

empowerment with feminism and the term begins to lose its meaning and power.

Camille Soucie
Seneca College

Craig Heron, *Booze: A Distilled History* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2003).

In his introduction to this well-written, soundly researched, and beautifully illustrated book Craig Heron claims that he never intended to write a book on “Booze.” We are lucky that he did. Heron’s book is a terrific contribution to the histories of working-class culture, masculinity, and alcohol. This masterful survey covers early taverns, social occasions involving drinking, campaigns for moderation, temperance and prohibition, the business of alcohol production, the role of labour and unions, the regulatory regimes that developed in Canada after prohibition, the rise of the “disease” model of alcoholism, the emergence of beer parlours and cocktail lounges, the increase in women’s drinking, the extra regulations and discrimination faced by aboriginal drinkers, and the impact of immigration on drinking patterns. Heron’s carefully organized research accounts for the morass of regional differences without confusion, and he also draws extensive comparisons between Canada, the United States, and European countries.

In pre-industrial Canada, Heron shows, drinking was extremely common. Taverns were ubiquitous and customers helped themselves from a pail of whiskey at the door of their local shopkeepers. Many people made their own alcohol from spruce, dandelions, and hops. Neighbors drank at work bees and canal workers, loggers and fur traders all demanded whiskey in return for their labour. Heron contends that heavy drinking was a way of solidifying bonds between men. He argues that rugged masculinity was enacted through drunken brawls, but that alcohol consumption gave license to these performances, rather than initiating them.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, temperance movements attracted a fairly broad range of “common” people, including farmers, shopkeepers, and journalists as well as members of the “respectable” working class. The movement sometimes critiqued upper-class drinkers, but temperance campaigns were dominated by the image of the “working-class drunkard who drank up his wages, left his children starving and beat his wife” (64). Heron argues that temperance distracted people from the larger economic forces of industrialization that were uprooting many lives by proposing an easy solution to poverty and criminality. Nonetheless, the effects were dramatic – drinking

on the job largely disappeared, alcohol was often barred from “bees” and other community events, and the tavern became increasingly disreputable.

Even so, drinking continued and urban populations dramatically increased their consumption of beer in the second half of the nineteenth century. Because of the difficulties in preserving, brewing continued to be small-scale, with owners working alongside skilled craftsmen, while distilling became larger and relied more on mechanization. By World War I, nearly all bartenders and brewery workers in the major cities outside of Quebec were unionized and both the beer and the barrooms sported union labels. Taverns grew more glamorous with brass foot rails, mahogany bars, and pictures of manly pursuits such as hunting trips and sporting events. A man could find accommodation or a job and cash a cheque. Taverns were also important sites for political organizing and occasionally offered musical entertainment or boxing matches.

The taverns were dominated by young men. In the late nineteenth century, men entered the workforce young and often did not marry until their late 20s, leaving 10-15 years with few domestic responsibilities. Many worked away from home, and the saloon became their community. These tavern-goers were sometimes boisterous, but in Heron’s view, they were rarely the violent drunkards of the temperance imagination, and generally they kept their drinking under control. Most married men drank less, using their money to support their families.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, people concerned about alcohol turned to the state to impose a solution. Heron argues that prohibitionists, who were increasingly drawn from the upper and middle classes, were conservative progressives. Heron has little sympathy for the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), who emerged as a major force in the fight for prohibition, complaining that “there was a relentlessly anti-male tone to much of the propaganda: men were weak, women were morally superior” (154). Prohibitionists worked at all levels – trying to reduce the number of licenses, restrict store hours, forbidding entertainment in addition to fighting for local options and all-out prohibition. Heron insightfully points out that there were differences between urban and rural prohibitionists – urban prohibitionists thought that banning booze would encourage industrial efficiency, modernity, and rationality while the rural supporters had a more trenchant critique of industrial capitalism, which “brought a democratizing current into temperance campaigns” (167). In French Canada, temperance supporters believed that alcohol was hindering the survival of the French-Canadian race. Prohibition met with mixed success until the war, when Canada was swept up in a campaign for self-sacrifice, efficiency, and nationalism. One by one, every province except Quebec implemented prohibition, closing saloons, clubs, and retail stores. People were still allowed to consume alcohol at home and “near beer” was available at hotels. Brewers, distilleries, and wineries still continued

to produce for export.

