Book Reviews


Smoke from cigars, pipes and cigarettes has curled its way through all levels of society in the last two hundred years. Matthew Hilton peels away the multifaceted images evoked by smoking in British literature, advertising and the cinema, as well as by more recent medical and political responses.

The virtues attributed to tobacco, pleasure and relaxation, were primarily for the leisureed classes, embodied in the cover illustration of Frederick Burnaby, the Victorian adventurer, Household Cavalry officer, boxer, magazine founder and special correspondent. Conan Doyle, Byron, and J M Barrie were smokers who praised its effects, with equally devoted critics from the Anti-Tobacco Society, mixing medical evidence (nausea, dyspepsia, blindness, lip and throat cancer, hysteria, paralysis, insanity) with a twist of moral and religious dogma. Later the protection of childhood by universal education coincided with concerns about the evils of juvenile smoking. The poor condition of the nation’s recruits to the Boer War led to welfare reforms including the prohibition of tobacco sales to those under sixteen by the 1908 Children’s Act.

Cigarettes were brought within the reach of the working classes with the introduction of a machine that could produce 300 cigarettes per minute in 1883, new technology that put the cigarette girls out of work, and the lowering of tobacco duty. By the end of the First World War, cigarette sales had overtaken those of pipe tobacco. Total tobacco use rose more than three-fold over the period from two pounds for every adult over fifteen to seven pounds after the Second World War, while the population in Britain increased by more than four times between 1801 and 1951.

The mass market required new images to accompany a wide variety of products. Advertising developed from cartoons with punchy captions to more sophisticated brand names, selling masculinity and femininity along with group identity. Increased advertising budgets (Imperial Tobacco Company spent £60 million in 1937) led to advertising inspectors and new dedicated retail outlets. Mass Observation described the place of smoking in daily lives as the cinema endorsed its glamorous image or defined its class affiliations.

Within two years after the Second World War, the medical community began to look at the effects of smoking. Government funds were committed to investigate whether the incidence of lung cancer was related to smoking or to atmospheric pollution. The MRC-supported study by Austin Bradford Hill and Richard Doll, published in 1950, and the follow-up two years later, demonstrated a statistical link between tobacco smoking and cancers. Further evidence gained from Bradford Hill and Doll’s questionnaire survey of doctors’ smoking habits led to a declaration of “cause and effect” in 1957, followed by the Royal College of Physicians’ Report in 1962. Health warnings were required on cigarette packets in 1971 with a campaigning organization, Action on Smoking and Health (ASH), established with government funding.

The two faces of tobacco—exposed by health professionals as a killer, embraced by the government as a contributor to the exchequer—have continued to attract new recruits in spite of bans on smoking in public places, particularly among girls (15 per cent of the eleven- to fifteen-year-olds compared with 11 per cent of boys were regular smokers in 1996). By the close of the twentieth century a different image is being portrayed—no longer a greying down-and-out determined to withstand public
pressure to give up his habit, but a young
man taking up a precious bed and
increasing the drain on the National Health
Service.

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Andrew Hodgkiss, From lesion to
metaphor: chronic pain in British, French and
German medical writings, 1800–1914, Clio
Medica 58, Wellcome Institute Series in the
History of Medicine, Amsterdam and
Atlanta, Rodopi, 2000, pp. iii, 218, £55.00,
£36.00, $51.00 (hardback 90-420-0831-8),
£18.00, £12.00, $17.00 (paperback 90-420-
0821-0).

During the past decade and a half, the
clinical and diagnostic category—and to
some extent, the cultural concept—of
"psychogenic pain" has proliferated in
Anglo-American medicine. "Pain clinics",
which specialize in the handling of cases
of non-organic pain, now dot the medical
landscapes of Britain and North America.
In response to the working belief that
psychogenic pain is a recent—or, at any
rate, comparatively modern—experience
and diagnosis, Andrew Hodgkiss has
provided a detailed and intelligent account
of the idea in British and European
medical texts across the nineteenth
century.

The clinical and intellectual history of a
disease concept à la Temkin can be a highly
scholarly and informative exercise, and
Hodgkiss provides an outstanding example
of the genre. Hodgkiss's subject is of high
intrinsic interest. He has researched the
topic extensively in the major, medical-
historical sources of Britain, France, and
the German-speaking lands. And he has
done a remarkable job of ferreting out from
scores of little-known clinical commentaries
a great many relevant passages, which he
explicates knowledgeably. In addition to
discussions of predictable figures, like
Benjamin Brodie, John Russell Reynolds,
and William R Gowers, he helpfully
brings to light numerous less familiar
authors, foremostly Joseph Swan
(pp. 61–4) and Charles Blondel (pp. 176–9).
Other pages, such as those devoted to
Otto Binswanger and even Sigmund
Freud, explore previously unknown or
under-appreciated aspects of the writings
of well-known physicians.

Likewise, Hodgkiss does a splendid job of
showing the many intricate ways in which
the three major national-medical traditions
of observing and theorizing "pain without
lesion" interacted across the 1800s. He also
shows a fine sensitivity to the shifting
disciplinary bases of his subject by
consulting in turns medical, surgical,
neurological, psychiatric, and
psychoanalytic texts. In a parallel fashion,
one reason many doctors previously
believed that this idea lacked a deep history
was because the relevant textual
observations were scattered so widely and
presented under a great diversity of
diagnostic labels: the cases Hodgkiss
examines, all of which seem easily to fall
under the current rubric of psychogenic
pain, were published in their own times
under the various labels of "hypochondria",
"neuralgia", "neurosis", "pain without
lesion", "spinal irritation", "surgical
hysteria", "cenesthesia", "mental
depression", "functional nervous disorder",
and "conversion disorder". There is an
important lesson in this fact for
reconstructing "the history of a disease".

Interpretatively, Hodgkiss's monograph
presents a significant revisionist statement.
Conventional scholarship, Hodgkiss points
out, typically conjures up a historical
picture in which the doggedly and
dogmatically materialist neurosciences of
the nineteenth century, centred invariably
on Germany and Austria, systematically
ignored the reported phenomenon of pain

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