A TYPICAL DRUNKARD:
THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ALCOHOLIC STEREOTYPE
ON THE AMERICAN STAGE

by

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A Typical Drunkard: The Establishment of the Alcoholic Stereotype on the American 
Stage

Thesis directed by Assistant Professor Beth Osnes

America saw much of the drunkard on stage during the nineteenth century, and our 
perceptions about who he was, what drove his actions, and what the inevitable 
consequences of his drinking would be, were well established in the American 
imagination by the turn of the century. Thus, it was during these years, and through 
depictions in melodramatic temperance plays that the characterization of the stereotypical 
American drunkard came to live in our collective psyche. The typical alcoholic, 
inevitably male, had failing ethics and morals, and was a victim of his own weak will. 
This project examines how the development of an ideological and religious view of 
excessive drinking, and the staging of that view, codified the characteristics of alcoholism 
through examinations of the alcoholic character, the alcoholism narrative and the 
ideological messages about alcoholism as depicted in seven plays produced between 
1844 and 1888. Patterns found in staged depictions placed in the American consciousness 
an image of the alcoholic that continues to shape public understanding of excessive 
drinking. This project defines and examines the components of that stereotype through 
the examination of representative plays taken from popular temperance drama, 
professional theater, and amateur plays performed in small towns and large cities across 
the country.
CONTENTS

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION ..............................................................................................................1

II. CHAPTER ONE Social and Political Temperance Reform and the Theatrical Representation of a Moral Dilemma ..............................................22

III. CHAPTER TWO The Temperance Movement in the Latter Half of the Nineteenth Century ..................................................62

   The Temperance Movement Changes Tactics: From Moral Suasion to Political Action ......................63

   Politics and Drinking: A Marriage that Ended in Banishment ........71

   Class Matters: The Continued Framing of the Alcohol Problem by the Middle Class ...............74

   Labeling Chronic Drunkenness .................................................................79

   The Evolution of Drinking Culture ...........................................................82

   The Immigrant as Scapegoat, the Immigrant as Lover of Drink .........................................................87

   The Middle Class American Family: Mother as the Guardian of Virtue and Morality ..................95

   The Woman Alcoholic: Extreme Deviance and Personal “Social Catastrophe” ......................104

   The Women’s Christian Temperance Union: Codifying Feminine Virtue to Implement Change ....110

   Intemperate, Inebriate, Dipsomaniac, Alcoholic: The Evolution of Descriptive and Medical Language ........122

   The Treatment of the Chronic Drunkard: The Duplicity of the Medical/Moral Model ..............130

   Chapter Conclusion .........................................................................................135
IV. CHAPTER THREE The Alcoholic Character ............................................. 137

V. CHAPTER FOUR The Alcoholic Narrative ........................................... 186

VI. CHAPTER FIVE Ideology of Temperance
Reform Found Within the Plays ............................................................. 246

VIII. CONCLUSION .................................................................................. 289

BIBLIOGRAPHY ....................................................................................... 303

APPENDIX

THE DRUNKARD; OR, THE FALLEN SAVED ........................................... 306

TEN NIGHTS IN A BAR-ROOM ................................................................ 312

THE FATAL GLASS; OR, THE CURSE OF DRINK .................................. 314

THREE YEARS IN A MAN TRAP ............................................................. 317

TWO MEN OF SANDY BAR ................................................................. 326

ON THE BRINK; OR THE RECLAIMED HUSBAND ............................... 333

DRIFTING APART; OR, MARY, THE
FISHERMEN’S DAUGHTER ................................................................. 335
FIGURES

Figure

1. Benjamin Rush’s Moral and Physical Thermometer........................................35
2. Barnum’s Teetotal Pledge.............................................................................59
INTRODUCTION

The exact nature of this project was slow in developing. While still completing coursework, I discovered that Eugene O’Neill’s play Long Day’s Journey into Night was written very shortly after the book Alcoholics Anonymous solidified the growth of the modern recovery movement. I thought that there might be something about the timing of these two events that indicated a shift in perception about the nature of alcoholism both socially and also as depicted on the stage. Certainly the way we see the Tyrones grapple with the alcoholism and addiction within their family was a marked shift away from the depictions that preceded Long Day’s Journey into Night. My intent as I first embarked on this research was to examine the changes in the way alcoholism was depicted and envisioned on the stage in the plays of Eugene O’Neill, Tennessee Williams and Edward Albee. Through the period covered by these three playwrights, I had intended to argue that alcoholism went through a transition from being a condition judged on a moral basis, with simplistic means to recovery, through a deeper exploration of the internal experience of the drunkard, and a broadening of who could be included in the definition. For instance we see in Long Day’s Journey, a family all of whom are embroiled in the codependent nature of alcoholism and addiction. But here, the men drink and Mary Tyrone is a drug addict. The separation by sex of the “drug of choice” was a hold-over in attitude from the nineteenth century when men were drunkards and women were treated for
various ailments with narcotics and tinctures. By the time Blanche DuBois made her appearance on stage, she was still judged by the other characters in the play for being both female and alcoholic, but the sympathetic portrayal she was given by Williams did much to change that image in the eyes of the public. By the time Albee wrote Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf, chronic drunkenness had almost become normative behavior as seen on stage.

I found that in order to articulate the changes I saw in the depiction of alcoholism in the theater over the course of the twentieth century, I had to also include a description of an earlier characterization of what alcoholism looked like. In other words, I had to be able to say that if there indeed was a change, then that change was from what? While there has been a great deal of scholarship about the temperance movement in general, including everything from political ideology to medical perspectives on alcoholism, I could find only one study that examined the relationship between the greater temperance movement during the nineteenth century and theatrical depictions of alcoholism on the stage. In his book Theatre, Culture and Temperance Reform, John Frick gives an in-depth study of how the theater contributed to the ideals being forwarded by the temperance movement, but he did not articulate the characteristics of alcoholism, nor the stereotypical drunkard’s story. I found myself researching the attitudes and ideology of nineteenth century Americans and then applying that research to an analysis of enough representative plays so that I could state with confidence what the changes to this image found in O’Neill, et al, were from. Given the scope of research appropriate to a dissertation-sized project, this avenue of inquiry became large enough, and clearly original enough so that the focus of my research shifted. What was originally intended as
a background chapter in a different project grew into a body of research large enough to stand on its own. What you will find within the pages of this project is an attempt to give a launching pad to any research about the changing nature of alcoholism stereotyping or depiction found on the American stage.

To undertake the establishment of the traits that identify a stereotype is challenging. Stereotyping itself has both individual and group, or societal functions. In the article “Stereotypes as Individual and Collective Representations,” Charles Stagnor and Mark Schaller note:

[S]tereotypes serve an individual function by systematizing and simplifying information available to a perceiver, and protecting that perceiver’s value structure. At a collective level, […] stereotypes serve groups by offering culturally accepted explanations for events, by justifying group actions, and by providing a means for groups to differentiate themselves positively from other groups. (19)

It is clear that the nineteenth century mindset was ripe for the formation of stereotyping both because of the need to define values and in order to explain behaviors not easily understood. Within this study, the critical observation of patterns of behavior and narrative structure assigned to that stereotype will constitute the bulk of the analytical work, but it is equally important to establish the social history out of which the stereotype arose. Much work has been done to examine the greater social and political movements generally gathered under the title of the temperance movement. Many extraordinary books have been written on America’s relationship to alcohol, and they have made for a broad foundation upon which I can base my own study. An analysis of how and why the
dramatic performance of drunkenness and its consequences was utilized by evangelizers and theatrical profiteers alike will teach us several things about the nature of the drunk as a stereotype. Certainly the widespread nature of the message makes theatrical performance only a small part of the general portrayal of alcoholism since there were novels, testimonials, pamphlets, songs, and illustrated storyboards all of which also contributed to the public opinions about the nature of alcoholism as it was understood over the course of the nineteenth century. But the power of a theatrical performance to impress upon the audience patterns of characterization cannot be understated.

Found in a public portrayal of character type in the theater, especially in popular theater, there is an implicit approval by the audience of the various ways that the character depiction can be read. By this I mean that within the play there is an undercurrent of public understanding and agreement about meaning behind various attitudes toward the alcoholic character. The first factor that influences the public understanding of what chronic drunkenness is, is the moral framing of intemperance in terms of religion. If the alcoholic is first a sinner, where the alcoholic was originally a good man, but has fallen victim to his appetite due to the demonic nature of his tempter (rum), then his redemption will lead him to seek God as a savior for his condition. Directly related to the moral and religious interpretations of alcoholism are the reasons given as to why the chronic drunk continues to drink. More specifically, whether the character drinks because of the weak spot in his moral fiber. The audience is provided with an understanding as to whether that weak spot is the result of an external force acting upon the man, or if it is a weakness which is vaguer in its specific origin but clearly mended through religious intervention, or the portrayal can include a combination
of the two. As the century progressed, the concepts that considered the influence of nature versus environment made their way into the messages put forth by the words and images of the drunkard as he crossed the stage. Alcoholism was seen as the father’s curse upon the son. Common in these depictions of the drunkard is the sense that drunkenness runs in families, and the hereditary nature of alcoholism is engaged in these plays, even as it is portrayed as a failing brought on by evil influence. This is not necessarily a mischaracterization or an exaggeration but it is often associated with the stereotype of the alcoholic.

Another important aspect to consider when looking at generalizations that could be made about these plays and their influence on public opinion is that each play has a set of behaviors and consequences that indicate a mutual understanding by the audience as to how intemperance manifests itself in the drinking characters. The structure of the drunkard’s tale is fairly uniform and predictable. These are morality plays, and so the outcome at the end, at least for the primary protagonists, is a return to a positive temperate life, and an escape from the terrible and devastating ride that alcohol has taken them on. They are returned to hearth and home where they will find happiness and satisfaction whether they have entered the alcoholic journey unwittingly or under the influence of temptation. Many of the characters are not redeemed, but always we see at least one man restored to sobriety. It is part of the form. On the other hand, if the drinker willfully engaged in a relationship with liquor—whether to drink it or sell it—he is less likely to survive his encounter intact. The stories of temperance dramas are remarkably similar, casting a repeated message to the public about the outcomes of drinking, even if the solutions were not as strictly codified.
The alcoholic’s behavior and choices are always contrasted with those of the wife and children at his mercy. Even in the rare cases when the drunken character is a woman, the children are cast as angelic and innocent victims of the terrible drunkard. This study does not include any cases of a woman as a drunkard because this phenomena is so far outside the standard form, as well as social acceptability or experience. For the most part, women were treated with tinctures and medicines which left them more likely to be addicted to opiates or, if alcohol, it came in the form of a medicine for some other ailment. During the nineteenth century, the social structure and roles taken within the family were becoming strongly divided between men and women. In his book *Family, Drama and American Dreams*, Tom Scanlan argues that the theater was a place where we can see the emerging values placed on family roles. These portrayals influence the development of the American Dream and were played out on stage and approved of by the audience. He writes:

In the American imagination the dream of domestic harmony is fundamental to our self-definition. Images of this dream appear over and over. They pervade our dramatic literature, high and low. Our drama is singularly about family life, and through attention to family images we can better understand it and ourselves. (49)

Father’s drinking and consequent moral failing is contrasted against his wife’s martyrdom and patient loving kindness in the face of the many challenges and tragedies that befall the couple as alcoholism continues to define their fate.

In many cases, the drunken behavior is also ascribed to a lowering in social and economic standing. Working-class standards about proper behavior or politics are at odds with establishment-valued norms often described as the Protestant ethic. The plays are
framed so that the upwardly mobile would be likely to choose temperate values over the
draw of the bar-room, since sober living was ascribed primarily to the upper classes,
designating drinking behavior to the lower and working classes. Consistencies found in
the moral and behavioral portrayal of the alcoholic character, as well as the nature of his
relationship to his family and ethnic, class or political associations allowed the drunken
“type” to begin to take shape in a tangible way. As Lender and Martin articulated in their
book *Drinking in America*:

> For the middle and upper classes, the skid row lifestyle was pluralism at its
> ugliest, and the so called skid row bum quickly became the popular stereotype of
> the alcoholic. He was the diametric opposite of the steady, virtuous citizen who
> held the social and political fabric of the republic together. (103)

Admittedly, there is no hard and fast line between the different economic and class
associations related to looking at character depiction. Each mode of examination will of
course include discussion of the others, but in trying to parse out what the stereotype
looks like, I believe that looking at the general moral, physical, relational and societal
similarities between drunken characters will produce enough detail about character
generalities so that the nature of the stereotype can be established.

The discussion and classification of any widespread depiction of a “group” of
people, in this case alcoholics, requires that the plays that include that depiction were
popular and that the act of watching constitutes an endorsement of the stereotyping of the
characterization. *The Drunkard* was possibly the most popular and widely attended
commercial play before *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* that we are aware of. Any depiction that
offends the public’s sensibilities does not last too long past the initial sensationalism
often associated with the play. In his book *Melodrama and the Myth of America*, Jeffrey Mason, an authority often quoted about the nature of American performance during the nineteenth century, argues that the public viewing of plays constitutes the approval of the ideology imbedded in those plays. He writes in the introduction to his own book,

This is a book about theatre as strategy, or about the strategic uses of theatrical representation in the context of relevant rhetoric, image, and experience. More fully, it is about how America performed “America” during a portion of the nineteenth century—how its people enacted their collective self-concept, or their sense of cultural identity…My investigation lies at the intersection of two rich fields: the study of nineteenth-century American culture, including its literature, politics, and social interactions; and the study of how theatrical events are written, produced, and received. In one sense, it is a demonstration of a certain cultural and especially intertextual approach to theatre studies as applied to only a few examples of one kind of play produced during a brief stretch of decades in one nation—a study of selected nineteenth-century American plays by attempting to locate them in the discourses from which they sprang and to which they contributed by finding-and-describing their places in the national imagination. (1)

My argument leans heavily upon his premise: that because these plays were performed repeatedly and the images were consistent across each particular play, the American public endorsed the depiction of alcoholism they saw on stage. That the reasons for drunkenness, that the harms done, that the disruption of family roles and that the preservation of the family was paramount, all add up to an agreed upon visage of
alcoholism as it emerged from the nineteenth century into the twentieth. This study is an attempt to articulate that visage.

The temperance movement as a social movement was the longest-sustained and overall most popular social movement of the nineteenth century (Pegram 18). There are many factors that contribute to this which will be discussed in this study, but consideration of the number of people involved in the temperance movement is a critical aspect of understanding how widespread the exposure to the vision of alcoholism that the plays in this study, and plays like them, promoted. This was not a small agitation on the part of upper class women; it was a full blown social movement that sustained momentum from the 1820’s through until the legislative actions that resulted in the ratification of the 18th Amendment to the Constitution, popularly known as Prohibition (enacted in 1920). Temperance Societies serving all segments of the aggregate American population promoted temperance ideals though novels, pamphlets, songs, parades, picnics, family outings, magic lantern shows, and of course, theater.

The exact relationship between the plays and the temperance movement is different for each play, but the plays in this study can be set into three categories, each having a unique affiliation with the temperance movement. The first categorization, represented by *The Drunkard, or The Fallen Saved* by W. H. Smith and *Ten Nights in a Bar-Room* by William W. Pratt, is made up of plays that were very popular in New York, had long runs (60 to 100 consecutive performances was a very long run for that period), and national tours, at first heading to major cities, and then smaller towns. Many smaller professional theatrical operations continued to keep *Ten Nights in a Bar-room* in their repertoire for decades after its initial appearance in New York. Professionally produced,
these plays took advantage of the national interest in temperance, and were used by the likes of P. T. Barnum and other temperance advocates to precede pledge-signing rituals, but they were solidly within professional theatrical tradition.

Secondly, there were hundreds, if not thousands of plays written by and for use by the temperance movement itself. These were more likely to receive an amateur production by local temperance societies as part of a larger strategy to spread information (or propaganda) about the nature of the drunkard. These amateur productions were very widespread, but did not fall under commercial theatrical production. The three plays that fit this description that I am including in this study are *The Fatal Glass; or, The Curse of Drink* by James McCloskey, *On the Brink; or The Reclaimed Husband* by H. Eliot McBride, and *Three Years in a Man Trap* by Charles H. Morton. I can’t discern exactly why the plays in this category were written, but none of them had a long successful Broadway run, although both *Three Years in a Man Trap* and *The Fatal Glass* did appear in New York Theaters at one time or another. The message about temperance reform changes over the three, and in fact they show a progression in depiction that becomes darker and more fatalistic, and also that turns attention toward the liquor industry. John Frick writes eloquently about the differences between Broadway and community produced temperance dramas.

Many of the most successful temperance dramas were thus written for venues other than commercial theatres. Of the hundreds of temperance dramas written during the nineteenth century, just a handful (*The Drunkard, Ten Nights in a Bar-room, The Bottle* and *Hot Corn* among them) succeeded on Broadway, the Bowery or in the major museums. The remainder, like George M. Baker's *The
Temperance Drama: A Series of Dramas, Comedies and Farces for Temperance Exhibitions and Home and School Entertainment, were created expressly for groups like “Divisions of the Sons of Temperance, Good Templar Lodges, Sections of Cadets, Bands of Hope and other Temperance Societies” who met in temperance halls, church basements, or “temperate theatres.” Still others, like Effie W. Merriman's The Drunkard's Family, were written to be “acted by children” in school, at home or in Sunday School. Thus, while companies of The Drunkard and Ten Nights in a Bar-room, were competing with city bars and persuading thousands in major urban centers to sign the pledge, temperance plays were serving additional thousands as alternate amusements in the nation's small towns. (76)

I found that the plays in this category had the most dynamic portrayals of the family and motives for drinking, and the deepest and most complex exploration of the cause to effect nature between men who drink and the consequences of drinking alcohol, to my surprise. They also had the most complex inclusion of different nineteenth century dramatic movements, including the binary world of melodrama, but also the questions of nature versus nurture and questions of determinism found in realism and tragedy.

The third category of plays examined in this study are plays written by non-temperance popular writers of the day. Drifting Apart was written by James A. Herne who wrote Margaret Flemming two years later. While it may not have been written explicitly for the temperance movement, the play draws on many of the temperance characterizations and narratives, and does serve as a warning against drinking. The last play in the study, Two Men of Sandy Bar by Bret Harte falls farthest from the temperance
message, yet, it is an overt exploration of the ravages that drinking can incur on a family, and includes a poignantly insightful depiction of alcoholism, its hereditary nature, and the poor chances for permanent recovery that the drunkard faces. Bret Harte was a contemporary of Mark Twain, writing mostly short stories about the American frontier and California. The play is emblematic of a non-temperance examination of chronic drunkenness that includes some of the same stereotypical depictions as the temperance genre while not espousing the didacticism of the form.

While the sources for this study have been drawn from a cross-section of different ways that alcoholism was depicted on stage during the nineteenth century, to broadly ascribe to an entire genre of plays and performances a series of defining characteristics is tricky. How can one say that all temperance plays are consistent in their depiction of alcoholism? And what about non-temperance plays that also explore drunkenness and its legacy? In choosing which plays to include in this study I tried to address plays that were clearly drawn from the temperance movement itself, used to demonstrate the moral lessons and to effect the kind of personal and societal change that temperance societies were after. The use of plays to effect change became much more widely practiced during the middle of the nineteenth century when local or culturally specific temperance societies emerged. John Frick describes why this contributed to the influence of the dramatic form of the temperance message when he writes, “[T]emperance reform remained open to any American who wished to sign the pledge and join a temperance society, and it was during this second, egalitarian phase that temperance entertainments became prominent tools for disseminating temperance ideology” (42).
Temperance plays were very effective because of the melodramatic form, which did not allow much room for moral ambiguities, and used the potential in the emotional vulnerabilities of those they would reform for the delivery of the temperance message. Frick’s notations on this say “While the melodrama could be employed to espouse any cause or ideological position from the most radical to the most conservative—in the hands of antebellum temperance writers, the melodrama served as a progressive genre for a progressive ideology” (61). Dramatists hit upon a subject that was in the forefront of social consciousness and their use of the popular form of the day combined to create a forceful set of images and ideological messages. *The Drunkard* and *Ten Nights in a Bar-Room*, two of the plays in this study, represent the Broadway and touring temperance dramas. Widely popular, drawing crowds for years, these two plays engender the height of popularity of temperance drama as temperance drama. Audiences attending these plays knew what they were going to see, and supported the performances as they participated in the social movement. This temperance message was found not only on the boards on Broadway and touring houses across the country, but also, as the number of temperance societies increased, and the temperance drama waned in popularity in the professional theater, more plays were written to be performed as temperance society events, locally produced and acted, but widely incorporated into regular gatherings of these groups, where the pledge—the catch-all solution for personal restoration, was administered on a regular basis. And the theme of alcoholism went beyond temperance drama per se, and was found in plays written for other audiences about other subjects. This study also includes plays that would not be considered temperance dramas, but conform to the concepts about alcoholism seen in temperance drama.
The study begins with *The Drunkard*. This play was the first known temperance drama to emerge in the United States. The script was very popular and has become part of the cannon of early American drama. Clearly, a detailed analysis of the concept of alcoholism as it formed in the American imagination while they attended the theater cannot leave this play out. This is the earliest of the plays in this study. First performed in 1844 in Boston (published 1847), it was a sensation, and after several years, was the play that P. T. Barnum chose to re-open the moral lecture room (theater) in his American Museum in New York after a devastating fire. *The Drunkard* is the most well known of temperance dramas, and is a model for the narrative structure and depiction of many of the other plays. In his book *Theater, Culture and Temperance Reform*, John Frick describes the significance of the ongoing run at Barnum’s museum and why it made *The Drunkard* the formative model of temperance drama.

[T]he legendary P. T. Barnum had quietly celebrated the 100th consecutive performance of *The Drunkard* at his famous American Museum on lower Broadway. While this event may have passed virtually unnoticed at the time, its significance has not been lost on historians who maintain that Barnum's production of *The Drunkard* heralded the entry of temperance narratives into mainstream theatre and immediately became the standard against which all other temperance dramas were measured. At the same time, it served as the prototype of the long run that was to become a standard practice in the late nineteenth and twentieth-century commercial theatre. (113)
While canonized, this play is far more optimistic in its outcomes than its successors. It created a model for temperance drama in America, and many of the markers are seen in the following plays, and so it is essential that it could not be overlooked in this study.

First performed in 1858, Ten Nights in a Bar-Room is likely the second most well known temperance drama that also qualifies as a popular Broadway play with a long run. Many touring companies took this play around the country for years and years after its initial appearance in New York. This play is a dramatization of a popular novel, published in 1854, written by Timothy Shay Arthur, a man who wrote hundreds of socially relevant cautionary tales, many promoting women’s rights. According to Frick, Ten Nights in a Bar-Room,

found a large, receptive audience, especially in rural America and among those who were not habitual readers. While it is impossible today to assess how much influence Pratt's drama had upon popularizing Arthur's novel or to predict what might have happened to the novel had not the play been written, it is generally conceded by historians that from 1858 on, the general public was unable to distinguish the novel from its stage adaptation and that the two went hand-in-hand into the history books. (132)

In addition, Frick argues that Ten Nights in a Bar-Room was “credited with being as influential at disseminating the temperance message as its famous predecessor, The Drunkard” (136).

Just before the Civil War, the temperance message was superceded by the more urgent abolitionist struggle, but the factors that made the temperance movement vital and necessary during the first half of the nineteenth century were even more pertinent after
the civil war, for veterans joined the scores of men using alcohol on a regular basis; some to forget, and some as medicine to dull the pain of battle wounds. The temperance movement resurged, but was more localized and politicized. The three plays written for localized performance included in this study reflect these changes. The first is *The Fatal Glass* by James McCloskey. Frick states that the play was “successfully staged at the Brooklyn Park Theatre in 1872 and the Bowery two years later,” so it did have some success in New York, but does not rival *The Drunkard or Ten Nights in a Bar-Room* in popularity. This play interested me because of the cross section of influences and implications the text holds. James McCloskey is only credited with writing this one temperance play, but he blends influences from melodrama, and imagery from *The Drunkard* and *Ten Nights with dark visions of the ultimate fatal end to the alcoholic narrative. He also adds stage time to demonstrating the emotional aftermath of a drunkard’s actions on his wife. *The Fatal Glass* allows for the death from starvation and exposure of the protagonist’s wife and child, and for the drunkard to turn into a plotting murderer, but uses a Rip-Van-Winkle style plot devise to prevent that protagonist from a condemnation that would turn audiences away from identification with him.

The next play that fits into the non-Broadway temperance play category is *Three Years in a Man Trap* (1873). This play is also a dramatization of a novel by Timothy Shay Arthur. It was “arguably the darkest, most deterministic temperance drama ever written in America” according to John Frick. The play condemns rum drinkers, but saved the worst fates to those associated with the liquor trade. The earlier scenes of restoration and spiritual redemption that make up the dénouement found in other scripts are replaced in the final image in this play: a scene in which the dead daughter of Lloyd,
tavern owner, watches over his funeral from heaven, knowing he will go to hell for the life he has led. There is a character in the play who is restored to sobriety, but most of the characters associated with drinking die horrible deaths. And this restoration seems more a nod to conform to the melodramatic form than a critical part of the message the play is trying to get across. Rather than a hopeful message, telling men they can stop the horror before it is too late, this play seeks to drive home the terror of the outcome if they continue to dance with the devil—either personally or by way of trade association.

*On the Brink; or The Reclaimed Husband* (1878) was written by probably the most prolific of the temperance playwrights, Eliot McBride. According to Hixon and Hennessee in the *Nineteenth Century American Drama: A Finding Guide*, McBride wrote fifteen published temperance dramas. These publications included prop lists and suggestions for staging amateur productions, and seem to be marketed for production by temperance societies around the country. This play I included because it was by McBride, whose many plays were part of the marketing of temperance plays by publishers to these small groups that desired to put them on. McBride’s play also includes many of the characterizations we saw in the earlier plays, but he also shows the devastating effects that living with alcoholic husbands can have on women. His characters are seen as succumbing to alcoholism in part due to their own personal ambition and social climbing—an interesting message about staying happy within one’s lot in life.

Finally, I thought that if I am going to sweepingly articulate a stereotype that emerged from the nineteenth century about what alcoholism looked like in the eyes of that society, I ought to include representative depictions from outside the temperance movement. This seems necessary because I argue that the depiction was more far-
reaching and pervasive than just an image formed within a certain sector of society. Inclusion of non-temperance plays shows that the understanding of who an alcoholic was and what his story would likely be was agreed upon by a large proportion of nineteenth century society. This is of course prefaced by our agreement that Jeffrey Mason (quoted earlier about the nature of performance and endorsement of imagery) is correct in his assertion that America was performing America for herself, and by so doing refining and disseminating an ideology unique to America.

*Two Men of Sandy Bar* (1876) is the story of a father finding his prodigal son in the wilds of California where cultures mixed and fortunes were won and lost all with little intervention by government. It is also an intensive study of how alcoholism can be traced, like family appearance, to bloodlines. According to Arthur Hobson Quinn, author of *The History of the American Drama: Civil War to Present* (1927), *Two Men of Sandy Bar* was first presented at the Union Square Theatre, New York, August 28, 1876 (109). This play includes forceful evidence of the hereditary nature of alcoholism, and reveals an emerging understanding of attributes passed along from father to son, a counter-point to the melodramatic take that the external outside force of alcohol itself, or a generalized evil tempter embodied into a character for the sake of dramatic action was the initiator of alcoholic destruction. Nevertheless, the depiction of drunken behavior and characteristics of the alcoholic character do fit into the nineteenth century scheme of who an alcoholic man was and what his story was likely to turn out to be.

*Drifting Apart* (1888) was originally entitled *Mary, The Fisherman’s Daughter.* It was written by James A. Herne, who wrote *Margaret Flemming* two years later. *Drifting Apart* follows the classical structure of temperance drama more closely than *Two Men of*
Sandy Bar, but again, was not written by Herne as a temperance piece for a temperance audience. The play does embrace the classic temperance message, and uses a Rip-Van-Winkle “it was all a dream” device, similar to the one used in The Fatal Glass. By the time he wrote this play, the temperance message had been so widely viewed and digested, that its reemergence in this play written for Broadway, while not framed within a didactic setting (a temperance hall), contains much of the ideology of temperance reform found in the plays written to instigate social change, and so is evidence for the broad adaptation of the alcoholic character as a mainstay of American character types. The play also repeats the temperance message, ingrained as it had become in American storytelling.

This collection of plays is well suited for this project. They are drawn from different segments of theatrical production, and are intended for very different kinds of audiences, and yet all contain much of the same messaging about alcoholism, both as a personal trait, and as a family story.

I refer to the plays in this study both as melodramas and as temperance dramas. My labeling does not mean to imply a formal and rigorous set of attributes that place the plays within a well-defined genre. Rather, I mean that my use of the term melodrama refers to a theatrical form appealing to society with a state of mind that tends to be binary. My use of the term melodrama also indicates a theatrical form that uses as its primary dramatic force an emotional appeal toward the implementation of poetic justice. Conflict in these plays usually arises from a threatening external force (alcohol or evil temptation embodied in a character) and after escalation and near ruin, another external force (often a temperance advocate) rights the situation and the stability of the social order is restored. The characters in melodrama are what they appear to be, and are not often
psychologically complex characters seen in later realism, and yet there are themes about alcoholism that are explored in these plays that do break this mold. We see some of the tension between alcohol as an external force and personal responsibility for continued drinking emerge in these texts, as the people behind the temperance movement grappled with the realization that a simple pledge to swear off drinking was not as effective as the movement first advertised. The sanctity and stability of home and hearth cease being restored to all. Innocent victims also sometimes are shown to have some complicity in their fates. And so I cannot be strict in my use of the term “melodrama,” for these plays offer a complexity (to a certain extent) in the presentation of alcoholism as a problem. In an articulation of the genre found in David Grimstead’s *Melodrama Unveiled*, he describes melodrama as I understand it in this study:

The early nineteenth century’s use of its dramatic heritage from earlier eras suggested both the period’s intellectual peculiarities and their lineage. The motivations and dilemmas of those men who wrote for the stage were akin to those experienced by American artists in other areas. And the melodramatic form itself embodied much of this democratic society’s attitude toward morality and nature, its enthusiasm for democracy and domesticity, its tacit separation of the world into spheres of the practical and the transcendent, its desire to see ordinary lives taken seriously and yet charged with excitement, and its faith in and doubts about progress and providence. (ix)

Melodrama as a form used to promote didacticism is helpful if one wants simple solutions and sweeping reform, as the temperance movement sought. It stirs the emotions and keeps the discourse in the emotional realm. In reality, America continues to try to
negotiate the social problems created by alcoholism and addiction, and has still not found any simple solutions for the resulting negative effects on society. The term temperance drama refers to plays that were specifically written to spread the temperance message, but I have used the term rather more liberally in this study, including those two plays here that are about alcoholism, but were not written with the reform intent behind them. If these plays are written in order to determine the difference between good and evil forces, as most melodramas were, then it follows that while the alcoholic himself is often not condemned, the temperance drama casts a moral judgment about drinking that eventually became part of the legal code of the country, and certainly followed the depiction of alcoholism into the twentieth century.

This study seeks to examine and articulate the way alcoholism came to be seen in the imagination of nineteenth century society. As part of a movement that went far beyond theatrical presentation, temperance drama was still seminal in the formation of this imagery because of the power of theatrical depiction and the widespread use of theater as a technique for swaying social opinion. Because the melodramatic form frames the alcoholic struggle within a desire for good to triumph over evil forces, the frame for looking at alcoholism was necessarily moral. If the alcoholic character himself was not seen as evil, it is because there needed to be a redeemable hero, or else all fight against the destructive nature of alcoholism was futile, and men would not see themselves reflected in the depictions and therefore have no impetus to sign the pledge and reform. In the following chapters, a frame will be given to the temperance movement, and an analysis of how these plays repeated certain ideology and imagery, forming a widespread concept about the personality traits of a drunkard, and the inevitable outcomes of his
story. These concepts, when broadly held within a society, constitute the development of a stereotype. Once into the twentieth century they changed, but elements of that stereotype still continue to influence attitudes and legal responses to alcoholism, even to this day.

A Note on Texts

The primary source of five out of seven of the plays in this study come from a collection of nineteenth century plays preserved on microprint cards found in a collection belonging to the University of Colorado, Boulder. The original manuscripts can be found in different libraries across the country. In some cases, the original was a published manuscript, but in the case of *Drifting Apart*, the original manuscript is in an unpublished typewritten form. Each act in this play had its own separate reproduction in microprint card form, and each act also returns to page 1. In an attempt to direct the reader to the source as accurately as possible, I have cited this play giving the act and page number. MLA has no model for citing this kind of source, so my own citation is an attempt to direct the reader as clearly to the place of citation in the corresponding manuscript as possible.
CHAPTER ONE

Social and Political Temperance Reform and the
Theatrical Representation of a Moral Dilemma

The beginnings of temperance drama on stage in the United States can be pinpointed to a production of *The Drunkard* performed in Boston in 1844. But beyond this first dramatic representation of alcoholism on stage that became such a sensation, the movement itself had been taking root in religious communities, primarily in the northeast for over a decade. The ideology that drove the larger temperance movement formed the basis for the depictions of alcoholism found on stage for the remainder of the nineteenth century, so it is important to understand the greater temperance movement and American interactions with alcohol. Before setting out upon my own discussion of the depiction of alcoholism on the stage, it is important to acknowledge some of the studies about the greater history of alcohol use and the temperance movement that have been essential to my own work.

Much of the social and political history found in this chapter can be found in more detail in *Drinking in America: a History* by Mark Edward Lender and James Kirby Martin, *Battling Demon Rum* by Thomas R. Pegram, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* by W. J. Rohrbaugh, and *The Spirits of America: A Social History*
of Alcohol by Eric Burns. This study also owes a great debt to John W. Frick for the work in his book Theater, Culture and Temperance Reform in Nineteenth-Century America. The production history of many of the plays referenced in this study can be found in much greater depth and analysis in Frick’s book, and I am leaning heavily on his findings to support my own study, which would not be possible without his. In this chapter I will use the information I have learned from studying these books to impart the historical background that explains the world in which the stereotypes this study will establish came about. In Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement, Joseph R. Gusterfield argues that the temperance movement was from the beginning adopted by the middle class as a way to control the moral and ethical ideologies of the American society, directing values away from lower and working class norms. In other words, temperance was adopted as an indicator of a citizen’s place on the social ladder, and associated strongly with middle class success. Gusterfield noted that temperance was used very successfully as a symbol of middle class values, a struggle he termed “status politics.” His work is critical to understanding how and why the image of the alcoholic was crafted for the political forwarding of the middle class agenda during the nineteenth century. Altering American Consciousness: The History of Alcohol and Drug Use in the United States, 1800-2000 by Sarah W. Tracy and Caroline Jean Acker, and Alcoholism in America: From Reconstruction to Prohibition by Sarah W. Tracy are also critical to understanding the differing ways that the medical profession and society in general tried to define and cure alcoholism. My work owes a great deal to these scholars, and I am deeply thankful for the scholarly path they have paved before my own.
Given the nature of this study, it is ironic to note that the first theatrical presentation in the newly formed colonies that can be accounted for was performed in a tavern. In 1665, *Ye Bear and Ye Cubb* was accused of being blasphemous and profane, thus causing the local judge to order a second performance to be presented in court. Two hundred years later, the theater would be a place where the morally righteous would perform anti-liquor temperance dramas to convert the fallen inebriate to a state of sober grace. Still later in the nineteenth century, the stage would be used to drive social action and round up the political will to condemn the manufacturers and sellers of alcohol, and make their trade unlawful; a movement that culminated in the passage of Prohibition on October 28, 1919. In the intervening years, though, America saw much of the drunkard on stage, and our perceptions about who he was, what drove his actions, and what the inevitable consequences of his drinking would be, were well established in the American imagination. Thus, it was through these years that the characterization of the stereotypical American drunkard, always a man, came to live in our collective psyche.

... 

For the purposes of this study, I will be using the terms *middle class* and *working class* in specific ways. These terms will have very little to do with the literal income level of the people in these classes. Rather, when I speak of the middle class, I will mean the industrious, the educated, the group of men and women who created the concept of the
American dream. I am particularly concerned with the ideological constructs toward which this group consciously strove. What did being an American mean to them? The core of the answer is that they were hard working, religiously conservative, and primarily carriers of the Protestant ethic. The term Protestant ethic is more a set of values than an ideology adopted by any particular denomination, and Catholics, Puritans, Quakers are among the groups that also held these principles. These people wanted to make clear their separation from the working class; comprised for most of the nineteenth century of newly arrived immigrants, but also the uneducated hired help. The people of the middle class were the employers, and the working class was made up of laborers. It is essential to mark the difference for several reasons. The social attitudes and ethics that came from the founding fathers of the newly formed republic and were adopted by the middle class were put through great strains and vast changes during the following one hundred years. Waves and waves of immigrants arrived with their own sets of acceptable behavior and aspirations, and with each subsequent challenge to the national ideology, and each subsequent wave of assimilation into the middle class, the values that had been held up as critical to the middle class’ (and national) self-concept had to be reconceived. They had to fight back ideologically from the onslaught of differing sets of values. The people of the middle class believed that in this great nation, an individual could achieve anything if he put his mind and industry to it. The working class was increasingly viewed through a frame constructed by the middle class. The working class was what the middle class was not. The further into the nineteenth century we progressed, the more this was an essential stronghold in middle class ideology. Again, this is especially true as the population grew and was under greater social stresses. The middle class had to push back at encroaching
social changes in values in order to maintain its self-concept. Working classes often aspired to middle class status, and so the social signals that told the story of that transition were especially important in framing social status. A man’s adherence to temperance was one of the “status” frames that was adopted, especially in post-antebellum America, as a clear signal of social status. The distinction between the middle class and the working class as described here is the basis for Joseph R. Gusfield’s argument about the use of temperance as a symbolic indicator of class status, or as he terms it, “status politics.” He writes:

Because abstinence has been symbolic of a style of life, conflicts about drinking and non-drinking have assumed symbolic properties and hence affected the distribution of prestige in American society…We cannot understand the history of the Temperance movement without placing liquor, beer, and wine in the context of social classes, ethnic cultures, and differential styles of life. (25)

It is through Gusfield’s lens about the class uses of the image of the alcoholic that I will examine the questions about why the characterization is depicted in a certain light. This will help shape the frame in which the stereotype of the alcoholic emerged.

…

In this section of chapter 1, I will examine the social and political movements that lead to the very successful performance of the life of a drunkard on Broadway for the first time; a brief overview of this section of the chapter follows. The temperance movement first emerged in England in the late eighteenth century, and it produced crowd-pleasing entertainments. The popularity of the temperance movement in England was somewhat short lived compared to its almost century-and-a-half of influence in America. The
earliest signs of a temperance movement in the U. S. came in the form of medical concerns about the heavy use of alcohol, expressed in a tract written by Benjamin Rush. Rush’s writings had a heavy influence on the development of several early temperance societies (Lender and Martin 36-7). In the decade between 1840-1850, several events propelled an increase in public perception about the narrative of the drunkard’s life, and where drinking could lead. The Washingtonian Society was formed in 1840, both popularizing the concept of temperance and actually managing to help up to a million men to sober up. Public drunkenness or admission of problems with liquor by women was so taboo that any woman with a drinking problem would never seek help for she would be shunned. Because of various social and political tensions within the society, The Washingtonian Society fell apart, but not before it had influenced W. H. Smith, an actor and the stage manager of the Boston Museum’s theater. Smith is credited with staging a quasi-autobiographical play called *The Drunkard*, in which he played the title role. This play became the longest running and most popular play performed in the United States to that date, and did much to establish the first depiction of an alcoholic character in the theater that really sank into the public imagination. Following the popular run in Boston beginning in 1844, *The Drunkard* was produced in New York by none other than P. T. Barnum, where it gained such an overnight success that it was copied and produced in several different versions, and under several different names. By 1850, images of the typical drunkard’s life were firmly embedded in the public imagination, and, as we shall see in the next section of this chapter, that imagery was manipulated by the middle class to serve their own construction of American ideology.
Before the temperance movement’s reform message made it to the American stage in 1844, major portions of the evolution of the movement had already taken place. The movement originated in England, and had spread by the turn of the nineteenth century to our shores, ending only with the enactment of Prohibition in 1920. The temperance movement as it existed in England is outside the scope of this study. By 1830, many regional, and several national societies, which aimed to reform the drinking habits of Americans, had emerged across our young country. Several factors contributed to the growth of temperance sensibilities in America. The first two decades of the nineteenth century were characterized by an increase in the consumption of alcoholic beverages. The consumption during colonial times and during the first few decades after the end of the Revolutionary war would be considered, under our contemporary criteria, quite high and troublesome. In fact, the typical agrarian life included long days of physically difficult farming work during which breaks throughout the day included alcohol consumption.

While encouraging alcohol on the job seems more than a little foolhardy by modern standards, there was a clear rationale: labor both on the farms and in the towns was back-breaking, and timely jolts of beer, cider, or spirits helped deaden the pain. And even if someone drank too much on occasion, safety or productivity was seldom jeopardized as seriously as would be the case in today’s more interdependent workplace. At any rate, it is clear that normal daily alcohol use involved frequent drinking—and fairly heavy drinking as well for many colonials. (Lender and Martin 10)
Historically, consumption of alcohol was very high during the colonial period across all parts of the society. As Mark Edward Lender and James Kirby Martin describe in *Drinking in America*:

> Informed estimates suggest that by the 1790s an average American over fifteen years old drank just under six gallons of absolute alcohol each year. That represented some thirty-four gallons of beer and cider (about 3.4 gallons of absolute alcohol), slightly over five gallons of distilled liquors (2.3 gallons of absolute alcohol), and under a gallon of wine (possibly .10 gallons absolute)...Six gallons is a formidable amount. The comparable modern average is less than 2.9 gallons per capita. To put it starkly, America's colonists were serious drinkers. (11)

The general feeling about drinking was that it was beneficial and nutritious, especially fermented drinks, which had kept people from dying from water-born parasites and bacteria for thousands of years. Few people during the first half of the nineteenth century, even the temperance supporters, held negative views about the daily use of (predominantly) cider as the drink most often found at the dinner table, as we will see when we examine the first medical tract about alcohol consumption.

Through the revolutionary period, and into the early days of the republic, though, a desire to create an American national ideology that clearly separated the “virtuous” nature of America from a “corrupting” influence of Britain led to an ideology championed by Thomas Jefferson and John Adams which called for placing the common good over individual ambition and freedom. The sense of personal responsibility for the betterment of all formed the foundation of the anti-liquor movement. The perception that
the British were a corrupting influence came in part from the increased production and importation of rum to the colonies, creating an increased appetite for distilled liquor, and once the revolutionary war stopped the import of rum from the West Indies, Americans began to greatly increase production of their own home-grown distilled liquor—whiskey. Rum had been imported and made popular by the British, who controlled its manufacture and distribution. Made from sugar cane, rum has to be distilled on site; meaning the sugar cane cannot travel without serious degradation to its quality before it is distilled, and so it is expensive to import because liquid is heavy, and must be contained, and the additional weight of bottles or casks increases the cost of distribution. Once the Revolutionary war began, the colonies placed an embargo on the rum imported by the British. Whiskey, on the other hand, is made from corn. Corn can be stored for long time, and is easily distributed before it is distilled, making it convenient and inexpensive to distill whiskey wherever one wanted to. So the colonists, having no rum to consume because of the embargo, began to manufacture whiskey out of the corn they grew themselves. Whiskey then became identified as an American drink and was drunk not only because it was easy to manufacture, but also because it was not controlled by the British. Whiskey became a patriotic drink. The increase in appetite for liquor (spirituous liquor), as opposed to cider, beer and wine—in part attributed to patriotic as well as economic reasons—triggered early anti-liquor sentiment; both rum and whiskey have a much higher percentage of absolute alcohol than beer, wine or cider. From 1790 to 1830 this increase in the consumption of liquor initiated an increase in many of the social ills associated with drunkenness, such as the abandonment of families by husbands, and increased violence and criminal activities.
Early reactions to the negative results of increased drunkenness were initially reformatory. A self-consciousness about what kind of post-revolutionary nation would emerge in the early nineteenth century pitted the hard-working conservative values attributed to the early settlers of Anglican Protestant descent against settlers who came from less stridently religious and ascetic backgrounds. In the early decades of nation-building, much of the struggle for control over the values, direction and work ethic that would define the United States was framed by the struggle over alcohol use and abuse. Quakers and Methodists were among the early settlers for whom temperance tradition established a certain set of favorable expectations about religion, ethics, morals and other societal norms of the “original” society in the United States. This created a kind of class-warfare wherein the earliest and most firmly established residents of the United States could claim superior moral standing and class. The targets of their “war on morality” were the newer arrivals to the country, and starting with the first large waves of immigrants, the new populations of Europeans. The population of the United States grew by 300% between 1790 and 1830 (Pegram 4). The contemporary stereotypical association between the Irish and alcoholism came as a result of prejudices arising from the great migrations from Ireland in the 1850s, the 1880s, and the 1900s; thus our backward view may jump to this stereotype, but at the time, immigrants were still mostly British, Scottish and Welsh.

The notion that temperance was an “American way of life” was endorsed by the religious establishment. This concept ran counter to the strong devotion to individual freedom upon which the country was founded; freedom to drink or not as one chose individually. The struggle between these two oppositional ideologies is a unique
characteristic in the early attempts to forge the nation’s identity. While the temperance sensibility was strongest in New England, it by no means defined the way of life there. The earliest colonists who arrived enjoyed drinking alcohol as much as the later groups, but the need to separate themselves in the early nineteenth century from the newly arrived immigrant population changed their attitudes. It was only when society recognized the “identification of alcohol as a social problem” that the established social leaders’ attitudes toward alcohol acknowledged the abuse often wrought by excessive imbibing (Pegram 7).

The first prominent medical attention placed on the drinking habits of the new nation was in a tract by a Philadelphia physician named Benjamin Rush. Rush had signed the Declaration of Independence and had been the surgeon general of the continental army. His republican ideology aligned with Jefferson and Adams in that he believed that individual rights were secondary to the betterment of society. This meant that the personal choices of men that were detrimental to the social good, alcohol consumption included, should be set aside for the good of the newly formed nation. His attention to the increasing use and abuse of hard liquor (as opposed to beer and cider) resulted in a document that was groundbreaking in several ways. The first way that Rush revolutionized the way that excessive drinking was looked upon was that he:

was the first American to call chronic drunkenness a distinct disease, which gradually, but through progressively more serious stages, led drinkers to physical doom. In fact, he described an addiction process and specifically identified alcohol as the addictive agent. As Rush claimed, once an “appetite,” or “craving,” for spirits had become fixed in an individual, the victim was helpless to resist. In
these cases, drunkenness was no longer a vice or personal failing, for the imbibier had no more control over his drinking—the alcohol now controlled him. In Rush's view, the old colonial idea that drunkenness was the fault of the drinker was valid only in the early stages of the disease, when a tippler might still pull back; once addicted, even a saint would have a hard time controlling himself. (Lender and Martin 37)

Rush believed that the only chance to stave off the addictive properties of alcohol was to stop any kind of excessive drinking early, and to refrain from drinking “ardent spirits” altogether. Rush’s pamphlet, *An Inquiry into the Effect of Ardent Spirits on the Human Mind and Body*, which he first published in 1784, condemned the heavy use of alcohol against the common attitudes in post-revolutionary America. His tenacity and continued re-printing of his document led eventually to its being widely known and very influential within national temperance societies forty years after it first appeared.

In a later printing, Rush included a section he called a *Moral and Physical Thermometer*, subtitled *A Scale of the Progress of Temperance and Intemperance—Liquors with Effects to their Usual Orders*. The remarkable thing about this supplement to his treatise is its description of the manifestations that came from too much drinking, and how each progressively worse set of characteristics is associated with the intake of a particular liquor and amount. Rush describes the decline of the character traits of the afflicted man, thus codifying the behaviors and results affiliated with the stages of excessive drinking that he identified. This laid the groundwork for the establishment of the character type—typical character traits—of the man with the “chronic drunken disease,” now termed alcoholism (beginning early in the twentieth century). This is
important because the purpose of this study is to establish the stereotypical drunkard, as portrayed on the stage. Rush’s descriptions of the stages of the disease, or as he put them, the alcoholic milestones found on his “moral and physical thermometer” correlate

Fig. 1 Benjamin Rush’s Moral and Physical Thermometer (Lender and Martin 39)
(although there is no proof of direct influence) to the later stage depictions quite closely, especially the specific association of the form (type) the alcohol took and its resulting behaviors.

Benjamin Rush’s *Moral and Physical Thermometer* is a scale that goes from 70° above zero to 70° below. Zero acts as the line between temperate drinking and intemperate drinking. Different beverages, corresponding to different behaviors, states of being, and consequences are found at each ten-degree interval both above and below zero. The highest place on the scale, 70° above zero is associated with water, implying that this is the purest beverage available, and the farthest from intemperance. Next “down” the scale are milk and water, and then small beer.¹ These, Rush asserts, allow for “serenity of mind,” the maintenance of one’s reputation, a “long life” and “happiness.” It is interesting to note that other non-alcoholic beverage options do not appear on his scale, but that he includes milk. In descending order from there are Cider (40°), Wine (30°), Porter (20°), and Strong Beer (10°). Rush qualifies his endorsement of these by noting that “cheerfulness,” “strength” and “nourishment” are only the result of drinking these in small amounts and at mealtime. Rush implies that excessive drinking of Cider, Wine and Strong Beer could be the gateway to intemperance because he cautions their use in only small amounts, but maintains the idea that they are nutritious and therefore beneficial. This differs from the view we find in the latter part of the nineteenth century, when the consumption of any alcohol in any form is considered intemperate because it was then believed that even the smallest amount could trigger an appetite for more.

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¹ Small Beer is a home brew with only a very small percentage of alcohol, perhaps 1%-.5%, similar to 2/3 beer these days.
The line in the sand that Rush draws between temperance and intemperance is with the consumption of distilled liquor, even when mixed. Rush describes the consequences of drinking intemperately in three categories: Vices, Diseases, and Punishments. Below the zero degrees line come Punch (-10°), and Toddy and “Egg Rum” (-20°). Punch is the same as we know it today, rum mixed with fruit juices; a Toddy is a warm drink made with brandy, rum or whisky mixed with water or tea and sweetened with honey or sugar. Toddies were often prescribed as a remedy for a cold or the flu. The vices at the same level as punch and toddies are “idleness,” “gaming” and “peevishness;” the diseases are “sickness,” “tremors of the hands in the morning,” “puking” and “bloatedness;” and the punishments are “debt” and “jail.” To various degrees, within the narrative of the plays in this study, these symptoms appear soon after the subjects start drinking. The characters that will be analyzed in depth later in this study are portrayed as suffering immediate results from their seemingly innocent drinking of liquor. At -30° Grog—brandy and water—is placed. “Quarrelling and fighting” are the vices that come with drinking at this level, as well as “inflamed eyes,” “a red nose” and a “bloated face.” The punishments are “black eyes” (presumably from the fighting) and “rags.” The vices and punishments at this level are widely portrayed as common to the theatrical alcoholic character. The changes in the appearance of the costumes of the drunken character and his family are important clues for the audience about the loss of social status that comes at this level of drinking. Next down, at -40° are “flip and shrub”; “flip” is a drink made by pouring a shot of rum into a mug of beer that has been sweetened with pumpkin, molasses, and/or sugar, and then stirring it all up with a red-hot poker. “Shrub” is a combination of whiskey or brandy and vinegar with fruit juice, like “raspberry vinegar
shrub” (Hopkins). Rush put bitters infused in spirits and cordials at 
-50°; the vices are “lying and swearing”, diseases are “sore and swelled legs” and “jaundice” (a sure sign of cirrhosis of the liver), and the punishments are the “hospital” or “poor house.” Certainly the families of the inebriates were depicted as poor-house material. The bottom of the scale is reserved for drams, or shots, of gin brandy and rum, “taken day and night” or “mornings and throughout the day.” Vices at the -60° to -70° level are “stealing and swindling,” “perjury,” “burglary” and “murder.” Diseases are “pains in the hands,” “burning in the hands and feet,” “dropsy” (swelling of soft tissues due to the accumulation of excess water), “epilepsy” (seizures), “melancholy” (depression), “palsy” (paralysis, loss of sensation, loss of control of part of the body), “apoplexy” (stroke), “madness” and “despair.” Many of these symptoms occur in the plays depicting alcoholism. Madness takes the form of the delirium tremens, occurring because of withdrawal from long-term substantial alcohol use. Delirium tremens, or DTs, are characterized by a state in which the patient appears confused and not apparently recognizing his surroundings and is spontaneously producing evidence of his confusion and disorientation by muttering or shouting, with evidence of delusion or hallucination. In the temperance play the drunken character almost always sees hallucinations of snakes or serpents. The punishments for this lowest part of the scale are “Bridewell” (prison; from Bridewell prison in London), “state prison for life,” or “the gallows.” Since these are consequences from which redemption is difficult to stage, the primary protagonist does not sink to these depths, but in several of the plays in this study secondary, non-redeemed characters do suffer this fate. The critical thing to note about the scale is that Rush relates the progressive nature of alcoholism (meaning that the volume of alcohol
consumed and the consequences of that drinking always gets progressively worse), and the results always negatively affect the morality of the alcoholic. The portrayal of the progression of the disease makes for clear rising action in the plays. Rush’s assessments about the nature of alcoholism are critical milestones in the establishment of what an alcoholic looked like in the public imagination and on stage.

Through his writing, Benjamin Rush continued to work for the betterment of the new American society as he saw it. His anti-liquor medical study and polemic, he felt, was an attempt to repair the retreat of the social controls around alcohol consumption; controls that held excessive drinking at bay during the colonial period. He was alarmed that after the revolution men seemed to care less that society was held back from reaching beneficial potential for all because of drunkenness. “Allow drunkenness to flourish, Rush cautioned, with its attendant crime, degraded individuals, broken families, economic loss, and other disruptions, and the Revolution would have been fought in vain” (Lender and Martin 38). And the negative results of drinking had increased significantly. He ascribed this change predominantly to the switch from beer and cider, to whiskey, rum and gin as the favored alcohol consumed after the Revolution. During colonial times and the very early days after the Revolution, excesses in alcohol consumption were mitigated by strong controls by church, family and government regulation, but the tide of individual freedom and the expansion of diversity of the cultural origins of the residents of the United States changed the effectiveness of those early social controls. Communities lost the familial and social ties that make them especially close knit. In addition, the rapid expansion of cities also greatly changed the structure of the relationship between most workers and their work (and also their family lives, and their economic communities),
thus making it less favorable for a worker to take small doses of alcohol throughout their workday, less for the worker’s personal safety than for his productivity level.

In pre-industrial America, a predominantly agrarian society, men mostly worked for themselves, or worked as hired farm hands living on a family farm. The custom was for the owner of the farm to provide a worker with alcohol at mealtimes and on breaks during the day, ensuring a steady, if moderate, level of intoxication. Once the first great influx of immigrants was underway, men flocked to cities and worked for companies where they had little control over their own workday, nor much prospect for ownership. Drinking then became the workingman’s release and moved from a day-long custom to the after-work saloon. Alcohol provisions were no longer implicitly provided with employment, and as the owners of the factories began to notice how alcohol adversely affected productivity, the use of alcohol on the job became a point of struggle between workers and factory owners, contributing to (if only in principle) the early formation of unions—workers wanting the right to continue to drink on the job as had been the custom. The average workman, who had spent his early years working on a farm and “tippling” throughout the day, was stripped of this allowance when he moved to work in industry in a city. To him it must have seemed that a major right of manhood was now in the control of the factory management, as he had to confine his liquor consumption to evenings and leisure time. In addition, the strong desire for individual freedom embraced by the working class undermined the formal controls that might have come with any anti-liquor legislation attempting to manipulate the behavior of the working class outside the workplace, especially since this was now the only time the workman could drink as he willed. Later, this very quarrel was at issue during Prohibition.
Saloon culture and tavern culture radically changed the nature of men’s relationship to alcohol use; drinking became associated with a release from the duties of work and family. Alcohol was consumed away from the home, and away from the presence of wives and children. Any social control that came from their presence was not a part of the camaraderie the men found with each other in the tavern. As we will see, the alcoholic character is never depicted as starting down the path to alcoholism because of at-home drinking; the tavern is always the place where his drinking habits begin. Men developed rituals around drinking that had the effect of bringing them closer together; “treating,” or taking turns buying rounds, was an effective way for men to establish companionship and the appearance of financial equality with their drinking associates. Tavern culture had a greater attraction than just the act of drinking because of the nature of the relationships that could be found there, and it encouraged men to stay out and away from home. When work shifted away from the family farm, it tended to make separate men’s and women’s lives and spheres of influence. Tavern culture further separated the worlds in which men and women operated. This social development, which sequestered men’s lives and women’s lives is especially important to this study for two reasons. The first is the way the alcoholic character’s family fares because of his alcoholism, and how women are depicted as the faithful victims of the economic insecurity resulting from alcoholism. Secondly, the lack of any agency by the wife to the influence of the alcoholic to stop drinking had a paradoxical message. On the one hand, women were thought of as the carriers of virtue in the home, the person who could influence the morals of the family, but on the other hand, the wives of alcoholics were portrayed as unable to change their husband’s behavior, regardless of pleading and faith, and so were the socio-
economic victims of their husband’s drinking in addition to being the victims of his violence. This study will explore in depth the implications of these concepts in chapter 5, but suffice it to say that once the problems of excessive drinking had moved to the public sphere because of tavern culture, the “pillars of society” were drawn to social and religious movements that tried to stop the trend of increased drinking.

