

ANNA POCHMARA

FROM SLAVES TO THE BOTTLE
TO SPEAKEASIES AND CHAMPAGNE BATHS:
ALCOHOL AND AMERICAN LITERATURE, 1840-1933

The lecture will discuss a series of paradoxes and shifts in representations of alcohol use in canonical American literature. They will be presented in relation to the changing perspectives on gender, racial, religious, and class identities. I will demonstrate the tension between the American desire for self-discipline and self-mastery, on the one hand, and the zeal to discipline and police other bodies, on the other. Among the most significant of the changes discussed in the talk will be the shift from the religious concept of intemperance as sin to the medical notion of addiction. Additionally, I will analyze the twin paradox of aesthetic excess in fictions within temperance-related literature and disciplined, minimalist style in modernist fictions that frequently represent alcohol use as liberating. Selected works of American literature, spanning from the 1840s to the end of the Prohibition Era, will serve as the corpus.