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Alcoholics Onymous: Experience of Change in British Women's Recovery Memoirs

Abstract: The present article focuses on recovery memoirs, a sub-genre of life-writing, in particular those written by British women. Recovery memoirs have been burgeoning in the past two or three decades, yet they seem to be generally ignored as far as literary criticism is concerned. The main objective here, apart from shedding light on such memoirs, is to analyse how they reflect the process of personal change from alcohol dependence to sobriety.

Keywords: alcoholism, women, recovery memoirs, life-writing

On the face of it, life-writing seems a convenient generic term for non-fictional accounts of an (auto)biographical nature; however, much as such accounts can be a common denominator, life-writing offers more than just a recount of personal experience. This is most conspicuous in texts which deal with past trauma, such as, for instance, domestic violence or sexual abuse, where pathography is foregrounded, and which are not merely factual, but also highly emotionally charged. Among various offshoots of life-writing this is certainly the case with narratives of alcohol addiction, usually termed recovery memoirs, though alcoholic/addiction/sobriety variants are also used. Owen Flanagan deems recovery memoirs “a powerful epistemic base for discussing common and uncommon features of alcoholism” (868). However, their added value is that being focused on the process of conquering addiction, they provide a reflection on experience of undergoing personal change. There has been a profusion of such memoirs, mainly published in the past

two or three decades and mostly written by women; yet, recovery memoirs as such seem to attract little critical attention.¹

Recovery memoirs are particularly popular in America, where the publishing scene is virtually flooded with such texts, discussed and reviewed on innumerable websites. Occasionally, one can find them mirrored in literary criticism, an example being Dagmara Drewniak's "'This Has Been a Painful Story to Tell': Excavating Stories of Motherhood, Alcohol Abuse, and Writing in Two North American Memoirs: *Lit* by Mary Karr and *Drunk Mom* by Jowita Bydlowska" (2019). However, the present article focuses predominantly on British women's memoirs, and on how they chronicle a change leading an alcoholic to sobriety. The rationale behind such a choice is twofold. First of all, the meagre number of memoirs authored by British women stands in stark contrast to facts and figures concerning women and alcohol in the UK. According to various surveys, British women come top of the league in alcohol intake (Oppenheim, quoting *The Lancet*), and they hold the same position in binge drinking (Williams, quoting the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development).² The media coverage of the problem in the UK goes as far as to suggest a kind of "getting blitzed spirit" (Moran), observing that it is "the only country where Dowsett Johnston's book, *Drink: The Intimate Relationship between Women and Alcohol*, was sold with the word 'deadly' in place of 'intimate' in the title" (Wolfe), which is most telling of British "alcoholic landscape". Yet, British women memoirists seem to receive no critical interest, so this article is also an attempt to shed more light, or to make them more "onymous". The memoirs selected for discussion here are Tania Glyde's *Cleaning Up: How I Gave Up Drinking and Lived*, Rosie Boycott's *A Nice Girl Like Me*, Catherine Gray's *The Unexpected Joy of Being Sober*, and Amy Liptrot's *The Outrun*.

Thematizing alcohol can be found in all literary genres, but publications spotlighting alcohol dependence appear as early as in the nineteenth century and are embedded in the then growing temperance movement.³ They have a distinctly didactic character, a good example being Luke Howard's *The Confessions of a Drunkard: A Narrative Founded on Fact*, which sets its moralizing tone at the very beginning, explaining that the purpose of the text is "to show the lamentable effects of habits of Drunkenness" (2). One should also mention here written under a pen name

¹ Even the seventh volume of *The Oxford History of Life-Writing*, which focuses on the 1945–2020 period, generally ignores recovery memoirs. On the other hand, articles such as Joyce Mercer's "Writing Transformation: Using Addiction Recovery Memoirs toward Personal and Social Change" (2019) or Neetu Vaid's "Addiction Recovery Memoirs: A Gateway to Learn Life Lessons" do not offer genuine literary criticism, but consider recovery memoirs from a theological or spiritual vantage point.

² See also "Britons Have Steadier Drinking Habits than Americans, Canadians" published by Gallup.

³ One should not omit the fact that the nineteenth century also witnessed a growing interest in the clinical research on alcoholism, owing to the publication of *Alcoholismus Chronicus* (1849) by the Swedish professor of medicine, Magnus Huss, who, in fact, coined the term *alcoholism*.