A surge in Evangelical religious revivals, referred to as the Second Great Awakening, started to become popular throughout the rural parts of the north. Between 1795 and 1837, but peaking during the 1820’s, these gatherings contributed to the establishment of religiously-based temperance societies that aimed to reform the drinking habits in America. Mostly the targets of these early reform movements were men drinking hard liquor. Like Benjamin Rush, the reformers found no fault with the use of cider and other fermented drinks, which were still consumed regularly at mealtimes. The first wave of temperance-focused societies used what has been termed “moral suasion” as their primary reform tool. “Moral suasion” refers to an emotional appeal directed at an individual’s conscience and moral compass, and is characterized by focusing on changing the social ills brought about by excessive drinking by reforming the individual, one drunkard at a time. This stands in contrast to the tactics (and the message found in post Civil War temperance plays) that dominated the latter part of the nineteenth century which were motivated by a desire to change public policy, and less concerned with the salvation of the individual’s soul.

The Massachusetts Society for the Suppression of Intemperance was formed by mostly affluent members of Congregational and Unitarian Churches in 1813. According to Thomas R. Pegram, the members paid annual dues of two dollars and membership was


exclusive. He describes the society as “an attempt by an embattled elite to protect public virtue from the corruption of popular intemperance” (15). This group was small, and did not have the populist appeal to force much in the way of political or social change, but it was the first sign that the struggle over alcohol use in America was not only framed as a moral issue, but also pitted the middle and upper-middle classes against the working class.

The American Temperance Society was the first national organization dedicated to the temperance cause. Formed in 1826 under the name The American Society for the Promotion of Temperance, this group based its platform on the writings of Benjamin Rush. The ATS did not advocate for teetotalism (total abstinence from alcohol consumption), but rather against the use of hard liquor. The leadership of the organization was made up of “socially prominent clergy and laymen, whose proclaimed purpose was the reformation of the nation under the guidance of ‘holy men’ who would ‘induce all temperate people to continue temperance’ through abstinence from ardent spirits” (Lender and Martin 68). Rush’s writings “became movement gospel (he would eventually be known as the ‘Father of Temperance’)” (Lender and Marin 68). Through the distribution of pamphlets and appearances on a lecture circuit, the ATS did inspire more than two hundred local chapters to form. Although still small in absolute membership, the ATS marked the beginning of a national movement.

Lyman Beecher, an evangelical preacher from Connecticut, was the first prominent voice for total abstinence in the temperance movement. Until his Six Sermons on Intemperance, which were immediately published in pamphlet form, the temperance message had been against “ardent spirits,” but Beecher’s arguments changed the
emphasis of the movement. His premise was based on the idea that alcohol itself had an overpowering addictive quality, and that even moderate drinking could trigger an inescapable craving for liquor, and so inevitable ruin. He thought that “people simply could not tell when they had crossed the line from moderate use to inebriety” and that the relative “safety” of beer, wine and cider was a dangerous illusion—that alcohol was alcohol no matter what form it came in (Lender and Martin 69). He also argued for controls on the liquor industry. Beecher’s influence began to change the nature of temperance discourse, and soon most temperance societies agreed that less was better than more when it came to any drinking, and that abstinence was the prudent course of action given any signs of trouble with alcohol.

The first widespread, and by all accounts, extremely effective temperance society was called the Washingtonian Society. Formed in Baltimore in 1840 by a few men who sought to share their successful abstinence and hopeful futures, the society was characterized by newly sober men giving personal public testimonials in front of a gathering of other men—society members and new recruits. The dramatic accounts of transformation based on abstinence that made up the gathering’s narratives culminated in an emotional appeal to those who had not yet sworn off liquor, an appeal to come to the front of the hall and sign “the pledge.” From its beginning, the Washingtonian Society set itself apart from the previous temperance societies. The membership was made up of more working class men than the other groups to that point.

Immigration brought new generations of drunkards to American cities and the working classes became more prominent and visible, the goals of some temperance proponents actively shifted from preserving the temperate middle
class to reforming the intemperate working classes…becoming for the first time open to those who most needed it: diehard drunkards. (Frick 32)

The tone in Washingtonian Society gatherings was that of peers talking to peers, rather than the “talking down to” that was more likely found in the sermons of the evangelists and the middle class New Englanders that formed the core of the earlier temperance societies. The understanding offered by the men who had been drunkards themselves, and the hope of a solution that appeared to come from another man who had wrestled with the same difficulty was far more effective at turning the intemperate toward sobriety. The lack of widespread appeal in the earlier temperance movements is probably in part because of the distance created by the “fire and brimstone” judgmental approach to reform that marked the style of the evangelicals. According to Thomas R. Pegram, whose book *Battling Demon Rum* examines the close relationship between the temperance movement, alcohol consumption, and the way politics was conducted in nineteenth century America, the Washingtonian Society, with its non-judgmental appeal, grew in its first year to membership of approximately 200,000. By 1843, he says, the membership had skyrocketed to over one million members who had sworn off liquor (29).

Washingtonians met three or four times each week. The meetings were well suited to provide a substitute for the fraternity and entertainment found in tavern culture. “Washingtonians provided amusements and activities to wean the pledge-takers from taverns. Their meetings were sometimes raucous affair, with minstrel acts, comic songs, and jokes bandied around in the language of the streets” (Pegram 29). Earlier temperance societies seem to have been marked by the gravity of intemperance and a humorless piety. Clearly, the Washingtonian Society was a departure from the formality of earlier
groups, thus making the concept of temperate living more appealing and generating a temperate place of amusement for working class families, (although it should be noted that the Washingtonian membership was made up from men of all classes, and wealthy benefactors joined the ranks to recruit drunken men from the streets.) The main attraction of each gathering, usually the high point of the evening, was the first-person narrative of a Washingtonian’s story, an account of how he came to be a member. “[T]he intemperate were addressed directly and in person, not simply provided with tracts to read on their own…” (Frick 32). These speeches had the same magical quality of “liveness” that so many have argued is central to the theatrical experience. This personal account was followed directly by an appeal to those willing to now take a pledge of abstinence to come forward.

The structure of the emotional appeal followed by a pledge-signing ceremony was not unique to the Washingtonian Society, but two other characteristics of the society were. The first is that mostly the appeals to drunkards to sign the pledge were made by ex-problem drinkers themselves rather than preachers or other men who appeared to hold a moral high-ground. The second was that this society was non-denominational, not affiliated with any particular church or doctrine, and (for the time) quite secular. As Thomas Pegram noted, “The centerpiece of the Washingtonian meeting was the ‘experience speech’ in which a reformed drinker discussed frankly and vividly his own struggle with alcohol” (29). As you might imagine, these narratives were highly dramatic and were structured around a climactic personal perepetia, or turning point, in the lives of these men. Their stories followed a typical melodramatic plot structure, and the popularity of the Washingtonian Society coupled with the personal story led to a broad
public experiencing of these accounts. Clearly there was something very compelling about the personal stories of these men, and once they were accepted as appropriate within the context of an evening of entertainment, the transition to making a play about them and staging it followed quickly.

Women continued to be ostracized socially if there was any indication that they had a problem with alcohol. Public admission was tantamount to being made pariah, and so we do not see any women within the ranks of The Washingtonians. Later in the nineteenth century, women would take a leading role in political agitation to legislate controls on alcohol consumption when the Women’s Christian Temperance Union was formed.

But some of the unique attributes of the Washingtonian Society, like the mixing of all kind of people and the heavy focus on replacing tavern culture, generated its downfall. The well-established temperance societies had contributed financially to the Washingtonians when it seemed that they had found a way to treat chronic intemperance, but soon afterward, the middle class, often religious, leaders who had supported the Washingtonians took issue with the society’s conduct. They objected to the general tone of the recreational activities, drawing on the old argument that theatrical entertainments were a place for the cultivation of sin, and subscribing to the broad anti-theatrical prejudice that has permeated association with the theater for centuries. They also objected to the irreligious nature of the society, since the Washingtonians had no specific religious affiliations, and finding the “irreverence” of the gatherings (as they contained dancing and entertainment) an affront to their values. The Washingtonians had used heavy advertising and promotion to grow their Society, but had also become embroiled in
political debates that had nothing to do with temperance. Probably the issue that stands out the most is abolition. It is likely that some of the Washingtonian members became disillusioned about the message of temperance, or thought to themselves that they were personally pro-temperance because they had trouble with alcohol, but they didn’t see how a stance on abolition had anything to do with their continued sobriety. Beyond the political involvement, another factor in the dissolution of the Washingtonians had to do with the tension between the very different kinds of people that the Society attracted. The more conservative and reserved members of the early temperance movements (the Massachusetts Society for the Suppression of Intemperance and the American Temperance Society) had continued discomfort with the behavior at the gatherings. But more to the point, the differences between the old guard temperance societies and the Washingtonians were based on class. The proper and reverent middle class supporters of temperance had successfully forged a new temperate standard for middle class conduct, and raucous entertainment was not part of it. Drinking at work and at home had become the exception rather than the norm for the middle class and sobriety also meant seriousness of purpose and impatience for activities that seemed to waste time and energy that could be spent working.

The Washingtonians, having placed much of their energy toward working class recruitment, were seen as not conforming to the proper enactment of temperate living, and so the middle class supporters broke away. Also an economic period of growth began in 1843, greatly increasing working class employment prospects, which lessened the real destitution and depression in which some of the families of the working class drinking men found themselves. Once the Washingtonians fell apart, one of the major offshoots of
the remnants was an organization called the Sons of Temperance. (Pearl Street in Boulder, Colorado has a Templar’s Hall that dates back to this time.) The Washingtonians slowly disintegrated along class and religious lines, having only had a loose structure to begin with, and by 1847 few groups were meeting on a regular basis anymore.

Some of the factions that came out of the Washingtonian’s split held ideological views that preview the direction the struggle for temperance reform would take in the future. Just as many former Washingtonians fell back to drinking as joined other temperance groups when the Society dissolved. Among the remaining temperance groups, there was a sense that the attempts at social reform through “moral suasion” were not producing the widespread social change that these groups sought. It was thought that the good of appeal to the individual had run its course, but that the “weakness” of the individual made for an unstable convert and that often the drunkard, after a period of sobriety, would return to drinking. The focus of the movement then turned toward the power of legislation, as I will discuss in chapter 2.²

The timing of the first well-known American temperance drama does not seem to be an accident. The Drunkard, or The Fallen Saved, by W. H. Smith, premiered at the

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² Many people, and in particular, members of Alcoholics Anonymous, consider the Washingtonian Society the forerunner to the modern recovery movement. Some of the same characteristics that made it so unique during its own time are the traits that make Alcoholics Anonymous unique today. The first of these would be the dedication to peer on peer work, or if you will, counseling; one member helping another by sharing his/her own personal experiences. A.A. is also non-denominational, and does not have any political or institutional affiliations. In the book Not-God, a History of Alcoholics Anonymous, Earnst Kurtz asserts that Bill Wilson, one of the founders of A.A., “listed four flaws that had led to the demise of the Washingtonians: ‘Overdone self-advertising—exhibitionism’; ‘Couldn’t learn from others and became competitive, instead of cooperative with other organizations in their field’; ‘The original strong and simple group purpose [the reclamation of drunkards] was thus [by prohibition zealotry] dissipated in fruitless controversy and divergent aims’; and ‘Refusal to stick to their original purpose and so refrain from fighting anybody’” (116-7). A.A. took the lessons that emerged out of the failed Washingtonian Society and made sure they wouldn’t go down the same path.
Boston Museum in 1844. The widespread influence of the Washingtonians ensured that “most urban dwelling Americans would have been familiar with the temperance issue, the pledge of abstinence, and the threats to family harmony that alcoholism engendered” (Richards 243). The issue was also explored through many different media; books, lectures, pamphlets and songs all spoke of the evils of excessive drinking. “The only mass medium yet to be tapped fully was the stage” (Richards 243).

The treatment of a topic that had such strong implications about morality and social self-reflection about the struggles for American self-definition (and more specifically middle-class self-definition) on the stage, in the theater (a place of such ill repute), did much to transform the theater’s reputation. John Frick argues that *The Drunkard* was seminal in changing American attitudes about the theater in general. “*The Drunkard* contributed significantly to the transformation of temperance narratives from the raw, unmediated emotionalism of the Washingtonian experience speech to the aesthetic realm, a necessary step if the temperance imperative were to reach beyond the Washingtonian hall and appeal to a more middle-class audience” (123). Initially, the alcoholic character was portrayed as an upstanding middle class citizen who fell into excessive drinking due to an external pressure, rather than some in-born moral failing or ethnic or class based trait. This made the story of *The Drunkard* appealing to a middle class audience, and launched the popularity of “moral instruction” as entertainment, later brought to its height by P. T. Barnum.

According to Jeffrey H. Richards, W. H. Smith was an accomplished actor, having left his home in Scotland at age 14. By 1828, he was in Boston, where he ended up working as the stage manager for Moses Kimball’s Boston Museum Theater (243). In
addition to authoring *The Drunkard*, Smith was the first actor to play the eponymous role of Edward Middleton. Scholars agree that it seems likely that *The Drunkard* was written, at least in part, as an autobiographical treatment of his own struggles with alcohol and his conversion experience that brought him to sobriety. “[H]is appearance as Middleton, apparently, had the force of someone who was publicly confessing to having been afflicted with alcoholism himself” (Richards 244). So it seems that W. H. Smith’s appearance on the stage bore some resemblance to the evenings at the Washingtonian Society. Because his performance was likely based on his own experiences, he could put into his role the kind of enthusiasm and fervor found in the confessionalists that had been used to get men to take “the pledge.” At the Boston Museum, *The Drunkard* was performed more than 100 times, which was a record in the United States at that time. Obviously, audiences were open to the message of *The Drunkard*, but they also enjoyed the theatricality of the play. John Frick describes W. H. Smith’s role in writing and performing *The Drunkard* this way:

[T]he stage manager was a “hard drinking man who signed the pledge of total abstinence” and thereafter dedicated himself to reforming others. In [actor Harry] Watkins’ opinion, Smith was simply translating his own experience to the stage and was portraying himself when he played Middleton. Considering that the Washingtonians were firmly established in Boston by 1841 and their temperance “message” and methods of canvassing the ranks of known drunkards had literally swept through the city by the end of that year, it is likely that Smith had encountered their spokesmen and was “dry” by the time he assumed the position at the Boston Museum in 1842. (115-6)
Despite the fact that W.H. Smith is likely to have based his portrayal of Edward Middleton on his own life experiences, the character he created was still very much a melodramatic hero, and his actions throughout the course of the play met all of the markers, and, in fact, established many traits found in the stereotypical drunkard’s story.

Briefly, *The Drunkard* tells the story of an upstanding and educated young man, Edward Middleton, who is tricked and lured into drunken despair and ruin by Lawyer Cribbs. Cribbs is driven by revenge and greed to pay back insults from long ago, and steal from his perceived enemies. In the end, Middleton is redeemed with the help of a temperate benefactor, reunited with his long suffering, faith-filled wife and child, and Cribbs is caught and brought to justice. The play is true to melodramatic form, and none of the characters show much depth, although, the stages of alcoholism, as they were perceived in the 1840’s, were portrayed in some depth. The play has specific scenes dedicated to exhibiting each stage. The structure of these scenes and the characterization in the play will be examined in the next chapters.

*The Drunkard* could be described as a direct descendent of Douglas Jerrold’s play *Fifteen Years of a Drunkard’s Life*, which played in London at the Royal Coburg Theater (later the Old Vic) in 1828. *Fifteen Years* is described by Frank Rahill in *The World of Melodrama* this way: “Jerrold’s hero, Vernon, has a devoted wife, and angel-child, and a false friend. This villain, Glanville, is the miscreant who, with devilish subtlety, lures Vernon to his destruction, chiefly by getting him drunk and swindling him” (240). The play bears a close resemblance to *The Drunkard* and can be traced back to a novel by T. S. Arthur, an American “Sunday school novelist,” (Rahill 246) and (later) author of a series of short stories called *Six Nights with the Washingtonians*. Arthur also wrote the
novel version of *Ten Nights in a Bar-Room*, another one of the plays included in this study. Temperance drama had become popular in England in the 1820s and the general narrative and character types did not change when they were introduced in Boston. Rahill notes, “Many of the British dipsomania\(^3\) plays were given in the United States, and their popularity inspired a vigorous native growth” (241). The popularity of these plays, though, fell off in England after a few decades, but remained a staple of American melodrama for the remainder of the nineteenth century, and were part of a much greater and more forceful social and political movement.

In his book *Theater, Culture and Temperance Reform in Nineteenth Century America*, research that is critical to this study, James Frick gives a detailed production history of *The Drunkard*. I will give an annotated version of his work here. *The Drunkard* opened at the Boston Museum in February of 1844. As indicated above, the public had been primed for this play by the Washingtonian movement, and by various other temperance organizations popular in New England. Although sole authorship of the play is ascribed to W. H. Smith, it may be that Moses Kimball, proprietor of the Boston Museum either was given or commissioned a version of the play that was considered unstageworthy before Smith staged it. If this is true, then W. H. Smith did much of the work to transform the script into a compelling play, both through rewriting and through his own acting prowess. The person most often named as the anonymous co-author of the play is the Rev. John Pierpoint. Pierpoint was a Unitarian Minister who was well-known and outspoken about many of the social reform concerns circulating within New England society, but he was also known as a poet and had an affinity for the theater. In

\(^3\) Dipsomania is another term for alcoholism, used primarily from the 1870’s through 1910s. The use of this word use will be examined further in chapter 2.
the eyes of the more conservative factions of Boston society, this made him unfit to
preach the word of God because artists were known to be less strictly reverent to church
doctrines than the righteous. In any case, during the years following the opening of *The
Drunkard*, Pierpoint’s own congregation tried to have him thrown out of the church
(unsuccessfully) in part because of his artistic bent and associations.

Scholars differ in their opinions about *The Drunkard*’s place in temperance
Jeffrey Mason indicates that his research found no evidence that *The Drunkard* was
adopted by the temperance reform movement.

*The movement scorned the plays and relegated them, through resolute neglect,
to a marginal position…*[Even] *The Drunkard; or, The Fallen Saved* (1844), is
notable by its absence from mainstream temperance commentary. There was even
hostility from those whose cause the plays purported to support.* (61)

This likely reflects the anti-theatrical attitudes of elite temperance advocates that
contributed to the downfall of the Washingtonians. On the other hand, John Frick
indicates in his research that there were close ties between temperance reform and
temperance entertainments, and although he does not say so directly, it may be that in the
years just after the successful run in Boston, *The Drunkard* played a role in some
performances tied to the temperance movement.

*Temperance entertainments proved the ideal means of communicating the
temperance message of abstinence and hope to a mass audience. Using forms
appropriated from the commercial stage and the bars themselves, nineteenth-
century reformers created a network of entertainments that not only legitimated
the emergent middle-class life-style based upon self-control and self-denial, but disseminated this ideology in a language that was engaging, attractive and accessible to “the people.” (77)

Whether The Drunkard toured New England in the late 1840’s in unknown, but the temperance message was about to move to mainstream entertainment, to Broadway in fact, where the image of the drunkard would become lodged in the public’s eye, and would change the middle class view of the theater forever.

We often think of P. T. Barnum of a man of excess and extravagance. The man who lived by the notion that there was a “sucker born every minute” is the very man who brought temperance entertainment to Broadway. In hindsight, he seems an ironic figure to be the man who introduced New York to the ideology of middle class moderation. In Theater, Culture and Temperance Reform, Frick writes about Barnum’s own conversion from a drinker to a teetotaler. He says that Barnum had become concerned about his own drinking, that he found he was drinking a full bottle of champagne every day, and that he could not work in the afternoons because of it. Barnum, with the encouragement of his wife (stereotypically enacting her role as the carrier of household virtue), and after hearing a temperance speech directed at moderate drinkers by the Rev. E. H. Chapin, gave up drinking somewhere around 1848, and signed the pledge of abstinence. At about the same time, he undertook a total renovation of the theater in his American Museum, converting it from a small poorly designed space, to a large 3000-seat proscenium style theater that he named a “moral lecture room” (113). During this period, it was just as common to have theaters inside larger entertainment venues as to have theaters unaffiliated with any other attraction. Thus, Kimball’s Boston Museum and Barnum’s
American Museum were typical locations for theatrical pieces, although to lure the proper middle class, these plays were often framed as moral lectures, or moral education, and shared the entertainment draw with other morally instructive exhibits, thus attracting audiences who might not otherwise consider going to the theater.

In the summer of 1850, Barnum opened his new theater with the New York premier of *The Drunkard*. Even before opening, the play had attracted substantial attention and was drawing large crowds. The July 13, 1850 publication of *The Spirit of the Times* noted “The Drunkard which has been put upon the stage here most efficiently, and has created a great sensation, continues to be the principal entertainment of the evening...People flock in large numbers to witness the representation of this moral drama” (qtd. in Frick 127). Frick notes that within a week of opening, the play had been re-created in several other New York theaters; in an era before copyright law would keep it from happening, *The Drunkard* was replicated around the city, one of the copies renamed *One Glass More*. Barnum also added to the other exhibits in his museum temperance-friendly displays, which made the proper middle class, somewhat skittish about attending the theater and exhibits at a museum like Barnum’s American Museum, more comfortable about attending a play presented in a Moral Lecture Room, and in so doing, institutionalized the entertainment goals of the Washingtonians.

Even if Barnum’s inclusion in his museum of materials of high moral standing came from a genuine desire to spread a temperance message, the results were very profitable. Barnum became the quintessential “moral entrepreneur,” a concept labeled by Howard Becker. According to Frick, Becker’s Moral Entrepreneur is:
...a man who, having discovered the commercial value of decency, believes that entertainment and morality are highly compatible and, as a result, actively promotes his moral views through artistic means. As a tactical approach, the moral entrepreneur “master[s] and [then exploits] a rhetoric of cultural refinement and moral elevation to legitimate a new kind of theatre” and then sets out to elevate the morals of the subordinate class by eliminating or at least publicly suppressing those lower-class ideas and behaviors which he deems annoying, wasteful, immoral or even dangerous. To do so, he capitalizes upon existing middle-class precepts that emphasize the development of self-discipline as the means to social progress, which, in turn, justifies his regarding himself as rational and civilized while categorizing the lower classes as emotional, “barbarian,” uncontrollable and in need of moral education. (120, Becker qtd in Frick)

In other words, the Moral Entrepreneur is a person who is taking advantage of the struggle between the middle and working classes defined by Gusfield’s idea of “status politics,”—the desire by the middle class to define the moral direction of the country, and by so doing, control the class-defining behaviors between middle and working class people. He is a man who inserts himself into the struggle, and appeals to the middle class’ group desire to see themselves and their world-view portrayed as righteous, reflected in the product (in this case entertainment) he offers. Terry Eagleton expands:

[T]he aesthetic offer[ed] the middle class a superbly versatile model of their political aspirations, exemplifying new forms of autonomy and self-determination, transforming the relations between law and desire, morality and
knowledge, recasting the links between individual and totality, and revising social relations on the basis of custom, affection and sympathy. (qtd. in Frick 123-4) Melodrama offered the perfect vehicle for American self-definition because of the clear delineation between good and bad characters, and the lack of moral ambiguity in the message.

In addition to making a good deal of money through the forwarding of the temperance message, Barnum himself was out on the lecture circuit winning over converts to the temperance cause. Barnum toured throughout Connecticut, and spoke in New York and Philadelphia at his own expense in order to warn of the dangers of intemperance. He even had his own teetotal pledge made up for men to sign at the conclusion of his lectures and performances of The Drunkard, or other temperance plays at the American Museum. For the rest of his career, Barnum stayed abstinent from alcohol, and continued to be a fierce advocate of the temperance cause, even switching his long-term political affiliation away from the Democrats when he found that they were not supportive of temperance reform.
By 1860, *The Drunkard* had moved away from the urban theatrical enters and was more likely found touring rural areas, or in theaters on the outskirts of the city. “By the time of its ‘passing,’ however *The Drunkard* had done more than any other play, with the
possible exception of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, to legitimize the theatre in the eyes of respectable Americans” (Frick 127).

The early temperance movement and the institution of the theater were seemingly at odds with each other in the early part of the nineteenth century. Benjamin Rush introduced a series of stages in the progression of alcoholism in his treatises in the late eighteenth century, which were published and widely distributed. And then several developments centered in the decade from 1840-1850 placed the depiction of the alcoholic character squarely in the center of the middle class awareness. The Washingtonian Society, through their appeal to the working classes, and in an attempt to provide an adequate substitute for tavern culture, introduced entertainment to the temperance-minded gathering. The Aristotelian structure of the ‘experience speech,’ coupled with other theatrical forms at their gatherings resulted in the ideal conditions for the successful debut of *The Drunkard*. In addition, W.H. Smith’s own extensive experience as an actor and stage manager and his own drinking history made his dramatic rendition of the alcoholic life stage worthy and a great theatrical success. Then P. T. Barnum opened his moral lecture room with *The Drunkard*, which was an instant success in New York. Barnum’s actions set up the prototype of the “moral entrepreneur,” who profited off of the middle class struggle for the right to determine the moral direction of the country, and determine the ideological concept of “American.”

In the early nineteenth century, attempts at social change were focused on an emotional or moral appeal to the individual alcoholic, a tactic called “moral suasion.” This approach was used by temperance societies, both through preachers and through the “experience speech” made famous during the years of the Washingtonians. But none of
these personal appeals held the emotional impact found in the form of melodrama, and
the depiction of the alcoholic character as an essentially good man who had been led
astray by a rum-wielding villain converted many men to the temperance cause. But many
of those men soon fell back to drinking after taking the pledge, and the leaders of the
temperance movement began to feel as if moral suasion had gone as far as it would go in
its usefulness in making sweeping changes to society. In the second half of the nineteenth
century, the temperance cause became much more focused on political action. In
addition, the middle class was working harder than ever to stem the tide of social change
that was coming with increasing immigration, and in so doing, made use of the depiction
of the alcoholic as an image that could be projected upon the working and immigrant
class.
CHAPTER TWO

The Temperance Movement in the Latter Half of the Nineteenth Century

The early contributions of temperance reform did much to change the drinking habits of early America. By 1850, average consumption dropped from approximately just over seven gallons of absolute alcohol per capita to just over three gallons, a drastic reduction in usage. This resulted in a (temporary) reduction in the size of the liquor trade, often referred to as “the traffic.” The swearing off from drinking liquor by approximately two million individuals led to the closing of four thousand distilleries (Lender and Martin 71). During the 1850’s and onward to the end of the nineteenth century, the social, economic, medical and political influences which contributed to the temperance discourse became much more convoluted than they had been in the first half of the nineteenth century. This complexity in the relationships between the social and political factors, and how those forces were seen in the continued use of theater to further the cause of temperance is difficult to weave into a continuous single narrative. In this chapter, I will discuss the many forces that contributed to the continuing development and codification of the alcoholic character by more formally separating the subjects into subheadings.
The Temperance Movement Changes Tactics:
From Moral Suasion to Political Action

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the temperance movement had evolved into one of the most popular of many reform movements that developed during that period. While the spirit of reform was in the air, and many causes received widespread support, the temperance cause sustained its place in the forefront of socially conscious mobilizations. Aside from the temperance movement some of the other causes that were part of the larger reform-oriented consciousness of the American public were abolition, education, religious orthodoxy, women’s rights, elimination of profanity, and mental health. This social motivation for widespread reform in many ways defined the American experience before the civil war, and was essentially motivated by a humanistic impulse, a remnant of the American Revolution. In the years leading up to the Civil War, the temperance movement was eclipsed and diluted by the cause for abolition, and the growing tensions between the north and the south. From the late 1850’s through the late 1860’s, the urgency of the slavery issue forced the temperance cause to the back burner until after the Civil War. In addition, both the Union and the Confederate armies returned to the practice of issuing daily rations that included whiskey, and the use of alcohol in surgery and other medical applications undercut cries for abstinence. In a play we will examine later, *Three Years in a Man Trap*, one character who is portrayed as the worst kind of low-life bum; a man willing to steal the clothing off the back of a little girl for whiskey, uses Gettysburg references to get other men and veterans to buy him drinks, claiming he lost his arm in the war (a lie). In this play, a drinking man references fighting
in the Civil War and even though that sentiment is exploited by this character, the reference is not treated as extraordinary; rather, there is no negative cast about the idea of soldiers drinking per se. The judgment within the play lies in his deception about it, and about drinking in general, rather than directed at soldiers drinking.

After the Civil War, the country saw an increase in the drinking habits of many of the men who had fought in that war. Since the temperance cause had temporarily lost focus, and the after effects of the war were devastating to many of the survivors (it being a particularly brutal and bloody war, with a greater percentage of soldiers lost than any other war in American history), it is no great surprise that there was an increase in drinking, both for medicinal use as a pain killer, and to relieve emotional scars left from the war. This was the first increase in alcohol use since the swell in alcohol consumption that peaked in the 1820’s, and it reignited the temperance cause—which had never gone away, but whose proponents had lost focus on temperance as the major cause of social problems, focusing on the anti-slavery cause instead. When the temperance movement regained its momentum, the concerns and ideas about how to solve the alcoholism problem started to shift. The “moral suasion” technique, which had been the major tactic employed by the temperance movement to this point, focused on changing the individual’s behavior. The individual drinker sometimes would and sometimes would not successfully sober up, and this unpredictability became increasingly less tolerable for the temperance reformers. The movement’s objectives moved more deliberately into the political arena, and the problem became focused on the addictive qualities of alcohol itself.
Temperance reformers had done much in the early part of the nineteenth century to reduce alcohol use. They had been very successful at cutting almost in half the average per capita alcohol intake from its levels in the 1820s, but their perfect goal of total elimination of alcohol’s influence on society had not been achieved to that point. They found that their efforts reduced individual drinking by a certain percentage, but regardless of increased reform fervor, alcohol consumption did not further decrease. When the energy they poured into reforming the individual alcoholic had reached this threshold of diminishing returns, the proponents of the temperance movement began to consider alcohol itself as the problem rather than the individual who drank. Beer, wine and cider, once considered healthy and nutritious, lost their more favored status and were lumped in with the distilled spirits that had drawn most of the cautionary tales in the early decades of the movement. The distinctions made about the form alcohol took, and the acceptability of cider or wine with a meal decreased markedly. The “temptation” of alcohol became identified as the problem. Alcohol itself started to represent all of the bad things that could come from excessive imbibing. In other words, the negative attention turned from the personal consequences of chronic drunkenness to the substance of alcohol. The neutrality of liquor as just a liquid, only evil in the hands of a drunkard, vanished. Instead, liquor and the liquor industry became the enemy. All consumption of alcohol came to be considered intemperate; moderate drinking was no longer an acceptable option for those who wanted to be considered temperate, as it had been earlier in the movement.

Just because moderate drinkers did not experience negative effects through their drinking didn’t mean that they were immune to the scorn of the temperance movement.
Their moderate drinking was perceived as dangerous in two ways; that they set a bad example for those individuals who might succumb to excessive drinking if they started, or to those who had sworn off drinking altogether, and secondly, it came to be believed that alcohol contained addictive properties similar in strength to the way we now think of heroin or nicotine. This view of the addictive properties of alcohol led to a change in the treatment of the individual alcoholic. If alcohol had such powerfully addictive qualities, then the individual could not be held as completely responsible for his addiction. The blame shifted to the implied social endorsement of alcohol through a lack of legislative control on its manufacture, sale and distribution. The concept that the alcoholic was redeemable fell in its popularity. If alcohol was a substance that had such highly addictive qualities, then once in its grip, men were not likely to be able to change. To eliminate alcohol’s availability became more important than the redemption of the individual. The humanistic quality of the reform efforts of the temperance movement changed to the need for political action, and the passage of laws forbidding alcohol use. If alcohol was unavailable to begin with, rehabilitation of the chronic drunkard would be unnecessary. Moderate drinkers came under the reform movement’s scrutiny, since chronic drunkards were relegated to a place of hopelessness, as they were already in the grip of such an addictive substance. In one temperance melodrama after another, the women have terrible forebodings and intuitive flashes that center around the taking of a single social drink, resulting in ruination. In these plays, any social drinking at all is a negative sign that all will not be well in the future. Also, the antagonistic language used around the owners of saloons and the detrimental consequences that befall them reveal this change in the social message in the later temperance dramas. In several of these
dramas, the worst of the drunkards find no redemption at all, but rather die as the hopeless drunkards they have become. As this study later examines, the temperance plays were used as recruitment and educational tools through amateur productions. Although the temperance movement was primarily made up of non-alcoholics (the Washingtonians being the major exception to this), the continued popularity of temperance reveals the widespread appeal of the messages in these plays, even though the intended audience may have been the non-alcoholic population, whose political will, and consequent vote was what the reformers wanted to influence once reform of the individual seemed futile.

Unlike the modern recovery movement, the temperance movement was populated by average citizens, most of whom were not in need of personal aid with a drinking problem, but rather who had personal philosophical reasons for supporting the battery of progressive causes listed earlier that were popular during that time. As the analysis of several temperance plays that make up the second half of this study demonstrates, the alcoholic character was crafted into a stereotype created through the vision of the majority of the populace. The characteristics, life story, consequences to others, and recommended cures for alcoholism were portrayed and preached by non-alcoholics trying to find simple solutions for a difficult and complicated problem. As the century progressed, the moral leadership of the movement and the energy brought to the cause came more and more from women, perceived as the primary victims of men’s alcoholism. The major change in this leadership area became formally organized with the formation of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, or the WCTU. A section of this chapter will be dedicated to examining the WCTU, and the role of women as temperance crusaders became paramount to the trajectory that the movement would take during the
rest of the nineteenth century. The women of the WCTU restored to the temperance movement a concern for the individual drunkard, which had been waning with the sharp increase in political aims. They combined political action with a tactic called “gospel” temperance, which fell into the former moral suasionist/religious conversion model of reform. In fact, the sons and husbands of the women of the WCTU were the primary reason many of the women joined the movement. The thought that their loved ones were not worth saving was incompatible with the hard line prohibitionists. “Gospel” temperance was characterized by individual testimonials coupled with prayers of thanks as well as the frequency of the gatherings, and continued use of the pledge of abstinence as a device.

This movement revived efforts to help drunkards reform voluntarily through confession and missionary work and endowed such reformatory acts with explicitly religious and evangelical meanings: drinking and drunkenness were sins; repentance and God's grace could save the drunkard; giving public testimony could stir others to sign the pledge and experience conversion. (Chavigney qtd in Tracy and Acker 114)

This resurgence in the concern for the individual began in 1875, when the women of the WCTU “sought out drunkards in private homes, hospitals, jails, saloons, and even workplaces. ‘Gospel’ temperance became a national phenomenon, and claims that it had saved thousands for sobriety and for God by the late 1870s are entirely believable” (Lender and Martin 117). But the WCTU did not shy away from work promoting prohibition either. The history and shape of the WCTU will be explored in greater depth later in this chapter.
In addition to theatrical presentation of temperance ideals, printed materials were used to great effect in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and the theater had a symbiotic relationship to temperance novels, since several of the well known temperance plays, most notably *Ten Nights in a Bar Room*, were printed as novels before they were adapted into plays. While the printing of tracts (like those of Benjamin Rush) had been extensively used during the first half of the nineteenth century, the use of other printed materials to forward the temperance cause exploded after the Civil War. Fictional tales of the drunkard’s redemption became very popular, as did non-fiction confessional essays, similar to the first person accounts made popular by the Washingtonians.

Even commercial publishers gave a helping hand, albeit for handsome profits. They brought out an entire genre of dry novels, short stories, plays, and illustrated materials (generally known as “Temperance Tales”) that glorified prohibition and warned of the dire medical, social, and moral consequences of drink. Beginning in the 1840s, the tales were best-sellers, a fact further indicating the intense popular interest in prohibition. (Lender and Martin 81)

One pamphlet, named *Is This Why You Drink?* includes mention of the very earliest psychiatric attempts to help the alcoholic.

The message is not one of rigid professional promotion, but of mutual aid; the psychoanalyst has helped the lawyer [the drunkard in this instance], and now the lawyer wishes to help others like him. Indeed, he has been empowered to do this through his own analysis. The scenario bears a close resemblance to early- and mid-nineteenth century temperance tales in which the “rescued” drunkard goes on to save others like him. (Tracy 234)
Scholars have suggested that the popularity of these stories (which included the sordid details of the drunkard’s downward spiral), and testimonials indicates that a less than savory curiosity about drunken escapades also was present in the otherwise proper middle class.

In addition to the budding field of psychiatry, the medical profession also started to look for cures for alcoholism. Accommodations from spas to asylums sprung up, where the drunkard could take a cure. Some of the medical profession started to believe that the patterns of chronic drunkenness indicated the possibility of a disease, but mainstream beliefs, and the later nineteenth century staged depictions continued to treat it is as a moral issue, or a weakness of willpower in early stages, and often a lost cause once the addiction had taken hold. I will outline the steps that were taken by doctors to deal with chronic drunkenness, and the different language and labels associated with it later on in this chapter.

The temperance movement generated sufficient political pressure to change the laws in many states, and to form the base for the Prohibition Party, which split the vote in an already politically turbulent period after the Civil War. The politics were focused on regulation and control of alcohol, indicating the shift in focus from the individual to the substance. This shift is reflected in some of the temperance plays that are part of this study, and certainly is reflected in the other manifestations of the temperance movement.
Politics and Drinking: A Marriage that Ended in Banishment

Politics and drinking had long been complicit bedfellows in getting politicians elected in the United States. Elections had traditionally been times when the winner was often the man who could afford to treat voters to the most drinks. Election days were anticipated as much as a day of free drinking than as part of the political process of a free nation, and certain offices were said to have been purchased for the cost of a shot of brandy. The legitimacy of elections was often in question and the idea of voting “early and often” extended to the man who was interested in tying one on for the day. So when the temperance movement became involved in politics, the two seemed to hold opposing values, but early headway was made in prohibitionist legislation.

The first major victory the temperance movement had in the political battle to control alcohol use through legislative means was in Maine in 1851. Termed “The Maine Laws,” and spearheaded by Neil Dow, Maine’s governor, this legislation outlawed the sale of alcohol, and Maine became the first dry state. Very quickly several other states followed suit. Within a year, Massachusetts went dry. Lyman Beecher, (discussed in chapter 1) whose sermons had accelerated the temperance movement in Massachusetts in the 1930s and early 1840s, led the political movement there. In 1852, Maine Laws passed in Rhode Island, Vermont and the Minnesota Territory. In 1853 Michigan went dry. In 1854, Connecticut passed the Maine Laws, and in 1855, legislation prohibiting alcohol passed in New York, Iowa, New Hampshire, Delaware, Indiana, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Wisconsin. But just as the temperance movement lost momentum and focus in the lead up to the Civil War, so too did the political parties and the political will that had
worked to pass the Maine Laws. One by one, the will to enforce the prohibitionist laws in these states rescinded. They were either repealed or just modified to an un-enforced watered down version of themselves. One of the major factors that contributed to the swift downfall of the different “Maine Laws” passed around the country was the demise of the Whig Party over conflicting positions about slavery. The Whigs had traditionally supported the prohibitionist cause, and had been the go-to party for the temperance movement’s political lobbying up to that point. The Republican Party, which came out of the remnants of the Whig party, was far too focused on the cause of abolition to pay much attention to prohibition.

But the prohibitionist-minded temperance movement had not allied solely with the Whigs. To the proponents of the movement, there was no party alliance that supplanted the cause. Temperance proponents “leagued variously with antislavery Democrats, who were warring with the dominant pro-South wing of their party, and with elements of the Whigs, who were already beginning to lose their party cohesion...” (Lender and Martin 81). During the Civil War, the political progress of the temperance movement was stunted. Large gains had appeared with the passage of the Maine Laws, and then just as quickly disappeared. The movement itself was disorganized and worry over how the country would survive the split over slavery was distracting to the temperance cause.

After the war, advocates for temperance tried to reorganize their influence in political circles, but they found that while temperance adopted on a personal level was still considered admirable, the politicians who were willing to forward the cause through legislative means were small minorities within each party. In addition, the newly formed
Republicans feared a split between wet and dry factions within their party, and so tabled any discussion of prohibition in order to maintain party unity. Frustrated by their inability to get prohibition onto the legislative agenda, temperance activists formed the Prohibition Party in 1869. The Prohibition Party went on to win a few legislative victories, which would not have been possible without the help and support of the newly formed Women’s Christian Temperance Union. While women could not vote, this organization took command of the dissemination of information about alcoholism around the country. One legislative battleground for prohibition after the Civil War was in Kansas, where the anti-saloon laws were on the books, but were not being enforced. The governor was a robust temperance reformer and worked hard to enact legislation that would compel enforcement of the existing laws, but his cause fell due to the Republican fear of party-splitting positions.

In many ways, fear of the creation of schisms within otherwise fairly unified parties drove the temperance issue out of mainstream politics, at least for a time. During this period, though, the WCTU continued to work toward finding a legislative voice among the exclusively male political parties, although it took them a while to find any political leverage.

[President of the WCTU, Frances] Willard's Home Protection party of 1881, and its fusion with the Prohibitionists as the Prohibition Home Protection party in 1882, went nowhere. Nor, aside from some local victories, did the Prohibition party itself. The hostility of the major political parties was a formidable problem. Party managers, some of whom recalled the antebellum chaos arising from prohibition [the Maine Laws], wanted to avoid the liquor issue. Party loyalties
were strong after the Civil War, and few Republicans or Democrats, many of whom were otherwise loyal to temperance, were willing to break ranks over any single issue, no matter how important. (Lender and Martin 112-3)

And so the influence of the WCTU would have to wait until the early twentieth century to gather enough political momentum to change the law of the land, but when they did, it came in the form of an amendment to the constitution rather than through an ordinary legislative process. The prohibition-supporting political message found in temperance plays is unmistakable. While the focus of this study is to parse out the stereotype of the alcoholic himself, the theater was a place where the temperance cause could gather support for Prohibition. Once the focus turned from reforming the individual to changing the laws of the land with regards to alcohol, the message against liquor-sellers becomes a prominent part of temperance plays, and recruitment of supporters was a vital use of home-grown amateur productions of temperance plays.

Class Matters: The Continued Framing of the Alcohol Problem by the Middle Class

There are several ways by which the progressive reformers of the middle class sought to solve the problems they considered to be caused by alcohol. But in order to find solutions, the problems had to be defined, and it was in this conscious or unconscious defining of the nature of the problem where the middle class sought to separate itself from that problem. The social concerns for the welfare of the poor were motivated by the economic concerns of the middle class rather than a more abstract humanistic concern for the poor. The connection the middle class had drawn between poverty and immigrants,
and alcoholism were not seen in their full contexts by most in the middle class. For instance, the negative reputation of saloons and saloon keepers did not take into consideration the beneficial services they provided to immigrants and the poor, like cashing checks, or lending money. Calls to close the saloons, and judgments upon the immigrants and the poor for being intemperate were clear messages put forth by the movement in reaction to customs and behaviors with which they could not immediately identify. But no calls for change of the conditions that contributed to poverty itself came out of the temperance movement, rather, the propensity to drink was considered part of the nature of the poor rather then as a result of being poor. In the play *Drifting Apart*, by Joseph A. Herne, it is a well-to-do young man who rescues Mary, the wife of the primary drunken character. It is her fisherman-husband, from working class Gloucester, Massachusetts, who seems almost destined to become a drunkard, like the men around him who urge him to come away from his home for a drink. The economic conflicts between class priorities still informed the stereotypical assumptions about the differences between the way the working class drank and the way middle- and upper-middle classes conducted themselves when is came to alcohol use, without inspiring a desire to change the economic standing of the poor.

Some of the working class persisted in drinking on the job, which offended the middle class work ethic and their desire for profit and productivity. Drinking on the job also caused alarm for the safety of the working class themselves.

The presence of alcohol in the long struggle between employers and workers for control of the shop floor gave a special intensity to progressive efforts to eliminate liquor from the workplace. Although middle class professionals differed
on the wisdom of prohibition, their commitment to discipline, order, and progress made them critics of working-class culture's attachment to strong drink. (Pegram 90)

The lack of insight into the immigrant’s experiences in America did much to malign the impression that the saloon was a place of debauchery and criminal activity, rather than the actual role it served in the immigrant’s life.

Aside from dispensing alcoholic drinks, many saloons provided vital services to working-class neighborhoods. Without easy access to banks, many workers cashed their paychecks in saloons and used saloon safes to store valuables. Saloons frequently catered to workers of specific trades, and barrooms often doubled as hiring halls. As one of the few open, public rooms in over crowded neighborhoods, saloons offered a place to use a telephone, receive mail, read a newspaper, or use a toilet. (Pegram 103)

In many immigrant neighborhoods, the saloon served as a kind of financially-oriented community center, a public place for men to gather, and not the bastion of sin that middle class perceptions would name it. The middle class saw the result of excessive drinking on the individual, and then assigned the greater part of poverty-related hardships to it. This factored greatly into the depictions of the results of alcoholism on the family found in the plays in this study. Rare is the alcoholic character whose children weren’t starving due to his drinking. A direct relationship between excessive drinking and the plunge into poverty was drawn. The creators of the stereotype did not account for the borderline existence that may of the characters, working class people, were living in to begin with, and only rarely did the affluent character fall into poverty due to drinking after The
Drunkard. It was easier to scapegoat the immigrant poor than to undermine the wealth that was built upon their backs. The question, then, was how to rid society of the troubling results of drinking among the poor? The search for an answer to this dilemma stayed primarily within the middle class, for they still took their self-appointed role of guardians of the social well-being seriously, not only when it came to alcohol, but in many other social welfare issues.

The middle classes did continue to have the tendency to be progressive and reform oriented in postbellum America. In a general way, “postwar assaults on alcohol generally came not against drinking patterns or consumption rates per se but against drinking as a symbol of rampant pluralism, individualism, and potential social disorder” (Lender and Martin 95). The idea of class difference was inextricably linked to the inundation of immigrants upon the urban centers in America, which was witnessed by many in the middle class. Poverty became more visible as cities grew in size and population. The middle class observed women and children begging on the street, and suspected a direct link between the husband’s drinking and the poverty of the wife and children. The reform-minded middle class found the unemployed poor, most of whom were recent arrivals, unnerving, and on top of that, it seemed to the middle class that many of these new citizens spent much of the little money that the did make in the saloon.

Even dispassionate studies of the matter—by urban reformers, municipal officials, and newly professionalized social workers—put alcohol at the root of a minimum of 20 percent of urban poverty cases. Such personal tragedy, of course, was not confined to the industrial poor; yet the relative novelty of seeing so many
instances of drinking-related poverty made a distinct impression on the middle-class public. (Lender and Martin 102-3)

The middle class saw this phenomenon through their own perspective, conceiving the drinking as the cause of poverty rather than as the result, a reaction that sums up the reason that the Marxist theoretical reaction to class differences became such a powerful force at the end of the nineteenth century. It is clear, though, that the temperance movement did little to rectify the larger situation that the poor found themselves in, for that would challenge the capitalist system within which their own values had been forged.

Not a single example of temperance literature suggested fundamental social change as a solution to the problem; every temperance narrative assumed that some form of individual action was necessary...[but] did not change the conditions—poverty, alienation, and insecurity in an industrialized, capitalist society—that inspired and encouraged the drinking in the first place. (Mason 72)

This bears up in the analysis of temperance plays, where the alcoholic is portrayed as making choices that contributed to the ills of society rather than being a victim of them, and this suited the middle class’ purposes, for they did not have to face their own culpability by considering the problem from the opposite point of view.

The temperance narrative succeeded not necessarily because it was able to address its audience's actual status, but because it was able to resonate with the audience's aspirations and dreams...In other words, we process experience according to our self-image (including our perception of our future potential), not according to a supposedly objective assessment of our condition by some outside party. (Mason 87)
In essence, the middle class was projecting onto the working class the values associated with the emerging potential of the American dream. “American Dream” values and aspirations became considered societal norms, rather than desires imposed upon the working class through the projection of middle class pursuits. Within the next century, these desires would come to define what it meant to be an American, and the projection of this concept was made easy in the form of the theatrical production.

Labeling Chronic Drunkenness

The medical profession became involved in defining chronic drunkenness in the latter part of the nineteenth century, as we will explore in depth later, but in doing so created whole categories of drunkenness that “belonged” to one class or another. The language used to describe the state of chronic excessive drinking went through several iterations between the Civil War and the end of the nineteenth century. As I have indicated from the beginning of this study, intemperance and temperance were used as opposites; a linguistic binary that leaves no room for an in-between state—exacerbated when the temperance movement rejected the use of beer, cider and wine and moderate drinking as part of what had been considered temperate. Whereas the word temperate comes out of the concept of a person’s temperament (sharing the same root), and has implications about the state of his soul and grace, the medical profession sought a word that was not as subjective and that had fewer overtones about morality. The words inebriety, inebriate and inebriation came into common use in the 1860s and 1870s. The word inebriety refers to a slightly broader notion of addiction; the inebriate could be
addicted to substances other than only alcohol. Drugs like morphine and cocaine that now have strong legislative controls (and taboos) surrounding their use were, in the later years of the nineteenth century, perfectly legal, and were additives in many curative elixirs as well as “recreational” foods and beverages, like Coca-Cola. An inebriate could be “stoned” or drunk on one or more mind-altering substances, although the use still predominantly referred to drunkenness. So the word inebriate came to be used as a slightly more medicalized descriptor of chronic drunkenness, which carried slightly different reasoning about why the drunkard drank the way he did than did the use of intemperance, which implied weak-willed moral failing. “[D]octors interpreted the inebriate's nervous weakness as the basis for his inability to adapt to modern society, and they advanced a definition and ideal of sober masculinity, or respectable manliness, that revealed their own professional, middle-class values” (Tracy 76). This definition served to separate further the middle class self-concept from that of the now “diagnosed” inebriate. Class values were used as diagnostic benchmarks.

But not all of the medical profession was convinced that inebriety was cause by a nervous disposition or a lack of masculine qualities:

[F]amed New York neurologist George Miller Beard …believed that “drunkenness the vice” was on the rise in the biologically inferior lower classes, who had reached an evolutionary dead end in the previous century. These people still possessed the rugged physiques, primitive and sensual instincts, and tolerance for alcohol that had characterized previous generations, while among the upper classes, the situation was quite the reverse…The more affluent and accomplished classes…had achieved their social status by dint of their exquisitely sensitive
nervous systems. These systems were susceptible to alcohol, rendering most of their owners unable to drink without suffering debilitating effects. Thus, reasoned Beard, most of society's higher ranks chose a temperate life, but when they did drink, they were especially vulnerable to “drunkenness the disease.” (Tracy 36)

So it seemed that diagnosis was subject to class scrutiny before symptomology, revealing in full the need the middle and upper classes had to defend their own, classifying middle and upper class alcoholism as the manifestation of a disease, while lower and working class alcoholism was propagated through the willful disregard of virtue resulting in the vice of alcoholism. Thus, ignoring the early depiction of Edward Middleton, the educated and upwardly mobile young hero in *The Drunkard*, the separation between “good” and “bad” drunkards came ever more clearly into focus as the middle class sought to distance themselves from association with alcoholism.

The next change in the language used by the medical profession to describe alcoholism was the term dipsomania. “[I]nitially, dipsomania was used by physicians and reformers simply to describe habitual drunkenness that was a disease rather than a vice” (Tracy 31). In the case of dipsomania, the term was distinctive from inebriety in that it described a syndrome or pre-existing condition rather than (disease or not) a self-inflicted or self-induced state. “[D]ipsomania stood for a type of alcoholism that possessed three important characteristics: it was a form of insanity; it was often hereditary; and it affected the middle and upper ranks of society” (Tracy 33). The implied meaning behind the change in terminology was that drunkards were of the lower classes, personally responsible for their conditions, whereas dipsomaniacs were afflicted with a condition associated with the delicacy and refinement of their nervous systems.
The last descriptive word that came into use in the nineteenth century was the word alcoholism, which is still in popular use. Inebriety, dipsomania and alcoholism were all commonly used at the close of the nineteenth century. It was not until after Prohibition was repealed in 1932, that alcoholism came to be the primary word used to describe medical diagnosis, symptoms and behaviors associated with chronic drunkenness. I have used it liberally throughout this study knowing that I am writing for a modern audience with a modern understanding of the word’s use. While the language used in temperance plays was not focused on the class distinctions that the differences in the medical terms were designed to imply, the separation in the results of drinking between the classes is clear, and an important signpost in the formation of types on stage.

The Evolution of Drinking Culture

The temperance movement continued to work toward shutting down taverns and saloons, which provided easy access to alcohol, selling drinks by the glass to husbands and fathers. Drinking establishments were thought to rob the family both of vital financial resources and also time that they could spend strengthening family bonds. In the expanding western frontier, saloons were symbols of lawlessness and individual liberty, and, like the urban saloons in immigrant neighborhoods, they provided financial services that were needed. They held valuables in their safes, and they often did informal banking and gave out small loans. Rural saloons and taverns in farming communities were judged as blights on otherwise wholesome towns and villages scattered throughout the country, but it was the urban saloon that was considered the most threatening to the security of the
middle class because it seemed to provide an alternative to the temperate society as a place of social interaction, entertainment and fraternity. Middle class impressions about the saloon deemed that “[t]he majority were neighborhood bars, and too many were simply ginmills. The worst were dives serving as centers of drunkenness, crime, profanity, prostitution, gambling, and political corruption. Their patrons, frequently immigrants and unskilled industrial workers, held few values in common with those of the temperance movement” (Lender and Martin 104). Not only was the perceived threat of the urban saloon a reaction against the immigrant population, but it was also a strong push against the working class identity that emerged out of a life tied to work in industry.

[T]he consumption of alcohol had come to signify the end of the workday and lithe passage to play. This too was an important element in the advance of modern industrial society, for it was only with the rise of the routinized, disciplined factory workplace that work and leisure were clearly delineated (34). As the laboring classes stepped out of the factory and into the saloon, they proceeded from work time to leisure time. Inside the saloon, the act of drinking could turn a roomful of working men into bonded brothers and offer men a chance to demonstrate their masculinity. (Tracy 74)

Having different aspects of identity compartmentalized in a way American society had not seen before forced adaptation on the part of the working man, which resulted for many in a sense of urgency to get all their recreation in during the time allotted. “The inside of the saloon was a masculine domain. There, men congregated outside the family circle and drank—pleasantly much of the time, but often improvidently and sometimes morbidly” (Pegram 54). This separation of work time and leisure time resulted in a
working class that embraced the after shift time at the bar room as a right. He had the boss tell him what to do all day, and nobody was going to tell him what to do during his time off, even if it meant detrimental circumstances for his wife and children; or, at least that was how the proper and temperate middle class perceived the culture of the tavern in the working classes. Indeed, it is how it was portrayed in many of the temperance plays.

Many of the rituals that developed as part of tavern culture accelerated the intake of alcohol by the group of men within. The brewing industry (differentiated from the distillery) had grown rapidly after the Civil War, and most working class men began to prefer beer and ale to more expensive distilled drinks (at least before they turned drunkard—as the inevitable outcome of sipping ale was portrayed in temperance plays). The technology to preserve and bottle beer had not yet been developed. This meant that the breweries had to sell their beer soon after brewing, and had to have a reliable outlet for their product or it would go bad and be wasted—a strong motivation for keeping the price low. What emerged was a business model in which the breweries themselves either owned outright the saloons where their beer was on tap, or held majority ownership or franchise rights to these saloons. Independent saloon owners had trouble getting a contract from the breweries, and much of the tavern and saloon business fell under monopolies held by the larger breweries.

Breweries were highly competitive, and they openly encouraged heavy drinking. Notably, bartenders frequently took advantage of treating—not the political variant but the practice of buying rounds of drinks for the entire group of patrons, a chain often started by publicans themselves…Treating brought “a feeling,” as one member of the traffic put it, “of independence and equality, in each
individual.” Buying a round of drinks demonstrated to friends that the purchaser could “keep his end up.” (Lender and Martin 104)

Treating, or buying a round for the group, became a ritual of camaraderie, and also a way for men to prove their masculinity, by proving their earning power—that they could afford to buy a round, often even when they couldn’t.

