

4-26-2013

Social Politics of Seventeenth Century London Coffee Houses: An Exploration of Class and Gender

Hollie McDonald
Grand Valley State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/honorsprojects>

ScholarWorks Citation

McDonald, Hollie, "Social Politics of Seventeenth Century London Coffee Houses: An Exploration of Class and Gender" (2013). *Honors Projects*. 208.
<https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/honorsprojects/208>

This Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Undergraduate Research and Creative Practice at ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Projects by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.

Hollie McDonald
 HNR 495- Senior Thesis
 26 April 2013

Social Politics of Seventeenth Century London Coffee Houses: An Exploration of Class
 and Gender

Reader, this drink call'd Coffee, it is good
 To dry the Brains, and putrefie the Blood:
 It Cures the Body of its health, no doubt...
 And makes a man unkind unto his Wife:
 It makes a Christian blacker far within,
 Than ever was the Negars outward skin:...
 That now hath gain'd the name of Coffee seed:
 It's be not brought from Styx, no man can tell,
 (It is so black) except it grow in Hell.¹

Despite being commonplace establishments in modern society, coffee houses introduced in seventeenth century London were groundbreaking enterprises in their day. Reactions to the new businesses ranged from staunch support to the negative opinion reflected in the above poem, which condemned the new beverage and its center of sale as blasphemous. Coffee houses invited men from every rung on the social ladder, and as long as a patron could afford the two-penny price of a dish of coffee, he could participate in the growing public sphere, without reference to his social status. The dilution of class and social rank made coffee houses unique and garnered considerable attention from King and country. However groundbreaking coffeehouses became, in some ways, they perpetuated other social segregations, particularly in regards to gender. Women did not participate directly in these spheres, making the establishments subject to opposition from early modern females. While these establishments attenuated class distinctions and opened the up the diffusion of information among varied socio-economic stations, the exclusion of women marked these as distinctly masculine spheres. The exclusion of women,

¹ "The Maidens Complain[t] Against Coffee," *Early English Books Online*, (1663), Copy from Harvard University Library, 6.

however, gave them a voice in their day, but also in modern day, particularly through their opposition to coffeehouses.

The coffee house, as an establishment, possesses a robust history; from its oriental origins to its western settlement, the migration of coffee is far-flung. The first coffee house arrived in London in 1652,² but it originated in the Ottoman Empire. Coffee and its subsequent merchants travelled west, across the Middle East, via trade routes. Slowly, it worked its way across Europe, settling first in Oxford, and eventually in London.³ Once the coffee house reached its London home, attention to the new drink skyrocketed and business soared. Coffee, during its introduction to England, was hailed as a sobering alternative to alcohol, praised for its intellectually stimulating effects, its “heightening perception,” and for its lack of intoxicating dangers.⁴ Coffee as a drink, though, is not central to the spaces themselves, rather “the coffeehouse... brought wide swaths of early modern English society together in an unprecedented way.”⁵ While the drink captivated the English, the effect the coffee house had on the interaction of different classes.

From the very coffee house, a distinct challenge to the socially accepted interface between people of different classes faced the English people. An Armenian servant, Pasqua Rosee, became the first London proprietor of a coffeehouse. Rosee’s employer, Daniel Edwards, was a wealthy English merchant so taken with the coffee beverage Rosee made for him, Edwards aided his servant in setting up the business. In addition to financially supporting Rosee, Edwards also encouraged his peers to visit the new establishment.⁶ Without the aid and support of Edwards, Rosee’s career as a coffee man would not have begun. Edwards held responsibility for

² Brian Cowan, “The Rise of the Coffeehouse Reconsidered,” *The Historical Journal*, 47, no. 1 (2004): 21.

³ Brian Cowan, “The Rise of the Coffeehouse Reconsidered,” 21.

⁴ Tom Standage, *A History of the World in 6 Glasses* (New York: Walker & Company, 2005), 135.

⁵ Nat Zappiah, “Coffeehouses and Culture,” *The Huntington Library* 70, no. 4 (2007): 671.

