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Tragic Victims of Mania a Potu ("Madness from Drink"): A Study of Literary Nineteenth-Century Female Drunkards

ABSTRACT

Temperance literature, though widely popular in America and Britain between 1830–80, lost its allure in the decades that followed. In spite of its didactic and moralistic nature, the public eagerly consumed temperance novels, thus reciprocating contemporaneous writers' efforts to promote social ideals and mend social ills. The main aim of this paper is to redress the critical neglect that the temperance prose written by women about women has endured by looking at three literary works—two novellas and one confessional novelette—written by mid-nineteenth-century American female writers. These works serve as a prism through which the authors present generally "tabooed" afflictions such as inebriation among high-class women and society's role in perpetuating such behaviors. The essay examines the conflicting forces underlying such representations and offers an inquiry into the restrictive and hostile social climate in mid-nineteenth-century America and the lack of medical attention given to alcohol addicts as the possible causes that might have prompted women's dangerous behaviors, including inebriation. This paper also demonstrates the cautious approach that nineteenth-century female writers had to take when dealing with prevalent social ills, such as bigotry, hypocrisy and disdain directed at female drunkards. It shows how these writers, often sneered at or belittled by critics and editors, had to maneuver very carefully between the contending forces of openly critiquing social mores, on the one hand, and not being censored, on the other.

Keywords: female inebriation, temperance, social antagonism, patriarchy, sensational prose.

Temperance literature was a popular literary genre in the mid-nineteenth century; thousand of novels, short stories and confessions of reformed drunkards pertaining to this genre were published mainly in Britain and in America. Many temperance tales depict male drunkards, who after a long period of suffering and brutality, due to excessive drinking, manage to discipline themselves to stop drinking. Some of them joined temperance movements and started preaching against inebriation; others published confessions or autobiographical stories aimed at disseminating temperance propaganda.¹ Temperance tales depict women as either silent victims of intemperate husbands, or as responsible for not warding off the latter's drinking problems. Female inebriation was rarely discussed publicly, in spite of the fact that female consumption of alcohol and narcotics tripled between 1780 and 1820. According to William White, there was "an increase in other psychoactive drug use in the decades that followed. The latter was influenced by the lack of medicinal alternatives to narcotics, and by a patent medicine industry that aggressively promoted alcohol, opiate, cocaine, and chloral-laced products for women's 'troubles'" (52). Some patients, who consumed alcohol for medicinal needs, eventually became addicts.²

In spite of its popularity from the 1830s till the 1880s, the temperance genre has lost its appeal with contemporary critics, some of whom have considered temperance writings as overly sentimental and at times sensational.³ Probably, the best-known novels dealing with destructive inebriation and intemperance are Walt Whitman's *Franklin Evans* (1842), T. S. Arthur's *Ten Nights in a Barroom and What I Saw There* (1854) and Lyman Beecher's *Six Sermons on Intemperance* (1846), referred to by Sue Vice as temperance "Ur-Texts" (700).⁴

¹ According to James D. Hart, more than twelve percent of the novels published in America during the 1830s dealt with temperance, and their circulation was quite extensive (108).

² As early as 1726 the Royal College of Physicians of London warned about the harmful effects of gin consumption. Gin became a very popular cure and was used as a universal panacea. The petition states that gin is "not fit for business" and "too often the cause of weak, feeble, and distempered children, who must be, instead of an advantage and strength, a charge to their country" (*Annals* n.pag.).

³ Leslie Fiedler, for example, ridicules the genre, saying that "the abused woman, beaten or neglected by the drunken bully, has become so standard a fixture in the sentimental melodrama of life in America . . . that we can scarcely believe it to have been invented at any given moment" (263).

⁴ David S. Reynolds's and Debra J. Rosenthal's seminal collection of articles *The Serpent in the Cup: Temperance in American Literature* and Scott C. Martin's "'A Star That Gathers Lustre from the Gloom of Night': Wives, Marriage, and Gender in Early-Nineteenth-Century American Temperance Reform" are among few literary critical works dealing extensively with the temperance novel. Reynolds classifies temperance

According to Ruth Bordin, although more than seventy-five percent of temperance literature was written by female writers (48), very few critical studies have been devoted to the latter's writings, and no major study has been dedicated to female temperance prose, featuring female drunkards as the works' main protagonists.

The aim of this paper is to redress this critical neglect by looking at three literary pieces—two novellas and one confessional novelette—written by mid-nineteenth-century American female writers. I intend to show that besides complying with the extended temperance campaign, or riding on the wave of the growing popularity of didactic, moralistic and reform threads, widely circulating in mid-nineteenth-century literature, these works shed light on the “tabooed” phenomenon of inebriation among high-class women.⁵ The paper explores the conflicting forces underlying such representations, since, on the one hand, it seems that when dealing with female addiction to alcohol, the female authors of the works in question demonstrate genuine empathy towards their protagonists' struggle, but on the other hand, as I will show, there seems to be a sense of silencing the victims or marginalizing their tragic predicament. Finally, the paper examines whether the restrictive and hostile social climate and the lack of mental or medical treatments available to alcohol addicts instigated and perpetuated women's dangerous behaviors, including drunkenness.

