DINING OUT:
BOURGEOIS ANXIETY IN NINETEENTH CENTURY PARIS

by

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Abstract

At the end of the nineteenth century, middle-class social life in Paris underwent drastic changes. Restaurant life, gastronomic literature and literary dinners during this period offer an interesting social and cultural discourse on middle-class social life. Restaurants were unique environments, where private and public lives mingled. By studying eating habits and the spaces in which people preferred to both eat and socialize, it is possible to learn more about middle-class identity. Brillat-Savarin's aphorism, "tell me what you eat and I will tell you who you are," rings true in the case of the Parisian bourgeoisie during the nineteenth century. Consequently, dining out can provide a window onto social changes that are difficult to discern using textual sources or conventional historiographical approaches.

This paper focuses on the period of 1848 to 1888. The close of the century compounded both the excitement and the uncertainty of modern life. These sentiments were expressed in a multitude of ways: from daily life in the quartiers of Paris to high art in the salons. The restaurant Chez Brébant, located in Montmartre, serves as a specific case study. In conjunction, the gastronomic writings of Charles Monselet (1825-1888) help to further illuminate the middle-class perspective of changing sociability and eating habits during this period.

Beginning with a brief history of the restaurant in Paris, this paper follows the rise and fall of the middle-class restaurant as an important place for bourgeois social life. The second chapter deals with the affects of Haussmannization and mass culture on bourgeois group identity. In conclusion, the third chapter looks at the resistance to change that was expressed by gastronomic literature and bourgeois *hommes de lettres* at the end of the
Second Empire. Dining out offers insight into how the democratization of taste affected the bourgeoisie as a group. The modernization of city-life was a central cause of anxiety. This study attempts to offer new insights into the complexity of the daily lives of the Parisian bourgeoisie during a period of rapid change.
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Introduction

Illuminated by flickering gaslights, small groups of men in dark coats and elegant hats strolled along the boulevard Poissonnière. They were heading to the numerous cafés, brasseries and restaurants of Montmartre. Chattering customers spilled out of a café onto the boulevard, where they watched the passing omnibuses and groups ambling along the sidewalk. The sultry sounds of a cabaret singer in a café-chantant drifted from around the corner, where men and women gathered to drink and socialize. Laughter and loud voices filled the air as the Parisian night brimmed with activity.

It was late in the evening when it began to rain and a lone gentleman scuttled out of the weather. The lights were low as Charles Monselet entered the restaurant Chez Brébant. The patron greeted his guest with a warm welcome of an acquaintance of many years. The diners in the main room discretely glanced at the new arrival. Cutlery and china chimed, and the humming of conversation filled the room. Monselet’s eyes scanned the restaurant and he smiled at the familiar faces: artists, fellow writers, journalists and distinguished members of the community. The restaurateur, Paul Brébant, showed the gentleman to his table upstairs in one of the private rooms. When Monselet joined his party, he was met with salutations from Saint-Beuve, Alexandre Dumas fils, Prosper Mérimée and the Goncourt brothers, Jules and Edmond. The evening promised lively conversation and sumptuous cuisine, for which Chez Brébant was famous. Members of Monselet’s literary circle were gathered this evening to discuss literature, politics, art and the important happenings around Paris. The gastronome’s heart warmed. The *dîners littéraires*, Boeuf de Nature, were sure to be a success. In his opinion, the restaurant was the best place to satisfy intellectual and gastronomic appetites.
The scene above is an imaginative rendering of a possible bourgeois evening out. It represents an ideal of middle-class society that was rapidly fading by the end of the nineteenth century. The literary dinners that took place during this époque offer an interesting social and cultural discourse: they mixed the political, the artistic and the personal aspects of bourgeois life. An extensive literature exists concerning Paris during the Second Empire and the effects of Hausamannization. Yet, the commentaries and anxieties raised by urbanization have not been discussed in the context of the sociability of the restaurant and the material culture of food. This paper aims to bring a new point of view to a topic that has been the centre of many historical and sociological discussions. In turn, it is my hope to broaden the scope of sources that can be used to research cultural history.

The literary dinners that were held in Paris’ fine eateries offer an unexplored source that addresses the problem of social anxiety resulting from urbanization and economic change. The vocal commentary of these diners, who were bourgeois hommes de lettres, traces the movement from idealized fraternal gatherings that fostered bourgeois masculine honour to the democratization of the dining room. This shift from bourgeois emulation of aristocratic culture to the democratization of middle-class taste was one of the central causes for this group’s social anxiety at the end of the century.