⁶ Tom Standage, *A History of the World in 6 Glasses*, 142.

the success of Rosee. The precedent of cooperation between the classes, in this case to start a business, became the hallmark of coffeehouses from the initial establishment.

The collaboration between Edwards and Rosee was clearly successful, because by the first decade of the eighteenth century, a reported 3,000 coffeehouses existed in London.⁷ While this is accepted among historians an exaggeration, especially for a city with the London's population at this time,⁸ the perception of contemporaries attests to the how integrated coffeehouses became in the seventeenth century London culture, the incredible popularity of coffeehouses and their sprawl across the city. Much like other establishments in London, these houses were open to the public, but they contrasted starkly from the gentlemen's clubs, which were exclusive and expensive. Some few coffeehouses required low entrance fees, but others only charged for a "dish" of coffee, making them accessible to all social classes.⁹ Oftentimes, the price for a coffee house visit was only "for spending of a Penny," according to a 1672 poem, "The Coffee-House of News-Mongers Hall,"¹⁰ widely accessible by all classes.

While it could be argued that the admission fee acted to separate the lower classes from the houses, the fee cost approximately the same price as a cup of coffee, so they were not extortionate charges, and the charges were not popular;¹¹ no exclusionary acts kept patrons from the premises. In fact, "coffee houses 'preserved a kind of social intercourse that, far from presupposing the equality of status, disregarded status altogether.'"¹² Nothing could completely erase the socially constructed class hierarchy, however, within the coffee house class distinction was severely diluted. This allowed for the spread of ideas, the interaction of all peoples, and a

⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1989), 32.

⁸ Tom Standage, *A History of the World in 6 Glasses*, 143.

⁹ Tom Standage, *A History of the World in 6 Glasses*, 158.

¹⁰ "The Coffee-House of News-Mongers Hall," *Early English Books Online*, (1672).

¹¹ Tom Standage, *A History of the World in 6 Glasses*, 159.

¹² Habermas, quoted in John Barrell, "Coffee-House Politicians," *Journal of British Studies* 43, no. 2 (2004): 211.

general trend in the social cooperation. Cooperation of this nature hearkened back to the start of the coffee house, and the teamwork between Edwards and Rosee. While not overemphasizing or exaggerating the relationship between the two, the mutual aid that survives in the sources points to a motif of assistance and class crossover, which continued in these spheres.

The mitigation of the social hierarchy and its subsequent aid in the perpetuation of ideas in coffeehouses began with the layout of the establishments, and the majority of the coffeehouses followed the same blueprint for their layouts. With a “long central table, around which the customers assembled,” free flowing conversation abounded, regardless of class.¹³ The transient nature of coffeehouses, with patrons coming and going as they pleased, made enforcing the typical hierarchical seating order difficult, and therefore, helped maintain classlessness of the table arrangements. A 1674 poem, “The RULES and ORDERS of the Coffee-House,” describes the unspoken, but nonetheless well-followed orchestration of interpersonal interactions in the coffeehouses:

*Enter Sirs freely, But first if you please,
Peruse our Civil-Orders, which are these.
First, Gentry, Tradesmen, all are welcome hither,
And may without Affront sit down Together:
Pre-eminence of Place, none here should Mind,
But take the next fit Seat that he can find:
Nor need any, if Finer Persons come,
Rise up for to assigne to them his Room¹⁴*

Instead of merely stating the disappearance of class, this poem belabors the point, but interestingly so. The quoted portion of the poem is but an excerpt, and the poem goes on to describe a great many more “regulations.” The beginning recounted here appeals to the clientele of the coffeehouses, without any distinction of rank. Every man reading the poem and/or

¹³ Markman Ellis, “An Introduction to the Coffee-House: A Discursive Model.” *Science Direct: Language and Communication* 28 (2008): 158.

