

# From Drinkseller to Social Entrepreneur: The Parisian Working-Class Café Owner, 1789–1914

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*Contemporary observers often referred to the working-class drinking establishment as the “church of the working class” or as the place where workers felt most at ease. This article demonstrates the validity of these statements. Parisian drinksellers sold much more than drink and food; they also sold a sense of tranquility that the Parisian populace transformed into an atmosphere of domesticity by conducting much of their personal and family life in cafés, from courting to child rearing. Workers extensively asked café owners to witness marriages and baptisms. As a result, cafés, unlike eighteenth-century taverns, often were theatres of family conflict.*

*Les observateurs contemporains ont souvent appelé les débits d'alcool fréquentés par les membres de la classe ouvrière les « temples de la classe ouvrière », ou l'endroit où les ouvriers se sentent le plus à l'aise. Cet article démontre la justesse de ces énoncés. En outre, les tenanciers de débits de boisson parisiens vendaient aussi un sentiment de tranquillité que les Parisiens transformaient en ambiance de domesticité, en menant une bonne partie de leur vie personnelle et familiale dans les cafés, et cela allait de faire la cour à éduquer les enfants. Les ouvriers demandaient souvent aux tenanciers de cafés d'être témoins de mariages et de baptêmes. Par conséquent, contrairement aux tavernes du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, les cafés étaient souvent le théâtre de querelles familiales.*

CONTEMPORARY OBSERVERS in the nineteenth century often referred to the working-class drinking establishment as the “church of the working class” or as the place where workers felt most at ease.<sup>1</sup> Seldom, however,

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Leroy-Beaulieu has provided one of the classic formulations of the idea of the café as the church of the working class. For an excellent overview of the question, see Pierre Pierrard, *L'Église et les ouvriers en France 1840–1940* (Paris: Hachette, 1984), pp. 58–62; and Henri Leyret, *En plein faubourg: mœurs ouvrières* (Paris: Charpentier, 1895), p. 17. A writer in *L'Illustration*, echoing the sentiments of Henri Leyret, believed that anyone wanting to find the typical worker of Paris going about his or her ordinary life should go to a café; see also Pierre Audebrand's “Courrier de Paris”, *L'Illustration*, April 18, 1873, p. 243.

did these commentators amplify their analogy. If the drinking establishment was the church of the working class, was the proprietor of the establishment then its priest? Recently, in an analogous but secular vein, Jacques Rancière has argued that small merchants, among whom café owners were predominant, were central to working-class life because, like poets and political activists, they “talked” with people as they engaged in cash exchanges in their neighbourhoods. This talk helped the working-class community to define itself.<sup>2</sup> Neither Rancière nor other historians have yet detailed how café owners functioned as either confessor or counsellor, however.

One of the café owner’s vital functions can best be summed up under another term: *paterfamilias* or matron in the home. This image captures the fact that nineteenth-century café owners facilitated a growing convergence between public and private life in their shops. After the introduction of the modern bar during the 1820s the café owner presided, to an unprecedented degree, over the development of neighbourhood friendships, marriages, and other family group activities. By the 1870s, in short, the Parisian café owner had become not just another shopkeeper but indeed a social intermediary and entrepreneur. The development of this domestic function was essentially the result of dramatic changes in drinking-establishment commerce as well as in Parisian life during the nineteenth century.

Drinking-establishment life among the lower classes during the eighteenth century, however, presents a very different picture. Thanks to the work of a talented group of historians — including Arlette Farge, Daniel Roche, Thomas Brennan, and David Garrioch — the picture is clear and detailed.<sup>3</sup> The typical café or tavern owner of the eighteenth century could never have been likened to either priest or *paterfamilias*, and these historians cite no instance of such terms being used for the tavernkeeper. Even though tavern owners and their families lived above or behind their shops, the family seldom had contact with the clientele. These historians, moreover, uncover a working-class world in which, paradoxically, a chaotic and dangerous street life often inhibited the open expression of family tensions and conflict in public places.

In his comprehensive study of the eighteenth-century proletarian tavern, Brennan notes that “the merchant was separated physically as well as

2 Ellen Ross, “*Sociabilité* of Workers and the Working Class in Comparative Perspective, 1850–1950”, *International Labor and Working Class History*, no. 29 (Spring 1986), p. 107.

3 David Garrioch, *Neighborhood and Community in Paris 1740–1790* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 24; Daniel Roche, *The People of Paris: An Essay in Popular Culture in the Eighteenth Century*, trans. Marie Evans in association with Gwynne Lewis (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 254; Arlette Farge, *Vivre dans la rue à Paris au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard/Julliard, 1979), p. 75. Farge’s argument on this point is the most extreme, asserting that the labouring classes did not have a real concept of the difference between public and private. See especially pp. 32–40. See also her more recent *Fragile Lives: Violence, Power and Solidarity in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, trans. Carol Shelton (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).

socially from his customers.” The “bar” was merely a serving table in a separate room where the owner measured out the orders and gave them to waiters or waitresses who then took them to the customers sitting at tables in adjacent rooms. Brennan concludes that “the bar itself played none of the role that it does in today’s ... cafes.”<sup>4</sup> Thus the café owner seldom had an intimate knowledge of his or her clientele: “Tavern keepers rarely revealed any particular recognition of their customers, however regular their visits.” Brennan adds that “tavern keepers were not always the best sources of information about their customers, though they may have been purposefully vague.”<sup>5</sup>