Memoirs of Alcohol (1834), a slightly *outré* manoeuvre personifying alcohol and endowing it with an authorial voice, which reveals that it has been “courted” and “employed” by Satan, and, referring to “the human family”, proudly concludes: “[t]hey have drawn and drank from my hogsheads, thousands and millions of gallons ... but thousands of the human family are not contented, unless they are *forever filled to the brim*” (11). Again, this is very much the rhetoric of temperance movement, whose simplistic “recovery measures” are best encapsulated in the following piece of advice: “the evil is acknowledged, the remedy simple. Abstain” (Lamb 364). Clearly, much as such texts fit miscellaneous alcohol(ism) writings, they only remotely resemble recovery memoirs. What is often considered the forerunner of modern recovery memoirs is Jack London's *John Barleycorn, or Alcoholic Memoir* (1913). John Crowley, however, seems to have doubts whether it is a memoir *per se*, and defines it as a “generally indeterminate narrative on the border between fictional autobiography and autobiographical fiction” (19). Claire Stasz extends this definitional dubiousness further, observing that there is a scholarly dispute “whether Jack London should even be called an alcoholic” (8).

The first fully-fledged recovery memoir seems to be William Seabrook's *Asylum*, a story of his voluntary stay in the New York Bloomingdale Insane Asylum, where he was treated for alcoholism, even though the institution was more suitable for dealing with mental disorders. Whether Seabrook's memoir was inspirational to future authors of similar texts remains open,⁴ but although the publication of *Asylum* coincided with the birth of Alcoholics Anonymous, founded in the same year, there is no link between the two. Moreover, Seabrook's memoir would not have fitted in anyway, because, as he declares in the preface, his role is not one of “a reformer of public opinion, or a propagandist” (xiii). Rather, *Asylum* is a genuine account of a personal endeavour to undergo a change, which he perceives as a return to sobriety, in whatever capacity the therapy prepares him to live it:

I hope, before I die, to be able to drink again and enjoy it. If I have been really cured, I shall. If not, I shall perhaps be a teetotalter as ruptured people wear trusses; I shall use teetotalism as a crutch. (12)

It is exactly the focus on the personal change, instead of being merely a diary of alcoholic years, which makes *Asylum* a novelty, differentiating it even from the accounts compiled in the series of publications titled *Alcoholics Anonymous: The Story of How Many Thousands of Men and Women Have Recovered from Alcoholism*, the first published in 1939, the latest in 2023, all of which include stories by AA members who managed to overcome alcohol dependence. Admittedly, they do offer a non-fictional record of recovery, but at the same time they emphasize or even propagate the AA ideas, using their individual cases as an example. Consequently, the reader receives a form of laudatory hymns to Alcoholics

⁴ Seabrook certainly did not go unnoticed by another literary alcoholic, F. Scott Fitzgerald, who mentions him in his 1936 “The Crack-Up” (40–41).

Anonymous and its twelve-step programme, which Owen Flanagan calls “AA-speak” and defines as an “AA authorized way of talking about alcoholism” (874). As he explains further, “[o]ne worry about AA memoirs is that they were all written by people who got sober in AA, who are true believers in AA, and who conceptualize their alcoholism and their recovery according to the episteme that is AA” (875). It should be emphasized here that recovery memoirs mushrooming from the 1990s onwards very often do not even mention AA, do so in passing, or express misgivings about its *modus operandi*, as does, for instance, Rosie Boycott, who considers “the whole question of God in AA ... a stumbling block” (271), adding further that the rigid therapeutic scheme used by AA makes her feel “reduced to a common denominator” (299). Another memoirist who voices her reservations about AA is Amy Liptrot. She observes that there is an “essential paradox” about its methods, simply because, as she clarifies, “the thing we are trying to eradicate from our lives ... is the very thing we spend all day discussing, analysing, reminiscing about. Many would say that it is simply replacing one way of being fixated with it for another” (206).

The twentieth-century literary scene, or, more precisely, the postwar period, offers numerous works which might be labelled as alcoholism literature. Among them are novels which, though seemingly fictional, provide veiled accounts of writers’ own struggle with alcohol (Day and Smith 63–66), examples being Charles Jackson’s *The Lost Weekend* (1944) and Malcolm Lowry’s *Under the Volcano* (1947). At the same time, in the first postwar decades there are hardly any genuinely autobiographical narratives of drink addiction, one of few exceptions being *Spin the Bottle: The Autobiography of an Alcoholic* (1964) by John Gardner, best known for his Bond novels continuation. Another good example, published nearly two decades later, is Donald Newlove’s *Those Drinking Days: Myself and Other Writers* (1981), the author’s autobiographic retrospect on his own alcoholism, with additional references to the fellow men of letters afflicted by the same problem. However, it is not until the 1990s when recovery memoirs come into vogue, culminating in a literary boom at the beginning of the 2000s that has been a steady trend ever since. This trend is not necessarily dominated by prominent (wo)men of letters, but often by those who simply feel an urge to put their own alcoholic experience⁵ on paper, the majority being female memoirists, a fact which is certainly a socio-cultural phenomenon worthy of a separate study.

