

Names of Fictional Characters by Three Alcoholic Novelists

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Abstract

Names of fictional characters in novels by three male alcoholic authors, Ernest Hemingway, Kingsley Amis, Sinclair Lewis, differ from names of fictional characters in novels by three male authors and three female authors who do not appear to have drunk alcohol excessively. The three alcoholic authors created the highest proportion of male fictional characters, ranging from 77% to 66%. The proportion of male fictional characters ranged from 64% to 56% for the three other male novelists and from 53% to 49% for the three female novelists. The novels by the alcoholic authors were mostly satirical, containing flawed characters, subordinated females, and unhappy outcomes. The first name of many fictional females has a masculine last letter. The alcoholic authors probably used the depressant effect of alcohol to deny their stressful conflict between infantile dependence and adult self-reliance. The mother of Hemingway was a musician who often dominated her husband and first son. The British mother of Amis passively accepted the family's descent to lower middle class. The mother of Lewis died of tuberculosis when he was six years old. The fictional female characters of the other six authors were generally more important and admirable.

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Alcohol Intoxication Relieves Conflict

Some popular and admired male novelists have been addicted to alcohol intoxication. Attributes of the fictional characters created by three male alcoholic authors may reveal motivations of men with great literary aptitude to become addicted to the depressant effect of alcohol.

Each infant is dependent on the mother or on a substitute for her. Subsequently, children gradually develop adult self-reliance. A desire for both conditions persists throughout life. The conflict between the incompatible desires is a source of distress.

Beverages containing alcohol have been drunk by humans for at least several thousand years. Alcohol is a powerful drug that depresses and impairs all functions of the central nervous system. The effects of this drug were summarized in a two-volume book (Wallgren and Barry 1970). Many people have been killed by an overdose of alcohol. A similar depressant effect is caused by barbiturates. They are used as sleeping pills and are sometimes used for a suicidal overdose. A similar but milder depressant effect is obtained from tranquilizers, such as Valium, Librium, and other benzodiazepines.

Several hours after a severely depressant effect of alcohol, a hangover usually occurs. It is a compensatory but aversive overstimulation of the central nervous system. Symptoms include headache, nausea, vomiting, and distressed feelings. Chronic consumption of alcohol results in physiological tolerance, so that repetition of the same dose has a diminishing effect. If the full depressant effect is desired, higher doses are required. A behavioral tendency is to

obtain the desired depression of the central nervous system by drinking progressively larger amounts of alcohol.

A crucial question is why a drug with such maladaptive effects is repeatedly consumed in excessive quantities by some people. The answer is that the depressant effect of alcohol relieves a different source of distress. The highly developed brains of our species contain contradictory desires. The conflict between these desires is distressing because satisfaction of one desire frustrates the opposing desire. Adult males suffer from a conflict between infantile dependence and adult self-reliance.

Dependence on the mother or on a substitute for her is necessary for survival of each infant. The mother is the source of milk from her breast, companionship, and protection from environmental threats. During physical development, the child separates from the mother. The toddler walks away from her more often than toward her. Self-reliance becomes a necessity and desire. A depressant drug can relieve the stressful conflict by enabling the person to deny either the motive for dependence or the motive for self-reliance. The drug effect can obliterate conscious awareness of the desire for dependence in some situations and the desire for self-reliance in other situations. Alcohol is an especially popular depressant drug because it is a legal substance for adults and usually drunk by groups of people in a convivial situation. A person who has withdrawn from other people by reading and writing fiction can enjoy companionship with the help of the depressant effect of alcohol. Three alcoholic novelists, Ernest Hemingway, Kingsley Amis, and Sinclair Lewis, became increasingly addicted to the depressant effect of alcohol during many years of heavy drinking.

	Novels	% Males
Ernest Miller Hemingway (1899-1961)	6	77
Sir Kingsley William Amis (1922-1995)	5	67
Harry Sinclair Lewis (1885-1951)	8	66
Phillip Milton Roth (born 1932)	5	64
John Hoyer Updike (1932-2009)	8	57
David Herbert Richards Lawrence (1885-1950)	4	56
Margaret Drabble (born 1939)	3	53
Edith Newbold (Jones) Wharton (1862-1937)	4	50
Anna Quindlen (born 1952)	5	49

Table 1. The name, year of birth and death, number of novels sampled, and the percentage of male fictional characters

Sample of Nine Novelists

Novels by each of nine authors have been admired by literature scholars and enjoyed by millions of readers. Table 1 identifies the authors in sequence of decreasing percentage of fictional characters who were male instead of female. Three male authors with the highest percentage of male fictional characters were alcoholics. Three male authors with lower percentages of fictional males were apparently not alcoholics. The lowest percentages of

fictional males, close to 50%, were created by three female authors who were apparently not alcoholics.