Besides having only tenuous contact with the tavernkeeper, customers found in the café little if any shelter from the hustle and bustle of the street. Farge, in her study of eighteenth-century street life, notes in particular that family quarrels on the street as well as in cafés usually prompted the intervention of neighbours or strangers.<sup>6</sup> Brennan also found family discussions in taverns to be extremely inhibited due to the possibility of scrutiny or intervention by third parties:

The public character of the cabaret evidently had the opposite effect on family conflict. The family seemed to close ranks in the public space of the tavern. There are enough cases of husbands defending their wives’ honor, or brothers defending each other, of the family generally exhibiting its solidarity to suggest that domestic conflict was possible only in the relative isolation of the home.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, Farge shows that workers may have felt more at home in the street than in the tavern, providing numerous examples of families fighting openly in public thoroughfares.<sup>8</sup> In any case, we have the autobiography of an eighteenth-century Parisian glassmaker, Jacques-Louis Menetra, confirming that the labourer’s tavern was clearly not a place where private feelings could be expressed. This essential primary source, first fully appreciated and published by Roche in the early 1980s, shows men courting, seducing, or frolicking with women in taverns, but we do not see Menetra taking his wife there to discuss family relationships or business.<sup>9</sup> Nor did tavern and

4 Thomas E. Brennan, *Public Drinking and Popular Culture in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 117.

5 Thomas E. Brennan, “Cabarets and Laboring Class Communities in Eighteenth Century Paris” (Ph.D. dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 1981), pp. 261–262.

6 See also Garrioch, *Neighborhood and Community*, pp. 77–80, for example.

7 Brennan, “Cabarets and Laboring Class Communities”, p. 302. Garrioch in *Neighborhood and Community*, p. 78, finds the same thing: “Domestic quarrels usually took place in the relative privacy of the room or apartment and few came before the commissaire. ... Going to the commissaire meant unwanted publicity and was a last resort.”

8 Farge, *Vivre dans la rue*, pp. 42–45, 123–163.

9 Jacques-Louis Menetra, *Journal of My Life*, with an introduction and commentary by Daniel Roche, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

café customers turn to the owner for help or support in times of crisis. There is no indication, for example, that the eighteenth-century Parisian population used the tavernkeeper as a legal witness to their weddings or baptisms. Much of this reluctance may have stemmed from the Catholic Church's hostility to this "counter church" and to the "counter priest".<sup>10</sup>

The French Revolution of 1789, although it allowed many café owners to become important members of the popular movement, did not greatly increase the level of social interaction between the owners and their clientele. The great social historians of revolutionary Paris, Albert Soboul, George Rudé, and Richard Cobb, have all detailed the importance of the café owner during the Revolution; Rudé concludes that they were "a most consistent revolutionary group".<sup>11</sup> Not only did they help, as might be expected, to organize protests and demonstrations, but they also presided over "revolutionary weddings". Such revolutionary rituals provided a perfect way for the anti-Christian Parisian populace to undermine the role of the Catholic Church. An example of this rite of dechristianization occurred in late January 1794. A police report noted that a wine shop of revolutionary *sans culottes* near Bicêtre hospital, appropriately named "Père Duchesne" after Hébert's popular paper, had been the scene of a series of weddings involving a "worker", a clerk, and a street sweeper. Thirty to forty neighbours joined the happy couples in celebrating at this Faubourg Saint-Marceau café. The festivities included drinking, singing patriotic songs, and making toasts to the Convention; children shouted, "Death to the tyrants! Long live Liberty and Equality!" The police observer commented approvingly that "in their wine they spoke with a religious respect for the Convention."<sup>12</sup>

Despite such activities during the Revolution, café owners had not yet become as integral a part of Parisian neighbourhood life as they would in later decades. In cases involving the newly decreed (1792) right of divorce, which most devout Catholics denounced as "anti-Christian", only 1.9 per cent of the petitioners for divorce called upon the café "antipriest" to support their new freedom to end unworkable marriages.<sup>13</sup> While the Revolution may have increased the café owners' political power in their neighbourhoods, it did little to augment their social influence.

10 The tension between the Catholic Church and the café in France is brilliantly analyzed in Gabrile Lebras's magisterial *Études de sociologie religieuse* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1955), vol. 1, pp. 240–241.

11 George Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 217; Albert Soboul, *The Sans Culottes*, trans. Rémy Inglis Hall (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1972); Richard Cobb, *The People's Armies*, trans. Marianne Elliot (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), and *Reactions to the French Revolution* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972).

12 Pierre Caron, *Paris pendant la terreur : rapports des agents secrets du Ministre de l'intérieur* (Paris: Société de l'histoire contemporaine et Société de l'histoire de France, 1910), vol. 3, p. 188.

13 Elaine Kruse, "Men in Support of Women's Rights: Witnesses for Divorces in Revolutionary Paris", paper delivered at the ninth annual conference of the Social Science History Association, October 25–28, 1984, Toronto, pp. 7–10.