This paper focuses on social anxiety in Paris because questions concerning the impact of modernity on the lives of individuals during this époque were central to social theorists of the day.¹ Social anxiety is a topic that continues to speak to the current

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¹ Emile Durkheim’s Suicide attempted to address the social malaise he saw in French society. He suggests the implementation of a system that would reintegrate alienated individuals back into society. For Durkheim, this alienation was caused by modern life that was overly focused on individualism. From a
situation in Europe as we enter the twenty-first century. Immigration, continuing urban
development and crime now play a central role in social anxiety amongst Parisians. How
does urban space affect social identity and the psychological state of city-dwellers?

As Jerrold Seigel suggests, the troubles of the new society of individuals were felt
most strikingly during the nineteenth century by the ‘grand’ bourgeoisie, whose
traditions, culture and social status came under attack.\(^2\) The main threats to bourgeois
identity during this period were social and economic democratization, compounded by
modern urbanization. Political instability also increased the middle-class’ feeling of
social insecurity. In addition, the rise of mass culture, the product of growing industrial
capitalism, was a central cause of this social anxiety. During this period, the middle class
had to adapt and carve out a niche in this new socio-economic structure. A class-related
social anxiety was most recognizable during this time of transition.

The restaurant Chez Brébant, located on the boulevard Poissonnière in the XI
arrondissement of Paris, Montmartre, will serve as a specific case study. Chez Brébant
was a popular locale for many *dîners littéraire*, which reached the peak of their
popularity during the 1850s and 1860s. Brébant’s was also a known sight of political
activism from the Second Empire through to the Third Republic. The gastronomic
writings of Charles Monselet (1825-1888) will help illuminate the middle-class
perspective of changing sociability and eating habits during this period. Monselet’s
writings offer a rich discourse that focus on changes in middle-class culture. He was an
outspoken and widely read critic of the Parisian restaurant. For these reasons, this paper

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will cover roughly the period of 1848 to 1888, following Monselet’s literary career. This period begins during the Second Empire, follows through the Paris Commune and ends during the Third Republic. The focus of this paper is not the historical events, but rather their impact on the Parisian middle class, as reflected in ideas of sociability and food. The changes in restaurant culture will provide an explanation for middle-class anxiety.

Detailed accounts and anecdotes about elaborate dinners and the seemingly bottomless appetites of the diners punctuate gastronomic writing. A gastronome’s fame was not determined by his good taste alone; a voracious appetite and strong gastric constitution were necessities in this line of work. By the 1870s, there was a shift in tone: many writers complained of the overly elaborate style of the bourgeois restaurant and the lack of creativity in the cuisine. The tone of these gastronomes is perhaps indicative of the tension between excess and control. This is a predominant theme in the social and cultural history of France during the latter half of the nineteenth century. During the Second Empire, decadence was the order of the day. After the Paris Commune, the outlook of the Parisian bourgeoisie was far more skeptical and self-critical. Due to social and cultural changes, restaurants underwent their own revolution during the nineteenth century. The restaurants that survived the fin-de-siècle did away with bourgeois opulence and aristocratic emulation, in favour of popular appeal.

These types of cultural changes have been the focus of a number of studies, including Norbert Elias’ *The Civilizing Process*. By looking at the changes that occurred in courtesy and customs, including table manners, Elias searches for the roots of the European drive towards civilization. He also attempts to discern the meaning of ‘civilization’ in various historical periods. In my study of middle-class life, Elias’ work
serves as a framework for the analysis of the cultural changes that occurred in the
nineteenth century. *The Civilizing Process* demonstrates the possibilities for using social
behaviour and, in particular eating, as an indicator of social change.

Changes in culinary and social habits were indicative of social anxiety amongst
the Parisian bourgeoisie. Walter Benjamin and Georg Simmel offer interesting insight on
the impact of modern life upon urban Europeans. Benjamin’s use of Charles
Baudelaire’s observations of Parisian life offers compelling sociological insight into life
on the boulevards. In addition, Benjamin’s specific studies on topics such as fashion and
urban space offer valuable perspectives on the impact of urbanization and mass
production at the end of the nineteenth century. Simmel and Benjamin’s studies will be
used as theoretical tools in order to gain a better understanding of the pressures that were
placed upon the inhabitants of Paris as it became increasingly modernized in the latter
half of the nineteenth century.