The percentage of males was calculated for each novel. The average % Males shown for each author was calculated separately for each novel. The % Males in Table 1 therefore was determined equally by the percentage of males in each novel by the same author regardless of differences among the novels in number of fictional characters.

Each of the three alcoholic authors had two or more failed marriages. Their closest and most prolonged friendships were with other men instead of with women. Many of their novels are satirical, containing fictional characters who are unethical or foolish. The names and other attributes of their fictional characters are summarized separately for each alcoholic author.

Ernest Miller Hemingway

The six novels are *The Sun Also Rises*, *A Farewell to Arms*, *To Have and Have Not*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, *Across the River and Into the Trees*, and *Islands in the Stream*. They narrate actions in France, Italy, Spain, or Cuba, but the principal male character in each novel has a surname that indicates the English language. The principal character, who is also the narrator, is Jacob Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises*, Frederick Henry in *A Farewell to Arms*, and Harry Morgan in *To Have or Have Not*. The principal character is Robert Jordan in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and Colonel Richard Cantwell in *Across the River and Into the Trees*. Both men die at the end of the novel. Thomas Hudson ('old Tom') is the principal character in *Islands in the Stream*.

The principal female characters in the six novels are subordinated to the men and have little or no influence on the principal events. Those with English language names are Lady Ashley Brett in *The Sun Also Rises*, nurses Catherine Barkley and Helen Ferguson in *A Farewell to Arms*, Mrs. Marie Morgan in *To Have and Have Not*, and Audrey Bruce in *Islands in the Stream*. The family name was not revealed for an important female in two novels. They are Maria, a young native Spaniard who has sexual intercourse with Robert Jordan in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and Countess Renata, a native Italian, in *Across the River and Into the Trees*.

Many biographies of Ernest Hemingway have been published. The most pertinent to his motive for alcoholism is probably *The Hemingway Women* by Bernice Kert (1983). Hemingway's portrayal of European countries and Cuba reveals deficient interest in their natives, especially the females. The author was the second child and first boy in a family of six children. He grew up in Michigan but spent most of his adult life in Europe or Cuba. He developed a compulsive interest in hunting, fishing, and watching the masculine behaviors of bull fighting and warfare. He identified strongly with his father's enjoyment of hunting, fishing, and hiking. The author's father was a strictly moralistic Christian physician. The author's mother forsook a potential career as an opera singer to marry his father. She was a devoted and attentive maternal presence throughout his childhood. In adulthood he denied his initial affiliation with her. He repeatedly declared that he hated her as a domineering shrew who drove her husband to suicide.

Sir Kingsley William Amis

The five sampled novels are *Lucky Jim*, *Ending Up*, *Jake's Thing*, *Girl, 20*, and *The Old Devils*. Some of the principal fictional characters have expressive and imaginative names. The principal fictional males are ethically flawed. In *Lucky Jim*, James Dixon is motivated by anger to do impulsive, nasty actions that he fails to conceal. In *Ending Up*, Bernard Bastable is selfish and malicious. In *Jake's Thing*, Dr. Jacques Cecil Richardson is obsessed with the declining ability of his penis to consummate adultery. In *Girl, 20*, famous orchestra conductor Sir Roy Vandervane compulsively pursues adulterous affairs with young women. In *The Old Devils*, Alun Weaver excessively craves recognition as a foremost writer. In accordance with the titles of two novels, *Ending Up* and *Old Devils*, the principal male character dies at the end.

The principal female character in the five novels is subordinated to the men and ethically or emotionally flawed. The last letter of the first name of most of them is a consonant that usually ends the first name of males. The first name of most females ends in a vowel, *a*, *e*, *i*, or the consonant *h* or *y*.

In *Lucky Jim*, Miss Margaret Peel is masochistic and attempts suicide. In *Ending Up*, Mrs. Marigold Pike has grandiose fantasies. In *Jake's Thing*, Mrs. Evelyn Greenstreet initiates adultery with 'Jake' Richardson. In *Girls, 20*, Penny Vanderveen, daughter of Sir Roy Vanderveen, tries to be a seductress. In *Old Devils*, Mrs. Rhannon Weaver is obediently subservient to her husband.