The dramatic change in relations between the café owner and his or her clientele came with the innovation of the modern counter during the 1820s. Affectionately called the “zinc” after its constituent metal, the counter provided a spatial and commercial prop with which the café owner could enter and regulate the social world of his or her shop. This new piece of commercial and social furniture appeared in 1821 when a Parisian joiner by the name of Emile Verrière conceived the brilliant idea of incorporating the functions of serving drinks and washing glasses into one space.<sup>14</sup> The idea was quickly adopted and imitated, and it spread rapidly throughout Paris, coinciding with the massive wave of migration that inundated the capital between the 1820s and the 1900s. John Merriman has noted that, for newly-arrived rural and small-town immigrants, the urban neighbourhood became a substitute for the village.<sup>15</sup> In an analogous fashion the café substituted for the town square and the village church. The invention of the counter permitted the café owner to replace the village mayor or priest. Virtually every nineteenth-century commentator on working-class café society noted that the counter had become the centre of proletarian sociability. Denis Poulot in *Le sublime*, Henry Leyret in *En plein faubourg*, and the dossiers of the Parisian judicial archives all underscore the importance of the *comptoir*.<sup>16</sup> A nineteenth-century adage succinctly summed up the situation: “The well-off at the tables, the people at the *zinc*.”<sup>17</sup>

Through the nineteenth century, with the rise of the bar, Parisian owners became integral parts of neighbourhood social life and news networks. Unlike the eighteenth-century court cases that Brennan and other historians of the Old Regime have explored, nineteenth-century cases reveal that the café owner, next to the concierge and family members, was the most frequently consulted witness in a defendant’s neighbourhood. Nineteenth-century café owners, also unlike their eighteenth-century counterparts, could usually give precise information regarding the character of the customers.<sup>18</sup> In some cases the relationship between the café owner and the defendant had lasted for more than 20 years. Seldom did a café owner catering to the working class report that the shop was too full for the owner to know what

14 Odette Pannetier, *Plaisirs forcés à perpétuité*, cited in Robert Giraud, *L’argot du bistrot* (Paris: Éditions Marval, 1989), p. 148. During the same period, the counter made its appearance in England. See Peter Clark, *The English Alehouse: A Social History, 1200–1830* (London: Longman, 1983), p. 276.

15 John M. Merriman, “Introduction”, in John M. Merriman, ed., *French Cities in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1981), p. 33.

16 Leyret, *En plein faubourg*, p. 23.

17 Maurice Crubellier and Maurice Agulhon, eds., *Histoire de la France urbaine* (Paris: Seuil, 1983), vol. 4, p. 436.

18 A systematic examination of the dossiers for the Parisian Correctional Tribunal, the Court of Appeals, and Assize Court reveals a heavy reliance of the police on the testimony of café owners. These dossiers are contained in the Archives départementales de la Seine et de la Ville de Paris (hereafter ADS), in the respective series D2U6, D4U9, and D2U8.

had happened during an incident, or that he or she did not know the individual concerned.<sup>19</sup> In fact, only on the well-travelled routes leading out of Paris and in cafés that served an extremely transient clientele do we see such unconcerned testimony as the following: "We cannot pay attention to all the drunks who pass on this route."<sup>20</sup>

As a result of the greater visibility of the owner and family behind the counter, the popular classes increasingly viewed the café owner as a sort of *paterfamilias* or matron. In particular the male café owner, but in certain instances the female owner, too, was usually portrayed as big, strong, and imposing, possessing broad shoulders, a short thick neck, and powerful arms visible below his rolled-up sleeves.<sup>21</sup> The image of a big, machinelike man or woman dispensing half-litres of wine (known in the eighteenth century as *setiers* — in popular slang, *strocs*) prompted the populace to nickname the owner the *mastroquet*, perhaps as master of the *strocs*.<sup>22</sup> He or she was also pictured as either directing waiters by voice and gesture or clinking glasses with the habitués. In his novel about the Parisian central markets (*les halles*), Emile Zola noted the power of the café owner: "M. Jules lorded it over his café whose clientele included porters, shop boys, fellows in white smocks, and velvet caps."<sup>23</sup> If customers drank too much on Sunday evening and became quarrelsome, folklore had it that the owner took them to the local police station and fetched them at dawn on the following Monday morning. An 1877 satirical cartoon in *L'Illustration* portrayed a "Jean Boileau *mastroquet*" with a large powerful body. The caption read, "He had the most wonderful clientele of drunkards [*pochards*] in all Paris."<sup>24</sup> The stereotypical café owner was brave and feared neither a "clientele with knives or competition from other shops".<sup>25</sup> According to Leon and Maurice Bonnef, these solidly built proprietors stood ready to kick out anyone who became undesirable.<sup>26</sup> As cafés became successful, a "self-satisfied" café owner's strongbox was said to rival the size of his stomach.<sup>27</sup>

19 Virtually the only case is ADS D2U8#52, *affaire Goblet et al.*

20 ADS D2U8#58, *affaire Goblet*.

21 See "Gravers ... de l'armée de salut", *L'Illustration*, March 26, 1887, between pp. 208–209, and commentary, p. 216, for a picture of the stereotypical male café owner. For a similar image of a female café owner, see the famous painting from the 1905 salon by Pagès entitled "Sur le zinc", which is reproduced in Henry-Melchior de Langle, *Le petit monde des cafés et débits parisiens au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990), opposite p. 56.

22 L. Sainéan, *Langage parisien au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Boccard, 1920), p. 268.

23 Emile Zola, *Savage Paris*, trans. David Hughes and Marie J. Mason (London: Elek Books, 1955), p. 250.

24 "Les expropriations et les expropriés", cartoons by Bertall, *L'Illustration*, January 6, 1877, p. 13.

25 Maurice Talemeyr, "Moeurs électorales les marchands de vins", *Revue des deux mondes*, August 15, 1898, p. 880.

26 Leon Bonnef and Maurice Bonnef, *Marchands de folie*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Rivière et Cie, 1913), p. 6.

27 Victor Fournel, *Ce qu'on voit dans les rues de Paris* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1865), p. 379.