As this article is only a general overview, it does not undertake a closer follow-up of Tania Glyde’s comment that “gender is a factor in recovery” (177), the more so because Glyde herself does not really elaborate on this issue in her memoir. Likewise, the gender factor does not really come to the fore in other memoirs

⁵ It is worth noting that this experience also encompasses witness accounts written from the perspective of mothers, wives or daughters, one example being Emilie Pine’s “Notes on Intemperance”, in which, referring to her alcoholic father, she concludes that “it’s hard to love an addict” (16).

selected for this article.⁶ The intersection of women and alcohol has been scholarly discussed in various studies, including Joseph Califano's *Women Under the Influence* (2006), which provides research-based data on biological, social, and familial factors affecting women's drinking. Califano makes comparisons between female and male patterns of drinking and the determining factors, including the alcohol industry engaged in alluring women into drinking alcohol, particularly in recent decades, with campaigns promoting drinks devised specially for women, such as, for instance, Babydam. What is pronounced in women's memoirs is predominantly to do with gender-oriented attitudes to alcohol abuse. They bring up the fact that a drunk or alcoholic woman is invariably put into a lesser category. Writing about the nineteenth-century temperance movement, John Crawley observes that heavy drinking was perceived as "a problem exclusive to men and, perhaps, to women of dubious class and virtue" (69). Almost two centuries later similar perceptions are pointed out in various sources, a good example being Devon Jersild's blunt conclusion drawn in her study on women and alcohol: "[a] drunk man with a lampshade on his head is cute, but a drunk woman is a slut and a whore and a piece of trash" (45). Such hypocritical attitudes are often accentuated in women's recovery memoirs, Rosie Boycott's comment being representative:

both men and women suffer guilt when they drink but women's guilt is far worse. A drunk woman is a far less wholesome object than a drunk man. Wantonness and abandon can be appealing in a man; in a woman they are signs of complete moral collapse. (149)

In a similar vein, Tania Glyde pinpoints the general image associated with drunk women, though she contextualizes it in British reality: "there is only one social group more held up to censure than a pissed Brit on the rampage, and that's pissed *female* Brit doing the same" (39).

Before departing on a closer analysis of women's recovery memoirs, it is worth considering why they have become such a thriving sub-genre. Leaving aside the worldwide AA network, it seems that the growing awareness of alcoholism as a serious social issue, and the therapeutic industry which grew up in its wake, with the mushrooming rehabilitation centres and various support groups, have contributed. The very same can be said of the pervasive presence of social media, which virtually entice its users to go public. This last factor should be foregrounded here, for it is also the reason for the wording of this article's title. In this context, Catherine Gray's rationale for her own self-disclosure seems to be most explanatory:

I was inspired by the "I am not anonymous movement", a series of beautiful portraits of sober people.⁷ I realized that if I hid behind a fake name, I would effectively be saying that growing addicted to booze, or getting sober are things to be ashamed of. (10–11)

⁶ An in-depth analysis is offered, for instance, in *Gender and Addictions: Men and Women in Treatment* by S. L. A. Straussner and Elizabeth Zelvin (eds.).

⁷ See more at the *I Am Not Anonymous* website: <https://www.iamnotanonymous.org/>.

Such alcoholic coming-outs, as it were, are often the driving force behind many recovery memoirs. Gray devotes a whole chapter, “Sober Heroes Speak Out” (230–35), to about forty celebrities who openly talk about their addiction, including household names, such as Brad Pitt, Ewan McGregor, or Irish writer Marian Keys. In fact, there are more chapters which clearly show how Gray values (post) alcoholic nonanonymity, to mention “My Favourite Sober-Inspiration Blogs” (81) and “Alcohol-Free Instagram Heroes” (83).