Very few nineteenth-century female writers addressed the topic of female inebriation in their fiction. Rebekah Hyneman's⁶ novella *Leaves of the Upas Tree: A Story for Every Household* (1854–55), Caroline Lee

literature as being related to four main types: conventional, ironic, transcendental and dark (“Black Cats” 22–59). Though such a categorization may be viewed as somehow rigid, it helps us understand the volume and diversity of temperance literature. Streeby neatly differentiates between sentimental and sensational literature. For her, “sentimentalism generally emphasizes refinement and transcendence, whereas sensationalism emphasizes materiality and corporeality, even or especially to the point of thrilling or horrifying readers” (31).

⁵ Jozef Pecina notes that while early temperance novels, written in the first three decades of the nineteenth century, employ a moralistic and didactic style, the next few decades feature much more sensational literature that emphasizes vice, murder and violence, resulting from excessive drinking, and aimed at shocking the readers (Pecina 113–14).

⁶ Rebekah Hyneman was born in Pennsylvania in 1812 to Abraham Gumpertz, a Jewish-German storekeeper, and a Christian mother. She converted to Judaism in 1845. Her prose and fiction mostly depict Jewish protagonists. Hyneman's best known work is the poetry collection, *The Leper and Other Poems* (1853). In *Re-Dressing Miriam: 19th Century Artistic Jewish Women* (2012) and in “Rebekah Hyneman's *Leaves of the Upas Tree: A Tale of (In)Temperance and (Im)Mortality*” (2020) I analyzed at length Hyneman's less known literary works, which include short stories, novellas and several novels, and are mainly serialized in *The Masonic Mirror and Keystone*.

Hentz's⁷ short novella "The Victim of Excitement" (1857) and Maria Lamas's⁸ confessional novelette, *The Glass: or, The Trials of Helen More: A Thrilling Temperance Tale* (1849) serve as telling cases in point of female temperance prose that demonstrates how dysfunctional American families operate as microcosms in the ailing American society. These works depict well-educated, wealthy, high-society young women who resort to heavy drinking, thereby destroying their familial bliss and causing the deaths of their children. Conversely, most temperance novels, written by men, portray either working-class country male drunkards, whose harsh working conditions and weakness of character drive them to debased addiction, or young men, who upon arriving to a big city, resort to drinking. Many fail to find employment, some feel extremely lonely while others fall victim to city temptations. The motivation behind female drunkards' retreat into excessive alcohol consumption, however, remains vague and is almost never elucidated. In order to redress this neglect, it is necessary to investigate how female writers depict female addicts.

The main plot of Hyneman's *Leaves of the Upas Tree* centers on the intemperance of the well-esteemed Judge Morton, an educated and distinguished man, the pillar of the local community. The respectful Judge is actually, though stealthily, a heavy drunkard and a gambler, who loses his estate and subsists on the measly teacher's salary of his obedient daughter, Ada, whom he in the meantime abuses both mentally and physically. The novella depicts several other intemperance sub-plots, the most interesting of which is probably that of Marion, a beautiful Scottish lady who upon marrying her second husband, an American gentleman, arrives in the small American town, Atherton, whose mayor is Judge Morton. The reader soon discovers that Marion, as a young mother in Scotland, in a fit of insanity, probably after drinking excessively, unintentionally dropped her baby into the sea, causing his instantaneous death. Marion, while in America, is seemingly happily married for the second time, and most likely is on the way

⁷ Caroline Lee Hentz (1800–56) was born in Massachusetts, but spent most of her adult life in the West and the South, living in Ohio, Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina and Florida. She is best known for her novel *The Planter's Northern Bride* (1854) in which she confronts anti-slavery allegations within the nation and chiefly those found in Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), which she believed shattered national accord and threatened national unison. Although Hentz wrote more than a dozen novels and published plays and numerous short stories in well-reputed magazines, she is mostly remembered for her polemical pro-slavery novel that has caused later critics to discredit her literary oeuvre. Her other works have been almost totally disregarded, in spite of Hentz's popularity among mid-nineteenth-century readers.

⁸ There is no biographical information about Maria Lamas. It might have been the pen-name of a female writer who did not want to reveal her identity. I assume that using a pseudonym may explain the novella's subversive nature.

to abstinence. Nevertheless, shamed and shunned by the local community members, who discover what happened, and spread the details of her past, she starts drinking again, and in a relapse into insanity flees from home and drowns in a river. Marion suffers from constantly changing moods, either acting as a perfect hostess and gentile wife, or showing aggression towards the servants and Mr. Felton's mentally disabled son. Though the narrator does not explicitly say that Marion might have committed a suicide, she reports Mr. Felton's musings on how Marion was "braving the darkness of the night . . . battling with the river, sinking perhaps forever, or faint . . . and yet unable to make herself heard" (Hyneman chapter XXIII).⁹

Marion's tragedy is referred to by the narrator in a non-committal manner. The narrator neither judges nor accuses Marion of immoral and debased behavior, as the Atherton's sewing club ladies do. Nevertheless, no attempt is made to delve into Marion's troubled psyche or to empathize with her inability to withstand the sorrow and guilt which have haunted her ever since she lost her child. Intoxicated women are often criticized for encroaching upon "the very ideal of womanhood as passive, respectable, and virtuous" (Zedner 2). As a woman living and creating within patriarchal society, as a Jew and as an artist, at times scrutinized by both Gentile and Jewish readerships and critics, Hyneman is thrice "the Other." It is this triple "Otherness" that might have caused her to abstain from overtly siding with Marion, although dealing with female inebriation is quite a bold move in itself for a mid-nineteenth-century female American writer.¹⁰