The counter permitted café owners to accentuate the existing aspects of the shop as a domestic space. As in the previous century, nineteenth-century café owners usually lived above or in back of their shops and used their families as staff. The fact that the running of a café was a family affair is confirmed by the high percentage of late nineteenth-century Parisian café owners, over 30 per cent, who had more than three children.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, most owners considered the shop as much their home as their business. Sulpice Dubrac's description of one evening at his café on 330 *rue Lecourbe* in the Javel district on the Left Bank sounds more like that of a homeowner than a shopkeeper: "When several friends came to drink, my son continued to drink with them."<sup>29</sup>

Although the police were legally entitled to enter cafés at any time during business hours, proprietors often viewed an unannounced entry as an invasion of privacy. A woman identified in the judicial archives as "*Femme Gombault*", following the arrest of her husband in July 1871 for permitting clandestine prostitution in their shop at 7 *rue du Maine*, protested to the prosecuting attorney: "It is incredible that a police commissioner and one of his assistants would cavalierly enter my house in order to make an arrest as if it was a house of prostitution without telling me the motive of his visit."<sup>30</sup> Patrons often had this same proprietary sense concerning cafés. In June 1880 in the nearby suburb of Levallois-Parret, a tax collector reported that a café owner and his customers attacked him when he tried to enter the shop: "They jumped on me ... yelling 'screw you! police spy, rabble; we are in our house.'"<sup>31</sup>

Short but poignant newspaper announcements, however, best record the success of some café owners in creating a friendly and homelike ambience. For example, the radical republican newspaper *La Lanterne* reported on March 11, 1879:

Yesterday, Sunday at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, the civil burial of M. Cocquart, *marchand de vins*, at 19 *rue des Noyers* occurred. [He] was universally respected in his neighbourhood, and a numerous crowd followed his coffin. He was a member of the Belleville choral group. The entire group sang at his funeral.<sup>32</sup>

28 Talemeyr, "Moeurs electorale", p. 881, also the source for the number of children listed for café owners in court cases in the Correction Tribunal, ADS series DIU6. This is a large family given France's demographic decline in the nineteenth century, when many families had just one child. See Michelle Perrot and Anne Martin-Fugier, "The Actors", in Michelle Perrot, ed., *The History of Private Life*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), vol. 4, pp. 320-330.

29 ADS D2U687, *affaire Dubrac*. This is a classic *marchande de vin* with the home over the shop; the incident occurred on a Monday evening.

30 ADS D2U6#5, *affaire Gombault*.

31 "Tribunaux", *La Lanterne*, June 10, 1880, p. 3.

32 "Paris", *La Lanterne*, March 11, 1879, p. 2.

The Library of the History of Paris, which contains files of newspaper clippings on various subjects, has five cartons of newspaper articles on the cafés. In this collection, the epitaph to a deceased café owner or a closed café is one of the most frequently occurring subjects.<sup>33</sup> The death of a proprietor or the closing of a café was clearly a newsworthy event.

Working-class café owners developed an elaborate set of rituals to enhance the camaraderie of the counter. Probably no two cafés ever had exactly the same customs. In general, however, a café owner would usually greet a customer at the bar with a handshake; a person who became an habitué might receive a nickname. As the relationship developed over the years the owner might help steady customers by getting a cab when needed, playing cards with the lonely ones, or treating birthday or anniversary celebrants.<sup>34</sup> Finally, for family occasions such as weddings or baptisms, owners would rent out or let a family or group use the extra room found in most cafés.<sup>35</sup>

By the 1860s the café owner at his or her counter had become a central focus of Parisian life, especially among the workers. Not only did most cafés now have counters, but also the sheer number of shops had skyrocketed since 1850: from 4,500 in the late 1840s to over 22,000 in 1870.<sup>36</sup> One measure of the café owner's growing success is the fact that proprietors became the subjects of humour and satire. An 1862 cartoon in the *Journal amusant* depicted a café owner raising his hands and pronouncing a wedding vow over a proletarian couple on his counter.<sup>37</sup> Undoubtedly intended to prompt a laugh, this scene also presented, despite its humorous exaggeration, an important truth about the changed social relations between the owner and his or her clientele. Obviously, café owners could not pronounce the wedding vow, but by the 1850s they and their shops had become much more centrally involved in the courting process and family life of their customers than they had been during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Under the protective gaze of the proprietor, men and women gathered more and more often as friends, lovers, couples, and families in the cafés.

Indeed, by the 1860s the café had become one of the primary places in

33 Bibliothèque historique de la Ville de Paris, dossiers "Actualités", no. 77, cabarets and cafés.

34 For some examples of this abundant literature, see *Physiologie des cafés de Paris* (Paris: Desloges, 1841), pp. 27–28; Bonneff and Bonneff, *Marchands de folie*, p. 6; and Fernand Vandéren, "Un garçon chez Véry", *L'Illustration*, April 9, 1892, pp. 300–301.

35 Garrioch in *Neighborhood and Community*, p. 26, notes that this was a longstanding feature of Parisian café owners, dating at least from the eighteenth century.

36 For the figure in the 1840s, see Louis Girard, *La Deuxième république et le Second empire : nouvelle histoire de Paris* (Paris: Association pour la publication d'une histoire de Paris, Diffusion Hachette, 1981), p. 221. The figure for the number of Parisian cafés in 1873 is in the Archives of the Prefecture of Police (hereafter cited as APP), series BA, carton no. 884, dossier 1, "Tableau comparatif du recensement des débits de boissons au 31 décembre 1872 et au 31 décembre 1873".

37 "Les quartiers de Paris", drawings by G. Randon, *Journal amusant*, no. 334, May 24, 1862.