Individual reasons for writing recovery memoirs vary, and the motivation is usually explained by the authors themselves. Tania Glyde in the opening passages of her memoir states that “[t]o understand living sober you need to understand living drunk” (xiii), which clearly shows how she tries to rationalize what she has gone through. In a similar vein, Catherine Gray admits that writing her memoir was an eye-opener: “I didn’t know what I thought about drinking and sobriety, until I started writing about it” (10). Both these examples clearly show memoirists’ insistence on what Katrin Den Elzen defines as “writing that seeks to understand the self and in particular distressing and difficult life experience” (2). Thus, recovery memoirs can work as a sort of “scriptotherapy” (Henke xiii), or, to borrow from Amy Liptrot’s memoir, “a reset button” (56), both for the authors and the readers, especially those who are grappling with alcohol dependence, the belief expressed by Rosie Boycott, who writes in her memoir that “the person who can most help an alcoholic is another alcoholic” (268). Catherine Gray’s aspirations go beyond a therapeutic lifeline, for she believes that her own experience and reflections “will help re-brand and re-align how people see sobriety” (11). Recovery memoirs can also offer a broader perspective on the socio-cultural context of alcoholism, a good example being Tania Glyde’s passages on the drinking habits of her British compatriots, whom she dubs as “the booziest nation in the entire world” (33). Similarly, Gray offers numerous reflections concerning the cause-and-effect relationship between social attitudes and alcohol abuse, arguing that “[s]ociety is a drink-pusher” (202).

As recovery memoirs are first-hand, by and large non-scholarly accounts of alcohol dependence, a question may arise about their reliability. As Constantine Fittzibbon, at the time himself getting to grips with a drink problem, observes, “to write of the excessive consumption of alcohol is to move into a profoundly emotive field” (16), and this emotionality can obviously “destabilize” the validity of recovery memoirs, the more so because there is the question of memory, which, in the case of such memoirs, can be filtered by what might be called an “alcoholic haze”. Consequently, it is not only the problem of “[m]emory and forgetting [being] caught in each other’s web” (Gudmundsdottir 2), but, more to the point in the context, the fact that alcohol “strips away memory” (Gill 7). As a result, the part of a recovery memoir which goes back to alcoholic sprees may be utterly distorted; hence, as far as providing an account of “drunken” periods, it seems fair to claim that recovery memoirs tend to rely on what Endel Tulving defines as episodic memory,

which covers “temporally dated episodes or events, and temporal-spatial relations among these events” (385). However, what has to be emphasized is that much as recovery memoirs can occasionally misrepresent facts, the common notion that “alcoholics are habitually in denial about their habits”, does not apply here, because recovery memoirs offer genuine confession, which Jo Gill defines a “technique for producing truth” (4). In consequence, suspecting recovery memoirists of being “ill-equipped for the ruthless truth-telling required in autobiography” (Morrison) seems unjustified and illogical.

Although recovery memoirs, by definition, focus on alcohol addiction and finding means to overcome it, they are not just a template for an alcoholic every(wo)man, and so the reader can come across quite an assortment of forms here. To anyone not familiar with the sub-genre the very concept may connote what Sally Cline and Carole Angier call a “misery memoir” (92), merely documenting an alcoholic’s traumatic past, or, in the case of more literary texts, depicting “the hellish web that alcoholism weaves around its victim” (Fitzgibbon 40). Likewise, one might expect hackneyed phrases used by alcoholics to rationalize drinking, scatological description of utter degeneration, usually absent in memoirs written by functional alcoholics, or recurrent images of the “little repetitive Phoenix myth” (Ames and Haspiel 109), representing the memoirists’ sober ups and drunken downs. However, this is often an erroneous assumption, as the memoirs selected for this article clearly prove.

The first one is Tania Glyde’s *Cleaning Up: How I Gave Up Drinking and Lived*, a memoir which can be described as a sobriety manual, because Glyde not only outlines all the stages of addiction and recovery process, but also provides practical and valuable pointers, both for those potentially in danger of falling into the snare of addiction as well as those trying to find an effective remedy. Glyde enumerates all the early portents of becoming addicted in a chapter titled “eighteen warning signs”⁸ (41), then continues her observations by focusing on what she labels as “eleven excuses” (87), listing most typical alcoholic alibis invented by addicts to rationalize drinking. The turning point comes in the chapter titled “day zero” (159), which begins with a warning to potential recovery proselytes: “[t]here are no immediate, miraculous changes” (161). Apart from cautioning the readers against potential pitfalls to be encountered in the process of recovery, Glyde guides them through the hardest stage, namely being consistent in sobriety, and this, as Amy Liptrot concludes is “a daily challenge” (80). In another instructive chapter, titled “eight people-friendly excuses for not drinking” (193), Glyde offers tips for those trying to stay sober in an environment which often considers teetotallers as an aberration. The memoir closes with “twelve benefits of giving up alcohol” (225), in which Glyde can finally share the bliss of being able to undergo the inebriety-to-sobriety metamorphosis.