¹⁴ Markman Ellis, “An Introduction to the Coffee-House,” 159.

potentially entering the coffeehouse is entitled “Sir,” not using any other qualifiers. Any man could enter, free of charge, and free of social distinction. The specificity of the classlessness was emphasized by placing “Gentry” and “Tradesmen” next to each other, both literarily and literally. In the poem, the two very different classes are welcomed equally, and instructed to sit next to each other “without Affront,” while the names of the two classes are forced next to one another by the author’s hand. The gentry classes being of a higher social status than the tradesmen, prior to the opening of coffeehouses, sat separately from the lower. Now, based on this poem, they all sit at equally around the same table, with no distinction of place. Not only are the patrons to be considered equals in their physical placement in the house, they are also not to rise and acknowledge the “superiority” of other guests and are not required to “assigne to them his Room,” or place, at the table. There is no deferment of place defined by class at these tables. Not all representations of this classlessness are positively flawless, as is remarked in this poem:

Now being enter’d, there’s no needing
Of complements or gentile breeding,
For you may seat you any where,
There’s no respect of persons there.¹⁵

Almost likened to barbarism, the lack of social distinction did not always carry positive connotations. However, “The RULES and ORDERS of the Coffee-House” emphasizes the dynamic role coffeehouses played in the new social interplay and the ways in which these establishments marked the new trend.

The reaction to these establishments varied greatly, and found both support and discontent. Seventeenth century England housed the politically turbulent time of the Restoration government. King Charles II, restored to the monarchical throne of England, held a precarious position. As the first monarch on the throne after his decapitated father, the balance of power

¹⁵ Quoted in Stephen B. Dobranski, ““Where Men of Differing Judgments Croud’: Milton and the Culture of the Coffee Houses.” *Seventeenth Century* 9, no. 1 (1994): 40.

shifted to the people, with increased pressures on the King. Changes in social maneuverings mirrored this adapting power system, particularly in the manner of social life. As power began to move to the people, so too did the epicenter of communal relations. The importance of court life, or the centrality of the King's court to group interactions, lessened and these exchanges began to take place in coffeehouses, with a higher emphasis placed on the intellectual.¹⁶

Restoration England saw new movements in the monarchy, as well as their subjects; the growing reclusivity of British rulers after the Restoration of the monarchy caused a breakdown of the typical court structure heretofore the focal point of social and intellectual life. The "court was the residence of secluded royalty," the monarch gradually pulling away from court life, the city of London and its trappings took on a new importance as a much needed alternative- people needed a new place to turn for gossip and intellectual stimulation.¹⁷ The arrival of the coffeehouse around the same as this shift made its social impact much larger than had it arrived at a different time. The coffeehouse offered the perfect alternative space for the continuation of intellectual life. The changes to the monarchical view of court caused this group to shift to the public realm, placing it within the reach of the wider population. Consequently, this also placed more authority with the people, loosening the control the government and King had over the dissemination of ideas. Establishments not tainted by alcohol, sedition, and immorality, much like taverns, coffeehouses offered acceptable alternative meeting places of the individuals, particularly the intellectuals, who made up this group.¹⁸ The expanded popularity and accessibility made coffeehouses public spheres- spheres in which social classes were attenuated. These were areas where the private self could come alive, make itself known, and connect with sympathetic minds.

¹⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 30.

¹⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 32.

¹⁸ Tom Standage, *A History of the World in 6 Glasses*, 135.

Due to status being disregarded in these institutions, the focus of discussion was of the “common concern.”¹⁹ Coffeehouses “associated not only with private exchange but also with conversation on topics of general interest and public import...continuing elaboration of print communication in these decades, which often meant government featured in these conversations.”²⁰ These public spheres are those that, according to Jürgen Habermas, twentieth century public sphere theorist, were under the jurisdiction of “public authority.”²¹ The shift from the court caused the domination of coffeehouses by the people, with no governmental regulation. Habermasian theory draws distinct differences between the court life, dominated by the monarch, and “the new, vibrant, and rising civil society, epitomized by the coffeehouses.”²² Operated by individual merchants for wider populations, these were truly public spaces. “they were centers of criticism—literary at first, then also political”²³ This led to increased cooperation between individuals and the spread of ideas across the socio-economic hierarchy, gaining velocity as time progressed.

