Serving Sex: Playing with Prostitution in the *Brasseries à femmes* of Late Nineteenth-Century Paris

ANDREW ISRAEL ROSS
University of Southern Mississippi

In a front-page 1882 article in *Le petit parisien*, Jean Frollo drew his readers' attention to a new kind of drinking establishment appearing on the streets of Paris. He claimed that these cafés, called *brasseries à femmes* because they employed serving girls who interacted with the customers, threatened the well-being of the city's youth: "Young people, sometimes children, lean on wooden tables, forcing themselves to swallow some infected beverage without grimacing, smoke cigarettes, and try to earn the approval [*suffrages*] of the venue's goddesses." These women, Frollo explains, "circulate, pouring the venue's poisoned ambrosia, sitting next to this one, provoking that one" in an effort at selling as much drink as possible.[1] With their presence thus depicted as the key component of the experience, these "goddesses," the serving girls, differentiated the brasseries à femmes from other kinds of drinking establishments. Serving up not just drink but an entire experience predicated on the interaction between customer and server, the brasseries à femmes simultaneously provided a novel form of pleasure, a unique business opportunity, and a target for moral disapproval.

First appearing in the 1860s, brasseries à femmes received a great deal of attention from the Paris police and various moral commentators because the way they used sex to attract customers linked them to the problem

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[1] Jean Frollo, "Le 'mauvais oeil,'" *Le petit parisien*, 13 November 1882. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the French are my own.

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of "clandestine" or unregulated prostitution.[2] This rhetorical connection between prostitution and serving drinks was part of a discourse that consistently described working-class women as being in danger of falling into prostitution, but it was also reflective of the changing nature of the business of sex itself.[3] According to Alain Corbin's influential interpretation, late nineteenth-century Parisian prostitutes increasingly catered to the desires of their growing bourgeois clientele by emphasizing practices of seduction rather than the base fulfillment of sexual need.[4] The serving girl's job amounted to performing her own sexual availability in order to attract a clientele. Frollo's article warned that the serving girls targeted youths who risked being drawn into a realm of false desire—"a world of perfections and the ideal of their pubescent dreams." In doing so, serving girls revealed their "evil eye . . . if one means by these words the terrible, incessant influence exercised on youth by these women, who, under the cover of a more or less acceptable métier, practice in all safety the role played in a more troublesome and dangerous way by their rivals of the street."[5] Frollo thus reduced a novel form of public entertainment and female employment to something more readily comprehensible: prostitution. In doing so, he rooted the brasseries à femmes in new practices of venal sex that justified persistent police attention and consistent moral concern.

Brasseries à femmes seemed different from other kinds of Parisian drinking establishments in the late nineteenth century because they explicitly used their female employees to deploy strategies of sexual titillation that would encourage men to consume. While prostitutes and other working-class women had increasingly integrated themselves into the life of the French café as both customers and employees during the French Revolution, the

[2] Most historians and nineteenth-century commentators date the origins of the brasseries à femmes to the 1867 World's Exposition in Paris, but they may have appeared earlier in the decade. See Alfred Carel, *Les brasseries à femmes de Paris* (Paris: E. Monnier, 1884), 3–4; Ali Coffignon, *Paris-vivant: La corruption à Paris* (Paris: Librairie Illustrée, 1888), 91; Gustave Macé, *Gibier de Saint-Lazare* (Paris: G. Charpentier, 1888), 127; Theresa Ann Gronberg, "Femmes de Brasserie," *Art History* 7, no. 3 (1984): 336; Jessica Tanner, "Turning Tricks, Turning the Tables: Plotting the Brasserie à Femmes in Tabarant's *Virus d'amour*," *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 41, nos. 3–4 (2013): 256.

[3] A variety of texts made the connection between class and prostitution. See Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet, *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris, considérée sous le rapport de l'hygiène publique, de la morale et de l'administration*, 3rd ed. (Paris: J.-B. Ballière, 1857), 1:103–5; Léo Taxil, *La prostitution contemporaine: Étude d'une question sociale* (Paris: Librairie Populaire, 1884), 7–9; Coffignon, *La corruption à Paris*, 17–28. On these discourses, see Jill Harsin, *Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 248–50; and Victoria Thompson, *The Virtuous Marketplace: Women and Men, Money and Politics in Paris, 1830–1870* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 17–27.

[4] Alain Corbin, *Les filles de noce: Misère sexuelle et prostitution au XIX^e siècle* (Paris: Flammarion, 1982), 296.

[5] Frollo, "Le 'mauvais oeil.'"

brasseries à femmes of the early Third Republic (1870–1940) explicitly demanded that the employees use sex to provoke, encourage, and otherwise incite the customers to drink.[6] Unlike in cafés that hired barmaids (*filles de comptoir*), no "protective counter," as one moral commentator called it, separated the server from her customer in the brasseries à femmes.[7] Instead, serving girls flirted with the clientele and cajoled them to consume. They sat with—and sometimes on—the customers while moving to and fro in the raucous café. Their flirtatious behavior implicitly hinted at the possibility of consummating a sexual encounter after work.

Unlike explorations of the French café as a site of political organization, class formation, and intellectual exchange by scholars such as Thomas Brennan, Susanna Barrows, and W. Scott Haine, I emphasize the café as a site of pleasure.[8] The brasseries à femmes were venues in which momentary sexual pleasure was the entire point. As such, they attracted the attention of state authorities, moralist commentators, clever businessmen, male customers, and potential women workers all at the same time. The police sought transparency as they kept an eye on public entertainments, moralists sought evidence for their various claims, proprietors sought profits as they directed and created those entertainments, and customers sought pleasure as they purchased them. All shared an interest in managing and understanding the kinds of social interactions available in public spaces such as the brasseries à femmes. Their emphasis on the availability of sex in the brasseries à femmes can be read, in this sense, as an attempt to conjure up and then control women's sexuality. As Charles Bernheimer has argued, artists constantly evoked the prostitute throughout the nineteenth century "not only because of her prominence as a social phenomenon but . . . because of her function in stimulating artistic strategies to control and dispel her fantasmatic threat to male mastery."[9] The serving girls of the brasseries à femmes similarly represented the unease created by the apparent easy availability of venal sex. The brasseries à femmes thus stand as an example of what Michel

[6] On women's presence in nineteenth-century cafés beyond the brasseries à femmes, see especially W. Scott Haine, "Women and Gender Politics: Beyond Prudery and Prostitution," in *The World of the Paris Café: Sociability among the French Working Class, 1789–1914* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 179–206.

[7] Coffignon, *La corruption à Paris*, 91. See also Carel, *Les brasseries à femmes*, 2.

[8] Haine's *The World of the Paris Café* remains the touchstone for studies of the nineteenth-century French café. See also Thomas Brennan, *Public Drinking and Popular Culture in Eighteenth Century Paris* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988); Susanna Barrows, "'Parliaments of the People': The Political Culture of Cafés in the Early Third Republic," in *Drinking: Behavior and Belief in Modern History*, ed. Susanna Barrows and Robin Room (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 87–97; and Leona Rittner, W. Scott Haine, and Jeffrey H. Jackson, eds., *The Thinking Space: The Café as a Cultural Institution in Paris, Italy, and Vienna* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2013).

[9] Charles Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 2.

Foucault called "perverse implantation": the objections of moralists and police helped to create a discourse that inflamed passions and produced new forms of public sexuality.[10]

The assertion that serving girls were prostitutes is thus revealed as a strategy of discipline insofar as it implies the servers' absolute subordination to the male clientele. For if a prostitute, in the words of the doctor and moral commentator Louis Martineau, was a "woman who keeps herself at the disposition of the one who pays," then the serving girl too lived at the mercy of those who patronized the bar.[11] And yet, an ordinary bar or café only became a brasserie à femmes insofar as serving girls were allowed to actively interact with the customers. While Frollo, for instance, asserted that the serving girls were prostitutes, he also admitted that "these women have a science of extracting money from the most unlikely source," and thereby acknowledged their ability to at least partially control the interaction.[12] Associating the serving girls with prostitution was a rhetorical strategy that sought to render a form of working-class women's employment amenable to surveillance, knowledge, and control, but the effort by moralists, the police, the customers, and café proprietors to represent the serving girl as just another kind of prostitute enabled women workers to participate in the production of a new kind of public pleasure. This tension between the subordination of serving girls to the police, proprietors, and customers and the independent activity they engaged in produced the particular experience of the brasseries à femmes. Indeed, the very moral discourse that labeled the serving girl a prostitute provided the terms through which workingwomen deployed sexual desire. These women perpetuated the image of their own sexual availability, which provided them with the opportunity to reshape the category of the prostitute itself: prostitution became the promise and display of sex, not only the sexual act itself. In this way, the transformation of the business of prostitution may have been less due to the clientele and more due to the workers than we have previously thought.

