Drink in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: Consumers, Cross-Currents, Conviviality

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The eighteenth century saw the emergence of an urban public sphere connected to a sociability that often occurred in spaces where drink was available. The London coffee-house is a prime example of a centre of communication, where commercial, political, and private interests were negotiated. Its rural counterparts, the tavern and the inn, likewise fostered sociability, albeit one that was closer to the tenets of the local squirearchy and the church. Since these institutions were instrumental to the forging of the public sphere, it is sometimes overlooked that they were also spaces of amusement, play, and relaxation, which went hand in hand with drink, often with alcoholic beverages. The nineteenth century saw a further differentiation of such spaces along the lines of social class and profession as well as gender.

Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century drink was coded in terms of nationality, class, and gender: In the early eighteenth century, cider, for example, came to be seen as English, rural, and masculine. Chocolate, on the other hand, occasionally mentioned in contemporary debates around luxury, was regarded as an aphrodisiac and as urban, later as a comforting drink particularly suited to female needs. Especially in the Victorian Age, tea and the tea ceremony became the centre of a domesticity, for which women were considered responsible. In the American War of Independence, tea, like other goods that had been imported from Britain, was no longer acceptable for patriotic Americans, who resorted to herbal infusions instead.

A large body of texts testifies to the on-going debates. Taverns, coffee-houses, cafés were chosen as settings for literary texts: Henry Fielding's Joseph Andrews (1742) evolves around various fights and conversations in roadside inns. Medical writing dealt with the properties of beverages, e.g. Richard

Bradley's *The Virtue and Use of Coffee* (1721). Sermons, tracts, and graphic material warned against the abuse of alcohol. Famous examples are William Hogarth's *Gin Lane* and *Beer Street* (1751), the first marking out oppression by the ruling classes as a contributing factor in the gin craze, while the second, depicting the benefits of being nourished by native beer, can be read as a celebration of Englishness. Victorian novels, such as Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853), negotiated social identity in picturing the typical "English tea".

Although some studies have mapped out the history of individual drinks and institutions (e.g. the coffee-house), little work has been done on transnational issues: Was the English coffee-house comparable to the New York coffee-house? Who advised against the consumption of alcohol on both sides of the Atlantic in any given year? In which ways did importing and consuming goods from outside the borders of England impact on negotiations of national identity?

This conference aims to deal with

- individual alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages such as cider, beer, wine, coffee, chocolate, gin, and punch
- institutions and discursive milieus like the tavern, the coffee-house, the domestic tea ceremony
- key mediator figures
- fictional and non-fictional texts, visual material, and cultural practices in the English-speaking world
- the "long" eighteenth and nineteenth centuries
- methodologies of examining drink cultures

The proceedings of the conference will be published. The conference is funded by the German Research Council and the Faculty of Arts, University of Bonn.