A lengthy biography is *The Life of Kingsley Amis* by Zachary Leader (2006). The novelist was the only child of his parents. The author's father had the lower middle class occupation of clerk in London, United Kingdom. The author's paternal grandfather, Joseph James Amis, had been a prosperous merchant. The author's father was strictly moralistic, for example warning his young son that masturbation would result in insanity. The author's mother passively supported his father but urged the son to become a writer.

The author throughout adulthood was a frequent adulterer, rebelling against his moralistic parents. Frequent alcohol intoxication probably helped the author to deny close affiliation with his mother during infancy and early childhood. The characters of the principal fictional females appear to express that denial.

Harry Sinclair Lewis

The eight sampled novels are *The Job*, *Main Street*, *Babbitt*, *Arrowsmith*, *Elmer Gantry*, *Dodsworth*, *Ann Vickers*, and *It Can't Happen Here*. They contain a wide variety of themes. In three of them, a woman is the principal character. All of the novels satirize flaws of the principal fictional characters.

The principal male characters are either ethically flawed or unsuccessful. In *The Job*, Walter Babson is a journalist who is admirably creative and cynical but drinks alcoholic beverages too often and loses his job. In the end, he has the opportunity to be rescued by the principal female character. In *Main Street*, Dr. Will P. Kennicott loyally but unsuccessfully supports his wife's efforts to improve their small city. In *Babbitt*, George Follansbee Babbitt is a real estate agent and developer who epitomizes an enthusiastic, insensitive booster of his

profession and city. He has an episode of adultery. In *Arrowsmith* Dr. Martin Arrowsmith is an idealistic physician who fails to document adequately an epidemic that has killed his wife. In *Elmer Gantry*, Reverend Elmer Gantry is successful but insincere in persuading other people to devote their lives to Jesus. In *Dodsworth*, the owner of an automobile company sells his company and travels to Europe with his wife. She leaves him for a European lover. In *It Can't Happen Here*, newspaper owner Doremus Jessup heroically opposes a Fascist politician but flees to Canada to save his life and continue his struggle from that foreign country.

In most of the eight novels, the principal female is subordinate to a man. In *The Job*, Una Golden performs well in clerical positions. She foolishly marries Julius Edward Schwartz, who is a more obnoxious caricature of Babbitt, the title character of a subsequent novel. Una Golden improbably becomes a successful business executive. In *Main Street*, Carol Milford, after marrying Dr. Will P. Kennicott, tries persistently but unsuccessfully to improve the small city where her husband is a physician. In *Babbitt*, Mrs. Myra Babbitt loyally subordinates herself to her husband. In *Arrowsmith*, Miss Leora Tozzer marries Dr. Martin Arrowsmith. Her principal effect on the narrative is her death in a disease epidemic, thereby causing her husband to abandon his systematic study of the origin of the epidemic.

In most of the four subsequent novels, the first name of the principal female has a consonant last letter that occurs more often in first names of males. Miss Sharon Falconer, a successful evangelist, becomes the lover of Elmer Gantry. She dies when a fire destroys her and the building where she was preaching. In *Dodsworth*, Mrs. Frances Dodsworth, is selfish and commits adultery during the trip to Europe with her husband.

In *Ann Vickers*, the title character becomes an admirable and successful superintendent of a prison for women in New York City. Contrary to conventional morality, she marries two men whom she does not love enough, and as a single woman she has two pregnancies. She chooses abortion of the first but not the second pregnancy. At the end of the novel, she subordinates herself to the only man whom she loves sufficiently. He is Judge Bernard Dow Dolphin. This fictional judge is jailed for bribery and pardoned by the Governor of New York soon after 1972, the year the novel was published. In *It Can't Happen Here*, Mrs. Lorinda Pike joins Doremus Jessup in opposing the Fascist political regime and flees to Canada with him.

A detailed biography is *Sinclair Lewis: Rebel from Main Street* by Richard Lingeman (2002). The novelist was four years old when his mother became ill from tuberculosis. She died when he was six years old. In adulthood he stated that he had no memory of her. A traumatic deprivation has persistent effects even if the event is repressed from conscious memory. The biographer stated that the early maternal deprivation suffered by the novelist was a source of his quarrels with both wives and with other women. Alcohol intoxication during adulthood enabled him to deny his expectation that his two wives and other women would abandon him. When he was intoxicated, he sometimes eloquently described to both of his wives their offensive characteristics. These episodes contributed to his divorce from both wives.

