

**BETWEEN THE DRUNKEN ‘MOTHER OF DESTRUCTION’ AND THE SOBER ‘ANGEL OF THE HOUSE’.  
HIDDEN REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN’S DRINKING IN POLISH AND BRITISH PUBLIC DISCOURSES IN  
THE SECOND HALF OF THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY.**

*Female drunkenness has always been seen as more serious and degrading than the equivalent male excess,  
in spite of the fact that historically male dissipation has led to far greater domestic hardships.*  
(Jean Charles Sournia)

The policing of women’s bodies and minds in the nineteenth century through the rhetoric of responsibility and moral duty was a marked feature of the articles and fiction published in the new periodicals. The choices of women regarding their personal consumption of alcohol were constrained, culturally and legally, by a perceived gender-specific responsibility to the family and community. Women's drinking culture was reduced to two extremes: the fallen drunken woman, ‘mother of destruction’ and the sober mother, ‘the angel of the house’. This project will seek the middle ground between these two extremes to focus on the recreational female drinkers and the rebels. This will allow us to contextualise these extremes and put them in their proper place. Thereby we aim to nuance and balance our understanding of representations of women’s drinking in the second half of the nineteenth century by investigating two extremely different examples of European cultures: Britain, a powerful international player and the scattered nation of Poland fighting for independence after the partitioning.

We will analyse British and Polish discourses on women and alcohol in the second half of the nineteenth century through the social and material networks, exchange of ideas, metaphors, and narrative patterns apparent in public discourses across newspapers, periodicals, fiction, and expert and popular publications. We will examine the creative strategies and rhetorical tricks used by women during this period to encode references to and advice on the consumption of alcohol at a time when restraint and abstinence were considered essential to domestic happiness as part of the gendered discourse on female moral rectitude. To assess the extent to which these discourses relied on ‘moral panic’ and ‘double standard’ inevitable to a gendered study of this type, we will compare and contrast publications by male and female authors to map and analyse this dialogue in the context of the many voices involved. The project will be the first such initiative to introduce an interdisciplinary research approach of food and drink studies to explore the relation between women and alcohol. In this way, the project will provide a panoramic picture of the relationship between society and the stimulant.

The objectives of this research project are: To investigate how choices about drinking and abstinence made by women in the second half of the nineteenth century in Poland and Britain related to their need for emancipation, to escape the limiting social order of that time, and for celebration and enjoyment; To examine how, during the period researched, the relation between women and alcohol (particularly choices to drink and not drink) evolved through time, place, space, and how its purpose changed; To understand how masculinized discourse sought control by actively policing representations of women’s drinking, and acted upon women’s drinking practises, in categories of place, time, space and purpose, through inclusive and exclusive actions; To compare the unheard voices arising from the conflicts between women’s relation to alcohol and men’s reaction to it, in Polish and British discourses to see how the social, political, cultural and religious situation determined its character.

This will be achieved through an interdisciplinary research approach in the field of food and drink studies, advocating a combination of research methods in, e.g., cultural anthropology, sociology, history, and literary studies, as well as tools that have not yet been sufficiently used in historiography. In this way, we intend to create a new method that could be more broadly useful in cultural history.