On the whole, female inebriation is either completely silenced or equated with mental illness. Parsons remarks that "[e]veryone was well aware that there were female inebriates, but their stories simply did not work their way into public discourse to the extent that those of their male counterparts did"¹¹ (11). Thomas Trotter's medical treatise, *An Essay*

⁹ Ferris N. Pitts Jr. and George Winokur, among others, published numerous studies on the connection between affective disorder and alcoholism. "Affective disorder is a mental disorder characterized by dramatic changes or extremes of mood. Affective disorders may include manic (elevated, expansive, or irritable mood with hyperactivity, pressured speech, and inflated self-esteem) or depressive (dejected mood with disinterest in life, sleep disturbance, agitation, and feelings of worthlessness or guilt) episodes, and often combinations of the two" ("Affective disorder"). According to Pitts Jr. and Winokur, "alcoholism and affective disorder share a common cause of death-suicide . . . approximately seventy percent of deaths by suicide are of individuals with recognizable alcoholism or affective disorder" (37).

¹⁰ In the introduction to *The Leper and Other Poems* (1853), Hyneman's only book of poetry, she refers to it as an "unassuming little volume"; she confesses that she "trembles" and fears that the audience would scrutinize it, as she comes "before them unknown and unnamed" (iii).

¹¹ Catherine Gilbert Murdock in her study, *Domesticating Drink: Women, Men, and Alcohol in America, 1870-1940*, though contends that the stereotypes of Victorian women

on *Drunkenness, and its Effects on the Human Body*, published in 1804, is the earliest study by a British physician which classifies drunkenness as a disease. He asserts: “I consider drunkenness, strictly speaking to be a disease; produced by a remote cause, and giving birth to actions and movements in the living body, that disorder the functions of health” (Trotter 8).¹² I have argued elsewhere that Marion’s nervous feat may be the result of misdiagnosed postpartum depression, suggesting that

Marion’s emotional difficulties emerged right after giving birth. It was then that she went for the bottle, while suffering from severe mood changes and physical ailments, which led to her inexplicable escape from home with the baby in her lap. Typically, nineteenth-century doctors tended to blame women’s irrational behavior and physical and mental ailments on hysteria. . . . Nonetheless, almost no medical consideration was given to possible postpartum depression as a potential cause to a woman’s mental instability after giving birth. (“*Leaves*” 56)

According to Michael W. O’Hara and Katherine L. Wisner, “perinatal mental illness refers to psychiatric disorders that are prevalent during pregnancy and as long as one year after delivery” (4). It is possible that Marion was a victim of an undiagnosed perinatal disorder. Nevertheless, neither Marion’s doctor, nor her husband, shows sympathy or understanding. To silence the gossiping servants, the doctor spreads a rumor that Marion was bitten by a mad dog, and hence needs to consume alcohol as a medical cure. Regrettably, many women became addicted to alcohol and narcotics which were needlessly and irresponsibly prescribed by doctors as a treatment for nervousness or hysteria.¹³ Similarly to the doctor, Mr. Felton, Marion’s

as “abstemious” have caused many critics to presume that most upper-class women did not drink. She challenges this idea with evidence from table-setting guides, etiquette manuals and cookbooks, all of which show that alcohol was an essential part of hospitality in the nineteenth-century home (Gilbert Murdock 88).

¹² Several other contemporaneous medical researchers describe the straightforward connection between drunkenness and mental disease. Robert Macnish in *The Anatomy of Drunkenness* (1832) maintains that “[m]adness—this terrible infliction often proceeds from drunkenness . . . drunkenness, according to the reports of Bethlehem Hospital, and other similar institutions for the insane, is one of the most common causes of lunacy . . . one-half owe their madness to drinking” (156–57). James Cowles Prichard in his *Treatise on Insanity* (1835) claims that “amongst physical causes of madness, one of the most frequent is the immoderate use of intoxicating liquors. . . . It has been repeatedly observed that a large proportion of the cases admitted into pauper lunatic asylums arise from this cause” (204).

¹³ An anonymous article published on 6 November 1830 in the journal *Medicus* stated that “in many cases the habits of drinking may be traced to a needless medicinal use of strong liquors; among these might be classed perhaps a majority of the female tipplers, as with the gentle sex, custom or fashion does not authorize the habitual practice of intemperance” (“Communications” 14).

husband, is so concerned with his public image—being “so delicately sensitive on all subjects connected with himself, so super-refined in his ideas concerning women, to be made a theme for idle gossip . . . and the very writhings of his heart commented on by his inferiors, to a nature like his, the thought was misery” (Hyneman chapter XXIII)—that he cannot feel any compassion toward his ailing wife. For him, Marion’s inebriation is equated with just another unbearable flaw that a woman can fall victim to, namely, being “a Woman’s Rights’ advocate” (chapter XV). Both behaviors threaten the established patriarchal edict and prevalent social order. Mr. Felton’s “beautiful prize,” Marion (chapter XV), becomes “damaged goods” once she starts drinking excessively. The husband is well aware of her nervous breakdown. Hence, he supervises every move Marion makes, and sends servants to spy on her, saying, “Marion, . . . you know me; I never change. Where you are, is my place; rest assured of that” (chapter XVI). According to Rachel Ryder, “the idealized femininity was presented through the control evident in [a woman’s] body, character and social conditions. Conversely, the transgressive femininity was presented through a lack of control, abandonment of character, loss of attractiveness and the depravity of her social conditions” (14).