Paris where men and women could meet in a casual and informal way. Unlike their counterparts a century earlier, Parisian working-class women seem not to have felt the need for male accompaniment in the café, and in fact they often invited men to join them in these establishments. For example, Marie Morel invited her former lover Davidts, who was also the father of her child, and his new lover Louise Montginoux for a drink in the café on the first floor of her apartment building. There, according to Louise, they discussed family matters:

The evening passed without incident — we talked of banal things and about children. M<sup>me</sup> Morel said that she was currently at Varenne Saint Maur, but that she was going to move back to Paris because it was too far. We then walked her to the train station.<sup>38</sup>

The link between public and private life as well as between merriment and marriage is epitomized in the popular expression “to have a wedding [*faire la noce*]”, a synonym for any holiday or drinking party.<sup>39</sup>

Because they were at the centre of the dynamics of courtship, it is logical that café owners were frequently chosen by Parisian proletarian and lower middle-class couples to witness marriage contracts. The civil marriage records of Paris, not the religious ones, reveal that between the 1860s and the 1890s (records for earlier decades are no longer available) 23 per cent of the couples getting married selected café owners to sign the contracts legalizing this “rite of passage”. After 1900 this figure dropped to 15 per cent; nonetheless, the café owner remained a fixture of neighbourhood life in Paris and its suburbs until the 1960s. At this point a new wave of urban renovation and suburban development, which often included zoning ordinances banning or restricting cafés, effectively eliminated this institution from neighbourhood life. The *Journal amusant*, with its satirical “café priest” cartoon, had captured an essential truth about Parisian society that would endure for over a century.

After the signing of the marriage contract, working-class wedding parties frequently took place in cafés. Honoré de Balzac’s short story “Facino Cane” provides a detailed description of a typical wedding celebration.<sup>40</sup> During the same era as Balzac’s story, the 1830s and 1840s, the Parisian Prefects of Police, in their ordinances concerning the closing hours of cafés, singled out wedding celebrations and banquets as a frequent cause of after-hours violations. The Prefects also complained that café owners almost

38 ADS D2U6#80, *affaire* Morel.

39 Widely found for example in Tristan Bernard’s play, *Le petit café, l’illustration théâtrale*, May 18, 1912, p. 14.

40 Honoré de Balzac, *Selected Short Stories*, trans. Sylvia Raphael (New York: Penguin, 1977), pp. 237–242.

always waited until just before the event to put in their requests to extend the closing hour and thus prevented the police from following proper procedures.<sup>41</sup> The Prefects did have cause for concern, for sometimes these wedding parties, such as one on *barrière* des Martyrs in January 1829, lasted until 2 a.m.; others went as late as 4 a.m.<sup>42</sup>

Couples did not abandon the café and its owner after their wedding party. They often called upon the owner to appear at the city hall again, to witness the happy event of a baptism.<sup>43</sup> The percentage of baptisms witnessed by café owners (10 per cent) is roughly half that of weddings. This lower figure may be the result of a law requiring only two witnesses for baptisms, rather than the four needed for marriages. Indeed, had four witnesses been required also for baptisms, the percentage of café owners involved might very well have equalled that for marriages. The preponderance of café owners, compared with other types of shopkeeper, in the civil records of marriages and baptisms reveals that these owners purveyed much more than food and drink to their customers. Their relationships frequently broke through the boundaries separating public and private life and personalized the usual interaction between patron and customer.

As the children grew up, parents, particularly among the proletarian and white-collar sectors of the population, took them to cafés during family outings. A long-standing tradition in artisanal Paris had been for the male workers to spend Sunday walking in the country or on the boulevards with their families and to spend Monday drinking with their comrades beyond the city tax barriers where the wine was cheaper.<sup>44</sup> Naturally, there were many variations within this tradition. For example, artisans from one of the main luxury trades, the bronze founders, during the July Monarchy (1830 — 1848) often took their children with them to the barrier cafés on Monday.<sup>45</sup> In some instances workers brought their families to the Belleville barriers two or three times a week.<sup>46</sup> The custom shifted locale to the boulevards after Haussmann's renovations and annexations destroyed the old barrier cafés with their cheap prices. One of the great novelists of working-class life during the second half of the century, Alphonse Daudet, reported seeing whole families at the tables of small cafés on Sundays, reading illustrated

41 See *circulaire* of January 11, 1837, quoted by M. F. Mironneau, *Nouveau manuel de police* (Paris: Fayard, 1877), pp. 525–526.

42 "Chronique ... Paris", *La Gazette des tribunaux*, January 3, 1829, p. 216; Joanna Richardson, *The Bohemians: La vie de Bohème in Paris, 1830–1914* (London: Macmillan, 1969), p. 34.

43 ADS V4E, registers for births (*naissances*); Louis Lazare, *Les quartiers de l'est de Paris* (Paris au bureau de la bibliothèque municipale, 1870), p. 125.

44 Charles Rearick, *Pleasures of the Belle Époque: Entertainment and Festivity in Turn-of-the-Century France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 182.

45 Georges Duveau, *La vie ouvrière sous le Second Empire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1946), p. 246.