This claim demands that we pay closer attention to the process through which certain classes of working women were categorized as prostitutes and to the ways such labeling provided possible opportunities, as well as constraints. Both historians and art historians who have highlighted the brasseries à femmes as new venues serving the sexual life of the city have tended to leave unquestioned the designation of the employees as prostitutes. Historians such as Alain Corbin and Jill Harsin have situated the brasseries à femmes in the context of growing fears of clandestine or un-

[10] I thank Annette Timm for helping me clarify this point. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1980), 47–49.

[11] Louis Martineau, *La prostitution clandestine* (Paris: A. Delahaye et É. Lecrosnier, 1885), 35.

[12] Frollo, "Le 'mauvais oeil.'"

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registered prostitution during the last third of the century and have traced a shift away from the brothels and toward informal spaces such as these as the central theaters of Parisian prostitution. While Corbin argues that the shift reflects a change in male desire, Harsin argues that it was more due to administrative attempts to maintain police control over prostitution in the wake of legal challenges to the moral police and the regulationist system.[13]

Few historians, however, have addressed the brasseries à femmes in a sustained manner. Work in art history and literary criticism, on the other hand, has used these histories to show how institutions like the brasseries à femmes produced a new kind of entertainment. Scholars such as Theresa Ann Gronberg, Hollis Clayson, and Jessica Tanner have highlighted the ways in which representations of serving girls and brasseries à femmes constructed a mode of male pleasure dependent on ambiguity. The serving girl's social role and her cultural depiction, they argue, was entirely dependent upon keeping the question of whether she was a prostitute or not open. While Clayson argues that the very question made the serving girl subservient to male desire, Gronberg and Tanner claim that the ability of the serving girl to hide the answer to the question reveals a nascent social power.[14] Here, I emphasize Gronberg's and Tanner's view while also showing that this power emerged from the initial attempt to label the serving girl a prostitute in the first place.

This article refuses to take as axiomatic the moral discourse that categorized serving girls as prostitutes. Instead it puts the administrative and social history of prostitution into dialogue with studies of representation in order to show how serving girls participated in the construction of a novel form of sexual labor within the brasseries à femmes. Drawing inspiration from the critical theory of Michel de Certeau, I argue that while a moralist discourse, police practice, and business strategy shaped their possible range of action, serving girls were not left without a role to play. According to Certeau, while experts will always seek to discipline urban space through "imaginary totalizations produced by the eye, the everyday has a certain strangeness that does not surface, or whose surface is only its upper limit, outlining itself against the visible."[15] In other words, the attempt to fix the meaning of everyday life, whether by urbanists or moralists, was never and will never be totally complete. The representation of any given space or practice both endows meaning on and is shaped by the way such repre-

[13] Corbin, *Les filles de noce*, 249–54; Harsin, *Policing Prostitution*, 317–21.

[14] Hollis Clayson, *Painted Love: Prostitution in French Art of the Impressionist Era* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2003), 150–52; Gronberg, "Femmes de Brasserie," *Art History* 7, no. 5 (September 1984): 339–40; Tanner, "Turning Tricks," 256–57.

[15] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 93. My use of Certeau in this context is indebted to Phil Hubbard and Teela Sanders, "Making Space for Sex Work: Female Street Prostitution and the Production of Urban Space," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27, no. 1 (2003): 75–89.

sentations were deployed. Therefore, the effort to define the serving girl as a prostitute both shaped her role and provided the terms on which she could act.

The brasseries à femmes were produced by the interaction between the moralist discourse and business practice that assigned serving girls the role of prostitutes and activities of the serving girls themselves in a process that Sharon Marcus deems "the play of the system." Following and modifying Roland Barthes's notion of the term, Marcus argues that cultural systems build into themselves the possibility for "play," which "signifies the *elasticity* of systems, their ability to be stretched without permanent alteration in their size or shape."[16] For Marcus, female friendship provided Victorian women the opportunity to explore kinds of same-sex relationships without "changing the normative rules governing gender difference."[17] Similarly, serving provided the opportunity to develop new kinds of sexual labor without seriously putting into question the sexual availability of certain groups of working-class women. Moralists and the police accused serving girls of being prostitutes, and business owners utilized these moralist sexual discourses to attract a new clientele interested in sexual adventures, even as they provided the opportunity for workingwomen to use those discourses to their own ends. In other words, the accusation that serving girls were prostitutes associated them with sexual availability, a linkage that was put to good use by clever proprietors seeking a novel mode of enticing men to drink. By encouraging their employees to interact with the clientele, however, proprietors also provided an opportunity for the serving girls to intervene and reshape the assumption of their own sexual availability by constructing a sexual space that alluded to but did not necessitate a sexual act.

The brasseries à femmes therefore serve as a useful arena for thinking about the relationship between sexuality and consumption. The police and expert moralists associated serving girls with prostitutes as a way of controlling and managing arenas of consumption. These discourses produced a new kind of sexual object, the *fille de brasserie* (serving girl), who was ostensibly available to all men in public but in particular to the young customers targeted by these cafés. Clever proprietors depended upon the public perception that the fille de brasserie was a prostitute, available to anyone who desired her, and they monetized this association by using the promise of sexual pleasure to draw in male customers. These businessmen thus strove to place an old object of consumption on a new footing: they relied upon a moral discourse that associated serving girls with prostitution to help them create a field of sexual pleasure that was premised upon the customer's domination of the employee. A threefold operation resulted wherein the serving girl was at the mercy of the police, the proprietor, and

[16] Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 27, emphasis in the original.

[17] Ibid.

the client all at once. This apparent subordination, however, relied upon the serving girls to act it out as they moved about the café, flirting with their customers, encouraging them to drink, and alluding to the possibility of sex after the café closed. In this way, the serving girls themselves gave specific shape to the brasseries à femmes as they used the assumption of their sexual availability to earn themselves a living. By actively perpetuating that assumption, the women who worked in the brasseries à femmes revealed that the coherence of the category of fille de brasserie ultimately depended on their own participation and therefore exposed the contingency of their subordination.

CLANDESTINE PROSTITUTION AND THE MORAL DISCOURSE OF THE CAFÉ

The moral discourse surrounding the brasseries à femmes was wrapped up in broader debates over the regulation of prostitution in nineteenth-century Paris. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Paris police constructed a complex system of sexual regulation predicated on the registration, confinement, and surveillance of female prostitutes in an effort to promote public health.[18] Prostitutes in nineteenth-century France were defined by their relationship to the police, who were tasked with regulating the business of sex. Known colloquially as *filles publiques* (public women) or simply as *filles* (girls), prostitutes were enmeshed in a system of classification and surveillance that police and municipal authorities deemed essential to the security of an orderly industrial city. Whether as a *fille de maison* (a prostitute who lived and worked in a *maison de tolérance*, or regulated brothel) or as a *fille isolée* (a registered prostitute who lived on her own), a woman who sold sex was to be placed under the eye of the state authorities.

