

LIST III MT

HIU33114 The Early Modern Alehouse (Susan Flavin)



Anonymous, *Peasants in the Tavern*, Netherlands, oil on panel, 17th century (detail)

This module introduces students to the field of ‘drinking studies’ – currently one of the most dynamic areas of research into the early modern period. Historians have come to appreciate that the role alcohol (and other intoxicants) plays in society reflects themes of much broader importance. The regulation of alcohol consumption can tell us, for example, about evolving relationships between the state and its subjects. Studying patterns of alcohol consumption – such as who people drank with, when and how – can shed light on attitudes to gender, class and friendship. Studying drinking therefore provides a ‘lens’ through which to explore many interesting themes in social and cultural history.

Our approach to drinking studies centres on a detailed exploration of one key early modern space: the Alehouse. Focusing on sources including diaries, ballads, legislation, dietetic literature, sermons and depositions, as well as material culture, we will uncover the attitudes of both alehouse patrons, and those who sought to control this core institution. We will consider why authorities saw the alehouse as such a problem and the extent to which they were genuinely subversive. We will critically examine the supposed rivalry between the church and the alehouse. We will also think about drunkenness in this period, and how it was understood within early modern dietetic and cultural frameworks. In more cultural terms, we will work on drinking songs, a source used a lot in recent historiography. Using these, we will think about why people may have gone to the alehouse, and how they behaved when they were there? This will also allow us to think about the rituals of drinking and early modern drinking games, which shed light on interesting issues like ‘compulsion’ and forced sociability in society as well as the performance of gender relations in popular culture. Finally, we will consider the value (and limitations) of trying to reproduce early

modern alehouse culture today. Engaging with new research that recreates historic beers, we will address issues of 'authenticity' and 'taste', while also exploring less traditional and interdisciplinary or 'practice-based' approaches to drink culture and intoxication.