Three Other Male Authors

The sample of novelists includes three males who were apparently not alcoholics. Their novels indicate some flaws of their fictional characters but less severe and less repetitious than in the novels by the three alcoholic authors.

The five novels by Philip Roth that were sampled are *Goodbye Columbus*, *Portnoy's Complaint*, *American Pastoral*, *The Plot Against America*, and *Nemesis*. Alexandeer Portnoy, in the second novel, is satirized. The topics of the novels are diverse. Some of the events are horrifying. There is no consistent subordination of women. Most of the principal characters are not ethically flawed or unsuccessful.

The eight novels by John Updike that were sampled are *The Poorhouse Fair*, *Rabbit Run*, *Rabbit Redux*, *Marry Me*, *Rabbit is Rich*, *The Witches of Eastwick*, *Rabbit at Rest*, and *The Widows of Eastwick*. The first novel includes a resident, John F. Hook, who was given the author's first name. John Hook is the most admirable character among the residents and staff members of the poorhouse. Four novels are about successive stages in the life of Harry Angstrom, whose nickname 'Rabbit' refers to his running speed as a basketball player. Two novels are fantasies about several women who sometimes display malevolent or benevolent powers of witchcraft. Diverse social and sexual actions are described. One episode is sexual intercourse by 'Rabbit' with his son's wife. The novels contain no consistent subordination of women. The only death of an important character is 'Rabbit' at the end of the fourth novel about him.

D.H. Lawrence was a British author. Four of his novels were sampled. The first three are *Sons and Lovers*, *The Rainbow*, and *Women in Love*. In spite of the titles of two of them, they contain very few explicit descriptions of sexual behavior. *Sons and Lovers* describes the family of Walter Morel, a coal miner. The author's father had the same occupation. The narrative spans the years from birth to young adulthood of the oldest children. Paul, the third child and second son, becomes a writer and is an autobiographical model for the author. Paul and his mother, Gertrude, display an almost erotic love for each other. The father becomes a contemptible drunkard. As a young adult, Paul has unsatisfactory romances with two unsuitable women, Miss Miriam Leivers and Mrs. Clara Dawes.

The Rainbow describes a family that owns a farm. The principal fictional character is a daughter, Ursula Brangwen. She has a brief love affair with another woman, Miss Winifred Inger, followed by an unsatisfactory love affair with a young man, Anton Skrebensky. *Women in Love* narrates the subsequent young adulthood of Ursula and her younger sister, Gudrun. Ursula, a school teacher, marries a highly intellectual and unconventional young man, Rupert Birkin. Ursula, a talented sculptress, almost marries a rich young owner of a coal mine, Gerald Crich. When Gerald Crich freezes to death after a solitary accident in the Swiss Alps during winter, Gudrun Brangwen prepares to join Herr F. Loeke, a small, ugly, young sculptor, who lives in Dresden, Germany.

The fourth and most famous of these novels is *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. It is a love story that contains explicit descriptions of sexual intercourse between Lady Constance Chatterley and Oliver Mellors. She is the wife of Clifford Chatterley, a British baronet who is partially paralyzed and sexually impotent because of a wound during combat in World War I. Oliver Mellors is the gamekeeper for her husband. The outcome of the adultery is uncertain.

A preference for male over female fictional characters is indicated by the majority of males created by each of the six male authors. The majority of fictional characters share the male gender of the author. The six male authors demonstrate a tendency for male novelists to create a majority of male fictional characters. The preference for fictional characters of the same gender as the male author is less extreme for each of the three non-alcoholic novelists than for each of the three alcoholic novelists. The three non-alcoholic authors portrayed most of their fictional characters realistically without satire. The behavior of their principal characters was motivated by love or rational self-interest instead of by malice or stupidity.

Three Female Novelists

Slightly more males than females are born in most human populations. Slightly more adults are female than male because of greater mortality of male than female infants and children. Contrary to the six male novelists, the three female novelists reproduced the usual social conditions accurately by approximately equal percentages of male and female fictional characters.

The three sampled novels by a British author, Margaret Drabble, are *The Millstone*, *The Needle's Eye*, and *The Ice Age*. The topic of *The Millstone* is an unmarried woman who unintentionally becomes pregnant and decides to become a single mother. *The Needle's Eye* and *The Ice Age* are about relationships between spouses, ex-spouses, and between parents and their children. Stressful relationships are described, but there is no dominance of men over women, behavior is not intentionally unethical, and the outcomes are not lethal or tragic.