By the second half of the century, this attempt to register and ensure the health of every prostitute in Paris faced increasing challenges. Not only did the sheer numbers involved make it unlikely that the police would ever succeed, but the process known as Haussmannization, which destroyed broad swaths of the medieval city and rebuilt it with the now-familiar boulevards, parks, and cafés, changed the kinds of opportunities available for finding sex in the city. The destruction of slums and the growth of new entertainments and public spaces such as parks, cafés, and dancehalls contributed to a decline in the number of regulated brothels and a rise in opportunities for social interaction that threatened to outpace the ability of the police to manage

[18] On French regulationism in the early nineteenth century, see especially Corbin, *Les filles de noce*, pt. 1; Harsin, *Policing Prostitution*, pt. 1; Bernheimer, "Parent-Duchâtelet: Engineer of Abjection," in *Figures of Ill Repute*, 8–33; and Jann Matlock, "Traffic in Mystery: The *Roman-Feuilleton* and the Tolerance System," in *Scenes of Seduction: Prostitution, Hysteria, and Reading Difference in Nineteenth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 19–59.

the city.[19] The growth of these new spaces all seemed to contribute to a marked increase in "clandestine prostitution," prostitution that occurred outside this "regulationist" system. The brasseries à femmes became a focus of attention because they employed women to openly interact with men and thus flaunted the regulationists' belief that sex, and especially venal sex, had to be confined to controlled spaces. As a police report on one brasserie claimed in 1888, "All the women are indulging in prostitution and are evading, by virtue of their profession as serving girls, all regulation."[20] The opportunity to work as a serving girl seemed to offer the ability to solicit sex in a way that evaded police control.[21]

This perception took on a great deal of force with the growth of the café business during the French Second Empire (1852–70) and especially during the first decades of the Third Republic. Despite legal restrictions and moralizing concern, the second half of the nineteenth century was the golden age of the Parisian café. Between 1851 and 1880, all drinking establishments were regulated by a law that endowed the police with the responsibility to approve any café that wished to open and with the power to close them at will. Historians generally agree that the law's goals were essentially political. However, this "sword of Damocles over every drinking establishment in France," as Barrows has called it, did not prevent their rapid growth.[22] Despite the authority granted to the police, almost twenty thousand drinking establishments had opened in Paris by the end of the Second Empire.[23]

With the fall of Napoleon III in 1870, France underwent a decade of transition toward republicanism and was governed by a "Moral Order" coalition of conservatives whose officials harassed drinking establishments with even greater vigor than during the latter part of the Second Empire.[24] However, the collapse of the Moral Order government in 1877 brought to power a group of dedicated republicans who, after solidifying their gains in 1879, repealed the 1851 law in 1880 and granted citizens the right to open a drinking establishment if they wrote to the police and declared their intent to do so at least fifteen days before the café opened. Local authorities throughout France, however, retained the authority to regulate the distance

[19] On the numeric decline of the tolerated brothels, see Corbin, *Les filles de noce*, 171–78.

[20] "Rapport," 3 March 1888, BM2 33, Archives de la Préfecture de Police de Paris (hereafter cited as APP).

[21] Martineau, *La prostitution clandestine*, 78–81; Coffignon, *La corruption à Paris*, 91; Jean Fauconney, *La prostitution: La debauch à Paris—Les maisons de tolérance—La prostitution clandestine—Règlements de police—Caractère des prostituées* (Paris: Charles Offenstadt, 1902), 37–38.

[22] Barrows, "'Parliaments of the People,'" 88. For the text of the 1851 law, see "No. 3481 Décret sur les Cafés, Cabarets, et Débits de boissons," in *Bulletin des lois de la République française* 8, no. 475 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1851), 1266–67.

[23] Haine, *The World of the Paris Café*, 28.

[24] Barrows, "'Parliaments of the People,'" 89.

of cafés from certain public institutions such as churches, hospitals, and schools.[25] The police thus lost their ability to arbitrarily close down drinking establishments while maintaining a measure of responsibility to manage them. The results of repeal were as expected: by the 1880s, the number of drinking establishments in Paris had skyrocketed to over forty thousand. This number then decreased to just under thirty thousand by the end of the century.[26]

As a kind of drinking establishment, the number of brasseries à femmes also grew during these decades, but they remained a distinct minority within the broader context of Parisian drinking establishments. The brasseries à femmes developed out of the tradition of filles de comptoir. The fille de comptoir can be associated with the figure of the *grisette*, an idealized shop girl who, rather than prostituting herself, took on a regular lover.[27] While the grisette served as a useful contrast to the prostitutes and eventually serving girls who preyed upon young men—with the former representing a sort of idealized youthful, but essentially innocent, sexual relationship and the latter standing for base, commercialized pleasure—the distinction between the two was never very clear.[28] For example, a chapter of Pierre Véron's collection of vignettes and short stories, *Paris s'amuse* (published in 1861—six years before the first "official" appearance of the brasseries à femmes), depicts four hapless male customers who have all fallen in love with a fille de comptoir named Pénélope. Like all women so employed, Pénélope remains behind her counter; she languidly turns the pages of a serialized novel with one hand while playing with some sugar cubes and change with the other. Describing a night in the bar, Véron moves the reader's perspective totally away from her and toward the four men who fawn over her, drinking all the while. The reader returns to Pénélope only when it is time for the men to pay. In Véron's account, therefore, the fille de comptoir, unlike a fille de brasserie, did quite literally nothing to encourage men to drink or attract their attention; she simply accepted the men's payment.[29]

Nonetheless, even in Véron's story we can glimpse the nascent power of all serving girls. At the end of the evening, Pénélope's boss admonishes her: "If I am not mistaken, you smiled an extra time at [table] 2. My house does not tolerate these immoral preferences. Would you please henceforth smile equally, otherwise . . ."[30] The proprietor, attempting to mobilize Pénélope's

[25] *Instruction sur la police des cafés, cabarets, auberges et de tous les lieux publics: Avec la jurisprudence de la Cour de cassation sur tous les cas particuliers* (Paris: Léautey, 1896), 5–8; Haine, *The World of the Paris Café*, 20–21.

[26] Haine, *The World of the Paris Café*, 29.

[27] Thompson, *The Virtuous Marketplace*, 19–21.

[28] André Carel explicitly links the disappearance of the grisette and the appearance of the brasseries à femmes. Carel, *Les brasseries à femmes de Paris*, 18–20.

[29] Pierre Véron, *Paris s'amuse* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1861), 145–52.

[30] Ibid., 151.

body as an enticement, recognized the importance of maintaining an illusion. "Don't crush the hopes of them all at the expense of a favorite," he was telling her. Recognizing the value of her presence within the bar, she then threatens to leave, revealing that she already has a lover, who will be able to find her a new position closer to his store.[31] As this fictional example demonstrates, barmaids and serving girls could manipulate the promise of sex in their own interests and in ways sometimes opposed to the interests of their bosses. Véron was playing to his readers' understanding that the line dividing the innocent barmaid from something more dangerous was rather thin.[32]

This awareness prompted various moral commentators and police officers to decry the transformation of filles de comptoir into serving girls as they spread throughout the city from the late 1860s to the end of the century. In 1872 Paris featured about 40 brasseries à femmes together employing 125 women.[33] By 1879 this number had increased to 130 brasseries à femmes employing 582 serving girls, while in 1882 there were 181 brasseries employing 881 serving girls.[34] The liberalization of café regulations in 1880 had a similar effect on brasseries à femmes as on drinking establishments as a whole. Their number grew to a little over two hundred institutions employing over one thousand women by the early 1890s.[35] According to one commentator, however, by 1894 there was a sharp decline to a little over one hundred institutions employing just over four hundred serving girls, a retreat that may be due to the same market forces that Haine blames for the overall decline in the number of cafés in the decades after their explosive growth in the 1880s.[36]

About one-third of the brasseries à femmes were concentrated on the Left Bank of the Seine in the fifth and sixth arrondissements of Paris, where a steady supply of students based in the Latin Quarter constituted a great deal of their clientele.[37] The tenth arrondissement on the other side of the river, home to two major train stations, as well as a large working-class population, had the next highest concentration of these establishments, with a little over 10 percent of the total number of brasseries à femmes in Paris during

[31] Ibid., 152.

[32] The police also understood the danger. In the 1840s, for instance, they conducted a series of raids against shop girls in the Palais-Royal whom they accused of using their positions to solicit sex. See the dossier "Répression: Lieux interdits," docs. 20–54, DA 222, APP.

[33] Charles Virmaître, *Trottoirs et lupanars* (Paris: Libraire Jouffroy, 1893), 273.

[34] Macé, *Gibier de Saint-Lazare*, 127–29.

