

suggested informed the master's publications.)

Nevertheless, I do not think that this esoteric plea for constructivist accounts of the development of medical knowledge is a severe problem for McLaren. He does direct the reader to other sources which focus on these issues. If we accept that he has developed a large historical synthesis of much material in order to construct a coherent narrative about sexuality in the twentieth century, and that he has packaged it in an extremely readable form (although in a lurid cover), then we can have something to direct our students to for an easy to read, overarching analysis of a complex issue.

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John Burnett, *Liquid pleasures: a social history of drinks in modern Britain*, London and New York, Routledge, 1999, pp. viii, 254, £14.99 (paperback 0-415-13182-0).

Betsy Thom, *Dealing with drink: alcohol and social policy: from treatment to management*, London and New York, Free Association Books, 1999, pp. xi, 266, £15.95 (paperback 1-85343-450-7).

Despite an obvious contiguity of subject matter, one is immediately struck by the contrasting approaches taken by these two authors. The main difference is that John Burnett, as his title suggests, concentrates mainly on the pleasures of drinking, while Betsy Thom focuses on the negative consequences of alcohol consumption, and the development of policy and services in this field. Furthermore, Burnett's book has a broader coverage, exploring non-alcoholic as well as alcoholic drinks and adopts a longer historical perspective, whereas Thom is primarily concerned with "contemporary history". Their research methods also differ.

Thom's study is based to a considerable extent on primary sources in the form of interviews with key participants and observers and an analysis of official documents. Burnett's book, as one might expect given the available literature, relies more on published secondary sources.

Liquid pleasures is the kind of book which, no pun intended, literally lifts the spirits of an academic book reviewer. It is both readable and entertaining. Burnett leads us through the social history of various drinks: water, milk, tea, coffee, beer, wine and spirits. The breadth of the subject implies some compromise on detail. However, there is no shortage of statistics, detailed examples, and faintly amusing observations and anecdotes. The analysis is perhaps a little truncated, though the author collects his thoughts in the final chapter, identifying a number of key themes. He remarks that the history of individual drinks cannot be considered in isolation because they are to some extent complementary to each other. Two major periods of transformation in drinking habits are identified: the mid-seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth century with the rise of tea mainly at the expense of beer; and the 1960s onwards with the rise in alcohol consumption (notably lager, wine and cider), soft drinks and coffee. In both cases wider international influences were at work; in the latter period a degree of Europeanization of British drinking habits is observed. One of the more important conclusions made by Burnett relates to the health dimensions of drinking. At various times, each drink has been seen as a threat or a benefit to health. Beer was once regarded as a healthier drink than water because of poor sanitation, while tea was at one time viewed by some as a serious threat to public health. But the crucial point is that even where health implications are evident, drinking is embedded in a complex set of environmental, economic and social relationships. A failure to appreciate these factors is likely to limit the effectiveness of

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public health interventions aimed at promoting healthy drinking habits by, for example, seeking to discourage the excessive consumption of alcohol or soft drinks with high sugar content.

Dealing with drink is a much more solemn affair, the “morning after” perhaps to the *Liquid pleasures* earlier imbibed. None the less, it is an equally good book. Against the background of growing alcohol consumption since the 1950s, Thom analyses the development of the “policy community” which shaped the response of successive governments to an increasing level of alcohol problems. The main contribution of this book lies in its consideration of the changing emphasis of policy from treatment towards prevention. Thom highlights changes in the alcohol policy community, and the introduction of competing conceptions and paradigms of alcohol problems as key factors behind this shift. She charts how the initially dominant disease model championed by psychiatrists gave way to a population-based approach advocated by a broader range of professions and voluntary groups, highly consistent with broader ideological influences in the health field, such as the “new public health”. Thom discusses the tensions within government prompted by the new approach and documents interdepartmental battles in Whitehall. She goes on to discuss more recent developments, notably the shift towards a “harm reduction” approach and suggests that the tensions surrounding policy in this field remain. The deliberations regarding the Blair government’s long overdue alcohol policy, to some extent provide further evidence of this.

Thom also analyses the role of researchers in providing an evidence base for public policy formation in this field, noting that during the 1970s research findings became more important in the development of alcohol policy. She also demonstrates how evidence has been used selectively to advocate (or oppose) particular policies. This kind of approach is

at the cutting edge of contemporary policy research. The politics of expertise, evidence and discourse has now become central to our understanding, not only of the governance of public health problems but in other policy areas as well.

In summary, both books are a welcome addition to the bookshelf and have an appeal beyond their respective target audiences of social history and alcohol studies. Despite their contrasting approaches, they also complement each other well, providing a considerable insight into the social and political aspects of our drinking habits.

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Johanna Geyer-Kordesch and Fiona Macdonald, *Physicians and surgeons in Glasgow: the history of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow 1599–1858*, London, Hambledon Press, 1999, pp. xviii, 478, £30.00 (hardback 1-85285-186-4); **Andrew Hull and Johanna Geyer-Kordesch**, *The shaping of the medical profession: the history of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow 1858–1999*, London, Hambledon Press, 1999, pp. xxx, 288, £30.00 (hardback 1-85285-187-2).

Soon after my appointment as archivist to the Greater Glasgow Health Board in 1979 I was taken to the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons to discuss the College records and history. Stanley Alstead and Willie Reid, two leading members of the Senior Fellows Club, enthused about the need for a comprehensive history to mark the College quatercentenary. This two-volume history does not do justice to their commitment, or to the efforts of many other loyal local members over the past 400 years.

One problem is the failure to adopt a