In Habermasian discourse, “coffee-houses famously have been celebrated (if at times uncritically) as public places wherein socially heterogeneous groups of men- from the poorer sort of artisan to the gentry- could associate freely, meeting as intellectual equals to engage in discussions concerning business, politics and learning.”²⁴ These institutions served as public spheres for discussion and classlessness, and as a result became epicenters for debates, discussion, and dissemination of information. Ironically, the dilution of classes in the coffee houses and the social interactions that occurred there, led to the creation of another social

¹⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 36.

²⁰ Lawrence E. Klien, “Coffeehouse Civility, 1660-1714: An Aspect of Post-Courtly Culture in England,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (1996): 32

²¹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 9.

²² Brian Cowan, “The Rise of the Coffeehouse Reconsidered,” 26.

²³ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 32.

²⁴ Richard Coulton, “‘The Darling of the Temple-Coffee-House Club’: Science, Sociability and Satire in Early Eighteenth-Century London,” *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35, no. 1 (2012): 46.

distinction. Both Jürgen Habermas and Thomas Babington Macaulay describe the clientele who frequented the coffeehouses as the “fourth estate.”²⁵ This “estate” was created by a mixture of the other estates.

While social classes could never truly be abolished, the patrons of the coffee houses, chose to ignore the hierarchy and create their own class. The idea of typical class distinction garners no “respect” and is not heeded by frequenters of coffeehouses. Indirectly, literature, mainly in the form of published poems, dictated social interactions in these spheres. Poems such as “The RULES and ORDERS of the Coffee-House,” “The Coffee House or News-Monger Hall,” and “A Brief Description of the...Wholesome Drink Called Coffee,” placed the reader in the position of patron through use of the word “you,” directed people’s comportment in the sphere and laid responsibility for the perpetuation of the nature of social intercourse in these spheres on the reader. What is truly remarkable about these poems and others like them, is the sheer number of poems that were in existence. Coffeehouses began dictating the content of literature, and authors possessed opposing viewpoints in regards to the social benefit of these establishments.

With so many classes converging in coffeehouses and such empowered people, the King and his administration began to feel uneasy. The uninhibited dissemination of ideas and information led to rumors of political dissent and plotting against the newly installed King. Charles II’s insecurities about the freedom of intellectual ideas in these spheres grew and in 1675, a mere twenty-three years after the first London coffeehouse opened, Charles II attempted to close the coffeehouses.²⁶ It was not a successful attempt. The 29 December 1675 Proclamation, “By the King: A Proclamation for the Suppression of Coffee-Houses,” sought to

²⁵ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* 60; Thomas Babington Macaulay quoted in Brian Cowan, “The Rise of the Coffeehouse Reconsidered,” 23.

²⁶ Brian Cowan, “The Rise of the Coffeehouse Reconsidered,” 21.

stymie the sale of coffee, eventually closing down the coffee houses. The Proclamation banned people “to keep any Publick Coffee-house or to Utter or sell by retail, in his, her, of their house or houses (to be spent or consumed within the same) any Coffee, Chocolet, Sherbett, or Tea, as they will answer the contrary at their utmost perils.”²⁷ To further explicate the point, the Proclamation continued on to expound the punishments of selling coffee; not only does a five pound per month selling coffee fine come with breaking of the proclamation, “but [the culprit] shall (in case the persevere to Offend) receive the severest punishments that may by Law be inflicted.”²⁸ To a modern reader, the language in this document is strong and threatening, but Charles II’s contemporaries did not share this sentiment.

Coming on the heels of the Restoration, the complete ban of coffeehouse was not widely accepted by the people, who petitioned the King for an extension of the sale of coffee. Seventeenth century coffee house patrons and proprietors, alike, actively challenged the Proclamation, forcing Charles II into revision. “Charles II issued a proclamation ... on the grounds that coffeehouses attracted idle and disaffected personas and spawned false, malicious, and scandalous reports to the defamation of His Majesty’s Government,”²⁹ and that coffeehouses were to be closed. This caused an uproar, worse than that which had the potential to arise from coffeehouse chat, and the proclamation failed. To resolve the conflict, coffeehouse owners became subject to rules and regulations agreed upon by both the regime and the houses.³⁰ While the government implemented these regulations, their enforcement was difficult and power remained with the people.