46 Peter de Polnay, *Aspects of Paris* (London: W. H. Allen, 1968), p. 405.

papers and drinking beer.<sup>47</sup> In 1884, *Le cri du peuple*, the paper edited by radical writer and former Communeard Jules Valles, observed that workers now took their children to the café for New Year's Day dinner rather than celebrating that holiday with a family feast at home, as had once been the custom.<sup>48</sup> In another article, Valles expressed his fear that the accessibility of prepared food in cafés and delicatessens was destroying home cooking in particular and home life in general.<sup>49</sup> Although this may have been the case with some families, the detailed case studies of Parisian working-class households done by Frederick Le Play's students in the series *Les ouvriers des deux mondes* reveal that families frequenting cafés on holidays and special occasions did not necessarily become regular customers.<sup>50</sup>

Parents enjoying café sociability did not forget about their children, but generally monitored them closely. The empathetic and empirical American observer Alvan Sanborn noted that the typical café contained "bloused and frocked laborers, with their whitecapped wives and their black-aproned children". Sanborn thought that Parisian working-class cafés were a much more conducive space for children than American saloons: "Here is tobacco smoke and good humor, and emulation and curiosity and labyrinthine chatter, but no drunkenness or rudeness or tobacco juice or saturated sawdust."<sup>51</sup> A similarly vivid image of working-class café life, in this case among the upwardly mobile clerks, is found in a 1911 *L'Illustration* article. The chronicler of local Paris colour relates how, once a week, especially at the end of winter between five and seven in the afternoon, the face of the boulevard changed; it ceased to reflect a mixture of international cosmopolitan tourists and became a boulevard of Parisians and their families. After a long walk in the still largely open spaces of the Champs Élysées, the Champs de Mars, and the Invalides, families went back to the central and peripheral boulevards and sat at the brightly lighted sidewalks. Clerks concentrated on keeping their hats on straight, and grandmothers held children tightly by the hand so they would not stray.<sup>52</sup> Rarely did the judicial archives, the newspapers, or the periodical press mention unattended children roaming through the cafés. Even the street-smart urchins, *gamins*, seemed to have kept their distance from this adult institution, for they reportedly scavenged for cigar butts on the sidewalks next to cafés rather

47 *The Works of Alphonse Daudet*, trans. Marian McIntyre (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1899–1906), vol. 21, *Jack*, p. 322.

48 "La journée", *Le cri du peuple*, January 4, 1884, p. 2.

49 Jeanne Gaillard, *Paris la ville (1852–1870)* (Lille: Atelier reproduction des thèses, Université de Lille, III, 1976), p. 249.

50 E. F. Herbert and E. Delbert, "Tisseur en chales", *Ouvriers des deux mondes*, 1st series, vol. 1, no. 7 (1857), pp. 318–319.

51 Alvan Sanborn, "Paris Workingman's Cafés", *North American Review* (1894), p. 252.

52 "Les premiers beaux dimanches — Le retour au logis par les grands boulevards", *L'Illustration*, March 18, 1911, p. 199.

than going inside.<sup>53</sup> The few recorded scenes of unattended children in cafés take a tragic rather than moralistic tone. *L'Illustration's* Parisian chronicler in 1873 told the story of two merry working-class buddies drinking and laughing unrestrainedly at a *père* Guérin's shop near the Montparnasse cemetery. As they drank the "blue wine" characteristically consumed by workers, a six-year-old child approached them. They invited him to drink, but he refused because he was at Montparnasse to mourn the loss of his mother on the first anniversary of her death.<sup>54</sup>

Parental surveillance was apparently effective, because the behaviour of minors in Parisian cafés, especially in relation to those in other French cities, was commendable. The family surveys in *Les ouvriers des deux mondes* or working-class autobiographies sometimes reveal that sons were more sober than their fathers.<sup>55</sup> Across the century, social observers in Paris did not document the heavy childhood drinking in Paris that they found in such textile towns of the northeast as Rouen, Nancy, Amiens, Besançon, and Douai.<sup>56</sup> A youth's first drink and initial bout of drunkenness were not the important rites of passage into adulthood among Parisian youth that they were in Brittany or Picardy.<sup>57</sup> Adolescent Parisian proletarian culture centred much more around the dance floor than the bar.<sup>58</sup> The fear expressed at the turn of the century about proletarian juvenile delinquents, embodied in café-based criminal bands called "Apaches" by journalists, found little factual support.<sup>59</sup>

Numerous nineteenth-century moralists wrung their hands as they observed the family activities occurring in cafés among the middle class and the "lower orders". For these moralists such domesticity in the public domain represented one of the ultimate degradations of modern urban life. Reflecting on the new cafés and music halls (called, appropriately enough, *café-concerts* in France) that had sprung up in the wake of Haussmann's renovations, Edmund and Jules de Goncourt in their diary for 1860 noted: "The home is dying. Life is threatening to become public. The club for the

53 Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, trans. Charles E. Wilbour (New York: Modern Library, n.d.).

54 Pierre Audebrand, "Courrier de Paris", *L'Illustration*, April 18, 1873, p. 184.

55 P. du Maroussem, "Ébéniste parisien de haut luxe", *Ouvriers des deux mondes*, 2nd series, vol. 4, no. 74 (1892), pp. 69, 60.

56 Maurice Yvernès, "L'alcoolisme et la criminalité", *Journal de société de statistique de Paris*, vol. 2, no. 49 (1908), p. 412.

57 Arnold van Gennep, *Manuel de folklore française contemporain* (Paris: Auguste Picard, 1943), vol. 1, pp. 166, 198. The Bonneff brothers in their exposé of the evil effects of café owners in working-class life, *Marchands de folie*, provide only one example of a café owner tempting working-class youth, pp. 13–14.

58 François Gasnault, *Guinguettes et lorettes : bals publics à Paris au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Aubier, 1986).

