



Early Morning Drinkers Explained

by a Fly on the Wall

I've been all over. I've supped from puddles on the shellac in Warwick, gorged on vomit in lavatories in Hampstead, buzzed through illicit smoke after hours in Thetford. And I've rubbed knees with peers from further north, who brag about exposed bar food in Dumfries and the great grease slick in the pub kitchens of Houghton-le-Spring. Yes, I have a lot of ordinary to compare the extraordinary to. I know a regional idiosyncrasy from an out-and-out oddity. And where you are immersed in your significances and symbols, none of it has any bearing on me. I simply observe.

I watch you come and drink your sticky liquids from the shiny bottles and brass pumps. (I get a proboscis in too, when I can.) And I see who comes in and when and what for. We have tallies of types that we compare. It's a point of conversation: 'How many lads on the lash have you annoyed this last week?'; 'Intruded on any break-ups lately?'; 'Whither yuppies?'

One of the most interesting, variegated types is the early doors drinker. They are waiting outside the pub door when it's first unbolted. I am at pains to impress on my peers that this is not a singular type, but a cluster of sub-types. They might look the same – pink-eyed, a bit wobbly – but their ontologies are fundamentally different.

The easiest to identify is the all-night benderer. This is someone who's been drinking since 8pm the previous evening. It's been a few hours since the last bar closed and they've been wandering the streets or sitting in the dew in a park waiting for opening time. They have the pinkest eyes, their mouth smells sour and they give off a musky

tang from other crevices. They are docile, since they are three-quarters hangover and only a quarter drunk. Their single wish is to dilate into a giddy and endless bright day so that the almighty fallout of tomorrow never arrives.

The next category is a rare spot. They too are pale and uncertain in their footing, but their eyes are more watery than pink. They are sober and seek a massive hit of anaesthetic. These are the pierced and the tattooed. To assuage the immediate pain of self-adornment, they often order a double something from the top shelf and a separate glass of ice. They are seldom here for long, just time enough to revive their strength before diving back in to the throng outside.

The third category, like the first, has not slept all night. Their eyes are rimmed red and they too have a tremor in their hands, although their gait is more or less fine, save a weary slump to the shoulders. These are surgeons and anaesthetists who have just lost a patient after a long, complicated procedure. Often they are younger practitioners not yet used to this feeling of impotence. But sometimes the seasoned, too, buckle under the weight of their responsibility. Having been called in the night to an emergency, they return home via the pub for a glimpse of the world as it ordinarily turns. They leave behind a trace of desolation, which for several hours dims the shine of the mirrors and bottles and the staff's eyes.