²⁷ Charles II, “By the King: A Proclamation for the Suppression of Coffee-Houses,” *Early English Books Online*, (London: John Bill and Christopher Barker, 1675), Copy from Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery.

²⁸ Charles II, “By the King: A Proclamation for the Suppression of Coffee-Houses.”

²⁹ Harold Love, “Sir William Petty, the London Coffee Houses, and the Restoration ‘Leonine.’” *Seventeenth Century* 22, no. 2 (2007): 386; Lawrence E. Klien, “‘Coffeehouse Civility, 1660-1714,’” 40.

³⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 59.

In January of the following year, a mere eleven days after the first proclamation, Charles II amended his original document to pacify the disapproval of the people, but also attempted to maintain his position staunchly against coffee houses. In an “Additional Proclamation Concerning Coffee-houses,” Charles II argued that the coffeehouses “have produced very evil and dangerous effects,”³¹ citing them as a waste of time, energy, and centers of treasonous talk about King and Country. This clause maintained his original petition against the effects of the coffee house, but the rest of the document addressed the arguments of petitioners, granting an extension to the sale of coffee. The extension merely became permanent and the sale of coffee continued, and so too did the coffee houses.³²

Considering the power of the people in the political climate of Restoration England, too much dictatorial authority on behalf of the King could endanger his position. Indeed, power was split between county, parish, and city levels, in addition to the larger national context. Even if he sought to stabilize his throne, “King Charles II found it almost impossible to extirpate the new coffeehouses.”³³ Additionally, repressing the coffeehouses economically harmed the crown; “the award to the crown of the revenues based on the excise taxes and the licensing system of which the coffeehouses were a part,”³⁴ made them economically beneficial to the crown, despite their freedom of ideas. The “fourth estate” proved itself stronger than the first estate of King and nobility by overriding his Proclamation of repression. The “classless” class valued its dilution of the hierarchy, and demonstrated the importance of the breakdown of the normal social constructs.

³¹ Charles II, “By the King: An Additional Proclamation Concerning Coffee-Houses” *Early English Books Online*, (London: John Bill and Christopher Baker, 1676).

³² Charles II, “By the King: An Additional Proclamation Concerning Coffee-Houses.”

³³ Brian Cowan, “The Rise of the Coffeehouse Reconsidered,” 33.

³⁴ Brian Cowan, “The Rise of the Coffeehouses Reconsidered,” 34.

Not all people of England appreciated the coffee houses or sought their perpetuation. Eighteenth century critics of coffeehouses bemoan the failure of Charles II; in the eighteenth century, Roger North for example, stated, “the mischief is arrived to perfection, and not only sedition and treason, but atheism, heresy, and blasphemy are publicly taught in diverse of the celebrated coffee-houses...and it is as unseemly for a reasonable, conformable person to come there, as for a clergyman to frequent a bawdy house.”³⁵ North specifically cited the King’s concerns about the coffeehouses and added other, more creative objections. Other objections focused less on the political or religious associations, but rather on the beverage itself, calling it “thick as puddle-water, and so ugly in colour and tast.”³⁶ One source asked “how do the English Palats differ from those of sober Nations?”³⁷ These written literary objections, penned by men, did not dominate the coffee house “question.” While limited opposition occurred in the masculine sphere, seventeenth century women definitely sought the closure of the establishments.

On the surface, the coffeehouses favor the masculine identity, giving them unprecedented access to knowledge, other classes, opportunities, and new forms of male sociability. Delving deeper into the reality of the coffeehouse conundrum, women start appearing more frequently in the sources, oftentimes causing the sources to dispute each other. Coffee house historian Brian Cowan cites Habermas’ argument that “the coffeehouse exemplified his public sphere: it was open to all comers (except for women).”³⁸ Habermas is widely regarded as the preeminent scholar on coffee houses and public sphere, but some of the sources contradict the widely accepted argument that women were not permitted in the coffee-houses. As a general rule,

³⁵Quoted in Brian Cowan, “The Rise of the Coffeehouse Reconsidered,” 22.

