

Beer Pong With the Nobel Prize Winners

by Con Chapman

Alcohol and American writers have always had a connection—about 70 percent of American winners of the Nobel Prize for Literature could be considered heavy drinkers if not more.

Five Fantastic New Orleans Bars, MSN

Cityguides



Pearl Buck: "I could drink your sorry ass under any table in the joint!"

It was getting late, and I was getting tired. I pressed my temples to my head, trying to finish at least one good paragraph for my work-in-progress; a stream-of-consciousness novel about an unconscious boxer, flat on his back.

My wife appeared at the den door. "Are you coming to bed soon?" she asked, rubbing her eyes.

"I'd like to," I said, "but I feel my life slipping away, and I haven't written anywhere near all the stories I have to tell."

Sinclair Lewis: "Whiskey on beer, never fear? Beer on whiskey, never risky?"

"I know sweetie, but you need your rest," she said. "You've got a real job, remember?"

"You're right," I said. "But I've got to keep writing—it's who I am."

"You'd probably write better if you were rested."

"No—what I need is to have some more to drink," I replied as I drained my glass of merlot.

Her eyes opened wide, no longer sleepy. "I think you've had enough already," she said, more than a little concerned.



Eugene O'Neill: "If you drink a rum coke through a straw really fast, you'll get drunk quicker."

"Not according to MSN Cityguides," I said, hitting the "Print" button on the msn.com website. "See—it says here that about 70%—if not more—of American Nobel Prize winners for literature were heavy drinkers."



Hemingway and six-toed cat: "Six toes and you still can't hold your goddam liquor."

I had her attention now. The Nobel Prize is worth ten million Swedish kronor, or \$1,132,182.50 at current exchange rates. *That* ought to pay off those credit card balances!

"Maybe you're right," she said as she handed the article back to me. "After all, nobody knows literature like the Microsoft web site—right?"

"You can say that again," I replied with a smug, knowing look.

"I'll go get the gin," she said, as she hustled off to the liquor cabinet.



Toni Morrison: "Just a glass of chardonnay—something oaky if you have it."

I searched around for some tonic and a lime, but it was still March, and I'd had my last G&T right after Labor Day. We didn't have any vermouth either, so it looked like just gin on the rocks. Not my favorite, but I *am* dedicated to literature.



Saul Bellow: "I seem to recall this fellow waited on me once. He spilled Vichyssoise in my martini."

"You ready?" my wife asked as she poured the liquor over ice.

"Don't we at least have a lemon twist?"

"Nope. You've got to take your medicine straight."



Joseph Brodsky: "My cat can kick Hemingway's cat's scrawny butt from here to next week."

I took a look at the glass—two fingers of the stuff that used to be called "blue ruin" in Samuel Johnson's day. "Over the teeth, through the gums—look out stomach, here it comes!" I said, and knocked it back.

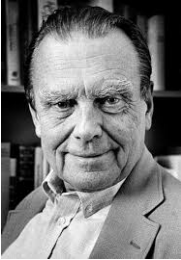
Wow! I felt as if I'd been kicked in the head walking through the mule barn at the Missouri State Fair. I was both clear-headed and stunned—little blue and yellow shooting stars all around me—at the same time.



Samuel Johnson: "This was written by a sot!"

"How do you feel?" my wife asked.

"Ready to write!" I exclaimed, and I sat down at my four-and-a-half-year old Toshiba "Satellite" model laptop that the pimply guy at BestBuy had convinced me was my, uh, best buy.



Czeslaw Milosz: Only half-American, so only half-drunk.

"It was the best of times, and a dark and stormy night," I began. "If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is my name—call me Ishmael," I continued.

"That's some really good stuff you're cranking out!" my wife exclaimed as she looked over my shoulder.

"Happy families are all alike," I tapped out. "I am an American—Chicago born."

"You're on fire!"



T.S. Eliot: "Budweiser is the King of Beers, Bud Light the crown prince."

"I am a sick man . . . I am a spiteful man . . . I am the eggman . . . I am the walrus—goo goo gajooob."

"Oh . . . my . . . freaking . . . god! You are incredible!"

"And it's just the liquor talking!" I exclaimed, happy to at last have found my voice at the bottom of the bottle.

"Do you want some cheese curls?"

I thought about it for a second. "I don't know—do you think Isaac Bashevis Singer—"

"Let me check the bag," she said. "Yep, it's *pareve*."



Kosher cheese curls.

"That's comforting," I said as I stuffed my mouth full of the salty, orange cheese-flavored food products.

I looked at her, and she looked at me. She'd stuck it out with me through the thin years, and now we were on the verge of the big bucks.

"Just supposing," she said, her voice as dreamy and ephemeral and far away as a jet contrail in the sky. "If you were to win the Big One—the Nobel—what would you do with all that money?"

"I don't know," I said, gazing off into the distance. "I might stop buying Beer Nuts in the giant economy size at Costco . . ."

" . . . and?" she asked expectantly.

"Well, I guess I could actually spring for some imported beer."

*Available in Kindle format on amazon.com as part of the collection
"The Genteel Crowd: Being Vulgar is So Much More Fun."*