Hyneman, while trying not to explicitly side with Marion’s anguish, harshly criticizes Atherton’s rotten, merciless and corrupted society, a society which apparently supports the temperance mission and even establishes a temperance club. She neither spares her disapproval of Mr. Felton’s conduct when his hypocrisy, snobbery and ostentatious behavior are clearly condemned. Criticizing the “oppressors,” but not fully sympathizing with the victim, creates an interesting moment of tension which can be explained, as mentioned before, by Hyneman’s careful attempt to navigate through the various contradictory claims made by the domineering patriarchal authorities and by social or religious mores. Drunkenness, besides its association with mental conditions, was closely linked to sinful and morally-debased conduct. Openly siding with a drunkard may have jeopardized Hyneman’s reputation as a writer. Hence, Hyneman, like some of her contemporaneous female writers, was sometimes obliged to compromise her art; time and again she had to yield to public taste, and quite frequently she had no choice but to comply with the Victorian mindset that encouraged female domesticity and restricted artistic freedom.

Ironically, although many women actively participated in various temperance societies, and, according to Tyrell, “women were deeply involved in temperance agitation from the time of the American Temperance Society crusade (1826–36)” (131), their plight was mostly directed at eliminating liquor sales and alcohol consumption, and inflicting sanctions on drunk violent fathers and husbands. Their quest did not include the treatment of

female drunkards. Lewis Shiman explains how female temperance activists' "functions were what current society accepted as purely female activities: teas, bazaars, children's work and so on. In none of the major temperance organizations did women have important policy-making roles" (182).¹⁴ Bordin maintains that though female activists went against the abuses of the patriarchal method, they did not attack patriarchy itself (9).

Inebriation among women, and especially among high-strata women, was a taboo. Female participation in Temperance Societies in the 1830s, 1840s and 1850s neither advanced women's rights nor promoted equality between the sexes. According to Berkley Fletcher, though women joined the American Temperance Societies in great numbers and signed the oaths, they were mainly given supportive positions in the movement's antebellum stage; the movement principally "addressed the needs of male identity and authority" (21).

The close association between temperance, church missionary and benevolent activities placed women within conventional, domestic and morally upright terrain. This may explain why Hyneman and Hentz, though depicting female drunkards in their fiction, which may already be regarded as quite a bold move, "play it safe" when referring to the symptoms, rather than tackling the root causes of the problem. Mental disorders, abuse, post-partum depression or other possible causes of a victim's addiction are never discussed. According to Reynolds and Rosenthal, nineteenth-century society viewed "inebriation as a sign of moral weakness and the drinker as a subject of moral defect" (3–4). Hence, instead of showing compassion towards the sufferers, the victim, male or female alike, is viewed as "defective" or morally flawed (a sinner) and thus should be either reformed or eliminated. Parsons asserts that while male drunkards

¹⁴ It should be noted that in spite of the emphasis women's Temperance Societies put on female moral abstemiousness, domesticity and "true womanhood," "it was from the women's Temperance Societies of the 1850s and from the Good Templars that many Midwestern suffrage leaders of the 1860s and 1870s came" (Tyrrell 151). WCTU (Woman's Christian Temperance Union), for example, was organized in 1873 in Ohio with the aim of creating a "sober and pure world" by temperance, purity and evangelical Christianity. According to Bordin, in addition to temperance activities, the WCTU members (all women) worked for prison reform, founded day nurseries and kindergartens, lodging houses for inebriate and "fallen" women and shelters for homeless men, hence promoting not just temperance causes but empowering low-class women (Bordin XVI). Several decades later, however, the WCTU gained more clout when embracing suffrage as a way to put their reforms to practice. "In 1873 and 1874, tens of thousands of women in nearly a thousand towns in 31 states marched on saloons and liquor outlets and voted with their feet to shut them down. The uprisings were collectively known as the Women's Crusade, and they led to the formation of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, which eventually became both the largest women's organization as well as the largest temperance organization after the Civil War" (Harding 1292).

were granted some sympathy, the discussion of female drunkards unfolded differently and “with much less sympathy”; for instance, women drunkards were framed as completely “beyond the pale” of seduction (119).