³⁶M.P., “A Character of Coffee and Coffee-Houses,” *Early English Books Online* (London: John Starkey, 1661): 2.

³⁷M.P., “A Character of Coffee and Coffee-Houses,” 2.

³⁸Brian Cowan, “The Rise of the Coffeehouse Reconsidered,” 23-24

women were not allowed in the establishments as patrons, but John Barrell argues “though they [women] evidently *were* admitted (even polite women) to some coffeehouses, [but were] unlike to have been invited to participate in what appears to have been the exclusively masculine practice, even homosocial rite, of coffeehouse-conversation.”³⁹ As historians, this discrepancy in the sources causes fundamental issues in the interpretation of gender relations in regards to the coffee houses. For the purposes of this study, the standard for coffee house interaction will be the exclusion of women, and their participation in these spheres will be considered the exception. The excluded women, while they could not participate in the coffee houses, were active in the history of these establishments.

As previously discussed, coffee as a drink was not *central* to the spaces themselves, but, ironically, it becomes central to the arguments levied against coffeehouses by women. The general exclusion of women from these “public spheres” led to a certain distrust of coffeehouses on behalf of the women. Their husbands visited these spaces, spent money, and were exposed to new ideas, and women were conspicuously excluded. The lack of control or involvement in masculine participation in these spheres caused women to petition the coffee houses, and clearly would have preferred the success of Charles II’s Proclamations.

Much of the literature featuring women and coffeehouses, the criticism focuses on coffee itself and its effects on the body. In the 1663 play, published before Charles II’s Proclamations, “Maidens Complaint Against Coffee,” one of the female characters exclaimed, “I believe the Devil first invented this liquor, on purpose to plague our Sex.”⁴⁰ The drink, then, was the crux of their criticism, but it is the coffee house that housed the source of their discontent. In this way, women could blame the coffee, the drink, as a force which changed men’s behavior. This

³⁹ Barrell, “Coffee-House Politicians,” 217.

⁴⁰ “The Maidens Complaint Against Coffee,” 3.

allowed them to criticize the men without completely holding the men responsible. By lessening the culpability of men, women did not become mere nagging wives, but rather concerned citizens. In the same play, the central character, Mrs. Troublesome, which in and of itself described the view of the women's complaint, chastised her husband, saying "you'll ene make your body as black with this cursed liquor, as your Soul is with extortion."⁴¹ Most women, in their complaints described the ways in which coffee altered the behaviors of their husbands: "for since he drank Coffee, he is no more like the man he was then an apple's like an Oyster."⁴² The behavioral argument, though, did not dictate the entire canon of female resistance to the coffee houses.

Other women, especially those of the lower classes working in alehouses, focused their complaint on the economic disadvantages the coffeehouses brought to them. "The Ale-Wives Complaint, Against the Coffee-Houses," a 1675 tract, an ale-wife complains, "the Neighbourhood swarm thither like Bees, and Buzze there like them too, but return like drones with little either honey or money."⁴³ Her distaste centered on the frustrating lack of customers to her alehouse, considering they all flocked to the coffee houses. The misdeeds of coffee houses criticized in the text condemned the amount of coffee in a dish,⁴⁴ but also cited the behavioral issues, contrasting them to the behavioral changes elicited from drinking ale. To top of the disapproval, coffee was described as "your insipid, filthy, nauseous, rot gut liquors."⁴⁵ The root of the problem though, was the establishment itself, and the amount of time men spent at the coffee houses. The neglect women felt at not being included in spheres where their husbands

⁴¹ "The Maidens Complaint Against Coffee," 1.

⁴² "The Maidens Complaint Against Coffee," 5

⁴³ "The Ale-Wives Complaint, Against the Coffee-Houses," *Early English Books Online* (1675), Copy from Harvard University Library, 2.