The drinking rituals enacted in the bar room allowed men to prove their place within the society of their fellows. But unfortunately, sometimes the men got carried away, under the influence and at the encouragement of the bartenders, men who could little afford to squander their pay away in the saloon would get caught up in a treating round, and the results would be very bad for the family. It was this kind of behavior and result that pitted women’s interests against men’s, and kept saloon culture somewhat secretive and threatening to those who did not frequent these establishments. “Beyond the brutality of drunken husbands and fathers, or the damage done by squandered wages or alcohol-induced accidents, the very fact that many American men spent time away from home drinking caused unease in an age that lavished sentimental affection on the ideals of home and family” (Pegram 54). Most women had little first hand knowledge of what went on inside the saloon, since appearing in one could do social damage to her reputation. But women did have an interest in the goings on inside the saloon, and could summon up in their imaginations all manner of sordid activity. “Women and children were barred by custom from taverns and did most of their drinking [if they drank at all] in the home. The rise of domesticity in the nineteenth century solidified expectations of virtue and restraint for female behavior and closed women off from active participation in the public world of drink and fraternity” (Pegram 11). The battle over temperance in the
latter part of the nineteenth century in many ways became a battle between the sexes. The tavern was a place to which women were neither welcomed nor privy. Women also had no agency in the political realm, as they were barred from either voting or holding office, so they could not directly influence how saloons were regulated. And since they were unwelcome within the taverns themselves, this left a very wide gap between men and women when it came to culture and influence upon drinking behavior and all that surrounded it.

The appearance and atmosphere of late-nineteenth-century saloons as centers of a rough masculine society further antagonized middle-class women… [M]ost American saloons catered to men. Many saloons advertised cigars as well as liquor on their windows; their floors were usually sprinkled with poorly aimed tobacco juice. Paintings of female nudes gave a hint of illicit sexuality to even the best hotel bars. Among the low-grade places, curtained “wine rooms,” upstairs bedrooms, and the presence of prostitutes confirmed to worried observers the connection between alcohol and sexual transgression. (Pegram 56)

It was easy for temperance advocates, especially women, to see drinking culture as something alien—since it was foreign to their experience. As middle class women saw it, many of the working and immigrant classes spent excessive time in saloons, and in their minds, they separated the drinking behavior of the working and lower classes from that engaged in by their husbands, brothers and fathers. The characterization of drinking culture as wholly a lower class activity was a convenient way to toss the scapegoat as far afield as the temperance advocates could from their own backyards. But the immigrant population, in fact, did have a particularly close relationship to the use of alcohol in
addition to being stereotyped as the source of all bad things associated with alcohol. Many of the ethnic groups that came to America had their own relationship to a specific ethnic drinking culture, which either aided them with the transition into American society, as with the Irish, or kept their traditions alive for them, as with the Germans and Italians. Oppositional ideas about drinking became framed in an “American” versus “immigrant” dichotomy, where “American” came to mean temperate, home loving and industrious, while “immigrant” came to mean intemperate and without appropriate value for home and work.

The Immigrant as Scapegoat, the Immigrant as Lover of Drink

After the Civil War, perceptions about the ways alcohol could threaten society changed. There was an expansion in the distinctions in class that had been an underlying point of difference between who were the temperate and intemperate. These changes included considerations of diversity and perceived threats from the great influx of immigrants. Between 1845 and 1900, the population in the United States increased from roughly three million to almost fourteen million. The vast majority of this increase was due to immigration, first from Ireland, Germany and Scandinavia, and then from Mediterranean and Eastern European nations. A high percentage of these immigrants came from places where drinking was an essential aspect of daily life and was closely tied to the things that define culture: food, ritual, celebration and identity. As mentioned earlier, the local (often ethnically affiliated and operated) saloon provided the newcomer a place to fraternize with his own countrymen—a place to rest from the mental struggles
that come with language barriers and assimilation. The gathering of so many strange new people in saloons made fear and distrust of the strangers with their strange habits all the easier to demonize, and gave all activity associated with drinking, ethnic or not, an “ethnic cast” (Lender and Martin 97).

From the earliest waves of Irish and Germans, who were the first large groups of non-Anglo-Saxons to immigrate, the attitudes about drinking that these immigrants brought with them to America clashed strongly with the wave of temperance sensibilities that had swept the country. The Irish especially became intimately associated with excessive drinking, and a whole host of negative associations and stereotypes about drunken Irishmen, “Paddy Wagons” (coming from “paddy”—Irish slang for father, and the horse-drawn wagons that used to clear the streets of drunks until they had sobered up), drunken celebrations of St. Patrick’s Day, and the local Irish Pub, all of which crept into the national psyche, almost defining the culture.

The great majority of Irish immigrants were young, penniless, male refugees from famine. Driven by familiar customs, their strained circumstances in America, and loneliness, they drank whiskey, often to excess, in “bachelor groups.” This culture of male drinking corresponded to early nineteenth-century American practices but alarmed middle-class natives…who were already put off by the poverty and Catholicism of the Irish. (Pegram 32)

Banding together, these young men bolstered their egos and identities by drinking to reinforce who they were within a social system where they felt lost and devalued. The act became more than just a way to fend off awareness about their loneliness and poverty; it
became an adaptive way to fit into the role they were perceived already to occupy, taking on the characteristics into which they were being stereotyped.

In America however, Irish drinking took on greater symbolic and emotional significance. Faced with an openly hostile environment, and both unable and unwilling to Americanize, the immigrants seized upon drinking as a major symbol of ethnic loyalty. That is, they drank hard to assert their Irishness: the harder they drank, the more Irish they supposedly became. (Lender and Martin 60)

Because drinking heavily was a sign of masculinity in Irish circles, challenging and treating rituals made it easy for young men to get addicted to alcohol, and to step right into the shoes of the stereotype that had been projected upon them. This stereotype may be the one that developed around drinking during this period that has been the most enduring; many popular images and concepts that continue to surround an understanding of Irish culture developed and were codified in the public’s imagination during this period.

Popular opinion held that the Irish and liquor were virtually synonymous, and the drunken Irishman became one of the major social stereotypes of the nineteenth century. To a degree, even the Irish-Americans accepted this image, although some ethnic spokesmen acknowledged that this did nothing to improve Irish status in the eyes of other Americans. (Lender and Martin 60)

The publicly accepted depiction of the drunken Irishman became a major stereotype emerging on the stage as early as the 1870s and 1880s. This character not only made his way into melodramas warning the public about drinking, but also (and more extensively) was a cornerstone of many vaudeville acts. Harrigan and Hart, one of the most popular
playwriting and acting duos at the end of the nineteenth century, made their careers on “Mulligan plays.” These featured Mulligan, an Irish grocery store owner and the patriarch of his Irish neighborhood in New York, whose comic appeal was largely based on troublesome situations and quarrels—all results of his drinking. Harrigan and Hart’s comic portrayal of drinking activities are among the first cracks we see in the united public opinion opposing drinking that had been portrayed on the stage. This study will examine the way the drunken character was stereotyped in dramatic, serious-minded portrayals, rather than comic stereotypes. While comedy was the place where we first see alternative portrayals of alcoholism, an analysis of vaudeville and comic characters opens an entire new set of assumptions about the audience’s relationship to the images depicted in the theater, and is beyond the scope of this project (although it would make an excellent study).

The second notable ethnicity that was perceived as a threat to temperate standards were the Germans. Earlier in the century drinking beer, wine and cider had not been considered intemperate, but sentiment had changed, and the prevailing opinion of the temperance movement believed that small amounts of alcohol in beer and wine would lead to larger amounts of distilled liquor because alcohol had such highly addictive qualities. In contrast, the brewing and drinking of lager is a major defining aspect of German culture. When the German population first arrived, the brewing of beer was mostly confined to within German ethnic circles, but after the Civil War, the popularity of beer exploded, and German breweries multiplied at a very high rate around the country.
German breweries continued to boom, and sophisticated advertising efforts claimed ever more partisans of lager beer. Members of all social strata enjoyed the brew, but its low price made it especially popular as a working-class beverage. As such, the rise in the drinking of lager paralleled the rapid growth of the postbellum urban industrial work force. Consequently, by the late 1870s beer consumption was more than double the level of the 1860s; it had tripled by the 1880s; and by the 1890s beer was well on its way to challenging native American whiskey as the nation's most popular alcoholic beverage. (Lender and Martin 97)

Temperance advocates attacked the German population for their participation in what was called the “traffic,” or the business of producing and distributing alcohol. When attacks against alcohol turned toward the industry and away from reform of the individual, the German population took the brunt of the negative propaganda, since they were both “ethnic” and supporters of the “traffic.”

The Germans did not see the negative associations with drinking that had the middle class population of America up in arms. Much to the disdain of the various supporters of temperance, the Germans found the alarm about drinking unsupportable from their own cultural experiences, and resisted it. “Germans saw no incompatibility between drinking and family entertainment and further offended native Protestant sensibilities by enjoying their beer on Sundays. ‘Most of the people about here are Catholic German,’ a young Protestant acidly observed in 1855, ‘and they go to church at the Beer shop and go home drunk at night’” (Pegram 32). But the German population held some power of their own in the face of prohibitionist agitation. Germans had moved in droves to the larger cities and rural areas of the Midwest. By in large, they joined the
Republican Party, but when it came to laws that put limits on alcohol, the Germans rebelled. “Whereas native Protestants turned to the law, common schools, and other public institutions to safeguard their cultural values…German Immigrants in the rural Midwest believed that those institutions undermined the authority of parents over their children, weakened cultural bonds, and threatened to drive a wedge of governmental interference through the daily interaction of inoffensive households” (Lender and Martin 77). In fact, it was the German population that was in part responsible for the split in the GOP vote that shot down the prohibitionist legislation in Kansas, mentioned earlier in the politics section of the chapter. And when the “[M]ayor of Chicago announced in 1855 that saloons would be closed on Sundays, Germans took to the streets in a disturbance known as the Lager Beer Riot” (Tracy 41).

Antagonism toward Irish and German populations over temperance ended up translating into a more generally directed hostility toward Catholics, and in many areas of the country, the wet-dry issue was drawn along Protestant and Catholic lines.

Christians coming from evangelical or pietistic confessional traditions that laid stress on individual conduct—Methodists, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, most Baptists, Scandinavian Lutherans, and most smaller Protestant denominations—tended to back prohibition and oppose tax support for Catholic schools and the relaxed Continental Sunday. Those whose faith stressed church traditions and liturgical richness—primarily Catholics, German Lutherans, and Episcopalians—often interpreted Sunday blue laws and liquor regulations as outrageous restrictions on personal freedom and cultural traditions. Of course, most Irish, German, and central European immigrants were liturgicals, and many natives
belonged to pietist faiths, adding an explosive ethnic cast to cultural politics. (Pegram 76)

As this schism between Catholic and Protestant ideals about prohibitionist legislation advanced, middle class American who supported the prohibitionist cause either inadvertently or deliberately infused much of the temperance debate with a feeling of xenophobia. But the lines between Catholics and Protestants were not as duplicitous as the biases of the middle class temperance advocates would have had the public believe.

Despite the undeniable hostility toward the Roman church on the part of many native-born drys, Catholic participation in the temperance movement, given impetus by Father Mathew’s antebellum ministry, had become a larger phenomenon than most historians have realized. Throughout the latter part of the century, a number of priests engaged in social work campaigned vigorously for prohibition, citing liquor as a prime source of urban poverty. Indeed, many Catholic clergy were no happier than their Protestant counterparts about parishioners in the traffic. (Lender and Martin 112-3)

Evidence shows that a superficial look at immigrant relationships to alcohol prompted the negative stereotypes adopted by the native middle class, but a deeper examination of the activities within those immigrant populations show that temperance reform had support. In fact, even in light of the immigrant cultural inclinations toward alcohol use, the broad xenophobic stereotype of the immigrant as harbinger of alcoholic social troubles was unfounded when actual numbers of inebriates within each ethnic group are examined.

What is usually not known is that the new immigrants did not generally contribute to national alcohol problems. Indeed, some probably helped contain them. The
Italians, for example, used wine extensively at mealtimes and in social contexts. But while drinking was an integral part of their tradition, they maintained strict customary sanctions against drunkenness. Jews also enjoyed alcohol as a normal part of their culture, incorporating ritual drinking into wedding ceremonies and other religious observances. Like the Italians, however, the Jews proscribed intemperance. Both these ethnic groups represented voices for drinking moderation; and while they probably had fewer total abstainers than did other communities, their rates of alcoholism were among the lowest (if not the lowest) in the country. (Pegram 32)

Despite the strong negative associations that were projected onto the immigrant populations, and despite the middle class’ wish to distance themselves from the drinking cultures that accompanied the newly arrived citizens, the stereotypes that emerged about these ethnic groups were more troublesome and damaging than the actual behavior found within the immigrant population. Irish immigrants are stereotyped in several temperance plays, notably in *Three Years in a Man Trap*. In Act Five, there is a trial scene in which an Irishman is accused of beating his wife. She explains that they were both drunk, and that he is a good man when he hasn’t been drinking (which doesn’t seem to be that often according to the dialogue in the scene). Both have a heavy Irish brogue, and they seem comically violent and unconcerned about the conduct of their drinking. This scene demonstrates one example of a stereotype that came to inhabit plays, depicting drunken, brawling Irish men and women, to audiences across America. In *The Fatal Glass* by James McCloskey, a pivotal scene in the play takes place in a German “beirgarten,” (or “beer garden”—an open air version of a bar common in Germany), in which two
characters plot a vengeful death of a third man, indicating the evil that can be conjured in such a place. While immigrants were not featured as central characters in the majority temperance dramas, the drinking action often included character types of lower class and immigrant populations (who don’t usually get sober), and gave the temperance movement an identifiable group of people that they could hold up as bad examples around drinking behavior.

The Middle Class American Family:

Mother as the Guardian of Virtue and Morality

What is commonly referred to as the “nuclear family” ascended to its prominent place in America’s society and self-concept during the middle of the nineteenth century. The roles within and aspirations of this family unit defined the values of middle class Americans, and gave drama an ideal, but sentimentalized picture of family life and the roles of father, mother and children against which the pitfalls of drinking could be portrayed. Many scholars have tracked the evolution of family structure and its social importance. They have found that many of the changes in family roles and economics can be linked to the industrial revolution and the impact of capitalism on society as a whole. As discussed earlier, men and women started to occupy different “spheres;” men primarily inhabiting a “public” sphere—leaving the home to go to work; drinking in public places—and women relegated to the “private” sphere—the realm of the home and childrearing. The value of these newly defined roles within the family was expressed through a sentimental depiction of the ideal way men and women could occupy their
separate positions, and the benefits of adhering to the vision of the perfect family unit. The family was thought of as a place of refuge from the stresses of the outside world for father, and for mother it was to bring satisfaction and happiness through domestic achievement and recognition; values still found in the pages of *Martha Stewart Living*. The nineteenth century’s social structure (as with many societies that have rigid gender roles) seemed to have an interesting performative aspect to the roles of mother and father, wife and husband. Value was placed on the fulfillment of a pre-determined narrative and role; a script that dictated appropriate actions and satisfactions—certainly not unique to the mid-nineteenth century, but interesting to this study because alcoholic disaster and misery in temperance plays were measured through deviation from the narrative and the roles that define middle class family ideology. It is important to note that the ideal family life was a critical part of the dramatic narrative in temperance plays but also that the construct was much broader than simply a dramatic device. This ideology redefined the gender and family roles in American society, and is reflected in many other writings and forms of expression, from essays to poems to advertising.

In his book *Family, Drama and American Dreams*, Tom Scanlan argues that the pursuit of the American dream has been primarily expressed by American dramatists through *family drama*. In fact, he argues that the family unit has been the primary preoccupation of American playwrights, and the glorification of the American Dream has been promoted through theatrical representation. Even though his examples are drawn from early twentieth century drama, his premise applies to the temperance drama, for it is the effect of alcohol abuse on the home and family that defines the deepest of the tragic results of inebriation. The ideal, harmonious home was depicted not only as the perfect
objective for those trying to achieve the American Dream, but also the “family” as people should desire it to be. The exaltation of the family found in the drama of the times reflects ideologies held by much of the middle class. The attitudes about the nature of the family, and the role of wife and mother, were paramount to middle class self-definition. Mother was held up as the epitome of virtue, and thought to be inherently “good.” It was her job to teach her children moral values. Scanlan writes, “…the ‘ideal family’ [was] the most important goal in life. It [was] characterized by love and freedom, where mothers and daughters teach the soft refinements of life to fathers and sons” (36). This interpretation of gender roles defined the frame through which the alcoholism problem was viewed. In all of the temperance plays, the home and hearth bore the threat of father’s intemperance. And to the extent that women lived at the mercy of their menfolk—on stage and in real life—men’s actions had profound effects on women’s lives. Women had little agency to change their situations without suffering other kinds of ostracism, for most options offended the prescribed gender role, and women were neither allowed to own property, nor divorce without their husband’s consent, so their options were quite limited.

The ideals of domesticity already encouraged women to act as moral guardians for their families and to tutor their children in the duties of virtuous citizenship. Antebellum women had identified drunkenness as an affront to middle class respectability and working-class survival, a threat to the health and harmony of families, and a peril awaiting every boy as he grew to manhood…Motherhood in the mid-nineteenth century shifted from a duty to a sacrament of sorts, as romantic notions of the special relationship between mothers and their children flooded popular culture. (Pegram 55)
A societal construct, which has been referred to as the “cult of motherhood,” emerged during this period. Books, pamphlets, songs, and other conveyors of popular sentiment hailed the beatific nature of the mother. Popular writers such as Timothy Shay Arthur, author of temperance novels that were the basis for two of the plays in this study (Three Years in a Man Trap and Ten Nights in a Bar Room) wrote titles such as Hints and Helps for the Home Circle; or, The Mother’s Friend (1844), The Lady at Home; or, Leaves from the Every-Day Book of an American Woman (1850), The Angel of the Household (1854), and Home-Heroes, Saints, and Martyrs (1865) (wikipedia). These books propagated the myth of mother perfected, and helped to entrench men and women into inflexible gender roles. In these writings, and works like them, motherhood was conceived in saintly terms, forcing women to conform to this ideal as the only critical role they could play in the world. The expectations placed on her, however, also created grave responsibilities for all manner of ills done by their children. Poor choices or tragic lives were often blamed on a bad or absent mother during childhood. We see the cult of motherhood reinforced in a short scene in Three Years in a Man Trap (original version by Authur). A young woman made a poor choice in a future husband, who lured her away from home, “ruined” her before marriage, and then left her to starve. In a quick reference in the play, it is revealed that she was raised without a mother, and surely that is why she made the poor choice.

Concepts of masculinity and femininity were framed oppositionally, and a great deal of pressure was put on women to provide the perfect home environment where men could find a retreat from their stressful lives. Occasionally women were blamed for their husband’s carousing, the implication being that if they had kept an attractive and appealing enough home, their husbands would have no reason to seek out the saloon, or
the other comforts offered there. In a twist on the temperance message, one play portrays
the unpleasant home situation of a husband as a reasonable excuse for his going to the
tavern in the evening. In a play called *Two Drams of Brandy* by H. Elliott McBride, the
older neighbor and mother figure for a young wife who finds her husband at the tavern in
increasing regularity warns the young wife about her own culpability in her husband’s
behavior in a “countrified” voice:

MRS. JENKINS: Yeou’re makin’ yeoursel’ unhappy, and drivin’ yeour husband
away from his home by yeour cleanliness and yeour desire to hev everything nice
and tidy. Go and put a fire in yeour best room, and don’t keep him and Tommy
sittin’ eout here in the kitchen. Stop yeour scrubbin’ and scoldin’, and make yeour
home more attractive, or Edward will keep a goin’ to the tavern, and he’ll git
wuss and wuss. Yeou’d better turn squar’ around right neow, or it’ll soon be too
late. If he goes to the tavern a few times and falls in with bad company, and
continners to drink, it’ll be purty hard to git him away. Better take warnin’ in
time. (6-7)

The pressure to keep the husband happy or pay the consequences by finding him at the
tavern put women in an impossible place, and the pressure must have been very difficult
to endure. Women were supposed to be the feminine ideal, have enough inherent moral
draw to save their fallen husbands if they were drinking, and sometimes had to suffer
humiliation at the prospect of being the reason her husband went out to drink; a position
that was formidable indeed. Unfortunately women were just as complicit in forwarding
this impossible role as men were.
Women temperance advocates supported and personified the century's feminine ideal. The “cult of motherhood” added to the idea that the moral weight of the family was strictly in the hands of mother, and keeping women from serving alcohol in the home, where it could have a detrimental affect on her children as well as her husband became part of the temperance crusade.

These organizations promoted an image of woman as pious, pure, domestic, and submissive: the "true woman" who obeyed her father or husband while quietly swaying him with her inherently moral nature. Such selfless femininity was intended to counteract the amoral public world of nineteenth century men.

(Murdock 17)

The temperance movement promoted the home as a place of abstinence from alcohol, and women were placed by society as the perfect advocates for temperance reform, because they were expected to be teetotalers themselves (if they followed social norms). “Two images dominated the public's perception of the relationship between women and alcohol: women who were the victims of their husband's, father's, or brother's drinking; and the WCTU's [Women’s Christian Temperance Union] women in white who campaigned against the liquor traffic under the ‘home protection’ banner” (Tracy 45). The home became a symbol of all that could be well with society, and also all that could go wrong. Women, who were perceived as the victims of chronic drunkenness on the part of their husbands, were under a great deal of pressure to provide the ideal home environment so that their husbands would not venture out to the bar rooms, where they might come under the influence of the rum seller.
Ideological messages endorsed and propagated by the temperance movement promoted the concept that all women were part of the feminine ideal, and women who did not adhere to those standards were deviant. But it is clear that many people in the nation continued to drink without ruin or loss. Many households did serve alcohol. “Social drinking, while much reduced from antebellum levels, nevertheless remained a fixed custom in many households, and plenty of businessmen still ordered a bourbon or a beer over lunch. Those who could afford them guaranteed a lucrative market for imported wines and spirits. The peculiarly American ‘cocktail’—a mixed drink, often including non-alcoholic ingredients—also gained in popularity” (Lender and Martin 98). The social circles within which drinking was accepted—which were more than just the lower classes—were part of the resistance that the temperance push for reform came up against.

On the other hand, alcohol was served in many homes. While the temperance movement would have had the public believe that there were few women who drank, and those that did were extreme cases of deviance, the sheer number of available drinking accessories that were marketed for purchase in catalogues belie the myth of the saintly woman and mother.

Cookbooks, etiquette manuals, table-setting guides, and menu collections of the time reveal…much about respectable American drinking. More significant still is the physical evidence of spirituous living—the wine glasses, cocktail glasses, decanters, and liquor cabinets that formed America's material culture. (Murdock 4-5)

If home etiquette manuals provided recipes for cocktails (and many did), this implies that some women did engage in social drinking. Irish women had a reputation for drinking
alongside their male counterparts, but that led to negative stereotypes. Women of the upper classes, on the other hand, drank on social occasions, but endured no tarnished reputation, and rituals around women’s complex relationship to alcohol have similarities to the custom of treating inside the saloon.

Nineteenth-century etiquette writers discussed as a matter of course the tradition of “challenging” women to drink, which appears to have evolved from all-male drinking rituals. After the soup course (at formal dinners, presumably), a man could “quietly” lift his glass to a woman, who was expected to at least raise her glass to her lips as an act of courtesy…Challenging appears fraught with complication and meaning, implying male sovereignty and female obligation, and hinting at both sexual union and alcoholic excess. (Murdock 59)

As is still the case, women who drink, and especially women who drink to excess, are sometimes presumed to have questionable sexual “morals.” For women who lived in circles where drinking was acceptable, or even expected—as “challenging” would indicate—the tightrope around how much drink would damage the reputation must have been difficult to walk.

Some women drank to excess, and their reputations were virtually destroyed because of it. While the ideal of womanhood excluded drinking, especially as envisioned by the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, many women were frequently in drinking situations within their homes and at private social occasions, and partook of alcohol, even if only at the behest of a man. The ideals of femininity and womanhood were just that; ideals, and even the strongest and most widespread ideologies do not pertain to all
members of any society. The temperance movement was important and popular, but did not apply to all social strata or individuals.

Expectations for men were not quite as confining as those of women, for men were creatures of the public sphere, and had the luxury of more choice in what they did and how they spent their time. But the family was dependant on the male head of the household for all financial support. In several temperance dramas, women are shown seeking out piece-work (sewing—paid by the piece) only as a last resort, and in these plays the implication is that this is a source of deep shame (or it should be) on the husband. Good husbands made a comfortable living for their families—but never through the “traffic” (the liquor industry). It was more honorable to stay poor and work at an honest living as a laborer in a factory or as a tradesman like a fisherman than to make money from selling liquor. The message in many temperance plays was that engaging in the liquor trade was tantamount to stealing food from the mouths of wives and children. Father was expected to come home after work, and reciprocate the earnest, trusting, love of their angelic children and loving wives. Because his sphere was public, though, the husband was welcome at the saloon, and his enjoyment of fraternal company was also part of the separation of the lives lead by husbands and wives.

Much of the information that codified the stereotype of the drunkard is portrayed in light of the social roles that defined the proper American middle class during the second half of the nineteenth century. Who the alcoholic was, the story of the drunkard’s path and the consequences of his actions are all tied up in the social codes during this period, and the analysis section of this study is dependant on understanding the societal expectations and pitfalls of the period.
The Woman Alcoholic:
Extreme Deviance and Personal “Social Catastrophe”

As has been made clear, the alcohol problem was conceived in a way that divided it along gender lines. As I have discussed, alcoholism was considered a male problem; women and children, while victims of the male drinker, did not fit the typical depiction of an alcoholic. In fact, not only did women not fit that common understanding of what an alcoholic could look like, but if she turned out to be one, the social repercussions were severe. As we shall see, during this period in the nineteenth century so many women had invested in a particular interpretation of gender roles that the existence of a woman alcoholic was extraordinarily threatening to the maintenance of that worldview. As the previous section indicated, this was true not only as it pertained to alcohol use, but even beyond—into more general understandings of gender difference—like being known as the gentler sex. The nineteenth century, as we have seen, and as we shall continue to see, was really a binary world. The evolution of the family unit into two distinct spheres—public and private—became a crucial way that society defined itself. This is why the presence of the woman alcoholic was so terribly troubling to society—and women especially. It implicated the possibility that their ideological structure was unsound. And the knowledge of a woman alcoholic threatened the gender division that defined that outlook.

Both fictitious and “truthful” descriptions of women inebriates dwelt with particular horror on the public nature of their drunkenness: the daughter of a judge
arrested while walking the streets “in her night costume,” for example, or the
businessman's wife who insisted on going into “public places where she makes a
show of herself.” (Murdock 43)

Publicly displaying herself, whether in nightclothes or not, could be scandalous for a
woman. Nineteenth century ideals not only held the exemplary femininity as temperate,
but even more important to her reputation was her chastity. The Victorian society was
prudish to an extreme, and any indication that a woman was other than purely undefiled
could be disastrous. Since saloons were suspiciously considered places of debauch and
implied sexual transgression, public drinking for a woman could be tantamount to being
labeled a prostitute, and the associations between drinking at all and loose morals could
be stringent. This was especially true for public drinking as opposed to private drinking
or upper class society drinking by women in discreet environments.

The general association of women's drinking with sexual depravity and with
prostitution—a profession connected to public spaces and particularly to male
saloons—reinforced this horror over public drunkenness. As early as the 1840s
some women's temperance groups had difficulty empathizing with women
inebriates, associating them too closely with prostitutes and immorality. The
temperance movement, after all, was profoundly vested in domesticity and in the
contrast between public male drinking and private female abstinence. Women,
expected to be “angels,” suffered especially when exposed as human. (Murdock
44)

Unfortunately for women who found themselves addicted to alcohol, the social stigma
about their sexual morality could incur a damaged reputation even regardless of their
actual drinking patterns. A strong association between drink and sexual behavior, which still exists to some extent today, came to be part of the characterization of alcoholism in women.

Across the spectrum of society, from temperance advocates to medical doctors, the verdict on the female alcoholic was always unforgiving, and the sentence was a condemnation that exceeded the worst of the drunken men.

Being labeled an alcoholic was a social catastrophe for women in Victorian America…Alcoholism was considered to be so far from an acceptable standard of behavior for Victorian women that society could explain such conduct only in terms of extreme deviance…This was something the nation would not forgive, noted Dr. Albert Day (an early specialist in alcoholism treatment). The public, he observed, invariably saw inebriated women as worse than drunken men. “A debauched woman is always, everywhere, a more terrible object to behold than a brutish man. We look to see women,” Day said, “a little nearer to the angels” than men, “so their fall seems greater.” (Lender and Martin 117)

Women alcoholics were judged far more harshly than male drunks. While many people in nineteenth century society considered drinking by men to be negative, the act of drinking was considered a masculine behavior. It did not unbalance the whole system of gender identity the way female drinking did. “The stigma imposed by this double standard led to the now familiar ‘hidden alcoholism’ among women…Alcoholic women kept their condition to themselves for fear of social disgrace, only to deteriorate physically as a result. Delay in seeking help…accounted for the relative severity of alcoholism in women when the problem finally came to light” (Lender and Martin 118). Women hid their
drinking, also, through prescriptions, medicines and tonics, all of which had a high alcohol content, but were consumed under the guise of being beneficial to the health, or to treat nervous conditions.

The medical profession had a very ambivalent relationship to women inebriates. Doctors were presumed to be objective, and to have the best interest of their patient in mind during treatment, but the transgression of gender roles often proved too much, even for diagnosing doctors. “Physicians’ assumption of more severe pathology in the female drunkard than her male counterpart was closely related to her breach of social role” (Tracy 46). This was true even for doctors, who were interested in investigating the medical aspects of chronic drunkenness, and who had come to an early version of the disease concept (which will be discussed later). “Habitually drunk women…represented a…less common and distinctly more stigmatized image—one that was synonymous with loose morals, sexual promiscuity, and ruined motherhood” (Tracy 45). The exception to this rule were the Irish. Irish women were known to drink alongside their men, although they were not relieved of the stigma outside the Irish communities.

On the other hand, doctors were often complicit in furthering women’s dependence on alcohol and other drugs. In lieu of alcohol, many women were prescribed the more socially acceptable opiates, which were tied to treating nervous conditions and other “feminine” ailments. Women who were admitted into facilities to “cure inebriation,” were more often drug addicts. This image was canonized by Eugene O’Neill in his play Long Day’s Journey into Night.

Much of the discussion on women's asylums revolved around drug rather than alcohol abuse. In the late nineteenth century, Americans acknowledged women’s
opium addiction far more readily than their alcohol addiction. Available in patent medicines and by prescription, opium, laudanum, morphine, and heroin treated countless physical and emotional ailments. Women took opiates knowingly, when prescribed, and unknowingly, when drugs were added to prescription and over-the-counter medications. By the turn of the century, respectable middle-aged women made up the majority of opium addicts. Many female asylum patients, therefore, were admitted for drug addiction. (Murdock 47)

During this period, and up until just before Prohibition was enacted, opiates and other drugs were legal, and did not carry the stigma of illegal and illicit substances they now connote, and so it was much easier for a woman to take her drug, since they were liberally prescribed and would not be subject to the condemnation that drinking alcohol imposed. Links between alcoholism and heredity were starting to be noticed. It was thought that a woman who carried a child within her while she drank was a “blight on the nation” (Tracy 50). This was true whether she had an alcoholic history in her family or not, because she undermined the “cult of motherhood” ideology so vital to Victorian gender role interpretation. “Turn-of-the-century physicians asserted that a woman’s drinking made her ‘useless’ toward fulfilling her domestic duties and likely to harm the health of any children she conceived and carried in her toxic womb or nursed from her besotted bosom. Indeed, ‘race suicide’ was a common theme in much of the literature on women's drinking” (Tracy 50). To drink alcoholicly for a woman was not only anti-social, but even hostile to the middle class’ self-discernment. This has a direct relationship to the ideal of femininity that pervaded nineteenth century understanding about the female identity within the middle class.
The only known popular play, temperance or otherwise during this period, that had a female alcoholic character is a play called *Hot Corn*. While a production history can be traced, and the general narrative is known through notices and reviews, the script of *Hot Corn* is no longer extant. John Frick discusses this play at depth in his study:

*Hot Corn*…featured a female (Katy’s mother) as the principal drunkard and, in so doing, revealed to the American public a problem that plagued principally the Irish community in the United States. While in all other cultures it was mainly the men who drank, Irish-American women were as likely to drink to excess as the men…Ostensibly ignored by other temperance writers (dramatists included) who presumably sought to preserve the moral superiority of the American woman, female drunkenness was instead foregrounded by Robinson and the playwrights who translated his narrative for the stage and the drunken woman thus entered the cast of characters in nineteenth-century temperance dramaturgy. (141-2)

*Hot Corn* is described by Frick as one of the most heart rendering portrayals of the effects of alcoholism on a child. The play featured and was the inspiration for many popular temperance songs. Presumably Little Katy, the Hot Corn girl (forced to sell corn in the streets to feed her mother’s alcoholism) was doubly cursed since she was deprived of the love of a mother and was subject to the violent beatings of an alcoholic parent. It is likely, as Frick indicates, that most of the temperance playwrights wanted to preserve the accepted gender definitions, and so ignored the “hidden” alcohol problems in women, but Frick’s assertion that it was only in the Irish community that women drank is misleading. He does not include in his discussion evidence of the “hidden alcoholism” of women in
other social circles, and so advances the stereotype of the Irish woman as the only female bold enough to drink like man.

As already discussed in the previous section, the particular way the middle class had of identifying the differences between women and men—truly considering the feminine and masculine in binary terms—created a rigid codification of behaviors appropriate to each gender. Women alcoholics, who currently make up close to half the membership of Alcoholics Anonymous in the United States (less in countries that still have stricter gender roles), had to hide their condition or suffer the severest of social ostracism. The problem of alcohol was framed within a male/female context. The act of drinking was part of the male prototype, while women were the victims of male drinking, never the perpetrators, and this rigidity became essential to the messages spread by the various temperance groups around the country, especially the Women’s Christian Temperance Union.

The Women’s Christian Temperance Union:
Codifying Feminine Virtue to Implement Change

The Women’s Christian Temperance Union was perhaps the most influential temperance organization in postbellum America. The WCTU seized upon and made use of the sentimental version of family life and the idealized feminine to forward its own agenda. This does not imply that these ideologies were solely the responsibility of the WCTU, but the WCTU did sponsor aggressive information campaigns about alcohol, which included emotional appeals based on these concepts. In addition, the WCTU
brought to political circles the activism of hundreds of thousands of women from throughout the United States, and even though these women could not vote, they did form a resolute “political action committee.” Through their well-organized information campaigns, they influenced the formation of the public image of an alcoholic, and in so doing, helped to shape the way the alcoholic was depicted on stage. The WCTU was structured in part into small activist groups that used the power of theater to spread their messages on a regional level. Even though these plays may not have been acted with prowess or professionalism, they did form a widespread home grown industry of playscript publishing and providing the means for amateur productions of temperance plays across America.

As discussed in the section of this chapter about the temperance movement’s influence on politics, the successful passage of Maine Laws in many states was followed rather quickly by repeals of those laws, or a lack of will to enforce them. Before the formation of the WCTU, a grass roots movement started to stir in the rural areas of the country reacting against these repeals. In small towns, women who had supported the temperance cause, only to be disappointed by the fleeting nature of their success, decided to challenge the lack of enforcement of existing law, considering it a major hindrance to the temperance cause. They also “enforced” their own laws where none existed against alcohol. Contrary to the ideal feminine later promoted by the WCTU:

they took up axes and destroyed the liquor supply in local saloons. These vigilante attacks occurred between 1853 and 1859 in dozens of towns in Illinois, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Massachusetts, and other Northern states; immediately after the Civil War, several more raids occurred. Rather than condemn the women,
many of whom were from prominent families, local opinion supported the
vigilantes. (Pegram 58)

Women also held marches and other public gatherings to rally support for the re-
regulation of alcohol. This outburst of activist agitation came to be called the Women’s
Crusade, and marked the beginning of a new chapter in the composition of the
temperance movement, leading eventually to the formation of the Women’s Christian
Temperance Union in 1873. One of the aspects of the Women’s Crusade that tied the
demonstrations and vigilante actions to attempts to change policy within the political
system was the agitation by these women to bring about lawsuits against the owners of
taverns, saloons and also the distributors of “prescribed” drugs. These were civil damage
suits, meant to disrupt commerce where legislation failed. Of course these women could
not bring the lawsuits themselves because the legal system gave them no rights to do so,
and so they had to “rely on men to guard their interests” (Pegram 61). These lawsuits
were filed by men sympathetic to their cause, but it was understood that the force behind
the legal action came from the Women’s Crusade, a marked departure from the impetus
behind earlier temperance campaigns.

The initial swell in activity known as the Women’s Crusade, which pre-dated the
Civil War, was most likely interrupted by the concerns and distractions of that war.
Northern women’s groups focused on providing nursing, bandages, clothing and other
support for the soldiers of the Union Army, and so temperance concerns were put on the
back burner until after the war. A second surge in activism by grass roots groups of
women occurred a little more than ten years after the initial actions had ended.

“Beginning in December 1873 clusters of middle-class women in small towns
periodically marched through the streets of their communities, entered saloons or ringed them with praying women, and closed them down” (Pegram 44). This renewed action spread through the country, and culminated with a much more formalized organization than the Women’s crusade—The Women’s Christian Temperance Union. Initially formed in 1874, the WCTU grew to national prominence under the leadership of Francis Willard, who became president in 1879, and used her charismatic personality to move women’s voices into the mainstream discourse about temperance, and who lead the ideological framing of temperance as a male/female dichotomy. It should be noted that the WCTU was not a formalized version of the Women’s Crusade. There were several very distinct differences between the two, as we shall explore, even though the Women’s Crusade seems to have generated the momentum among women that made the more formal organization of the WCTU possible.

On its founding the WCTU shared the religious imagery and emphasis on moral suasion that characterized the Women’s Crusade. But, quite unlike the grass-roots Crusade, the new organization developed out of more formal ties to evangelical Protestantism. It quickly moved away from the direct-action confrontations made famous by the marching women…[From the beginning, the WCTU] were proponents of gospel temperance, a strategy aimed at saving drunkards and rehabilitating liquor sellers through mass meetings, prayer, and publicity…In keeping with the interests of many WCTU organizers in childhood education, the Union also advocated temperance instruction for children in Sunday schools and in public schools. (Pegram 67)
The most important thing that the WCTU brought to temperance reform was the organized dissemination of an ideology about men, women and alcohol that shows up very clearly in the temperance plays, and was the foundation of all of their education campaigns.

The WCTU promoted ideas that broadly covered civic discourse about alcoholism. These included the education of the public and children about the dangers of alcohol, and informational campaigns based on the sociological and medical knowledge of the time (although tilted toward the WCTU ends). The WCTU championed the newly-conceived standards of family values, ideal femininity and masculinity, and promoted an incredibly influential framing of the roles and obligations of each member of the family.

The political involvement of the WCTU had a great deal of influence, but many WCTU members were frustrated because they could not vote, or directly lobby, or sometimes even speak at national temperance conferences. Ironically, even through the WCTU never made suffrage a primary goal of their movement, it was one of the first organizations that called for the need for women’s right to vote, and because of the strength and duration of their organization, the WCTU paved the way for the successful lobbying for suffrage. These two political movements were parallel in their development, and not surprisingly women won the right to vote within the same year that prohibition was adopted.

Before an audience of evangelical Methodists, Willard declared that…women, “truest to God and our country by instinct and education, should have a voice at the polls, where the Sabbath and the Bible are now attacked by the infidel foreign population of our country.” (Pegram 70)
It is clear by Willard’s statement that she not only was a proponent of women’s right to vote, but that the WCTU was also partly responsible for pointing the finger at recent immigrants for the degradation of American morals. The WCTU believed that continued problems of inebriety among the immigrant population, presumably influencing the general population of the United States, were a fundamental part of the continued problems with intemperance, and xenophobia was part of the WCTU campaign which promoted gender and family ideals not necessarily espoused by immigrant populations.

Additionally, the WCTU was tangentially involved in the medical profession’s evolving assessment of alcoholism (which will be explored in this chapter). The WCTU practiced “gospel temperance,” which sought redemption for the individual drunkard. When the medical field started to regard chronic drunkenness as a disease, the ideas embedded in “gospel” temperance—that the drunkard was redeemable, or at least not wholly morally responsible for his behavior—was a positive reinforcement to the emerging disease concept. Even though Benjamin Rush had argued that chronic drunkenness was a disease half a century before, doctors were slow to consider inebriates anything other than weak willed and of low moral character. The disease concept of “alcoholism fit neatly with the WCTU's…depiction of alcohol as a universally corrupting poison. It was also easily aligned with the Anti-Saloon League's campaign against the sale of alcohol. For temperance reformers, the onus was right where it belonged: on King Alcohol's shoulders. Of course, alcoholism proved useful in light of inebriety's broader meaning, for it specified the substance responsible for intoxication” (Tracy 41). The women of the WCTU, then, could view their own loved ones, their husbands and sons, with the compassion brought to the ill, while pointing toward the substance of alcohol as
a corrupting influence, without which their relatives would not have become alcoholics.

In several temperance plays, questions about the drunkard’s morality are circumvented through a Rip Van Winkle type device wherein the play depicts terrible things done to his family, and they endure the worst of tragedies, only to discover that the play’s action was all a dream, and that he can heed the warnings without actual harm coming to himself and his loved ones. Alcohol could be demonized, and the lessons of drinking could be learned while the protagonist in the play retained respect from the audience.

While the “medicalization” of alcoholism was convenient as a way to deflect blame from the individual alcoholic, medical cures, of which none truly existed, but have been pursued, were not favored over old-fashioned morals as a solution for inebriation. The gospel part of “gospel temperance” continued to advocate for cures based on religious conversion and the idea of being “saved.” Frances Willard, the president of the WCTU, had opinions shadowed by many throughout the country, which obstructed the advancement of the medical consideration of alcoholism, even though the disease concept made it easier to consider loved ones redeemable.

First, Willard regarded the studies of religious and ethical experts as no less valid than those of physicians and scientific experts. This was a decided obstacle to the physicians who were promoting the necessity of science-based medical care to address the problem of habitual drunkenness. For while she might champion medical care, moral solutions were equally appropriate in her mind. For Willard, habitual drunkenness remained a moral condition first, and a medical condition second. Moreover, she was hardly alone in her views, which at the very least
exercised a tremendous influence over tens of thousands of women across the

country. (Tracy 81)

This resistance to the medial advancement of treatment of alcoholism was wrapped up in
the images of femininity and family that were so essential to the platforms the WCTU
advocated.

This censure of alcohol and forgiveness of alcohol abusers deserves detailed
consideration, for it illuminates the attitudes of many nineteenth-century women.

Because motherhood explicitly defined femininity, women focused on the home
and their biological role within it as a source of empowerment and autonomy.

This explains women's enthusiasm for temperance and the effectiveness of their
public role. (Murdock 24)

The feminine ideal and the concept that the moral influence of women could have some

effect on their drunken husbands continued to play a key role in the family dynamics
promoted by the public education policies that the WCTU embraced.

The public information and education programs that were run by the WCTU
constituted the most widespread source of information about alcoholism to the public at
that time. Even though Benjamin Rush’s pamphlets had been widely distributed, they did
not have the impact that the volunteerism and organization of the WCTU had on public
understanding of inebriation. The women of the WCTU used their community
involvement to coordinate all manner of activities where they could promote the
WCTU’s conception of alcoholism and their solutions to the local populace.

Indeed, when we think about the level of public agitation over excessive alcohol
consumption, it would be hard to overestimate the role of the WCTU. Frances
Willard's “do everything” policy meant women crusaders were present in a wide range of social-improvement campaigns—child welfare, kindergartens, the Americanization of foreign-speaking peoples, health education, the suppression of impure literature, international peace, women's suffrage—and the WCTU delivered its anti-alcohol message in all of these arenas. (Tracy 11)

Since the WCTU was so prominently responsible for disseminating the information the majority of the public had about excessive drinking, the images that found their way onto the stage were highly influenced by the male-female duality and culture of motherhood, which stood as the moral backbone of the organization’s positions. One of the most notable developments in temperance drama was the addition of women playwrights to the assortment of voices writing for the temperance cause. An example of how the WCTU message made its way to audiences is a play by Effie W. Merriman called *The Drunkard’s Family* which was “written to be ‘acted by children’ in school, at home or in Sunday School” (Frick 76). The social agenda was overt and forceful, making use of the manipulative nature of melodramatic form, and inviting children into the forwarding of the image of the alcoholic as perceived by the WCTU. The intensity behind the information campaign makes sense because the women of the WCTU had so much personally at stake driving their cause.

For the general public at the turn of the century, the bulk of their information regarding alcohol came from organizations such as the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, not from the medical establishment. The relations between men and women were at the heart of the WCTU’s critique of alcohol, but it was
women’s victimization by male drinkers that received the lion’s share of the organization’s attentions when it came to reforming the drunkard. (Tracy 77)

Alcohol use seen in terms of dichotomy—as an issue that made clear the separation between men and women—became the primary way that the nation engaged in discourse about alcoholism under the influence of the WCTU. Of course, portraying things in a dichotomy was perfectly suited to melodrama as a form, where ambiguity is not an acceptable part of the narrative. Another bilateral way that the WCTU framed alcoholism was in the public versus private nature of drinking. The WCTU also looked at drinking in terms of the differences between masculine and feminine relationships to alcohol and the idealization of the feminine as temperate. Opposing the vision of the quintessential feminine, the masculine ideal was that of breadwinner and public figurehead of the family. Father was the disciplinarian, and had responsibility for the well being of his wife and children as well. But in the sphere of the tavern, masculinity also meant a proven ability that a man could “hold his liquor” and pay for a round of drinks for all when any toasting challenge was posed by the group. The WCTU suspected that immigrant populations were responsible for the continued abuse of alcohol and the continued support of the urban saloons, where illicit sexual activity always threatened the sanctity of home and marriage.

In the 1870s, these drinking establishments became the bête noire of the WCTU. Members viewed the saloon as a danger to their families, to the republic’s values, and to their status as women. In the social context of the day, these fears were not unreasonable. (Lender and Martin 106-7)
And so, the education campaigns, bake sales and other community engagement that the women of the WCTU pursued were all focused on naming the kind of values that dictated proper middle class American behavior in order to provide a backdrop against which they could say what moral failings and abhorrent conduct constituted the drunkard.

The culmination of what the WCTU stood for was well represented by the formal name of their ideological and political platform; “home protection.” The WCTU’s affiliated political party was called the Home Protection Party. As framed by the WCTU, alcoholism was a problem in that it posed a danger to the security of the home and family. Marriage, the moral influence of a wife or mother and more general “family values” (to use a more contemporary term), were thought to provide safe haven that a heretofore drunken bachelor needed to secure his release from alcohol’s grip. While a woman’s influence was thought to offer a protective leverage on the prospective drunkard, the evidence of the age ran counter to this ideology. Even in dramas, wives and children do not prove to be effective persuaders, but tragedy visited upon them sometimes incited their husbands to stop drinking. On the other hand, being married when a man stopped drinking was portrayed as a safeguard which many bachelors did not have. Despite widespread influence in the way the public viewed the myriad aspects of alcohol use and abuse, women continued to hold minimal direct power over the politics and agenda of the larger temperance movement, which had many other formal organizations (like the Anti-Saloon League), each with their own particular concern related to alcohol. As mentioned earlier, the Prohibitionist Party, while short lived, at least had direct political influence. The Anti-Saloon League gained a great deal of power and influence toward the end of the nineteenth century, and contributed greatly to the
eventual passage of Prohibition. Thus the actual political results of the WCTU’s work were mixed.

Women occupied a paradoxical position in the American temperance movement of the mid-nineteenth century. On the one hand, the dedication and enthusiasm of female volunteers were critical assets in building temperance into a mass movement. But as the movement grew powerful enough to advance political solutions to the problems of intemperance, women found themselves shunted to the margins. Women circulated petitions and lobbied legislators in support of prohibition laws, but they lacked the central tool of pressure politics—the vote.

Women's voices were also muffled within temperance organizations. (Pegram 52) Thus, the WCTU was a critical movement when it came to the creation and forwarding of the ideological constructs within which the stereotype of the alcoholic emerged and was staged. Had their education programs not been as far reaching as they were, and had they not promoted the staging of community productions of temperance plays, the alcoholic stereotype might not have had the numerous examples found in nineteenth century plays. The broad transmission of information and representation by the WCTU’s activities reinforced this ideology, which became dominant and pervaded the American imagination until after the repeal of Prohibition.
Intemperate, Inebriate, Dipsomaniac, Alcoholic:
The Evolution of Descriptive and Medical Language

The words used to describe phenomena often become quickly laden with the social implications surrounding those occurrences. In the latter part of the nineteenth century this was especially true for the language used to describe what we now term alcoholism. While I have often used the words alcoholism and alcoholic so far in this study to describe chronic drunkenness in all of its forms, at the time, the language used to describe it was charged with many different implications. A survey of the language used to describe the condition we now know as alcoholism, and the way the language was used and changed over the latter part of the nineteenth century serves us as a background for later in the project, when language used to relate the same ideas is examined.

From the 1840s through the Civil War, the prevailing word used to describe chronic drinking was intemperate, although intemperate also came to mean the imbibing of any alcohol during the latter half on the nineteenth century, rather than implying the drinker was always a drunkard. “Intemperate” had religious affiliations, and was especially closely associated with evangelically motivated actions to fix chronic drunkenness and the social ills associated with it. Moral suasion, pledge-signing, and “gospel” temperance all used “intemperate” (as well as drunkard) as the primary terms for frequent chronic drinking, but from the Civil War to the turn of the century, the most commonly used terms changed several times from intemperate to inebriate to dipsomaniac to alcoholic. “Of the four terms, the oldest and most morally suffused was intemperance, a term that suggested a deviation from the golden rule of moderation
championed by church and health evangelists alike—a term that physicians hoped to replace with inebriety” (Tracy 27). The building tension between the insistence on a spiritual solution to the problem, and the desire for successful medical intervention led to the initial reinvention of language that captured what drunkenness was at its core.

“Intemperance” had a whole host of associations that the emerging scientifically-based medical field found problematic, and early attempts to describe how and why excessive drinking manifested itself in humans, even when described as a disease, was infused with moral condemnation, and was considered the result of weak willpower. Benjamin Rush’s tracts read this way, as do the descriptions of William Sweetser, a doctor from Vermont, who wrote in 1829:

[I]t is a disease produced and maintained by voluntary acts, which is a very different thing in my view from a disease with which providence inflicts us...Ignominy and disgrace should ever be associated with intemperance, no matter how much, there is not yet enough to prevent the spreading evil...I feel convinced that should the opinion ever prevail that intemperance is a disease like fever, mania, &c. [sic], and no more moral turpitude be affixed to it, drunkenness, if possible, will spread itself even to a more alarming extent. (qtd. in Tracy 29)

The notion that problems with alcohol were a question of morals and a cure was simply a matter of exerting the will had not changed much by 1870 (and in many respects have not extensively changed among many people today). Most people continued to believe that alcoholism was the result of shabby usage of God-given free will. “[A]ll persons were divinely endowed with the power to resist temptation and to find salvation through the exercise of the will; only the vicious and the weak failed to exert the necessary self-
discipline to remain sober” (Tracy 29). Intemperance was thought to be a self-inflicted experience worthy of the kind of punishment delivered upon deliberate decisions. The notion that alcoholism was a willing choice of the part of the drinker still pervades public understanding of addiction. Thinking about alcoholism as a condition in which the drunkard has no choice whatever in his actions while under alcohol’s spell was still somewhat alien to the “disease concept” of alcoholism, which had just started to enter medical discourse in the 1870s. Public policy and legislation maintained a reaction to the negative results of excessive drinking in a punitive fashion.

Nowhere was public skepticism of the disease concept more apparent than in the words of police-court judge Nathan Crosby of Lowell, Massachusetts, who spoke before the State Legislature’s Committee on Charitable Institutions in 1871: “The great general fact remains that the drunkard is self-made, progressively self-taught, and obstinately self-immolated. I regard the doctrine of ‘disease’ and ‘insanity’ a new incentive to intemperance, the waiver of imprisonment, of prosecutions, a removal of criminality, and an asylum a bounty for drunkenness.” (qtd. in Tracy 29)

The disease concept was still not a convincing argument to many doctors, and had gained very little public acceptance even as the religious implications of the word intemperance lost the force behind the language once found.

“Inebriety” and “inebriate” came into popular usage in the 1870s. In an age of commonly held respect for scientific discovery and inquiry—Darwin’s Origin of Species had been published barely a decade before—the term “inebriety” served to describe chronic drunkenness that was not overly laden with the religious implications that
“intemperance” was. It became the primary term used for the rest of the nineteenth century.

Initially, inebriety referred to the disease of habitual drunkenness caused either by defective heredity or repeated debauch. Physicians frequently referred to the former as hereditary inebriety or as periodic inebriety...Simple inebriates or chronic inebriates were usually those who compromised their health through routine indulgence...The process by which drinking passed from vicious habit to debilitating disease was a staple of most discussions of inebriety. (Tracy 37)

Physicians began to study and catalogue the symptoms of inebriety and consider the ways that it resembled other known diseases. The study broadened to other addictions and the term came to include the progressive nature (it gets worse over time) and mental state found in all addiction, regardless of substance. “Inebriety,” then, became associated with the broader notion of addiction in general. The important thing about the switch to the use of “inebriate” to describe the chronic drunkard is that it indicates a shift in the public’s understanding about the essence of alcohol addiction. No longer simply a rupture in the state of an individual’s soul and salvation, factors of heredity and the way the substance acted upon the metabolism were also part of the understanding of what this descriptive word meant. But the term “inebriety” did not lose all association with moral judgment upon the alcohol addict, and some in the medical profession used another new term to continue to try to disassociate the topic of their study and treatment from moral failing.

The even newer term was “dipsomania,” specifically introduced for use as a medical diagnostic term. The etymology comes “literally [from] a mad (Greek mania) thirst (Greek dipsa) for alcohol, dipsomania was perhaps the most colorful of terms for
habitual drunkenness. ‘The craving for drink in real dipsomaniacs…is of a strength of which normal persons can form no conception,’ wrote psychologist William James in his 1890 discussion of human will” (qtd. in Tracy 31). Dipsomania was an attempt to impose a further medicalization upon the language used, and to further the disease concept growing in popularity around the discourse of alcoholism.

Its meaning evolved over time, as did every term used to describe habitual drunkenness, but initially, dipsomania was used by physicians and reformers simply to describe habitual drunkenness that was a disease rather than a vice. In the closing years of the nineteenth century, however, dipsomania more often denoted a special form of inebriety, one characterized by its periodicity, its hereditary nature, its middle- and upper-class victims, and above all, its relationship to insanity. (Tracy 31)

Many of the hospitals and asylums that were opened during the last few decades of the nineteenth century to treat chronic drunkenness were referred to as being for the treatment of dipsomaniacs and inebriates. The term “dipsomania” was significant to the temperance reform movement because it was associated with upper class drinking problems, and could be psychologically placed in a different category than the moral problems brought on by lower class drinking—all part of the WCTU’s public information campaign. The term was an essential tool in continuing to forward the campaign to stomp out the social misery caused by drunkenness among the masses (a moral failing), while treating the disease of the more fortunate, prone to delicate sensibilities and nervous dispositions. But even so, the moral cast to alcohol addiction followed the changes in language, and treatment was often conditional upon the background of the patient.
It was no accident that upon the opening of the Massachusetts Hospital for Dipsomaniacs and Inebriates in 1893, patients were admitted only if they were certified in a court of law as “not of bad repute or of bad character, apart from [their] habits of inebriety.” Over the intervening two decades, the term intemperance had fallen from grace, but its moral valence had persisted even as physicians employed the two more medicalized terms, dipsomania and inebriety.

(Tracy 31)

Clearly the language changes were intended to distance the concept of chronic drunkenness from the certainty of hell and damnation in the drunkard’s future entrenched in the minds of the religious temperance reformers. But the changes in language didn’t make too much of a difference in the public (as opposed to medical) perception of the nature of the affliction. Nor did the new language make its way into the plays, where, for the most part, the message continued to be one warning of the evils of intemperance.

The final linguistic contribution to the labeling of alcohol addiction was the passage to the now universally accepted term “alcoholism.” As a word, “alcoholism” had an earlier beginning than we might assume, considering when it came into general usage.

The Swedish physician Magnus Huss introduced the term alcoholism in 1849 to describe a state of chronic alcohol intoxication that was characterized by severe physical pathology and disruption of social functioning. His new term was intended to replace the German term methylism, which Huss judged to be both obscure and technically incorrect. (White 34)

It was a useful term for the WCTU and the Anti-Saloon League, which maintained focus on alcohol as the substance at the root of many social ills, and much suffering.
“[A]lcoholism proved useful in light of inebriety's broader meaning, for it specified the substance responsible for intoxication” (Tracy 41). The WCTU remained focused on alcohol as the source of social ills, and largely ignored problems with drugs, since drug use by women clouded the male-female dichotomy that was so useful to their message.