⁸ All titles of chapters in Glyde’s memoir are in lower case.

Glyde's observations are empirical, and she prides herself on being "like a scientist, a pioneer" (162), but Catherine Gray, whose *The Unexpected Joy of Being Sober* is also an informative guide, does not only draw on her own experience. Hers is almost an attempt to undertake a semi-academic research: "I studied to be sober like I was studying for a degree" (67). In fact, her analytical mind touches upon such subtleties as, for instance, a lexical analogy, as in her reflection on "sober" and "so bored" (12), which she uses in her discussion on what makes inebriation so seductive. Gray draws on numerous sources, seemingly in an attempt to steer away from the purely subjective in favour of what she calls "soberspiration" (68), which means utilizing facts and figures concerning the recovery process and applying it for her own case. She makes references and comparisons, provides statistical details and concluding remarks, which also stems from her interest in the perspectives and reflections of other memoirists writing about their own paths to sobriety (67). The same applies to Gray's interest in alternative forms of therapy, as in the passages concerning a technique called Addictive Voice Recognition Therapy (84–88). Finally, in the chapter titled "Unplugging from the Alcohol Matrix" (201), she analyses the influence of cinematography and commercial/advertising campaigns on creating positive attitudes towards alcohol and promoting a general leniency for potential dangers of alcohol consumption. As in the case of Glyde's memoir, Gray's final successful transformation is marked in the chapter titled "Surprising Sober Bonuses" (89–91), in which she rediscovers a multitude of seemingly trivial details which herald her recovery, such as remembering to "take my make-up off every single night" (91).

Two memoirs which stand apart from Tania Glyde's and Catherine Gray's, though each for a different reason, are Rosie Boycott's *A Nice Girl Like Me* and Amy Liptrot's *The Outrun*. The former employs two types of narratives, which immediately distinguishes it from other memoirs, for Boycott uses alternately the first person while talking about the present, and the third person to talk about her alcoholic past. Drawing on the works of Roland Barthes and particularly the concept of John Coetzee's *autre*-biography (Coullie et al. 216), Paul Williams discusses how "counter-selves" (12) function in autobiographical writing: "a memoirist/autobiographer can only read a past self as an '*autre*', and make explicit to the reader that they are writing about an 'other' who is not author, not narrator, not necessarily protagonist even, but character" (5). This is most evident in Boycott's memoir, for she positions her sober-self in contrast to her inebriate-self by distancing and detaching herself:

She poured a drink. She was half-crazed with a new kind of fear. The jealousy felt like a surgeon's knife, eating into her self, her esteem. She watched TV. All the rules of being laid back were useless. The Scotch bottle stood there like an ally. She drank till she passed out. (201)

Even before fully embarking on the third-person narrative, Boycott signals such an angle by observing that "[n]ice girls, according to the books, don't end up,

aged thirty, in bins for alcoholics" (ix), adding further that "alcoholics were down and out winos, not nice girls like me" (28). This emphasis on "nice girls" has its continuation in numerous references to the question of gender and alcohol, for unlike Tania Glyde, who only signals the issue in her memoir, Boycott is more analytical in her observations of this particular aspect of alcohol abuse. Being an editor of *Spare Rib*, the groundbreaking feminist magazine, Boycott is probably more observant and sensitive in the matter of blatant disparity in the perception of alcoholism and gender. She comes to various conclusions based on available data, quoting what she calls "a hard statistic", according to which "whereas only one in ten alcoholic husbands are left by their wives, nine out of ten husbands eventually leave their alcoholic wives" (54–55). Likewise, she offers comments based on her own experience and observations: "It's a hard truth, but women drinkers have it worse. They're not exciting challenges like men who drink" (187). More importantly, however, Boycott frequently gives voice to other women, particularly those she meets at the clinic she attends:

I had noticed the way that women speak about their alcoholism:

I'm evil, said Anne; I'm wicked, said Shelagh; I've committed sins, I thought. The rules of womanhood, particularly of motherhood, mean that once you crumble into alcoholism you've fallen from grace. Women's drinking may be covered up for longer: by husbands who don't want to admit that there's a lush in their bed; by the secret patterns of dinking alone; by doctors who send a woman home with a bottle of Valium to cure the shakes; but once it's out in the open, then forgiveness is harder to come by, self-esteem harder to restore. (190)

Boycott's insistence on providing an "account of another self" (Coullie et al. 1) when writing about the alcoholic spell in her life comes full circle, as it were, in the closing paragraphs, in which she distances herself again from the alcoholic-former-self, this time underscoring her transition: "how many Rosies were there, I wondered, as I watched myself change" (303–04).

