters' lives warped by excessive drinking, as in Graham Swift's *Waterland* (1983), drink being, to quote Jordison, the background for "human entanglements" (2012). In many fictional works the characters seem to be lost in a semi-alcoholic haze, or "half-drunk consciousness" as Joe Kennedy (2015: 127) defines it in his discussion of Henry Green's *Back* (1946) and William Sansom's *The Body* (1949), a fragment of the latter novel being most illustrative here:

> The drink was souring inside me. My head began, slightly at first, muzzily to ache. I saw a public lavatory, tiled and sunless – I went in and down. Underneath, among the tiles, in the aqueous gloom of the pavement lights, it was cooler. Other men were there, but they stood independently – the sense of the crowd was gone. There was a bubbling of irrigation water – and suddenly, very suddenly, *almost as a revelation* to my aching head, I realized the presence

[6] The same applies, of course, to strictly autobiographical treatments of alcohol, that is *alcoholic memoirs* (often called *recovery memoirs*, if, of course, they chronicle the author's successful return to sobriety) such as John Gardner's *Spin the Bottle: The Autobiography of an Alcoholic* (1964).

> of the pipes. Pipes I saw. They ran everywhere – white-painted pipes, gleaming copper pipes, old dust-laden pipes, and all of them curling and branching and forking like things alive and waiting; some suddenly bulged, like snakes digesting a swallowed prey. The full horror of plumbing came to me. Disintoxication in a strange way sharpened my eyes – though much was muddled, certain objects obtruded themselves with startling clarity. (1959: 183-184)

Drink-themed fiction is particularly deeply-ingrained in the prose of Scottish and Irish writers, in part a reflection of the drinking cultures. Such backgrounds are bound to provide various literary representations, and these are, in fact, plentiful. In Scotland, a specific drink landscape is offered by what Smith calls the "hard-drinking Scottish male writing" (Smith 2004), particularly Gordon Williams's *The Siege of Trencher's Farm* (1969). In the novel, the local pub-dweller, Tom Hedden, spends his time at The Inn, as it is called, and later becomes the ring-leader of the eponymous siege to catch the murderer of his daughter, the siege being laid by a number of whisky-fuelled locals. Another novel referred to by Smith is Alasdair Gray's *1982, Janine* (1984), featuring Jock McLeish, an alcoholic installer of alarm systems, who, in the opening passages, establishes the proper terminology to be used when defining his relation to drink: "I'm certainly alcoholic, but not a drunkard" (2003: 2). Heavy drinking is also the attribute of Danny Skinner, the protagonist of Irvine Welsh's *The Bedroom Secrets of the Master Chefs* (2006). Danny's predominant activity is drinking pints of Lowenbrau and "knocking down the double JD and Pepsi" (2007: 217), his addiction resembling an emotional relationship, the sense of security provided by the bottle: "As he savoured his intoxication and thought of the bottle of Johnnie Walker that sat in his flat, Skinner's grin expanded to the width of the street. He was back on home territory" (351).

In many Scottish novels, drink, mostly whisky, functions in rather depressing backgrounds, often set in urban landscapes and working-class communities. Glasgow, for instance, is prominently highlighted in numerous novels, such as *Dancing*

in the Streets (1958), Clifford Hanley's account of his early years in the city where drinking, as he puts it, was "savage" (1983: 25). In a much more recent novel, *Our Fathers* (2006), Andrew O'Hagan's main characters are family related: grandfather, father and son, all "hard-drinking Catholic Glaswegians" (Glancey 1999). The last in line, Jamie Bawn, refers to his father's alcoholism by comparing him to a "blind-drunk bat in love with the dark" (O'Hagan 2006: 6), but they all are, in fact, "damaged men" (Glancey 1999),[7] Jamie's father additionally also damaging, if only because of his violent treatment of his wife. Another novel set in Glasgow is James Kelman's *A Disaffection* (1989), a story of a frustrated and embittered alcoholic schoolteacher, Patrick Doyle. Kelman's drink-writing is also prominent in his short stories, collected in, for instance, *Greyhound for Breakfast* (1988), which features working-class Glaswegians, drink seemingly an inherent part of their everyday lives.

