

“Be Drunk”: Literatures of Intoxication

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LIT 4650 (Comparative Literature) Professor: Clark Lunberry

“One should always be drunk. That’s all that matters; that’s our imperative need. So as not to feel Time’s horrible burden that breaks your shoulders and bows you down, you must get drunk without ceasing.”

— Charles Baudelaire, “Be Drunk”

“Now I am an outcast. I loathe my country. The best thing for me is a drunken sleep on the beach.”

— Arthur Rimbaud, “A Season in Hell”

Intoxication offers hope. Intoxication offers escape. Intoxication offers illusions, a temporary respite from the weight and weariness of the world. All such sentiments were voiced by the great 19th century French poet, Charles Baudelaire, in his still stunning and shocking prose poem “Be Drunk.” In this class, we will have as our focus the literatures of intoxication that have, in part, helped to shape our modern and contemporary sensibility. Beginning, as we must, with Baudelaire (his *Artificial Paradises: On Hashish and Wine*), we will chart our way through the rich and hallucinatory terrain by which so many modern writers have written so vividly of various forms of intoxication. Imagined there are alternative worlds, an expanded consciousness of consciousness, and a desired escape from the boredom of everyday life...the tedium (and terror) of “Time.” (Our modern dilemma: there’s both too little of time [causing terror] and too much of time [causing tedium]...*at the same damn time!*). I’ll be the designated driver.

In addition to Baudelaire, we will be looking at the work of Edgar Allen Poe (“A Tale of the Ragged Mountain”), Thomas de Quincy (*Confessions of an English Opium Eater*), Arthur Rimbaud (“Drunken Boat” and “A Season in Hell”), Sigmund Freud (“On Cocaine”), Henri Michaux (*Miserable Miracle*), Antonin Artaud (*The Peyote Dance*), Walter Benjamin (*On Hashish*), Aldous Huxley (*The Doors of Perception*), María Sabina (and the “Mushroom Ceremony of the Mazatec Indians of Mexico”), William S. Burroughs’s *Junky*, Oliver Sacks on hallucinations, and more.

1. *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, by Thomas De Quincy. Publisher: Dover Publications; ISBN-10: 0486287424
2. *Miserable Miracle*, by Henri Michaux. Publisher: NYRB Classics; ISBN-10: 1590170016
3. *The Doors Of Perception: Heaven and Hell*, by Aldous Huxley. Publisher: Fontal Lobe Publishing; ISBN-10: 1907590099
4. *A Season in Hell & The Drunken Boat*, by Arthur Rimbaud. Publisher: New Directions; ISBN-10: 0811219488
5. *Artificial Paradises: Baudelaire's Masterpiece on Hashish*, by Charles Baudelaire. Publisher: Citadel; ISBN-10: 0806514833
6. *Hashish, Wine, Opium*, by Charles Baudelaire and Theophile Gautier. Publisher: Oneworld Classics; ISBN-184749093X
7. *On Hashish*, by Walter Benjamin. Publisher: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press; ISBN-10: 0674022211
8. *Baudelaire: Poems*. Publisher: Everyman's Library, ISBN-10: 0679429107
9. *Junky*, by William S. Burroughs. Publisher: Grove Press; ISBN-10: 9780802120427

As Handouts:

- “A Tale of the Ragged Mountain,” by Edger Allen Poe
- *Hashish, Wine, Opium*, by Theophile Gautier (handout)
- Antonin Artaud’s *The Peyote Dance*
- “An Overdose of Hasheesh,” *The Popular Science Monthly*. February, 1884, by Mary C. Hungerford
- “Sigmund Freud: Letters and Papers on Cocaine” (1884), (handout)
- María Sabina (and the “Mushroom Ceremony of the Mazatec Indians of Mexico”)
- “Peyote Poem,” by Michael McClure
- “Lunar Baedeker,” by Mina Loy (UK, 1886-1966)
- Billie Holiday, from *Lady Sings the Blues* (1956)
- “Altered States: Self-experiments in chemistry,” by Oliver Sacks (from *The New Yorker*, August 27, 2012)