ABSTRACT

BRIDGET JOCELYN SHARLOW. American Literature Cocktail Club: Exploring Literary Characters through Drink. (Under the direction of Professor Dr. Jason Miller)

This project analyzes the characters of fifteen American short stories written by a variety of authors over several decades. In response to the recent food studies movement in literary studies these character analyses are constructed through the lens of alcohol. The project attempts to gleam information about each character based on the drink that the author pours them and differentiate between characters that consume different drinks. Investigating the symbolic value of a character’s drink to their personality traits and actions reveals information that would not be discovered by other analysis. This study shows that alcohol has as many individual traits as the geographic regions they represent. In fact, alcohol is its own language, and an entire culture of value opens up by exploring its dialectical variants. As with all native speakers, each individual drink and type of alcohol reveals something distinct about its drinker. This study thus serves as a specific means to demonstrate ways to extend what is currently being practiced by food studies. Further research into the symbolism of alcohol throughout American literature will uncover even more of the power that this symbol holds for understanding the motives, dilemmas, and circumstances surrounding the identity of both its most beloved and sometimes more obscure characters.