The two other female authors are United States citizens, Edith Newbold Wharton and Anna Quindlen. The four sampled novels by Wharton are *The House of Mirth*, *Ethan Frome*, *The Custom of the Country*, and *The Age of Innocence*. Diverse relationships among people are described. Some are tragic, including suicide of a young woman in *The House of Mirth*. In *Ethan Frome* the title character and his lover, Mattie Silver, are crippled by a mutual suicide attempt. They spend many subsequent years living with and being taken care of by Ethan Frome's unpleasant wife, Zenobia. There is no male dominance. Stupid and self-destructive actions are narrated as tragic instead of satirical.

The five sampled novels by Anna Quindlen are *Object Lessons*, *Black and Blue*, *Blessings*, *One True Thing*, and *Rise and Shine*. Their topics are diverse. *Object Lessons* is about three generations of a rich Irish-American family, *Black and Blue* is about a wife who is battered by her husband, *Blessings* is about adoption of an abandoned infant by the male caretaker of the house of a wealthy family. *One True Thing* is about a young woman who interrupts her career to care for her dying mother. The daughter is mistakenly accused of giving her mother a lethal overdose of morphine. Her mother had secretly accumulated enough morphine pills to overdose herself. A jury acquitted the daughter prior to revelation of the mother's suicide. *Rise and Shine* is about the relationship between two adult sisters. None of the narratives is satirical. Most of the fictional characters are admirable. Male dominance occurs only in the first two novels. Outcomes are generally happy.

Conclusions

Chronic alcoholism of three prolific, popular, and generally admired male novelists appears attributable to the depressant effect of alcohol. The addictive alcohol intoxication is motivated by craving for temporary relief from conscious awareness of the stressful conflict between infantile dependence, usually on the mother, and subsequent development of adult self-reliance.

Predominance of male fictional characters is the most objective difference found between the three alcoholic novelists and the six non-alcoholic novelists, three male and three female. Distrust of women is inferred from adverse experiences of the three alcoholic novelists with their mother during infancy or childhood. The fictional female characters of alcoholic novelists are usually subordinated to the males and satirized in addition to being less numerous. Distrust of women is also inferred from multiple failed marriages and from stronger and more enduring friendships by the alcoholic authors with other men than with their wives and with other women.

A possibility is that the inferred motive for addictive alcohol intoxication by three male novelists is the same as for most other male alcoholics. Evidence in favor of this inference is in a review article by Blane and Barry (1973). Alcoholic patients were more often the last child in a large family of four or more children. The last child often receives extra nurturance from the mother and is described as the baby of the family. The intensified affiliation with the mother might strengthen the desire for infantile dependence in the conflict against the desire for adult self-reliance.

An alternative possibility is that the motives of the three alcoholic novelists differ from the motives of most other alcoholics. Each of the three alcoholic novelists had superior literary aptitude and achievement. They created popular and generally admired fictional narratives during many years of addictive alcohol intoxication.

The most severe limitation of this research is the small number of alcoholic authors, only three. Conclusions must be tentative instead of definitive, especially because the three alcoholic authors differ from each other in various attributes. The principal value of this research might be to induce further research that can support or refute the inference that temporary relief of the conflict between infantile dependence and adult self-reliance motivates addictive alcohol intoxication by male novelists. I hope that other people interested in personality and drug addiction will do and report research on additional alcoholic authors.

I am in the process of sampling novels by three additional alcoholic authors. They are Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald, John Steinbeck, and William Faulkner. The latter two, in addition to Sinclair Lewis and Ernest Hemingway, were awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Further alcoholic authors might include John Cheever, Jack London, Steven Crane, and Edgar Allan Poe. Alcoholic authors of many plays were Eugene O'Neill, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, and Tennessee Williams. The names of fictional characters in plays can be analyzed and also can be compared with the names of the actors or actresses who portrayed them.

Several novelists who were female alcoholics are identified in a book by Lucy Barry Robe (1986). The author, born in 1934 and died in 1996, was the younger of my two sisters.

The most popular of these female novelists was Margaret Mitchell, author of *Gone with the Wind*. (1936). Her alcoholism probably contributed to the fact that she wrote no other novel.

Each of the three alcoholic authors wrote numerous short stories. A single short story contains few fictional characters, but many fictional characters are accumulated in many short stories by the same author. A disadvantage of analyzing short stories is that many of them were written rapidly for the purpose of making more money than can be obtained from the much smaller number of novels. An advantage of analyzing the novels is that they probably express more authentically the foremost emotions of the authors.

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