Prohibition would be a short experiment. Quebec voted against it in 1919, and British Columbia followed in 1920. In other provinces, Moderation Leagues appealed to individual liberty in defending their right to booze. Heron traces the shift in public opinion to a change in the social organization of gender. In the early part of the twentieth century, many middle and upper class men sought a more masculine and vigorous culture, less hindered by bourgeois self-restraint. "New women," and especially flappers, were less interested in the maternal feminism of the WCTU, and keenly partook in the alcoholic pleasures of their male peers. Organized labour, which had previously been sympathetic to temperance, turned increasingly wet. And returned soldiers, who had accustomed themselves to drinking overseas, demanded their beer.

Moreover, prohibition was easily flaunted. Doctors prescribed alcohol for a wide range of supposed ills, with prescriptions peaking in December. Drugstores occasionally became makeshift bars while blind pigs and other bootlegging establishments flourished. Enforcement was a challenge – many police were reluctant to investigate, some judges were loathe to convict, and bootleggers regarded fines and bribes as part of the cost of doing business.

In most provinces, prohibition was replaced by sparsely decorated and government-run liquor stores and later by carefully controlled public drinking establishments. Beer parlours had no entertainment, even checkers or music, no stand-up bar, and a limit on how many glasses could be on the table at a given time. Cocktail lounges, which were less common, served a greater variety of drinks to a better-dressed clientele. Three large conglomerates – Molson, Labatt, and Canadian Breweries came to control most of the market. Prohibition had hurt the unions, but they regrouped. By 1960, brewery workers were the highest paid industrial workers in the country. "Union-made" appeared again on beer bottles. Bartenders were also unionized under the Hotel and Restaurant Employees. As province after province repealed prohibition, a greater proportion of Canadians began to drink and they drank more.

Beginning in the late 1970s, "neo-temperance" movements emerged. Alcohol use fell substantially from the late 1970s to the early 1990s. Alcohol researchers moved away from focusing solely on the "alcoholic" and paid more attention to the dangers of increased consumption, and to the problem of binge-drinking. Campaigns against drunk driving increased penalties and enforcement across the country.

Throughout, Heron's emphasis is on the male drinking experience and male sociability. In providing a corrective to earlier literature on temperance and prohibition in Canada, which he sees as being too sympathetic to the critics of "demon rum," Heron perhaps leans too far to the other side. Drunken brawls injured and even killed workers. For women who watched men "smashing crockery and furniture" and feared they might be next, this was not a per-

formance of “symbolic aggression,” it was real (125). It would have been useful to hear more from the women who took their drunken husbands to court for non-support, from children who suffered abuse, or even to have taken the narratives of members of Alcoholics Anonymous more seriously. Problem drinkers are a minority, but there are more of them than Heron wants to admit, and there are valid reasons to be concerned about the harm they do to themselves and to others. Compared to his terrific work on drinking cultures and policy, Heron pays less attention to the history of alcohol research and treatment, although he makes a compelling case for how badly many treatment professionals dealt with working-class drinkers. More than once, Heron mentions that moderate alcohol consumption has health benefits, but he pays relatively little attention to contemporary research on the costs of alcohol consumption including disease, family disruption, violence, and accidents. He dismisses the “total consumption model,” used by the Addiction Research Foundation of Ontario, but I would argue that the evidence that harm increases as total consumption increases is actually quite compelling, at least in certain drinking cultures. The World Health Organization recently determined that four percent of the global burden of disease is caused by alcohol – about the same percentage as tobacco.

These minor concerns aside, Heron has created a lively world of drinkers, temperance supporters, and workers. Heron should be applauded for taking on such an ambitious project, and adding so much to our knowledge of drinking, masculinity, and working-class culture. Cheers!

Catherine Carstairs
University of British Columbia

Marlene Shore, ed., *The Contested Past: Reading Canada's History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

The Contested Past performs a service to the Canadian historical community. Aside from providing excellent notes for doctoral students approaching their comprehensive exams, it assembles the essential points of nearly 80 years of Canada's leading historical journal. The book comprises 69 article excerpts accompanied by commentary by Marlene Shore. These excerpts are divided into four mainly chronological sections and then subdivided by theme within those periods. No explanation of the selection criteria is given, but presumably the choice was based on informed personal impressions. This book could anchor an undergraduate historiography class, as it reveals how some of the main trends and issues in the study of Canada's past have changed, or not