Marion, a dysfunctional mother and a wife who shames her husband, has no reason to exist, as she failed to reform; she must die in order to repair the family’s damaged reputation. The same fate awaits Anne (Weston) Manly, the beautiful, educated and distinguished protagonist of Caroline Lee Hentz’s short novella “The Victim of Excitement.” The novella starts with a very lengthy and unusual introduction:

Intemperance is a vice which is generally considered of the masculine sex. In the pictured scenes of the ravages it has wrought woman is seldom introduced but as the patient victim of brutality, or as the admonishing angel of transgressing man. There are instances on record, however, of a sad reverse. Not alone in the lower classes of life, amid the dregs of society, but in higher walks, where intelligence, wit, beauty, and wealth, virgin worth, wedded love, and Christian grace, are all cast as unvalued offerings at the beastly shrine of intemperance. One of these fatal examples (of which, to the honor of our sex be it said, there are so few) once came under the observation of the writer. (Hentz 40)

The writer comments that women’s drunkenness is a dishonor to the female sex. Moreover, it is an indication of depravity, immorality and irrationality, a disgrace to familial respectability, and a major threat to society. A woman who drinks violates the code of moderation, a vital feminine trait. She loses femininity and womanly poise and becomes unattractive and disorderly. Moreover, she often becomes a dysfunctional mother and wife.

Mr. Manly is a prominent lawyer and “a very proud man . . . [who] had the air of one who felt himself too superior to the multitude to mingle in the general amusement” (40). He does not believe in love, maintaining that women are “vain, flimsy, garrulous, and superficial beings who win the smiles, and fix the attention of the many” (41). Eventually, he falls madly in love with Anne Weston, the belle of the town, admiring the “simplicity of her dress, its fitness and elegance . . . her voice [that] was singularly persuasive in its tones, . . . as the brilliancy of her mind, . . . the purity of her feelings and the goodness of her heart” (42–43). Obviously Manly does not know and cannot imagine that the virtuous Anne sometimes indulges in drinking, especially when she recalls the humiliation she experienced when a former follower left her to marry her best friend. When Anne recounts her tragic story to her best friend Emily, the latter, upon hearing the story, warns Anne against the destructive effects of inebriation. Emily, says the narrator, “felt that she had fulfilled her duty as a friend” (46). Nonetheless,

she shows no sign of genuine empathy or compassion to Anne's plight.¹⁵ Anne marries Manly, bears two children, and for the first five years marital bliss seemingly reigns in the Manlys' household. Then, probably haunted by past reminiscences, or depressed due to her taxing maternal, spousal and social responsibilities, Anne takes to the bottle again.

As a result, Manly, who cannot bear the shame, resigns from his prestigious post and moves the family to a remote town. He exerts domineering power over both Anne's body and her soul. She is constantly supervised to the point that the couple's new acquaintances, unaware of the former's past, accuse Manly of acting as a "domestic tyrant, and that his wife was the meek victim of this despotism. Some suggested that he had been convicted of crime, and had fled from the pursuit of justice, while his devoted wife refused to separate her destiny from his" (46). In the new town, Anne, for some time, abstains from drinking, but an unfortunate incident of tasting brandy (for cooking purposes), at the request of her cook, causes a disastrous relapse. Tragic consequences soon follow: Anne, drunk and unaware of her little daughter crawling to her bed, accidentally lets the toddler fall and get severely injured, which eventually leads to the child's death. Following the disaster, Anne's mental and physical health deteriorates and she dies in great agony. It is only at her deathbed that Manly shows slight signs of regret, but not true compassion. For him, Anne lost her worth, as her "features whose original beauty was so fearfully marred by the ravages of intemperance" (60), and a year later he marries Anne's best friend, Emily, a much less distinguished, but perfectly compliant and meek, woman. Anne, an intelligent, warm-hearted, talented, beautiful young woman, a devoted daughter and a genial friend, fails to reform. Trained to please her father and husband and comply with social demands, Anne takes the blame first for her thoughts, and later, for her actions, merely on herself.¹⁶ The night before her wedding she confesses that

the very qualities that won my admiration, and determined me to fix his regard, now cause me to tremble. I have been too much accustomed to self-indulgence, to bear restraint, and should it ever be imposed by a master's hand, my rebellious spirit would break the bonds of duty, and

¹⁵ Emily's reaction is quite surprising, if not disappointing, since in Smith-Rosenberg's 1975 seminal study on female friendship, she remarks that "deeply felt, same-sex friendships were casually accepted in American society. Indeed, from at least the late eighteenth through the mid nineteenth-century, a female world of varied and yet highly structured relationships appears to have been an essential aspect of American society" (1).

¹⁶ Several studies show a connection between self-blame and depression, and self-blame and alcoholism. For example, Nuwan Jayawickreme et al. contend that "interpersonal consequences of AD (alcohol dependence) are significantly related to self-blame in women" (13).

assert its independence. I fear I am not formed to be a happy wife, or to constitute the happiness of a husband. (44)

Paradoxically, Anne, who since childhood has been disciplined to be submissive and to gratify her father's and friends' wishes, accuses herself of being egoistic and self-indulgent. A woman has no right to exercise free-will or any sort of autonomy without her "master's" consent. The title of the novella ironically emphasizes this grim predicament; Anne is "The Victim of Excitement" rather than a victim of the patriarchal and hypocritical nineteenth-century social order. Although alcohol was viewed as a stimulant, and a means of eliciting provisional excitement,¹⁷ its long-term consumption often led to addiction, which, in turn, may result in a mental condition, as mentioned before, and even to suicide.