[35] Virmaître, *Trottoirs et lupanars*, 273. These numbers are also cited by Corbin, *Les filles de noce*, 250.

[36] O. Commenge, *Hygiene sociale: La prostitution clandestine à Paris* (Paris: Schleichter Frères, 1897), 55; Haine, *The World of the Paris Café*, 29.

[37] On students in the brasseries à femmes, see Lola Gonzalez-Quijano, "Entre désir sexuel et sentiments: L'apprentissage amoureux des étudiants du Quartier Latin du second XIX^{e} siècle," in *Les jeunes et la sexualité: Initiations, interdits, identités (XIX^{e}–XXI^{e} siècle)*, ed. Véronique Blanchard et al. (Paris: Éditions Autrement, 2010), 183–85.

the 1880s and 1890s. The second, third, and eleventh arrondissements also housed a significant number, while the twentieth arrondissement is the only district not recorded as having a brasserie à femmes during this period. These figures imply that, at most, brasseries à femmes constituted less than 1 percent of the total number of drinking establishments in the city of Paris and remained concentrated in areas frequented by young men.[38]

These figures also reveal that the very category of the brasserie à femmes was an effect of a discourse of moral approbation. The contingency of the category reveals itself in the difficulty commentators had in defining both the institution itself and the serving girls who worked there. While all commentators agreed that the brasseries à femmes were simply bars that featured serving girls who were engaged in prostitution, they seemed to have had a great deal of trouble counting them. For instance, the police chief Gustave Macé claimed that in 1882 the seventh arrondissement featured four brasseries à femmes, but only one—apparently very busy—serving girl.[39] While the writer Charles Virmaître argued that there were 203 brasseries à femmes employing 1,100 women in 1888, journalist and moral commentator Ali Coffignon stated that there were 224 institutions with 1,655 employees in July of that year.[40] Even within a single text, the numbers often do not add up. Some of the errors can be attributed to mathematical error (manually adding the numbers recorded by Macé for each arrondissement in 1882 gives 191 brasseries à femmes, while he arrived at 181), but other errors are more confusing.[41] For instance, while the doctor O. Commenge reported in a statistical table based on an 1897 census that "the maximum number of women found in [these establishments] at the moment of their greatest popularity" was 501, he also claimed that "it appears from these documents that there are, in the brasseries, more than six hundred women engaging in clandestine prostitution under the pretext of serving ordinary drinks."[42] This indeterminacy can be attributed to movement within the working population; Commenge claims that "brasserie personnel . . . is more numerous in winter."[43] But it also reveals the ways in which the statistics themselves participated in the construction of these institutions; deciding what was and what was not a brasserie à femmes was left up to the individual commentator. The line dividing the brasseries à femmes from other kinds of drinking establishments was largely an effect of the discourse that sought to classify them.

This discourse emerged in response to the growth of cafés and other drinking establishments following the 1880 law, which prompted critics to declare that the city's administrators had given up their duty to regulate city

[38] Macé, *Gibier de Saint-Lazare*, 127–29.
[39] Ibid., 128–29.
[40] Virmaître, *Trottoirs et lupanars*, 273; Coffignon, *La corruption de Paris*, n.p.
[41] Macé, *Gibier de Saint-Lazare*, 128–29.
[42] Commenge, *Hygiène sociale*, 54–55.
[43] Ibid., 54.

life. The police inspector and chief of the moral police under the Second Empire, François Carlier, for example, lamented that "as the appetite for comforts and the taste for luxurious pleasures have developed and become the norm, [the authorities have] become just as liberal in regard to spaces of pleasure."[44] To critics, this liberalization implied that the police had no power to manage the spread of drinking establishments. In 1887, the same year that Carlier published his memoir, the doctor and moral commentator Auguste Corlieu argued that "since taverns are opened with a simple declaration, the administration no longer has rights over these establishments: it cannot withdraw an authorization that it had not granted."[45] In addition, the decline of state authority over the café served as a license to immorality. As Alfred-Jean-Marie Pierrot's study of the relationship between alcoholism and prostitution put it, "Not only does the law of 1880 constitute an encouragement to debauchery and drunkenness for those who frequent cabarets, but it is even more frequently an incentive to idleness for those who keep them."[46] According to these men, by relaxing state regulation, the authorities had, in effect, encouraged café proprietors to appeal to society's lowest common denominator. Despite the very real ability of the police to monitor and regulate drinking establishments, the process of liberalization brought forth moralist nightmares of a culture unmoored from imagined moral ideals of respectability and sobriety.

In making these claims, commentators emphasized the supposed link between drinking establishments and the spread of clandestine prostitution. In doing so, they drew on a long-standing discourse that dated to the very origins of the regulationist system in the early nineteenth century. Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet, the primary theorist of regulationism, declared in his posthumous magnum opus, *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris* (1836), that various kinds of small drink and smoke shops "welcome prostitutes, for whom they open private rooms [*cabinets noirs*], intended for exercising their profession."[47] Such rooms could still be found in Paris during the second half of the nineteenth century. In one instance, a letter sent to the police in 1876 complained about a bar that had a room on the first floor that was "cut in two by a screen of frosted glass, which now forms two rooms that are designated for turning tricks."[48] During the following

[44] François Carlier, *Études de pathologie sociale: Les deux prostitutions: 1860–1870* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1887), 27.

[45] Auguste Corlieu, *La prostitution à Paris* (Paris: Librairie J. B. Baillière, 1887), 118.

[46] Alfred-Jean Marie Pierrot, *Essai d'étude sur l'atténuation de l'alcoolisme et de la prostitution par la modification de la loi du 17 juillet 1880 sur les cafés, cabarets et debits de boissons* (Montmédy: P. Pierrot, 1895), 19. On the connection between the 1880 law and the increasing popularity of drinking establishments for sexual encounters, see Corbin, *Les filles de noce*, 216–20; and Régis Revenin, *Homosexualité et prostitution masculines à Paris: 1870–1918* (Paris: Harmattan, 2005), 50.

[47] Parent-Duchâtelet, *De la prostitution*, 1:510.

[48] Ann-Joséphine Petit to Préfet de Police, January 1876, BM2 60, APP.

decade, the anticlerical and antiregulationist writer Léo Taxil claimed that one could still go to "taverns, cheese shops, small restaurants, where street prostitutes go . . . [to] solicit according to their vulgar method" and retire with a client to a private room, where the waiter would allow the couple to act "as if they were at home" in exchange for paying a bit extra for a drink.[49]

Despite the continued talk, however, others emphasized that the 1851 law led most of the private rooms to close down.[50] The police shifted their concern to the drinking establishments that were being used to rendezvous for sexual activity that would be consummated elsewhere. Moralists argued that prostitution served an essential role in the business practices of certain drinking establishments. The doctor Louis Martineau once claimed that some wine merchants "close their eyes to the traffic in flesh that goes on around [them], sometimes encouraging and profiting from it," since the clandestine prostitute "encourages consumption" in these merchants' establishments.[51] These strategies involved entire neighborhoods in the economy of prostitution and drink. One 1891 police report on a bar on the boulevard de la Chapelle, for instance, claimed that while women did not "turn tricks in the establishment," they did go to a nearby furnished hotel.[52] Some proprietors, the police claimed, encouraged prostitution in their establishments by "turning their bars into hotels or bringing the two industries together in the same building. . . . The furnished hotel and wine sellers are, in sum, the two most useful auxiliaries to the development of clandestine prostitution."[53] The police and moralists therefore claimed that the profits of wine sellers and café proprietors depended more on sex than on drink; attracting customers rested on the ability to harness sexual desire for profit.

These discourses did more than simply reflect a preexisting reality; in justifying increased police surveillance of public space, moralist rhetoric vilifying the cafés for their association with illicit sex produced the conditions that linked sex and drink. The police asserted expert confidence in their ability to discern where and when public sexual activity was taking place; they joined forces with moral commentators to produce spatial meaning as a way of defining their own capacity to monitor and regulate the city. In providing sites of police surveillance, the space of the café thus provided a useful replacement for the regulated brothel. In this sense, the rise of prostitution within cafés should be seen less as an aberrant effect of a consumer culture spiraling out of control, as the moralists claimed, and more as a disciplinary strategy. Associating sex with the café had the effect of "inciting" activities in ways that made them available for surveillance.[54]

[49] Taxil, *La prostitution contemporaine*, 217.