However, the more idiosyncratic of the two appears to be Amy Liptrot's memoir, focused less on her drinking years in London and more on the cathartic experience of returning to her native Orkneys, where she celebrates her sobriety by "drinking the cold air with gratitude" (268). The title is a play on words,⁹ as the eponymous *Outrun* is "a stretch of coastland at the top of the farm island where the grass is always short, pummelled by wind and sea spray year-round" (2), but also a verb synonymous of *beat*, *escape*, *leave behind*, *get away from*, *triumph over*,¹⁰ both meanings most telling in the context of recovery, because for Liptrot the wilderness of the Orkneys, the "anchorage" (110) they offer, helps her to leave behind her alcoholic past. Liptrot structures her memoir on similitudes: on the one hand the urban milieu, "the hot pulse of the city" (17), immediately connoting Liptrot's

⁹ In fact, this is often the case with the titles of recovery memoirs. A good example is Adrian Gill's *Pour Me: A Life*.

¹⁰ Source: Collins English Dictionary and Cambridge English Dictionary.

alcoholic downfall in London; on the other, that of her refuge in Orkney Islands, where she gradually manages to find, as she calls it, her “centre of gravity” (149). Her return to the native land results in a rehabilitation far more efficient than that she received in London clinics, the therapeutic power of which is repeatedly emphasized throughout the memoir, with observations such as “a mouthful of oblivion sent from the sea” (268). At the same time, it is an eye-opener, allowing her to realize that back in London she was “in a bubble” (155). The return to the remote areas of Orkney Islands allows Liptrot to experience deliverance from her alcohol dependence, which she owes to her escape “from inner city to outer isle” (274). This is most conspicuous whenever she likens the destructive forces of addiction to the natural forces: “The alcohol I’d been pouring into myself for years was like the repeated action of the waves on the cliffs and it was beginning to cause physical damage” (14). It might be said that topography is the key to Liptrot’s recovery, both literally and figuratively:

When first I left Orkney, my friend Sean gave me a compass. I used to wear it round my neck at parties, and when people asked about it, I would tell them it was so I could find my way home. Wherever I was, north was always home. I left the compass somewhere one night. Then I was totally lost. (167)

For Liptrot, deliverance from alcoholism is fundamentally based on return to the past, the life she lived prior to moving to London, where she lost herself in addiction: “Recovery is making use of something once thought worthless. I might have been washed-up but I can be renewed” (276).

Conclusion

Sarah Hepola claims in her memoir *Blackout: Remembering the Things I Drank to Forget* that “[e]very sobriety tale is a cliffhanger”, explaining subsequently that “[n]one of us knows how our story ends” (230). As a sober alcoholic, Hepola is undeniably an authority to remind the “alcohol-illiterate” that writing a memoir does not secure lasting sobriety, as it is only a written account of personal experience, emotive as well as reflective, and, if considered a form of expressive writing (Den Elzen 1–3), also therapeutic. However, what seems to be the core of recovery memoirs is not the multitude of descriptions of alcoholic downfalls and physical and mental degradation, but the emphasis on “retrieving” one’s identity. Elaine Savory makes a point by saying that “[a]lcohol is a particularly dangerous mask, for it can appear to create a different personality” (78), a point any recovery memoir will confirm. The memoirists discussed in this paper detach themselves from this alcoholic mask, or “alco-armor” (Gray 61), and even though the heterogeneity of accounts clearly shows that the process of returning to sobriety can take various forms, they all share one conspicuous feature, namely drawing a clearcut contrast between the-alcoholic-I and the-sober-I. As a result, recovery memoirs,

apart from telling a story of alcoholic past, provide an account of change which leads to self-invention, the final lifeline, which is best encapsulated in “lots of me being, finally, the New Me” (219), Tania Glyde's comment on the result of her personal metamorphosis.

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