This paper focuses specifically on a group of middle-class men that took part in
literary dinners, and who can be seen as important players in defining bourgeois
sociability in the model of eighteenth-century aristocratic gentility. I have chosen to look
at a specific group, while taking into consideration that partitioning along class lines has
both useful and potentially problematic results. The division of societies using class
structures is a hotly contested issue. The employment of class as a category of analysis
used cautiously, taking into consideration the issues that have arisen from this debate, can
reveal important historical changes. In this essay, I use the term middle class loosely to
define a group of people who shared similar cultural and social values. They were people
who shared a common orientation, whether based on economic standing, vocation,
heritage, education and neighbourhood. It is the inconsistent and changing nature of this subject that is the root of this particular inquiry.

Consequently, the economic aspects of class will play a part here but will not be a focal point. The purely Marxist approach to social class often limits individual agency, leaves little room for gender differences and frequently oversimplifies complex relationships between different social groups. Pierre Bourdieu argues that, economic theories often reduce the consumer (the individual) to his or her purchasing power, while passing over the rich and complex relationships between products and their markets.  

The relationships between the means of production, the consumer and the market are not as simple as some economists and Marxist thinkers would have us believe. Different forms of capital, including educational, economic and cultural, define class membership. According to Bourdieu, the distribution of these different types of capital determines an individual’s position within social power relations. At a very basic level, class distinctions are recognized through the differences and similarities between individuals. Not all members of a particular social class possess all of the characteristics of that group. Yet, it is through the member’s general ability to relate and function within the central norms of a particular group, that they maintain a certain sense of belonging to a larger social and cultural structure. Bourdieu states that:

[...] we can speak of a class although it is nowhere possible to draw a demarcation line such that we can find no one on either side who possesses all the properties most frequent on one side and none of the properties most frequent on the other.  

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4 Ibid., p. 315.  
5 Ibid., p. 258.
Despite the general difficulties in placing concrete qualifications on the category of class, it is still a useful and perhaps necessary tool for the analysis of many societies. Class was a term used by the historical actors themselves. During the nineteenth century, the Parisian bourgeoisie were aware of their social and cultural differences as a group. The term ‘bourgeois’ was part of their language, which they used to set boundaries and affirm social hierarchy.

Bourdieu’s reconsideration of Marxist categories of class, as both economic and cultural constructions, is helpful in understanding a more fluid conception of class identity. Bourdieu notes that, “the entry of the petite bourgeoisie into the game of distinction is marked interalia, by the anxiety of exposing oneself to classification by offering to the taste of others such infallible indices of personal taste as clothing or furniture.”

Bourdieu focuses on the cultural distinctions that separate class groups. Public displays of class symbols reconfirm group membership. Consequently, culture will be the central focus of my definition of the middle class: outward cultural signs which reveal themselves in the public sphere such as dress, etiquette and choices of entertainment.

E. P. Thompson’s emphasis on class as a process is also a consideration when discussing class groups. Thompson argues that class is something that happens in human relations over time, rather than as a structure or a category that does not leave room for the constantly changing nature of human relationships. Following Thompson’s example, this is a study of group identity that concerns real people and contexts. This paper traces the development of bourgeois identity in Paris over the latter half of the

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6 Ibid., p. 57.
nineteenth century. Thompson views group identity formation as a negotiation process that occurs between various social groups over a period of time. Unfortunately, it is not possible to view the entire development of this group within the limited chronology of this project. Yet, consideration for the nature of the development of social identity will help avoid placing class in a historical vacuum.

This study must also consider questions of gender and social space. During the nineteenth century, the middle-class restaurant was a male dominated social arena. While men, such as the flâneur, as described by Simmel and Benjamin, were enjoying a newfound freedom in the urban setting of the modern city, women did not share the same liberties in the public sphere. It was not yet acceptable for a respectable woman to dine in a café, bistro or restaurant. Increasingly, as women entered public social spaces, they challenged traditional conceptions of bourgeois masculinity. Despite the predominantly male clientele of the bourgeois restaurants of nineteenth-century Paris, middle-class social habits tell us about relations between men and women, changing gender relations and the impact of new social activities on the family. This paper will attempt to address this topic as part of an investigation of middle-class social identity.

In examining social group identities, the links and differences between the individual and the group are often revealing. As Sigmund Freud has suggested, directly connected to group identity is the identity of the individual. The 'self' is a complex construction of internally nurtured elements as well as a combination of social factors.

