



Farther and Wilder: The Lost Weekends and Literary Dreams of Charles Jackson

Blake Bailey

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From the prizewinning biographer of Richard Yates and John Cheever, here is the fascinating biography of Charles Jackson, the author of *The Lost Weekend*—a writer whose life and work encapsulated what it meant to be an addict and a closeted gay man in mid-century America, and what one had to do with the other.

Charles Jackson's novel *The Lost Weekend*—the story of five disastrous days in the life of alcoholic Don Birnam—was published in 1944 to triumphant success. Within five years it had sold nearly half a million copies in various editions, and was added to the prestigious Modern Library. The actor Ray Milland, who would win an Oscar for his portrayal of Birnam, was coached in the ways of drunkenness by the novel's author—a balding, impeccably groomed middle-aged man who had been sober since 1936 and had no intention of going down in history as the author of a thinly veiled autobiography about a crypto-homosexual drunk. But *The Lost Weekend* was all but entirely based on Jackson's own experiences, and Jackson's valiant struggles fill these pages. He and his handsome gay brother, Fred ("Boom"), grew up in the scandal-plagued village of Newark, New York, and later lived in Europe as TB patients, consorting with aristocratic café society. Jackson went on to work in radio and Hollywood, was published widely, lived in the Hotel Chelsea in New York City, and knew everyone from Judy Garland and Billy Wilder to Thomas Mann and Mary McCarthy. A doting family man with two daughters, Jackson was often industrious and sober; he even became a celebrated spokesman for Alcoholics Anonymous. Yet he ultimately found it nearly impossible to write without the stimulus of pills or alcohol and felt his devotion to his work was worth the price. Rich with incident and character, *Farther & Wilder* is the moving story of an artist whose commitment to bringing forbidden subjects into the popular discourse was far ahead of his time.

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