Following poisons in society and culture (1800-2000): a review of current literature
José Ramón Bertomeu Sánchez, Ximo Guillem Llobat

Resum
This paper offers an overview of recent historical studies on toxic products. First, we offer an introduction to the literature and the principal academic groups, describing the major trends in four different areas of scholarship: history of crime and forensic science, history of food quality and adulteration, history of occupational and public health, and environmental history. Second, we suggest avenues for future research by highlighting three meeting points: protagonists, spaces and proof. We also discuss some challenges of the historical narratives: the agency of human and non-human actors; the integration of material, human and environmental effects; and the combination of the socio-cultural analysis of historical cases with the current understanding of poisons. While avoiding the unforgivable sins of anachronism or, even worse, of technological determinism, we want to encourage historical narratives with a bearing on current affairs. This is the last point discussed in the final conclusions. We claim that the history of toxic products can raise long-term debates, decenter the current focus, look for hybrid and complex causations, deconstruct the technocratic discourse of experts, empower victims, question legal standpoints and received cultural constructs, or point out the difficulties of democratic decision-making processes in matters regarding toxic products, particularly in a world marked by an uneven distribution of power and risks. In this sense, we claim that a history of toxic products can create new links between historians and social movements, academic research and activism, while enlarging the opportunities for fostering the uses of history in policy-making. In order to follow this promising path, we argue the need of crossing disciplinary borders of the history of crime, the history of occupational health, and food and environmental history, while moving outside academia and engaging in public debates.

The history of American literature can be divided into five periods: Colonial and Early National, Romantic, Realism and Naturalism, Modernist, and Contemporary. Each has its own unique characteristics, notable authors, and representative works. The human cost of the Civil War in the United States was immense: more than 2.3 million soldiers fought in the war, and perhaps as many as 851,000 people died in 1861–65. Walt Whitman claimed that “a great literature will…arise out of the era of those four years,” and what emerged in the following decades was a literature that presented a detailed and unembellished vision of the world as it truly was. This was the essence of realism. Naturalism was an intensified form of realism.