While “alcoholism” was coined as a term half a century before it was used within discussion of drunkenness, and eighty years before it came into widespread use, it’s specific referance to alcohol did much at the end of the temperance movement and after repeal of Prohibition to divide, in the minds of the public, addiction into separate realms. America’s understanding about addiction to alcohol and drugs became separate—two different phenomena. After Prohibition, alcohol addiction, while troublesome, was legal, whereas drug addiction was not only problematic socially, but also constituted illegal behavior (with the exception of prescribed drugs). This change in perception served the alcohol industry, which promoted the use of the term alcoholism to draw a distinction between their legal substance and the addiction to illegal substances. Upon repeal of Prohibition, the alcohol industry offered an elixir which was legal and respectable. The other drugs—used both for what we term “recreational” and for “medical” reasons, which had enjoyed the same legal status as alcohol before Prohibition, were never re-legalized, and so became demonized in a way that resembled the reputation of alcohol during the height of temperance reform. The ideological tension between alcohol and drug addiction was complicated by the manipulation of language to serve the interests of the alcohol industry.

Alcohol inebriety seems to have encompassed more common forms of chronic drunkenness, while the term dipsomania was a more medicalized term for
episodic but explosive drinking binges that were thought to be a special form of temporary insanity. The term inebriety fell out of favor following the repeal of Prohibition, perhaps in part because the term embraced both good drugs that were to become celebrated and bad drugs that were to become increasingly demonized. The differentiation between alcohol language and “drug” language begins to become solidified in this post-Repeal period. (White 35) And so alcoholism came to be the primary word used to describe the condition that the temperance movement sought to reform in the earliest part of the nineteenth century. The term itself had existed, but the strange conglomeration of words used to name alcohol addiction belies the struggle over deeper social understanding and belief about alcohol abuse.

The evolution of the language used to describe a phenomenon which had caused trouble for society for the better part of a century can give insight into the struggle over imagery, meaning and implied character found in dramatic portrayals of alcoholism in the late nineteenth century. This chapter section serves as an important background to the later examination of the kind of language the characters in temperance plays used to describe the effects of alcohol and the meaning of drunkenness, and reveals a larger struggle over the basic construction of what alcoholism was (and is) in the minds of the nation.
The Treatment of the Chronic Drunkard:

The Duplicity of the Medical/Moral Model

The evolution of the disease concept of alcoholism was slow and met quite a bit of resistance from the temperance movement. The implications of “disease” are that treatment is medical rather than moral, and that concept challenged the foundational principles of the temperance movement, which sought to cure the drunkard through moral instruction and religious conversion experiences. The temperance movement’s very beginnings started with religious revivals and the moralizing of behavior rather than the clinical treatment of a disease. If, as doctors began to suspect, the disease concept proved to be true, the treatment of alcoholism would then be the responsibility and territory of professional medical personnel rather than the realm of the socially conscious and ideologically driven. The introduction of the “disease concept” into temperance discourse created an ideological turf war between the social reformer and the physicians. The result was that medical progress in treatment was very slow to establish itself; especially the introduction of effective treatment rather than quackery, of which there was a lot, including the substitution of drugs in the form of elixirs and tonics for drink. A further complication to the debate was over the medical use of alcohol, which the temperance movement was vehemently against, and which was responsible for much of the “hidden alcoholism” among women. Nineteenth century medicines were crude at best, though, and alcohol continued to be an important anesthetic, among other uses. Alcoholism was also associated with a barrage of tangential illnesses, and was found as a co-symptom to
many lethal conditions (such as tuberculosis). Early treatment options became available as the concept of alcoholism as a disease made headway within the medical community.

The push to medicalize alcoholism was championed by a Maine doctor named Joseph E. Turner.

[He] launched a crusade calling for the medical treatment of alcoholics and urged the construction of ‘inebriate asylums’ for that purpose. Only in these institutions, he claimed, could alcoholics get the professional care that would enable them to break the chain of addiction. And with genuine foresight, he stressed an equally important justification for the asylums: Turner believed that studies of patient populations would lead to breakthroughs in the medical battle against alcoholism.

(Lender and Martin 119-20)

Turner oversaw the opening of the first state run medical facility for the treatment of alcoholism, the New York State Inebriate Asylum in Binghamton, N. Y. in 1864. Over the next thirty-five years, many other institutions were opened for the same purpose, and by 1900, over fifty were treating patients, indicating a move to professionalize rather than moralize solutions for alcohol addiction.

While schisms between medical and moral treatment approaches were present within the temperance movement, there was also cooperation between doctors and the organizations invested in alcohol reform because deviation from social norms continued to impact the diagnostic lens through which the disease concept was viewed and diagnosed.

Instead of promoting exclusively medical interpretations of inebriety, grounded in biology, physiology, and psychology, physicians continued to address the moral
and social aspects of the condition. They recognized that any disease concept that ignored the moral dimensions of drunkenness would face both public and professional resistance. Medico-moral entrepreneurs, physicians worked within the cultural thought styles of their day. Thus, their “rational” and “effective” clinical solutions to alcoholism also constituted a campaign to redefine manhood, womanhood, and citizenship in America in sober, responsible, and fiscally independent ways. Physicians saw their curative efforts in role-restoring terms, helping their inebriate patients develop the skills they deemed necessary for life in a modern, patriarchal, industrial capitalist democracy. (Tracy 19)

Treatment and perception of a cure for alcoholism were biased toward restoration of social norms, deviation from which contributed to the primary diagnosis. This paradigm was also true for many other ailments that afflicted people. Doctoring in the nineteenth century continued to be based on guesswork in most cases, with causative factors attributed to seeming links between circumstances and sickness—like poverty and drunkenness or tuberculosis. Doctors also were not immune from the prevailing moral and gendered concepts about chronic drunkenness, as described in the section on women alcoholics, and their diagnoses were not purely scientific.

As asylums became available, the medical associations began to pressure legislators to give doctors the legal power to commit an unwilling alcoholic. This was especially true if the alcoholic behavior was deemed the dipsomaniac type, which was as you may recall, was linked to insanity.

Medical discussions of inebriety routinely focused on the compact between the individual and the state. To do so was a necessity, for physicians portrayed
alcoholism as a public health problem, and they enjoined state legislatures across
the country to pass laws permitting them to commit inebriates to medical
facilities. Neurologists, psychiatrists, and general clinicians alike wished to
control the inebriate as they had managed the insane and quarantined infectious
smallpox patients. To treat the inebriate as they desired meant obtaining the
power to institutionalize the drunkard for long periods of time. Thus, physicians
mobilized to convince municipal and state officials that it was crucial to alter the
laws governing habitual drunkenness—laws that usually levied a short jail
sentence or fine on the public inebriate but rarely facilitated his medical care.

(Tracy 70)

If the pressure from temperance societies could not legislate the banishment of alcohol,
then pressure from the medical profession could banish the alcoholic. Doctors had limited
success with this tactic, as institutionalization was far more expensive than imprisonment,
and the cost to the state was a critical factor in the legislative decision-making. A
shocking extension of the desire to legislate the power to control the alcoholic was the
advocacy of so called “hereditary containment” for the chronic drunkard, finding its
extreme case in the desire to sterilize the alcoholic, especially if the case was a woman
(Tracy 59).

President of the Indiana Medical Society Gonzalva Smythe observ[ed] in 1891:
‘Most rapid advances have been made recently in the treatment of the insane, the
epileptic and the inebriate . . . They are correctly regarded as sick with a physical
disease and treated accordingly—kindly and humanely. This course should be
continued. . . but no license to marry should ever be issued, and every means
necessary to prevent reproduction should be vigorously enforced.’ (qtd. in Tracy 59)

So while understanding of what alcoholism was made the transition from a religiously-cured moral failing to the disease concept, these strides were tempered by the beliefs about the ethical issues surrounding drunkenness, which continued to pervade the thinking at the time. And as noted earlier in this chapter, the woman alcoholic was thought to be especially monstrous because of the pressures the cult of motherhood and the feminine ideal placed on her. She also challenged the prevailing male-female dichotomy about alcohol abuse, undermining the motivation for much of the WCTU information campaigns.

Medical solutions for problem drinking do not appear in the dramatic depictions of alcoholism, in part perhaps because they muddied an ideology. The more likely reason is that the moral valence placed upon the drunkard made for better theater, especially within the melodramatic form. It is more difficult to portray the moral redemption of a diseased man than a fallen one, and melodrama depends on characters with clearly drawn moral boundaries, so it is no wonder that portrayal of alcoholism as a disease made little headway in theatrical depictions, although the word disease does enter into the text of the plays. It is also important to note that the change to a disease model was very slow to take hold, and that even when the possibility or likelihood that alcoholism was a disease was acknowledged, the actual ideas about social roles and the harm done to society still held major weight in the consideration of how to cure the inebriate. Doctors simply didn’t think of disease outside the context of social circumstances, as is the practice these days. It was just as important to treat the conditions that led to disease as the disease itself. The
“disease concept” did not make the public sympathetic to the drunk the way they would be to a victim of cancer. Even the terminology—a victim of cancer—believes biases about personal accountability. Cancer patients are for the most part thought of as innocent victims of their disease, whereas alcoholics are thought to be complicit in the devastating results of their drinking, again making for a better dramatic story. (Perhaps exceptions are lung disease caused by cigarette smoking and obesity.)

While the medical model of alcoholism would not take hold in the public imagination until after Prohibition, and the stereotype of the drunkard would not change until into the twentieth century, the introduction of the disease concept in an important development in the discourse about alcoholism in the nineteenth century, even if it did not make its way to the stage.

Chapter Conclusion

The many different religious, societal, moral and medical factors that contributed to the formation of the alcoholic stereotype are all interwoven. It is hard to separate one sphere interpretation of the meaning of excessive drinking over another, which is why the different factors have been examined one at a time in this chapter. But emerging out of all of the different influences on how the alcoholic was perceived, is a stereotype which was portrayed on countless stages across the country, solidifying in the minds of the public what alcoholism was, and allowing the public to identify that depiction when they saw it. An acknowledgement of all the elements that influenced the formation of this image is critical to an analysis of the stereotype itself as seen in temperance drama.
Chapter 1 traced the development of the temperance movement alongside the presentation of the first image of the American drunkard on the stage in *The Drunkard*. The model set forth by this play both forged a new practice in American theater—the long run—and also showed how successful the drunkard’s tale could be within the melodramatic form. Chapter 2 has continued to describe the evolution of the temperance movement and the emergence of a strong ideology that framed the temperance debate. The following three chapters will engage in a thorough analysis of the portrayal of the drunkard in several different kinds of plays, from Broadway to backyard, and from temperance ideology to popular entertainment. The chapters will articulate who the character of the alcoholic was—what his behaviors were and what that revealed about the way society conceived of him. In addition, an analysis of the typical alcoholism narrative will reveal much about the sense of inevitability and trajectory that was thought of as the drunkard’s outcome. This will also give insight into the tension between the drunkard’s personal responsibility for his story and the desire to engage the audience on an emotional level—where the use of dramatic highs and lows feed the need for the deterministic tragic end to play itself out. Each play has obvious markers where the ideology that was prevalent in the nineteenth century was forwarded by the script, and chapter five will examine that. The repetition of the attributes that signal a stereotype are seen throughout all seven plays, and will be noted. The nineteenth century saw specific social pressures, concepts and strongholds all of which compiled into the depiction of a character and narrative that became so forceful and ingrained in our society, that even now it is hard to see past the stereotype that came from these plays.
CHAPTER THREE

The following chapters make continued reference to the seven plays chosen for this study. In order to follow the similar storylines and repeated use of the same name in most of the plays, characters lists and synopses of plots are available in the appendix.

The Alcoholic Character

This chapter will examine who the alcoholic is and will articulate how many of his characteristics are portrayed again and again. Repeated portrayals of certain behaviors demark a perceived association between alcoholism and those attributes. When in performance, the alcoholic character is found to nearly always to repeat specific behaviors (whether this is an accurate portrayal or not), and those actions have become stereotypically attributed to alcoholism. In the following pages, several aspects of the drunkard’s personality that repeatedly appear in these plays will be analyzed. Through this process, the stereotype of the alcoholic character as seen on the nineteenth century stage will be articulated. Close analysis of these plays can prove difficult. Many of the characters within them have the same names. Almost every play has a wife or child named Mary, a name heavily laden with Christian implications and performed for a Christian audience. I will do my best to keep these characters straight, but almost
ironically, in addition to the tendency for melodramas to operate within the realm of typical rather than individuized characters, the repetition of character names reinforces the notion that they are repeated stereotypes. The alcoholic characters found in temperance drama serve primarily as warning figures. True to melodramatic form, these characters, for the most part, lack complexity and serve to demonstrate the differences between the before and the after images that relate alcohol’s influence. Stark contrasts are drawn between the characteristics displayed when a character is drinking or in the grips of alcoholic obsession, and how the character is portrayed prior to and/or following the period when they are under alcohol’s influence. Most importantly, the behaviors the alcoholic exhibits when drinking are recognizably the same throughout the plays.

In contrast to the drinker, the characteristics sought in the most upstanding of citizens were temperance, hard work and what we would now term family values. The plays were structured to create a contrast between the alcoholic and this ideal in the hope that the distinctions could be clearly recognized in performance and have an influence on the audience. In his book *Theatre, Culture and Temperance Reform in Nineteenth Century America*, John Frick described the social ideal against which the contrast of the alcoholic character was pitted. He wrote:

[T]he non-drinking man became the model of respectability and the relationship between temperance and social status—a relationship aggressively promoted and reinforced by anti-liquor activists from 1830 to 1930—was established. The rationale was simple: moral, abstinent men made better workers, husbands, fathers, leaders, borrowers, citizens; and, those who possessed the will power and strength of character to undertake a program of self-improvement could be trusted
to accomplish whatever they undertook…As the century progressed, the dominance of middle-class norms governing drinking and the targeting of working-class habits became more apparent and increasingly the identification of alcohol consumption with social status was reinforced. (31)

By portraying the alcoholic character as a contrast to the prevailing attitudes about proper class-associated behavior and respectability, the temperance dramas could tap into a desire within the audience to be associated with a successful class of people, even if it meant letting go of the idea of appropriate or culturally significant use of leisure time. In order to make the character’s redemption believable, many of the plays gave stage time to establishing the basic good nature of the alcoholic character before the onset of alcoholic troubles.

In order to allow the men in the audience to gain some identification with the main characters in these moral tales, the pre-drunkard man was portrayed or spoken of as kind, loving and good hearted. Even though society drew strong associations between alcohol use and immigrant classes, the protagonist in these plays was never an immigrant, rather an upstanding native born American who fell under the influence of more questionable types. The earliest of the temperance dramas examined in this study, *The Drunkard*, dedicated quite a bit of stage time in its plot to truly demonstrate that Edward Middleton was a young man of high moral standards and a good background. An entire scene is devoted to showing Middleton defend and protect the honor of a young woman and her widowed mother living on his property. Cribbs, the figure in this play who embodies the tempting and seductive nature of drinking, and who is determined to bring about Middleton’s downfall, accuses Middleton of wanting to allow Mary to remain in
the cottage for Middleton’s sexual exploitation. Middleton proves himself to be an upstanding man, defending the girl’s honor and naming Cribbs “too foul a carcass to walk erect and mock the name of man” (Smith 256). Middleton forgives the women’s debt and allows them to stay in the cottage rent free, while also implying that he intends to ask for Mary’s hand in marriage. Later on in the play, Middleton has fallen to alcoholic depths and his wife and their child are poor, frozen and starving. Even given these circumstances, Mary defends Middleton’s character despite his drunkenness: “The only fault of my poor husband, has been intemperance, terrible, I acknowledge, but still a weakness that has assailed and prostrated the finest intellects of men who would scorn a mean and untrustworthy action” (286). The idea behind not dismissing the alcoholic character as hopeless or evil was used to create a scenario in which hope for the alcoholic continued. Otherwise why even attempt to reform him? *The Drunkard* spends more time explicitly laying out the morality and underlying good nature of the alcoholic than the other plays in this study, but generally these men are understood to be descent good men before they begin to drink. The model of this “man of good character” depiction established in *The Drunkard*, was repeated throughout the nineteenth century.

In *The Fatal Glass*, Ambrose Verney, the alcoholic protagonist, offers the use of his mill free of charge to “old Farmer White, who has been sick a long time and unable to get his wheat to mill” (McCloskey 3). He is praised for this “charitable deed,” and Mabel, his wife to be, says he is a “Nobel man!—his heart is ever open to distress” (3). Similarly, in *On the Brink*, Mrs. Thaxter, wife of that play’s primary alcoholic character, sees a change in her husband, “My husband has been kind and thoughtful, but the tempter has come and is luring him on to destruction” (McBride 5). It is important to note that Mrs.
Thaxter places the source of oncoming difficulty outside of her husband. A vague but firmly external “tempter” is to blame for the commencement of her difficulties, not any inherent qualities within her husband. The portrayal of the protagonist in a good moral standing is a key component in the creation of an atmosphere where identification with the alcoholic character can be maintained by audience members, whom the tales hoped to convert. And as we will see later, the ideas of temptation and blame have many different manifestations in these plays. In *Drifting Apart*, when she is questioned about her fiancé’s drinking, Mary says that she knows that he is “rough, but he is honest as he is rough” (Herne 6). The main characters in this play are from the lower classes, but of honest and noble stock. They may not be educated, but they are loving and honorable.

In several of the plays the backwards-looking wife laments the changes she sees in her husband’s character. Nettie, a secondary character in *Three Years in a Man Trap*, says of Harry, “Oh, Mrs. Lloyd, Harry is so changed! Coming home now late every night, and always with liquor in him—he was once the kindest and best of husbands” (Morton 13). Another instance of memories of a wife recalling the former character of a husband comes from Mable, who says about Ambrose in *The Fatal Glass*, that “drink has clouded that once bright, pure mind” (McCloskey 15).

After a year’s absence, Romaine, the temperance advocate in *Ten Nights in a Bar Room*, says that he hopes that that Slade, the tavern owner, has left off from the liquor business, that he “cannot but believe that there is the basis of good in his character, which will lead him to reserve as far as possible those soul-destroying sins that attach themselves to almost every house of entertainment” (Pratt 16). And in *Two Men of Sandy*
Bar, Mary, in the role of the virtuous woman, “sees through” Sandy’s drunkenness to his “true” nature—that he is not a criminal, but an honest, if drunken, man (Hoyt 377).

The overall idea in these statements is to indicate that the central personality of these men is not inherently evil to begin with, but an outside force of some kind has taken hold of them, and they have succumbed to a decline in character through that influence. As we will see, these men are not innocent victims either, but often culpability looks more like carelessness, or ambition or inheritance rather than some fundamental lack of moral fiber even though the plays frame alcoholism as a moral issue. It would be hard to sell tickets to a redemptive play about a man who has no redeeming qualities to begin with, so knowing that these were basically good men before becoming entangled with drink serves both to enhance the public appeal of the story and to create points of identification for the men whose lives these plays were produced in an effort to save or convert.

Often the first crack in the upstanding image of the alcoholic is when he breaks his promise to stop drinking. Several of these plays open with an impending wedding, a hopeful scene in which it is acknowledged that the husband to be has been known to imbibe, but his fiancée is certain that he will keep his promise to stop drinking as soon as they are married. While a general discussion of promises made and broken with wedding vows can be found within these plays, the particular promise of interest here in the establishment of the alcoholic stereotype is the promise to stop drinking.

In The Fatal Glass, we find many different examples of how this vow can be broken, and reasons the men find for breaking it. From the very opening of this play, it is clear that the pattern of making this promise and then breaking it is part of the character
of men who drink. On her wedding day, Mable’s mother warns her of the tenuousness of such a promise made by a husband to be:

MABLE: …and may I be enabled to make our union one long and pleasant dream.

DOROTHY: Which it will be, if he but remembers what I told him when I gave him your hand.

MABLE: With regard to drink! Have no fears, mother, Ambrose’s word is enough!

DOROTHY: Yes, child; but I remember your father’s resolve. This very day forty years ago, upon his bended knees, he pledged his word, in presence of our parents, never to let the demon, drink, pass his lips. Then, as now, had assembled a crowd of friends with joyful wishes. I, like you, attired in spotless white, ready to give my hand and heart into another’s keeping. I heard the vow, and I believed it. What was the sequel? You know it child—ruin! Starvation! Death!

(McCloskey 4)

We see in this dialogue a basic understanding about the kind of patterns that can develop over generations of family members exposed to alcoholic behaviors, and a strong indication that among the first warning signs is a man who drinks before marriage but who promises to stop once married. Imbedded in this implication is the notion that once drink has taken hold, however lightly, of a man, that first his honesty, and then later many other values once important to the man will fall away. This is where the morality of the alcoholic character is shown to be questionable, where the audience is allowed to see the
first cracks in a nature that will surely lose the benevolence first established in his character due to the overpowering pull to continue drinking.

Ambrose’s promises to stop drinking are quickly shown to be unreliable. Initially, Ambrose vehemently defends his new way of life. He says that Mabel “refused to marry me unless I made her a solemn promise. That promise I mean to keep!” (5). And when pressured by a peer to drink, having had many a fun day carousing together, Ambrose again defends his promise saying that he remembers those days as “dreams of horrible fancies through the night, to awake next morning, with a splitting head, and cursing the day before, that brought it!” (5). But Joe, the character that embodies temptation in The Fatal Glass, first mocks Ambrose as becoming a mouthpiece for the temperance movement, and then implies Ambrose is only abstinent because his wife is making “eyes” at him. Ambrose says he “can never become a drunkard! I have learned to know what’s right, and knowing it, with Heaven’s aid, I will keep the pledge I have made to that pure and trusting girl today” (8). But Joe responds contemptuously with “Oh, I know how it is when a woman’s arms are around your neck, and her eyes are looking into yours, you’d promise anything—you can’t help it!” (8). And later, when Ambrose refuses a glass before the wedding, Joe mocks him again, saying, “Oh, he daren’t offend his intended wife! Perhaps if you should ask permission of your respected mother-in-law, she might give her consent, especially if she knew it were the last glass—(*laughs*)—or sweet Mabel might unloose her apron strings for once” (9). And after getting Joe to “promise” that it’s the last glass he will ever try to get Ambrose to take, he says angrily “Give me the cup!” and drinks because he is afraid he will become “the laughing stock of others” (9).
The Fatal Glass also includes two characters who form a parallel couple to Ambrose and Mable. They provide a comic spin on the alcoholic marriage, although in the end, the worst befalls them as well. Bob and Fannie, examples of the “countrified” comic characters often found in these temperance plays, have a parallel story to that of Mabel and Ambrose. Only a few hours after promising that if her father consented to allow him to marry Fannie, he would never take another drop, Bob breaks that promise. Fannie asks him “Didn’t you promise my father when you asked my hand this morning that you’d give over your drinking from that moment?” (6). But Bob makes a joke of it and says that he’ll drink all day because the memory of that moment is so sweet. So within The Fatal Glass, neither solemn oaths nor promises made lightly are trustworthy, and the alcoholic character cannot be counted on to keep any promise to stop drinking regardless of the importance placed on that promise being kept.

On the Brink opens with Thaxter, the protagonist, drinking heavily and attempting to make nonsensical speeches in a tavern. He is clearly already within the grip of alcohol’s influence. When, in the next scene, he is confronted by his wife about his intoxicated state the night before, Thaxter lies about it, saying “I was away last night, but that’s no evidence that I was indulging in wine or strong drink.” But Mrs. Thaxter says “I know from your appearance this morning that you have been drinking” (McBride 5). Implied is a promise not to have been drinking at some point, and also that the alcoholic character is hiding his drinking and lying about it. Mrs. Thaxter is later shown to be patient with her husband’s alcoholic mania to the point of saintliness. While this patience in the face of continual broken promises is a model for how women were to treat their alcoholic husbands, their patience does not seem to do much for the capacity of their
husbands to keep those promises. In another example of the pattern of the broken promise, Thaxter’s son Harry promises his fiancée that he will never have another drop:

HARRY: Oh, now, Mary, don’t say anything more about it. I know I made a
dunce of myself, but I promise I will not do so again.

MARY: You are probably aware that this is the third time you have made that kind of promise to me.

HARRY: But I am sure I will keep it this time.

MARY: I believe I should cast you off now and forever, and yet ’tis hard to do so.

HARRY: (Kneeling before her and taking her hand) Mary, as true as there is a God in heaven, as true as I love you above any woman on the face of the earth, I will never, never drink another drop of intoxicating liquor. I swear it. I make this now before you and my God. And may he enable me to keep it.

MARY: (Weeping softly) Amen and Amen! (13)

The impact of breaking this oath is punctuated later in the play, when after Harry dies in a bar fight, Mary goes insane, and in her insanity, Mary focuses on Harry’s broken promise and how she sees it as a lack of love for her (26). There is a subtle pressure on the wives of alcoholics in these plays demonstrated here. Mary has internalized the idea that if she could have gotten her husband to love her enough, he would have been able to stop drinking because of that love. As described in chapter 2, the wife was expected to be the bearer of moral standards in her family, and failure to stop drinking on her husband’s part was a source of shame about her own identity as a woman. So while the broken promises are clearly indicative of the nature of the alcoholic’s character, they do reflect on his wife
and cast a negative view about her capacity to wield moral sway over her husband in the
eyes of nineteenth century society.

In *Drifting Apart*, there is another example of a woman putting faith in her
husband’s ability to keep his word about not drinking. Jack is known as a hard-drinking
sailor, but he has promised that once married he will stop: “he has promised me that on
the day I become his wife—he will give up drink forever. I believe him. I trust him. I
must do so, for do I not love him?” (Herne 6). And all seems to be well, but on Christmas
Eve, after going out with some other sailors, Jack arrives home in a drunken stupor (12).

*Three Years in a Man Trap* is a complicated play showing many different
manifestations of the destructive nature of alcohol on men. Among other depictions, *Man
Trap* has a fairly detailed examination of different ways that men can resume drinking
after swearing off. Very early in the play, we are introduced to Perry, a known drunkard,
once the owner of a tavern, but now down trodden and at luck’s end. He has managed to
scrape together three weeks of sobriety, but is brought to the bar by Tom Lloyd and
Hiram Jones who want Perry to give them information about how to get into the tavern
business. Perry is muscled into drinking after he has sworn off by the men, and cautions
them, admitting that his work in the liquor trade had done him in (Morton 9).

Harry (a different Harry from the solemn oath above), a young mechanic and the
one of *Man Trap*’s principle characters, returns to drinking repeatedly after swearing off.
The first time we see him do this, he is in the tavern, but says he doesn’t want anything,
his “been drinking too much of late,” that he is “going to try the sober tack for a while, I
don’t want to be an old bummer like Perry Flint” (19). But his friends tell him there’s no
danger of that happening, and the bartender serves them all. The next time we see Harry,
he enters the bar drunk with two n’ere-do-wells. The bartender asks “Why I thought you had sworn off Harry,” but Harry responds “What’s that to you?” (25). Later in the play, Harry learns his wife has begged for food money from a childhood friend of hers, and we witness him swearing off again:

NETTIE: Your heart is good and kind, but easily led away! Well, she has given me this (shows pocket book) bless her dear heart! And has promised—forgive me for asking her—but you are weak you know—to beg her father not to sell you any more liquor.

HARRY: Dear, good wife! But there was no necessity of that. I will never enter his doors again. That place has been a curse to the neighborhood. See what it has brought me to amongst others in two short years. No dearest, I will never drink another drop.

NETTIE: Oh how it gladdens my heart to hear you say so! We will be so happy again! Oh dear Harry for your own sake—for all out sakes—shun that deadly poison which fascinates but to destroy and whose end is death!

HARRY: Yes, dear Nettie, I now see the folly—the wickedness of my conduct. Poor old Perry Flint told me two years ago what it would come to. I laughed at him then, but now I feel the truth of his words. (33)

In this scene, Nettie runs an errand a short moment later, leaving Harry alone. He finds a hidden bottle and in a revealing monologue, examined later in this chapter, depicts the thinking patterns in the alcoholic character that allow him to return to drinking.

In *Ten Nights in a Bar-Room*, we see a mental disconnect between what swearing off means and the “medicinal” use of alcohol. Willie Hammond, son of the protagonist,
tells a story of too much to drink the night before and that he swore he would stop drinking. All the while he is sitting in the tavern waiting for his cocktail to be mixed. When it arrives, Green, a regular in the bar, questions him about it. In a typical rationalization, Willie says he drinks the cocktail as medicine, which is very different from drinking “wine as wine” (Pratt 20). In the same scene, Morgan, the play’s known drunkard, “despite his resolutions” finds himself back in the tavern for another drink (20). Later, after Morgan’s daughter has been hit in the head in a bar-room brawl, she asks him to promise never to go to the tavern again. Here is a promise made at the bedside of a dying child. Like the promise that Harry made to Nettie seen above, this is another oath presented in a way so that the gravity of the child’s state implies that the promise should hold, and yet it does not (26). Although eventually, Morgan is restored to his former self and stops drinking altogether in fulfillment of the melodramatic expectation for a message of hope or redemption at the end of the play, where good wins out over evil.

In Two Men of Sandy Bar, the protagonist, Sandy, is described over and over as returning to drink at the least opportune moments. Don Jose says Sandy was drunk again after promising to stop. “You said you would reform. How have you kept your word? You were drunk last Wednesday” (Hoyt 337). And later in the scene, when Sandy has promised to be clear headed so that he can help the young mistress run away with her lover, Sandy is drunk again. Later in the play, we learn that Mary, the devoted but poor school-teacher, loves Sandy and sees his goodness through his drinking. She asks him to stop drinking for her sake. “Listen, Sandy; you promised me, you know, you said for my sake you would not touch a drop.” But Sandy replies, “Then miss, I’ve broke my word with ye; I’m drunk” (383). In this play we again see the elevation of the woman morally,
which is an important part of nineteenth century ideological construction—that women should hold moral sway over men—and implied is that women are of a superior moral nature. A man’s promise to a saintly and sacrificing woman was expected to keep him sober with more force than a promise to himself or to another man. Sandy Bar as a play also goes against the typical temperance message (since it is a play about alcoholism and reform, but was not written as a temperance play; it is a “western”). After making it his life’s work to find and reform his prodigal son, old Morton drinks again. He is handed a drink by the imposter who played the role of his son for a year, and seemingly without much thought, drinks. Here is a man whose seeming life’s work was reform in general, but also specifically geared toward his own son, and yet at the banquet where he was to formally accept his son back and give his blessing to his marriage, Old Morton shows up unkempt and very drunk, breaking a “life promise” (345). The change from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the end is clear in the messages embedded in the plays. In The Drunkard, once “the pledge” is administered by Rencelaw, all is presumed to be well for the rest of the alcoholic’s life. As the century passes, the messages in the plays become darker and more cynical until we find that promises are portrayed as less reliable and that even a life-long promise of reform and abstinence can be broken without much thought.

Broken promises by the alcoholic characters are the actions that are the end result of “faulty thinking” of the drunkard. In several of the plays there are scenes where the audience is privy to the thinking pattern in which the alcoholic moves from determination to never drink again to the crucial moment where he picks up a drink and then continues drinking himself into a drunken stupor (sometimes resulting in a devastating
These scenes are usually monologues. We see in *The Drunkard* an example of how this alcoholic logic is worked out by the character, and scenes depicting this thinking are repeated in many other temperance plays throughout the nineteenth century. In a monologue that feels very Hamlet-inspired, Middleton tries to sort out the forces he wrestles with during his continued struggles not to drink:

MIDDLETON: Is this to be the issue of my life? Oh, must I ever yield to the fell tempter, and bending like a weak bulrush to the blast, still bow my manhood lower than the brute? Why, surely I have eyes to see, hands to work with, feet to walk, and brain to think, yet the best gifts from Heaven I abuse, lay aside her bounties, and with my own hand, willingly put out the light of reason. I recollect my mother said, my dear dying mother, they were the last words I ever heard her utter, —“whoever lifts his fallen brother is greater far than the conqueror of the world.” Oh, how my poor brain burns! My hand trembles! My knees shake beneath me! I cannot, will not, appear before them thus; a little, a very little will revive and strengthen me. No one sees; William must be there ‘ere this. Now for my hiding place. Oh! The arch cunning of the drunkard! So, so! It relieves! It strengthens! Oh, glorious liquor! Why did I rail against thee? Ha, ha! All gone! All! Of what use the casket when all the jewels are gone? Ha, ha! I can face them now. (Smith 275)

Middleton’s early regrets and acknowledgement that he is falling to temptation give way very quickly to a desire to treat his physical symptoms (trembling in the hands, weakness in the knees). He initially indicates that just a little will do the trick, but as soon as the liquor has passed his lips, all notion that just a little “to revive” is what he needs
disappears and he finishes off the bottle. There are three factors that are often present when an alcoholic’s thinking moves from regret, remorse or promise not to drink again to a return to drinking. In this passage they are implicit: the desire to relieve physical symptoms, the presence of hidden alcohol and that he is alone. Often he thinks he will “only have one,” —“a very little will revive and strengthen me” is what Middleton says (275). And it is in that delusion that a major flaw in the thinking of the alcoholic character lies, and it is also an explicit characterization of how the drunkard, despite ruin, returns to drinking.

In *Three Years in a Man Trap*, Harry’s wife has humbled herself to borrow money from a childhood friend—daughter of the tavern owner where Harry spends the family income, in order to feed their starving child. Harry is resolved to never drink again and as described above, solemnly swears to never do so, but just a short while later Harry wants something to calm his nerves:

HARRY: Curse this shaking, if I had only one good stiff drink now it would set me up again—but no, I promised Nettie, and I’ll keep my word. And yet, I don’t think one more would do me any harm. There’s a bottle of gin hid away in the closet, I brought home the other night. No, no, I won’t touch it! I wonder if the bottle is still there? I’d like to know if Nettie found it! There’s no harm in looking, I suppose. Why it’s more than half full. Ah, accursed spirit—you have been the cause of all my troubles. But for you, I might now own my little house, see my wife and children comfortably clothed, and be respected by my fellow men. Offspring of the Devil! I can’t bear the sight of you. I’ll—*(seizes bottle and is about to throw it out the window)* And yet it is a pity to waste it. No, it might
come in handy for something. Ugh! What horrible sensations I feel! My hands are like ice and yet my head is on fire—and my heart beats as if it would burst. I don’t think one drink would hurt me. I’ve a great mind to—Nettie won’t know anything about it and it will brace up my nerves. No, I’ll take just one. It won’t do, I’ve heard say, to stop drinking too suddenly. (takes cup, pours out and drinks) Ah! That’s good; that warms me like a furnace! That will do now. I feel better already. I think I’ll try a drop more. I didn’t get the right taste of it. Ah! I feel like a new man! It isn’t the use, but the abuse of liquor that ruins people. If I had only remembered that I’d be better off now. One little drop more, and this is the last— (34)

He thinks his way back to the drink, and then Harry goes on to get very drunk, knock over a lamp and burn down the house with their child in it.

The crux of this crucial decision to return to drinking turns on the presence of three factors. First is that the husband has started the detoxification process. At its mildest, this brings on shakes and agitation, and at its worst delirium tremens and death. So relief on a physical level is a primary factor in the man’s decision to return to drinking. The flaw in his thinking, though, is that he always tells himself that he can have just one. And while these temperance plays do not address the mentality behind this crack in the logic aimed at getting relief from the shakes, the scenes in which characters think themselves back into drinking after swearing off all depict the alcoholic character saying or thinking that he can have just one drink to “calm his nerves.” The second factor is the presence of alcohol itself. Often hidden in a spot that has not been detected by the spouse, this stashed bottle allows for the opportunity to relieve the symptoms of withdrawal. In
the monologue above, Harry’s initial instinct is to throw the bottle away, having found it to begin with, but he finds a reason to keep it, “And yet it is a pity to waste it. No, it might come in handy for something” (34). And in this glitch in his resolve, he opens the door for a quick return to drinking. The last factor is that he is left alone. Here is where the contribution of the wife to the return to drinking can come in. She is complicit in that she trusts her husband’s promise over her own experience. Or sometimes the man is just circumstantially alone, as in The Drunkard. In all cases it is clear that once the alcohol has passed the lips of the drunkard, all will to stop, all thought to keep his promise leaves quickly, and he again loses all capacity to do anything but continue to drink. Frick describes the stances of many of the reformers who produced temperance drama. He writes,

These reformers, while they still maintained that drinkers remained morally responsible for their decisions and held that drunkenness was a sin against both God and society, nevertheless were forced to admit that, although a man may be moral and well-intentioned, human will power was frequently frail and often insufficient protection against the temptations to which man was exposed. The danger of drinking, reformers theorized, arose at the point when the weak were paired with the “poison” that they were incapable of resisting and that had the power to “enslave” them. (71)

And so we see this stance embedded in the characterization of the moment when the drunkard returns to drinking.

Another major factor that is depicted as contributing to the drunkard’s cycle of returning to drink is his guilt, shame and remorse at the effects his drinking has been
causing his family. In the passage above, Middleton invokes the dying words of his mother, and promptly declares that his brain burns. And just after, he returns home drunk, having started to drink again upon this memory of his own dying mother, to find Mary’s (his wife’s) mother is on her deathbed. During the scene Mary’s mother promptly dies sending Middleton into a regret-filled but self-involved rant. He says, “Horror! And I in part the cause? Death in the house, and I without doubt the means. I cannot bear this, let me fly—“ (Smith 279). At the end of this scene, he rushes out, saying he is leaving forever. Mary begs him to stay but he breaks away from William and leaves.

We next find Middleton in the Bowery section of New York. Lawyer Cribbs has followed Middleton there, to try to do what he can to finish him off. Cribbs lies to Middleton telling him that Mary pities him and hopes he will some day be a respected member of society again. This sets Middleton off, he is “deserted, miserable,” but he has one friend—liquor. And he rushes off to avoid his pain by a return to the bottle (281). A few scenes later we see Middleton again articulate regret and remorse for his condition, but the pressure to relieve his emotions overwhelms the knowledge that it is drinking that caused the emotions to begin with. Waking from a drunken stupor, Middleton wishes to be drunk again, saying, “I am not so ashamed, so stricken with despair when I am drunk” (288).

Guilt and remorse are found in all of the depictions of alcoholism in this study, and this is one of the foundational characteristics of the alcoholic character in temperance drama. In *The Fatal Glass*, Ambrose, the primary alcoholic character, comes to, having passed out from drinking with his head tied in a bloody cloth. He awakes to discover his wife close to death, and expresses great regret.
AMBROSE: My senses are benumbed, I can remember nothing. The room whirls round and round, some dire calamity has surely happened. Speak but one word, and tell me what has caused this misery?

MABEL: (faintly) Drink!

AMBROSE: I understand. The demon has again taken possession of me. But why should it wreak its vengeance on the only being who has been my friend?

MABEL: Because the drunkard knows not friend from foe.

AMBROSE: Oh! Kill me not with your words! Why did not the blow fall on me alone?

MABEL: When you are stricken down, the blow recoils on me, does it not? Are we not one?

AMBROSE: Why, what a fool, what an idiot, I have been to fly to the bottle for relief from my shame, while the author of them is permitted to live and hold his head high among honest men? And his dupe, his victim, must chafe and jest instead of killing him as he has killed my happiness and my peace? (McCloskey 16)

Within a few minutes in this scene Mabel dies, and Ambrose is left with even greater guilt and regrets. The pattern of drinking, regretting the results of that drinking and then drinking more to cover up those regrets becomes a recognizable vicious cycle and a clear pattern in the alcoholic character. Later in *The Fatal Glass*, Ambrose talks about how alcohol has ruined his life. In conversation with another man, Ambrose is remembering the death of his wife and as he relives the events, he says, “I feel myself growing frantic! Her low sobs, her dying groans are now ringing in my ears. What can stifle them? Ah,
this. With the greater madness must I put down the lesser. My soul’s on fire, let me in a frenzy strive to quench it. (seizes glass, drinks furiously). See my hand is form now, my limbs are braced” (29). The downward spiral that comes with ever greater tragedy coupled with a greater need to suppress the emotional repercussions of those results marks what has been termed in a more modern understanding of alcoholism as its progressive nature. But clearly the need to cover up the emotional wreckage caused by the drinking serves to perpetuate the causes of the trouble to begin with.

In *On the Brink*, Thaxter, the alcoholic, weeping confesses his wrongs—in part due to ambition—which then transforms back to a raving desire for alcohol. In a stereotypical regret-filled scene, Thaxter reveals his guilty conscious,

THAXTER: Oh! I deserve to be plunged into the hottest hell! You loved me, Ellen, and we were very happy. Many years passed away and nothing came to cause up trouble. But I was a fool. I wanted an office. I wanted to be one of the great men of the State, I wanted to be popular, and I drank and I treated; I went down and down, until I am here to-day not worth a penny, and still going down. Oh! Ellen! Why don’t you turn away from me in scorn? I have robbed you, I have killed you, I am your murderer. And in all these years you have been so kind and gentle. (McBride 13)

In his next line, the admission turns quickly into a rave for rum and brandy and a collapse into delirium tremens. In this case, personal ambition is part of the scapegoat for a plunge into alcoholic despair, but the regret itself does seem to exacerbate Thaxter’s condition and contributes to the onset of DTs.
In *Three Years in a Man Trap*, there is an example of regret not at the results of drinking, but for the drinking itself. This is likely because the character, Perry, is an “old bummer” with considerable experience with what a return to drink will mean for him, but the regret is expressed simply because he has fallen off the wagon. After being bullied into taking a drink he doesn’t want to take, he states, “Again I have broken my word; again tasted that fatal poison; poor infatuated fool that I am! After all the misery I have suffered, can I not conquer this fiendish appetite? Here, bring me some brandy; brandy, quick!” (Morton 8). But in this case self-awareness is still no match for the power of alcohol on the character. In the following scene, Perry fights urge to drink, knowing he ought to go home, but then cannot face his wife after breaking his promise to her. “I’ll go home to my poor wife! But how can I look her in the face after my promise? I—I—I must get another drink, or I won’t be able to face her” (12). The same pattern of regret followed by a return to drink in order to suppress the feelings is shown here. A moment later, Perry kills a man in a struggle over a gun, and so this character is never granted any redemption from this pattern. This is often the case in the later plays, where the message is more cynical.

*Man Trap* also more specifically targets the liquor trade as complicit in the creation of the alcohol problem. Lloyd, the tavern owner, feels guilt about going into the rum selling business, (in contrast to the actual taking of drink), but his mind turns with resolve back to his decision to open the bar. Speaking of his daughter he says, “Dear good girl, how I love her! And yet what will she say when she finds I am going to keep a bar-room?...Why it would almost kill the poor child! Well let them say what they like. I’m tired of this miserable life, working hard to keep body and soul together, with six
mouths to feed! Yes, by George, I’ll do it!” (15). The structure is parallel to the guilt and remorse followed by an overwhelming thirst for alcohol. Lloyd feels guilt for what opening the bar will do to his daughter, but resolves to do it anyway.

In the next act, Harry, the young mechanic, attempts to slow down on the drinking, saying he knows he’s been drinking too much, “You see I don’t find that whisky ever did me any good, but rather a good deal of harm—so I’m going to try the sober tack for a while” mentioning he’s afraid he will become like Perry Flint (19). Two scenes later he is seen drunk in the company of Joe and Bill, two incorrigible drunkards.

In Man Trap, as alcoholism progresses in the characters, often regret is wholly supplanted by a desire for liquor. Having opened the bar and profited from the downfall of others, Jones and Lloyd are thrown in jail, the saloon lost. With no knowledge of how his family fares, Lloyd only wants brandy, and does not seem to have any remorse or regret for the loss of the bar or the money invested.

JONES: How goes on all at the saloon?

LLOYD: (laughing bitterly) The saloon, ha! Ha! Ha! It’s gone to the devil, like everything else!

JONES: (seizing his arm) What do you mean—speak out!

LLOYD: Curse you, let me go! The Retreat is played out I tell you. Everything sold up—so you needn’t cry about it.

JONES: Gone, all gone! The hard work and savings of three years.

LLOYD: No use crying over spilt milk. I couldn’t help myself. It was a bad sort of business anyhow. (throws himself on bed—then rises and walks restlessly to and fro) Is there any water here. I’m choking with thirst.
JONES: You’ll find some in the corner there. *(LLOYD gets water, but in pouring from pitcher to cup his hand shakes and he spills it. JONES holds cup to his mouth, he drinks eagerly, walks restlessly up and down.)*

LLOYD: Oh for a strong cup of coffee! I’d give ten dollars for a cup of strong coffee!

JONES: Here, Tom, try and eat something.

LLOYD: Eat! I can’t eat! I want brandy! Brandy! I’d give my right hand for a glass of brandy! God help me if I don’t get some whisky or brandy! *(48)*

And predictably within minutes, Lloyd falls into a fit of delirium tremens. Even though Lloyd seems outwardly quite callous about those losses, having a conversation about his the results of his dealings with alcohol triggers a craving for drink and a descent into DTs in him.

In *Ten Nights in a Barroom*, Swichel, described in the script as a “yankee tippler,” expresses to Romaine, the play’s temperance advocate, that he wishes he could stop. But he claims that he cannot because liquor is really everywhere and is part of the society. This makes it very difficult for him to not drink—he says it seems unsociable to not stop in at the tavern *(Pratt 17)*. In this case the “temptation” Swichel faces is from the widespread availability of liquor—a condemnation of the trade rather than the individual. This comes early in the play, but the scene depicts an awareness on the part of some characters that drinking alcohol may not be the best road for them to take. Swichel just cannot see himself a teetotaler, he says he was raised taking “his regulars” *(17)*. Implied is that it is part of the culture and difficult to overcome.
As is clear from these examples, one of the major characteristics of the alcoholic character found within nineteenth century temperance drama is a pattern of expression of guilt and remorse over the consequences of drinking. This guilt then triggers another episode of drinking because the alcoholic cannot endure the emotions he feels when faced with his own behavior. Sometimes these raving cries for liquor are followed by an obligatory delirium tremens scene, an emotional crucible in many temperance dramas.

During performance, the spectacle of witnessing a case of delirium tremens is used as an emotional hook for the audience, presenting simultaneously a situation that is both fascinating and horrifying. Alcoholic characters are portrayed as so highly addicted to alcohol that withdrawal causes this life and sanity threatening reaction. The dramatic effect of these scenes is described by Frick when he writes:

Not surprisingly, considering the emotional extremes inherent in such “a terrifying testimonial to the hellish darkness of intemperance,” the theatrical potential of delirium tremens proved irresistible to playwrights who sought spectacular effects that would frighten the intemperate into abstinence. When performed to its fullest by actors the caliber of “Drunkard” Clarke or E. W. Wynkoop, a former bartender who presumably had ample personal experience with the phenomenon, the delirium tremens scene probably convinced more people to sign the pledge than did all of the temperance tracts ever written. (64) Several of the plays in this study have scenes in which the chaos and unpredictable violence that often accompany alcoholic withdrawal are portrayed. In The Fatal Glass, Ambrose’s delirium tremens scene takes place in jail, where he has been taken after
killing Joe in a blackout. Ambrose is chained like a wild animal, and goes crazy from DTs, reliving in his fantasy the moment of his wife's death.

AMBROSE: Here, place your cold cheek to my heart, cling closer to me, there, there! Why do you look at me with those glassy eyes? Merciful heaven! She is dead! Dead! Dead! Never fear I will avenge you! Not by accusation for none will believe a drunken sot; but by the same means he murders—by unforgiving hate!

Hush there he steals to make more victims, I know his step. Caution. Caution. (tries to steal off, chains hold him) Who holds me back? What! You think to let him escape? You shall not (breaks chains). Ha! Ha! (McCloskey 33)

Ambrose’s super human strength while in the grips of DTs is a fear provoking portrayal, and just a moment later, he is lead to the gallows by the officers at the jail. In our times, alcoholism is rarely seen causing public cases of delirium tremens anymore because pharmaceuticals can ease the symptoms of withdrawal, but the alcoholic characters in these plays are addicted to an extreme degree where they experience raving, alcohol induced insanity.

In On the Brink, Thaxter, our want-to-be state representative, sinks into alcoholism through his ambitions and vanity. His time in the bar-room is shown to be the cause of an addiction that climaxes in delirium tremens. In this play, Thaxter’s own raving is directly tied to cases of insanity in his wife and daughter-in-law (more on that in chapter 5). Carried home by men from the tavern, Thaxter is passed out in his livingroom. His wife worries about him, when he wakes in DTs. Like Ambrose, Thaxter’s delusions are filled with paranoia, in Thaxter’s case, an unspecified threat:
THAXTER: *(springing up, wild look on his face)* I did hear something—I saw something. *(retreating)* It’s coming here—it will tear me to pieces. *(runs and crouches down in one corner of the room)* Keep back I tell you. *(McBride 20)*

Paranoia continues for Thaxter in this DTs scene, but the stakes rise even higher, showing how extreme alcoholic behavior can get—and demonstrating why alcoholic withdrawal was such a social concern, especially for women. Thaxter’s hallucinations get him to turn against his wife, not recognizing her in his state:

MRS. THAXTER: David, don’t you know me? I will get you a cup of water.

THAXTER: Rum! Rum! Water! Water! I’m all on fire, the flames are all over me. Oh! Oh! Oh! Rum! Water! I’m dying! I’m dying! Help! Help! *(Mary utters a shriek and sinks on the floor. Then she raises herself slightly and with horror pictured on her face gazes at Mr. Thaxter.)*

MRS. THAXTER: Mary, this scene is too much for you. Go into the other room.

THAXTER: Is there no water? Oh! Water, water!

MRS. THAXTER: David, I will get you a cup of water. *(Goes out)*

THAXTER: It’s coming again! It’s coming again! Help! Help! See his eyes! Great burning, blazing balls of fire! Ellen, Ellen! Can’t you help me? Can’t you drive him off?

MRS. THAXTER: *(Re-entering)* Here, David, I have brought you a cup of water. *(Goes toward him)*

THAXTER: Oh! Mother don’t go there—don’t go there! He may kill you!

MRS. THAXTER: David, don’t you know me? I have brought you water. *(Stops to give him a drink)*
THAXTER: *(Strikes the cup and knocks it out of her hand)* Stand back foul demon from the bottomless pit! You shall not take me without a struggle! *(Rises and comes toward Mrs. Thaxter. She retreats.)* You may howl and your eyes may flash, but I’ll fight you. You shall not conquer and carry me away.

MARY: *(Shrieking)* Oh! Mother come away! Help! Help! *(She sinks down)* (20-1)

While no actual physical harm comes to Mrs. Thaxter during this scene, the performance implies that it could, and probably does in other moments, which we learn when the women discuss their experiences of violence later in the play. The DTs scene is probably the moment where the character is seen as his most volatile, where the most damage could occur, where he has strayed farthest from the goodness found deep inside, and is completely overtaken by the external force of alcohol.

In *The Drunkard*, Middleton has a scene of DTs where he goes through the archetypal paranoid rant. After choking the landlord because he won’t give Middleton any brandy, he sinks to the ground and begins to rave about snakes coming after him:

MIDDLETON: *(On the ground in delirium)* Here, here friend, take it off, will you—these snakes, how they coil round me. Oh! How strong they are—there don’t kill it, no, no, don’t kill it, give it brandy, poison it with rum, that will be judicious punishment. That would be justice. Ha! Ha! Justice! Ha! Ha! *(Smith 290)*

Middleton then has a fantasy similar to Ambrose’s vision of his wife—Middleton sees his wife and daughter and goes to give his wife a kiss, but his mind continues to be confused and he only briefly mentions her.
MIDDLETON: Hush! Gently—gently, while she’s asleep. I’ll kiss her. She would reject me, did she know it, hush! There, heaven bless my Mary, bless her and her child—hush! If the globe turns round once more, we shall slide from its surface into eternity! Ha, ha! Great idea. A boiling sea of wine, fired by the torch of fiends! (290)

Middleton displays both the paranoia about snakes or serpents coming to get him and also a tender love for the ones who are suffering the most because of his drinking.

In *Ten Nights in a Bar-room*, the delirium tremens scene has added heightened emotional pressure because the scene takes place while his daughter is dying from a head wound she received while trying to fetch him home from the tavern. Morgan’s raving looks similar to Middleton’s and it includes a delusioned sweetness and innocence toward his family even in the midst of the imagined war against the snakes:

MORGAN: Wife, wife! My brain is on fire! Hideous visions are before my eyes! Look! Look—see—what’s there?—there—in the corner?

MRS. M: Oh, heavens! ‘Tis another symptom of that terrible mania from which he has twice escaped. There’s nothing there, Joe.

MORGAN: There it is, I tell you! I can see as well as you. Look! A huge snake is twining himself around my arms! Take him off! Take him off!—quick, quick!

MRS. M: It’s only a fancy, Joe. Try and lie down and get some rest; I will get you a cup of strong tea; you’re only a little nervous. Mary’s trouble has disturbed you—there—I’ll return in a minute. (*Exit*)

MORGAN: There! Look for yourself! Don’t go!—don’t go! Oh, you’ve come for me, have you? Well, I’m ready! Quick! Quick! How bright they look!—their eyes
are glaring at me! And how they are leaping, dancing, shouting with joy, to think
the drunkard’s hour has come. Keep them off! Keep them off! Oh, horror! horror!

*(Rushes, throws himself behind couch)*

MARY: *(Awakening)* Oh, father! Is it you? I’m so glad you’re here.

MRS. M: *(Entering)* Not here? Gone? Joe! Husband!—where are you?

MARY: Here he is, dear mother.

MORGAN: Keep them off, I say! Keep them off! You won’t let them hurt me,
will you? *(Clings to Mary)* There they are creeping along the floor! Quick! Jump
out of bed, Mary! See, now—there—right over your head!

MARY: Nothing can hurt you here, dear father.

MORGAN: No, no; that’s true. Pray for me, my child; they can’t come in here,
for this is your room. Yes, this is Mary’s room, and she is an angel. There—I
know you wouldn’t dare to come in here. Keep off! Keep off! Ha! Ha! *(Falls to
the floor).* *(Pratt 26-7)*

This long scene not only depicts the perversity of alcohol-induced hallucination, but it
also emphasizes the angelic and perceived moral superiority of Mary and Mrs. M, part of
the Cult of Motherhood described in chapter 2. Morgan’s delusions are serious enough to
be frightening, but because he turns to his dying child to be his protector in the scene, we
do not fear harm will come to the family through his hands. Even so, the scene places
Mary in the position of the “parent” in the room, implying that alcohol induced delirium
inverts the natural structure of the family and subjects the innocent children to
experiences that should be way beyond their years.
In *Three Years in a Man Trap*, Perry Flint accidentally kills a man and never gets sober again. He had been trying who we saw try to resist a return to drinking, only to be bullied into it. Harry, who later has his own fit of delirium tremens, describes Perry’s death:

HARRY: Died day before yesterday in the Mania-a-potn ward of Moyamensing⁴. He confessed that he shot John Glum; the remorse for the deed and delirium tremens caused his death. (Morton 19)

So again we see alcoholics characterized as men who once in the grip of alcohol will continue to drink themselves into the state of mania, which could cause their own deaths. Harry’s own struggles with alcohol lead him to his own derangement. Nettie, his wife, describes to Harry the scene from the night before, of which he has no recollection:

NETTIE: …You had a fit of delirium at “The Retreat,” they told me who brought you home. Oh, Harry, dear, I hope never again to see the ghastly picture you presented—your eyes starting wildly—the foam coming from your mouth—the agony of your face! Oh, it was a dreadful sight! Much as I love you, darling, I think I would rather see you dead and in your coffin than see you looking as you did last night! (33)

Harry himself then succumbs to yet another fit of DT’s in the midst of which he thinks that he has been abandoned by his wife Nettie because he has treated her so poorly—but he cannot stand the thought of being alone, and so he seeks alcohol for relief. *Man Trap* also depicts the owner of the bar, Lloyd, dying in delirium tremens while in jail. In

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⁴ This is a famous prison in Philadelphia opened in 1835.
probably the most graphic of the DT scenes examined in this study, Lloyd’s end is both a grave warning and presents a picture of alcoholism almost entirely lacking in hope.

LLOYD: See there! There! It’s coming for me! Keep it off! Keep it off!
That horrid beast! Strike it! Kill it!—don’t let it come near me! *(Flies from one side of the cell to another, screaming as if escaping from something)*

JONES: Help! Help! Hullo! outside there! Help!

TURNKEY: *(Enters)* Hullo! What’s up? Ah, he’s got the rams too, eh?

Just hold on to him a spell, and I’ll bring the boys that will fix him. *(Goes off)*

*(Jones goes to Lloyd and tries to soothe him. Lloyd seizes)*

LLOYD: Keep off! Let me go! I won’t be held! Help! Murder! Murder!

*(Terrible struggle—Jones trying to hold him down—Turnkey and two Keepers enter. All four place Lloyd on bed, still struggling and screaming madly. Keeper has him down, Turnkey puts groantlets on him, over which are manacles. Lloyd crying “Hiram! Hiram! For God’s sake Hiram!” His cries gradually get fainter, and at last all is still. Turnkey places his hand upon Lloyd’s heart.)*

JONES: He’s better now.

