

Touched with Fire, Treated with Lithium: A Personal Perspective on Creativity and Bipolar Disorder



Eric G. Wilson



Why is it that all those who have become eminent in philosophy or politics or poetry or the arts are clearly of an atrabilious [or melancholic] temperament, and some of them to such an extent as to be affected by diseases caused by black bile, as is said to have happened to Heracles among the heroes?

Pseudo-Aristotle, Problemata XXX



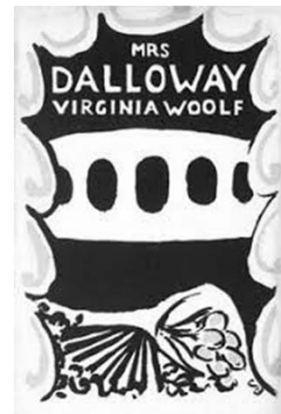
The Fish gasps on the glittering mud,
the mud of this once full stream,
now only moist enough to be
glittering mud/ the tide will flow
back, time enough to lift me up with
straws & withered sticks and bear
me down to the ocean. O me! That
being what I have been I should be
what I am!



The Poet is dead in me — my
imagination ... lies, like Cold Snuff on
the circular Rim of a Brass Candle-
stick, without even a stink of Tallow
to remind you that it was once
cloathed and mitred with flame.



Madness is terrific I
can assure you, and
not to be sniffed at;
and in its lava I still
find most of the
things I write about.
It shoots out of one
everything shaped,
final, not in mere
driblets, as sanity
does.



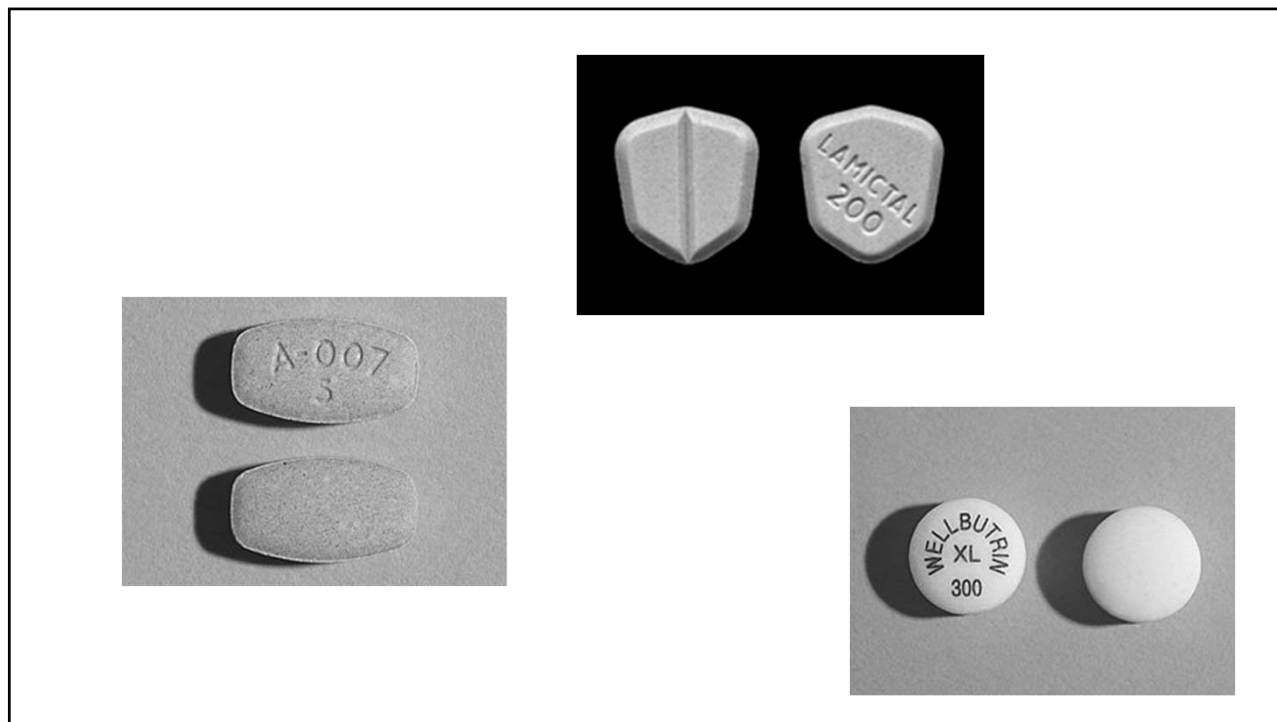
all I've suffered,
and all the
suffering I've
caused, might
have arisen from
the lack of a little
salt in my brain.



Like thousands, I took just pride and more than just,
struck matches that brought my blood to a boil;
I memorized the tricks to set the river on fire—
somehow never wrote something to go back to.



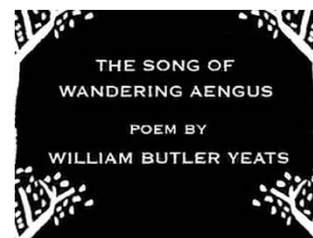




I went out to the hazel wood,
Because a fire was in my head,
And cut and peeled a hazel wand,
And hooked a berry to a thread;
And when white moths were on the wing,
And moth-like stars were flickering out,
I dropped the berry in a stream
And caught a little silver trout.

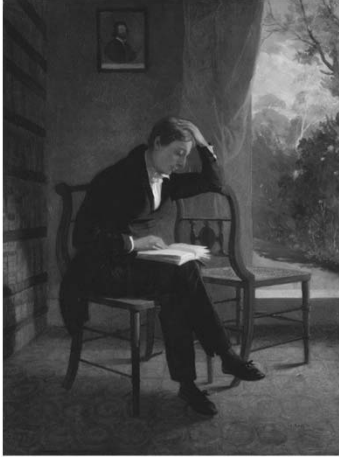


When I had laid it on the floor
I went to blow the fire a-flame,
But something rustled on the floor,
And someone called me by my name:
It had become a glimmering girl
With apple blossom in her hair
Who called me by my name and ran
And faded through the brightening air.



Though I am old with wandering
Through hollow lands and hilly lands,
I will find out where she has gone,
And kiss her lips and take her hands;
And walk among long dappled grass,
And pluck till time and times are done,
The silver apples of the moon,
The golden apples of the sun.

John Keats, "Ode on Melancholy"



She dwells with Beauty—Beauty that must die;
And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips
Bidding adieu; and aching Pleasure nigh,
Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips:
Ay, in the very temple of Delight
Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine,
Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue
Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine;
His soul shalt taste the sadness of her might,
And be among her cloudy trophies hung.

Emily Dickinson

Water, is taught by thirst.
Land—by the Oceans passed.
Transport—by throe—
Peace—by its battles told—
Love, by Memorial Mold—
Birds, by the Snow.