[50] Carlier, *Les deux prostitutions*, 95–96. See also Harsin, *Policing Prostitution*, 32–33.

[51] Martineau, *La prostitution clandestine*, 75.

[52] "Rapport: Au sujet du débit de boissons sis Bd de la Chapelle, 74," 28 November 1891, BM2 65, APP.

[53] Carlier, *Les deux prostitutions*, 266.

[54] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 23.

Power and Male Desire in the Brasseries à femmes

In the brasseries à femmes, this incitement was directed at male customers who were promised the pleasures of sexual interaction with the female employees. The pleasures of the brasseries à femmes were thus predicated on the ability of men—whether the police, the proprietors, or the customers—to control workingwomen's sexuality. While other cafés invited prostitutes in as customers, proprietors of the brasseries à femmes took the logic of sexual enticement even further by directly hiring serving girls who were then accused of being prostitutes. In other words, the proprietors strove to control the process of sexual enticement and use it to further their economic interests. As one 1880 police report claimed, the manager of a café in the Latin Quarter "sent away the serving boys and replaced them with serving girls, hoping that their presence would attract clients and that his takings would be higher."[55] This strategy fed off the symbolic place of the café as a site of illicit sex that emerged from police surveillance. The long-standing moral discourse that decried the relationship between prostitution and drink became a business strategy in the hands of clever managers. While the police elaborated a system of public sex and surveillance in order to render public desire amenable to forms of discipline, proprietors took advantage of this system in ways that made desire amenable to forms of consumption. The apparent conflict between cafés and those tasked with policing them actually produced a strange symbiosis; despite disparate visions of the relationship between sex and authority, these supposed adversaries became unlikely compatriots in the construction of public forms of sexuality that could be effectively managed.

In following this strategy, proprietors participated in a broader trend within Parisian consumer culture that emphasized the deployment of seductive spectacle in the service of consumption. Institutions such as department stores, panoramas, and music halls created a new kind of mass culture through the deployment of "dream worlds of mass consumption."[56] Vanessa Schwartz, for instance, has argued that forms of late nineteenth-century mass consumption provided the means through which a participatory, shared urban culture emerged. The development of a mass culture in late nineteenth-century France, Schwartz argues, depended on the emergence of shared modes of spectatorship that positioned Parisians as participant-viewers in the "spectacle" of everyday life. As newspapers, panoramas, and even the morgue elevated the everyday to the level of spectacle, the distinction between reality and illusion blurred. Indeed, to Schwartz, forms of

[55] "Rapport: Au sujet du café situé Boulevard St. Germain, 166," 22 November 1880, BM2 16, APP.

[56] Rosalind Williams, "The Dream World of Mass Consumption," in *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 58–106.

illusion themselves produced reality.[57] The brasseries à femmes participated in this development not only by making sex into a public spectacle but by elevating an illusion to the level of reality as well. By positioning customers as viewers of the workingwomen's bodies, the brasseries à femmes encouraged customers to share in the pleasures of sexual possession, even as that power was also put into question.

While the police sought to render the brasseries à femmes subordinate via strategies of surveillance, the managers sought to render their employees subordinate by taking advantage of their economic needs. The attempt to subordinate the serving girl thus began at the beginning of her employment. There were many different pay schemes at the brasseries à femmes, but a few generalizations are possible.[58] According to Macé, serving girls were not paid a salary and instead actually owed two fees to the manager: the first secured the right to serve in the first place; the second secured the number of tables and placement of the employee's service area. The serving girls then relied on tips and commission for their pay, which, by the end of the day, could range between five and twenty francs.[59] The medical writers Barthélemy and Dévillez provided a similar description, arguing that serving girls relied mostly on tips and most often earned between three and four francs a day, though some could see ten francs.[60] This claim is corroborated by an 1892 police report on a brasseries à femmes that stated that its employees lived on their tips alone, which amounted to about five francs a day.[61] However, in other instances, the serving girls were paid a small salary. The Brasserie de la Mappemonde, for instance, employed about a dozen serving girls. While some of them lodged outside the brasserie, others, comprised mostly of women "specially engaged from the provinces in Bordeaux and in Arles," lodged and ate their meals at the brasserie. Rather than receiving commissions, the serving girls of the Brasserie de la Mappemonde "were required to give up their tips to the boss, who paid them at a rate of sixty francs per month."[62] These estimates should be looked at with skepticism, emerging as they do from the same authorities that had difficulty counting the brasseries à femmes in the first place. It is nevertheless clear that these authors all assumed that economic constraint thrust the serving girl into prostitution.

The requirement to drink with the patrons and supply the customers with matches at their own expense furthered the girls' dependence on the

[57] Vanessa Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 6–11.

[58] These are summarized in Corbin, *Les filles de noce*, 251–52.

[59] Macé, *Gibier de Saint-Lazare*, 140–42.

[60] Barthélemy and Dévillez, "Syphilis et alcool. Les inviteuses," *La France médicale* 29 (1882): 314.

[61] "Rapport: Au sujet de la brasserie sise Bd St. Martin, 2," 8 April 1892, BM2 65, APP.

[62] "Rapport: Renseignements au sujet de la brasserie de la Rue de la Fidélité, no. 3," 14 November 1887, BM2 33, APP.

proprietors.[63] Barthélemy and Dévillez, in particular, focused on the question of drink and serving girls' inability to resist the café manager's demands: "The duty of the women employed in the brasseries is to make people drink and to drink. The boss looks poorly on them if they do not drink."[64] How, then, did these women make any money in the end? The answer was obvious: "It happens through a worthy industry which has no other bases than the encouragement of vice and the encouragement of debauchery."[65] By maintaining their employees in a state of economic deprivation, these café proprietors not only encouraged their employees to engage in prostitution but also increased the association of their establishments with venal sex.

Proprietors played on their employees' economic desperation by forcing them to wear sexually alluring clothing, often at their own expense. For instance, in 1879 the police reported that the Brasserie de la Cigarette was requiring the employees to purchase "Oriental costumes" at an average price of two hundred francs. In the evenings, the report notes, "the public and all the children of the neighborhood stop before the shop and watch through the window panes as these costumed women drink at all the occupied tables."[66] In this case, the proprietor had actually succeeded too well in attracting attention to his establishment; instead of drawing customers, he had created a new public.[67] Other brasseries à femmes used similar techniques, with one distributing leaflets that declared that "everyone wants to admire the marvelous goddesses in the graciousness of their costumes" and another describing the "Cupid's Inn. . . . The service is done by priestesses of the god of love in the most original costumes. Come one more time to sacrifice at their altars."[68] By advertising the special allure of their costumed employees, these proprietors linked the pleasures of consumption with those of sex.

Advertising the sexual allure of the serving girls did not, however, necessarily mean that they were actually prostitutes. Rather, the figure of the brasserie whore only emerged as a consciously deployed enticement to enter the brasseries à femmes after a long phase of moralist and police condemnation. In other words, the condemnation of police and moralists, whose beliefs about the relationship between sex and drink convinced them that all serving girls were prostitutes, gave added force and meaning

[63] Macé, *Gibier Saint-Lazare*, 141; Barthélemy and Dévillez, "Syphilis et alcool," 314.

[64] Barthélemy and Dévillez, "Syphilis et alcool," 315.

[65] Ibid., 314.

[66] "Rapport: Au sujet de la Brasserie de la Cigarette, rue Racine, No. 3," 24 June 1879, BM2 24, APP.

[67] Café managers and owners who wished to avoid unwanted attention, on the other hand, tended to insist that their employees dress modestly, particularly if the police had already temporarily banned them from opening. See "Rapport: Au sujet de la brasserie du Bas Rhin," 28 October 1880, BM2 60, APP.

