

## A Downside to the Printing Press?

Prior to the invention of the printing press in 1440, originals and copies of books about drugs (and every other topic) were laboriously written down by hand. This was no easy task given the length of some of the world's classic medical and science texts such as the five-volume encyclopedia of herbal medicine, *De Materia Medica*, penned by Pedanius Dioscorides between 40 and 80 CE.

After the printing press became more mainstream, information about alcohol (and other drugs) flowed more freely and easily, as did the alcohol itself. For example, in 1512 CE Hieronymus Braunschweig published *The Big Book on Distillation*. Soon afterward, distilling alcohol moved from the realm of monasteries and apothecaries to include artisans and merchants. An alcohol industry was being born. This was followed by a rise in alcohol consumption.

In reading Shakespeare's plays, one can see a possible consequence. In the late 1500s, the characters in his plays echo the Renaissance view of wine as pleasant and inviting. In the plays written after 1599, the negative effects of alcohol consumption are portrayed.