TURNKEY: Yes, he’s better off. He’s dead.

JONES: Dead! *(Sinks on his knees and covers his face with his hands).*

*(48-9)*

The DTs scene can be divided into DTs which take place in public and DTs which happen in the home. Public (jailhouse or mental hospital) cases of DTs seem to result in
death, while private (at home) cases of delirium are not portrayed as fatal, but they end up being very damaging to the integrity of the family. None of the plays demonstrate that the onset of delirium tremens can be predicted, nor do they guarantee that the alcoholic will live through them. It may just be that to die an alcoholic death is seemingly more horrifying when alone in prison rather than at home, and so death in these presentations is relegated to a cold institutional place.

Related to the complete imbalance of reason found in the delirium tremens scenes is the depiction that alcohol triggers easy offense in a man who is drinking, a demonstration of a less severe, but yet clear sign of lack of reason. Offense taken often leads to violence and sometimes to accidental death. The alcoholic character is almost always portrayed as a man easily offended, quick to react to wounded pride and he is angry and aggressive in his response. In the case of the easily offended, examples abound in these plays, and it is almost completely characteristic for the alcoholic to be touchy and reactive. In *The Drunkard*, Middleton is offended when Stevens won’t drink his treat, because he only drinks what he pays for himself. Stevens says Middleton is making a fool of himself.

MIDDLETON: A fool! Say that again and I’ll knock you down—a fool!

STEVENS: I want nothing to do with you—be off—you’re drunk!

MIDDLETON: *(strikes him)* Death and fury! Drunk! (Smith 273-4)

The perceived offense moves quickly to violent action on the part of the drunkard and then, reviving a moment afterward, Middleton seems to have been in a blackout, for he doesn’t seem to remember the incident.
In *The Fatal Glass*, Bob and Fannie are comic counterpoint characters to Ambrose and Mable, but both men are drunkards and both women suffer because of it. Fannie threatens to leave Bob and go home to her family because he has drunk all of their money away and she has been living a hungry, poverty stricken life since they were married.

BOB: And leave mine—my bed and board?

FANNIE: Your bed! Where is it? Pawned and the ticket stolen!

BOB: Didn’t the doctor say it was healthier to sleep on a hard bed than a feather one?

FANNIE: Yours will be a hard enough one—on the cold ground. As for your bed and board, have I not supplied myself with food for the last six months?

BOB: Madame, don’t rouse the sleeping lion, that now sleeps. Beware his fangs! Here unfeeling woman, take the food I have been saving for you—take it and fare sumptuously. Here’s a banquet! *(pulls out from different pockets pieces of cracker and cheese and herring, etc.)*

FANNIE: Where did you get all of those scraps from?

BOB: Samples from my new lunch route. Take them, Mrs. S and taunt me no more.

FANNIE: *(throws them at him)* You unfeeling monster! And is that the way you feed your wife? I’ll show you I have some spirit! *(beats him about the stage, and then exits crying)*

BOB: *(on the ground)* This is too much. I could bear her abuse, her beating me, but to throw in my face the food I’ve been collecting for her dainty stomach for
over a week. Crackers and cheese from Hotchkin’s Counter; Limburger from Dutch Jake’s; nice smoked ham a king might envy thrown in my face. I’ll assert my manhood and give her a devilish good trouncing! Shakes, be a man and show her who’s who and what’s what! *(exit reeling and indignant).* (McClosky 13-4)

While this example might prove too comically inclined to qualify for a true depiction of reactive indignation, the point is that the alcoholic character is seen as taking offence to what is true. Bob has not provided for Fannie, but pointing it out seems to trigger anger rather than regret. In this scene he is the recipient of violence rather than the perpetrator.

In *On the Brink*, there are several examples of quick offense and violence due to drunkenness. Mr. Thaxter recalls that a companion laughed at him the night before when brandy got the better of him, saying “I’ll remember him for that, and I’ll not invite him to drink with me again. I don’t care for his friendship anyhow” (McBride 6). But even though Mrs. Thaxter has just asked him to stop drinking, he concludes that it is better to just not ask his friend to drink with him again rather than quit drinking altogether, and justifies his drinking saying he only drinks because it is popular. Thaxter does not make the connection between feeling insulted because of his now ex-friend’s remark and the fact that he was under the influence. Later in the play, we see Harry, having attempted to stop drinking a few times already, get mad at Jake because Jake doesn’t want to continue drinking with him. They argue, Jake saying “I told you I didn’t want any of your whiskey. I know when to drink and when to stop drinkin’.” To which Harry replies, “Well I reckon you can go to thunder” (23). This scene also indicates that some men do not fall prey to alcohol’s addictive properties, putting more responsibility on the individual for allowing himself to become a drunkard.
In another scene, *On the Brink* depicts fighting as the result of excessive drinking. Later, the grudge between Harry and Jake, which began with the short argument above, blows up into a fatal incident when Harry and Jake fight because Jake tells Harry that he is drunk and to shut up from making speeches.

JAKE: You’re drunk. Shut up and mind your own business.

SAM: Hello! Here’s another tuss arisin’.

HARRY: *(getting angry)* I’ll talk jis’ whenever I please. I know what I’m doin’.

*(Goes toward Jake)* I ain’t drunk as you are yourself. I can lick you anyhow.

JAKE: Stop! Don’t come near me or you’ll suffer for it.

HARRY: *(still advancing)* Nobody’s going to talk to me that way and not get licked. *(Harry strikes Jake. He falls. The others crowd around, shouting and laughing.)*

JOHN: *(Coming from behind the bar.)* We won’t have any fighting here. If you fight you must go out of the house.

SAM: Look out boys, Jake’s got a revolver. *(McBride 25)*

This scene ends with Harry dead in the tavern, shot by Jake. The alcoholic characters so often are easy to take offense at the littlest thing and escalate that offense into violent acts. The link between drinking, offense taken and resulting violence is repeated over and over in these plays. In this case, Harry pays for his drunken over-sensitivity with his life.

*Three Years in a Man Trap* also has an example of a perceived insult that results in death. In this case, both men end up dead; one as a direct result of the fight, and the other dead of DTs in a sanitarium as the result from guilt over the accidental murder. Perry Flint, who we know as the bummer who was bullied back into drinking after his
attempts to swear off, and who we know died in a fit of DTs in an asylum, has an argument with the man who owned the bar where he was served drinks for so long, Glum. Perry tells Glum that he is responsible for all the bad things that happen to the men that he serves alcohol to. Glum tells Perry he should simply not drink it then.

PERRY: Not drink it! Curse it and you: when I have become such a slave to the fiend that I cannot help myself!

HARRY: Ha! Ha! Ha! Come sit down boys. *(They all sit at table c)* Don’t be hard on John, old man, he’s only following his lawful business.

*(During the above Glum has poured out drinks and serves them at table)*

PERRY: Lawful! Yes, and the more shame such a law should disgrace our statute books. A law which permits any designing schemer to poison his fellow men! A law which fills our prisons, almshouses, and lunatic asylums with poor wretches who might be a credit to their country.

GLUM: *(in a rage)* Curse you—you drunken old loafer—take that!

*(Seizes Perry and throws him round—he falls heavily. Men all jump up. General cries of “Ah cowardly scoundrel, strike an old man” Two men seize Glum and struggle with him. Glum breaks away from them, runs behind bar and gets a revolver and comes back Harry seizes his hand).* *(Morton 10)*

The next time Perry and Glum meet, Glum still has the revolver and the resentment against Perry. He pulls the gun on Perry again, and in the ensuing struggle Perry shoots and kills Glum with his own gun, and Perry’s fate leaves him dead in an institution from the DTs. Perry ends up in the institution because of this propensity toward easy offense,
an indicator of an unstable mental state not as grave as the insanity of DTs, but still reactive and lacking control.

*Man Trap* has several other examples of drunken men turning violent. Characters at the bar engage in fighting because they don’t want to pay for the liquor they just drank. Lloyd and Jones, the owners, grab revolver and club—knives drawn (*tableau*). Police enter and end the conflict, but it is a close call (20). In another scene, Harry, having returned to drinking after promising to stop, engages in violent argument and almost gets into a physical fight with the two old bummers whom he insults, but when he offers to buy drinks they quickly let go of the offense (27). And in another example, when Jones refuses to serve him any more liquor, Harry flies into a rage and is “brained” (28).

We find this character flaw in the drunken men in *Ten Nights in a Bar-Room* also. The most prominent of the examples is an event around which the plot pivots, and in which there is an innocent victim. Morgan, the primary alcoholic character, is resentful that he is a drunkard and that Slade, the tavern owner and other patrons in the bar now consider him a vagabond when they were friends in earlier times. Slade tries to throw him out of the tavern and Morgan refuses, insulting Slade. Slade throws a glass at Morgan, missing him and hitting Morgan’s daughter Mary in the head as she is coming to bring her father home.

SLADE: Off with you Joe Morgan! I won’t put up with your insolence any longer! Leave my house and never show your face here again. I won’t have such low vagabonds as you here. If you can’t keep decent, and stay decent, don’t intrude yourself here.

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5 Stage directions in script. In this case, suffering a head wound from a severe blow to the head.
MORGAN: You talk of decency!—a rumseller’s decency. Poh! You were a
decent man once, and a good miller into the bargain, but that time is past and
gone. Decency died out when you exchanged the pick and facing hammer for the
glass and shaker. Decency—poh! How like a fool you talk; as if it were any more
decent to sell rum than to drink it!

SLADE: I’ve heard enough from you. *(Goes to bar—takes up a glass)* Now leave my house!

MORGAN: I won’t!

SLADE: Won’t you?—take that then! *(Threws glass—it passes Morgan out R—glass crashes off R—Mary screams—runs in R forehead bloody—falls c)*

MARY: Father! Dear Father! They have killed me! *(Pratt 21-2)*

Mary’s concussion eventually leads to her death and to her father’s eventual reform, but the act stems out of offense taken while drinking and the violent action, which follows the offense. The connection between offense taken and death or serious injury is undoubtedly marked as part of the alcoholic character in these plays. In a foreshadowing of the moment when Slade tries to ban Morgan from his establishment, we see Willie and Green, two regulars at the bar, disagree about whether Slade should refuse to serve Morgan. Willie thinks Green’s stance (that Slade should refuse) is uncharitable and Green takes it as an insult. From this argument, the two men come to blows *(14)*. And the night after Mary receives her injury at the hands of Slade, a card game leads to another drunken fight between Willie Hammond and Green, still nursing grudges against each other. As a bookend to their argument about Morgan, Willie is stabbed and killed by Green in the same tavern *(32)*.
In *Two Men of Sandy Bar*, we see another example of the relationship drawn between violent fighting and drunkenness. Sandy, the alcoholic protagonist, grapples with Starbottle, who pulls out a pistol, saying he is a “desperate man crazed with drink” and only the emergence of Mary from the schoolhouse stops him from throwing Starbottle over the precipice. Disaster is only averted by the intrusion of Mary, the saintly school teacher.

SANDY: Look yer, stranger, don’t provoke me, I, a desperate man, desperate and crazed with drink—don’t ye, don’t ye do it! For God’s sake, take your hands off me! Ye don’t know what ye do. Ah! *(Wildly holding Starbottle firmly and forcing him backward to precipice beyond ledge of rocks)* Hear me! Three years ago, in a moment like this, I dragged a man—my friend—to this precipice. I—I—no! no!—don’t anger me now! *(Sandy’s grip on Starbottle relaxes slightly, and his head droops)*

STARBOTTLE: *(coolly)* Permit me to remark, sir, that any reminiscence of your—er—friend—or any other man is—er—at this moment, irrelevant and impertinent. Permit me to point out the—er—fact, sir, that your hand is pressing heavily on my shoulder.

SANDY: *(fiercely)* You shall not go!

STARBOTTLE: *(fiercely)* Shall not?

*(Struggle. Starbottle draws derringer from his breast pocket, and Sandy seizes his arm. In this position both parties struggle to ledge of rocks, and Starbottle is forced partly over.)*
MARY: (opening schoolhouse door) I thought I heard voices. (Looking toward ledge of rocks, where Starbottle and Sandy are partly hidden by trees. Both men relax grasp of each other at Mary’s voice.) (Hoyt 370)

In this case, Sandy has some awareness of the effect of alcohol over his lack of ability to control the violence, and even tries to warn Starbottle to that effect, but that awareness cannot overcome his anger.

From all of these examples, it is clear that a strong association is drawn between the effects of drinking and violent action of the characters’ parts. It is not until a decade into the twentieth century that the funny drunk, so closely associated with W. C. Fields came about. The seriousness of the social messages about the dangers of alcohol use created a grim picture of the alcoholic as a man dangerous and prone to easy offence and violent retaliation, often over trifles. This makes sense in light of the warnings these plays were often performed to present. In the nineteenth century, the consequences of excessive drinking were presented as serious and dire, with little room for a lighter look at who this character was.

There are several other examples of how seriously the messages presented in these plays and absorbed by the public were taken. In many cases, the character’s alcoholism led to total moral collapse. This crumbling of any ability to do the right thing also contributed to the overall depiction of an alcoholic as morally culpable for his actions. In The Drunkard, Mary and her child are freezing cold and starving, left vulnerable to sexual advances by Cribbs, the embodiment of alcoholic temptation and degradation, because Middleton has become a drunkard (Smith 285-6). But often the damage is not through what the alcoholic does not do, but rather, an active part of the
portrayal of alcoholic behavior. In *The Fatal Glass*, Ambrose comes to in withdrawal, and spies his wife’s wedding ring on the kitchen table. She had set it aside to sell so she could feed their starving child; her own act of desperation. Ambrose pockets the ring in order to sell it for liquor, telling himself that he will replace it tomorrow, but symbolically choosing the alcohol over his marriage and more importantly, food for his child (McCloskey 14). Later, Ambrose turns up at Joe’s wedding to find some bread for his starving wife and child—he is treated as despicable. Then Mabel rushes in with their dead child in her arms, reinforcing the message of how alcohol obliterates moral obligation to family (19-20). Later in the play, even after both Mabel and his child have died, Ambrose throws Joe, the evil tempter character, off a roof to avenge their deaths. Ambrose shows no recognition that he contributed to the circumstances that led him to his losses, but rather goes on to even greater moral bankruptcy, murder (32). In a less grave, but still poignant scene in *The Fatal Glass*, Bob, a secondary character, cuts off his wife’s beautiful hair in order to sell it for alcohol (19).

In *Three Years in a Man Trap*, Harry is home in a drunken state. He knocks over a lamp and sets a fire. The fire causes the staircase to collapse on the crib where his baby is sleeping, and this causes the child to die (Morton 34). In addition, this play has two characters that are not central to the plot, but are depicted over and over stealing and lying in order to get money to drink. Joe and Bill, “known” n’ere-do-wells, early in the play, take advantage of a disturbance in the bar, and steal bottles of liquor and cigars while the crowd is distracted (10). Later, they steal money from Harry’s daughter who has been sent on an errand to buy food—likely the only money the family has, given
Harry’s alcoholism. Not only do they steal the money, but take the child’s coat, hat and boots to pawn as well (38).

While sexual advances due to drunkenness are notably not expressed in the majority of these plays, we do see Sandy try to embrace Manuela in Two Men of Sandy Bar (Hoyt 334). With the exception of Sandy Bar, and Drifting Apart, it is interesting to note that the preservation of the fidelity of marriage is maintained. Any marriage that is over, ends because of neglect and abuse by the husband rather than infidelity. This seems to have a direct connection to the value placed on the family, and especially a portrayal of the rewards a patient and faithful wife would be granted in the more optimistic of the plays.

The addictive nature of alcohol and how it takes hold of the alcoholic character is demonstrated, though, in many scenes in these plays. To the alcoholic, drink is often described as a soothing friend, a medicine that will calm the nerves. To other characters, the addictive nature of alcohol is described in more sinister terms. All of the plays have a certain ambivalence about where the “blame” for the resulting addiction is to be placed. Some characters succumb to the addictive nature of alcohol, while others, though they imbibe, seem immune to the addiction. Alcohol itself, and the distributors of alcohol are more likely to fall under a negative light in some of the plays, while in others the character whom embodies temptation or revenge is presented in a more negative light. As the century progresses, the shift from a character in the play whom embodies the evils of temptation and addiction to a more blatant condemnation of the alcohol industry is clear. Paralleling this is the decreased likelihood for redemption of the alcoholic himself, for as
the century wears on, the alcoholic characters are more and more likely to die as a result of their addiction, and less and less likely to return to some kind of domestic bliss.

Temptation and the placement of blame for alcoholic addiction is a central focus in the depictions of many of the alcoholic characters. In most of these plays alcohol seems to have a lure like a magnet that cannot be avoided. Or in other cases, “temptation” is enacted through a villainous character. In *The Drunkard*, (1844) we see Cribbs deliberately feed alcohol to Middleton, the upstanding young man. Cribbs, although he drinks some along with Middleton, seems immune to alcohol’s addictive effects, while Middleton is caught in the grip of that addiction almost immediately, which seems to exactly fulfill Cribbs’ plan. He describes Middleton’s addiction, saying “he has tasted and will not stop now short of madness or oblivion” (Smith 272). The other play with a prominent character that is clearly meant to embody the evils of alcohol is *The Fatal Glass* (1872). Joe, that play’s evil character, describes the nature of alcohol addiction, and the difference between a man who will get addicted and a man who will not.

JOE: I tell you, the devil rum never worked so great a change in the nature of man as it has in him. All his thoughts, feelings, and actions begin and end in the bottle. Do you think such a miserable wretch has room in his heart for revenge? True, the flame may sometimes flicker, but the ruling passion rages high again, and puffs poor vengeance out.

TOM: Entirely gone, eh?

JOE: Entirely. With me, drink sharpens my wits, and brings out the dormant villain. But weak, virtuous souls like Verney find in intoxication the epitome of every crime. When the Roman stoic sought to fix a damming stigma on his sister’s
betrayer, he called him neither simple rebel nor bloodshedder, or even villain—no, he heaped every odium in one word, and that was drunkard!

TOM: It may be, but I still have known men to come out of that abject state and sometimes reason too.

JOE: Reason in a sot? I tell you, when a man is so fallen as Verney is, he becomes like wax, and you may work him ‘twixt your fingers, molding him fool or villain, as you will. Have no fear of him. (McCloskey 25)

And later in the scene, we hear from Ambrose, the man who Joe has deliberately set upon the road to alcoholic ruin. He describes from his own point of view the way his life has been ruined.

WALTER: I say friend, you look rather worse for the wear: what’s the cause—sickness, trouble, or want?

AMBROSE: (takes up bottle) This, aided by plotting, villainy, a weak mind, and a too-confiding nature.

WALTER: Unfortunate, eh? I thought I was the only unhappy one in the world. I’m young, and I thought that in the wine-cup was the only place to drown my sorrows, but I see you’re right. The end must come sometime, and so there’s the last for me. Stop, though I’ll have this one last glass. (goes to drink, but Ambrose stops his hand)

AMBROSE: The last glass? ‘Tis never found. I’ve been looking for it for years—for years that have been to me a century, and yet there it in before me urging me to quaff it. That last glass, that, like the serpent’s eye, brings down the fluttering
bird to its pitiless jaws, still grips me with an iron hand, and drags me toward the yawning gulf!

WALTER: Yes, in time it would bring us all down. But with me it is a newly-born habit.

AMBROSE: Shun it, do not trust it! I have seen man, the image of his maker—proud, Godlike, ambitious man, the master of the earth and all that it contains, the power that can bind the elements at his will, that tempts the billows in their wrath, can blunt the lightning—that gifted spirit that would read the will of fate written within the star-lettered front of heaven; I have seen him debase himself to the level of the brute by the curse of drink. Behold and example: ‘tis here—in myself, lost, irrevocably lost! (28)

In the eyes of Ambrose, alcohol is a force that has power over what is most noble and extraordinary in mankind. He himself has been ruined by its pull and sees potential ruin in every man. It is notable that he says his ruin was aided by “plotting,” so he has an external blame, and yet also “a weak mind and a too-confiding nature.” This points to the ambivalent point of view in these plays about where the reasons for alcoholism are to be placed.

In *Three Years in a Man Trap* (1873), Perry describes his own powerlessness saying “Curse it and you: when I have become such a slave to the fiend that I cannot help myself!” (Morton 9). As probably the most cynical of the temperance plays, *Man Trap* presents a pessimistic outlook on the potential any alcoholic character has to reform. Harry’s wife, Nettie, says “not one in one hundred ever reforms” (14). And later, expanding on the exponential nature of alcohol addiction and its effects of society,
Mullen, a police officer says of Lloyd and Jones’ tavern: “six or seven thousand places like this breed such vermin very fast…if it wasn’t for rum, the police force might be cut in half” referring to trouble-making drunks at the bar (20).

The alcoholic character as depicted in the nineteenth century on stage has had a very lasting impact on the way we view him, and alcoholism in general in America, although clearly some understanding of alcoholism has changed into the twentieth and twenty-first century. The most frequently repeated markers of the nature of this character turn up in these temperance dramas and define the lens through which this character was viewed. This man could not be taken at his word, for he repeatedly swears off drinking, only to be found drunk in the next scene. Neither the gravity of his oath, nor the importance of the people to whom he makes promises, change his inability to keep his promise. The alcoholic deludes himself into thinking he can have only one drink to stave off the effects of withdrawal, and is blind to the fact that he has never been able to do so, and also to the fact that taking the drink will set off another round on uncontrollable cravings. These men lack the emotional capacity to face the wreckage their drinking has wrought, and often will return to drinking simply to quell the remorse they feel because of the impact of drinking to begin with. This regret, rather than turn the drunkard away from drinking, drives him back to it. A crucial aspect of the depiction of alcoholism during this period is the recurrence of delirium tremens. Here the man shows himself to be so wholly addicted to alcohol that he cannot go without drinking for any extended period without slipping into a state which effects him physically (he has the shakes or even convulsions) and includes a mental agitation which can become hallucinatory and violent. This depiction speaks both to the urgency with which the reformers sought to
affect their audience’s opinions, and also to the actual gravity of the alcohol problem during the nineteenth century. Alcoholism was portrayed in such a way that a raving and ranting spell of delirium tremens was seen as the consequence of taking up drink to begin with. Lastly, but possibly most prominently, we see in so many of the drinking characters a cycle of offense easily taken followed by an episode of violence, that often leads to murder. The offending statements are either truths or trifles, but the drunkard reacts and often attacks the person making the offending statement. In case after case, the alcoholic is a man who is capable of throwing all sense and security away for an offense to his pride. The stereotype then could be said to be always a man, incapable of holding down any kind of work, prone to fighting over nothing, finding himself remorseful, but not so much as to stop drinking and aid his family. He is so addicted that he often will find himself in withdrawals, and can bring ruin upon himself and his family due to an ambivalent lack of culpability for his own behavior.

Public perception, aided by repeated performances of temperance dramas across the country boiled down to a negative view and a widely accepted stereotype as described by Lender and Martin in *Drinking In America*:

Instead, many Americans adopted a view of the drunkard as a physically and economically broken derelict, a socially disruptive person whose lifestyle was at variance with accepted mores, whose very existence was an impediment to the coming of the sober republic. After the Civil War, this image crystallized in the skid row stereotype. And given the fears for the sanctity of the middle-class home, the demands of industrial efficiency, and the premium on good citizenship in a rapidly changing society, the individual drunkard's aberrant behavior and
apparent lack of regard for, neorepublican values was intolerable, at least in temperance eyes. (114)

Engrained in the depiction found in the temperance plays is a truth about the nature of alcoholism, but these plays lack insight into the personal experience of the alcoholic, due to the “good and evil” nature of characters in melodramas. Because they are predominantly shallow figures, these portrayals are the perfect vehicle for the introduction into the American imagination a stereotype of alcoholism that continues to sway and distort public understanding of the disease.
CHAPTER FOUR

The Alcoholic Narrative

Along with presenting a stereotypical character, the temperance dramas of the nineteenth century told the “story” of alcoholism. The narrative component used to spread the message of temperance may have been even more important in warning men off drinking than the depiction of character. In this chapter, the seven representative dramas will be examined for similarities in the story of what happens to the man who takes up drinking. Because the plays are cautionary tales, the suggested outcomes of drinking are portrayed as inevitable and catastrophic, leaving no room for the audience to doubt what will become of the man who does not heed the warning.

The story of the drunkard often begins with an optimistic picture. The protagonist’s future usually looks bright and he is seen as a man with potential. The epitome of happiness is always framed within a domestic sphere; in fact, pursuit of business success is often linked to a start in the liquor trade in these plays, which inevitably becomes a dire business decision. Success is measured as commensurate with a happy home and the solidarity of the family unit. An impending wedding is often a beginning place for these tales, although not always, but several of the plays have a
wedding scene as a part of the narrative in order to reinforce how much potential the situation has.

In *The Drunkard*, much time is dedicated to portray the courtship between Middleton and Mary. In early scenes, before she and Middleton are married, emphasis is placed on the appealing and beneficent nature of Mary and her mother, directing the audience to find the draw of home and hearth superior to any camaraderie found in a bar room. The opening scene of *The Drunkard* shows Mary and her mother Mrs. Wilson as saintly, devoted and pure. They are willing to accept whatever Heaven brings, but are at the mercy of their landlord’s son, Middleton, who they fear will sell the cottage where they have lived. It is a scene dedicated to the reinforcement of the value that the emerging American Dream ideology placed on happiness being found in the domestic sphere. In the second scene Middleton is pressured by Cribbs, the evil tempter, to sell the cottage out from under the women. Middleton refuses, saying it is “a place endeared to them by tender domestic recollections, and past remembrances of purity and religion” (Smith 255). First seen courting, when Mary lives with her mother in the cottage, and then seen as happily married with a bright future ahead of them, the beginnings of the story allow the characters to be in a desirable position, one from which their fall elicits pity.

John Frick articulates the necessity of beginning with a picture of domestic happiness because the ideology of middle class values was so embedded in that picture. He writes,

Like *The Drunkard*, that pictured Mary and Edward Middleton in “peace, purity and happiness” following their nuptials and before “that horrid drink had done its work,” most temperance melodramas began with scenes of domestic tranquility
and well-being, visually illustrating how much the protagonist risked sacrificing because of his intemperance. Following the introduction of the bottle or the revelation of the protagonist's intemperance, frequently a focal point of the first act, the drunkard began a downward spiral during which he was “ripe for any deed, however wild.” In the scenes that followed, the drunkard, unable to hold a job and economically disenfranchised, was pictured gambling, embezzling, stealing from his former employer, swearing, and/or brutalizing his family, all unmistakable signs of the drunkard's moral deterioration and activities guaranteed to further divorce him from respectable society. (66-7)

It is important to recognize that the launch into the downfall is framed with in this potential for great contribution to society. And extended time is given to establishing this frame in The Drunkard. Less time is dedicated to it in The Fatal Glass, but we see the image of domestic happiness repeated in an opening wedding scene, where Ambrose and Mabel stand on the precipice of hopeful potential. The scene opens with villagers singing:

May Heaven’s choicest blessings fall
Upon your bridegroom and yourself;
Happy your lot, on one and all,
And keep you both in perfect health (McCloskey 3)

The village is assembled and the wedding is about to take place, but The Fatal Glass has a plot devise whereby Ambrose, the bridegroom is given opium in order to force him back to drinking by Joe, that play’s embodiment of temptation. As the play proceeds, the terrors of the alcoholic narrative befall Ambrose, but in the end we find out it was all a dream induced by the opium and so the play ends on the wedding day as well as
beginning on it. Because of this plot device, Mabel and Ambrose are spared the actual horrors of alcoholism, but the audience does not know this until the end of the play. In the meantime, they are a couple shown to be truly in love with each other and with potential for great domestic happiness in front of them, but they encounter the worst horrors that could befall a young couple.

In *Drifting Apart*, we see a scene of domestic bliss that takes place on Christmas eve. Mary, the wife of the alcoholic in that play, is with child, and Jack, the drunkard, goes out for a holiday celebration. Using a similar plot twist to *The Fatal Glass*, the audience is shown a downward spiral in Jack and Mary’s lives, ending in tragedy, but it is revealed that it was all just a dream. Nonetheless, Jack and Mary are hanging stockings on the mantle. As they do this, Mary reveals her pregnancy saying, “Jack, did you ever think that perhaps next Christmas there might be another stocking, a tiny one, Jack, to hang in the chimney corner?” (Herne act II, 4). The family is about to cement into the domestic ideal, and in this moment the vision of the future gives Jack a sense of how important it will be for him to continue to keep his pledge of temperance.

In two other plays the scene is less focused on the home life of the alcoholic character, and more on his success in business. In both of these plays, success by way of the “self made man” or the emerging ideal of the “American Dream” seem to be in the future for these entrepreneurs. John Glum runs a tavern in *Three Years in a Man Trap*, and Simon Slade is landlord for the “Sickle and Sheaf” in *Ten Nights in a Bar Room*. As the focus on reform turns over the nineteenth century from individual salvation to demonizing the liquor industry, the evils that are set aside for the individual who has fallen into the grips of alcohol’s influence start to befall the providers of liquor. The
message implies that those who drink, and those who profit from the drunkard are equally vulnerable to downfall. Glum is the model of temperance at the outset of his work in the trade. When asked to join some friends for a toast, he declines, saying “No thankee, I never touch a drop.” But when his friend say that seems strange for a barkeep, he replies, “That’s the only way to be a good bar-keeper. No man can attend to business that drinks liquor” (Morton 5). But as evident from the last chapter, John Glum ends up killed by Perry in a struggle with his gun, and he certainly goes back on his values about drinking and business not mixing during the play, clearly a prey to alcohol’s temptation. In the case on Simon Slade, he is portrayed as a happy, successful man in good standing in his community. Romaine, visitor to the tavern, tells Slade he ought to be a happy man. Slade says “I am so; I have always been and I always expect to be” (Pratt 7). But after profiting from unfortunate and seemingly innocent drunkards, he is killed by his own drunken son.

In all of these cases, hope seems bright for these characters at the outset of the play. Whether the focus is on the home and the manifestation of the domestic ideal that emerged as part of the image of happiness in the nineteenth century, or on the economic success of the self made man, all of these men are positioned at the beginning of these plays as having the potential to fulfill the society’s ideal, an ideal which still holds weight today.

Once the alcoholic character is established as having potential happiness, whether in the domestic or the business segment of his life, often his wife is warned or has some apprehension about the security of that vision because of the man’s past associations with or continued use of alcohol. These warnings serve dramatically to foreshadow the coming events of the play, and to indicate that disaster could be averted if only the warning signs
had been heeded. In *The Drunkard*, before ever meeting Middleton, Mary admits she “fears this young man. He has been described as so wild, so reckless. I feel a sad foreboding—“ (Smith 247). And while Middleton and Mary marry and all seems happy, this little intuitive insight into the future sticks with the audience, cautioning them not to disregard the same kind of thoughts in their own lives. In another scene, a few troubled farmer neighbors speak to William (Middleton’s step-brother) about Middleton missing church services and tavern hopping instead. William sees no signs of trouble. Interestingly, the farmers invite William over for as much cider as he can drink, indicating a distinct difference in the way distilled spirits and fermented drinks were viewed in the early stages of the temperance movement. In terms of the narrative, these warnings serve to show that the drunkard’s downfall did not come out of nowhere, but could have been anticipated. They create small doubts in the audience’s mind and begin the initial complications to the plot.

In *The Fatal Glass*, there are several moments where Mabel is warned about the dangers that may come her way by marrying a drinking man, even though he has promised to stop once married. In a quote we saw in chapter 3 regarding the drunkard’s capacity to keep his word, we also see a warning to the young wife-to-be. Dorothy, Mabel’s mother says regarding how happy the marriage will be,

DOROTHY: …it will be, if he but remembers what I told him when I gave him your hand.

MABEL: With regard to drink? Have no fear mother, Ambrose’s word is enough.

DOROTHY: Yes, child, but I remember your father’s resolve (*wipes her eyes*).

This very day forty years ago, upon his bended knees, he pledged his word, in
presence of our parents, never to let the demon *drink* pass his lips. Then, as now, had assembled a crowd of friends with joyful wishes. I, like you, attired in spotless white, ready to give my hand and heart into another’s keeping. I heard the vow, and I believed it. What was the sequel? You know it child—ruin!

Starvation! Death! (McCloskey 4)

But Mabel cannot see the parallels between her situation and her own mother’s experience, and the warning falls on deaf ears. Additionally this scene implies that there is a generational factor not only in the drunkard, but also in the woman attracted to him.

*On the Brink* offers warnings that seem less inevitably laid out, yet also serve to raise questions in the audience’s minds about the capacity for continued good fortune when drink is involved. After her husband returned from the tavern drunk the night before, Mrs. Thaxter admits, “My troubles have commenced. I had hoped that my future life would be as pleasant and as happy as the past, but I fear I am doomed to disappointment. My husband has been kind and thoughtful, but the tempter has come and is luring him on to destruction” (McBride 5). And when Thaxter wakes up, Mrs. Thaxter confesses her anxiety about what the future will hold for them if he keeps on drinking.

MRS THAXTER: …I implore you, give up your drinking and carousing. My life thus far has been unclouded and I have been a happy wife. Until a few months ago I knew no serious trouble. But a change has come; you have taken to drink. Two weeks ago you came home in the same condition. David, our married life has been happy. Why destroy our happiness now? Oh, I beseech you, turn away from the accursed cup, and let us go onward in our journey through life with clean
hands and pure hearts. Do not be led away by the tempter and we can be as happy in the future as we have been in the past. (McBride 6)

In this case, Mrs. Thaxter is not at all ignoring a little nagging feeling, but doing her best to change the course of her husband’s behavior, trying to use her moral authority to persuade Thaxter to change his behavior. But this superior morality does nothing to redirect his choices. She is the bearer of the warning rather than the receiver, but clearly the warning serves as part of the narrative structure to build dramatically to the drunkard’s downfall.

*Drifting Apart*, although a popular Broadway show not marketed as a temperance drama, still follows the warning pattern by depicting doubt about a drinking man’s ability to sever his relationship to alcohol. In this play, Mary, the play’s heroine, is courted by an upper class man named Percy. Eventually she goes on to marry him after Jack, her young sailor, returns to drinking and seems to have been lost at sea. Early in the play, before these events, Percy asks Mary if she is afraid that Jack will someday disappear.

PERCY: I do not mean sea faring dangers, I mean, pardon me—his love for—

MARY: What he calls a social glass?

PERCY: Yes, I have seen—

MARY: So have I. All our people here drink more or less, they seem to inherit it from their cradles, it is as natural for a fisherman to drink as it is for the fish they risk their lives to catch—

PERCY: Have you no fears that this pernicious habit may grow upon him and one day wreck his life and yours—yes—even that of the unborn babe of which you just now spoke.
MARY: Hush—please—don’t, please don’t. I dare not look so far as that…

(Herne Act 1 5-6)

As seen before, a young woman’s love for her betrothed interferes with her capacity or desire to see into the future with objectivity. She even admits that drinking is so engrained in the society of fishermen that it seems unlikely Jack will extricate himself from such a strong cultural marker of identity. When Jack arrives home from sea, he sends for the Parson so he can marry Mary straight away. In a scene filled with highly theatrical premonition and foreshadowing, dark clouds gather and a storm whips up. At the conclusion of the wedding vows the following scene takes place:

JACK: Mary, my own, my wife.

(Goes to embrace her. The horizon has become black by this. At the word wife a terrific flash of lightning and a crash of thunder, at its sound all of the characters who had their hats in hand in act of shouting, pause and picture of alarm and fear. Margaret springs up in alarm. Mary shrieks and hides her head on Jack’s breast. Jack looks alarmed but defiant. Hester alone faces the sea and looks boldly at the storm. Silas hides himself behind her.)

MARY: Oh, Jack, if that should be an evil omen!

JACK: Nonsense! (Half superstitious himself) It’s but a summer storm, and see how brightly the sun shines on us—what matter the storm, it cannot harm the sea—look up, there is no danger.

(A terrific flash of lightning and crash of thunder, a bolt descends and fires Jack’s ship.)

NICK: The Dolphin’s struck. Jack, your ship’s on fire. (Herne act 1 18)
Far more theatrically sophisticated than the straight warning from another character, the effect has a greater impact on an audience because of the spectacle and jolt of surprise the thunder and lightning causes. It provides a dire warning indeed, which also goes unheeded by the characters involved.

*Drifting Apart* also reveals more of the psychological effects that come with alcoholism. Mary reveals an ongoing anxiety that Jack will return to the bottle, even if it is theatrically exaggerated. In the idyllic scene on Christmas Eve when they are shown to be happy and full of hope, and she tells him that she is pregnant, she also expresses doubt about how wise it is for Jack to go out with his fellow fishermen.

MARY: Then if anything should ever come between us—

JACK: Come between us— (*fiercely*)

MARY: (*Placing hand over his mouth*) No! No! I don’t mean that—I mean—if ever you should be tempted to—

JACK: (*Soothingly*) Oh, there I see now. (*Kisses her*) Bless you, why didn’t you say that before, there, I’ll not go out at all—

MARY: (*Recovering herself*) Oh! Yes you must, your men expect you, it would be selfish of me to keep you here—don’t mind me Jack—you know how we women are apt to be moody and capricious when— (*Herne act 2 5*)

Mary convinces Jack to go receive the silver watch the men are going to present to him, but just after he goes, Mary again falls into a fearful state. We learn in the next scene that Jack did indeed get drunk that night, and so her worries were not unwarranted.

MARGARET: Why child alive—what’s ever come over you?
MARY: I don’t know mother, it seems as if some great evil was about to fall upon us—try as I will I cannot shake it off. *(With fear)* Oh! Mother if Jack should—

*(Herne act 2 6)*

In a reversal from the scene in *The Fatal Glass*, Mary, the wife, is anxious about her husband’s possible return to drinking and it is the parent that minimizes the validity of that fear. But *Drifting Apart* makes use of an abundance of plot points raising anxiety in the audience about the future of Jack’s drinking habits and Mary’s safety and happiness.

*Three Years in a Man Trap* offers several scenes that fit into the same pattern of warning and foreshadowing a coming disaster resulting from drunkenness and association with alcohol. As you may recall, in this play John Lloyd and Hiram Jones bring Perry Flint, a one-time bar owner, to the tavern to get information out of him about the liquor selling business. As they men are inquiring about it, Perry figures out that they intend to open a saloon, and he warns them: “So that’s what you’re driving at, eh? But take my advice and don’t do it. Stick to honest work, boys; it pays best in the long run!” *(Morton 8)*.

Lloyd’s daughter, Maggie, consoles her friend Nettie, about a drinking bender that Harry, Nettie’s husband has been on. She counsels her friend by saying, “if he has fallen among gay companions, reason with him gently when he is sober; do not reproach him—be all smiles and cheerfulness” *(Morton 14)*. But after her friend has left, she admits, “Poor Nettie, if Harry Glen has indeed taken to drinking, what a life is in store for her!” revealing that she does not really believe that her advice to Nettie will turn Harry away from drink *(Morton 14)*.
In a last ditch effort to convince her father not to open the bar-room, Maggie and her mother plead with Lloyd to find a way to earn a living that will not bring ruin upon others, but Lloyd is determined.

LLOYD: My mind’s made up, and nothing upon earth can turn me!

MAGGIE: Then we may bid farewell, forever, now to joy and happiness, and in their places I can foresee danger, aye; and death! The pleasant words that used to greet us will be changed to curses and reproaches; the neighbors’ loving looks to scornful glances. A curse, a heavy curse, will light upon this once happy home!

(Morton 17)

This scene has a hint of the alcoholic as a man with a tragic flaw, a blind spot to how his own ambition, especially by means of the liquor trade, will cause his own ruination. It offers a slightly different message than the idea that temptation is external to the alcoholic character found in most temperance plays. Somehow he is complicit in the outcome by being stubborn and willful, even in the face of his daughter’s oracle-like pronouncements. Clearly the emphasis is upon the danger of going into the liquor trade in this scene, but the pattern and message is that bad things will befall the family of those profiting from selling alcohol.

In Ten Nights in a Bar-Room, the temperance character, Romaine, expresses concern to Simon Slade, the tavern owner, that working in a bar may be a bad influence on his son, Frank. Later, Slade mentions this conversation to his wife and she expresses the same concerns.

MRS. SLADE: If he was concerned about him, and an entire stranger too, judge, then how must I feel? I do not believe we are as happy as when we were at the old
mill. You yourself seem different. You assume a cheerfulness that, in reality, I fear you feel not. Do you not think the habits of these men will exert a bad influence over our dear boy? (Pratt 10)

She goes on to restate that “We shall never be as happy again as we were at the old mill” (Pratt 10). Clearly this pattern of warning works very well for the development of the plot in these plays. It is a clear sign that the characters within the play itself suspect that the stasis may have been disrupted, so in terms of narrative structure, these moments all serve the plot, but in terms of the alcoholic narrative, they also imply that all of the coming tragedy could have been averted; that the alcoholic (or liquor seller) could have done something to change the course of events if only he had listened to those around him.

And in the public’s understanding of alcoholism, and even in the literature of recovery movements, the concept that there were warning signs years before trouble set in is part of the alcoholic story. In a certain sense this is the point from where a moral stance on alcoholism can take root, because the ignoring of warning signs seems deliberate and willful on the part of the men—depicting this moment as almost evil. It implies that the alcoholic should have known and was in a position to stop the coming wreckage, but chose not to, and all of the following chaos comes out of choice.

Following warnings and fearful intuitive premonitions, the next complication in the story is often that the man is out at the tavern when he should be home. This development again draws heavily upon the ideology that places the family unit as the primary source of happiness and implies that the home is where a man should be. As chapter two outlines, in the changes to nineteenth century society, men and women began living and operating in different spheres, leaving the functions of the family roles
specialized. Women were considered inherently more moral and were therefore responsible for the ethics of the home. When the husband stayed out at night, or spent the money earned as the sole bread-winner in the tavern, the balance needed to support the family structure tipped and the security of the family members became endangered far more quickly than earlier social structures based on agrarian living. So the alarm in the characters about father’s late night drinking bouts comes across as rather alarmist to the contemporary reader, but there was reason for alarm, if the values (and pitfalls) of the social structure at that time were being held up by the message of the play.

In *The Drunkard*, we see Mary at home, distraught that her husband is out somewhere drinking while she sits by her dying mother’s bedside. The circumstances of this scene make the message very clear that Middleton’s place should be by his wife’s side rather than out, but nevertheless, the scene does play on the ideology of family structure. In a scene designed to pull at the heartstrings of the audience, Mary is discovered coming out of the bedroom where her mother lies dying.

MARY: Oh, heaven, have mercy on me!—aid me!—strengthen me! Weight not thy poor creature down with woes beyond her strength to bear. Much I fear my suffering mother never can survive the night, and Edward comes not, and when he does arrive, how will it be? Alas, alas! Mt dear lost husband! I think I could verve myself against every thing, but—Oh misery! This agony of suspense! It is too horrible.

(enter Julia from room—she is barefooted—dress clean, but very poor)

JULIA: Mother, dear mother, what makes you cry? I feel so sorry when you cry—don’t cry anymore, dear mother.
MARY: I cannot help it, dearest. Do not tell your poor father what has happened in his absence, Julia.

JULIA: No, dear mother, if you wish me not. Will it make him cry, mother? When I see you cry, it makes me cry, too.

MARY: Hush, dear one, hush. Alas, he is unhappy enough already.

JULIA: Yes. Poor father! I cried last night when father came home, and was so sick. Oh, he looked so pale, and when I kissed him for good night, his face was as hot as fire. This morning he could not eat his breakfast, could he? What makes him sick so often, mother?

MARY: Hush, sweet one.

JULIA: Dear grandma is so sick, too. Doctor and nurse both looked so sorry. Grandma won’t die tonight will she, mother?

MARY: Father of mercies, this is too much. (weeps) Be very quiet, Julia. I am going to see poor grandma. Oh religion! Sweet solace of the wretched heart!

Support me! Aid me in this dreadful trial. (Smith 277)

In this scene we see the epitome of the trials of the abandoned wife portrayed. But the pattern follows through many of the other plays. Later in The Drunkard, Mary and Julia are left alone in a hovel with no food and no heat because Middleton has become a full time resident on the streets of New York. While alone and abandoned, she is nearly raped by Cribbs, only to be stopped by the timely arrival of William, Middleton’s loyal step-brother.

In The Fatal Glass, we find a similar scene. Mabel has been left alone by Ambrose, and, seeking vengeance, Joe Bennett buys the property Ambrose and Mabel
live in. He arrives to take his revenge for a long-held resentment against Mabel, who
chose to marry Ambrose over him.

MABEL: Oh, merciful powers! My fears were then too true. Say, man, why have
you done this thing? Why have you made this wreck? Why have you broken my
heart? *(weep)*

JOE: Why, Mabel? Because you chose to marry Ambrose Verney, rather than be
the wife of Joe Bennett.

MABEL: As there in an All-seeing eye, this act will not go unavenged! Oh,
Bennett, if, as you say, you once loved me, on my knees I implore you, by those
fond recollections of the past, restore him to his father’s heritage—restore me to
my shattered heart—undo your work—bury your fiendish malice—bury it!

JOE: Too late! Mabel—you spurned me, because you said I was a drunkard; why
did you not add, because Ambrose was possessor of the mill and its broad acres,
and the lovely house needed but a mistress to make it Elysium. But you have lost
all mill, land, house—and in exchange you have for a husband—

MABEL: A drunkard; and you have made him so. Now hear me and mark well
my prophesy; that mill shall be your tomb. Blight and murrain fall upon your
fields, yourself a miserable outcast, an Ishmael among your fellow men—disease
and affliction penetrate your body, till you groan and curse, ay, even life itself.
And when, overburdened with woes, and finding no consolation among mortals,
you’ll turn to heaven for aid, and find yourself abandoned, even there. Accursed!
Accursed! Accursed! *(she falls on her knees when Bennett raises his hand as if to
strike her, but rushes out)*. *(McCloskey 12)*
Rather than lamenting her situation, it is clear that Ambrose’s absence forces Mabel to defend herself against Joe Bennett, and although she does manage to come out of the encounter without the need of outside aid, it leave in the audience a knowledge of what could have happened even if it wasn’t staged.

In On the Brink, Thaxter is shown overdoing it after a meeting of the farmer’s club—he also admits ambitions to run for office. Overreaching ambition is also targeted as a reason men tend to end up drinking too much. We see it in the men who try to profit from selling liquor, and in the case of Thaxter, it comes across as a case of too much ambition for his particular lot in life—again a subtle reference to how home and hearth should be quite enough to leave a man happy and contented. In this scene fraternization leads to peer pressure and more drinking, keeping Thaxter out much later than appropriate. In the first three pages of the play, Thaxter and his peers consume four shots of liquor, and by the end of the scene, Thaxter is portrayed as a drunken buffoon making nonsensical speeches.

MR. THAXTER: Confound these chairs, they’re kind ‘f unsteady.

BENJAMIN: Ho! Ho! The Pres’dent of the Knoxville Farmer’s Club’s got the floor. (laughs) Ho! Ho! Tha’s pu’ry good. The Pres’dent of the Knoxville Farmer’s Club’s got the floor. Go ahead now an’ make yer speech.

MR. THAXTER: (trying to rise) Oh, you needn’t talk; you’ve been pu’re bad yerself many a time.

BENJAMIN: Ho! Ho! Berrer take annnuzer drink, then go ahead an’ make yer speech, fur, you know, you’ve got ‘er floor. Ho! Ho!
MR. THAXTER: If I get er hold of you I’ll stop yer laughin,’ you imp’dent puppy. (McBride 5)

In the scene following this one, we see Mrs. Thaxter sadly saying “my troubles have commenced” implying that one drunken night out breaks the security she has felt in her marriage, and that if Thaxter had not been out, that security would have remained intact.

In *Three Years in a Man Trap*, the first we see of Tom Lloyd’s family is his wife wishing he was home rather than out at the tavern. She speaks to her young son about it.

MRS. LLOYD: It’s getting late, I wonder your father isn’t home as it’s past his usual hour.

YOUNG TOM: I saw him and Hiram Jones go into John Glum’s about an hour ago to get their lager.

MRS. LLOYD: I wish he would keep away from John Glum’s. That place is a curse to all the working men and their wives within a mile of it. (Morton 13)

This scene is early in the play and can serve also as a kind of warning, like the ones we saw in the last section of this chapter, but the idea that Lloyd is out when he should be home is a signal that the well being of the home life and the family is at stake when father decides to stay out rather than come home.

In *Ten Nights in a Bar-Room*, Morgan’s young daughter, Mary is sent to the “Sickle and Sheaf” to collect her father when he has not come home. The first time she comes for him, he reluctantly goes home with her. The second time we see her come to the bar to fetch him in a moment when Morgan and Slade are fighting. Mary gets caught in the fight and is hit in the head by a glass. The day after her injury, Morgan starts to indicate he might want to go out again. Mrs. Morgan pleads with him.
MRS. MORGAN: Don’t go out tonight, Joe. Please don’t go.

MARY: Father! Father! Don’t leave little Mary and poor mother alone tonight, will you? You know I can’t come after you now. (Pratt 24)

Mary’s injury eventually kills her, and is probably the most forceful evidence out of all of these plays that the consequences of heading to the tavern rather than home to the family can be dire.

The emphasis in these scenes is to reinforce the ties of the family unit, since mother has no means of supporting the family except possibly to take in a little sewing for starvation wages, as Middleton’s wife Mary does when she follows him to New York in The Drunkard. The women and children are the ones who suffer greatly when the husband does not come home, and this development in these plays is a confirmation that the warnings were not heeded and that father has stepped out of his designated role in the family.

Assignment of responsibility for the drunkard’s decent into misery becomes one of the most complicated messages in these stories. In most of these plays the alcoholic both is and is not responsible for his downfall, and the part of the message that says he is not responsible comes from the inclusion of a character that embodies temptation and the evils therein. In his book Theatre, Culture and Temperance Reform, John Frick points out the difficulty American dramatists, and society in general had in pointing directly at the alcoholic character to assign blame for his alcoholism. While messages imbedded in these scripts all clearly fall onto a moral line, they found that it was less dangerous to dodge the issue of personal responsibility.
As Jeffrey Mason has pointed out, since quite often in American-written temperance dramas, “the drunkard was beyond blame, the temperance apologists looked for other scapegoats, and the most convenient one was an abstraction – temptation” (56). Commonly this temptation or free-floating evil in the environment was reified in the form of either a conventional melodramatic villain or occasionally the bottle itself, both external forces. Seldom, if ever, was the drunkard alone directly responsible for his own plight, this despite the prevailing belief within the temperance community that the source of intemperance was man's sinful nature and that drunkenness was a moral failing. (134)

While the character of the evil tempter makes culpability for alcoholism complicated, it also serves the melodramatic structure of these plays, and therefore conforms to the audience’s expectations. Even the later and most cynical of the plays in this study, *Three Years in a Man Trap*, does have a tempter character as an outside force exerting itself on the alcoholic and possibly forcing upon him a legacy that might not be his except for the evil-doer. These plays have many instances where the alcoholic is tricked or deceived or forced to drink when “ordinarily” they would not. They are peer-pressured and slipped alcohol, eventually leading them to become drunkards. It is interesting that the evil characters themselves do not seem to succumb to the dire outcomes of drinking that come to the men they victimize. To the contrary, the tempter seems to flourish and profit while drinking, at least in the cases of Cribbs in *The Drunkard* and Joe in *The Fatal Glass*. In some ways the message could be read as “become evil and tempt other men and you will be saved from the worst of the drunkard’s fate yourself;” but also in both cases, these men do meet with undesirable outcomes. Joe is murdered by Ambrose, and Cribbs is
caught and arrested for forgery. Nevertheless, the evil character is a staple in the temperance dramas and is a way for the temperance movement to create an associated relationship between embodied “evil temptation” and the inert substance of alcohol.

The Drunkard offers the first example found in American theater of this characterization of tempter. Before he even tries to lure him to drink, Cribbs portrays Edward Middleton to Mary and her mother as “given somewhat to excess” and as having “extravagance, you know, the folly—“ (Smith 253). And in an attempt to undermine Middleton’s whole family, he is seen trying to lure William into the tavern to get an invitation to the wedding between Mary and Middleton. William replies, “when your uncle Belzebub wants to bribe an honest fellow to do a bad action, he’d better hire a pettifogging bad lawyer to tempt him, with a counterfeit dollar in one hand and a bottle of rum in the other” (Smith 263). A few scenes later, Cribbs feeds Middleton liquor at the tavern and then when Middleton decides to head home to his wife, Cribbs stops him by playing on his pride and desire for his reputation to remain intact with his wife.

CRIBBS: Why, where would you go thus, Edward?

MIDDLETON: Home! Home!—to my sorrowing wife—her dying mother, and my poor, poor child.

CRIBBS: But not thus, Edward, not thus. Come to my house, my people are all out. We’ll go in the back way—no one will see you. Wash your face and I’ll give you a little—something to refresh you. I’ll take care it shall not hurt you.

MIDDLETON: Ought I—dare I? Oh, this deadly sickness. Is it indeed best?

CRIBBS: To be sure it is. If the neighbors see you thus—I’ll take care of you. Come, come a little brandy—good—good brandy.
MIDDLETON: Well, I— I—

CRIBBS: That’s right—come. (aside) He’s lost. Come, my dear friend, come.

(Smith 276)

Later in the play, when Middleton has gone very far down the alcoholic road, Cribbs tries to get him to forge a signature on a check. Cribbs implies that if he does so, he will receive some money and possibly regain the respect of his wife. Again, Cribbs is playing on Middleton’s ruined reputation and the guilt that come with loss of stature and esteem.

Cribbs is painted as the ultimate villain, personifying and externalizing Middleton’s problems with alcohol, but not creating any implied meaning beyond himself as a villain. This muddies the cause and effect relationship about the reasons for alcoholism imbedded in The Drunkard, and is indicative of the continued ambiguity about the explanations and responsibilities for alcoholism still prevalent in modern day America. It is also interesting to note that even in 1844, Middleton refers to alcoholism as a “deadly sickness.”

Remember that W. H. Smith, author of The Drunkard, was likely influenced by The Washingtonians, who in turn were influenced by Benjamin Rush. Rush’s treatises against alcohol use took the stance that chronic drunkenness was a disease. Language indicating this concept as part of the paradigm about alcoholism appeared long before the medical establishment had taken up drunkenness as an issue worthy of investigation or treatment.

The Drunkard offers a brief glimpse into the direction of blame many of the later plays would take in a short scene in which, wretched and desperate for drink, Middleton calls an innkeeper who is refusing to give him a drink a “common poisoner of the whole village” and “blast ruin over the land” (Smith 289). Here Middleton points at the provider of alcohol as the causes for his downfall. Later plays, more deliberately
targeting the liquor industry would have temptation and evil clearly linked to the tavern owners. Over the course of the nineteenth century, temperance plays make a generalized transition toward institutional blame, clearly aiming the influence toward a legal solution to the liquor problem in America, which culminated in the passage of Prohibition.

Another, darker play that has an external villainous tempter character is *The Fatal Glass*. Seemingly modeled on Cribbs, Joe Bennett, too, is out for revenge, but his resentment is over spurned love, not financial matters. On their wedding day, Joe pressures Ambrose to drink, calling him names and resorting to giving him opium in an attempt to keep him from keeping his promise to stay sober. During the wedding scene, Joe does several things that clearly mark him as a tempter and an evil character. First, he insists that the only way to celebrate a marriage is with some punch. He goes on to disparage temperate people:

BENNETT: What unfortunate creatures; they are so to be pitied! Let us hope they will see the error of their ways, and repent. But we’ll have one bottle before we start to church, won’t we?

AMBROSE: No, I am about to change my course of life. Hereafter, nothing intoxicating will pass my lips; water only if I must drink. (McCloskey 5)

A few words later, Bennett tries to persuade Ambrose by romanticizing the times they spent drinking together.

BENNETT: What! After the many carouses we have had together? ...[R]efuse to steady your nerves of a morning with a good cocktail? For shame! Think of the good old times! Fifteen before dinner, just to make your step elastic, and aid
digestion; and at night a steaming jug, and the appetite to swig it. Visions of angelic delight; no thought of the past, no care for the future? (McCloskey 5)

His appeal to Ambrose’s sentiments does not work, so he relentlessly tries different approaches to see what will get Ambrose upset enough to relent and drink, implicating that there are negative human qualities which could be ascribed to alcohol as a tempter—persistence, determination and the like. In chapter 3, the following scene was used to demonstrate Ambrose’s inability to keep his promise, but it is worth revisiting the scene in light of the drunkard’s narrative and where the causes for his return to drinking are found.

BENNETT: …Verney, pledge one to your beautiful Mabel—the last one, old boy, we shall ever take together.

AMBROSE: No, no!

BOB: No? Idiotic miller! Refuse a social glass! Send for the undertaker at once!