[68] [René] Bérenger, "Proposition de loi: Sur la prostitution et les outrages aux bonnes moeurs," *Sénat session 1894* (Paris: P. Mouillot, 1894), 13, in Nineteenth Century Collections Online (GALE|AZUYTB689349717), accessed 6 April 2014.

to the sexualized advertising strategies of the brasseries. The result of this symbiosis was a new kind of pleasure for the men who patronized the brasseries à femmes, since it conveyed a promise that this space would allow them to attain what was otherwise unattainable. René Bérenger, "Père la Pudeur" (Father Decency) himself, described how the brasseries à femmes advertised the sexual pleasures they offered their customers by distributing flyers on the streets of Paris: "On their mischievous lips / Are joyous kisses [*baisers*] / Which can, one guesses, / Pick up lovers."[69] Bérenger may have been drawn to this particular poem by the dual meaning of the French word *baiser*, "to kiss" or "to fuck." The reference to lips evokes the former while still cheekily implying the latter. The poem relies on an essential ambiguity by, on one level, offering the fantasy of love (kisses) and, on another level, promising vulgar sex. Both were possible, but to justify his moral outrage, Bérenger had to efface the former reading and insist that the advertisement referred to prostitution. The moralists thus did the proprietors' work for them by informing their audience of precisely the kind of pleasures they should expect in the brasseries à femmes. The serving girl emerged as a figure of prostitution because she was circumscribed within a discourse that categorized her as such.

This process was reinforced by a multitude of texts declaring the pleasures of the brasseries à femmes to be simply another form of prostitution. In his overview of the illicit sexual life of Paris, *La corruption à Paris* (1888), Coffignon divided all serving girls into two groups, "prostitutes and the debauched." The former, he claimed, were professional prostitutes who were seeking a safer way of plying their trade. But his label of "debauched" was "not intend[ed] to establish a class of femmes de brasserie who [were] not indulging in prostitution" but rather was meant to "indicate that until now they have not openly exercised prostitution."[70] In other words, one group was seeking to engage in a more casual form of prostitutes, while the other worked in the brasseries à femmes in order to become prostitutes. Coffignon left no space for the serving girl who fell into neither category. He was not alone in this presumption. Even a bill posting that called on serving girls to join the Ligue de l'affranchissement des dames (League for the Enfranchisement of Women) declared that they should leave the profession because they were hired "in order to attract men" and that they were participating in "disgusting traffic in which woman is the merchandise."[71] Unlike the shop girl or department store salesclerk, whose sexual availability was assumed to be regulated by either a regular lover or her boss, the fille de brasserie was simply declared to be a clandestine prostitute. She was thus put up for sale, her availability for the pleasures of the customers not simply assumed but actively constructed.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Coffignon, *La corruption à Paris*, 97.

[71] Judith Tavaria and Astié de Valsayre, "Aux dames employées dans les brasseries," F. Harry, Paris, 1892.

The pleasures of the brasseries à femmes were thus predicated on the assertion of male sexual power over women. While the customer's understanding of this assumption only rarely emerges with any detail in the police archives, an incident that occurred at the Folies-Bergère music hall on 3 October 1877 demonstrates how the active production of a space that was predicated on the sexual availability of women influenced the way customers imagined the pleasures they were paying for. The active production of women as prostitutes in spaces of popular entertainment provided the opportunity for men to buy not just sex but also the ability to publicly demonstrate sexual power. That evening, a thirty-nine-year-old paper maker named Pierre Kintzinger was arrested during a night out with two friends. The police report describes "an individual who was wandering the *promenoir* [gallery-lounge] with affectation, was calling out to women with a loud voice while addressing the most licentious remarks at them."[72] Ordinarily the police report would stop there and not describe the actual remarks because no arrest would have followed. At around 10:30 on this night, however, the police stepped in after a woman named Eugènie Ricard crossed Kintzinger's path. He "touched her hair from behind while telling her, in a manner that ensured that the people who occupied the loges could hear, that she had a nice pussy [*un beau chat*], and then he put his hand on her dress and touched her lower abdomen in the area of her womb."[73] Kintzinger was then taken before the police and the director of the Folies-Bergère.

The extant archival documents from the period detail the intense surveillance of the Folies-Bergère by the morals police but only rarely refer to the behavior of the men who went. Kintzinger seemed to have been surprised himself that his behavior attracted any attention at all. He had two friends with him, both of whom refrained from joining in on the fun. As the police reported, Kintzinger "encouraged his friends to imitate him, assuring them that they had nothing to fear [because] the Folies-Bergère was known to all Parisians to be a brothel."[74] When brought before the police, he claimed that he "did not believe he was committing an infraction by slinging the insults that had been overheard by Monsieur Clément, police superintendent."[75] Kintzinger's actions reflected his attempt to subordinate the woman he encountered to his own desires, to render her totally passive in this encounter. He reduced Ricard to her sex and made her into his own object. He did so because he believed that he had entered a space explicitly

[72] "Rapport: Surveillance aux Folies-Bergère," 4 October 1877, BM2 7, APP. The translation of *promenoir* as a "gallery-lounge" is Charles Rearick's. See Charles Rearick, *Pleasures of the Belle Epoque: Entertainment and Festivity in Turn-of-the-Century France* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 84.

[73] The French slang for "pussy" is translated in the feminine form of the word for "cat" (*chatte*), but the context leaves little doubt that this is what Kintzinger meant. "Procès-Verbal, Kintzinger," 3 October 1877, BM2 7, APP.

[74] Ibid.

[75] "Rapport: Surveillance aux Folies-Bergère."

designed to encourage him to engage his sexual fantasies. Indeed, he had paid the entry fee for the privilege. By encouraging a regime of sexual desire within these institutions of mass consumption—prostitutes sometimes had free entrance to the Folies-Bergère, for example—proprietors enabled men to engage in sexual behavior that was supposed to be prohibited elsewhere.[76] The ordinary rules of social comportment were not meant to apply here. Institutions such as the brasseries à femmes and the Folies-Bergère were thus intended, like the brothels before them, to channel male sexual privilege and provide opportunities for its enactment. The association of certain entertainment spaces with sex multiplied the available venues for the exercise of male sexual power.

While there are few archival traces of the details of sexual exchanges in the ordinary brasseries à femmes, it is no coincidence that one of the most famous representations of the Folies-Bergère, Manet's *Un bar aux Folies-Bergère* (1882), depicts a barmaid who may or may not have been selling sex as well.[77] Just as the Folies-Bergères emerged as a space seemingly directed toward providing male sexual pleasure, so too did the brasseries à femmes encourage their clientele to project their power fantasies onto the women employees. The pleasures of the Folies-Bergère were different in kind, rather than in type, from those of the brasseries à femmes. Indeed, Kintzinger's actions were not so different from those of the customers of the brasseries à femmes, where, Jean Frollo told his newspaper readers, a typical interaction might begin with a serving girl asking, "What can I get you, sir?" and the customer's reply, "What are you offering me, *mon petit*?"[78] Thus the drink is automatically metaphorically linked with sex. Just as in the "brothel" of the Folies-Bergère, this was expected behavior in at least some of the brasseries à femmes, as Victor Leca made clear in his 1906 trilingual travel guide to Parisian night life. Under the title *Guide secret des plaisirs parisiens* (and its slightly different English variant—*The Gayest Pleasure of Paris*), Leca warned that "in these particular bars, the service is provided by women who are far from timid, who, after serving you and toasting with you—because, charmer, you have offered her some drinks—will serve you . . . everything that you will want by way of sensuous pleasure, for money, of course; your natural grace will not suffice for seducing them, and, with

[76] Free entries were handed out in late 1878, for instance, after the director became worried that prostitutes had moved on to other venues. "Rapport: Surveillance aux Folies-Bergère," 4 December 1878, BM2 7, APP.

[77] On Manet's painting, see T. J. Clark, "A Bar at the Folies-Bergère," in *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers*, rev. ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 205–58; Clayson, *Painted Love*, 151–52; Bradford Collins, ed., *Twelve Views of Manet's Bar* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); and Ruth E. Iskin, "Selling, Seduction and Soliciting the Eye: Manet's *Bar at the Folies-Bergère*," in *Modern Women and Parisian Consumer Culture in Impressionist Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 35–59.