Contemporary Irish literature offers a lot of varied examples of similarly distressing depictions of drink in fictional works, one such to be found in "Just Visiting", a story by the writer of Irish origin settled in Scotland, Bernard MacLaverty, in which Paddy Quinn, a cancer-diagnosed alcoholic slowly ending up his life in hospital, is visited by Ben, his friend. Ben is not just a visitor, but also functions as a mastermind of what might be called drink manoeuvers, intended to supply Paddy with whiskey, his last remaining lifeline. Ben delivers a flat half-bottle of Scotch for Paddy, pondering on the ingenuity of the very concept of such: "They're made flat like that *for* the pocket. No bulge, no evidence. A design to fit the Scots and the Irish psyche" (Haining 2002: 321). There is an inescapable feeling of Ben's clandestine "bottle logistics" being awkward, if not shameful. Drink is no longer a badge of pride, as in, for instance, Robert Burns' poem "Scotch Drink" (2008: 98-101),

[7] In general the alcoholic protagonists tend to be male, but there are exceptions here, such as Hannah Luckraft in A.L. Kennedy's *Paradise* (2005), who defines her own personality using the alcoholic collocations: "I am distilled. Washed down to nothing" (2005: 19).

and in fact this degrading element attached to the fictional representations of drink in contemporary literature is quite prevailing. Another good example here is Brian Moore’s *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* (1955), a story of a piano teacher who comforts her spinster life with whiskey she consumes in the seclusion of her room: “What is to become of me, O Lord, alone in this city, with only drink, hateful drink that dulls me, disgraces me, lonely drink that leaves me more lonely, more despised?” (1988: 225). Similarly, in the recent thriller *The Girl on the Train* (2015), by the Zimbabwe-born English writer, Paula Hawkins, drinking is furtive, the protagonist, Rachel, consuming her “pre-mixed gin and tonic” (2016: 17) and other such concoctions in substitute plastic bottles whose labels conceal the real contents.

What is quite characteristic of contemporary British and Irish fiction in which drink is an important part of the narrative, the focal point is usually the emotional ravages caused by alcohol. Even in MacLaverty’s story, where Paddy’s condition is the result of his long-time alcohol abuse and the devastation it has caused, the physical dimension is dominated by more philosophical reflections concerning drinking, a good example being Paddy’s attempt to define alcoholism: “Addiction is a strange bastard. It creates a need where no need existed. And satisfying it creates a pleasure where no pleasure existed” (320). A slight deviation here are Roddy Doyle’s novels, *The Woman who Walked into Doors* (1996) and its sequel *Paula Spencer* (2006), in both of which emotional disturbance exists side by side with pathographic depictions of alcoholic stupor. In the two novels alcohol fuses with anger and drink-fuelled violence, rendering the nastier face of drink abuse. The first novel is a story of an alcoholic woman, Paula Spencer, who has been maltreated by her husband for years, a harrowing account of her drab existence, domestic violence and a world in which drink offers an easy though illusory escape. It is also an accusatory voice against the superficial judgements and the “mechanisms” of evasive indifference:

> The doctor never looked at me. He studied parts of me but never looked at my eyes. He never looked at me when he spoke. He never saw me. Drink, he said to himself. I could see his nose twitching, taking in the smell, deciding. None of the doctors looked at me. (1996: 186)

Part of the novel focuses on the viciousness and brutality of Paula's husband, Charlo, but much as these graphic depictions are disturbing, much more unnerving are the passages in which Paula's motherhood falls in direct conflict with her addiction:

> I kissed John Paul. I got into the bed beside him. He woke me up in the morning. He was trying to get over me. God love him, he was terrified. His mother in her Sunday clothes and shoes beside him in the bed. And sick on the pillow. I turned the pillow over and closed my eyes. (84)