⁴⁴ "The Ale-Wives Complaint, Against the Coffee-Houses," 4

⁴⁵ "The Ale-Wives Complaint, Against the Coffee-Houses," 5.

spent so much time caused friction causing them to exclaim “I shall fling your Coffee to the Devil.”⁴⁶

Some men even supported the complaint of the women. In “A Character of Coffee and Coffee-Houses,” the male author argued that “the other Sex hath just cause to curse the day, in which it was brought into England; Had women any sense or spirit, they would remonstrate to his Majestie, that Men in former times were more able, than now, they had stronger Backs, and were more Benevolent.”⁴⁷ The criticism continued on to say it made men more talkative, made them loud, disorganized, they stayed up all night, they became lazy and distracted. However, the strongest argument against the coffeehouses seemed to be the fact that these houses had “no respect of persons” arguing “that great privilege of *equality* is only peculiar to the Golden Age, and to a Coffee-house.”⁴⁸ This male attack on fellows of his gender tells historians that the adulterated class distinctions did not sit well with all contemporaries. Additionally, this argument validated women and their complaints.

The specific attention women garnered for their complaints gave them social agency and minor social authority. “The Mens Answer to the Womens Petition Against Coffee” sought to “[vindicate] their own performances, and the Vertues of that Liquor, from the Underserved Aspersion lately cast upon them by their SCANDELOUS PAMPHLET.”⁴⁹ This description appears on the title page of the text, which demonstrated the strength of the response of the men in this instance; they discounted the women’s grievances before the actual text even began. Upon perusing the text, women are described as “ungrateful” and they are *told* how they would view the coffee houses: “The News and Chat of there, you will not think it Impertinent, when you

⁴⁶ “The Maidens Complaint Against Coffee,” 2.

⁴⁷ “A Character of Coffee and Coffee-Houses,” 4.

⁴⁸ “A Character of Coffee and Coffee-Houses,” 6.

⁴⁹ “The Mens Answer to the Womens Petition Against Coffee,” *Early English Books Online* (1674), Copy from Harvard University Library.

consider the fair opportunities you have thereby, of entertaining an obliging friend in our Absence.”⁵⁰ Then, the men go on to argue that alehouses pose a greater threat to domestic happiness and that they posit that women had unfair social advantages with their social circles, specifically that they met these friends in the absence of husbands, arguing that men should be allowed the same luxuries. This very authoritative voice demonstrates the flagrant masculinity of seventeenth century gender relations.

The tension between the two genders clearly demonstrates itself at the end of the document. The closing line was “Tis Coffee that both keeps us Sober, or can make us so; And let all our Wives that hereafter shall presume to Petition against it, be confined to lie alone all Night, and in the Day time drink mothering by Bonny Clabber.”⁵¹ As the final say, the sarcasm and borderline spite permeates the text, remarking that coffee is the reason men come home at night. The underlying connotation is that without coffee houses, men would spend their time and money imbibing ale and other such liquors, which have more intoxicating effects, and more serious consequences.

Much of the literature and ideas arising from coffee house chats is masculine and dominated by the male voice, so the female dissent in the records is beneficial to historians. Without the opposition of women and their complaints, their voices may not have survived in historical records. Women during the seventeenth century did not have the same social rights as men, which often times makes them silent in the sources. Through opposition to the coffee houses, women made their voices heard. More often than not, men wrote the sources, citing the behavior of women. While women did not write all of the sources recording their responses to coffee house popularity, the fact that men cited their arguments in their pamphlets and texts casts

⁵⁰ “The Mens Answer to the Womens Petition Against Coffee,” 3.

⁵¹ “The Mens Answer to the Womens Petition Against Coffee,” 5.

women in a slightly contradictory light. As second-class citizens, women had little social power, and this is demonstrated through their lack of authorial presence and agency in publishing their grievances. At the same time, the response to women's criticism tells historians that men heard their petitions and acknowledged them. This dichotomy in agency, between having to authorial presence and having their disparagements heard, is indicative of the tedious place coffee houses held in seventeenth century society.