[78] Jean Frollo, "Filles de brasserie," *Le petit parisien*, 13 December 1881.

your soft words, your caressing gestures, you will also have to put together between one and five louis in order to obtain the favors of one among them."[79] This passage accomplishes a dual purpose. It provides insider information about how to interact with the serving girl. You are expected, the reader is told, to buy her a drink, touch her, talk with her, all with the understanding that you are playing at sex and seeking to obtain "sensuous pleasures" (*voluptés*). The implication is that she was always available. At the same time, the book reduces the serving girl to something essentially comprehensible: a prostitute. Ultimately, the play is rendered mute by the need to exchange cold hard cash to consummate the relationship. She was available because she could be bought. And yet, the serving girl manages to push back: she is "far from timid" and thus initiates the encounter herself; she is not fooled by "caressing gestures." Unlike the customer, she knows the score, whereas he needs to rely upon a guidebook to know how to act.

Customers thus went to the brasseries à femmes with the expectation that the servers were theirs for the night. Drawing on the moralist discourse that surrounded their businesses, proprietors encouraged their clientele to behave as if employees were prostitutes without explicitly identifying them as such. The pleasure of the brasseries à femmes was created through this tension: moral discourses condemning the cafés were instrumentalized in the practices of café managers as they demanded their employees encourage sexual desire among the male customers. As Alain Corbin has emphasized, the brothel was rendered less central to the business of prostitution as new sites such as these became increasingly available. Corbin situates the brasseries à femmes as the venues of new forms of false seduction, where the act of prostitution was disguised as seduction.[80] The emphasis on the activities within the brasseries themselves, rather than in spaces that would have enabled the sexual act, reinforces the significance of the seduction at the expense of the sex act itself. Indeed, the brasseries à femmes used the moralist discourse on clandestine prostitution and drinking establishments to advertise their wares: a form of sex that could be bought in the open but was often left unconsummated in favor of the play of fantastical desire. Rather than only seeking the sexual act itself, those who enjoyed these new spaces searched for the imaginative and public play of desire. In their effort to control the possible benefits of prostitution in their establishments by hiring serving girls, these proprietors therefore emptied the category of the

[79] Victor Leca, *Guide secret des plaisirs parisiens. The Gayest Pleasure of Paris. Geheimer Führer der Parsiser-Freuden* (Paris: L. Chaubard, 1906), 19, ellipses in the original. The English version of this passage is not a direct translation and gets right to the point: "In the following public-houses, no waiters (men) but girls everywhere that is charming: / You ask for a glass of wine, beer or cherry-brandy, one of the girls brings it, but you must offer her a glass too. After she comes to you to talk, you may stick your finger up here! . . . That is all." Even with the physical image of the customer physically assaulting the serving girl, he still had to buy her a drink in order to consummate the exchange. Leca, *Guide secret*, 64.

[80] Corbin, *Les filles de noce*, 249.

"prostitute" of some of its content. In doing so, they left an important role to the serving girl herself, whose job it was to manage these interactions and offer the promise of sexual pleasure without necessarily—though possibly, it is true—offering sex itself.

AMBIGUOUS PLAY: SERVING GIRLS AND THE USE OF SEX

The question as to whether the serving girl was or was not just another kind of clandestine prostitute thus unsettled the confident assertions by the police, moral commentators, and café proprietors that the serving girl remained under their control and the control of the customers. As Clayson has argued, the ambiguity produced by this dilemma helped create an economy of male pleasure.[81] Gronberg and Tanner, on the other hand, have emphasized the ways in which the production of ambiguity provided new opportunities for the serving girl herself.[82] This tension between constraint and opportunity was never resolved. The women who worked in these places offered the possibility of a sexual encounter but made no promises to their customers. They dealt in illusions that they only sometimes fulfilled, and they evoked the clandestine prostitute without reducing themselves to this identity. Hired to attract men, the women who worked in brasseries à femmes participated in the advertisement of their own sexual availability. By placing the practice of the serving girl into dialogue with the discourses that surrounded her, we can discern how the mechanisms through which sexuality was disciplined and managed in late nineteenth-century Paris provided novel opportunities for pleasure, work, and play within the modern metropolis.[83]

Women who worked in brasseries à femmes were not as easily classified as the police and their customers claimed, and they had considerable power over the precise nature of their interactions with customers. Serving girls directly approached customers in order to provide them with the opportunity to touch, flirt, and drink, all in the service of providing the fantasy of sexual play. A police report from December 1879 noted that the serving girls at La Cigarette, "as in all establishments of this type," carried out their duties by "sitting with the clientele, being informal with them, encouraging them to buy, and having dirty and gross conversations with them."[84] Serving girls not only took customers' orders but also acted as their friendly companions throughout the evening; they supported the proprietor's business while also determining the particular contours of any

[81] Clayson, *Painted Love*, 150–52.

[82] Gronberg, "Femmes de Brasserie," 339–40; Tanner, "Turning Tricks," 256–57.

[83] This line of argument follows Christine Stansell's emphasis on the ways in which working-class women in nineteenth-century New York City could use sex, even prostitution, as a way of turning an exploitative social structure into one that could be at least partially beneficial. Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789–1860* (New York: Knopf, 1986), 185.

[84] "Rapport: Au sujet du cafés de la Cigarette," 12 December 1879, BM2 24, APP.

single interaction. In 1891 a police report was filed on a café called Antre des Sorciers that had six women employees, three of whom worked on the ground floor and three of whom worked in a basement room. "It is in the latter location," the report claimed, "that the serving girls allow themselves to be touched by the clients."[85] In these two cases, the responsibility for the activity was placed on the behavior of the servers. In the context of a police and moralist discourse that declared them to be prostitutes, available for sexual advances, these serving girls played their appointed role.

And yet, these documents also make clear the ways in which the servers themselves manipulated and obscured such simple classifications. In La Cigarette, the servers used the informal form of address (*tu* instead of *vous*) and thereby temporarily redefined the social relationship between server and client. There was, of course, pleasure for the man in this reversal, but here it is not the man reducing the woman—as in the case of Kintzinger's night at the Folies-Bergère—but rather the woman reducing the man. In addition, the servers at Antre des Sorciers demonstrated their ability to moderate their interactions with the customers while also evading classification by the police. That the women there "allowed themselves"—and by implication could have "not allowed themselves"—to be touched enabled their ability to evade total control of their bodily actions. In addition, the police officer who was observing the institution was unable "to establish that they [the serving girls] indulge in prostitution."[86] The moral discourse of the brasserie à femmes declared all serving girls to be prostitutes, while the actions of the serving girls themselves evaded such absolute determination. While their position as employees of often unscrupulous businessmen signifies their relative constraint in the economy of the late nineteenth century, the conditions imposed upon them also provided a certain space for maneuvering.[87] Their own social position and cultural meaning, therefore, were not simply inscribed by the police or the proprietors but instead emerged through the ways in which employee and customer interacted with one another.

Proprietors were never in complete control of these interactions, and the serving girls had the power to subvert the ordinary rules of prostitution. They did not necessarily have to have sex in order to sell sex. The power of drink served as the overall context for these interactions as young men fell prey to it while young workingwomen controlled it. "Why do we tolerate these brasseries à femmes," asked Virmaître in 1897, "which are nothing but public spaces where, under the eyes of the authorities, the young men who

[85] "Rapport: Au sujet des cafés sis Bd St. Martin, 2," 27 May 1891, BM2 65, APP.

[86] Ibid.

[87] This interpretation is indebted to Kathy Miriam's argument that "even if these stratagems [of resistance by sex workers] amount to negotiating the terms of their unfreedom, many victims can also be said to have 'agency'" ("Stopping the Traffic in Women: Power, Agency and Abolition in Feminist Debates over Sex-Trafficking," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 36, no. 1 [2005]: 1–17, quote at 14).

frequent them fall into drink and ruin themselves?"[88] Drink thus signified the latent danger of these spaces. As one imaginative description by the writer Harry Alis, quoted by André Carel in his short treatise on the brasseries à femmes, stated: "I drank, I drank, unable to leave my seat and not thinking anymore. I watched foolishly while the hours passed. . . . Now the brasserie was quite full of awful odors, hanging in the room with the smoke and infernal mix of cries, bellows, and calls. The drunk drinkers pestered the women, who disengaged themselves while exchanging with them foul words."[89] The young writer thus describes how the male privilege of observation had been incapacitated. Active serving girls set the tone, while passive customers could only watch. As the serving girls "disengaged themselves" from their drunken customers, in other words, they participated in the production of a new kind of interaction that rendered the drinker unable to fully appreciate or control his own situation. While constructed around the supposed availability of the serving girls to the customers, the pleasures of these drinking establishments ultimately rested on the customers' enjoyment of the women's ability to invert power relationships between customer and server.