BENNETT: Oh, he daren’t offend his intended wife! Perhaps if you should ask permission of your intended mother-in-law, she might give her consent, especially if she knows it was to be the last glass… (McCloskey 9)

This exchange finally gets Ambrose to consider drinking, but in his hesitation, Bennett adds the opium to his drink just to insure the damage is done. This implies that Bennett seems to be willing to go to any lengths to lure Ambrose back from temperance in order to ruin him. The act of giving Ambrose opium also points toward a knowledge of the relationship between drug addiction and alcoholism, and the medical uses, personal abuses and social implications of both. Some of the background about this information was covered in chapter 2, but this discussion is beyond the scope of this study.
In the cases of *The Drunkard* and *The Fatal Glass*, the temptation of liquor is embodied into a character who has vengeful and evil motivations for driving the protagonist toward alcoholism, drawing associations between the behavior of these men, and the draw of liquor in general, but in vague terms. The nature of the evil character in general is more deeply explored in these two plays. In most of the other plays, the character that fills the role of tempter actually has a link to the liquor industry. Most of these other characters are bar owners—landlords. The social and political landscape of temperance reform shifted after the Civil War to a greater focus on the evils of the liquor industry, and less to individual “moral suasion.” Pledge signing after performances directly linked to temperance societies continued to be a popular tactic to address individual souls, but the movement was making little headway in the eradication of the social destruction caused by alcoholism. And so attention turned to the industry, and an attempt to demonize any selling of liquor as a direct assault on the well-being of innocent women and children, dependent on their husbands and without a social safety net.

In the first scene of *Three Years in a Man Trap*, Tom Lloyd is trying to convince Hiram Jones to go into business with him, to open a tavern together. Although Jones eventually agrees to go in on the business, he voices some of the reasons that social pressure would make him hesitate about it. Lloyd persuades him with the other half of the argument; that men are personally responsible for their choices and the liquor trade doesn’t really have anything to do with that.

JONES: Well, for my part, Tom, I never saw any good come of the liquor business, but I have seen a great deal of harm; and I don’t think it’s honest to engage in a trade which makes men worse instead of better.
LLOYD: Honest! Humbug! Men will drink liquor, and if they take more than they ought, they have only themselves to blame. A saloon keeper’s business is just as honest as that of his neighbor’s. The law says so, and it’s not his fault if men make beasts of themselves. (Morton 5-6)

The argument about the morality liquor trade is set out here, but as the events of the play unfold, it is clear that Jones and Lloyd are far worse off for having opened a tavern, as are the men who have visited that tavern. Interestingly, the spotlight of blame turned away from the alcoholic himself plays into the tendency of the drunkard to find blame for his drinking anywhere but in himself, reinforcing thinking that may keep him drunk.6

Later on in the play, Nettie blames a tavern owner and “pusher” of the liquor for Harry bringing injuries upon himself in a barroom rather than seeing that Harry had something to do with it. She confronts Hiram Jones about Harry’s injuries after arriving at the tavern just as Harry is badly hurt.

NETTIE: Brought it on himself? Liar and villain! It is you and such as you—keepers of these vile dens—that bring misery and ruin to many a happy home. My husband was ever good and kind, until lured here to spend the best hours of his life, and squander his wages upon profligate companions. Not satisfied with taking the bread from his wife and children, you now seek his life… (Morton 29)

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6 The ambivalent nature of finding blame and responsibility for alcoholic behaviors also indicates the interplay between melodramatic form, where the tempter is an external figure or force, and tragedy, where the alcoholic is fully culpable for his demise. Additionally, the inclusion of references toward environmental or hereditary factors that contribute to alcoholism are themes found in realism. An analysis of the interplay of theatrical genre during this period would make for an interesting study, but it is outside the scope of this project.
Nettie goes on to cast a curse on Jones and his establishment—a curse that eventually comes true in the play. The message reiterates the tempter as an external force; Nettie believes that Harry was a good man until lured into the bars by the liquor trade.

In *Ten Nights in a Bar-Room*, Simon Slade was a miller by profession, but in order to make more money, he sold his mill and went into the tavern business. In this play, personal greed conspires with the temptation of the liquor trade to ruin both Morgan, the play’s redeemable drunkard, and Slade himself, who kills Morgan’s daughter and loses his life by the hand of his drunken son. The tavern is seen as a dishonest way to make a living. In the second scene in the play, Slade has a conversation with Romaine, the man who passes through the town witnessing the “Ten Nights.” Romaine’s inquiry about why Slade switched professions had imbedded in it a condemnation of tavern owning as a less than honest, upright way to earn a living.

ROMAINE: Consider the different callings and influences; the trades—that of miller and that of tavern-keeper; will your children be as safe from temptation here as in their former home?

SLADE: Just as safe—why not? I don’t see why a tavern-keeper is not just as respectable as a miller—in fact, more so. The very people who used to call me “Simon,” or “Dusty Coat” now say “Mr. Slade” or “Landlord,” and treat me in every way more as if I were an equal than ever they did before. (Pratt 9)

Clearly the baiting of these men early on in the alcoholic narrative needs to come in to the story, else why would these upstanding men succumb to temptation? Something outside of themselves must be drawing them to it.
Even in *Two Men of Sandy Bar*, the play least typical of the temperance narrative in this study since it was written as a “western,” we see a man whose whole life has been dedicated to the redemption of drunkards and a search for his prodigal son, fall off the wagon and resume alcoholic behavior. John Oakhurst, the “bad guy” who impersonates Sandy Morton (the prodigal) offers old Morton a drink in a moment where he thinks the old man is emotionally overcome by the evening’s events. Oakhurst casually and seemingly without much thought, but decisively sends the old man back down the path of alcoholic horror, a fate he presumably would not have encountered but for the handing off of the drink.

Sometimes the sense that temptation lay outside the drunkard remained vague. These plays often had a broad thematic sense that the “country” had less of the “lure of the tavern” than was present in the city. This association of city life with temptation is also loosely linked to a fear of immigrant populations coming to the cities. The city was sometimes the place where an external temptation accelerated the drunkard’s downward spiral, as in the case of *The Drunkard*. John Frick noted the association:

> [M]odern city culture, teeming as it was with vice and temptation, was represented both in print and on the stage as a corrupt and corrupting environment; one in which countless young men and women met their ruin in the early years of the nineteenth century, and it was this ambiguous, largely fictive representation, appropriated into the common culture, that shaped perceptions of the modern city for decades to follow. (56)
The relationship between culpability of drinking and external forces is a place where in these plays the message was mixed as society continued to look for somewhere to place blame for the ongoing alcoholism of loved ones.

Keeping the temptation or blame for continued drinking outside the drinker himself may also have served to allow the potential alcoholic in the audience to see the course of his life unfolding without putting him on the defensive. The mixed messages about accountability and blame, as stated above, are ingrained in our attitudes about alcoholism and addiction. Most temperance plays were written by non-alcoholics, who had only witnessed the unfolding of the drunkards’ story. These people were probably confused themselves in their search for reasons why some men became alcoholic and some men didn’t, but the end result was a narrative that had ambivalent messages about what temptation was, where it came from, and how “it” exerted an irresistible force upon drinking men.

Turning a more vivid spotlight onto the inevitable negative results of drinking, the plays offer all manner of destructive events that befall the drunkard and his family. Often the drunkard finds himself in harm’s way because of his drinking. The violent fighting and DTs scenes discussed in the last chapter as examples that helped to form a sense of the alcoholic character or personality type also fit into the narrative of alcoholism as laid out in these plays. Personal harm often comes to the drunkard. In The Fatal Glass, Mabel tries to defend herself from Joe, who is now her landlord. While Joe is attempting to rape Mabel, she strikes a blow to Ambrose, who unknowingly walks into the scene. Here Ambrose is not harmed directly because of his drunkenness, but because he was out when he should have been home. He would never have been hit had he not been out drinking.
In *On the Brink*, Mrs. Thaxter answers a knock at the door at night. Two men from the tavern carry her husband into the house.

JOHN: Madam, There’s Dave Thaxter. He’s purty drunk.

JIM: People that can’t keep sober enough to walk ought to stay home.

MRS. THAXTER: Will you please place him on that settee?

JOHN: Yes, yes, of course. *(They place him on the settee)* He’s purty bad. I git purty bad myself sometimes, but I don’t get quite so boozy as that. This drinkin’ is a bad business.

JIM: The “Golden Rod’s” got to be a mighty bad place. I was there tonight, but I reckon I’ll keep away after this. They chucked Dave out of the house and I thought it was too cold to lie on the ground, so we concluded to bring him home.

*(McBride 19)*

So while the actual harm was averted, the potential that Thaxter could have frozen to death while passed out is evident in the play and acts as a warning.

In *Man Trap*, Lawson, a minor character, is stabbed to death in the tavern by a woman he betrayed. Many of the harms done to the alcoholic character himself are evident in the chapter on character, but to pull at the heart strings of the audience, the family of the drunkard also need narrative consequences.

The outcomes that take place in these plays almost inevitably involve harm to the wife and children of the drunkard. These developments are helpful at countering one of the typical thinking patterns of the alcoholic—that he is only hurting himself. The children of the alcoholic character are used in terms of narrative to raise the stakes for the continued use of liquor. And the death of a child as a consequence seems to be the
ultimate in emotional reasons for taking the pledge that was often offered after a performance. In a discussion about the use of the imagery of harm to innocent children, John Frick writes,

For their most poignant and evocative images, however, temperance dramatists invariably turned to the most innocent and vulnerable victims of the bottle - small children. While an occasional reformer may have claimed that “little can be known of the suffering and mortification of the children of intemperate parents,” most temperance playwrights knew and were more than willing to illustrate that suffering and mortification on the stage. Invariably, the drunkard’s child was shown, emaciated and dressed in rags, waiting in a squalid apartment for his or her drunkard father to return home (“Mama, will father soon be home?”) or quaking with fear and anticipation of the beating and verbal abuse that would certainly be forthcoming upon the drunkard’s return (“my father’s a drunkard and beat me today”). (63)

The image of children as the innocent victims, who often paid a high price for their father’s drinking was used masterfully as an emotionally volatile point of manipulation, for while harm came to many of the children, many others died due to their father’s neglect.

In The Fatal Glass, Ambrose has gone far down the alcoholic scale. His wife and child are starving to death, and he has gone out to search for food. He turns up at Joe’s wedding to a young woman, ignorant of his past, toward the end of the play (this is the same Joe who tries to rape Mabel earlier in the play). Ambrose is searching, pleading for
food for his starving daughter, and almost gets in a fight when he warns Joe’s bride to beware of Joe’s evil nature.

JOE: Begone beggar; I do not know you.

AMBROSE: Sweet girl, fly from this polluted presence—back to your virtuous fireside. Do not link your fate to his: if you do, want and woe and a life of suffering will surely be yours. Back, before it is too late; and on bended knees, bless the name of your deliverer for having saved you from such a fate.

EMMA: Bread, did you say? (gives money) Oh, here quick! Hasten back and save her life—nay, I myself will go.

JOE: I forbid you to leave this house at the beck and call of a drunken vagabond. Leave this house, fellow, before I force you. (music, hurry—Ambrose dashes in JOE—women shriek—short tussel, he throws Joe down, seizes a chair to brain him, when Mabel rushes on with child in her arms)

MABEL: Ambrose, desist! (lays down child on ground) Stay, Ambrose, husband, respect the presence of the dead.

AMBROSE: Dead! My little darling? Dead! Hear me! That child’s blood shall not sink silently into the ground, but shall raise its voice on high for justice on its murderer. (McCloskey 20)

Here we continue to see the “blame” for the results of alcoholism placed on the tempter character, making ambiguous the role the drunken character himself plays in his own child’s death. But the death of the child as a plot point, drives home the mounting repercussions of her father’s drinking.
In *Three Years in a Man Trap* another child dies as the result of her father’s drinking, this time because her father is drunk and knocks over a lamp. This scene was discussed in connection to the alcoholic’s thinking pattern when returning to drink. Harry swears off, but soon enough tells himself just one to calm his nerves won’t hurt. He then proceeds to get drunk enough to knock over the lamp sitting on the table.

**HARRY:** …*(staggers a few steps toward the bed)* Stop! No use to leave that little drop in the bottle! I’ll finish it. *(fills and drinks remainder)* Why! Wha’ wha’; what’s the matter with my head?—everything is turning round. I, I…*(seizes table to steady himself and upsets it. With the action of pulling the table he falls with it. Dead drunk. Table falls against stove which is upset on the floor. Train of powder flashes, and then fire seen through wall. Then behind wall and staircase. Flashes appear one after another in different places. Portions of wall fall out at back and sides. Ceiling falls. At last, staircase falls with a crash, and blocks up door. At that moment, Nettie is heard to scream without.)*

**NETTIE:** Harry? Speak to me; powers of mercy, he will be burned alive!

*(The quick sharp strokes of an axe are heard; the door is broken open, and Nettie rushes in. She throws away axe, kneels down and raises Harry, who is senseless, with a sudden thought she drops him, and rushes to the cradle, which is covered with debris of the staircase.)*

**NETTIE:** Father in Heaven, he has killed my child.

*(With a piercing scream she falls on cradle. Stage all on fire; firemen enter through openings; climbing up ladders with hose, axes, some break open doors, others playing with hose, getting out furniture, etc. Flash boxes, red fire and*...
smoke everywhere. Shouts of fire! Fire! Crashing and ringing of bells till curtain falls, general confusion.) (Morton 34-5)

In both of the above cases, the children are killed but we do not know much about them, nor do they have any voice in the plays. The death is a negative milestone in the downward spiral that comes with alcoholism, and it is an important part of the narrative of what comes with continued drinking.

Much more common is the portrait of the angelic, innocent and uncomplaining child who appears as one of the main characters in the play. Usually she is a daughter, and often she is named Mary, bringing all the virginal and saintly associations that come with that name. The audience is given a chance to know this devoted child, never faltering to simply adore her father regardless of his drunken behaviors. In The Drunkard, Middleton’s daughter is innocent and saintly, starving and yet willing to share the little food she has with her mother. She does not die because of Middleton’s drinking, although she does suffer. As a character, she does offer the prototype of the child of the drunkard.

Probably the most striking of these daughters is Mary, the daughter of Morgan in Ten Nights in a Bar-Room. The death of this child is long and drawn out. She suffers her fatal injury while trying to fetch her father home from the tavern. Morgan and Slade, the tavern owners, are in an altercation, and Mary is struck in the head by a glass thrown at her father. She enters after a scream and crash are heard off stage saying, “Father! Dear father! They have killed me!” (Pratt 22). But it takes several scenes before Mary’s injuries take their toll, and she is shown to have angelic visions and to be as patient and saintly as the most mature and spiritual adult could be. In a scene at the Morgan’s home, the blame is much more pointedly aimed toward Morgan’s drinking, although Mary
herself has absolutely nothing but love and forgiveness toward her father. Mrs. Slade has come to see how Mary is doing, since it was her own husband who threw the glass that struck Mary on the head.

MRS. MORGAN: Her mind at times wanders. Lie down again, dear. What is it, my child?

MRS. SLADE: Has the doctor seen her today?

MRS. MORGAN: No, he has not.

MRS. SLADE: He should see her at once. I will go for him, and should you need my services, pray, send for me. I will do anything in my power to assist you.

MARY: \textit{(delirious)} Remember, you have promised me, father. I am not well yet, you know. Oh, don’t—go! —don’t! There, he has gone. \textit{(sits up again)} Well, I’ll go after him again! I’ll try and go there! I can sit down and rest by the way! Oh dear, how tired I am! Father! Father! Oh! Dear!

MORGAN: Here I am. Lie down, my child. I have not gone and am with you.

MARY: Oh, I know you now! It is my father! Stoop down to me. I want to whisper something to you—not to mother. I don’t want her to hear it—it will make her feel so bad.

MORGAN: Well, what is it my child?

MARY: I shall never get well, father; I am going to die.

MRS. MORGAN: What does she say, husband?

MARY: Hush, father, don’t tell her; I only said it to you. There, mother; you go away—you’ve got trouble enough. I only told him because he promised not to go to the tavern any more until I got well—and I’m not going to get well. Oh! Mr.
Slade threw it so hard; but it didn’t strike father, and I’m so glad! How it would have hurt him! But he’ll never go there any more, and that will be so good, won’t it mother? (sleeps). (Pratt 25-6)

Mary is shown to suffer the consequences of her father’s drinking, while remaining innocent, forgiving and non-resentful or reproaching. Just after she falls asleep, her mother articulates what would not come from the mouth of the little child. This allows Mary to become the quintessential innocent victim, neither disdainful nor admonishing of her father.

MRS. MORGAN: If she should die, Joe?
MORGAN: Don’t! Oh, don’t talk so, Fanny! She’s not going to die; it’s only because she’s a little light-headed.

MRS. MORGAN: Yes, why is she light-headed? It was the cruel blow that caused this delirium. I’m afraid, husband, the worst is before us. I’ve borne and suffered much. I prey Heaven to give me strength to bear this trial, also. She is better fitted for heaven than for earth. She has been a great comfort to me and to you, Joe, too—more like an angel than a child. Joe, if Mary should die, you cannot forget the cause of her death, nor the hand that struck the cruel blow? (Pratt 26)

In the next act, Mary is still hanging on, and still displaying the selflessness that the audience finds endearing admirable.

MORGAN: What can I do for you dear child?
MARY: Nothing. I don’t wish for anything. I only wanted to see you. You’ve always been good to little Mary.
MORGAN: Oh, no! I’ve never been good to anyone.
MARY: You haven’t been good to yourself, but you have always been good to me. Yes; and to poor mother, too. (Pratt 34)

This little exchange gives further evidence to Mary’s angelic nature. The deification of innocence and the reverence for the purity of childhood are social ideals that developed during the middle of the nineteenth century. This served to place more sentimental pressure on the father who lets bad things happen to his children. At the end of Ten Nights in a Bar-Room, it is Mary’s nature that prompts Morgan to promise to never drink again, and allows for a restoration of the domestic ideal. Mary has a vision of her father restored to an upright respectable man. She recounts the dream, and asks her father to promise to never take another drink.

MORGAN: That dream, my dear child, shall become a reality; for here I promise that God helping me, I will never go out again at night for a bad purpose.

MRS. MORGAN: Do you indeed promise that, Joe?

MORGAN: Yes and more.

MARY: What?

MORGAN: I’ll never go into a bar-room again.

MARY: Never!

MRS. MORGAN: Do you indeed promise that?

MORGAN: Yes, and what is still more, I will never drink another drop of liquor as long as I live.

MRS. MORGAN: Oh husband! This is indeed happiness! (kneels by Mary) Look! Look at our dear child! Her eyes are fixed—she is dying!
MARY: Yes, mother; your Mary has lived long enough—the angels have heard little Mary’s prayer! Father won’t want anyone to follow him, for he will be good, and sometime we shall all be together. Don’t you remember the little hymn you taught me? It all comes in my mind now, although I had not thought of it before for a long time. Everything looks beautiful around me; I don’t feel any pain now. Good-bye father; I sha’n’t have to ask you to be good to mother now. Good-bye mother. *(she sings hymn and dies).* (Pratt 35-6)

Here the child’s heavenly mission to get her father to promise to stop drinking is accomplished, so she can let go. This little Mary is likely the model for the little daughter in *Drifting Apart*, named Little Margaret.

In *Drifting Apart*, we return to Little Margaret the starving child’s deathbed. She has a similar capacity to have dreams and visions about her father’s drinking and the return of domestic tranquility, again making her appear less firmly tethered to the earth, and by implication closer to heaven.

LITTLE M: *(faintly)* Mama?

MARY: *(goes quickly to her)* Yes my darling.

LITTLE M: I’m so hungry. Are you hungry, mama?

MARY: *(almost choking, Jack stands wild)* No, my darling.

LITTLE M: It’s dreadful to be hungry, ain’t it mama?


JACK: *(desperately)* I will.

LITTLE M: Mama.
MARY: My baby.

LITTLE M: Is papa gone?

MARY: Yes dear. He has gone to get bread for my baby.

LITTLE M: Will he come back soon?

MARY: Yes, dear, very soon.

LITTLE M: Oh! Mama I had such a beautiful dream.

MARY: Did you dear?

LITTLE M: Would you like to hear it?

MARY: Yes darling. Tell mama your little dream. (Herne act 4 4)

At first Little Margaret tells of living in their little fishing shack in the fishing village, and how happy that made her, but than she starts to have visions.

LITTLE M: …Mama, look! (raising up in bed, Mary holds her) The ship—call Papa—quick.

MARY: There is no ship darling, you are dreaming still.

LITTLE M: No Mama, there—can’t you see? Look! The Angels sailing over it, they’re calling us Mama. Come! (gets up in bed, Mary holds her, tries to calm her)

MARY: There, there, my child, lie down. (almost frantic, realizes that death has come but dare not give way)

LITTLE M: Don’t you hear, Mama? They are calling you, too. Come, mama, or the beautiful ship will be gone. Quick! Ah, mama. (crying) Give me your hand, it’s all dark now; I can’t see the ship. It’s all dark. Where are you, Mama?

MARY: (holding her in her arms) Here darling here.
LITTLE M: Kiss me, Mama. I wish Papa would come. Will he know that the ship took you and me? There it is again. I’m coming. I—good bye Papa, come Mama, come! See! I— (Dies. Mary lays her down, closes her eyes, takes her hand and hides her head in the bedclothes) (Herne act 4 5)

The death of a child is a terrible consequence of drinking the family’s resources, and it is a clear cause to effect relationship that is drawn in these plays. Usually the plays do not go into the emotional impact on children that drinking has, and the next chapter focuses more thoroughly on impacts and associated consequences. In terms of narrative, the loss of a child or harm to a child due to drinking seem to be a constant part of the story.

In *Three Years in a Man Trap*, the highlighted girl is an older child, and the daughter of the tavern owner. Usually the adult children of tavern owners are depicted as sons who fall to the temptation of being around liquor and become drunkards. In *Ten Nights in a Bar-Room* Slade is killed by his drunken son. But in the case of Lloyd’s daughter, the consequences have more to do with the social stigma. She begs her father not to open the tavern, but he does so anyway, and so her fiancée leaves her because her father is a saloon owner. Having lost her hopes and dreams of a life with Mark Watson, her former fiancée, Maggie falls ill and feels heaven coming, saying, “Yes, soon all will be forgotten, for the grave has no remembrance” (Morton 29). But sadness and loss of social status are not the end of consequences for Maggie.

Her father’s profiting from the liquor trade creates a schism between Maggie and her childhood friend Nettie, married to Harry. But Nettie cannot forgive Maggie for the clothes on her back and the food she eats because Harry spends his wages at her father’s tavern. Maggie goes out in a snowstorm to ask her father to stop selling liquor as she
promised Nettie she would. Maggie gets lost in the storm, and dies of exposure and exhaustion just as her father discovers her. At the end of the play Lloyd dies in jail during a fit of delirium tremens, detailed in chapter 3. The last image in the play features Maggie, in heaven, surrounded by angels, appearing at her father’s funeral. While Maggie’s earthly concerns and struggles are not as child-like and she is not as clearly devoid of anything but innocence, she is placed in the angelic role at the end of the play. As stated already, this reinforces the strong social ideological structures that separated the roles men and women were playing, and painted the domestic sphere, the responsibility of women, as morally superior to the public sphere, the place for men.

The security and comfort offered by the home are also often lost as part of the alcoholism narrative. The couple, or sometimes the wife alone, often endures terrible conditions of poverty, living in hovels, or exposed to the elements. These wives are mostly patient and faithful, while clearly suffering but without any agency to help themselves. These women suffered greatly from the neglect of their drunkard husbands. The driving force behind the Women’s Christian Temperance Union was the desire to give a voice to women who had no agency, nor legal rights to take action against neglectful or abusive alcoholic husbands. Frick’s description of the portrayal of these women was ideologically aligned with one of the main motives that kept the temperance movement so active and strong for so many years.

Women's suffering, in reality and on the stage, however, was by no means restricted to waiting patiently for their men to return from the grog shop; in countless plays they were subjected to vicious beatings by their drunken husbands, and in several cases (The Bottle and Fifteen Years of a Drunkard's Life,
to cite two) they were murdered. With few exceptions, dramatic literature reinforced one message: a lone woman whose sole weapon was her “moral authority” was virtually powerless against the combined forces of the liquor industry, her husband's coterie of bar-room companions and the drunkard himself.

(71)

And so while society held women up as morally authoritative in their own homes, that moral authority did not seem to sway the course of inevitable alcoholic downfall as portrayed in these plays. In fact, any moral characteristic found in these wives was reserved for the patient understanding and keeping their own grief to themselves if they happened to survive the events of the play.

A kinder, gentler suffering by the wife is seen in *The Drunkard*, which offers a depiction of the wife and child living with no heat or food. The scene opens with a description that reads:

* (A wretched garret—Old table and chair with lamp burning dimly—Mary in miserable apparel, sewing on slop-work, a wretched shawl thrown over her shoulders—child sleeping on a straw bed on the floor, covered in part by a miserable ragged rug—half a loaf of bread on the table—the ensemble of the scene indicates want and poverty) 

MARY: Alas, alas! It is very cold—faint with hunger—sick—heart weary with wretchedness, fatigue and cold… (Smith 284)

Mary and her little daughter do not die in *The Drunkard*, but the scene of poverty directly linked to Middleton’s drinking and abandonment is another clear marker in the narrative of alcoholism found in these temperance plays.
In other plays, the husband has not quite so thoroughly abandoned his wife, but the consequences are more severe. In *The Fatal Glass*, Mabel and Ambrose arrive at the poorhouse as Mabel is starving and feels death is near.

(Snowy landscape—the poorhouse—enter Ambrose and Mabel—he goes to house, rings bell, Mabel falls c.—enter porter from poorhouse with lantern)

AMBROSE: Open your doors and receive a suffering and starving pair, who once knew plenty, but now feel want. (sees Mabel) Oh, heaven, the gripping hand of starvation has laid its hold upon her. Mabel, darling, oh speak. Relief is at hand. Heaven, she does not hear me. Mabel, my darling, oh, say this is not death.

MABEL: Yes, darling it is death. My little innocent child, so little while gone before, beckons me to join her there, where the curse of drink cannot crush the heart and madden the brain—where there is peace—where there is rest. Death, oh, welcome guest, I have waited for you long. Over my lonely grave you will drop a tear of penitence, and retrace your steps, and turn again to the path of virtue and temperance. Oh, strive, my dear husband, for the hope you may have of meeting me hereafter, to live so that we may meet where all will be peace and joy and love. It comes, it comes. *(Mabel falls back, her head drops)*

AMBROSE: Gone; and I am entirely alone—alone in my misery *(draws knife)*

Thus then do I end my wretched existence. *(Attempts to stab himself, she arrests his hand)*

MABEL: Stay your hand, Avoid the suicide’s doom if you would meet me there. *(falls backward—Ambrose falls across body, weeps)*. *(McCloskey 24)*
Even on her deathbed, the wife holds the morally superior position in the family, preventing her husband from taking his own life, and spending an eternity in hell. This Christian concept of mortal sin was almost universally held at the time. The threat of the loss of salvation and everlasting happiness in heaven within this story shows that the alcoholic character could lose everything by continued drinking.

In a twist on the starving wife, in *Drifting Apart*, Mary leaves Gloucester since she does not know where Jack is after he begins to drink again. Saying he was lost at sea, she marries Percy, a well-off man, and so initially avoids starvation, but when Jack unexpectedly shows up, her marriage to Percy is over and she ends up on the streets. Then later, just after Mary’s little daughter dies of starvation, Mary herself dies of grief from the loss of her child and the circumstances just as Jack is arriving back with something to eat for the baby.

MARY: Hester—she’s gone—my beautiful baby, my little Margaret’s gone—see—isn’t she beautiful? See the smile upon her lips—she is waiting for me—she wants her mother—yes—baby—I’ll come to you—Jack— (*half turning to Jack*) I love you, Jack—I forgive and I love you—but I cannot stay—I must go with baby—don’t blame me—and don’t mourn, it was to be—you remember the storm on our wedding day—well, it has ended at last—don’t drink, Jack! Be brave—be my old, old Jack once more—goodbye Hester, dear kind Hester and Silas too. Ah Silas! I’ll never ride Deuteronomy again. (*as if to baby*) Yes. Yes, I’m coming. Good-bye—I’m coming. (*turns and quietly dies, with back against bed and head on child’s body.* (Herne act 4 5)
Again, we see the arrival of food too late to save the family. The grief is too much for the women, but this utter loss of everything is tempered in these two plays by a twist of plot. In both cases where the alcoholic’s family is utterly destroyed due to his drinking, the fatalism of the situation turns because in both cases, the alcoholic men are revealed to have been asleep. In the case of Ambrose, he was fed the opium by Joe, which knocked him out and gave him the nightmare of the utter devastation of his family. In the case of Jack, he was passed out after a brief drinking bout, and his dreamt losses serve as his warning to stay true to his promise not to drink. This narrative device, waking from a dream, saves the audience from having to grapple with the moral dilemma of watching a man who is responsible for the deaths of his wife and child also achieve the redemption that the melodramatic form requires. The worst-case scenario can be played out within the narrative, while the character himself does not suffer irreparable moral loss in the eyes of the audience. This Rip-Van-Winkle style device frequently makes up for the most severe of the alcoholic fallout.

Poverty is the most frequent result of the drunkard’s narrative. In *Three Years in a Man Trap*, Maggie sings “Driven from Home” about her friend Nettie as a sentimental way to get sympathy for her friend’s plight, meanwhile her husband, Harry becomes a true homeless bum begging for a quarter to buy a drink, reinforcing the idea that Nettie has no safety net nor shelter for her children. In a slightly different way of recounting the horrors and poverty that falls upon the female members of the drunkard’s family, we see that in *Two Men of Sandy Bar* the stories of the past are recalled by the school teacher Mary, once disappointed by Old Morton’s inability to care for her because of his drinking. Old Morton, after his restoration, attempts to find Mary and “express the
yearnings of cousinly affection” (Harte 374). Mary’s response recalls his treatment of her when he was still drinking.

MISS MARY: In other words, your client, my cousin, having ruined my father, having turned his own widowed relation out of doors, and sent me, her daughter, among strangers to earn her bread; having seen my mother sink and die in her struggle to keep her family from want,—this man now seeks to condone his offenses—pardon me, sir, if I use your own legal phraseology—by offering me a home, by giving part of his ill-gotten wealth, the association of is hypocritical self, and the company of his shameless profligate son—. (Harte 374-5)

And in an even fuller telling of the story of Morton’s drunken betrayals of his family, Mary says:

MISS MARY: …I will tell you my secret; and you shall aid me with your counsel. (they sit on ledge of rocks) Listen! My mother had a cousin once—a cousin cruel, cowardly, selfish and dissolute. She loved him, as women are apt to love such men—loved him so that she beguiled her own husband to trust his fortunes in the hands of this wretched profligate. The husband was ruined, disgraced. The wife sought her cousin for help for her necessities. He met her with insult, and proposed that she should fly with him.

SANDY: One moment, miss; it wasn’t his pardner—his pardner’s wife, eh?

MISS MARY: (impatiently) It was the helpless wife of his own blood, I tell you. The husband dies broken-hearted. The wife, my mother, struggled in poverty, under the shadow of a proud name, to give me an education, and died while I was still a girl. Today this cousin—old, rich, self-satisfied, reformed, invites me, by
virtue of that kinship he violated and despised, to his home, his wealth, his—his family roof-tree! (Harte 380)

And so even though the failure of holding the family together is not depicted as part of the action of the play, the legacy of the behavior is included in the narrative of the drunkard’s story in this case. *Two Men of Sandy Bar* is an interesting play, in that it does not trace the narrative of drinking and redemption like the others, but rather explores the search after redemption, of a man who tries to pull his long lost family back together, only to drink once more when he is on the verge of recovering all of his lost relations and reputation, as well as his finances. This play does not hold true to the temperance form, but has many of the key ingredients of the drunkard’s narrative and explores alcoholism from a different position. Unlike *Sandy Bar*, the redemption of the alcoholic character is the event that the audience waits for in most of these plays.

It is the redemption of the drunkard that marks the typical temperance narrative structure. All evidence preceding this event demonstrates that the alcoholic is incapable of change without some kind of intervention. In the case of these plays, it usually comes in the form of a reformed drunkard who is an advocate of the temperate life, and who enters the life of the alcoholic, deus-ex-machina style, in order to administer the pledge of temperance and restore the family to its previous happy and contented state. The fact that he is reformed is not made a big deal of, rather the focus is on the taking of a pledge, which amounts to a complete about-face in the alcoholic. The pledge was seen as the most effective defense against a return to drinking, but more likely it was acceptance into a temperance organization, and the accompanying fraternity and service work that was the real help.
As has been the case in the modeling of the narrative structure, *The Drunkard* presents the portrait of the redemptive turn around for the temperance genre. Rencelaw, who has briefly appeared as an upstanding and well respected citizen and philanthropist, comes across very much like a benevolent force from above, “administering the pledge” and “restoring” Middleton to his former self. This intervention happens at the height of Middleton’s insanity and violence. He is in delirium tremens, having just attempted to choke a landlord for refusing him brandy, and recognizing his hopeless state, Middleton takes out a phial of poison with which he is about to take his own life.

*about to drink, Rencelaw seizes phial and casts it from him*

MIDDLETON: Ha! Who are you, man? What would you?

RENCELAW: Nay, friend, take not your life, but mend it.

MIDDLETON: Friend, you know me not. I am a fiend, the ruin of those who love me, leave me.

RENCELAW: I came not to upbraid you, or to insult you. I am aware of all your danger, and come to save you. You have been drinking.

MIDDLETON: That you may well know. I am dying now for liquor—and—will you give me brandy? Who are you that takes interest in an unhappy vagabond—neither my father nor my brother?

RENCELAW: I am a friend to the unfortunate. You are a man and if a man, a brother.

MIDDLETON: A brother! Yes, but you trouble yourself without hope. I am lost, of what use can I be to you?
RENCELAW: Perhaps I can be of use to you. Are you indeed a fallen man?

(Edward looks at him, sighs and hangs his head) There you have greater claim upon any compassion, my attention, my utmost endeavors to raise you once more, to the station in society from which you have fallen, “for he that lifts a fallen fellow creature from the dust is greater than the hero who conquers the world.”

MIDDLETON: Merciful Heavens! My mother’s dying words? Who and what are you?

RENCELAW: I am one of those whose life and labors are passed in rescuing their fellow men from the abyss into which you have fallen. I administer the pledge of sobriety to those who would once more become an ornament of society, and a blessing to themselves and to those around them.

MIDDLETON: That picture is too bright, it cannot be.

RENCELAW: You see before you one who for twenty years was prey to this dreadful folly.

MIDDLETON: Indeed! No, no; it is too late!

RENCELAW: You mistake; it is not too late. Come with me, we will restore you to society. Reject not my prayers; strength will be given you, the Father of purity smiles upon honest endeavors. Come, my brother, enroll your name among the free, the disenthralled, and be a man again. (takes hand)

MIDDLETON: Merciful heaven! Grant the prayer of a poor wretch be heard.

(Smith 291)

The administration of the pledge is treated like an instant cure. In these narratives somehow a “pledge” is different than a promise. It is only through this outside
intervention—likened to an earthly agent of God’s aid, that can instantly turn the life, circumstances, disposition and desires of the alcoholic around.

In *Three Years in a Man Trap*, the scene of redemption is painted with far greater dramatic impact. Harry, having a moment of insight into his life—that he has killed his child in the fire and abandoned his wife, prays. Heritage, the temperance representative, enters just as Harry is praying for help. In this play the taking of the pledge is fully staged:

HARRY: …Oh father in heaven, the sinner’s last and surest refuge, forgive me! And you my innocent murdered angel now standing before the throne of grace, plead for mercy on your father’s guilty soul. *(sinks down sobbing with his face covered with his hands—at that moment the sound of voices is heard singing the temperance hymn from the State House—toward the end Harry looks up, surprised)* What sounds are these? It is the air my mother taught me when I knelt at her feet, a little child. What tender, sacred impressions it brings back to me, and melts my stubborn heart.

*(Heritage, who entered after hymn, advances to him)*

HERITAGE: *(kindly)* Are you in trouble, brother?

HARRY: *(holding his face)* Do not call me brother. I am a miserable, guilty wretch.

HERITAGE: Come, come, there is nothing so bad it can’t be mended. Can I assist you?

HARRY: No, no, I am past all earthly help. Leave me to die!
HERITAGE: Our mission is to save, my friend, not to destroy. I need not ask if rum has brought you to this state?

HARRY: Yes, it was rum! Curse it! Curse it!

HERITAGE: Nay, nay brother—do not curse, but avoid it—that’s the way to conquer! You’ve got to the end of the line, and you must turn with me, sign the pledge and all will yet be well!

HARRY: It’s no use—I’m too low down. I couldn’t keep it if I did.

HERITAGE: But come and try, sign this pledge, and that’s stopping, you know! Keep stock still and plant your feet down! I’ll keep by you—if you feel weak, you can lean on me. I’ll stand by you till you can walk by yourself. Come, cheerily.

HARRY: If you think it’s of any use.

HERITAGE: Of use! I have seen many come out of deeper pits than the one you have fallen into, and their feet are now on solid rock. Here! (takes out a card and pencil) Write Your name Just there!

HARRY: What does it say?

HERITAGE: I’ll read it. (Reads) Temperance Blessing Pledge. I ________, do solemnly promise to abstain from the use or sale of all spirituous or malt liquors wine or cider, and that I will not provide them as an article of entertainment; neither will I offer them to my associates, or provide them for persons in my employ. I also pledge myself that I will under suitable circumstances, discountenance their use as a beverage. God being my helper.

HARRY: Give me the pencil. (signs the card with shaking hand) There! I will be free, God helping me! And by that pledge I’ll stand or die. (Morton 37)
Three Years in a Man Trap offers the music of the choir, the serendipitous arrival of Heritage, and then the transformative signing of the pledge all on the stage. This instant transformation and restoration is a key element in understanding how the stereotype of the alcoholic came to be interpreted coming into the twentieth century. If, as implied by these stories, all it takes for an alcoholic to turn his life around is the taking of this pledge, then understandably, the disdain for those who do not seems reasonable, since not doing so could even be seen as willfully evil. It is out of this portrayal of the ease with which the solution to the problem of alcoholism could be achieved that many of the punitive reactions to alcoholic behaviors may have arisen, for if a cure was this easy and within reach, then any continued drunkenness must be willful and deliberate on the part of the drunkard, and therefore punishable.

This formula of an intervention by a reformed drunkard that transforms everything about the drunkard’s life is found in other temperance dramas as well. In Ten Nights in a Bar-Room, Romaine admits that he is a reformed drunkard seeking to help others. While Romaine is not present as Morgan promises on his child’s death bed that he will never drink again, we know that Morgan and Romaine have met several times in the tavern. And in the scene following Morgan’s promise, we find out that he is now the local temperance advocate and has just helped Switchel (another tippler) to swear off. In Morgan’s case, it is the emotional fallout from his daughter’s death that moves him to ask help of heaven, and his little daughter too, to keep him from drink, but the pattern of temperance advocate and instant salvation remains present in this play.
We see the pattern also appear in *On the Brink*, where Thaxter is restored when the death of his son Harry shocks him to look to “merciful heaven” for aid in stopping drinking. Thaxter then delivers a temperance restoration speech that ends the play.

**THAXTER:** Truly, we have much to be thankful for. I have been freed from the terrible curse of intemperance, and although by my dissipation and neglect of business, I am now very poor, yet, trusting in God, I am determined to go forward and regain my former place. And while I fight again for an honorable position in society, I will also fight with unyielding determination against mankind’s greatest and most deadly enemy, intemperance. (McBride 34)

This play ends with a clear attempt to rally the temperance advocates, and has a didactic and forceful message about the gravity of the alcohol problem within society.

*Two Men of Sandy Bar*, even though not a temperance play per se, depicts Old Morton as a temperance advocate. Morton’s mission upon his own reformation was to find his wayward prodigal son and reform him, but he was also an advocate for abstinence in general. He is not seen as a zealot, but the restoration of his son is his clear calling in life. Morton is seen as an upstanding successful banker for the majority of the play, and then, when handed a drink by the evil imposter of his son, Morton takes to drinking again like a fish to water. Interestingly, it is the sight of his father drunk again after many years of being “reformed” that prompts Sandy, the son, both to swear off drinking himself and also to smash the decanter to prevent his father from continuing to drink, afraid the cycle will not stop now that he has begun to drink again. Once again, even though the call to heaven, nor outside intervention is not seen in this particular narrative, we see the instant transformation of Sandy from drunkard to redeemed. On the
other hand, we also see the cynical portrayal of a return of the father to a drunkard almost instantly after many years of sobriety, a more realistic depiction of the nature of untreated alcoholism.

This intervention and instant recovery is a misleading aspect in the story of being lost and then found that marks the arc of these stories. It builds an expectation in the eyes of society that recovery is fast, easy and accessible to all men who would need it, placing a false supposition of the likelihood of success on the alcoholic’s capacity for recovery.

The last images found in these narratives are usually those of a restored state of domestic bliss. All of the members of the family show nothing but utter confidence in the alcoholic’s complete and permanent recovery. Here is another place in the narrative where the formal nature of melodrama conspires with society’s ideology about the central place the family should take in completing the happiness and satisfaction in men’s lives to reinforce the temperance message.

In *The Drunkard*, the Middleton family is reunited at the home of Rencelaw, in the scene following his deus-ex-machina appearance to Middleton. Edward has been restored to “himself,” and everyone is happy and thankful rather than suspicious and resentful, as you would think a normal person would be under the circumstances. And after the evil Cribs has been apprehended, the final scene is a scene of domestic peace and tranquil happiness in which the family is gathered round and the song *Home Sweet Home* is playing in the background.

Similarly, in *Three Years in a Man Trap*, while many of the characters do not recover from their long-standing relationship with alcohol, Nettie and Nellie (the surviving daughter) are shown waiting for Harry to return home. Nellie asks will father
come home soon? And Nettie says reassuringly that he always comes home now, and then he arrives, creating picture of restored family. He has been given a new position and a raise.

LITTLE NELLIE: I’m so glad he never goes to that wicked bar room any more.

Ain’t you, Ma?

NETTIE: Yes, my pet. Your father is a good man again. Heaven grant him strength to keep so! Kiss me, my love, my only one!!

LITTLE NELLIE: What makes you cry, Mamma?

NETTIE: I was thinking, darling, of your little sister who is now in heaven. You must pray for her, Nellie, and your father too, that he may not be led into temptation. *(Seven o’clock strikes)* Ah, there is seven o’clock. Your father will be here directly. He must not see these tears. *(dries her eyes. Last four bars of “Home Sweet Home” played. Harry enters, neatly, but plainly dressed)* Harry!

Dear husband!

HARRY: My dearest Nettie! *(Morton 51)*

Later in the scene, Heritage drops by, checking in on Harry and his family. He reminds Harry to further the temperance message. *Man Trap* also allows Nettie some dimension beyond a simpleton’s restored happiness. In this scene, we see her continued grief for her lost daughter, but this burden is hers to bear alone, for it is implied that the sight of Nettie in grief over the loss of her baby could spin Harry back out into alcoholic relapse, so the women must treat these men with care once they are sober.
The very last image in *Man Trap* also includes a strong temperance message, delivered by Heritage, but also has imagery that warns that not all homes are restored to happiness and not all men who fool with alcohol recover.

HARRY: Dear friend, to you we owe this happiness.

NETTIE: Our blessings night and day shall follow you.

HERITAGE: Your thanks are due to Him alone! He has rescued you, in turn you must consecrate yourself to rescue others. If ever you see a poor worn down drunkard, look after him, as I looked after you. It is a holy cause and will make you strong and brave. And let us hope our humble efforts have made some impression here tonight. (to audience) You see the peaceful home of sobriety before you, now you shall behold the drunkard’s doom!

*(Four bars slow. Funeral music. Flats and backdrop off and disclose the two cells at Monyamangsing as before; the lower one empty. Tom lies dead on mattress in upper cell; Mrs. Lloyd and Young Tom and a small child all dressed in black, kneeling, weeping. Clergyman reading book at head of corpse; after a pause music changes to “Angels Ever Bright and Fair” backing of upper cell draws off and discloses Maggie dressed in white, hair down, standing on a pedestal pointing upwards, cloud backing. Strong limelight on Maggie from both sides; slow curtain.)* (Morton 51)

With the dual message of happiness and doom, the point is doubly drawn about the dangers of drink, but because the scene ends with the funeral, the play’s ending does seem more cynical about the possibility of redemption than many of the others *(Sandy*
Bar being the other exception in this study). And yet, we do see Harry and his family hopeful, if more tentatively than in other plays.

*Ten Nights in a Bar-Room* ends with a similar scene of restoration. Mrs. Morgan gives thanks, Romaine reminds Morgan that he should now dedicate himself to help others, and Morgan repeats that message.

MRS. MORGAN: Words cannot describe the joy I feel, to see you thus redeemed. I could have knelt above your grave and blessed Him who took you from me, rather had you continued in your old habits. How, day by day, have I looked forward, with a shuttering and dread at my soul, as I have seen you sinking day by day away from me! But that is past. You are now free once more, and able manfully to stand up beat the temptation with which the coming years are crowded. There will be no more hindrances, no more hands stretched out to drag you down. If love can shield you, you are safe; for my heart will, for your sake, ever prove constant.

ROMAINE: Yes, years of happiness are in store for us all. And the results of the past few years will serve as a beacon to warn us of the dangers and temptations that constantly beset the pilgrim on his voyage through life.

MORGAN: Restored once more to happiness, let us hope that others may have a useful lesson from our past experience, and that none will regret deducting from their lives the ten nights in a bar-room. (Pratt 45)

As is the case in *Man Trap*, there is a fair amount of pressure on Mrs. Morgan in this play to supply the love and support Morgan will need to stay sober, although her love has not proven to keep him off drink up until now. And while there is no overt trepidation about
the future, which is portrayed as bright, there is acknowledgment that years of temptation lay ahead.

In *Two Men of Sandy Bar*, the focus is not on a domestic restoration, but on success in business. Sandy is recognized as the former drunken worker of Don Jose by Morton’s business associates, but is restored to the upstanding businessman his father looked like (before he started drinking again.) And in an interesting twist on the narrative, Sandy seems on the verge of marrying Mary, his cousin, just after swearing off. This play shows that after years ‘off the sauce,’ Old Morton returns to drinking, but the foreshadowing imbedded in the narrative is subtle and could easily be lost on an audience not sensitive to temperance issues, which the audience for this play was less likely to be since it was produced as a popular western on Broadway, and not in a temperance-friendly situation. This does not change the fact that the messages imbedded in the play still hold to the redemption model, even if placed in a somewhat more doubtful world in which the ultimate outcome is less predictable.

The drunkard’s story as repeated in the nineteenth century codified in the American imagination a predictable set of events resulting from an association with alcohol. Through the repeated markers of this story, the inevitability of the negative outcome of alcoholism was impressed upon the American imagination. We see the hopeful beginnings of a life, either in matrimony, or a new business venture, tarnished by warnings, sinister characters and bad omens. The central alcoholic character has promised to stop drinking, but is tempted by an external force to take another drink. More warnings about the dangers of drink heighten the anticipation about what might result in the reckless disregard for its power. The story moves then to depicting the swift and dire
outcomes of the life of the drunkard, who may lose a child, is driven to the poor house and sometimes loses his wife as well. In all cases, his family suffers. Many of the men involved in the liquor trade lose everything, and some die from their folly.

As expected in the melodramatic form, the most dramatic circumstances are swiftly followed by a divinely inspired intervention, acting as a deus-ex-machina to save the drunkard from death or suicide. This character is redeemed and shown to make a seamless transition back to sober happy living, with little time or attention paid to the difficulties that beset most alcoholics when they attempt recovery. The characters that embodied the evil aspects of the liquor trade are not characters that gain redemption for themselves or for their families. The message from the cumulative body of temperance work is that as individuals, men have the possibility of returning to a blissfully happy domestic life through the signing of a pledge, or some other form of divine intervention, whereas the characters involved in the distribution of alcohol have little or no chance at the restoration seen in these plays. In addition, the redemption message was loaded with an association with economic status. Continued drinking meant poverty and with that came rough identification with immigrant populations, which were seen as negative and “other” in the eyes of the protestant majority.

As indicated above, the story of the drunkard paints the outcomes in very moralistic terms, and because his redemption seems so easy, it places an air of willful disregard for the well being of his wife and children, seemingly self-centered at best and truly evil at worst. If the public perceived the turn around of the drunkard’s life as so easy to accomplish, it is no wonder that public reactions, language, and legal sanctions to alcoholism all tended (and in many ways still tend) to be punitive with an eye toward
immorality rather than compassionate, as toward the sick or disabled. The plays were
didactic in messaging and as is clear from the narrative analysis, the outcomes were
painted as inevitable. Frick discusses the narrative of another temperance play, pointing
out the common structure the plays all had.

   His first drink starts the deadly causal chain of events that leads to the inevitable
   outcome—the destruction of his entire family—and the audience is “driven” to
   one inescapable conclusion: to drink is to invite total disaster. Given these
   characteristics, it is little wonder that others have been tempted to brand the moral
   reform melodrama the morality play of the nineteenth century. (63)
CHAPTER FIVE

The Ideology of Temperance Reform Found Within the Plays

Beyond examining who the alcoholic was as a character, and where his use of alcohol led him and his family, the stereotype of alcoholism also carried with it many tangential associations that are real and highly impactful in terms of examining the public impression of what alcoholism is. The question of who suffers the most from the alcoholic’s neglect, and why that is of particular concern to society is an important aspect of the concept of what alcoholism is. Class associations with alcohol use and abuse are very ingrained in the stereotype, as are explanations about the causes of alcoholism. Political and religious messages, too are embedded in these plays, as are attitudes about the liquor trade and the temperance movement. This chapter will parse from these plays the ideological messages found most frequently (and also point out some of what is not found in these plays) in order to enhance our understanding of how they influenced America’s concept of alcoholism.

Many of the events in the drunkard’s narrative are emotionally charged because the plays portray women and children as most frequently and deeply suffering from the alcoholic’s actions. In chapters 3 and 4, many of the events that cause the suffering of these women are detailed, but an examination of the impact of alcoholism on the women
themselves, as well as a fuller examination of the social and ideological issues that the suffering of these women evoke is in order. On an emotional level, many of these wives proclaim their unhappiness, recount their suffering and are shown weeping, or worse, as a result of their husband’s actions. Since women were offered limited rights during this time period, an emotional appeal to the tender feelings toward Mother as the warm, sweet carrier of the best in human nature is an important place to start. As discussed in chapter 2, social attitudes at the time placed women on a moral pedestal and the “cult of motherhood” further placed women in high ethical standing within society. This was both a blessing and a burden, for women had to live up to very high standards for what they were expected to endure while turning the other cheek. At the same time, they were excellent melodramatic victims because of the pull on the heartstrings that the display of their suffering could evoke in the audience. It is much harder to see an innocent suffer than a person who is somewhat culpable for her own conditions. Since women had no rights to property or to divorce, and because work was difficult to find and wages were outrageously low, women were tied to their husbands, and made for good dramatic victims.

In The Drunkard, as detailed earlier, we find Mary abandoned by Middleton. She follows him to New York and has to fend for herself in the city, taking sewing work and living in a freezing cold room with her starving child. While Mary is portrayed as stoic and patient in the scene, her words do reveal a great deal of anxiety and reason to fear the future. They show the conditions of poverty that she has to endure.

MARY: Alas, alas! It is very cold—faint with hunger—sick—heart weary with wretchedness, fatigue and cold. (clock strikes one) One o’clock, and my work is
not near finished. I—they must be done tonight. These shirts I have promised to hand in tomorrow by the hour of eight. A miserable quarter of a dollar will repay my industry, and then my poor, poor child, thou shalt have food. (Smith 284)

Mary’s living conditions betray the structure of the family as it ought to be. Sewing and piece work were occupations reserved for immigrant populations and “resorting” to have to do this kind of work may have been viewed as a source of shame by the audience. In a separate scene, Miss Spindle, a comic character who gives some relief from the seriousness of the play’s main theme, derides Mary for having to take on the work.

MISS SPINDLE: Oh, she is low, degraded! She sank so far as to take in washing, to feed herself and her child. She would sooner follow her drunken husband, and endeavor to preserve him as she said, than remain where she was. (Smith 282)

Mary also suffers from not knowing where or in what conditions her husband is living, the worry acts as a flame for her imagination, and she finds herself considering even terrible possibilities, like the possibility that Middleton might be in prison.

MARY: Alas! Where is he on this bitter night? In vain have I made every inquiry, and cannot gain any tidings of my poor wretched husband; no one knows him by name. Perhaps already an inmate of a prison. (Smith 285)

Going through all this fear and uncertainty while having to put a brave face forward for her child demonstrate serious psychological trials beyond the physical suffering she is enduring.

Later in the scene Mary is attacked and almost raped by Cribbs, who finds her alone and vulnerable. This scene drives home even more poignantly the dangers associated with having a drunkard as a husband. The trauma of an attempted rape both on
Mary and on the witnessing child are not addressed in the text per se, although clearly this kind of experience would leave a psychological mark, but the representation of a threat to her chastity and fidelity to her husband touch on grave and taboo subjects within Victorian society.

*On the Brink* offers a few examples of how Thaxter’s drinking has led to unhappiness and the implication of violence in the home. In the middle of Thaxter’s delirium tremens scene, after he is deposited home by fellow imbibers, Thaxter goes after his wife as she tries to aid him, all as their daughter-in-law, Mary, witnesses the threat.

MRS. THAXTER: Here David, I have brought you a cup of water. (*Goes toward him*)

MARY: Oh! Mother, don’t go there—don’t go there! He may kill you!

MRS. THAXTER: David, don’t you know me? I have brought the water. (*Stops to give him a drink*)

THAXTER: (*Strikes the cup and knocks it out of her hand*) Stand back, foul demon from the bottomless pit! You shall not take me without a struggle. (*Rises and comes toward Mrs. Thaxter, she retreats*) You may howl and your eyes may flash, but I’ll fight you. You shall not conquer and carry me away.

MARY: (*Shrieking*) Oh, mother, come away! Help! Help! (*she sinks down*).

(*McBride 21*)

By implication and by reading Mary’s reaction to the situation, it appears that violence is not unknown in this home. Beyond the physical suffering of poverty and hunger, we see in this play a sense that women suffered from domestic violence at the hands of their drunken husbands, and while the same could be said of many women today, at the time
the advocacy for women who suffered this kind of battery was only in its earliest stages. This was one of the motivating factors for the success of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union. The point here is that while the issue was often underplayed in temperance drama, the image of the alcoholic was that of a man who was capable of beating his wife and scaring the daylights out of his children. This is one of the ideas about alcoholism has stuck in the American imagination, and is part of the stereotypical image of alcoholism as it emerged from the nineteenth century. I do not argue that it is unfounded, only that it is there in the plays, and therefore a part of the image.

In *The Fatal Glass*, there are two comic characters, who more often than not add comic Punch-and-Judy-like scenes to the play. These characters do, though, examine the alcoholic relationship between husband and wife even though they are comically inclined. Fannie is seen beating Bob, asking him to promise to reform, comic because it upsets the power relationships in the household and places both Fannie and Bob in behavioral patterns seen as inverse to social norms. While these characters are often funny, their relationship contains more violence than Ambrose and Mabel, the primary characters in the play. Bob promised, just like Ambrose, to stop drinking when they were married, but he never really intended to keep the promise and is shown goading Ambrose to have a drink on his wedding day. Fannie suffers from their fighting, and while her character is not depicted with all the sympathetic and saintly qualities that many of the suffering wives have, the following scene shows that she is also a woman who is in pain because of Bob’s drunken behavior.

FANNY: The brandy makes you eloquent.
BOB: Why, that’s what I’ve been telling you, but you won’t believe it. *(rises)*

Woman, beware of intemperance. Shun the flowing bowl. Is the drunkard happy, my fellow inebriates?

FANNY: No; for no one loves him.

BOB: Yes, his dear wife, my dear.

FANNY: No; for she curses the day she first knew him. Nor his children; for they are ashamed of him. Nor his neighbors, for they point at him as a corruptor of society—a moral plague. Nor even his fellow drunkard, who shuns him when sober, for he reminds him of his own degradation. Nor the seller of the poison, for he, though he takes his money, despises him.

BOB: Well, who loves him, then?

FANNY: The fiend only loves him, and he loves but to torture him. While he does his work, his master loves, but repays him by a drunkard’s death.

BOB: You are getting mighty eloquent Ms. S.

FANNY: Yes, I speak the eloquence of the truth, because I am sober.

BOB: *(staggering)* Sober. Do you insinuate that I am not! Madam, a man who can walk like this, can sing like this, can’t be drunk. *(sings)* ‘Landlord fill the flowering bowl’ Many’s the time on the briny canal, with the wind howling and the—

*(enter policeman)*

POLICEMAN: Stop that noise, or I’ll take you in custody.

