

Manhood Lost: Fallen Drunkards and Redeeming Women in the Nineteenth-Century United States, by Elaine Frantz Parsons. New Studies in American Intellectual and Cultural History. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2003. xi, 241 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$42.95 cloth.

Reviewer Rachel E. Bohlmann is director of public programs at the Newberry Library in Chicago. Her dissertation (University of Iowa, 2001) was "Drunken Husbands, Drunken State: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union's Challenge to American Families and Public Communities in Chicago, 1874-1920."

In *Manhood Lost*, Elaine Frantz Parsons examines the drunkard narrative, that ubiquitous story of nineteenth-century American drinking. This narrative, of a pure man lured, tricked, or coerced into drinking who suffers the subsequent loss of his livelihood, his wife and children, and finally his reputation, has been remembered, if at all, as a quaint, humorous stereotype of a lost moral reform. Parsons gracefully shows that we should take this narrative seriously. She has mastered a mountain of temperance and anti-temperance material to show how many Americans understood husbands', sons', brothers', fathers', and their own drinking in the nineteenth century.

The drunkard narrative was, as Parsons points out, a manly story. The basic story lays bare two intellectual problems that nineteenth-century Americans confronted: first, the question of individual volition, and second, women's and men's proper roles within the family and the public sphere. Examining six themes—volition, manhood, contentment, seduction, invasion, resolution—through as many chapters, Parsons thoughtfully considers why alcohol figured so pervasively in American culture, and she persuasively shows us how debate over its consumption helped Americans define masculinity and examine the pace and nature of social change. She concludes that, by the end of the nineteenth century, the telling and retelling of the drunkard narrative led to fuller participation of women in public life and a massive shift away from belief in the power of individual volition.

Throughout her book, Parsons skillfully draws on a group of hitherto neglected sources in alcohol studies: transcripts from civil damage lawsuits brought by wives against saloonkeepers who sold to their husbands. (These transcripts came largely from courtrooms in Iowa, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin.) Parsons guides readers through carefully crafted prosecution and defense narratives as each side argued over what men's drunkenness meant. One of the most provocative sections of the book is her inquiry into how nineteenth-century Americans argued over what it meant to be "drunk" and how that argument remained embedded in a network of male privilege within the saloon, home, and courtroom. The portions of court documents

she includes convey a sense that female plaintiffs faced a phalanx of male lawyers, witnesses, jurors, saloonkeepers, defense teams, and judges invested in preserving a man's (informal) right to drink and to manage his "business" of work and family without interference. Parsons explains that most of the cases women won were overturned, usually on procedural grounds, by higher courts on appeal.

The discursive method that Parsons employs is the appropriate tool for her cultural history of drinking and gender. At the end of the volume, however, she attributes too much power to the narratives she has examined. In her arguments about the relationship between the drunkard narrative and women's activism in the late nineteenth century, Parsons describes a counternarrative in which temperance women invade saloons and the public sphere to purify them so that the women may retreat back into their domestic sphere in peace and security. She argues that members of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) followed this separate-spheres-based narrative of invasion in their own activism and organization, but this reading pushes the power and influence of the narrative too far.

As Parsons shows, this narrative of invasion is part of the powerful nineteenth-century prescriptive gender ideology of separate spheres, which it nicely reinforced. Separate spheres ideology, of course, was just as much a carefully constructed, fictive story as the drunkard narrative, and even more subtly intractable, in that it still exists today in ways that the drunkard narrative does not. WCTU members understood clearly, as did many women related to drinking men, that the market, workplace, and saloon were all part of women's lives, even if the women never invaded a saloon themselves. Separate spheres offered no protections for a woman under the law or social custom other than what she could demand from the state or beg from her husband or father or brother. WCTU women could not, nor did they wish to, retreat from the challenges they posed to male privilege and claims to full citizenship.

Parsons states at the end of her book that she intends it to be read alongside the social histories of temperance and alcohol studies that appeared in the 1970s. Her book does indeed need to be added to that shelf. Not only has she added a fresh cultural studies approach to temperance and alcohol work, but by using civil damage sources she has also uncovered a debate about alcohol initiated by non-temperance advocates who nevertheless found alcohol sale and consumption problematic. Bringing these public discussions to light establishes more firmly how strongly many Americans understood alcohol to be a central social question in the nineteenth century.

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.