

Patrick Dillon, *The Much-Lamented Death of Madam Geneva*. London: Review, 2002. Boston: Charles Justin & Co., 2003.

Jessica Warner, *Craze: Gin and Debauchery in an Age of Reason*, New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2002.

For years, anyone interested in the eighteenth century “gin craze” of London, could read a series of journal articles (Clark, 1988, Coffey, 1966, Rude, 1959) and a handful of others, notably articles by Warner and Ives (1999, 2000) or one could rely on George’s *London Life in the Eighteenth Century* (1925). From such material one would obtain a stark picture of heavy consumption, ineffective legislation and sordid personal tragedies. Now in one year, two books have been published that flesh out the three plus decades that provide the parameters of this unusual slice of time. Jessica Warner continues her contributions to the history of alcohol use and abuse. Patrick Dillon debuts in this genre. He is an architect with an abiding interest in the eighteenth century. In his acknowledgments, Dillon expresses appreciation for Warner’s articles on the gin craze.

Covering much of the same ground, Warner and Dillon describe the basic economic, political and social forces involved in the craze. The jacket covers of each book feature Hogarth’s *Gin Lane*, with the symbolic drunken Madam Geneva (so-dubbed by Dillon) unaware of her baby sliding off her lap, plunging head first over the step rail. Yet, there are differences in styles, details and purposes. An illustration of this is found in the reporting of the propaganda efforts of the reformers, particularly those of two close friends—Henry Fielding and William Hogarth. Warner speaks of the dramatic influence of the works of both, suggesting that Hogarth’s *Gin Lane* and *Beer Street* had a greater impact on the reaction to gin abuse than did Fielding’s tracts. Dillon not only tells us that these contributions were important, but also describes Fielding’s card-game partners and how friends helped him overcome the loss of his wife. We learn Hogarth’s father was

in debtors' prison and his mother had died "of a fright" after a fire in a brandy shop, which may have influenced his attitude toward Madam Geneva. Dillon is extravagant in marshaling of descriptions and sprinkles the many stories of debauchery with his interpretations. The personification of Madam Geneva by Dillon gives him license to speak in an informal voice, suggesting an intimacy with the reader. Warner, apart from an occasional playful chapter title, makes her observations clearly and without distractions.

Warner offers a format of a dramaturgical sort: a cast of characters is introduced and the book is divided into three acts. She employs the legislative efforts – eight Gin Acts – as themes from which she offers observations or reports of significant events. Warner's central task is to provide a model for understanding how economics, politics and class struggles combined to produce the gin craze. Thus, she provides ample data showing how the poor and the wealthy benefited from self-serving and sloppy legislation and how reformers objected for reasons other than crime and health issues associated with excessive gin drinking. "This complaint," she writes, "that ordinary people were living above their station, would figure prominently in the ensuing campaign against gin and the people who drank it" (37).

A chapter devoted to the role of women in the gin craze builds on Warner's previous efforts to amend the omissions in the literature by describing the women's role as purveyors and not just consumers. The politics of the gin acts, especially the employment of informers in the 1738 act and the violent opposition to such folks, are deftly handled. Warner makes an interesting and debatable point in her suggestion that the gin craze came to an end as a result of exhaustion of a generation and not because of legislation or an economic downturn.

In her last chapter, entitled *Recent Events*, she provides an excellent discussion of modern drug problems, filtered through her analysis of the lessons of the gin craze. It is a significant

contribution and provides a model for studying current and future societal struggles with substance abuse of all types. Finally, the chronological summary of the various gin acts, with comments on their purpose and efficacy conclude the book.

Dillon provides a more ambitious account of the era as he has uncovered all kinds of first hand accounts of different aspects of the gin craze. Chapter after chapter contains detailed descriptions of many individual acts of gin abuse, comments from many reformers, and references to other aspects of the society. In a chapter entitled "The Christians," the dramatic story of Judith Defour is told. She takes her baby's bunting, abandoning the naked child in a field and sells the clothes in order to have money for gin. The casual death of the child became a stimulus to the reform groups, and the Defour story, a rallying event for the enemies of *Madam Geneva*. Dillon provides extensive coverage of this horrific act, including the trial in which Defour's testimony reveals a desperate woman. In another chapter, Dillon suggests that the central figure of Hogarth's *Gin Lane* was that of Judith Defour, a symbol of degradation of dram-consuming women. Like Warner, he asserts that women not only consumed gin, but also sold it on the streets of London: "And so sipping gin in shops or dispensing it from barrows, women became the public face of the gin craze" (210).

It is this attribution of gender to gin binging that agitated the reformers and Dillon correctly points out the double standard as the drunken female was more alarming than the besotted male. Not surprisingly, chastity was the issue. Dillon closes the gin era by touting the influence of the rising middle class on behavior. He also carries his analysis further into the decade of the 1750s pointing out the poor harvest of 1757 as a factor in the rising cost and diminishing popularity of gin. In an epilogue, Dillon concludes with a modest conversation about gin guzzling, America's prohibition era and modern day drug problems. It is

the least successful contribution from an otherwise highly original effort.

Both books are eminently readable and should become the definitive works on the gin craze. Warner's work is a succinct, analytical portrayal and the Dillon effort offers copious details and descriptions of a society undergoing change. For the curious, both provide extensive notes and sources.

JAMES R. MCINTOSH, LEHIGH UNIVERSITY
ijm1@lehigh.edu

NOTES

Clark, Peter. "The 'Mother Gin' Controversy in the Early Eighteenth Century," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 38/37 (1988): 63-84.

Coffey, T.G. "Beer Street: Gin Lane some views of 18th Century Drinking," *Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol* 27 (1966): 669-692.

George, M. Dorothy. *London Life in the Eighteenth Century* (1925).

Warner, Jessica, and Frank Ives. "'Damn You, You Informing Bitch' Vox Populi and the Unmaking of the Gin Act of 1736," *Journal of Social History* 2/33 (1999): 299-330.

Warner, Jessica, and Frank Ives. "Gin and Gender in Early Eighteenth-century London," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 24 (Spring 2000): 85-105.