With all of the opposition and dissent, the open dialogue allowed for the redressing of the issues taken with the coffeehouses, regardless of gender. In a 1675 document entitled "Coffee-houses Vindicated in Answer to the late Published Character of a Coffee-House," the title extols the contents of the piece. Including health benefits, such as "strengthening weak Stomacks, Helping digestion and obstructions, and Tumours of the Liver and Spleen," coffee also aided in the use of reason, was less expensive than alehouses.⁵² The author of this vehement support of coffee houses closed his tract with the following praise of the establishments: "The Sanctuary of Health,/ The Nursery of Temperance,/ The Delight of Frugality,/ An Academy of Civility,/ AND/ Free-School of Ingenuity."⁵³ Despite the varying accounts, this positive and well-meaning view of the coffee houses clearly dominated the collective opinion towards these establishments.

Coffee houses, controversial and groundbreaking in the seventeenth century, revolutionized social and gender interactions. The breakdown of class distinctions to more diluted and unsupportable forms allowed for a mingling of social "un-equals" and the spread of ideas across economic bounds. Despite the vehement attempts by King Charles II and his government to stem the sale of the beverage and its places of retail. Beyond the socio-political

⁵² "Coffee-Houses Vindicated in Answer to the Late Published Character of a Coffee-House," *Early English Books Online*, (1673), Copy from Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, 2-4.

⁵³ "Coffee-Houses Vindicated," 5.

constructs of the coffee house, stereotypical gender roles were also sustained; however, through the maintenance of these roles, women gained historical voice and presence, where it may have otherwise been impossible.

Bibliography

- “The Ale-Wives Complaint, Against the Coffee-Houses,” *Early English Books Online* (1675),
Copy from Harvard University Library.
- Barrell, John. “Coffee-House Politicians,” *Journal of British Studies* 43, no. 2 (2004): 206-232.
- Charles II, “By the King: A Proclamation for the Suppression of Coffee-Houses.” *Early English Books Online*. London: John Bill and Christopher Barker, 1675, Copy from Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery.
- Charles II, “By the King: An Additional Proclamation Concerning Coffee-Houses.” *Early English Books Online*. London: John Bill and Christopher Baker, 1676.
- “The Coffee-House of News-Mongers Hall.” *Early English Books Online*, 1672.
- “Coffee-Houses Vindicated in Answer to the Late Published Character of a Coffee-House,” *Early English Books Online*, (1673), Copy from Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery.
- Coulton, Richard. “‘The Darling of the Temple-Coffee-House Club’: Science, Sociability and Satire in Early Eighteenth-Century London.” *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35, no. 1 (2012):43-65.
- Cowan, Brian. “The Rise of the Coffeehouse Reconsidered.” *The Historical Journal*, 47, no. 1 (2004): 21-46.
- Dobranski, Stephen B. “‘Where Men of Differing Judgments Croud’: Milton and the Culture of the Coffee Houses.” *Seventeenth Century* 9, no. 1 (1994): 35-56.
- Ellis, Markman. “An Introduction to the Coffee-House: A Discursive Model.” *Science Direct: Language and Communication* 28 (2008):156-164.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a*

Category of Bourgeois Society. Trans. Thomas Burger. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1989.

Klien, Lawrence E. "Coffeehouse Civility, 1660-1714: An Aspect of Post-Courtly Culture in England." *Huntington Library Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (1996): 30-51.

Love, Harold "Sir William Petty, the London Coffee Houses, and the Restoration 'Leonine.'" *Seventeenth Century* 22, no. 2 (2007): 381-394.

"The Maidens Complain[t] Against Coffee." *Early English Books Online*. 1663. Copy from Harvard University Library.

"The Mens Answer to the Womens Petition Against Coffee," *Early English Books Online* (1674), Copy from Harvard University Library.

M.P., "A Character of Coffee and Coffee-Houses," *Early English Books Online* (London: John Starkey, 1661).

Standage, Tom. *A History of the World in 6 Glasses*. New York: Walker & Company, 2005.

Zappiah, Nat. "Coffeehouses and Culture." *The Huntington Library* 70, no. 4 (2007): 671-678.