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8 Ibid., p. 9.
that play a role in shaping the identity of an individual. Each individual is a member of numerous groups ranging from the family to the nation. The individual's actions may differ greatly when in a large group. Emotions, such as anxiety and fear, and reactions to stimuli become amplified and often irrational in large groups. I would like to suggest that the Parisian middle class during the latter half of the nineteenth century was affected by group psychology which led to an overall feeling of anxiety. This social malaise of nineteenth-century Paris is also outlined by Gustave Le Bon in his study on “la foule parisienne.”

A sense of losing control of social identities, poorly defined lines within the urban hierarchy and a general inability to keep up with the rapid changes of modern society caused a great deal of uncertainty. Tradition and economic status alone no longer determined the secure ranks of the haute-bourgeoisie.

The meaning of social anxiety requires further elucidation. In general terms, anxiety is a state of mind expressed in the public sphere and by the social activities of a particular group. It is a state of acute awareness, which evidently takes place within the public sphere of everyday life. Arnold Buss suggests that social anxiety is a state of “being upset or disturbed by others' scrutiny or remarks [...]” Another major cause of anxiety is rapid change and the inability to adjust quickly to social change. A predominant symptom is a general feeling of loss of control, in this case, of social distinction or group identity. Consequently, anxiety creates a social climate that affects a large number of people put under external stress. In this sense, social anxiety cannot be divorced from its public nature and 'modern' characteristics.

12 Arnold H. Buss, Self-Consciousness and Social Anxiety (San Francisco, 1980), p. 204.
Public opinion, such as, critical editorials on alcoholism, an increased interest in the number of suicide deaths and violent crimes in the city of Paris and personal memoirs offer indications of middle-class anxiety. Other signs of social anxiety include what was seen by the middle-class as atypical public behaviour. Bourgeois Parisians stopped to take part in the public spectacles that were a part of everyday life on the boulevards. New types of mass entertainment exploited forms of popular spectacle: wax museums, dioramas and universal exhibitions. The exotic and unusual was brought within the reach of the average Parisian. These new forms of diversion not only delighted the popular classes; they also drew a strong following amongst the middle class. As the bourgeoisie took part in the culture of the boulevards their traditional social behaviour changed. They were becoming part of the masses.

The physical restructuring of Paris during the Second Empire compounded bourgeois anxiety. Napoleon III and Baron de Haussmann envisioned Paris as the metropolis of the modern world and the capital of the new French empire. The city facilitated modern state control, while encouraging public life. New public spaces for socializing and entertainment opened in Paris in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Middle-class men, in particular, were venturing out into a new arena that was previously taboo. The popularity and mixed clientele of the café-concerts were an example of new forms of social entertainment that was not in keeping with traditional middle-class values.\textsuperscript{13} Mass culture made new forms of entertainment, such as the moving picture, affordable and attractive to a wide audience. Yet, as Jürgen Habermas suggests, mass media and culture create a culture of integration in which it is difficult to assert a distinct

identity.\textsuperscript{14} Although Paris was a place aglow with public life, the bourgeois was beginning to loose himself in the crowd.

Central to this discussion, anxiety will be considered in relation to the eating habits of the Parisian bourgeoisie. The home was no longer the only place where the bourgeoisie took their meals. This proved problematic for middle-class families: the ritual of the meal was central to the cohesion of the family. It was a time for confirming familial roles, and a place where manners and customs were passed on to younger generations and where community was developed with close friends and relatives. As dining out became a regular part of life, this basic domestic ritual came under attack. On the other hand, restaurants became a place where the middle class could assert their social position. This change posed a challenge to middle-class traditions in the domestic sphere.

This essay begins with a definition of the Parisian middle-class restaurant. Starting with a brief history of the restaurant as it developed into a bourgeois institution after the Revolution, this chapter contextualizes the developments in the restaurant that occurred throughout the nineteenth century. The physical and social changes that took place in Parisian middle-class restaurants are traced through their peak, during the Second Empire, and demise, during the Third Republic.

The second chapter of this essay addresses the changes in Parisian social life due to the restructuring of the city during the Second Empire. In particular, this section follows the chronology of the restaurant Chez Brébant. The impact of urbanization on the middle-class restaurant will serve as an important element for understanding the

\textsuperscript{14} Jurgen Habermas, \textit{The Transformation of the Public Sphere} trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA, 1989), p. 175.
transformation of bourgeois sociability. New social spaces and forms of entertainment will offer insight into the impact of mass culture.