The brasseries à femmes promised men sexual control of women, yet they created an atmosphere where women had control over the specific form of interaction. The dreamscape of the brasseries à femmes thus rested on a fundamental instability whereby the pleasure of interacting with a serving girl simultaneously rested on visions of her subordination and a recognition of her nascent power. For instance, the requirement that the employees drink with the customers failed to render them incapable of managing their own behavior. One 1874 police report on a brasserie known throughout the neighborhood for its bad reputation claimed that "it's worth pointing out that the serving girls drink with all these individuals [the clientele], and they often have several emptied tankards on different tables." However, the employees, the report noted, had "nothing extraordinary about their appearance," and "all have lovers who come to take them at the end of the work or who wait for them inside the establishment."[90] Even in the context of an institution that would shortly be closed down due to the presence of known prostitutes (who were not also servers), the police had difficulty simply explaining the behavior of the employees as a form of prostitution. Indeed, even the report that recommended closing the establishment distinguished the serving girls from the prostitutes and pimps who frequented the establishment, though the officer also described the servers has having had "more than doubtful morals."[91]

[88] Virmaître, *Trottoirs et lupanars*, 7. For another example using similar language of decay, see Carel, *Les brasseries à femmes de Paris*, 18.

[89] Ibid., 12.

[90] "Rapport: Au sujet de la brasserie du Château d'eau," 20 May 1874, BM2 17, APP.

[91] "Rapport: Proposition d'ordonner la fermeture du café du Château d'Eau, dit 'la Vacherie,' tenu par le Sr. Amgiuet, Place du Château d'Eau, No 23," 3 June 1874, BM2 17, APP.

Nor did drinking render serving girls incapable of doing their jobs of getting the customers themselves drunk. An 1881 police report described a brasserie on boulevard St.-Germain that was "frequented partially by students and workers of the neighborhood. As in most houses of this type, the women drink with the customers, but . . . they do not make more of a spectacle of themselves than elsewhere, and if they accept propositions, it's only after closing, because there is no evidence of prostitution in this establishment, which is not, furthermore, set up for it."[92] In other words, serving girls often knew how to avoid trouble with the police. They could drink with the customers while maintaining their composure. And in doing so, they actively protected their livelihood; the police, while watching, did not see any reason to cite or close down this particular establishment.

Indeed, even those most concerned about the relationship between these institutions and the problem of alcoholism recognized the ways that the serving girls seemed to be trying to avoid contributing to it. While they had to drink in order to keep their jobs, serving girls generally did not like to drink: "I do not like it, I hate all these drinks," a former serving girl supposedly told Barthélemy and Dévillez.[93] In order to avoid drinking, some serving girls used techniques such as pretending "a small glass of cherry-stem tea" was alcohol when drinking with the clientele.[94] In all these cases, the serving girls demonstrated their ability to maneuver determine their own relationship to their job as serving girls. Rather than getting drunk, they found ways of either faking it or maintaining their own agency as they interacted with the customers.

Serving girls' ability to shape the interactions that took place in brasseries à femmes created the anxiety that the men would ultimately lose their ability to dominate the female employees. In fact, the situation threatened to reverse itself, as the serving girls capably arranged to convince young men to drink and fall in love with them. As *Le petit parisien* asked in response to evidence that the cafés were distributing pictures of their serving girls to attract customers: "How many young men, so attracted, have lost money, their honor, their health, and their life in these dives! We have seen children of twenty years blow their brains out for a serving girl!"[95] Young men were the most vulnerable to the display of sex and risked forgetting that serving girls offered nothing but illusion. Relying upon the men's desire for love, serving girls offered only fantasy.

Le petit parisien was not alone in warning that men were being "pushed . . . to dishonor or death."[96] The theme of young men falling in love with

[92] "Rapport: Au sujet de la brasserie situé boulevard St. Germain, 166," 14 February 1881, BM2 16, APP.

[93] Barthélemy and Dévillez, "Syphilis et alcool," 313.

[94] Ibid., 314–15.

[95] Frollo, "Filles de brasserie."

[96] Frollo, "Le 'mauvais oeil.'"

unattainable serving girls proliferated in newspaper articles and moralist commentaries. Coffignon, for instance, described an article from *Le temps* that told the story of a man who committed suicide in the Bois de Boulogne, the large park on the western side of Paris, after falling in love with a serving girl.[97] In 1887 a short newspaper article noted a fight that broke out between serving girls' lovers and the customers of a bar.[98] According to Dr. Martineau, the relationship between customer and serving girl often took on "the appearance of young and crazy love, which gives the exchange a naïveté and makes him voluntarily believe in a driving force when there is only calculation."[99] Martineau believed that these women were cynically manipulating male sexual desire and creating a new kind of sexual economy; like other moral commentators of the day, he sought to render the serving girl comprehensible by underscoring her particular dangers. But in decrying the dangers of the brasseries à femmes, this moralist discourse also created the image of the brasserie whore—an image from which the proprietors profited and that paradoxically gave the serving girl some degree of control.

CONCLUSION

The breakdown of the regulationist system that began in the 1860s fed a discourse that associated new kinds of spaces with the presence of prostitutes. These spaces were most often places of consumption where the enticement to buy a product was intertwined with the enticement to buy sex. These institutions relied upon the perpetuation of hierarchies of gender and class and created growing anxiety that prostitution was escaping police discipline. Police confidence that brasseries à femmes were the site of prostitution thus justified continued surveillance of certain drinking establishments. But it also provided a unique opportunity for café owners to place sex as their primary product. The association of brasseries à femmes with prostitution thus simultaneously justified the continued surveillance of workingwomen by the authorities and their subordination to the whims of male customers and proprietors.

At the same time, the process through which discipline was enacted enabled opportunities for the serving girls. Police categorization of the brasseries à femmes as sites of prostitution helped to enable the very sexual interactions the police claimed to be forbidding. This process also created the opportunity for serving girls themselves to transform and play with the meaning of sex in public. In this situation, it was the server herself who could determine just what it meant to be labeled a fille de brasserie. If to some that simply made her into another kind of prostitute, to others it endowed her with an opportunity to shape to some extent her own sexual agency.

[97] Coffignon, *La corruption à Paris*, 106. For the article itself, see *Le temps*, 3 May 1888.
[98] "Les brasseries de femmes," *Parti National,* 20 October 1887.
[99] Martineau, *La prostitution clandestine*, 78.

This is a story, then, not of resistance to a preexisting moral discourse but rather of an ongoing process in the history of sexuality and urban space. The multimodal relationship between the police, the proprietors, the serving girls, and their customers produced a dynamic discourse with far-reaching effects on social practice. The serving girls were themselves active agents in the creation of this process, and their roles in determining the precise contours of social interaction in the brasseries à femmes demonstrated the inherent instability and novelty of the expression of desire in these new public spaces. It is impossible to know the precise feelings, experience, and understanding of these serving girls as they interacted with frequently vulgar, rude, and event violent men. But the traces left by disputes over the brasseries à femmes reveal that the lives of these women were symbolic of an emerging urban mass culture. In providing a target for the police, proprietors, and customers, this new way of putting sex on display helped perpetuate forms of social control. But it also provided a venue for a new kind of public spectacle that openly thwarted the discourse of moral condemnation. The very attempt to control this emerging consumer culture, in other words, created the conditions for unexpected forms of public sexual activity to emerge.

About the Author

Andrew Israel Ross is an assistant professor of history at the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg, where he teaches courses in modern European history, French history, and the history of sexuality. His work has previously appeared in the *Berkeley Journal of Sociology,* and he is currently preparing his first book manuscript, "The Pleasures of Paris: Sex and Urban Culture in the Nineteenth Century."