Whereas in *The Woman who Walked into Doors* Paula is a victim of abuse and an "[a]lco. Alco. Paula the alco" (115), as she defines herself, in *Paula Spencer* she struggles to keep sober, yet fully aware of her environment, working-class and largely unemployed: "[e]veryone's an alco these days" (2006: 137). However, the most bitter and painful part of the novel is coming to terms with the fact that her daughter, Leanne, has become dependent on drink, a fact which is a new challenge, particularly difficult for someone who has had the very same experience: "What does an alcoholic mother say to her alcoholic daughter?" (2006: 20-21).

***

The juxtaposition of two different perspectives in the literarisation of drink reflects the changing cultural paradigm, and reveals a visible shift "from jubilation to despair".[8] Pre-twentieth-

[8] The line is borrowed from Anya Taylor's 1999 study, *Bacchus in Romantic England: Writers and Drink 1780-1830* (30).

century British and Irish literature abounds in literary depictions of drink being symbolic of conviviality, evoking the spirit of festivity and celebration, or having a remedial power which allows to “banish despair in a mug” (Maynard 1919: 37). The twentieth century is a convenient counterpoint here, though as this article suggests, the first visible transition in the way the drink theme is rendered takes place in nineteenth-century literature. This obviously mirrors the changing attitude to alcohol at different historical points. There are numerous examples to consider: the brewing of beer for its nutritional purpose in the Middle Ages; the Irish and Scottish “aquavitae”, as it is referred to in the 1494 Scottish Exchequer Rolls (cf. Brown 1993: 10), boosting the spirit and believed to have medicinal properties; the eighteenth century Gin Craze, a period when, owing to its low price, gin was within easy reach of the poor, “Drunk for one penny. Dead drunk for two” (Dillon 2004: 37); the growing problem of drunkenness in industrialised England (cf. Nicholls 2013: 201), highly detrimental to the workers’ efficiency, and finally, mass access to alcoholic beverages from the twentieth-century onwards, with the whole industry to diagnose, analyse, and treat alcoholism.

All this finds its literary representation. The very same “despair” which drink can alleviate, as the anonymous poem quoted earlier promises, in contemporary British and Irish literature, predominantly fiction, is usually pictured as the result of drink consumption. Alcohol usually appears in disturbing contexts, often familial, where it is destructive in social and emotional terms. As opposed to the communal merrymaking during social gatherings in alehouses and inns, the contemporary depictions often feature solitary drinkers, whose lives are obsessively limited to the technicalities of drink, as it were, a good example being Hannah Luckraft: “Bushmills, County Antrim, 700 millilitres, 40 percent. I mean, what else do you need to know?” (Kennedy 2005: 17). As this article has tried to argue, one critical avenue in considering drink-themed literature written in the British Isles is the general paradigm shift in the literary representations of alcohol. The value of such a per-

spective is that it clearly reflects the correlation between the cultural perceptions and their literary reflections. Obviously, this is just one possible approach, but the abundance of material in the field of drink literature certainly calls for further analysis and detailed thematic studies.

References

Booth, John (1997). *Creative Spirits: A Toast to Literary Drinkers*. London: André Deutsch.

Brown, Gordon (1993). *The Whisky Trails: A Geographical Guide to Scotch Whisky*. London: Prion.

Burns, Robert (2008). *The Collected Poems of Robert Burns*. Ware: Wordsworth.

Byron, George Gordon (1858). *Don Juan*. Boston: Philips, Sampson.

Chaucer, Geoffrey (1977). *The Canterbury Tales*. Robert Pratt (ed.). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Crabbe, George (1840). *The Poetical Works of the Rev. George Crabbe; With His letters and Journals, and His Life*. Vol II. London: John Murray.

Dickens, Cedric (1998). *Drinking with Dickens*. New York: New Amsterdam Books.

Dickens, Charles (2008). *Hard Times*. New York: Signet.