Charles Monselet's gastronomic literature and *dîners littéraires* are the focus of the third chapter. This will include an interpretation of literary texts, mémoires and actual details of the literary life of the restaurant. Monselet's writings demonstrate the middle-class opinion that the restaurant was to be guarded as an important space for bourgeois sociability and community life. This gastronomic discourse also demonstrates the outrage that many felt towards the tendency of bourgeois excess. In Monselet's writing there is a precarious dichotomy between excess and control. Monselet's call for change in the gastronomic world coincides with the eventual demise of the bourgeois restaurant.

The middle-class restaurant offers a complex view of these social and cultural changes. The act of eating and the social interaction that surrounds the rituals of dinner offer compelling insights into the way in which social and cultural change affected people's lives and communities. Group identities altered, creating new social orientations in the broad boulevards of Paris. This study attempts to offer new insights into the complexity of the daily lives of the Parisian bourgeoisie during a period of rapid change.
Chapter One - The Restaurant: Creating a Space for Bourgeois Social Life

“La gourmandise est un acte de notre jugement, par lequel nous accordons la préférence aux choses qui sont agréable au goût sur celles qui n’ont pas cette qualité.”  

During the nineteenth century the restaurant became an important place for middle-class social life. Throughout this époque, dining out and sociability in public spaces were important acts of group identification for the bourgeoisie in Paris. The development of the Parisian restaurant during the nineteenth century parallels the history of the middle class in France. Although restaurants began as aristocratic institutions during the eighteenth century, after the French Revolution, they became increasingly democratized. This chapter will outline the evolution of the middle-class restaurant, in conjunction with the development of this social group during the nineteenth century. A rough definition of the bourgeois restaurant at the beginning of the century will provide contrast for the changes that occurred in these establishments at the end of the nineteenth century. This will demonstrate the ways in which social anxiety and mass culture played an essential role in altering Parisian social habits and class culture.

Aristocratic culture was the essential defining feature of the first historical period of the Parisian restaurant. The exact origins of the first restaurant in Paris are greatly contested. It is generally agreed that Monsieur Boulanger opened the first dining establishment with the title restaurant in the middle of the eighteenth century in the rue des Poules in Paris. A sign with the following saying: “Venite omnis qui stomacho laboratis, et ergo restaurabos vos,” designated the location as a place for repairing one’s health. At its inception, the restaurant was a place for aristocratic convalescence. As

3 “Venez tous qui travaillez de l’estomac, et vous restaurerai.”
Rebecca Spang notes, the restaurant was a forum that theatricalized ill health.⁴ These establishments were places where private health problems were acted out in public. Fragility, associated with urban existence and its effect on refined spirits, was valorized in the restaurant. According to the contemporary philosophy on health, the foods served at the original restaurants had fortifying qualities. Boiled down meats made hearty bouillons served to those with bad bile or weak blood. Other foods also followed Enlightenment thinking on health; white soft substances were thought to be particularly useful for pulmonary illnesses that were quite common in the city. In the beginning, the restaurant had a social function that was closely linked to aristocratic fashion. Jean-Paul Aron remarks that, “Avant 1789, le restaurant était un objet de curiosité. Vite il a conquis sa dignité sociologique. C’est là que l’on discute de politique, et bientôt d’affaires et de mariages.”⁵ The restaurant did not remain an establishment uniquely concerned with health and aristocratic fashions.

Restaurants had a number of social and cultural functions by the beginning of the nineteenth century: they were places for repairing health, distinguishing social class and creating social ties in one’s neighborhood. From its conception, the restaurant was a social place where public appearances were important. According to Norbert Elias’ analysis of eating habits, the civilizing process was actively changing people’s perceptions of social behaviour through eating habits during this period.⁶ The restaurant was a milieu where social etiquette was refined, in order to suppress the primal and uncivilized characteristics surrounding eating. This function became increasingly

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important with the democratization of the restaurant during the nineteenth century. The bourgeois obsession with restraint and control can be seen in the development of the middle-class restaurant.

