

W. Scott Haine. *The World of the Paris Cafe: Sociability among the French Working Class, 1789-1914*. Baltimore, Md., and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996. xix + 325 pp. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8018-5104-9.

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## Cafes and the Parisian Working Class

Paris had some 3,000 cafes in 1789, 4,500 in the late 1840s, 22,000 in 1870, 42,000 in the mid-1880s, and around 30,000 from the late 1880s to 1914. Moreover, Paris in 1909 had a higher ratio of cafes to residents (11.25 cafes to a thousand inhabitants) than comparable cities in Europe or the United States, and many were frequented by the working class (pp. 3-4). Numbers aside, cafes had a remarkable presence in the political, social, cultural, and intellectual life of nineteenth-century Paris. They have been associated with Gracchus Babeuf's "Conspiracy of Equals"; with true as well as literary crime, including the "exotic criminality" of Eugene Sue's fictional *Tapis franc*, or thieves' den, of pre-Haussmann Paris. Haine finds Parisian cafes in the first showing of a motion picture by the Lumiere brothers in 1895; in the songs of Aristide Bruant, who celebrated aspects of cafe life, and in the prints of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, who evoked the ambience as well as the personalities of turn-of-the-century cafes like the *Moulin de la Galette*. Although Scott Haine provides the evidence for this sketch of Parisian cafe life, his subject is the working-class cafe, offering workers a unique space within which developed a "distinctive subculture" with its own order, structure, and rituals (p. 2). The result is a stimulating, well-written, richly documented, not to mention entertaining and immensely informative study of the location and function of the cafe in Parisian working-class life and sociability between the French Revolution and the beginning of World War I.

*The World of the Paris Cafe* contains eight topical chapters, and they treat respectively the perception, reg-

ulation, and policing of the cafe; the cafe in the context of family life and housing; the cafe and work; the cafe and the drinking experience; the cafe and the publican; the cafe and the etiquette of sociability; the cafe and gender politics; and the cafe and politics. There is also a brief conclusion, a discussion of historiography and methodology, and a bibliographic essay. Most chapters are structured chronologically, which occasions some repetition and makes difficult both the delineation of a composite image of the cafe at a given historical moment and comparisons across different periods. Nevertheless, Haine traces changes as well as continuities in the perception and nature of the cafe and cafe sociability, and he stresses the positive function of the cafe in the evolution of working-class life since the eighteenth century. In so doing, he explicitly challenges both contemporaries, who viewed cafes as places of sinful behavior, dangerous opposition politics, or moral degeneration, and more recent historians, who have paid them scant heed. "The nineteenth-century Paris cafe," he writes, "was a transitional space between the essentially public world of early-modern lower-class life, epitomized by the street and the marketplace, and the essentially private world of late-twentieth-century workers, usually living in high-rise apartment complexes. As an informal institution that bridged the distance between public and private life, leisure and work, the individual and the family, the cafe provided a unique space in which the tensions arising from such juxtapositions could be articulated" (p. 236).

The nature of the cafe as an intermediate and medi-

ating institution provides a unique perspective for the study of working-class sociability. Parisian cafes provided workers with “an accessible, public, and open forum for social life” (p. ix). And, they could become “cauldrons of conversation and thought” (p. 1), “a primary circuit for Parisian social networks” (p. 2), a “living room for the working class” and “an annex to the workshop and factory” (p. 59), a “theater of neighborhood life” (p. 163), substitutes “for the parliaments, clubs, and salons of the upper classes” (p. 235), and “potential bridge[s] between the ordinary world and the festival time of carnival and revolution” (pp. 237-38). Finally, and perhaps most important for Haine, cafe space and cafe sociability made possible the growth of a “proletarian public sphere” and helped foster “a latent class consciousness” that on occasion had political consequences (p. 207).

Haine groups working-class activities within the cafe space into the three broad categories of “shelter, incubator, and stage” (pp. 234-35). During the nineteenth century, when the life of the Parisian worker underwent wrenching dislocations—ranging from political oppression and inadequate housing to increasing workplace discipline—the cafe provided a sheltered space where the worker could fraternize and express himself. Second, the cafe provided space where political or labor actions could originate and grow and where the worker could protest, using methods ranging from the verbal insult to strikes and riots. Third, the cafe provided a space where workers, employers, and publicans could act out a variety of social roles. Such sociability, in short, “helped preserve the preindustrial connection between work and community life and provided a valuable space in times of strikes” (p. x); it enhanced the lives of workers who had few material possessions; and it included positive and varied roles for women. Accordingly, Haine argues that cafe sociability, far from undermining family life, actually enhanced it. In the substantial chapter on working-class politics, Haine treats the role of the cafe in the revolutionary eruptions of 1789-1794, 1830, 1848, and 1870-1871 and attempts to account for the failure of the French to develop a disciplined and militant organization, arguing nonetheless that cafe sociability helped create and spread new ideas during periods of free expression. During the times of repression following these revolutions, cafes served as shelters and as places where the working classes could express themselves by insulting government officials and the police.