59 See W. Scott Haine, "Youth and Drink in Late Nineteenth-Century Paris: Rhetoric and Reality", *Contemporary French Civilization*, vol. 12, no. 1 (Winter-Spring 1988), pp. 87–101.

upper classes, the café for the lower.”<sup>60</sup> Even into the mid-1880s, this type of broadside against Haussmann’s transformation could be read in Charles Devon’s *Notre capitale Paris* (1885).<sup>61</sup> Aside from Leyret, Sanborn, and a few others, most observers never considered that café sociability might represent precisely the opposite historical trend: the means by which private life expanded into a previously public sphere and consequently made society more peaceable and tolerant.

Although it cannot be documented in exact detail here, we can nevertheless provide some indications that a growing sense of and respect for the privacy of individuals and groups developed in the café over the course of the nineteenth century. The best proof of this development lies in the fact that by the early 1830s we see café habitués viewing this space as part of their personal domain. A café scene from the life of that working-class son, Jean Renoir, provides both a touching and telling indication of this sense of domesticity. In the early decades of the Impressionist School, Renoir and some of his friends frequented a small café at the corner of *rue Saints-Pères* and *rue de l’Université*, a café exclusively frequented by long-time habitués who always sat at the same tables. One night an old couple entered and were disturbed to find that Renoir’s group had taken “their” table. The couple were relieved and delighted when the artists moved. They immediately sat down and played their usual game of dominoes.<sup>62</sup> In Zola’s novel about the central markets, the radical Gavard virtually lived in the panelled side room of a café in the market district. He left overcoats, books, and papers. Lebigre, the proprietor, accommodated such nesting by removing one of the room’s tables in order to provide an upholstered settle that could be used for a bed.<sup>63</sup> Zola’s fictional character had a real-life duplicate in the person of Joseph Fabre, a supervisor who fought for the Commune and who received a three-year prison sentence for this act. In his testimony, Fabre stated that he had lived at and moved from a place called Massard just as he had earlier at a café.<sup>64</sup> The eighteenth-century historians cited above offer no comparable evidence from that time for this feeling of comfort and familiarity in a café.

This growing sense of being at home in the café explains why incidents of family fights and lovers’ quarrels became common during the nineteenth century, unlike in the eighteenth century. Now couples aired family or personal problems in this public setting without fear of bystanders intervening in their affairs. Family disputes thus moved from private into public life.

60 Edmund de Goncourt and Jules de Goncourt, *From the Goncourt Journal*, trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 53.

61 Quoted in Timothy J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 206–210 and 304, n. 6.

62 Georges Rivière, *Renoir et ses amis* (Paris: H. Floury, 1921), pp. 173, 176.

63 Zola, *Savage Paris*, p. 245.

64 ADS D2U6#5, *affaire Fabre*.

Couples, brothers, or cousins did not feel inhibited in arguing or in verbally or physically attacking each other. The Parisian courts and newspapers of the era were filled with dramatic stories of family conflict in the café. Although the following cases involve “irregular” or separated couples, Assize Court records and especially those of civil cases in the Correctional Tribunal contain numerous instances of marital discord.<sup>65</sup> As early as the 1830s the sources provide abundant examples. For example, a prostitute who had lived maritally for three years with a hauler at the grain depot reproached him at a café near the Palais Royale for infidelities. He responded by hitting her twice.<sup>66</sup> The fact that the woman was a prostitute does not detract from the fact that she was with her lover, not a client, that she chose a public venue to express her anger over a personal matter, and, moreover, that no one intervened to stop her.

The number of couples engaging in family fights in cafés grew steadily across the century, and we find this type of incident especially abundant in the judicial archives and newspaper reports from 1870 through 1914. On May 29, 1874, Honoré Marie de Lisle, an unemployed clerk, had a violent argument with his wife over the custody of their children after she had obtained a *séparation du corps* from him. When the fight erupted on the terrace of the café de la Rotonde at 50 *boulevard* Courcelles, in the Ternes neighbourhood of the 17th *arrondissement*, a few customers, along with the husband and wife owners, were inside at the bar. The woman’s screams brought them outside, but the former husband’s assertion that it was a family quarrel immediately persuaded them to go back.<sup>67</sup> Two years later the soon-to-be notorious retired army sergeant Sebastien Billoir shocked the café habitués at a series of Montmartre cafés with his tyrannical treatment of his lover, Jeanne Belange. There is not the faintest indication, however, that anyone ever tried to intervene in their quarrels, perhaps because he did not resort to the brutal physical attacks in the café that he would later inflict on her in his apartment, finally cutting her up in pieces.<sup>68</sup> A much more banal case involved a worker named Henri Houdremont, who, after one of his all-night revels on April 13, 1885, encountered his estranged wife Marie in Madame Lefebvre’s café at 39 *rue* des Amandiers, Belleville. At the bar they immediately began to argue about Houdremont’s lack of support or concern for their children.<sup>69</sup> In each of these cases, the café owner was present and ready to monitor the exchange, but primarily in order that the privacy of other customers should not be violated.

65 Ruth Harris in *Murders and Madness: Medicine, Law, and Society in the fin de siècle*, Oxford Historical Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), based upon the Assize Court dossiers (series D2U8), notes that married couples often fought in cafés, p. 267.

66 “Chronique ... Paris”, *La Gazette des tribunaux*, November 3, 1830, p. 8.

67 ADS D2U6#27, *affaire* Marie de Lisle. See also “Chronique ... Paris”, *La Gazette des tribunaux*, February 13, 1873, p. 147.