BOB: Noise! Many’s the time on the stormy canal—

POLICEMAN: I’ve heard enough from you—be off!
BOB: Be off? Insolent guardian of the night. I’ll chastise you. You are not addressing an ordinary bummer, but a gentleman. Many’s the time. When on the briny billows, the other side of Skeneatles, I’ve heard—

POLICEMAN: I’ve heard enough from you. *(runs him off—exit Fanny weeping).*

(McCloskey 31)

Both Bob’s refusal to take Fanny’s grievances seriously and her mortification at watching her husband be insolent with a police officer contribute to the scene’s ending image; Fanny leaving the stage while weeping, alone. In the intervening scene change, this image is one that resonates with the audience’s sense of how in addition to her own personal humiliations at Bob’s hands, she also suffers the kind of public humiliation we see here.

In another scene in *The Fatal Glass*, Mabel sits home listening to the clock tick away the time as she waits for her husband to come home. She struggles with the knowledge that her mother warned her of the dangers of marrying a man who drinks and she suffers from feeling vulnerable and unprotected. Since her father was also a drunkard, her imagination can summon foreboding and despair about what may come.

MABEL: *(starting)* Who’s there? Not yet returned? *(storm heard without—looks at clock)* Why does he stay? It is twelve o’clock! Oh the ticking of that clock reminds me that the end must come, and is this the fate reserved for me? How keenly I feel my mother’s sad warning now, against the wine cup. And yet, in spite of all my tears, prayers, and threats, it is the same old story from day to day, from year to year. *(rises in despair)* Oh, I shall go mad! Merciful Heaven!

Support me—in this trying hour, where else can I look? My dear mother beneath
the sod, and he who should be my protector wasting our little means ‘til all now is
exhausted. One by one, I have parted with our household articles. Until beggary
and ruin stare us in the face. Poor infant! What a bleak and ruinous prospect is in
store for you. (McCloskey 10-1)

Mabel’s monologue reveals several aspects of her suffering. First, for her personal safety,
Second, by recounting her tears, prayers and threats, she reveals how many times she has
tried through the only means she has to reverse her husband’s course, and by extension
her own fate. She regrets not listening to her now dead mother’s warning about a drinking
man’s capacity to keep the promise he makes about quitting. And she indicates that she
could go mad from having to endure so many points of suffering. The consequences of
alcoholism are shown to sometimes result in driving the wife to insanity. While in some
of the plays, these women stop short of madness, just saying that they will be driven mad
by their husband’s alcoholism. In other plays we see characters who have lost their wits
altogether.

We see several illustrations in these plays of how a man’s alcoholism or death
from drinking directly results in driving his wife or betrothed insane. In probably the
clearest example of the cause-to-effect relationship between a man’s drinking and the
state of a woman’s mental health, these plays leave no doubt that the women have been
driven insane precisely because of a man’s alcoholism.

The first example comes from The Drunkard, model for so many of the other
themes present in temperance drama. In this play, it is a minor character who suffers
insanity. Agnes is sister to William, Middleton’s loyal half-brother. It is reported that she
was driven to madness because her fiancée was ruined and died drunk deliberately
(probably in delirium tremens). This information comes by way of Cribbs’ own admission, cementing his role as villainous tempter.

CRIBBS: Here comes that crazy sister of his. She knows too much for my happiness. Will the creature never die? Her voice haunts me like the spectre of youth that was engaged to her, for my own purposes I ruined, I triumphed over him—he fell—died in a drunken fit, and she went crazy. Why don’t the Alms House keep such brats at home?

(Enter Agnes deranged)

AGNES: (sings) “Brake and fern and cypress dell / Where the slippery adder crawls / Where the grassy waters well / By the old moss covered walls.” For the old man had his grey locks, and the young girl her fantasies. “Upon the heather, when the weather / Is as wild as May / So they prance as they dance / And we’ll be all gay.” But they poured too much red water in his glass. The lawyer is a fine man, ha, ha! He lives in the brick house yonder. But the will, Ah, ha, ha! The will—

CRIBBS: (Angrily) Go home, Agnes, go home.

AGNES: Home! I saw a little wren yesterday. I had passed her nest often. I had counted her eggs, they were so pretty—beautiful, so beautiful—rough robins of the mill came this morning and stole them. The little bird went to her nest, and looked in—they were gone. She chirruped mournfully and flew away. She won’t go home any more.

CRIBBS: Agnes, who let you out? You distress the neighborhood with your muttering and singing. (Threatening) I’ll have you taken care of.
AGNES: There’s to be a wedding in the village. I saw a coffin carried in full of bridal cake. *(sings)* “And the bride was red with weeping / Cypress in her hair.”

Can you tell why they cry at weddings? Is it for joy? I used to weep when I was joyful. You never weep, old man. I should have been married, but my wedding dress was mildewed, so we put off the marriage to another day. They’ll make a new dress for me. They say he won’t come again to me, but then the will, ha, ha, old man, the will.

CRIBBS: Ha, confusion! Get you gone, or thus—

*(Seized her and raises cane. William enters rapidly, and throws him round to corner).* *(Smith 264-5)*

At the end of the play, once Cribbs has been arrested for forgery, Agnes is restored to sanity just after Middleton stops drinking. She then bears witness to Cribbs’ crime. Her portrayal is a little reminiscent of Ophelia, although it lacks the suicidal aspect of Ophelia’s character that we see in other women made insane by their men’s drinking.

Another young woman who goes insane because of her husband’s drinking is found in *On the Brink*. Her name is (of course) Mary, She is the daughter-in-law of Thaxter and Mrs. Thaxter, married to Harry, their son. Again, here is a situation where because so many of these characters have the same name and the stories are so similar, it is easy to confuse them. In this case, Harry, Thaxter’s son, becomes a drunkard right along side his father and in a fit of temper while drunk, he is killed in a bar-room brawl. Before Harry dies and Mary truly does slip over the edge of sanity, she tells of how her father was an alcoholic and that Harry had promised upon their wedding day that he
would never drink again (sticking with the temperance formula). As she goes on, she is unsure of how much more she can bear.

MARY: …Oh! It is a hard dreary life to lead, and sometimes think that my reason must give way. I cannot endure it much longer.

MRS. THAXTER: My poor child, the morning of your life has been clouded; your sorrows have come upon you early, and to us both there seems no relief, no happiness, no bright future to look forward to. All is dark and foreboding. May the God of pity look upon us and help us. *(noise outside)*

MARY: *(Starting up)* There’s someone coming. It’s father or Harry. Mother, I am beginning to be afraid of them. Let me stay close beside you. *(Goes and crouches down beside Mrs. Thaxter)*

MRS. THAXTER: My poor darling, we must appear to be brave. It may be that they are not in the dreadful state they were in last night. And David shall not strike you again. If he does, he must kill me first.

MARY: *(Starting up)* Something tells me that I ought to run and leap in the river. I can find rest there—I can find it there!

MRS. THAXTER: *(Drawing Mary down beside her)* Hush, child; do not talk so; it is very wrong. God knows I pity you, but do not think of that.

MARY: *(Weeping)* But there my troubles would all be over. *(Attempts to rise, but is held by Mrs. Thaxter)* I believe I’ll go. Why need I have all this worry and trouble when it can so soon be ended? *(Noise outside)*
MRS. THAXTER: *(With her arm around Mary)* Poor child! This trouble is too much for you. But stay close beside me. I can’t lose you. How could I live if you were gone?

MARY: *(Sitting down beside Mrs. Thaxter)* I did not think of that. My kind mother, I will not leave you. *(McBride 19)*

The sense that her sanity might break at any moment, coupled with suicidal impulses are clear markers that the results of a man’s drinking can gravely effect the capacity of their women-folk to carry on at all. Later in the scene, Mr. Thaxter comes home drunk and abusive again. There is no word of where Harry is. Mary is overtaken with her inability to cope and speaks again of suicide.

MARY: Mother, I don’t want to leave you, but let us go together and leap into the river. It will all be over in a few minutes—no more beatings—no more drunken brawls—no more disgusting sights. There we can rest in peace—all will be quiet, and calm and still.

MRS. THAXTER: Mary, don’t think of such a thing. Don’t you know it is sinful? This worry and trouble is too much for you. Go into the other room and try to get some sleep.

MARY: I cannot sleep; it is useless to try while Harry is away. No, mother I will stay here with you, and watch and wait. But I cannot help thinking how quietly and peacefully I could rest at the bottom of the river. *(McBride 20)*

When Mary finds that Harry is shot in an argument, an argument that he drunkenly instigated because he was quick to take offense at a trifle, Mary displays an even more Ophelia-like insanity. In a telling scene that details exactly how and why Mary finally
lost all reason, the audience comes face to face in a much more striking and vivid way the despair and psychological terror that alcoholism can cause the family.

(A room poorly furnished. Mrs. Thaxter seated. Mary insane, walking around the room.)

MARY: He is gone! He is gone! Shot down in a grog shop. Yes, a drunkard killed by the hand of a drunkard. Oh! The woe that has been heaped upon me! Oh! The trouble, the sorrow, the anguish. (sings wildly) [lyrics omitted]

MRS. THAXTER: (aside) Poor child! The blow was too great for her. I fear her reason will never be restored. Ah! What a train of woe and suffering intemperance has brought upon us!

MARY: Harry was kind and good, and I loved him—yes, I loved him and I promised that I would be his wife. But did he care for me? Did he care for me when he would leave me and go and spend hours with the loafers and drunkards of a bar-room? Did he care for me when he would not stop drinking? And he knew I despised the poisonous liquid—yes he knew I despised drunkards and all kinds of intoxicating liquor. Ah! Yes, he knew it. (weeps) And yet he went on drinking—he went on dragging us all down to poverty and disgrace. (continues to weep and walk around the room) Oh! Harry why did you do this? My kind, noble Harry why did you drag us down and then go and leave us? It was very unkind—it was very unmanly. Harry, didn’t you promise to love and protect me? Didn’t you promise that at the altar? Ah! I was happy then—I was happy when I stood at your side. You were so good and so kind and I loved you. You had promised on your knees that you would never, never again touch the accursed poison, and I
believed you, Harry; I believed you would be true. *(Weeps a short time and then commences to sing)* [lyrics omitted—“Yes We Will Gather By the River”] We shall meet beyond the river, but we shall never meet here again. My poor Harry is gone. Ah! Harry, you were kind and good, but the chain was thrown around you and you were dragged down to destruction. *(sings)* [lyrics omitted] *(speaks excitedly)* No, we’ll not gather at the river—we will never meet on that beautiful shore. How can I expect to meet him there when he was a drunkard, and was shot down in a drunkard’s hell? How can I expect to meet him beyond the river, when he vowed on his knees that he would never allow a drop of the accursed liquid fire to pass his lips, and then turned, became a despised drunkard, and dragged us all down to poverty and disgrace?

MRS. THAXTER: Mary, be calm. Do not think of the past.

MARY: *(still walking about)* Ah! Yes, how could I expect to meet him in the sweet bye and bye? I can’t meet him. *(gesticulates)* No, I can’t meet him. I can never see him. He was a drunkard. He was not faithful to his promises—he brought us to poverty and distress—he was a wretched outcast—he shall never walk on the beautiful shore. *(Fiercely)* No, no, no! He was a drunkard, and he has gone to the drunkard’s hell.

MRS. THAXTER: *(going to her and taking her hand)* Mary, can you not forget your trouble? Come, sit down and let us talk about something else.

MARY: *(Taking her hand away)* Talk about something else! *(Laughs wildly)* Ha! Ha! As if I could talk about something else now! He was a drunkard, and was shot
by a drunkard. He was a drunkard and he is gone to a drunkard’s hell. I will go too—I will follow him! Sweet bye and bye! *(Laughs)* Ha! Ha! *(rushes out)*

MRS. THAXTER: *(following her)* My poor child! *(McBride 26-7)*

Mary’s focus on the unfulfilled role of husband within her marriage, seen as a breaking of the marriage vow itself, is an indicator as to how critical to their identities the enacting of these roles in their lives was to nineteenth century women. *On the Brink* shows in rather vivid and explicit detail this result. The play does not, though, give any hints about the family-nature (co-dependence) of the disease that come in the twentieth century through playwrights like Eugene O’Neill and Tennessee Williams. For the most part, the lack of clarity about causes and results that emerged in later explorations of alcoholism on stage do not fit into the binary world of both melodrama and of nineteenth century domesticity.

Both *Three Years in a Man Trap* and *Ten Nights in a Bar-Room* offer evidence of the same insight into the psychological effects of living with a drunkard. In *Man Trap*, Nettie appeals to her childhood friend Maggie to ask her father to stop serving alcohol to Harry, Nettie’s husband.

MAGGIE: Oh, Nettie, that ever I should see you thus! You, the once bright and joyous girl, the life of all the school. Believe me, Nettie, I feel your sufferings deeply.

NETTIE: Yes, Maggie, you are good and kind, I know, forgive me for speaking so harshly; but, oh, my heart is broken! Ah! If you could see my wretched room; the bare floor, the scanty bed, the ragged covering that scarcely keeps the cold from our shivering bodies; with hardly food to eat, and all caused by rum! Rum!
The accursed fiend that has made you rich, and made us beggars; Oh! I shall go mad! Mad!

MAGGIE: Nettie, Nettie, you freeze my blood to hear you talk thus… (Morton 30)

As discussed earlier, Nettie’s appeal sends a feverish Maggie out into a snowstorm in which she gets lost and dies, but we also see in this scene how distraught Nettie has become because of her change in circumstances. *Ten Nights* also links the mental state of Mrs. Slade, wife of the tavern owner, to the drunken state of her husband and her son. A discussion between Romaine, the man through whose eyes we see the ten nights, and who is also the advocate for temperance, and Swichel, a “yankee tippler,” tells what has happened to the Slade family since Romaine’s last visit to the town.

SWICHEL: …Things are altered a little since you came around here, I can tell you! You wouldn’t hardly know old Slade now, and as far as his son, Frank, he takes to drink just as natural as can be. Between the two of them, they’ve broke the old woman’s heart and sent her up to the lunatic asylum… (Pratt 37)

Mrs. Slade after fretting about the safety of her son working at the tavern has lost him to drinking, and it breaks her.

Clearly the consistent message in these plays is that alcoholism generates enough anguish in the wives of drunkards to cause a break in their mental states. Most of these characters recover their senses once their households are restored to temperate living, but insane Mary of *On the Brink* has lost her husband to an alcoholic death, and Mrs. Slade does not return to the play from the asylum, and is later reported to have died, so the permanent recovery of all that was lost is not guaranteed, even though most of the women
recover. These burdens are for the women to bear and work out alone without true support from their alcoholic husbands whose restoration is often fragile. The notions of alcoholism as a family disease, and co-dependence are implicit because of the deterioration of all of the family members due to the alcoholism of one, but any culpability on the part of the women folk in contributing to the conditions that cause alcoholism (enabling) are absent in these plays, as this is a concept about alcoholism that did not emerge until the middle of the twentieth century.

As has already been made clear by the way the drunkard’s narrative unfolds, the even more dire consequence that could befall the wives and children of drunkards is the matter of their survival at all. In *The Fatal Glass* and *Drifting Apart*, both wife and child starve to death as part of the narrative. In both plays, though, the alcoholic character wakes to find he lost them in a nightmare, foretelling the drunkard’s future if he didn’t stop drinking. It is a dubious warning, but one in which the moral fiber of the alcoholic is spared from that final unforgivable judgment—to be responsible for the deaths of his innocent wife and child. Nevertheless, the suffering, or potential starvation and death of his family raises the stakes to even higher an appeal to not be the cause of mental anguish or physical suffering. Even if the men in the audience didn’t care much for the mental health of their wives, the women’s very existence is tied to the man’s drinking habits and his responsibility for her. And in all cases, these women suffer from poverty, exposure to the cold and hunger. In *The Fatal Glass*, when a bar-room tab eats up a man’s weekly wages, leaving little or nothing with which to feed, clothe and house his family, the action is framed as a violation of marriage contract. Mabel objects to Ambrose’s getting drunk.
JOE: …He’s old enough to know when to refuse a social glass, and if he does get a little top-heavy, what’s the harm, eh?

MABEL: This: robbing me and our child of our lawful rights—food, health comfort. Forsaking those he has sworn to watch over for the company of the low, bestial, heaven-forsaken wretches like his friend Joe Bennett. (McCloskey 11)

This way of looking at Ambrose’s behavior is a reinforcement of the need to keep the structure of family obligations intact, not only for the family itself, but for the maintenance of the fabric of society. As Scanlan has argued before in his book *Family, Drama and American Dreams*, the extended family loses ground as an institution in the industrial revolution and with the loss of that extended family goes the safety net that women and children had.

Not only during colonial days but particularly after the Revolution immigration brought new family patterns, often tied to a variety of religions and sects, which made for great diversity of family type. In the nineteenth century wave after wave of these families arrived here. Still, for most immigrants such diversity gave way, at least in part, to the effects of “Americanization,” that is, traditional ties were weakened and families moved toward the nuclear type. (24)

This more vulnerable state for the women and children is seen in *Three Years in a Man Trap*, when Mullen, the temperance advocate, lectures Jones, tavern owner, about the evils of the liquor trade, “…heedless of the bitter cry of poor women and children, for on them the crushing weight of this great millstone is heaviest, grinding out hope, happiness and often life itself!” (Morton 37). The theme that chronic drunkenness falls heaviest on the family finds its way into these plays often, and the ideology about the nature,
structure and obligations of the husband’s role in the family is an important message in the temperance plays. The objection to drinking really has to do with the undermining of the family, which at that point had become the basic building block of American society, as it continues to be to this day (although the idea of what makes a family has expanded). John Frick describes the importance of this ideology to the temperance movement and depiction on stage:

Confronted with a problem of growing proportions and potentially catastrophic consequences, temperance playwrights responded to the perceived crisis by dramatically representing the threat “on the boards,” characterizing intemperance as the “fiendish destroyer of the American family” and portraying liquor as the principal competitor for the weekly paycheck. Through their efforts, countless Americans were introduced to the neglected, battered, abandoned and murdered families of drunkards, and the plaintive question, “Mama, will father soon be home?” became one of the most frequently heard lines on the nation's stages. (69)

Society itself was threatened by rampant alcoholism during the nineteenth century and the legal as well as moral obligations of husbands to stay the potential unraveling of social fabric was a message that was heavily embedded in temperance drama.

In addition to the harms done to wife and children due to the family resources being squandered in the saloon, the implication of class, and with it, status in the emerging ideology of the American Dream became part of the message delivered by these dramas. There are strong warnings in these plays about the detrimental effect alcohol has on a family’s ability to thrive or make any economic progress. This is especially true in the plays that contain men trying to further their class status through the
selling of alcohol (Slade in *Ten Nights in a Bar-Room*, and Jones and Lloyd in *Three Years in a Man Trap*). This message is also present in *On the Brink*, where Taxter’s ambitions to become a state representative are flamed by treating (buying rounds and pressure to drink if someone is buying) and general tavern camaraderie. One value that the country was founded on—the Protestant work ethic—was being challenged by an influx of immigrants who were less convinced that the best in life could be gained by hard work and self-sacrifice alone. Immigrants worked very hard, but did not identify asceticism and temperance with their capacity to be productive. Traditionally, the Protestants lived with a disdainful eye toward pleasure and comfort. In his book *Melodrama and the Myth of America*, Jeffrey Mason describes the economic messages found in temperance plays.

The respectable man takes advantage of his society's offer of personal freedom in order to further his material progress, which not only supports his family but sustains the wealth of the community. Drinking is not respectable—not only because it releases inhibitions and confuses one's sense of propriety, but also because it hinders economic achievement. In spite of their constant, sensationalistic appeal to the emotions, the narratives and the plays express the shattering impact of compulsive drinking in economic terms; the visits to the dramshops waste the capital that the drunkard should be conserving, and when he ceases to provide, his family loses the home that is their bastion and symbol. In other words, the drunkard's moral collapse inevitably produces a corresponding economic catastrophe; the loss of property and financial security becomes the outward sign of the inner waywardness. Once fallen, the drunkard despairs. (75-6)
While the tradition of treating and the offer of a touch of brandy as part of the work day had been part of the rural life that was the basis of the economy in the eighteenth century, the owners and managers of industry, the economic work-horse of the nineteenth century, found that drinking on the job reduced productivity. This point became one of the central issues in the original formations of the labor movement, and as such became a point of class identification. Ideologically, the message in the plays and from the temperance movement in general was that working class men drank, while the upper classes did not. In his book *Symbolic Crusade*, Joseph Gusfield argues that temperance came to symbolize much more socially than just a personal lifestyle choice.

Issues of moral reform are analyzed as one way through which a cultural group acts to preserve, defend or enhance the dominance and prestige of its own style of living within the total society. In the set of religious, ethnic, and cultural communities that have made up America society, drinking (and abstinence) has been one of the significant consumption habits distinguishing one subculture from another. It has been one of the main characteristics through which Americans have defined their own cultural commitments. The “drunken bum,” “the sophisticated gourmet,” or the “blue-nosed teetotaler” are all terms by which we express our approval or disapproval of cultures by reference to the moral position they accord drinking. (3)

Framed in economic terms, we see the struggle for national values between the classes is present in the temperance plays. Clearly, since temperance itself became a class-associated movement, men reaching to associate themselves with the upwardly-mobile also embraced the ideology of temperate living and its economic advantages.
This message comes through clearly in these plays. It is shown in terms of personal suffering to wife and children, and in terms of consequences, with negative outcomes placed upon the family that profits from the liquor industry, i.e., tavern owners profiting on the economic misery of the drunkard’s family. The story of *Ten Nights in a Bar-Room* tracks Simon Slade over the course of his venture into the tavern business. He notes his gain in reputation as he perceives it in the beginning, moving from being referred to as “dusty coat” when he was a miller, to “landlord” as the owner of the tavern, and this clearly pleases him. But in the end, he is killed by his drunken son and his wife ends up in a lunatic asylum, and later dies there. The moral lesson of profiting from the liquor trade comes through in the consequences dealt to Slade, who wished to profit from other men’s misery according to the play’s ideology.

*Drifting Apart* deals overtly with the issues of class. At the outset of the play, Mary, our heroine, is romantically pursued by Percy, an upper class young man. Mary seems aware of the difficulties the class differences could cause them, and she says to Percy when he asks her hand in marriage, “Would it not break the heart of that mother you love—to see you married to the ‘Fisherman’s child’—would she be willing to receive me as a daughter?” (Herne act 1 4). In a display of self-sacrifice but also a nod to the saintliness of women, Mary chooses her rough-hewn fisherman, Jack, over Percy. As the play develops, Jack drinks again after his promise to stop, and disappears. Mary goes to Percy, and despite the fact that she has a daughter with Jack, he marries her. Mary then enjoys the life of an upper class woman. This “dream life” crashes down when Jack reappears, and Percy’s mother and family are disgraced because Mary has committed bigamy. Mary is then cast out, to live in grave poverty with Jack, eventually losing her
child and then perishing herself, out of grief. When Jack awakes from this dream of the inevitable consequences of his return to drinking, all is restored, and the lesson about the dangers of alcohol is learned without much actual harm being done. In terms of messaging about economic opportunities, this play is complicated, because Mary chooses her rough-cut fisherman over her initial opportunity to marry Percy. And Percy’s wealthy family is also shown to be unforgiving and heartless when she is cast out once Jack reemerges, but the warning about alcohol’s ability to take a poor, but happy family to disaster is firmly incorporated into the play. The reputation of the upper classes is also redeemed when Percy arrives on Christmas with gifts for Mary’s family, after the nightmare is revealed, leaving the basic social structure and promise of the American Dream intact.

*On the Brink* contains a story that also has subtle ambiguities about rising through social classes, but it’s main point about the detrimental effects of alcohol upon a man’s ability to provide for his family is clear. David Thaxter is president of the local Farmer’s Club and expresses ambition to run for state legislature, but his primary location for campaigning and lobbying for this idea is the tavern. Thaxter has promoted the possibility of winning the heart of a legislator to his old-maid sister. She is enchanted by the idea, but can also see the negative consequences of her brother’s ambition on the family. She says, “He is already leapin’ and playin’ upon the verge of destruction, and if he should run fur the office he would be almost sure to plout in. I must bestir myself and see that he rushes no further on the downward road…” (McBride 12). In between acts 1 and 2, five years have elapsed. Roxalena, Thaxter’s sister, is still unmarried, and still despairs about
where her brother’s ambition has taken the family. In a monologue that opens the second act she expresses this.

   ROXALENA: …I think I shall soon sink and go down in the great whirligig of loneliness and despair. And this has all come about just because brother David took it into his head that he was a popular man who was destined to rise and become a big aristocrat. But instead of risin’ he has been goin’ slitherin’ backwards, until now we are about as poor as Mr. Job’s turkey. (McBride 14)

The play offers the idea that it is better not to try to be too upwardly mobile; that to work hard and be content in one’s born station is a better choice than to fall to the temptation of any gain associated with drinking or tavern culture. It is also a criticism of the traditional relationship between politics and alcohol consumption—that treating and drinking as part of political life and elections would have a very negative result for anyone who might want to hold elected office. The message points to a clear boundary between success due to hard work and devout living and success won through a more gregarious lifestyle, and it serves as a warning to split drinking behavior from the election of political representatives.

   Similarly, in *Three Years in a Man Trap*, Tom Lloyd and Hiram Jones decide that running a tavern would allow them easy money and movement up the rungs of the social ladder. This play has many economic messages about financial gain, and the disparity between wealthy and poverty stricken. Maggie and her childhood friend Nettie live rich and poor because Maggie’s father profits off of Nettie’s husband’s drinking, and this creates a schism between them. The loss of reputation from association with liquor plagues the family. Recall that Maggie, daughter of Lloyd, tavern owner in this play,
loses her fiancée because her father has opened a tavern to make a profit off of other men’s woes.

The plays have much to say about the liquor trade, and increasingly pointed messages against liquor sellers can be found in some plays as the nineteenth century moves forward. In *The Drunkard*, the only mention of the liquor trade as a negative enterprise is when Middleton curses the saloon owner who is unwilling to give him any liquor as he raves calling him a “common poisoner of the whole village” (Smith 289). But in *Ten Nights in a Bar-Room*, there is a stronger message condemning the men who operate establishments that sell alcohol. Morgan spends his last dime on liquor in Slade’s tavern, but begrudges giving him the money, claiming Slade only cares about a man as long as he has money to spend on liquor, “Now that you’ve got my last dime, no more use for me tonight” (Pratt 12). Slade is portrayed at the classic embodiment of evil temptation, but his heartlessness when it comes to the patrons of his tavern also paints the picture of a profit-driven exploiter of men. The day after injuring Morgan’s child with a thrown glass, Slade shows no regret, but is determined that Morgan should not enter the tavern again. He asks why was that pesky child there to begin with, blaming the victim.

SLADE: It does seem to me as though I had the devil’s own luck lately. That’s just the way, when a man tries all in his power to get an honest living, something is sure to turn up to injure him.

GREEN: Ah! Landlord! How are you tonight? Well and jolly as ever, I suppose. Your particular friend, Joe Morgan, hasn’t given you his usual call yet.

SLADE: No, and if he’ll just keep away from here, he may go to the devil on a hard-trotting horse, as fast as he pleases. He’s tried my patience beyond
endurance, and my mind is made up that he gets no more liquor at my bar. I’ve borne his vile tongue and seen my company annoyed by him just as long as I mean to stand it. Last night decided me. Suppose I had killed that child?

GREEN: You’d have had trouble, and no mistake.

SLADE: Wouldn’t I? Blast her little picture, what business has she creeping in here every night?

GREEN: True enough. She must have a queer kind of a mother.

SLADE: I don’t know what she is now—heartbroken, I suppose. But there was a time when Fanny Morgan was the loveliest woman in Cederville. What a life her miserable husband has caused her to lead!

GREEN: Better he were dead and out of the way.

SLADE: Better; yes, a thousand times better. If he’d only fall down some night and break his drunken neck, it would be a blessing to his family.

GREEN: Yes, and to you in particular.

SLADE: You may be sure it wouldn’t cost me a large sum for mourning. Ha! Ha!

Ha! (Pratt 27-8)

Slade’s unfeeling attitude toward Morgan and his family continues throughout the following scenes, creating clear a relationship between Slade’s profession and his lack of charity. Mrs. Slade begs her husband to give up the tavern and go back to the mill after she has gone to see dying Mary Morgan. She says she will endure poverty—anything—just for Slade to be out of the liquor business, but he refuses.

The politics of temperance reform is the subject of a discussion inside Slade’s tavern. Temperance is seen as a factor in upcoming election by the tavern patrons. They
theorize that the poorhouse will be closed down if the temperance candidate is elected (because there won’t be a need for it). But the men discussing the candidates feel they themselves will need the poorhouse after not too long, so they want to vote for the other guy. While this scene is a moderately amusing take on temperance politics, it does speak to the general social concerns and expenses that society has while tavern owners are taking the profits from the men who would end up in the poor house, and so it is a condemnation of the liquor trade, not only on a personal level, but also on a society-wide level. And in a sign of the capacity of politics to change the power of the liquor trade, in the last act, Romaine, our temperance advocate, returns to stay at the “Sickle and Sheaf” once more.

ROMAINE: Things look rather dull with you here.

SLADE: Yes, rather.

ROMAINE: Not doing as well as you were?

SLADE: No, these ‘ere blamed temp’rance folks have ruined everything.

ROMAINE: Indeed!

SLADE: Yes, Cederville, ain’t what it was when you first came to the Sickle and Sheaf. I—I—you see—cuss the temp’rance people, they’ve ruined me… (Pratt 41)

_Ten Nights in a Bar-Room_ has a fairly thorough condemnation of the man who engages in profit through selling alcohol to his fellow citizens, and offers the voting for temperance candidates as a solution to the widespread availability of liquor. In terms of the messages found in this play, however this solution to America’s drinking problem is
somewhat subtle, since the play ends with the personal restoration of Morgan to a sober and respectable member of society, which is a more didactic aspect of the plot.

Wholesale denouncement of the liquor industry is a major aspect of the ideological messaging found in Three Years in a Man Trap. Little Nellie, Nettie’s daughter says she will give Maggie a kiss even “if your daddy is a rum seller” (Morton 31). Beyond all of the harm done to Lloyd’s family and the relationships and reputations that are ruined because of his participation in the liquor trade, Lloyd’s son is caught drinking. He is sent over to the bar by his boss to collect the workers and get them back on the job. While there he has a little beer himself. When his mother finds out about it, Young Tom catches hell from her.

MRS. LLOYD: I wish he would keep away from John Glum’s. That place is a curse to all the working man and their wives within a mile of it.

YOUNG TOM: I tell you it’s a bully place, mother, all fixed up with looking glasses and bottles and bagatelle boards and—

MRS. LLOYD: How would you know anything about it?

YOUNG TOM: Why Mr. Ashley sent me over the other day, from the bindery, to see if any of the men were loafing there, and Bill Jackson gave me a drink of lager out of his glass to say I hadn’t seen anybody!

MRS. LLOYD: Bring me that spool of thread, Tom.

YOUNG TOM: Yes, ma. (takes spool from work box which he and Billy were playing with and brings it to her; she catches him by the collar and cuffs him)

MRS. LLOYD: There and there you young villain! (Tom sets up a howl and goes R crying) You graceless young sump! Not only drinking their filthy stuff, but
telling lies to your employers? If ever I hear of your drinking beer or going into that place again I’ll tell your father and he’ll take the skin off your back for you!

(Morgan 13)

In this scene, Mrs. Lloyd has yet to discover that her husband plans to buy the bar in question, and so while she means her threat about her husband punishing their son, the threat ends up being an empty one. The fact that a young underage boy can get liquor quite so easily indicates that the tavern is being portrayed as a den of sin and a corruptor of men and boys alike.

Later in the play, begging on the streets, Harry scolds Mr. Holdfast, a wealthy citizen, for making money from renting his stores to liquor sellers, and blames the industry for his own downfall.

HARRY: …I know you—you are the rich Mr. Holdfast that has made his money by government frauds, and now increase it by letting his houses to rum sellers who have been my ruin and that of thousands like me!

HOLDFAST: Look here young man, if you let your tongue wag so freely about me you may chance to become acquainted with the Station house.

HARRY: Won’t you help me—just a trifle—for God’s sake! (catches his coat)

HOLDFAST: Let go of my coat! Vagabond—go to the soup kitchen—go to the alms house. (breaks away from him) Go to the devil! (Morgan 36)

The chain of culpability rises right up the classes in this play, pointing the finger not only at those who profit from the trade directly, but those who profit from those who profit from liquor selling. The play acknowledges all of the links in the entire business, and the
characters associated with the liquor trade are uniformly portrayed in some kind of negative light.

The temperance movement and temperance advocates are also represented in these plays, sometimes seriously and sometimes with humor. As discussed in the section of this project that examines the alcoholism narrative, the drunkard is often only redeemed through the intervention of an outside deus-ex-machina type of character, and that man is almost always a representative of the temperance movement and its values. In *The Drunkard*, Rencelaw is the archetypical temperance man, “whose life and labours are passed in rescuing their fellow men from the abyss into which [they] have fallen. I administer the pledge of sobriety to those who would once more become an ornament to society, and a blessing to themselves and to those around them” (Smith 291). He is solemn and righteous, a model for the values that the Protestant establishment put forth as American. Once Edward Middleton and Rencelaw meet, Middleton’s drinking trajectory is almost immediately reversed. He takes the pledge after he has cleaned up just a bit, and the end of the play is dedicated to portraying the return of domestic happiness.

In *The Fatal Glass*, we see the message that comes through in this play vis-à-vis the temperance movement itself is a little bit tongue-in-cheek. The two lower class comic characters are often seen fighting about Bob’s drinking. In the scene described above, where Fanny is seen weeping when Bob is chased away by a policeman, her plight seems serious, but in another scene, Fanny tells Bob off for joining the temperance society over 75 times, and he is still drunk.

FANNIE: …How many times have you joined the Temperance Society since you came here?
BOB: About six.

FANNIE: Six? Seventy-five times I know of myself.

BOB: Well, we won’t quarrel about trifles—make it seventy-five.

FANNIE: Did you ever mean to keep your pledge? One was enough if you did.

BOB: I’m a philosopher. If I break one, I’ve got others to fall back on, you see—

(McCloskey 30)

The effectiveness of the pledge as an all-powerful saving device is in question here in this play. It marks a clear turning point from the power of individual “moral suasion” as a tool to a stronger push toward anti-liquor action in the political sphere. This is true even though there is still an intervention of sorts in this play. The Fatal Glass has an allegorical figure called “The Spirit of Temperance” that floats above Ambrose during the critical moments of his drinking career. There is no human temperance figure in this play—and since the action is all within Ambrose’s opium-induced dream, this makes sense. Still, the intervention does happen, and it leaves room for both a serious take on the need for temperance in society, while acknowledging that pledge-signing did not work to resolve alcoholism in all men. This allowed that the pledge was not as effective as the early temperance plays would indicate, and Fanny and Bob’s discussion about his membership in the Temperance Society shows that concession to the realities of alcoholism.

The focus in The Fatal Glass on political activism is found in a staging of scenes that mirror events that were part of the Women’s Crusade. As you may recall from chapter 2, the Women’s Crusade was a short-lived, but very widely felt activist movement that occurred just before the Civil War. Women from around the country
gathered in groups and attacked bar-rooms and saloons, wielding axes and breaking liquor bottles in an attempt to try to fight back against the institutions they felt were destroying their domestic lives. This play includes a scene in which women, led by Fannie, plan an attack on the local tavern, and then a scene in which they carry that out. Here, in the planning scene, we see the kernels of the women’s rights movement and the impetus behind the Women’s Christian Temperance Union portrayed on the stage.

*(Enter Fannie and several women armed with clubs)*

FANNIE: Is it agreed?

ALL: It is! It is!

FANNIE: Too long have we borne our wrongs. Is there one among you who has not a drunken husband?

ALL: Not one *(murmurs).*

FANNIE: Is there one among you has a stick of wood to warm you in her house?

ALL: No, no!

FANNIE: Or a loaf of bread in her cupboards?

ALL: No! *(some weep)*

FANNIE: Did not the newly elected town officers promise to close the rum shops?

ALL: Yes they did.

FANNIE: And have they?

ALL: No, no!

FANNIE: Are we not neglected abused, treated more like brutes than the helpmates of that thing called man?
ALL: We are.

FANNIE: Now, friends, I propose to take the remedy into our own hands. We have learned how much the law will do for women. What shall we do with those sinks of iniquity where our husbands spend their own and their wives’ hard earnings in drink and carouse?

ALL: Clean them out!

FANNIE: Clean them out? It would take more soap and water than we can get to clean them out. No! I propose to drive them out—fire them out! Look! (Pulls handkerchief off her head). There’s the effect of rum! Those curls were my pride, the only happiness I had left, for they carried me back to the days of my innocent girlhood. They are gone—cut off by a drunken brute that the law calls my husband. Gone to buy him some more drink. (Puts on handkerchief again).

ALL: Shame! Shame!

FANNIE: You may well call shame—I say revenge.

ALL: Revenge! Revenge! (McCloskey 20-1)

And in the next scene, the women attack the tavern, shattering bottles, knocking the men with their clubs, and disturbing the whole place. The scene speaks to the powerlessness felt by women abused and neglected by alcoholic husbands, and the inaction of the society in general to protect them. This play was first performed in 1872, and the depiction of the attack on the tavern advocates for an activist response to a continuation of laissez-faire legislative reactions to the temperance movement.

In a discussion between the tavern owners in *Three Years in a Man Trap*, Jones and Lloyd are concerned about selling liquor to underage boys, and that the temperance
society might catch them at it, and get them into legal trouble. Here we see the
temperance society portrayed as an institutional watchdog, reporting to authorities any
violation of existing temperance law rather than breaking the law themselves. This play
also has a temperance crusader, administrator of the pledge, as we saw in chapter 4.

Mullen, like Rencelaw in *The Drunkard*, is earnest and upstanding. Mullen warns against
the liquor trade to John Glum, barkeep and Harry who eventually takes the pledge and is
the drunkard who fulfills the vision of restored happy home in this play. In a scene in the
tavern, Mullen evokes anger in John, who says “I know that this is my house and I ain’t
going to be lectured in it by anybody, so there’s the door” but Harry defends him as a
good upstanding man. But Mullen says “Be warned e’er it is too late…Sobriety is money,
health, content. Whiskey is rags, misery and death! When you find that out, as you very
soon will, remember the Temperance blessing, at the state house every Tuesday night. Go
there, and in the same room where your forefathers signed the liberty of millions, sign
your own declaration of independence, that gives freedom to your immortal souls”
(Morton 21). Here the link between patriotism and sobriety is paramount. The signals to
maintain the protestant ethic as the fundamental ideology that the country was born out of
are clear. As the play is set in Philadelphia, the image of the pledge signing inside
Independence Hall symbolizes the interdependence of freedom as a patriotic sentiment,
and freedom from the grips of alcohol.

*Two Men of Sandy Bar* is a play about alcoholism written from outside the
temperance movement, but the play does send messages about the temperance movement
and it’s efficacy. In this play, the character of Alexander Morton, Sr. is the father of the
play’s primary protagonist and drunkard, Sandy. Our first look at him has him piously
trying to convert Spanish-speaking Catholics to be Presbyterians. In this scene we see the
Protestant evangelical tradition revealed and the desire to spread Protestantism, since
Catholicism was associated often with immigrant cultures more open to regular drinking
and carousing. Old Morton also reveals he is looking for his prodigal son, Sandy, to
reform him from being a drunkard. This characterization is typical of the way the
reformed drunkard is portrayed. All of the temperance advocates in these plays are
reformed drunkards themselves, wishing to help other men, although in this case, Old
Morton resumes drinking after years of sobriety and the play ends with his return to being
a drunkard, not showing with clarity that he will be restored to sobriety after his return to
drink. This is a cynical take on the capacity of a man to stay away from drink
permanently.

So, while most of these plays come at the portrayal of the temperance movement
from within, there are still some overarching messages about the movement and society
that can be distilled (no pun intended) from them. The temperance movement is portrayed
as being made up of earnest and somber men with pious ideals willing to help out the
wayward drunkard. But we also see doubts about the capacity of the pledge or the
temperance society to effect permanent change in these alcoholics, and therefore we see
many plays also put forth an advocacy to agitate politically for change, and take up arms
against the liquor trade if it is deemed necessary.

Some of the more problematic and morally infused messages found in these plays
were attempted disseminations of the causes for alcoholism. One of the scenarios that is
set up in these plays is a push—pull relationship between the domestic or private sphere
of the home and a man’s negotiation of the public sphere that he experiences in the
tavern. The push is an excuse given by men that their wives nag them or make the home environment unpleasant, sending them out to seek company at the saloon. The pull is the treating and general camaraderie that the men find once they are out in public. In *Three Years in a Man Trap*, Maggie tells Nettie not to reprimand Harry for drinking, that she should be all welcoming smiles to get him to want to return home rather than go to the bar. This places a rather severe restriction on the wives, undermining any advocacy about their own well being that the alcoholic’s wife would be likely to engage in for herself and her children. In the same play, Tom Lloyd blames his wife for complaining to him that he keeps a bar and uses her complaints as an excuse to get good and drunk. The wife is put in the position of having to create a happy home. Even when not blamed for sending the husband out, implications about a wife’s tempering abilities can be found in the plays. In *Ten Nights in a Bar-Room*, Judge Hammond’s son, Willie says his father sowed his wild oats before getting married, but since then marriage has had a tempering effect on his father. Willie questions why he shouldn’t be allowed the same in his youth. Here we see the expectation of a wife to exact that tempering influence on her husband, and if she does not, a certain amount of judgment about her husband’s continued drinking can be blamed on her inadequacy. The cult of womanhood and motherhood as described in chapter 2 dictated that she provide the moral steerage for the marriage, and if something has gone wrong, you can bet that she will bear some of the criticism.

In a different capacity, women were expected to cover up for the drunkard’s drinking to the public or authority figures. In *Two Men of Sandy Bar*, Manuela, the daughter of the ranch owner that Sandy works as a hand for, covers up his drinking to her father. The two are not linked romantically, but Sandy aids Manuala in secreting off to
see her lover. Sandy is often drunk, but Manuela covers up Sandy’s drinking to her father
telling him Sandy is sick. Again, we see an expectation that the woman will smooth
things over for the drunkard, making excuses and even stepping into the role of
breadwinner in some cases. These days, this behavior is referred to as enabling.

The pull side of this dynamic can be seen in tavern scenes, where men treat each
other to rounds and pressure each other into continued drinking. Already discussed in
chapter 4 is the situation where the tempter-character pressures continued drinking upon
the drunkard. In these scenes, the propensity for the evil character to do whatever it takes
to make sure the protagonist continues to drink is depicted. In *The Fatal Glass*, we see
Joe Bennett try all manner of tactics to get Ambrose to drink on his wedding day. He uses
sentiment and peer pressure. Ambrose is called crazy for refusing a “social glass.” He
mocks Ambrose as hen-pecked without a will of his own, and eventually we see him slip
opium into Ambrose’s glass to clinch his intemperance. The peer pressure to drink comes
in many forms in these plays, but mostly it is through a genial, but strong pressure to
drink like the rest of the group. In *The Drunkard*, Cribbs and the tavern landlord get
Middleton drunk by the peer pressure of treating. And in *Three Years in a Man Trap*,
Nettie complains her husband Harry always says “just one with the boys” but doesn’t
come home after just one. Joe and Bill, secondary characters in *Man Trap* who were
mentioned in chapter 3 discussing the morality of the alcoholic character, engage in
“false” camaraderie, continuously using the “fraternity” of having fought together at
Gettysburg to procure drinks and play on Veteran’s sympathy toward each other even
though it’s a lie, and neither of the men served in the Civil War at all. But the appeal of
the companionship and sense of belonging found in tavern culture is seen in these plays
as having a detrimental effect on the men. Again, the temperance ideology is that a man should be at his most happy and satisfied when he fulfills his role inside the family unit, preserving the basic building block of American society. The temptation that lures him away from this can be seen in this acknowledgement of the pull of the bar-room, but it is countered with the over-all lesson of the plays, where the restoration of the family and the playing of “Home Sweet Home” is shown as the epitome of satisfaction and happiness.

Another explanation of sorts as to why men drink is given in references to the hereditary nature of drunkenness. In a movement toward the understanding of nature versus nurture, seen in many of the earliest plays of the realism movement (like *A Doll’s House* by Ibsen), the exploration of inherited alcoholism and learned alcoholism is a theme that floats through many of these plays. In a different desire to understand why some men became drunkards, while others did not, we see references to hereditary links and family trends brought up in many of the temperance plays. The only play in this study that does not imply anything about the hereditary nature of alcoholism is *The Drunkard*. All of the other plays address some aspect of multi-generational dealings with it.

In *On the Brink*, Thaxter, our protagonist and ambitious want-to-be-legislator, is shown as a terrible drunkard, capable of violence toward his wife and daughter-in-law. His son, Harry, dies of a gunshot wound in a bar fight instigated by his own prideful taking of offense (one of the characteristics of the stage drunkard identified in chapter 3). This shows that, like his father, Harry is a drunkard. In *Three Years in a Man Trap*, Young Tom Lloyd is arrested in a “rat pit” and when his father won’t pay the fine, it looks like he will be carted away to prison. Young Tom blames his father for his
problems, saying “you bring me up in a place like this and then wonder I am no good” referring to his father’s ownership of the tavern, and the detrimental effect it has had on his upbringing (Morton 27). In Ten Nights in a Bar-Room, Young Frank Slade tends bar at the “Sickle and Sheaf.” Romaine, the temperance character, asks Frank’s father if he thinks tending bar is a dangerous temptation to Frank, but Slade scoffs at the idea. Later Slade will be proven wrong when Frank becomes the kind of drunkard who murders his own father.

The plays also touch on the propensity of young women with alcoholic fathers to marry alcoholic husbands, although the scenes do not frame the actions as such. In On the Brink, Mabel is warned by her mother about the dangers of marrying a man who drinks—an experience she knows well, since her father was a drunkard. But she believes that Ambrose will be different and she goes through with the marriage. Ambrose becomes the kind of drunkard her father was, and only because of the dream sequence device is he spared he worst judgment of being responsible for the death of his wife and child. We also find that in On the Brink, Thaxter’s daughter-in-law, the one who wanted to throw herself in the river, had a father who was an alcoholic. She married Thaxter’s son Harry, who dies in a bar fight, recreating the conditions of he childhood for herself. Both plays hint at the generational repetition of the alcoholic marriage. These portrayals are possibly the very kernels of understanding what has become known as alcoholism as a “family disease” or the concept of co-dependence, ideas developed much more fully in the twentieth century by playwrights like Eugene O’Neill and Tennessee Williams.

Two Men of Sandy Bar, while not in the genre of temperance plays, actually has more material about the hereditary aspect of alcoholism than the others in this study. The
play follows a reformed man’s search for his prodigal son. An opportunistic aide, Starbottle, and an old associate of the son, Oakhurst, conspire to place an imposter into the role of prodigal in order to inherit the old man’s fortune. The actual son is a drunkard, as was the old man, who threw away his family before he reformed. Early in the play, Starbottle plots to find someone who can step into the role of the prodigal son, but knows that there are certain hereditary aspects to this “role” that will need to be addressed.

    STARBOTTLE: How would it do to get up a prodigal? Umph. Something must be done soon: the old man grows languid in his search. My position as a sinecure is—er—in peril. A prodigal ready made! But could I get a scoundrel bad enough to satisfy the old man? Ged, that’s serious. Let me see: he admits that he is unable to recognize his own son in face, features, manner, or speech. God! If I could pick up some real rascal whose—er—irregularities didn’t quite fit the bill, and could, say—Ged!—that he was reforming. Reforming! Ged, Star! That very defect would show the hereditary taint, demn me! I must think of this seriously. Ged, Star, the idea is—an inspiration of humanity and virtue… (Harte 351-2)

The “hereditary taint” idea develops to a much deeper extent over the course of the play. When Oakhurst overhears Starbottle’s plans, consideration of how believable or recognizable Oakhurst could be in the role of prodigal centers around his drinking—how bad it has been and to what extent his drinking behavior mirrors Old Morton’s history. The play spends a fair amount of time developing the notion of inherited behavior and it’s proof about relation. Later in the play, once Oakhurst deliberately gives Old Morton alcohol instead of the water he asked for, the stage directions state that when we see old Morton drunk for the first time that his drunkenness ought to correspond to the drunken
behavior of Sandy, his real son whom we have seen drunk throughout the play. These directions imply that Sandy has an inherited trait—the way he moves should correspond to the movements his father makes when drunk—a strong corroboration between genetics and alcoholism.

At the very end of the play, Sandy stops drinking, in part due to the shock at seeing his father drunk once again. He orders his father to return to teetotalism.

SANDY: (passionately seizing Old Morton’s arm) Yes, Diego—Sandy—the outcast—but, God help me! No longer a drunkard. I forbid you to touch that glass—I your son, Alexander Morton! Yes, look at me, father; I, with drunkenness in my blood, planted by you, fostered by you—I whom you sought to save—I—I, stand here to save you! (Harte 446)

And so we see that these plays reflect the common observation that alcoholism has a tendency to run in families. During the second half of the nineteenth century, concepts of inherited traits were “in the air,” in part corresponding to Darwin’s publications and the adoption of genetics as a cause for ailment or condition, and much of the western world started to take these concepts into consideration. This may have also contributed to a strengthening of the alcoholic-by-inheritance references found in the later plays. It bears a quick mention that medically at this time, some of the most severe alcoholic cases were sterilized to prevent continuation of the cycle, but this only reinforces the surge in looking at heredity as a cause for alcoholic behavior included some of the plays.

Lastly, the plays offer, and in many cases were written specifically to offer some solution for alcoholism. Given the religious nature of the temperance movement, and its origins in Protestant evangelism in the early part of the nineteenth century, it follows that
solutions are of a religious nature. In *The Drunkard*, Mary says “ah, merciful heaven, restore me my Edward once again, and I will endure every ill that can be heaped upon me” (Smith 285). And when Middleton signs the pledge, it is with the understanding that he will only be restored “with the kind aid of Him” (Smith 285). The pledge-signing ceremony is not only framed as a solemn oath to the family, but also a pledge to God, and a return to faithful service to help others in need. Certainly, beyond a legislative change toward the availability of alcohol, which is the alternate solution offered by the plays, the personal transformation leans heavily on a spiritual solution to alcoholism. And in terms of the treatment and cure for chronic alcoholism, this approach has not changed too terribly much over the last century and a half, as the most successful program of recovery for alcoholism founded to date is Alcoholics Anonymous, which is spiritually-based. Further possible solutions, which could offer financial or social improvements, such as a change in economic structure or an elimination of the circumstances that might lead to a desire to escape reality are not addressed at all in these plays. The phenomena of alcoholism was explored but the solutions set forth in these plays never came close to eradicating chronic drunkenness, either through personal transformation or by means of legislative controls. Even though drinking per capita has decreased markedly since the temperance movement began, it cannot be directly linked to negative portrayals and associations found in these plays. On the other hand, it is plausible that drinking decreased as men tried to avoid association with a negative stereotype.

The temperance drama form reflects the values of nineteenth century society and the struggles for ideological supremacy in the continued development of America. We see that the plays show the harms done to women and children. This reflects a growing
value placed on the family unit, and positions the woman as the keeper of innocence, virtue and moral standing within that family unit. A drunkard who jeopardized his wife’s security was allowing an evil influence to infect the most basic and treasured foundation of society, the home and family. The industriousness and innovative potential of America’s economy were threatened by diminished productivity due to alcohol use, and so class aspirations and the emerging desire for the American Dream develop as themes in the temperance play. Drunkenness is shown as being antithetical to economic growth and productivity and the poverty brought on by alcoholism is clearly one of the most prominent of consequences. Direct calls for political action and legislative recourse against those involved in the liquor trade are strong messages found in many of the plays. And the temperance movement had a self-reflexive portrayal of its earnestness and piety, but also acknowledgement of the limits of the movement’s capacity to help all drunkards. The desire to understand why men are drunkards is examined to a certain degree in the plays. A direct assault on the drunkard does no good in helping him to become willing to sign a pledge or swear off drinking. These plays have within them some sense of the emerging field of genetic inheritance, and we see this observation about the way alcoholism runs in families woven into the plays. As for a solution to the problem of alcoholism, the plays remain bound to the roots of the temperance movement—evangelical Protestantism, the foundational ideology of the country itself.
CONCLUSION

There can be no doubt that throughout the nineteenth century the stage saw much of the drunkard. In many ways the depiction of alcoholism was used as a socially corrective tool by the middle class to try to exercise controls upon the morality of a rapidly growing and changing country. In the eyes of the nation, drinking came to symbolize much more than the effects of the behavior itself; it came to be identified with many of the negative elements in behavior and society. The social forces that were at work during the nineteenth century allowed for alcoholism to be cast as an easy scapegoat—and not without reason. Drinking per capita was close to twice the rate we see now, and a quadrupling of population between 1860 and 1910 contributed to an instability in American identity (Lender and Martin 96). The social positioning on alcoholism was one of the ways that marked class identity and morality. Upward mobility and temperate behaviors were commonly seen as compatible. Poverty was always portrayed as an inevitable consequence of drinking in temperance plays. The resultant misery—starvation, exposure, grief—felt by the wives of the drunkard helped to crystallize an emerging women’s movement—noting that Prohibition and the Women’s right to vote both were enacted in 1920. The middle of the nineteenth century was a period of thinking in absolutes, both in terms of social structure and in the melodramatic form. Men and women were seen as opposites, women being naturally good and men
having a nature than needed to be tamed by their female counterparts. The way alcoholism was portrayed on the stage during the nineteenth century was both simplistic and stereotypical. Stereotype emerged through both narrative conformity to the melodramatic genre and to satisfy nineteenth century binary attitudes. Alcoholic actions were cast into easily conveyed categories of good and bad behaviors. While some of the language used in the plays did skirt around the possibility of sickness or “condition,” as is the current view, the frame of melodramatic form kept the depiction within a dichotomy of good and bad—a place where the emergence of stereotype comes easily.

The theater during the nineteenth century, through repeated portrayals, demarked many characteristics that defined alcoholism during that period. Social taboos kept the drunkard, with very few exceptions, a man. (Drunken women were usually Irish.) Chronic drunkenness was a phenomenon problematic for men because of the economic structure of the family that developed along with the industrial revolution. Women and children became completely dependent on the earning power of their husbands. Ironically, several of the plays give a double message about upward mobility and a man’s earning power, for the men who choose to sell liquor in order to better themselves and their families pay harshly for this choice. This man, this drunkard, has a series of repeated personality traits that when put together start to define the stereotype. He is first off, unreliable at his word. Time and again he is shown swearing of, with and without an oath to his wife or to God, and yet often in the next scene in which he appears, he has returned to the bottle. Many of the plays show the train of thought that leads this man back to drinking. Quickly, remorse and guilt are supplanted by a stronger desire to medicate both physical symptoms of withdrawal, or the emotional wreckage done during his last spree.
The one drink taken to ease his discomfort so alters his thinking, that further drinking no longer seems to threaten his security. These aspects of the alcoholic are repeatedly depicted, and even though they become part of a stereotype, they also reflect much of the reality of alcoholic thinking. The difference is that the depictions found in temperance dramas are flat and two dimensional, not considering the interior life or experience of the man in any complexity, especially when compared to the later twentieth century portrayals of alcoholism where we see a far deeper personal struggle and emotional nuance attributed to the drunkard. Nor do the plays include scenes in which we see anything but a cursory resistance or struggle on his part to not return to drinking, and this is why this aspect of his character falls into a stereotypical rendition of a drunkard.

It takes a lot of alcohol over a long period of time, followed by an abrupt stop to set off a serious case of delirium tremens. On the other hand, a DTs scene makes for a dramatic spectacle and made for a safe voyeuristic journey into the seedy life of a drunk if viewed from a seat in a theater. For the temperance groups seeking to shape the message behind a reason for reform, the delirium tremens scene could be a very powerful tool, an alarming vision that could rally fearful citizens to the temperance cause.

Regardless of it’s usefulness as a dramatic contrivance for the temperance movement, the depiction of delirium tremens as the direct result of taking up drinking at all might have been somewhat exaggerated. Admittedly, average alcohol consumption was much higher during the nineteenth century, but the drunkard was depicted as a man who could launch into the state of a raving lunatic at most any time, placing him very far outside acceptable societal norms. This aspect of the stereotype may have done much to contribute to ostracizing him, placing him as a man who was dangerous and unpredictable.
Also seen in these plays was a man who was easy to anger and fight, who was prone to violence and who could start a conflict for no justifiable reason. He seems to react quickly and without much provocation. Ingrained in stereotype is always a truth, but the lack of character development is what leads to a dismissal of any complexity having to do with the nature of these interactions, especially since, as you may recall from the introduction, stereotyping serves to “protect [a] perceiver’s value structure” (Stagnor and Schaller 19). Rather, the alcoholic character seems in these plays to be responsible for any escalation in confrontational behavior. This peevish and unsociable aspect of the alcoholic personality seemingly disappears as soon as he is restored to sobriety, a stark contrast to the long struggle to return to balance that characterizes what is now known about recovery from alcoholism. All the negative aspects of the drunkard seem to befall him from outside himself, from the bottle. This characterization also downplays his own psychological and emotional journey, minimizing his own part in his experience and addiction, clearly placing the problem as a force enacting itself upon him. He seems to only have alcohol as a struggle. The plays neatly avoid mental states that could be brought on by social circumstances: rage or depression due to poverty, personal struggles with anxiety, identity, abuse, or loss that could account for excessive drinking.