Both Hyneman and Hentz view contemporaneous society as the chief culprit of women's degradation, but Hentz's message is harsher. Applying the tropes of what Rosenthal refers to as a "dark temperance" genre/sub-genre, Hentz describes in great detail the horrendous physical and psychological transformation Anne goes through, while Hyneman refrains from going into sensational and graphic details. From the psychological point of view, Anne's "[j]udgment—reason—at length, perception, vanished" (Hentz 52).

Physically, her condition is no better, as

the marks of intemperance, that, like the brand on the brow of Cain, single out its votaries from the rest of mankind, those revolting traces, were but too visible. . . . [She] saw the wild, haggard countenance. . . . The jewels with which she had profusely adorned herself, served but to mock the ravages the destroying scourge had made upon her beauty. (55, 56, 58)

She possesses "a wild and glassy stare" and her "original beauty was so fearfully marred by the ravages of intemperance" (60). The narrator equates Anne's misdemeanor to an unscrupulous murder. Anne is damned, a doomed sinner, like Cain; nevertheless, while Cain, though excluded from his kin, becomes a fugitive and is saved, Anne's sin is unpardonable in the eyes of her husband and society. A woman who transgresses social and familial conventions must face a tormented death. Paradoxically, the cause for Anne's transgression is tightly connected to society's expectations from and the roles it assigns to high-strata women, namely, actively participating in and hosting grand social balls and events, where wine, champagne and

¹⁷ In 1841, Walter Cooper Dendy, a medical doctor and researcher, wrote that "the effects of alcohol and opium are alike: the first degree is excitement; the second, reverie; the third, sleep, or stupor" (347).

women's cordial drinks were a must. The narrator casually remarks that before a large party of guests arrives, Anne "called for a glass of cordial, kindled up a smile of welcome, and descended to perform the honors of her household" (54). The woman's role is to entertain, to charm, to delight her guests and to serve alcohol. However, the thin line between socially accepted and disproportionate drinking is sometimes easily crossed. And, it is this fine line, which, when inadvertently transgressed, leads to a woman's downfall.

Maria Lamas's confessional novella, *The Glass: or, The Trials of Helen More: A Thrilling Temperance Tale*, published in 1849, is quite an exceptional work within the temperance genre. Lamas asserts that the tale is a factual story, told by a temperance reformer on her death bed, probably to justify some obscene and gruesome descriptions of the characters' physical and mental abuse and degradation. In this tale, a female protagonist, Helen More, tries to defy the conservative gender roles controlling women both in familial and social spheres. This attempt, bold and transgressive at the time, is doomed to fail, though the protagonist manages somehow, albeit for a short while, to shake the conventional social boundaries. Helen More, whose wealthy and strict father dies at an early age, is left to the care of an inebriated nurse who at the age of ten introduces Helen to alcohol. "I throve physically in spite of the neglect," says Helen, "but my moral culture, or rather luck of culture, implanted in my breast the seeds of a hundred foibles, which were to blossom and bear pernicious fruits in the after time" (Lamas 4). Helen's mother is a beautiful, high-society belle, who remarries soon after her husband's death and leads an active social life with her new husband, a cruel and abusive step-father and a drunkard. The neglected child is soon sent to a far-away boarding school, run by nuns, where her lively spirit and curiosity are subdued. After graduating from school and returning home, Helen, extremely beautiful, rich and haughty, viewed by many as "peculiar and piquant" (4), attracts hordes of distinguished suitors.

Continually ill-treated by a vicious step-father and neglected by a dysfunctional mother, Helen becomes a cynical and commanding young woman, a kind of "femme fatale," who takes revenge on her male admirers. She confesses that

any gentleman in my train should dare to disobey my commands or perform them with unwillingness, would have been a piece of presumption, to be rewarded by eternal banishment from the presence of Helen Moore. But no one seemed inclined to run so fearful a risk. My whims were attended to with the most profound respect, and I reigned the sole empress and an autocratice of a realm, whose population might be about two hundred fifty or thereabouts. (6)

Eventually, in an effort to assert domination, Helen, at one of the parties she organizes, convinces three non-drinking admirers—one of whom is her future husband—to drink until they become completely intoxicated. This move eventually leads to the future husband's financial and physical ruin. After several years of seemingly happy marital life, Helen's husband, a promising young lawyer, takes heavily to drink; this, in turn, leads Helen to drink behind closed doors. As a married woman, she depends financially on her husband, since once married, a woman's property is in the hands of the husband. Upon taking to the bottle, Helen's husband, Frederick, loses his clientele and prestige. Gradually, the couple loses their property and once Frederick leaves Helen after a row, she is financially ruined. From a feminist point of view,¹⁸ Helen's attempt to transgress male domination—forcing her husband to drink—is doomed to failure since her ostensible and short-term control does not empower her. The results of this transgression (a transgressive woman is considered one who ignores, rejects and/or declines the norms of nineteenth-century society) often lead to poverty, physical debilitation and loose moral behavior, which in turn, leads to aggression and vice. By ruining her husband, she wrecks herself. Helen cannot support herself financially, and though she tries to earn some money by doing various odd jobs, she never manages to stand on her feet. Rumors about her past destroy her chances of achieving financial and social independence. Deveaux rightly asserts that “women's ‘freedom’ does not simply refer to objective possibilities for maneuvering or resisting within a power dynamic but concerns whether a woman feels empowered in her specific context” (Deveaux 234).