Haine’s book is based on an impressive range of archival and published sources. These include judicial records after 1870, especially those dealing with the

sorts of petty incidents which took place in cafes, civil archives (including bankruptcy records), newspaper accounts, contemporary published accounts, novels, and studies by modern historians. He uses these sources to study the cafe from a double perspective, emphasizing simultaneously the changing historical character and role of the cafe and the “legitimate and constant social needs served by drinking establishments” (p. 242). His choice to portray individuals and their actions within the cafe space by combining impersonal statistics with the “voices” of individual men and women culled from the archives is on the whole quite successful, and it enhances the book’s readability and interest.

The considerable merits of this book notwithstanding, several matters warrant additional attention. On the question of just who frequented the working-class cafe and participated in its sociability, Haine is not always clear, especially with regard to men (though in contrast, he provides a concise profile of the female cafe-goer [pp. 193-99]). Early on, he suggests that more than 80 percent of the Parisian population frequenting cafes belonged not only to the working class of his title but also to the petite bourgeoisie (pp. 2-3). But it is difficult to make cogent generalizations about the attitudes and behavior of a group which extends from day laborers to small shopkeepers and white-collar clerks. Elsewhere, he notes that cafe goers were mostly “skilled and well-paid artisans” (p. 65), not, for example, the factory workers who favored other amusements (p. 87), and that most were aged thirty or more. Accordingly, the actual cafe-going population appears to be a relatively select group. In addition, the inclusion of the petite bourgeoisie within the working-class cafe population is made problematical by studies such as those by Geoffrey Crossick and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt (most recently: *The Petite Bourgeoisie in Europe, 1780-1914: Enterprise, Family and Independence* [London and New York, 1995]), which find the values and worries of the petite bourgeoisie to be largely distinct from those of the working class.

A second concern involves the use of the term cafe, understandably utilized by Haine in the most inclusive sense, but such usage means that he sometimes blurs distinctions by referring to an extraordinary range of institutions, from the *goguettes*, cafes where workers sang but which also were structured, organized, and required admission fees, *guinguettes*, or *barriere* taverns, to neighborhood cafes, to mention but a few. He also uses interchangeably the terms “working-class cafe” and “proletarian cafe,” but he often provides examples, such as quotes from Ralph Waldo Emerson or Jules Janin on the

importance of the cafe and conversation, which appear to refer to cafes other than those frequented by the working class. Finally, there is the matter of pictorial images, a potentially rich, if problematical source. Inserted just before the first chapter are twelve illustrations, but none are discussed in the text, and the criteria used for their selection are unclear. The omission is unfortunate, for they offer intriguing vignettes of cafe sociability and invite discussion. To take one example: an 1868 image from the *Journal pour tous* seems to show a cafe scene in which a vigorous woman wrests a wine bottle from an inebriated man who is restrained by a young girl while two men watch from the background and another appears poised to intervene. The provided caption, which says nothing more than women “were willing to assert themselves when necessary,” hardly explains the personal and social roles and relationships depicted (p. xiii).

Such reservations aside, there is much to learn from *The World of the Paris Cafe* and much to enjoy. There are, for example, such unexpected pleasures as a mini-essay on the vocabulary of drinking (pp. 104-7), an analysis of the importance of the rise of the modern serving counter after 1821 (pp. 121-22; 130-33), and a brief discussion of absinthe drinking (pp. 95-98). Scattered throughout the book are insightful asides, such as how the rebuilding of Paris in the mid-nineteenth century altered Parisian working-class life. Discussing police surveillance of cafes during the Second Empire, Haine observes: “Uniform and pervasive surveillance formed an ideal complement to Haussmann’s transformation, which opened up and regularized Parisian urban space.... While many scholars have noted the military advantages of the broad, straight

new boulevards, virtually no one has indicated how they served to facilitate police regulation as well. These broad boulevards and the increasing shift in commerce from the street to the shop permitted the police to scan cafe life more easily and efficiently. Only on the side streets did the old-fashioned sort of dense sociability persist, but these were now peripheral to the new Paris” (pp. 26-27). And, finally, Haine provides new insights into questions often debated by historians, refuting, for example, the argument that poor housing “pushed” the worker into the cafe.

Haine’s *World of the Paris Cafe* accordingly takes its place alongside such recent studies as Thomas Brennan’s *Public Drinking and Popular Culture in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Princeton, 1988); the sections on wineshops and guinguettes in David Garrioch’s *Neighbourhood and Community in Paris, 1740-1790* (Cambridge, 1986); and the several essays of Susanna Barrows, including “Nineteenth-Century Cafes: Arenas of Everyday Life,” in *Pleasures of Paris: Daumier to Picasso*, ed. Barbara Stern Shapiro (Boston, 1991). Read together, these works provide a nuanced portrayal of the place of cafes—called variously “cathedrals of the poor” by the disapproving social critic Paul Leroy-Beaulieu and “salons of democracy” by Leon Gambetta—in Parisian life during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Barrows, pp. 17 and 24).

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