The German Tobacco “Drinker” (1630)

Abstract

The text and imagery on this 1630 broadsheet are aimed at the literate German public. The broadsheet explains and warns against tobacco consumption. Smoking, which was called “tobacco drinking” back then, was still a novelty in Germany at the time. Smoking went on to became increasingly widespread in connection with the Thirty Years War. A translation of the poem follows underneath the image.

Source

The German Tobacco “Drinker”

My dear German, come here.
Look, read, and behold the new
“À la modish” monkey business
Which is going on now without measure or aim,
So that many of you even want to carry
Tobacco with you in your pants pocket
To make haze and smoke
In wine-taverns and ale-houses, too,
And think highly of yourselves when you do,
As if it were a great art,
So that many an upright man
Is greatly displeased by it.
But he who foolishly “drinks” tobacco
Gives no thought to their views,

But goes on spreading his new splendor,
And shows no regard for other people.
Yet he cannot cure his hare-brain
Cleanly with tobacco,
But needs his tobacco haze
To burden others and himself in vain.
Although I, from my youth on,
Never did approve of
Tobacco's effects, power, and virtues.
But I allow it to pass for good
For those in particular
Who use it at the proper time.
I do not wish in my poem
To mean everyone
Who in the lands
Where tobacco is generally "drunk"
Let themselves be seen completely without hesitation,
And are used to that, because it is the way of the land.
Those gallant cavaliers
I myself defend for that,
And my scorn is all the greater
Because many of those from the rabbit warren
Dare to "drink" tobacco.
They, who have not seen a foreign dog,
Just as is the nature of monkeys,
Always make problems for themselves.
What they have seen today
They will devote themselves to tomorrow.
In their arrogant hearts
And hare-brains, without jest,
In dress, manners, and gestures,
I say this without any difficulty,
Is an outright boisterous arrogance
And downright "à la modishness."
Many now "drink" tobacco
Out of blustering pomp and cockiness.
He has scarcely any money on him,
With which he honestly could
Pay the innkeeper for his bill.
Oh, that is for me a real gem.
You poor dolt, stop your bragging!
The innkeeper himself is truly displeased
By this worthless stuff; believe me,
He likes it much better when you often
Have a fresh beer poured for yourself

Than when you “drink” tobacco.
You only empty the house for him that way,
Drive still many more out
Who otherwise might have spent a short hour
To be happy on their part.
That is a shame for the innkeeper;
Hear and take note, you uncouth cow pie!
Many a man is fresh and healthy.
He “drinks” tobacco, and it gets in his throat;
It makes him listless and dull.
I say that nothing else brought him
To that but cockiness.
Then the following morning
His head is awfully heavy,
Perhaps his purse is light and empty,
So that he can take hold of nothing more
Than only his poor tobacco pipe
In his pitch-smeared pants pocket.
Yes, now tobacco is sucking
The apprentices, so common,
Into the ale houses,
And I would guess that the fewest
Know to what use or good.
Indeed, it is nothing but mad cockiness.
Many a boor and uncouth clod
Sucks tobacco that nauseates him.
It goes badly with him
Because he must trot from the table while being taunted,
He shakes his head back and forth,
Soon afterwards starts to stretch out his neck,
Awakening the vomit with reverence,
And that tobacco he guzzled in,
Now comes running out of him at a gallop.
All of them are young nags, gnats, crickets,
Ass’s heads, hare-brains, and bellowing cattle!
Oh, how sick the dolt is then;
That is all happening to him from tobacco’s stench.
How the fool’s stomach contents rise;
Run soon and fetch him rabbit food.
Bring along the rabbit’s heart.
Oh my, oh my, his tobacco pipe keeps
Him from going mad. Will he be able
To come back to his senses?
Or give it to him quickly in his mouth,
For tobacco is hugely healthy.

Oh, how the thing pains him,
Because he has never been to Holland
So that he is due tobacco
Like other gallant cavaliers
Who traveled through foreign lands;
For that they should be highly praised.
Not learning to “drink” is right for him;
He should suck on a cow teat.

Author.
You tobacco “drinkers” in general,
Who when drinking beer or wine,
Teach each other to “drink” tobacco,
Burdening the innkeeper and other guests,
If there were one among all of you
Who does not like my poem,
And lets himself perhaps dream that
He is also something for others,
He would also think that he is modest,
That others were also people.
And if he imposed the penance on
Himself, that he must always “drink”
Tobacco, he would leave.
But there is seldom an inn,
That does not have more than one room,
Where he could nicely act out
His gravitas, alone with just himself.
But where would his strutting go?
How could he, before everyone with praise,
Like a bungling schoolboy?
He thinks that from his manner,
Everyone considers him a gentleman,
Thinks that he is prudent.
How the dolt deceives himself.
Quite a few want to beautify the matter:
“Drinking” tobacco is healthy for all those
Who always find themselves
With serious fog in their heads.
My dear tobacco “drinkers,”
The matter seems strange to me,
That when drinking beer or wine
A person finds nothing jolly,
Sometimes even guzzles beyond his ability.
He should just care for his body’s health.
And as soon as you “drink” too much tobacco,

So that the same effect and taste
Begins to work on you,
You immediately start to make music,
No differently than especially
Occurs with patients in the hospital.
When this is praiseworthy and beautiful,
You can pass for a courtier.
Indeed, where? I think at places,
As now has been reported,
Where such music continues
Day and night without constraint.
What did the German have before
Tobacco came on the scene?
For catarrh, flux, and fog
In the head the German long ago used
Warmed mixtures, together with cold ice,
And learned people still praise the art.
My dear tobacco "drinker,"
I still advise you now truly about this:
The Dutchman is better than you.
Accustomed to tobacco, late and early.
He uses it on journeys by ship
From youth on, by nature and custom.
But you use it without aim,
As a wondrous marvel now,
And even at times and places
Where you don't gain a whit.
That is not praiseworthy, understand,
Nor is it useful, so give it up.
Especially the common handworker,
Should abstain from tobacco,
Because he cannot "drink" it
Until something new comes along.

Augsburg, Mattheo Rhembold, 1630
Translation: Kathleen Dell'Orto

Source: *Der teutsche Tabacktrincker*, broadsheet (copperplate engraving), Augsburg: Mattheo Rhembold, 1630. HAB Wolfenbüttel, Signature: 38.2 Aug. 2°, vor fol 134; reprinted in Wolfgang Harms, ed., *Deutsche illustrierte Flugblätter des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts*. Band I (Wolfenbüttel Teil 1). Tübingen, 1985, pp. 184–85.

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