This idea is perfectly in line with Barbara Leslie Epstein's criticism of temperance supporters. Like Helen, these female activists do not transgress male dominance. Because the WCTU put the family, and not women, at the heart of its ideology, it “assumed, rather than criticized, male dominance” (Epstein 133). In the same line, Parsons contends that most female members of Temperance Societies, after launching anti-drinking campaigns, attending protests and making rows at local saloons retreated to “sweet and docile” domesticity (153). Ironically, by marching into the public sphere, female temperance reformers, rather than gaining real power, aimed to restore the patriarch to his “pristine state” (Parsons 156).

Helen plays a dangerous game when pretending to be a “femme fatale,” who by transgressing the accepted boundaries (organizing wild drinking

¹⁸ For feminist criticism regarding female transgression, see Noble; Rubinow Gorsky; Gilbert and Gubar; and Avery. Virginia B. Morris notes in her book *Double Jeopardy* contends that “women guilty of . . . crime were at odds with the culturally nurtured image of acceptable womanly behavior, and they are punished as much for this as for the actual crime they commit” (9).

parties, flirting with young men, cajoling the latter to participate in drinking contests, etc.) destabilizes the established order. Her determination to defy patriarchal social norms does not give her the ability to define herself outside of women's restrictive roles. Slavoj Žižek, drawing on Jacques Lacan and Judith Butler, remarks on the concept of the "femme fatale," saying that "the threat of the *femme fatale* is thus a false one. . . . It is effectively a fantasmatic support of patriarchal domination, the figure of the enemy engendered by the patriarchal system itself" (14).

Similarly to Marion and Anne, Helen More, when completely inebriated and almost unconscious, loses her only child. While the death of Marion's and Anne's children, though undeniably tragic, occurred accidentally (the former drown and the latter fell from the mother's bed), Helen's son dies due to an unfortunate but deliberate move. Helen locks her son in a clothes cabinet as a punishment for misbehaving. She leaves the house to do some errands and buy drinks, and on returning home "was attacked with a fit of what . . . complaisant physicians called the brain fever, but what others have named mania a potu—the brain fever of drunkenness. . . . Thus I struggled between life and death, until at length skill triumphed and my life was saved" (Lamas 22). A few days after the incident takes place, when Helen finally recovers, she discovers that her child's dead body is locked in the cabinet. The description of the boy's dead body is graphic and extremely hard to digest. As is typical of sensational temperance literature, Lamas pushes the descriptions of cruelty and violence to the extreme. Upon opening the closet, Helen describes the terrible sight—"there bathed in his blood lay the mangled corpse of my child—murdered by his mother. There he lay, poor slaughtered innocent! Starved! Starved! His left arm gnawed to the bone—gnawed till the artery had been severed, and he had bled to death" (Lamas 22).

Helen herself is in a state of nightmarish phantasmagoria, imagining hellish scenes of hideous reptiles crawling over her body; the horrendous "toads crawled around and serpents slimed over . . . and every now and then there would come a scream, as of a child in mortal agony . . . what torments—what agonies of torment" (22). Indeed, Lamas insinuates that an inebriated woman is a degraded creature. Such sensationally graphic scenes are aimed at intensifying the readers' dismay at the savagery of intoxicated women. The drunken woman is a dreadful beast, as she violates the conventional responsibility of a woman to be an upright wife and a devoted mother.

In the article "Mania a Potu" (1874), Newington, a medical doctor and researcher, refers to the medical disorder named "Mania a Potu," characterized by delirium tremens and manic attacks. According to his description, the disease may lead to changes in the structure of the brain, dementia,

hallucinations and other severe syndromes, and in extreme cases, may result in a patient's death. Nevertheless, Newington, like most doctors of the time, does not address addiction as a condition stemming from psychological or mental difficulties. Instead, he asserts that the patients "always have minds that cannot concentrate themselves on the serious business; for them to work is hard; they must enjoy themselves; that they take the easiest and cheapest way of doing so; and that as drink can be got anywhere, they take a glass, and then begins the run" (Newington 495). Many contemporaneous physicians, instead of relying on scientific sources, were clearly affected by ideas propagated within popular culture *vis-à-vis* the conduct and appearance of drunkards. The sufferers are seen as guilty of irresponsible and hedonistic behavior, rather than as people in need of attention or support.

After losing her child, Helen is in total despair, suffering recurrently from delirium attacks. Without familial or communal care and empathy she leads a "mechanical" life "merely sufficient to satisfy animal wants" (Lamas 23). For some time, Helen, a proud, spoiled and wealthy woman, always served by numerous domestics, takes the initiative and operates some small business ventures; she then works for a bookseller, but eventually relapses to drinking. Penniless, she has nowhere to go, but to an Alms House. The lengthy descriptions of the physical and mental abuse of the inmates there are disturbing. The institution is no better than a prison. No medical or mental care is provided.¹⁹ The narrator provides multiple instances of the devastating effects of drinking on the lives of usually reputable people who reside there.