Dickens, Charles (1854). *Sketchez by Boz: Illustrative of every-day life and every-day people*. Available at <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/882/882-h/882-h.htm>. Accessed 15 May 2016.

Dickens, Charles (1866). *The Adventures of Oliver Twist*. London: Chapman and Hall.

DiGaetani, John Louis (2008). *Stages of Struggle: Modern Playwrights and Their Psychological Inspirations*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland.

Dillon, Patrick (2004). *Gin: The Much-lamented Death of Madame Geneva*. Boston: Justin, Charles & Co.

Doyle, Roddy (2007). *Paula Spencer*. London: Vintage.

Doyle, Roddy (1998). *The Woman who Walked into Doors*. London: Vintage.

Earnshaw, Steve (2000). *The Pub in Literature: England's Altered State*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.

Gately, Iain (2009). *Drink: A Cultural History of Alcohol*. New York: Gotham Books.

Glancey, Jonathan (1999). “Utopia & Sons”. *The Guardian*, 20 March.

Gray, Alasdair (2003). *1982, Janine*. Edinburgh: Canongate Books.

Haining, Peter (ed.) (2002). *Great Irish Drinking Stories: The Craic’s the Thing*. London: Souvenir Press.

Hanley, Clifford (1983). *Dancing in the Street*. Edinburgh: Mainstream.

Hardy, Thomas (1995). *Jude the Obscure*. Ware: Wordsworth Editions.

Hardy, Thomas (2004). *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Harrison, Tony (2000). *V.* Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books.

Hawkins, Paula (2016). *The Girl on the Train*. London: Black Swan.

Jordison, Sam (2012). “Booker club: *Last Orders* by Graham Swift”. *The Guardian*, 24 July.

Kennedy, A.L. (2005). *Paradise*. London: Vintage.

Kennedy, Joe (2015). “Tipsiness and ‘the reigning stupefaction’ in the British fiction of the late 1940s”. In: Eugene Brennan, Russel Williams (eds.). *Literature and Intoxication: Writing, Politics and the Experience of Excess*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 119-129.

Klepuszewski, Wojciech (2017). “The joyous inebriation: Drinking and conviviality in poetry and song”. In: Victor Kennedy, Michelle Gadpaille (eds.). *Ethnic and Cultural Identity in Music and Song Lyric*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 64-76.

Laing, Robin (2014). *The Whisky Muse: Scotch Whisky in Poem and Song*. Edinburgh: Luath, London: Chapman and Hall.

Magennis, Hugh (1998). *Anglo-Saxon Appetites: Food and Drink and Their Consumption in Old English and Related Literature*. Dublin: Four Courts Press.

Maynard, Theodore (ed.) (1919). *A Tankard of Ale: An Anthology of Drinking Songs*. London: Erskine Macdonald.

McSmith, Andy (2008). “The story of William McGonagall, the worst poet in the history of the English language”. *The Independen*t, 17 May.

Moore, Brian (1988). *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart.

Nicholls, John (2013). *The Politics of Alcohol: A History of the Drink Question in England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

O’Hagan, Andrew (2006). *Our Fathers*. London: Faber and Faber.

Pratt, David C. (2015). “Role of alcohol in literature”. In: Scott Christopher Martin (ed.). *The Sage Encyclopedia of Alcohol: Social, Cultural, and Historical Perspective*. Thousand Oaks, CA.: SAGE Publications, 798-804.

Sansom, William (1959). *The Body*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Smith, Ali (2004). “The road to oblivion”. *The Guardian*, 28 August.

Trawick, Buckner B. (1978). *Shakespeare and Alcohol*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Welsh, Irvine (2007). *The Bedroom Secrets of the Master Chefs*. London: Vintage Books.

Wojciech Klepuszewski
Wydział Humanistyczny
Politechnika Koszalińska
Kwiatkowskiego 6e
75-343 Koszalin
Poland
klepuszewski@poczta.pl