68 ADS D2U8#56, *affaire* Billoir.

69 ADS D2U6#73, *affaire* Houdremont.

These cases reveal that the nineteenth-century working class felt sufficiently at home in the café not only to discuss their private affairs but also to argue and fight over them. The reason people felt they could express such private emotions in public is that customers, thanks in part to the café owner's greater role in sociability, no longer meddled in each other's conversations or affairs, as had often been the case in the eighteenth century.<sup>70</sup> Judicial archives contain no examples of intervention in a domestic quarrel in progress. A similar evolution toward tolerance of private matters aired in public also seems to have occurred in England. However, the explanation given for the change in Britain, the general increase in the size of homes, does not apply to Paris.<sup>71</sup> Instead, the answer is to be found in the growing ability of Parisians to create private spaces in cafés. Henry Steele, an English mechanic who worked in Paris for a year at the turn of the century and wrote a book on his experiences, noted how pervasive this right to privacy in public had become among the workers by this time:

The families come and go away together, and though social intercourse with utter strangers is free in the course of the day's enjoyment, no one presumes on that freedom to the extent of entering into more intimate acquaintance with any family.<sup>72</sup>

As the century progressed and the city became more populated, growing from roughly 500,000 in 1789 to over 3,000,000 by 1914, the café increasingly provided the living space most workers lacked in their cramped apartments.<sup>73</sup> Rather than being a sign of material deprivation, this was a sign of cultural adaptation. The desire of the café owner to make a profit and the Parisian populace to find more space in an increasingly constricted urban environment coincided nicely in the café. The result was, on balance, largely positive in terms of morality when the Parisian café experienced its "golden age", characterized by a large number of shops and customers.<sup>74</sup> Also during these decades the proletarian couple and family became a stronger and more intimate institution in Paris. In the city, as in the rest of France, the number of weddings increased over the century (from eight per 1,000 in 1748 to 11.5 per 1,000 in 1872), while the number of births decreased (from 35 per 1,000) in the 1780s to 27 per 1,000 in 1876).<sup>75</sup>

70 Farge, *Vivre dans la rue*, p. 74.

71 Nancy Tomes, "A 'Torrent of Abuse': Crimes of Violence Between Working-Class Men and Women in London, 1840–1875", *Journal of Social History*, vol. 11 (1978), pp. 335, 341–342.

72 Henry Steele, *The Working Classes in France* (London: Twentieth Century Press, 1904), p. 37.

73 Ann Louise Shapiro, *Housing the Poor of Paris, 1850–1902* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), pp. 129–132.

74 Michael R. Marrus, "Social Drinking in the Belle Époque", *Journal of Social History*, vol. 7 (Winter 1974), p. 131.

75 "Faits divers", *L'illustration*, March 2, 1878, p. 147.

Thus the repugnance for marriage that the famous late eighteenth-century observer Louis Sebastian Mercier found in his era subsided during the same time frame in which the café became an ubiquitous institution.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, two of the leading historians of the Parisian family, Rachel Fuchs and Lenard Berlanstein, have shown that bonds of affection became all the more apparent among working-class Parisian families as we move from the 1860s through the 1880s.<sup>77</sup> By 1910, Berlanstein believes, the Parisian proletariat had become “familialized”; that is, the family unit had become smaller and more affectionate with fewer children. Numerous statistical indices support this interpretation. By 1900 the rate of illegitimacy had perceptibly declined, along with the birth rate. Begging among youth seemed to contemporaries to be diminishing by 1900.<sup>78</sup> In any case, the percentage of teenagers arrested in Paris in 1900 was appreciably lower than it had been 40 years earlier: 20 to 26 per cent compared with 33 per cent in 1860. These statistics suggest that workers were indeed devoting a growing amount of time to their children during the very decades in which they themselves were spending more time in cafés. Family life and café life clearly did not cancel out each other. Family arguments in cafés did not reveal the disintegration of family life, but instead the annexation of café space into the domestic sphere.

The evidence demonstrates the vitality and adaptability of the drinkseller during the nineteenth century in Paris. As the needs of the Parisian population changed, the drinkseller was able to devise new technologies and rituals to serve new needs. A larger, denser, more mechanized and bureaucratic city sparked a need in ordinary people for some oasis of sociability amidst a desert of anonymity. In an urban space increasingly dominated by strangers, the café owner cultivated friendship and familiarity. Consequently, the Parisian drinksellers sold much more than distilled and fermented beverages or even tea and coffee; they also sold a sense of peace and tranquility that the Parisian populace transformed into a sense of domesticity.

The discussion presented here also underscores the fruitfulness of historical and comparative study. Thomas Brennan’s ground-breaking work on the eighteenth-century labourer’s tavern has enabled this historian to map the evolution of the Parisian café proprietor. Future studies on the social impact of the drinkseller will expand and deepen our knowledge of this vital part of the social history of alcohol and its use.

76 Maxime DuCamp, *Les convulsions de Paris* (1881; rept. New York: AMS Press, n.d.), vol. 3, p. 111.

77 Rachel Fuchs, *Abandoned Children: Foundlings and Child Welfare in Nineteenth-Century France* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), p. 276; Lenard Berlanstein, *The Working People of Paris, 1871–1914* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), pp. 137–147.

78 Girard, *La Deuxième république et le Second empire*, p. 167; Fuchs, *Abandoned Children*, p. 264; Michelle Perrot, “La fin des vagabonds”, *L’histoire*, July 3, 1978; Jean-Claude Beaune, *Le vagabond et la machine* (Seysssel: Champ Vallon, 1983), p. 338.