The Alms House is a vast Golgotha—a commonwealth of the dead—or what are those within its bounds but practicably dead? What vice, folly and suffering stagnates and festers within the walls. . . . A more perfect despotic could not exist than this confederation. . . . Degradation is the pedestal, sycophancy the shaft, and petty tyranny the capital of this column reared a monument to the vices, the errors, and the mischances of our social system. (25)

Helen does not hesitate to criticize the despotic, tyrannical and merciless nature of these "correctional" institutions whose aim is neither to ease the suffering of the patients nor to rehabilitate them; instead, the system's

¹⁹ It should be noted that the first medically-oriented inebriate asylum was opened in 1864. Four hundred of the first four thousand applications for admission were from women. The recognition of the special needs of the female inebriate quickly led to the opening of the first gender-specific treatment program, the "Martha Washington Home in Chicago" in 1869. Other specialized women's programs followed, including establishing the Temple Home in 1876 and the New England Home for Intemperate Women in 1879 (White 53).

goal is to oppress, subdue and silence the inmates. According to Foucault, society wishes to maintain order by silencing the mad (and the drunk), and thus uphold the construction of rationality, usually appropriated to men. The repression of the mad “operated as a sentence to disappear, but also as an injunction to silence and an affirmation of nonexistence” (Foucault 4). Foucault’s inmates—subjugated, submissive, docile and powerless humans—are an emblem of medicalization gone wrong. Female inebriation is considered an even harsher offense than that of males. Since women are customarily regarded as the keepers of the familial unit, the misery of female drunkards evidently centers on their incapacity to perform motherly and wifely duties. Moreover, a woman’s sphere is her home; hence, drinking in public degrades and humiliates not just the individual but the whole community. Helen is eventually saved and released from the Alms House by one of her former suitors, the only one among the three who did not become a drunkard. He and his wife bring Helen to their house, where she is tenderly nurtured and taken care of. Nevertheless, there is no happy end here, since Helen, though saved from the ill-treatment and humiliation at the Alms House, is constantly haunted by horrifying images from the past:

A series of tableaux, so terrible, passes before me; and my sleep is filled with presences too vivid to be deemed phantoms . . . more dreadful than either of these—more heart-rending than all—is another scene. Heralded by the screams of a child, in extreme suffering the boy whom I have murdered comes before me—his little arms gnawed in the extremity of hunger—and his blood-bedabbled clothes telling of a mother’s crime! Woe! Woe! Unutterable woe! (Lamas 30)

CONCLUSION

The chief contention of temperance literature is that drunkenness brings about personal and societal devastation or, in some cases, leads to reform. Using various sub-genres, such as the confessional and “dark-temperance” (Lamas’s *The Glass: or, The Trials of Helen More: A Thrilling Temperance Tale*), the moralistic/sentimental (Hyneman’s *Leaves of the Upas Tree*), or the sensational/sentimental (Hentz’s “The Victim of Excitement”), and employing various rhetorical devices that epitomize the Victorian love of melancholic drama and encourage a strong emotional response, nineteenth-century women writers depict the destructive consequences of intemperance. Using these sub-genres and tropes (such as provocative scenes, losing one’s inheritance, neglecting social and familial duties, the fall of the capable young man/woman and the tragic death of the drunkard’s child, mainly characteristic of “dark-temperance novels” and confessions

in Lamas's case, or domestic fiction that depicts scenes of distress and emotional excess in Hentz's novella, or moral rhetoric devices aimed at promoting moral reformation in Hyneman's case) temperance writers aim to avert the social and communal turmoil that threatens middle and high-class codes and undermines social and economic stability. Reynolds rightly asserts that this literature "deemphasized the remedies for vice while probing the grisly, sometimes perverse results of vice, such as shattered homes, sadomasochistic violence, eroticism, nightmare visions, and the disillusioning collapse of romantic ideals" (*Beneath* 59).

Hentz, Hyneman and Lamas are not feminists in the modern sense of the word; therefore, their literature should not be considered according to the principles of radical feminism, or criticized for not challenging prevailing nineteenth-century gender roles. Nevertheless, exceptionally, Lamas's protagonist, Helen More, exhibits noncompliance with socially accepted norms which encourage women's total meekness and subordination.

Moreover, these writers' works endorse a social undertaking of pointing out society's immorality, hypocrisy and contempt toward dangerous behaviors, in Hentz's and Hyneman's case, and disregard of unspeakable atrocities, in Lamas's case. These writers' disillusionment with contemporaneous society's tainted morals is evident, but as female writers writing in mid-nineteenth century America, often marginalized or excluded from the literary canon, which is chiefly dominated by male publishers, editors and fellow-writers, they needed to navigate very cautiously between the competing pressures of manifestly scrutinizing the social order, on the one hand, and gaining a wide readership, on the other. Therefore, Hyneman and Hentz are careful not to overdo social critique. Lamas's tale is much more subversive, as Helen More tries, though unsuccessfully, to transgress the accepted social codes. These writers' contributions to the temperance genre are important in spite of the almost total neglect of their work. Their major achievement lies in successfully linking the major topic of temperance with contemporaneous cultural, social and political issues. Hence, temperance literature sheds light on wider concerns, while adhering to the restrictions imposed by accepted nineteenth-century literary conventions.

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