The story of alcoholism, as told by these temperance dramas, is both common and extraordinary. It is common because the story is meant to be one where the audience can relate to the situation and the possibilities for themselves inherent in it; extraordinary because of the state that drinking leads the characters. In portraying a steep fall from social status, the message hopes to show where the average man could end up with continued drinking. The call coming from the stage is for action, either personal or
political, to change the economic losses and miserable conditions seemingly brought on by alcohol abuse. And yet, the temptation comes from outside the drunkard, and so a call to take personal action seems incongruent with the seeming depiction of alcohol or a tempter entrapping the drunkard without his consent. And in another instance of inconsistency, the alcoholic is cured either by way of another reformed drunk or through some other divinely inspired intervention. His reentry into society is portrayed as seamless and facile. A new state of mind is instantly acquired upon the signing of the pledge, or whatever other dramatic device is employed to indicate a personal turn around. The redeemed alcoholic character, for the most part, is happy and satisfied, reinforcing the messages of the importance of home and family to a well-rounded happy life, endorsed by the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (recalling that this organization took a front seat role in the dissemination of information about alcoholism during the latter half of the nineteenth century). The darker plays, of course do not allow for the happiness of home and hearth for all the characters (not all drunkards are restored to sobriety), and the outcomes become bleaker as the century wears on. But in general the outcomes still portrayed the possibility of emerging from the grip of alcohol and instantly returning to a peaceful life, in which there is no lingering resentment on the part of the family, and no marked change in the alcoholic’s potential as husband or wage earner. Framed in this way, the question would come up while watching these plays, if redemption is so easy, why doesn’t the drunkard just choose to swear off? Without showing any struggle at the end, (depiction of which would be closer to realism than melodrama), the ease with which restoration is achieved casts a looming question about why the alcoholic just doesn’t get himself sober whenever he wants to—here is a place
where the melodramatic form, creating a binary world of absolutes, really imposes questions about the ethical nature of the drunkard’s inability to stop drinking. To put it plainly, if it is so easy to stop drinking, then the drunkard must have a moral failing of some sort if he continues to harm himself and his family. If the instant and inevitable cause to effect chain of events follows from the taking of the first drink and ends in devastation or death, the message imbedded in the plays is that to take a drink is to flirt with disaster. A dire message used to sway the intemperate away from drinking.

It is clear that the temperance play was used as social corrective of sorts, blending ideology from many different aspects of society to try to enact a change in that society—to redirect the value system that was threatened. Drinking was both a problem and a scapegoat for other issues. Poverty, immigration, women’s rights, work ethic, were all concerns that fed the temperance movement and its didactic, binary construction. The other concerns were less easily placed into clearly identifiable behaviors that fit “right” and “wrong.” And so drinking became a symbol of these other social ills, and a stereotype because the nature of the depiction was painted in such black and white terms. The harms done to the family and the disgrace and poverty the drunkard was seen as subjecting his family to were warnings, morality tales, truly capable of being so because the characters are cast as good and bad, lacking much personal depth and easily stereotyped. In an article entitled “Stereotypes as Individual and Collective Representations,” Stangor and Schaller write:

> [O]nce a stereotype has emerged within a culture, it takes on a life of its own and influences social behavior in ways beyond that of the actions of any individual. At this point, stereotypes depend not so much on direct perception (and
misperception) of the social environments on the existing manifestations of those stereotypes in the behavior and language of the society. (25)

The image of alcoholism seen in the temperance plays and forwarded by the temperance movement was intended to bring social values in line with a traditional protestant ethic, an asceticism found in the puritanical values of the founding fathers. What emerged at the end of the century was the image of a skid row bum who was incapable of taking care of himself or his wife and children.

What can be learned from the material covered in this study is that the nature of melodrama as a form was seminal in reducing a complex and difficult subject down to an easily identifiable problem with a clear solution that would smooth over even the worst of consequences. None of the plays address the nature of addiction as we know it today; that recovery is elusive and that addiction cannot be ascribed to a certain set of values (or lack thereof). Frick describes this disjuncture in the conclusion of his book *Theater, Culture and Temperance Reform*:

> From the outset, addiction presented problems for temperance reformers regardless of whether their principal strategy was moral suasion and their goal was the reclamation of drunkards or was coercion aimed at destroying the liquor industry and thereby removing the temptation to drinkers. While activists of both camps tacitly accepted some notion or other of addiction, which they characterized in political terms (i.e., liquor's capacity to “enslave” a drinker), they nevertheless retained a belief in the volitional nature of the drinker’s habit. Proponents of moral suasion found it necessary to de-emphasize or even deny the physiologically addictive qualities of alcohol, for their tactical approach to
intemperance required the drunkard to sign the pledge (the instrument by which one rejected alcohol), to voluntarily and immediately swear off drink forever and, through the exercise of will power, to refrain from drinking. In similar manner, prohibitionists needed to believe that drunkards could readily live without drink once the taverns had been closed and the liquor supply cut off. Both approaches, relying as they did upon the drinker’s being able to survive without alcohol (or, in the case of the suasionists, to even willfully reject it), neatly skirted the issue of addiction and sought instead to deny the impossibility of an individual’s simply walking away from drink; in other words, denied the existence of what we today regard as alcoholism. (199)

While the proponents of temperance certainly observed the complete lack of control found in alcoholism, they could not comprehend the utter lack of choice that defines addiction over heavy drinking. Within the plays is a prescription for recovery based on the notion that in the end the addict has a choice, but is making the wrong one. Here is one of the kernels of the stereotype that has continued to pervade understanding of alcoholism and addiction into the twentieth century; that in the end there is a choice, and each return to drinking is seen as a willful disregard of the moral one.

Certainly, the subject matter treated in temperance drama was more closely akin to the social concerns found in realism, and plays that addressed the issue of alcoholism could be viewed as a hybrid of theatrical genre—the addressing of a subject that loomed large in the realm of society’s problems, as was found in realism, while the treatment of that problem was anchored in the recognition of heroes and villains with little distance between psychological intent and action, clearly within the realm of melodrama. Even as
the situations presented in the plays became darker and more pessimistic about the possibility of escape from the grips of alcohol, the well-worn temperance formula cast the story into a world of absolutes, where problems are rarely solved except through instant providential intervention, but types are easy to recognize. On the other hand, the temperance movement did generate enough support to change the United States Constitution, albeit, after the peak in public will to do so. Whatever contribution the plays made in crystallizing in the minds of the public the image of the drunkard as something fearful enough to take legal action to prevent, the imagery and social positioning against the drunkard imbedded in these plays clearly had some impact.

More than anything else, it can be deduced from this study that there was in fact a stereotype of alcoholism that appeared with frequency and over many decades during the nineteenth century. This portrayal not only appeared in New York, but throughout the country, in large theaters and small, in professional productions and amateur, and in plays created with the temperance message in mind and plays written for mainstream consumption. The reoccurrence of a character bearing common traits is a sure demarcation of a type. When this type is seen as an image against which society can compare its own values, or upon which it can project negative attributes, this type can be categorized as a stereotype. Stereotypes are helpful in the simplification of a set of behaviors perceived as negative, but also easily assigned to all people bearing some resemblance to the type. For nineteenth century Americans, the drunkard was a male, with potential, but arrogant in ignoring warnings about drinking. He was willful in his continued drinking, even to the point where he lost his wife and child, and could become
a murderer due to peevish behaviors when drinking. He embodied the skid row imagery that remains with us today.

The nineteenth century framing of alcoholism painted women as the victims of drunken behavior, very rarely as perpetrators. The female alcoholic did not fit into the role that society assigned her, for she was to keep a watchful eye over the morality of her family, ever turning the patient, forgiving attention toward her husband, but also responsible in some way for steering him toward a life infused with the love of home and family, and pursuit of the American Dream. Women were tied to their husbands, afforded few rights and suffered greatly at the hands of drunken partners. In these plays, they are not shown to be complicit in any situation that might manifest itself in a return of her husband to drinking—or at least she should not berate him, threaten him or weep to him, for these actions do not result in sobering him up. The alcoholic is shown to be alone in the responsibility for his actions. The plays do not include any scenes condemning co-dependence\(^7\) as a factor in continued drinking, nor is any enabling\(^8\) behavior in the wives seen as contributing to the drunkard’s continued drinking. The alcoholic is out on his own, not seen as one part in the larger dysfunction of a family or society. He alone is responsible for the drinking behavior, while the wife and children have nothing to do with the dynamics that might contribute to his return to drink.

Lastly, in these plays, it is clear that drinking in any form is seen as a deviant behavior, an anti-social behavior, capable of undermining the very pillars of society. The threat that drinking poses as portrayed on the stage during the nineteenth century is grave.

\(^7\) Putting the needs of another person over one’s own, in an overly caretaking manner which, or obsessively worrying about another’s condition.
\(^8\) Dysfunctional reactions to another person’s negative behavior; attempt to aid, but in fact causing more harm than help.
and imminent. Both through the good and evil lens offered by the melodramatic form, and also because the need for simplistic messaging by nineteenth century society in their attempt to direct the course of American values, drinking falls into the “bad” category of behaviors. As with any absolute pronouncement, though, alternate portrayals of drinking were bound to appear to counter the hard line judgment that was ingrained in the drunkard-as-deviant characterization of alcoholism.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the treatment of alcoholism on stage started to change course. The plays examined in this study were first produced between 1844 and 1888, and in the latter plays the circumstances and consequences for drinking became more fatalistic. Eventually the heaviness of the subject reached as far as the theatrical portrayals could take them without transforming from melodrama into tragedy. The earnestness and intensity of temperance drama performances opened the door for lampooning. Emblematic of some of the stage treatments of alcoholism were plays like *A Temperance Town* (1893), where the jolly town drunk is the character who does the right thing for the right motive, and the temperance politicians are seen as greedy and lascivious, start to make their way onto the stage. *Poison*, a farce performed at the Hasty Pudding Club at Harvard in 1881, made fun of the social message about alcohol use delivered through the temperance play. The growth of variety shows that included many shenanigans of a drunken immigrant population drew crowds of those same immigrant populations eager to see themselves reflected up on the stage in a light and humorous way. *(Vaudeville, DVD)* A comic team called Harrigan and Hart staged a very popular series of plays about Mulligan, an Irish grocery store owner, and his drunken escapades
with his wife, family and colleagues (*Mulligan Guard, Mulligan’s Silver Wedding*, etc.)

Arthur Hobson Quinn writes of Harrigan’s character:

> Harrigan treated the Irish immigrant who had come to this country after the famine of 1848, and who remained in the cities of the east. He did not touch the generation that had come before that time, the younger sons of the gentry, or the commercial class, who had become assimilated into out national life. For the purposes of vivid contrast, he chose the keeper of the corner grocery, Dan Mulligan, who had fought in the Civil War with “the sixty-ninth,” and who is a leader of his clan. He is honest, courageous, loyal, impulsive, irrational, likely to become drunk and disorderly at slight provocation, and while irascible and quarrelsome, is forgiving and generous even to his enemies. His mate, Cordelia, is his counterpart, and yet she is individualized. (86)

It is likely that the strong stereotypical associations between alcoholism and the Irish came as much from Harrigan and Hart, and the entertaining spin-offs their popularity created as from serious reform minded portrayals. This trend toward an easing in the Victorian conservatism in all areas eventually resulted in happy-go-lucky drunken W. C. Fields and sexually-charged Mae West plays, (and later films) that more closely characterize popular entertainment between 1900-1930. From these comic treatments came a new stereotype onto the boards: that of the happy drunk who endures no serious consequences for his drinking. The old stereotype, a man seen through the lens of social values, was starting to be supplanted by a less serious vision of drunkenness. This makes sense in light of the complete transformation of American society through immigration.

Lender and Martin describe the impact this growth had on perceptions about drinking:
If anything, the variations in drinking styles became even more pronounced as millions of new immigrants landed between the 1860s and the early 1900s. The Irish and German waves continued, along with major contingents of other Northern Europeans. By the end of the century, however, the greatest numbers were coming from Southern, Central, and Eastern Europe. This influx raised the number of foreign-born in the United States to 13,515,900 souls by 1910, up from 4,138,700 in 1860. A high proportion of these newcomers, such as the many Poles, Jews, and Italians, hailed from wet cultures; and like every immigrant group before them, they imported their drinking customs. (96-7)

While the fight for the direction of temperate values was won in the polls with the passage of Prohibition, the “hearts and minds” of the newly arrived immigrant population were not won by temperance appeals. The lampooning of temperance was a way for the newcomers to retain an identity brought from their home countries and to deflect the negative stereotyping they were subject to. The change may have been the natural outcome of too much earnestness, and an attempt to correct an overly judgmental vision of drinking. Whatever the reasons for the changes, the social attitudes about drinking did begin to relax, even as the states were ratifying the seventeenth amendment. In came the era of flappers and the seductive images of drinking which served as a critical images that depicted what it meant to have good time. The temperance message did not disappear, but depiction of alcoholism was no longer viewed through the single lens of the temperance message.

When serious portrayals of alcoholism returned to the stage, it was through the pen of Eugene O’Neill, whose treatment of alcoholism was fully realized, insightful and
full of all of the complications and contradictions inherent in addictive behavior. Few, if any, of his plays do not address one aspect of alcoholism and addiction or another and his play *Long Day’s Journey into Night* (1939), written after Prohibition was repealed (1935), reveals the social change in attitude about alcohol as the worst of addictions. Alcohol, restored to legality was acceptable, and the men in the play did not hold back drinking, whereas, Mary Tyrone (a return to the often used name of the drunkard’s victim), is posited as the family’s problem, their shame. Drugs, having remained illegal after prohibition was repealed, became the “problematic” addiction. Mary Tyrone’s troublesome depiction is a holdover from nineteenth century portrayals that disparaged a woman when she was an addict. This social stigma remained, and she continued to be seen as a much worse case and any man who engaged in the same behaviors. It was not until Tennessee Williams, and the tragic heroine Blanche DuBois that a slight turn in the gendered judgment of alcoholism started to rearrange itself.

In order to fully understand how the departures in the depiction of alcoholism that came from O’Neill and Williams were so ground breaking, it is critical to have articulated the type from which the departure sprang. The objective of this study has been to articulate those characteristics, and to define the prevailing depiction of an alcoholic as he appeared on the stage during the nineteenth century. This study has been intended to make way for further examination of how alcoholism has been portrayed on the American Stage, especially the ways it changed during the twentieth century, and how those changes reflected the changing attitudes of Americans toward alcoholism.
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APPENDIX

SYNOPSES OF PLOTS

THE DRUNKARD; OR, THE FALLEN SAVED
A Moral Domestic Drama. Adapted by W. H. Smith
First performed 1844, published 1847

Cast of Characters

Edward Middleton
Lawyer Cribbs
William Dowton
Farmer Gates
Farmer Stevens
Old Johnson
Sam
First Loafer
Second Loafer
Mr. Rencelaw,
Landlord
Bar Keeper
Watchman
Mary Wilson
Agnes Dowton, a maniac
Mrs. Wilson
Patience
Julia, daughter of Mary and Middleton
Miss Spindle, an old maid
Villagers, Loafers, Watchmen, &C.
Synopsis of Plot

Act 1

Lawyer Cribbs arrives at the cottage where Mary and Mrs. Wilson have lived for years. Mr. Wilson died recently and the women fear being turned out by Edward Middleton, the young landlord. Cribbs warns the women that Middleton is “giddy, wild and reckless” (253).

Mary observes Cribs and Middleton as they speak of the women’s situation. Cribbs accuses Middleton of forgiving Mary their debt so he can take advantage of her beauty. Middleton defends Mary’s honor, highly offended at Cribbs’ implications. Once Cribbs leaves, Mary presents Middleton with all of the money the women have, but Middleton tells her to keep it as a portion of her dowry, instantly struck by Mary’s beauty and purity.

Miss Spindle, an old maid, fancies that Edward Middleton will come to court her. Edward’s half brother, William discourages her ideas, but she thinks he is mistaken.

On the day of Mary Wilson and Edward Middleton’s wedding, Lawyer Cribbs conspires to get himself into Middleton’s good graces and then bring him to a bar-room, planning to feed him liquor to turn him into a drunkard. He tries to entice William to have a drink, but William refuses. Agnes, William’s crazy sister comes into the scene. She witnessed a
crime Cribbs committed and then went crazy when her fiancée died from drinking. Cribs grabs her and almost strikes her with his cane, but William intervenes.

Mary and Middleton marry.

Act 2
Miss Spindle tells Cribbs she feels that Middleton has gone back on a promise of marriage to her. When Cribbs presses her for details and proof, she cannot provide them and he storms out in a huff.

Two local farmers discuss how Middleton has skipped church services and has spent Sundays at the tavern lately, speculating about how good that can be. William defends him, saying it’s not anything to worry about.

In a country bar-room, Cribbs buys rounds, feeding liquor to Middleton, and secretly throwing his own liquor on the floor. Edward get quite drunk, and has a fight in the bar, in a blackout. Cribbs sneaks out and Middleton is about to be thrown out of the bar when William arrives to take Edward home.

Cribbs admits his plan to ruin Middleton is working. William says he is sorry Mary will have to see Middleton in this condition with her mother sick as she is. Middleton arrives and says he is aware that he is in the grip of alcohol, that it is making him a different man than he wants to be. His guilt drives him to seek more liquor for relief. He finds a bottle
he has hidden in a tree and finishes it off. Cribbs arrives and says to Middleton it would be better if her does not go home in this condition feeding him yet more liquor.

In the cottage, Mary is beside herself, her mother probably won’t make it through the night and Edward is not home. Little Julia tells her not to cry, asks if grandmother will go to heaven soon. Edward arrives very drunk, and when he learns that Mrs. Wilson is very ill, admits that he is in part to blame. Making excuses, he says he slipped and fell and hit his head and that is why he is in that condition. Mrs. Wilson groans and dies, and Middleton, unable to live with his own guilt, tells Mary she should cast him out and never call him husband. She begs him to stay but he rushes out of the house.

Act 3
Now in New York, Cribbs pursues Middleton thinking it will be easy to get him to commit some illegal act that will be Middleton’s ruin. Cribbs tells Middleton that his wife doesn’t miss him at all, in fact she pities him. Cribbs tries to get him to commit forgery in order to avenge himself, but Middleton refuses, even though he is starving he will not go that far.

Cribbs runs into Miss Spindle who thinks it is a real shame and degrading that Mary Middleton has to take in washing and sewing to survive. Middleton meets up with some loafers who have scraped together enough money for a few drinks.
In the bar, Middleton and the others act in a very rowdy manner and the barkeep asks them to leave. The men fight.

Mary is found in a wretched garret, very cold and Julia starving. She is sewing to get a little money to feed the child. Cribbs enters and he tells her how degraded her husband has become. She defends him, saying that yes intemperance is terrible, but he is a good man. Cribbs tries to rape her, and only when William arrives is she saved from him. William tells Mrs. Middleton he will try to find her husband.

Middleton in the hands of watchmen, William causes diversion and then sends them after Cribbs.

Act 4

Middleton wakes up, still half drunk, asking the landlord for more brandy. When he refuses, Middleton curses him as the poisoner of the village, and attacks him. William again intervenes and comes to the landlord’s aid. Middleton has a severe case of delirium tremens. William goes for help, and Rencelaw, the philanthropist enters. He entreats Middleton to amend his life by taking the pledge of sobriety. Middleton thinks the picture looks bright and agrees to go with Rencelaw.

Cribbs sends a boy to cash the check he has forged a signature on to the bank to draw upon Rencelaw’s account.
Rencelaw is stopped by a messenger from the bank, inquiring about the validity of the signature. Rencelaw sends William to be with Middleton while he goes to catch Cribbs in the act of forgery.

Edward Middleton, restored, dressed well expresses gratitude to Rencelaw. Mary and Julia enter and the family is reunited. The all call for the blessing of Mr. Rencelaw.

Act 5
Two farmers discuss the gossip: that Cribbs had been accused in a case of heavy forgery against Rencelaw, but was still on the run. They also speak of Middleton’s sobriety, although they say it is still fragile. The villagers circle around to intercept Cribbs. Agnes is reported to have regained her sanity, and will be able to testify to other wrongdoings by Cribbs. Police officers enter chasing Cribbs.

Cribbs is caught. Rencelaw offers him repentance, but Cribbs refuses.

The family is reunited and returned to the cottage, all happy and tranquil. “Home Sweet Home” ends the play.
TEN NIGHTS IN A BAR-ROOM
Adapted by William W. Pratt, Esq.
Published 1958

Cast of Characters

Mr. Romaine, A Philanthropist
Simon Slade, Landlord of the “Sickle and Sheaf” Inn
Willie Hammond, Squire Hammond’s son
Sample Switchel, A Yankee Tippler, very much alive
Harvey Green, A Gambler
Frank Slade, The Innkeeper’s Son
Joe Morgan, A Drunkard’s Son
Mrs. Slade, The Innkeeper’s Wife
Mrs. Morgan, The Drunkard’s Wife
Mary Morgan, The Drunkard’s Daughter
Mehitable Cartwright, A Sentimental Yankee Girl

Synopsis of Plot

Act 1

Mr. Romaine, in a visit through Cederville, learns that Simon Slade, once owner of the local mill, is now the landlord of the “Sickle and Sheaf.” Slade is pleased with his new position in town, and sees no danger in running a tavern, although Slade’s wife is afraid of what tavern life will do to their son, Frank. Joe Morgan, once successful, now downtrodden, berates Slade for taking his last dime but then having no use for him once his money has been spent on drink. As the men argue in the tavern, Morgan’s daughter arrives to fetch her father home.

During his second visit to town, Romaine cautions Switchel, a local and frequent visitor to the tavern, about drinking. Slade still seems satisfied with his ownership of the inn, but resents the continued appearance of Morgan there, now quite far gone in his drinking.
Slade and Morgan’s dispute turns violent, and Slade throws a glass, missing Morgan, but hitting Morgan’s daughter, Mary, in the head. She cries, “Father! Dear father! They have killed me!”

Act 2

In the next act, following a peevish argument between tavern locals, Mary asks Morgan to promise to not go to the tavern anymore as he sits at her bedside, worried about her injury. Mrs. Slade visits, guilty for her husband’s actions and offers to pay for a doctor. Having ceased drinking several hours ago, Morgan has a severe case of delirium tremens. Mrs. Morgan tries to tend to him, and little Mary raises her hands in prayer. Back at the tavern, Slade complains about Mary coming to the tavern at just the wrong time. Mrs. Slade tells Morgan of Mary’s grave condition, but Simon grumbles, in effect blaming the victim. Green and Willie Hammond have a drunken fight, and Green stabs Hammond, who staggers out the tavern door.

Mrs. Morgan has watched over Mary and Morgan throughout the night. Mary wakes asking for her father, to whom she confides she know she will die. Morgan promises once again that he will never enter a tavern again, at which point Mary sings a hymn and dies.

Romaine returns ten years later to learn that Slade was acquitted of Mary Morgan’s murder, but that Morgan has not returned to drinking and is running the mill. Romaine remarks that one only has to “remain firm in the good resolutions” to stay sober. Slade appears in tattered clothing, complaining that the temperance folks have ruined his
business. Frank, Slade’s son, starts a fight with Romaine. Slade tries to apologize, but

Frank comes after his own father, killing him. Romaine pays a visit to Morgan,
encouraging him to carry the temperance message, supporting political action against the
liquor trade.

THE FATAL GLASS; OR, THE CURSE OF DRINK
by James McCloskey
Brooklyn Park Theatre, 1872
Bowery Theatre 1874
Published 1872

Cast of Characters

Ambrose Verney, a young miller
Joe Bennett a drunken fellow
Joe Shakes, who loves his glass of good beer
Walter Lisle, a young beginner
Tom Finch, an old offender
Apple Jack, the worst kind
Steven
Jack Sander
Bill Orton
Jim Sharp
Joe Small

Mabel Grey, the drunkard’s wife, God help her
Fannie Shivers, who trembles at the name of rum
Emma Lisle, a young bride
Spirit of Temperance

Sarah Sanders
Julia Orton
Fanny Sharpe
Susan Small, all strong-minded women
Deborah
Synopsis of Plot

Act 1

On Mabel and Ambrose’ wedding day, Ambrose is finally convinced to take one last drink before he embarks on the temperate life he promised to his fiancée. Joe Bennet seeks revenge on Mabel because she spurned his advances. Bennett adds opium to Ambrose’s drink, greatly increasing the potency of that final glass. Fannie Shivers reproaches Bob for promising her parents he would stop drinking when he asked for her hand, yet taking up drink again as soon as Fannie is distracted. Mabel’s mother warns her against taking Ambrose at his word that he will stop drinking, her father’s broken promise should be warning enough, but Mabel trusts Ambrose. Mabel finds Ambrose passed out drunk, suspecting Joe Bennet’s “devilish hand.” The Spirit of Temperance announces the play will show us what might have been. When next we see Mabel, she is married, waiting up for Ambrose to return from the tavern. Her child is hungry and her home is cold and bare. Ambrose arrives home in the company of Bennet and Bob, all drunk. Ambrose passes out, Bob leaves and then Bennet shows Mabel the deed to her home. Now owner, he tells her she will be evicted since she chose Ambrose, the drunkard, over him. In an argument about Bob’s drinking, Fannie tells him she intends to gather a group of women together to smash all the bottles and kegs in the local tavern. She also says she intends to leave him since he can’t even feed her. When he pulls broken bar crackers out of his pocket, she weeps. Ambrose is discovered in a state of withdrawal from liquor. He spies Mabel’s wedding ring on the table, which she has set aside to sell so she can feed her child, and nabs it, leaving the room. Mabel returns only to discover her missing ring. Joe enters, trying once last time to intimidate Mabel into accepting him.
When she refuses him, he orders her out of the home. She seizes an axe and aims a blow at him, but Ambrose enters just at that moment and receives the blow as Bennet flees.

Act 2

Mabel and Ambrose are living in a wretched room. Ambrose is very drunk and staggering, Mabel is weak with starvation, but goes out seeking food for her child. Bob and Fannie are fighting about his drinking again. He has pawned everything they own for drink, and at the end of the scene, seizes her beautiful curls and cuts them off to sell for liquor. In the next scene, we see Joe Bennet about to get married to a young woman. At the ceremony, Ambrose arrives looking for food for his starving child. He also warns Emma Lisle, Bennet’s bride, about how evil Bennet is. Lisle, gives Ambrose some money to buy bread, but Mabel enters with the child already dead in her arms. Ambrose promises revenge on Bennet. Fannie makes good on her promise to organize an attack on the tavern, and she and several local women smash up the place. Ambrose and Mabel wander a snowy landscape, knocking on the door of the poor house. Mabel collapses, and Ambrose says he will commit suicide from despair, but she warns him that if he does so, they will have no chance to reunite in the afterlife, and dies.

Act 3

At the top of act three, Joe Bennet is planning to flee from the brother of his new bride, having deceived and embezzled money from her. Ambrose enters the biergarten where Bennet is plotting, looking for a handout, and learns of Bennet’s plot. Bob and Fannie fight again about his drinking, and this time Bob is carted away by the police. Ambrose
decides to have his revenge, and after following Bennet home, murders him by throwing
him off a roof. Ambrose comes to in prison, shackled to the floor, and headed to the
gallows. The Spirit of Temperance reminds us that this would have been the end of the
story for Ambrose, but he dreamed it while passed out from the opium added to his drink.
He promises to never take another glass, and the wedding will proceed as planned.

THREE YEARS IN A MAN TRAP
By Charles H. Morton
Published 1873

Cast of Characters

Harry Glenn, a Young Mechanic
Tom Lloyd, co-owner of “The Retreat”
Hiram Jones, co-owner of “The Retreat”
William J. Mullen, Prison Agent
Charles Heritage, founder of the Temperance Blessing
Joe Quigian, a Bummer
Bill Munchen, a Bummer
John Glum, a Bar-keeper
Ebenezer Holdfast, an old sinner
Perry Flint, a broken-down drunkard
Judge
Fred Lawson, a gambler
Mark Curtis, a Gambler
Jacob, a Mechanic
Jerry, a Fourth-Ward Rough
Alfred, a Policeman
Barney, a Policeman
Dennis, an Irishman
Young John Ashley, a Young Sport
Young Tom Lloyd, A Young Boy
Nettie Glenn, Wife of Harry
Maggie Lloyd, with song “Driven From Home”
Eugene LaFont, A New Orleans Creole
Mrs. Lloyd, Wife of Tom
Jody O’Gallagher, From the Old Sod
Nellie Glenn, A Little Girl
Synopsis of Plot

Act 1

Tom Lloyd and Hiram Jones are drinking at a bar when they are inspired to investigate the possibility of opening their own bar so they can profit from it. Jones retrieves an old acquaintance, Perry Flint, who used to be a barkeep, but who is now broken down from drinking back to the bar so that the men can quiz him about the business. Before they ask him about the business, though, they buy him a drink against his protestations and then mock him as a pledge-signer until he takes the drink. He had sworn off, and had made it three weeks until this slip. Once he drinks, they discuss the profitability of saloon keeping, but Perry doesn’t recommend the business. Meanwhile two “bummers,” Joe and Bill try to order drinks on credit, and when denied, use false recognition, and false camaraderie about serving at Gettysburg to get other men to buy them drinks. Perry’s discussion with Lloyd and Jones ends, and Perry joins the group, but curses Glum for serving poison to other men, and curses the law that allows liquor to be sold. Glum gets angry and strikes Perry, and then goes for his gun, but is stopped by Harry Glenn. Joe and Bill steal a bunch of whiskey and run out. Glen calls out stop thief, and needs to be stopped by Harry again from committing violence.

Joe and Bill are sitting, drinking the stolen liquor. Two policemen discover them, and question them about where they got the bottles. They don’t believe the answers they get, and cart Joe and Bill off to the station house. Perry enters and debates whether to go home to his wife or to seek out more liquor, now that he has broken his promise, he is
ashamed to go home, and so should have another drink to deaden his guilt. Glum turns up, and Perry accuses Glum of taking all his money when he had some, and then kicking him out of his bar once all the money was gone. Glum pulls out his pistol. The men struggle and Perry gets a hold of it. Perry shoots Glum by mistake, then realizes what he has done and runs away. A crowd gathers, and Glum is carried off on a stretcher.

Mrs. Lloyd complains that her husband is late coming home. One of her sons says he thinks Lloyd is at Glum’s saloon. He admits to having been there himself and to taking a sip of beer. Mrs. Lloyd cuffs him and scolds him for drinking, lying and being in the saloon at all. Nettie Glenn, wife of Harry Glenn, arrives fretting that her husband is very changed since he has been drinking. Lloyd arrives home. His older daughter expresses a desire to marry a school-teacher, but her father disapproves because teachers don’t make much money. Maggie retires and Lloyd wonders what his sweet daughter will think of him once she finds out he is planning to open a barroom. Holdfast, the landlord of the saloon property, holds Lloyd to a hard bargain for rental of the saloon because Lloyd doesn’t have starter money. Glum’s wife wails for her husband’s death—and Holdfast offers Jones and Lloyd Glum’s saloon on the same terms. Maggie returns and won’t believe her father is undertaking to run a saloon. Mrs. Lloyd and Maggie beg Lloyd not to bring “this blight” upon them, but Lloyd has his mind made up. In a warning we are sure to see enacted, Maggie says they can then say farewell to their happiness.
Act 2

At Lloyd and Jones’ bar, all of the familiar characters from scene one appear, including Joe and Bill. Whiskey is ordered and drunk. Harry Glenn comes in and orders only lemonade. The others goad him about it, but he says liquor had been treating him poorly and that he didn’t want to end up like Perry, who had recently died in prison of the DTs after confessing to Glum’s death. Young Ashley has been playing cards with Joe and Bill, who try to cheat him, but his father approaches and he is hustled upstairs. Some roughnecks come in and refuse to pay for drinks, and Tom Lloyd pulls out a revolver. A row is broken up by Mullen, a prison agent, who blames rum for the criminal aspect of the roughs. Jones disagrees, and is about to throw Mullen out when Harry intervenes on his behalf and calms the situation. But Mullen leaves with a warning against rum sellers, and tells men to sign their own “Declaration of Independence,” (equating the pledge with patriotism.)

Mullen and Alfred, a policemen, have an ideological discussion about drinking, finding 90% of all crime traced to drinking, the murder of Glum, the evils of running a tavern, and asking God to help the poor women and children. Alfred moves on and Curtis and Lawson, gamblers enter, Lawson is drunk. Lawson complains that he is drunk because he lost all his bank the night before in a raid run by Mullen and the temperance folks, who made such a stink with the authorities that he lost his bribe-taking policemen and then lost all his loot. He pledges revenge and then notices Mullen standing right there. He draws a revolver and aims. Mullen stares him down and reminds him that he has justice and the backing of many of the upstanding citizens of Philadelphia who will pursue him
and send him to the gallows if he shoots. A woman named Eugene rushes up to attack
Lawson, who strikes her and flees. The police go after Lawson and Mullen comforts
Eugene, learning that Lawson seduced her and promised her marriage if she would leave
her home in New Orleans and come to Philadelphia with him. She came and found
herself starving and abandoned. Mullen tries to persuade her not to go after him, for she
aims to murder him, but she rushes off. He declares that he will get the police to look
after her.

At the bar, Jones tries to get Lloyd’s son not to drink, but Young Tom says his father
thinks the saloon is all the education a young man needs, so Jones relents. Harry, Joe and
Bill arrive—all drunk. When Jones asks, Harry says he was doing well until his brother in
law hassled him about drinking even when he hadn’t—he decided to teach him and his
wife a lesson and get good and drunk. Joe and Bill steal all the food set out on the bar.
Holdfast comes in for a drink—very jumpy. Harry makes fun of him, and then Eugene
rushes in and takes a good look at Holdfast, declares it’s not him and rushes out. The men
mock him and he leaves. Young Tom enters in the company of a policemen who has
arrested him. Just then Lloyd arrives and refuses to pay the fine, sending his son Young
Tom to jail. As the child goes, he says he would be a better boy if he hadn’t been raised
in a saloon. Lawson runs in pursued by Eugene, who stabs him in the neck. Jones and
Lloyd want the body out of the saloon—Lloyd heads for the station house for a
policeman while Harry and Joe and Bill get belligerent and drunkenly angry, demanding
to be served drinks for their silence about the event. In a violent struggle that is sparked
when Harry calls Jones a liar, Jones strikes Harry on the head with a bottle. Just then,
Mullen arrives with Harry’s wife Nettie. Jones declares that Harry brought it upon himself, but Nettie curses Jones for selling the thing that took Harry away from his family, lost all his money and resulted in his being hit.

Act 3
Maggie weeps from seeing her beloved school-teacher with another women since her father started selling liquor. Nettie enters and begrudges Maggie even the luxury of weeping. Nettie resents Maggie because she lives in luxury and has food and nice things that her father’s saloon has purchased while she and her daughter are starving and destitute. Maggie gives her some money and promises to ask her father not to sell Harry any more liquor. Nettie leaves for a long walk home to her hovel, and Maggie sings “Driven from Home.”

This scene begins with Harry in bed having a nightmare, which is reminiscent of delirium tremens scenes. Harry wakes and calls out for Nettie, saying he will die if left alone. She arrives and Harry promises never to drink again. Nettie recounts sitting with Harry the night before as he went through a fit of DTs, how horrible it was and how she had to physically keep him from throwing himself out the window. But Harry cannot relax and asks Nettie to get him something to calm down—perhaps from a doctor. She leaves, and after a little while he thinks only a drink will calm his nerves. He remembers a bottle of gin he left in the closet, and then delivers a long monologue, which reveals the thinking of the alcoholic before taking a drink—the remorse and pledges to himself and the justifications and how he talks himself into drinking. Harry drinks many shots of liquor in
succession, falls down, dragging a table with him, which starts a big fire in the apartment. The ceiling caves in. Nettie returns to discover the fire, Harry drunk and her infant child in the cradle dead from the falling ceiling.

Act 4

Two men who used to be associated with Harry when he worked at the bindery spot him and try to avoid him because they know he will try to bum a quarter. He sees them and asks, but they refuse—they ask him why he can’t leave drink alone, and he reveals some of the symptoms of alcoholism (can’t—will die without it). They say let him die then. Holdfast enters and refuses to help Harry also. Harry feeling desperate and sorry for himself, kneels to prey to God for forgiveness. Just then temperance singers are heard from the statehouse in the background, like singing from heaven or from angels. A character named Heritage offers to help Harry, and administers the temperance pledge to him, which he signs and says he will keep. Heritage says he will clothe and feed Harry, and find him a home, but first they should attend a “blessing” which seemed to be some kind of temperance meeting.

Joe and Bill are looking for drinks. They have tried all of their regular options, and are getting desperate. Little Nellie, Harry’s surviving daughter comes along with money to buy tea and sugar at the grocers. Joe and Bill not only steal the money, but take the clothes and shoes off of the child as she tries to get away. After a humorous discussion about where to spend their newly acquired money: shoes, coats, landlord or whiskey, or some combination thereof, not surprisingly, they settle on spending it all on whiskey.
Maggie, miserable from walking in the snow, arrives at her father’s saloon to entreat him once more to stop selling alcohol. Maggie sees her father still selling and screams madly and runs into the night. Lloyd goes after her. Young Ashley is very drunk, and Jones means to get him home before his father knows. A policemen refuses to take him to the station or help get him home, telling Jones that he helped to create the mess, he has to get the kid home. They exit, and Maggie returns freezing and not recognizing her surroundings. She collapses in the snow, close to death. Lloyd and Jones both return, and find her. They call a doctor, but she wakes, saying it is too late, that she hears death coming. On her deathbed she once again entreats her father to stop selling rum, and dies. Lloyd at first is in shock, and then falls on her crying wildly.

Act 5

A trial scene in which Jones is sentenced for violating laws against selling liquor on Sundays, and an African American is sentenced for using a razor against his wife, an Irishman is sentenced for brawling with his wife, but is let off because Mullen intervenes. Joe and Bill face the Judge for the theft of money and clothes from little Nellie. They are released to Mullen, who will administer the pledge to them.

A brief glimpse into prison where the folks just convicted are locked up.

In prison, Young Tom is brought into the cell where Jones is serving his sentence. YT says his father is a drunkard and his mother is in despair since Maggie died. He got
locked up for arguing with a bartender when he tried to serve court papers to him for violation of Sunday blue laws. Jones says his whole life has been ruined since he opened the saloon. Mullen vouches for YT and has him released. Mullen then speaks to Jones about the increase in intemperance in the last 20 years (since 1847), about the criminal increase blamed on alcohol, and on the difficulty the temperance people have in keeping up with so many saloons. He describes the social damage. Lloyd is then drunkenly led into the cell. He reports that the saloon is lost, and then he calls for brandy, startled by the crazy calls from the DTs ward. Lloyd then has a fit of DTs himself and dies as they try to take him out to the DT ward.

Two men discuss the dissolution of Lloyd and Jones’ saloon. Joe and Bill enter in plain but clean clothes, complaining that they are difficult to get used to. The policemen are suspicious of Joe and Bill, especially when they admit that they did not pay for the clothing themselves. Mullen intervenes before the police can take the men to the station, and tells them that it is now their duty to help to reform other men; that the prayers of the families of the men they help to reform will always be with them.

Domestic peace is restored in Harry’s home. Nettie is confident that he will come at 7, and he does. He expresses regret about their dead child. Heritage arrives and introduces a series of tableaus: Happy Glenn family, then Lloyd’s funeral with crying wife and children, and then angelic Maggie hovering above.
TWO MEN OF SANDY BAR
By Bret Harte
Performed and Published 1876

Cast of Characters
“Sandy,” son of Alexander Morton, Sr.
John Oakhurst, His former partner, impersonating the prodigal son, “Sandy”
Col. Starbottle, Alexander Morton, Sr.’s legal advisor
Old Morton, Alexander Morton, Sr.
Don Jose, Father of Jovita Castro
Capper, a Detective
Concho, Major-domo of Don Jose’s rancho
York, an old friend of Oakhurst
Pritchard, an Australian Convict
Soapy, Silky, his pals
Jackson, Confidential Clerk of Alexander Morton, Sr., and confederate of Pritchard
Hop Sing, a Chinese Laundryman
Miss Mary Morris, The Schoolmistress of Red Gulch, in love with Sandy, and cousin of
Alexander Morton, Sr.
Dona Jovita Castro, in love with John Oakhurst, and daughter of Don Jose
The Dutchess, Wife of Pritchard, illegally married to Sandy, and former “flame” of John
Oakhurst
Manuela, Servant of Castro, Maid to Dona Jovita

Synopsis of Plot

Act 1

A drunken Sandy, known on the ranch as Diego, our protagonist, has promised to help
Dona Jovita sneak off the ranch to meet her secret lover, John Oakhurst. Her father Don
Jose has forbidden her to see him. We learn that Dona Jovita found Sandy on the streets,
a drunken vagabond and brought him to the ranch. Don Jose hangs around the courtyard
to the ranch because he suspects his daughter is going to try to sneak out, that her lover is
interested only in the property she will inherit. Sandy speaks insolently to Don Jose, and
Don Jose decides to kick him off the ranch. The men exit and Dona Jovita enters,
discovering that her plan has been interrupted. Sandy returns and tells Jovita that her man
should take her whether her father disowns her or not. Sandy discovers that her lover is
the same man who betrayed him in business, Oakhurst. Don Jose returns and Sandy leaves.

Col. Starbottle and Old Morton arrive at the ranch seeking his prodigal son. Morton tells of his own years of intemperance and loss of family and home. They meet Manuela and ask her about the drunken man they passed upon arrival. She tells then he was dismissed for his drinking, and they wonder if he may be the prodigal they seek. Alone, Starbottle conspires to drum up a prodigal with a similar drinking pattern to Morton’s, sensing that Old Morton is getting discouraged, and Starbottle’s position depends on finding the prodigal. Don Jose places his daughter in the care of his guest, retiring.

Jovita sneaks back into the courtyard to try to escape, Morton follows her, and watching discovers that Oakhurst has snuck inside the walls of the ranch to meet up with Jovita. Oakhurst tells Jovita of his drinking and gambling, admits he has had reason to hide his identity from her father, but asks her to run off with him. Old Morton overhears and is hopeful that this man is in fact his son. Jovita exits and Oakhurst becomes aware of Morton, surprising him and holding him at knifepoint. Morton says he can run off with Jovita with conditions—that Morton is his long lost father. Morton says he came thousands of miles to save him (his son). Oakhurst willingly steps into the role of prodigal, and leaves the ranch with Old Morton allowing him to think he has found his son.
Act 2

Starbottle arrives in Red Gulch looking for Old Morton’s lost cousin, whom he had turned out of his home to fend for herself when he was a drunkard. He delivers a letter from Morton trying to make amends for his conduct. She then finds flowers left for her by Sandy. Sandy turns up and he and Starbottle get into a fight—Sandy trying to prevent Starbottle from knocking on Mary’s door. Mary opens the door, startling the men who immediately hide their behavior.

Concho, who works at the ranch, has also been investigating Sandy’s identity and has found evidence that he is the real Alexander Morton, Jr. Concho is about to approach Mary’s door to ask her about the man she knows as Sandy, but sees Starbottle there, and so retreats. Starbottle inquires whether Mary is willing to accept Morton’s offer to restore her to the family and to provide for her financially. She declines, but learns that Sandy also goes by another name.

As Sandy is doing chores for Mary, she asks him about his hidden identity. She tells him the story of how Old Morton caused the ruin of her family, and that she has rejected his apologies and invitations. Sandy says she did wrong, that she shouldn’t judge who can and cannot be sincere in his reform. She asks why he as not reformed, then. She goes on to say that her cousin is reformed and looking for his lost son. Sandy seems hopeful, but then when Mary reveals that the prodigal was “found.” Sandy asks what the name of this “found” prodigal was, and when he learns it is his own name, he is stunned enough so
that she thinks he is drunk, and is disappointed because he had promised not to drink. She then believes better of him, and decides to accept Old Morton’s offer to get to the bottom of things.

The Duchess asks Mary to take care of her child, whose secret father is the prodigal son. The Duchess tells Mary she was once happily married to Alexander Morton, but she ran away with his business partner, John Oakhurst, and her husband took to drink. Still not knowing that Oakhurst is acting as an imposter in the prodigal role, Mary tells The Duchess that the prodigal has been found, and that she will make things right. The Duchess reveals that the real prodigal is Sandy. Sandy overhears, and Mary asks him about it. When he admits he is father to the child, Mary gives him back the flowers he brought her and says goodbye forever. Starbottle arrives to extend the invitation from Old Morton one more time, and this time Mary accepts. Sandy agonizes over all that he has learned: that his father has sought him, that his son is in Mary’s care, that Mary will go to his father’s home, and that someone is impersonating him, and he fears that man will win Mary’s love. He doesn’t know how he will prove that he is the real Alexander Morton, but Concho, who has the evidence, steps in and says he will prove it. Still not knowing that Oakhurst is the imposter, Sandy says he will find Oakhurst, who knows Sandy better than any man alive even though he ran off with his wife—to help him be restored to his father’s side. Concho reveals that the man who has stepped into the prodigal position as an imposter is Oakhurst. Sandy faints.
Old Morton has received all kinds of letters with business offers for his prodigal son. Oakhurst was up all night securing deposits and deals at the bank. Morton is unhappy at the smell of tobacco smoke in the office. A note arrives from Starbottle announcing successful mission to bring Mary back in the company of a child. Don Jose arrives with a letter from Concho saying that the man Old Morton thinks is his son is an imposter, but Old Morton says he has received many such a letter. Old Morton learns that some money was stolen. An associate questions him about his “son’s” business associate, but Old Morton trusts his son implicitly. His confidant asks if he could arrange to simply observe this evening’s proceedings by hiding in the adjacent room. Oakhurst and an associate who knew him before he turned “prodigal” make business deals. Oakhurst laments that he has been dedicated to Old Morton for a year, and yet still sees the old man search his face trying to recognize his features. But it will all be “over” in a few days, when Old Morton will sign the whole business over to him, and then he can resume his old identity.

Starbottle, Mary and The Duchess all are admitted into the room, to wait for Oakhurst. In a shock to both Oakhurst and to The Duchess, they recognize each other; Oakhurst is the man she left Sandy for. Temporarily, Oakhurst assures Mary and Starbottle that all is well, but then when alone, The Duchess say she did not know he had taken Alexander Morton’s name. Oakhurst reveals that the Duchess had been married before she married Sandy—that she deceived both Sandy and Oakhurst, which is why he left her—it is enough that he will take in and raise the child. When they all leave, Oakhurst again struggles because of his deception and precarious position keeping his identity hidden. In a pre-arranged robbery in which the robbers have double-crossed Oakhurst, they tie him up and rob the bank. They bring in an extremely drunk Sandy to leave in the room when
they exit. The police who have been watching from the other room enter and arrest the robbers and reveal Oakhurst’s ruse. Sandy enters and Old Morton thinks he is one of the robbers—he goes to shoot Sandy, but Oakhurst intervenes. Old Morton insists he answer why but Oakhurst stands speechless.

Act 4

Sandy is passed out in Oakhurst’s private room, brought by a policeman. Oakhurst has sent for Starbottle to make the arrangements to have Sandy restored to his father, his wife and his child. Sandy wakes and recognizes Oakhurst. He asks after “her” and Oakhurst tells him The Duchess has left him to go back to her first husband, Pritchard. Sandy says he was asking about Mary. Oakhurst tells Sandy he is going to now meet his father. Sandy is terrified because he does not want Old Morton to have to endure seeing him drunk over all the other trials he has been through. Sandy hides when Old Morton enters. After telling Oakhurst he knows everything (clearly except that he is the imposter) Old Morton asks for a glass of water. Oakhurst serves him liquor instead. With a little drink in him, Old Morton encourages his “son” to marry Jovita, his true love. Oakhurst sees an out. Sandy overhears the plan, and emerges from his hiding place. The two men fight over whether to give Old Morton more liquor, Oakhurst wanting to quiet him with it, and Sandy throwing it down.

Concho and Don Jose have come to confront Oakhurst about his deception. Sandy arrives, announced by Starbottle as Alexander Morton, jr. Sandy presents a document releasing “Alexander Morton” from his betrothal to Jovita, making way for Oakhurst,
now exposed, to marry her. Don Jose and Concho feel betrayed, having sought a marriage to a wealthy banker.

Mary and Jovita talk about Jovita’s betrothal to “Alexander Morton” (both women still believe the imposter). Mary asks what if she were in love with a drunkard, what would she do? Jovita say love differs from all other emotions, but the Mary must have a virtuous lover, not a drunkard.

At the ceremony when Old Morton was to sign the business over to his son and release him to marry Jovita, Starbottle reveals that the child is Sandy’s to Mary, but not the identity switch. Mary speaks coolly to Sandy because she knows the child is his. He is torn and wants to tell all, but has promised to wait until the ceremony. The paper revoking the engagement to Jovita is revealed to her and Jovita weeps. Both women are reassured that all will be explained.

Old Morton shows up to the ceremony falling-down drunk. Sandy, having sworn off drink and now embodying the role of prodigal and businessman is in despair that his father may not recognize him because of his drunkenness, but he does. Both me are revealed, but Old Morton throws them both out as swindlers. The old man falls, and Sandy rushes forward asking forgiveness. Oakhurst admits his deception. Jovita cries for him to take her with him, but he say he used deceit to try to get her and so does not deserve her. But Don Jose intervenes and a coach takes Oakhurst and Jovita away,
presumably to marry. Starbottle explains to Old Morton the situation, and the old man, somewhat restored to sobriety, gives blessing for Mary and Sandy to marry after a year.

ON THE BRINK; OR, THE RECLAIMED HUSBAND
By H. Elliott McBride
Published 1878

Cast of Characters

Mr. David Thaxter, President of the Knoxville Farmer’s Club
Mrs. Ellen Thaxter, His Wife
Harry Thaxter, their son
Mary Effington, Harry’s betrothed wife
Miss Roxalena Thaxter, an old maid
Jotham Weeler, a yankee
Ebeneezer Affledaffle, a bashful widower
Benjamin Barker, a member of the Farmer’s Club
John Davis, a bar keeper
Ben Wood
Dave Black
Sam Clark
Jake Dean
John Bailey
Im Rankin, all bar-room loafers

Synopsis of Plot

Act 1

Thaxter and the rest of the Farmer’s Club have finished their meeting and are drinking and making non-sensical speeches at the tavern. The men drink several rounds of drinks and end up quite drunk. Someone insults Thaxter’s speech, calling him drunk and the men end up fighting.
Mrs. Thaxter laments her turn in fortunes since her husband has started to drink again. Mr. Thaxter denies being drunk or getting into a fight the night before. He says he is thinking of running for state legislature. Mrs. Thaxter implores him to turn away from drinking and ambition, and resume the happy life they have led up to this point. He denies having any trouble with liquor. Roxalena, Thaxter’s sister reprimands him for his drinking and ambition. Thaxter says that if he is elected, she may win the heart of a legislator, and so she warms to the idea. Jotham, Roxlena’s counterpart, arrives to flirt a bit, but she discourages his embraces and so he leaves.

Harry’s fiancée, Mary, asks him about news that he had been drinking. She is very disturbed when he admits it, saying he has made the same promise many times before. Harry gets down on his knees and makes a solemn oath to Mary and to God that he will not drink again.

Act 2
Five years later, Roxalena admits that the family has gone down rapidly. Jotham arrives and they start courting again, but Jotham is more inclined to set Roxalena up with an old widower he knows.

Mrs. Thaxter and Mary both suffer from poverty and degradation because of Thaxter’s and Harry’s continued drinking. Mary is very easily startled and seems to be fearful for her safety. Two loafers deliver a very drunk Thaxter to the house, having found him passed out in the snow. Mary talks of throwing herself in the river. Thaxter jumps up,
raving and burning up with thirst for liquor. He has a terrible fit of delirium tremens, becoming violent and terrifying Mary.

In a bar-room scene, Harry and some men play checkers, some of the men fight, and they mock the temperance movement. They continue to drink and Harry gives a very drunken speech, but when he is told to shut up, he gets into a fight and is shot dead.

Mary, clearly insane due to her loss (Harry’s death), continues to speak of suicide. She thinks she might meet Harry there, but then remembers Harry will be in a drunkard’s hell.

Jotham tries to set Roxalena up with Ebeneezer, but it doesn’t work out very well.

Mr. and Mrs. Thaxter with Mary are pictured in a peaceful home setting. Mr. Thaxter, having reformed, trusts in the Lord for guidance and assistance. The family is restored, and things even work out between Roxalena and Ebeneezer.

DRIFTING APART; OR MARY, THE FISHERMEN’S DAUGHTER
By James A. Herne
Produced and published 1888

Cast of Characters

Jack Hepburne, Skipper of “The Dolphin”—rough, but honest, with “a failin’”
Percy Seward, Son of a rich mother whom he loves, a good fellow, but a trifle sentimental
Silas Cummings, Dep’ty Sherriff, Farmacutesist and Claronettist
Harry Merton, of Percy’s set
Aleck Saunders
Josh Willbreck, two of Mary’s fathers
Synopsis of Plot

Act 1

Percy, in Gloucester with his yacht, pursues Mary, enchanted by her. She enjoys him but says his set will never accept her because of her origins, and besides she is betrothed to Jack Hepburne. Percy asks if Mary doesn’t fear Jack’s drinking, but Mary says he has promised to stop once they are married. Percy makes Mary promise that if she ever finds herself in trouble, she will seek him out. He tells himself he must be content to be her friend. Hester enters telling Percy he seems like a man in love. She asks if he has see the touring company perform Ten Nights in a Bar-Room in Boston. She would like to pursue a career on the stage. Silas, her boyfriend, enters and the two of them put on a performance for Percy to try to get his patronage. A group of fishermen enter, spying “The Dolphin” on the horizon. Jack’s ship arrives and he gives Mary a long, passionate kiss. Percy introduces himself. Jack calls for the pastor—he wants to marry Mary right away. A storm comes in quickly, the wedding party scatters. There are several flashes of lightning and then Jack’s ship catches fire. Mary is afraid it is an evil omen. The cast sings “Rock of Ages.”

Act 2
Fifteen months later, Mary and Jack are enjoying Christmas Eve. As they hang stockings, Mary indicates there will be a tiny stocking to hang next Christmas (she is pregnant). She is afraid that if he goes out he will have a drink, but then takes it back, not wanting Jack to think she doesn’t trust him. Jack goes out. Silas and Hester arrive for a visit. They pull out a program that announces their appearance on the stage, inviting Mary and her mother-in-law to come to the show. The leave. Jack staggers in very drunk and passes out. Mary shrieks and falls to the floor. Margaret rises, and Percy appears in the doorway, handsomely dressed for the holiday.

Act 3
Mary is now married to Percy, saying Jack has been “dead” for four years. Percy knows that Jack is missing not dead, and Mary is remorseful in deceiving Percy’s mother about it. Percy reassures her that after four years with no word from Jack, he is surely dead. They are throwing a party. Hester and Silas have made it to the Boston stage and arrive to entertain the party. Silas is mistaken for the help by the guests. After a dance for the guests, Mary looks up and there is Jack. Hester and Silas stare too. Jack tells of running back to sea, of being shipwrecked, and after finally making his way back, heard she was in Boston. He wants her back, but she says he broke his oath and became a drunkard. He says he does not want to ruin what she has made for herself, just to see his daughter. But Mrs. Seward comes upon the conversation. Jack and Mary try to cover up who he really is, but when Little Margaret comes into the room, Jack cannot hide his feelings about her. Realizing that Mary’s husband is still alive and the deceit she used to marry Percy, Mrs. Seward throws Mary out of the house.
Act 4

Jack and Mary in a wretched garret in the North End of Boston are starving and cold.

Jack rushes out to try to find food. Little Margaret has visions of being in heaven with her grandmother. Jack enters with Hester and Silas laden with food, but it is too late, Little Margaret has passed away. Mary then dies from grief. Jack goes crazy weeping over their bodies, he lifts Mary’s body and rushes out of the door.

Act 5

Christmas morning, Jack wakes from a terrible nightmare. He discovers that it was all a dream—all but his taking the drink on Christmas Eve, and asks Mary if she can trust him once more. She says yes, and Hester, Silas and many villagers arrive to wish them Merry Christmas! Percy arrives in a sleigh loaded with gifts.