The social constructs imposed on the basic act of eating persisted despite the changing function of the restaurant in Paris. After the French Revolution, the restaurant opened up to a wider audience of diners. To a large degree, these establishments lost their aristocratic clientele, yet consequently, they gained an entirely new market—the bourgeoisie. Restaurants flourished in Paris. In comparison to the hundred odd establishments at the beginning of the century, it is estimated that there were nearly a thousand restaurants in Paris by 1825.\footnote{Restaurants de Paris (Paris, 1993), p. 46.} The most prestigious dining establishments were located in the Palais-Royal area. People went to the Palais-Royal not only to dine, but to take in other attractions as well: “Au Palais-Royal les clients venaient pour se distraire, mais leurs lieu d’activité était proche; désormais, ce sont les lieux de promenade et les théâtres qui attirent les restaurants.”\footnote{Jean-Robert Pitte, Gastronomie française: Histoire et géographie d’une passion (Paris, 1991), p. 166.} After the closure of the Palais des Jeux in 1836, the restaurants of the Palais-Royal lost their vogue.\footnote{Christian Guy, La vie quotidienne de la société gourmande en France au XIXe siècle (Paris, 1971), p. 203.} Many restaurateurs began to open establishments along the new boulevards of Montmartre. The boulevard des Italiens became the destination of choice for the bourgeois diner. This movement marks a second stage in the history of the Parisian restaurant during the nineteenth century. Later, during the Second Empire restaurant culture was deeply affected by the physical and social changes that took place in Paris under Napoleon III. This is a theme that will be

developed further in conjunction with the rise of middle-class anxiety and urban restructuring in Paris.

After the Revolution, renowned French chefs, such as Antoine Câreme left their aristocratic employers and took up court in Parisian restaurants that they would make famous. The Café Anglais, les Trois Frère Provençaux, le Véfour and la Maison d'Or were some of the most distinguished dining establishments at the beginning of the nineteenth century. These restaurants were monuments to French cuisine, but also they were symbols of bourgeois freedom and financial success. French cuisine and bourgeois culture developed simultaneously during this period. Culinary aesthetics were a reflection of middle-class ambition and an attempt to appropriate aristocratic culture. The Rabelasian obsessions of bourgeois diners under the Second Empire were indicative of elaborate tastes. This was one way in which the bourgeoisie tried to distinguish themselves from other social classes. Traditional forms of commercial activity between the bourgeoisie and their communities were fading due to the displacement of the working class from the city centre. For the middle class, dining became an important affirmation of their place within a developing social hierarchy, which was directly related to capitalism and economic status. A dinner at a bourgeois restaurant was limited to those who could afford the pleasure. The middle-class restaurant was an exclusive social space where economic status played a defining role for the clientele.

Bourgeois values and ideals transformed the Parisian restaurant during the nineteenth century. The middle class demanded the services of the restaurant because, increasingly, their lives were conducted in the public domain. The restaurant was a place
where people could meet as equals as long as they could afford the experience.\textsuperscript{10}

Developments in the methods of preparation and presentation can tell a great deal about changing social and culinary tastes. For example, by the middle of the nineteenth century the middle class no longer favoured the aristocratic style of dining, \textit{service à la française}, where all the food was presented at the table at the same time, they largely preferred \textit{service à la russe}, where dishes are served individually in courses.\textsuperscript{11} This was chiefly attributed to the allocation of leisure time to activities other than eating. This change also facilitated service in public dining venues such as the restaurant.\textsuperscript{12} In this case, service styles were directly associated with the changing public identity of the middle class during this period. The bourgeoisie no longer needed to emulate the aristocracy in the ostentatious manner of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century; it could be said that middle-class identity was developing into an autonomous group identity by the end of the nineteenth century. Despite bourgeois fascination and emulation of aristocratic culture, a middle-class culture was becoming increasingly pronounced.

At the beginning of the century, when there were only approximately 15 restaurants that catered to an haute bourgeois clientele, the privilege of eating in one of these establishments was highly prized. Dining in a restaurant was no longer only a way of restoring one's health or feeding a hungry stomach; dining out had become a confirmation of social status:

\begin{quote}
Le besoin d’aller chaque soir s’attablir dans un de ces temples dans lequels la grande cuisine française a attint son apogée crée un véritable courant qui s’il n’entraîne pas dans son mirage qu’une catégorie sociale fatie de
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{11} Stephen Mennell, \textit{All Manners of Food} (Oxford: 1985), p. 150.
\textsuperscript{12} Finkelstein, p. 41.
financiers opulents, de bourgeois aisés, d’artistes, d’écrivains, d’auteurs, de journalistes en roman n’en demure pas moins extrêmement important.\textsuperscript{13}

The restaurant became a central place for reconfirming social status and maintaining public appearance in important social circles.

Despite attempts to persevere important bourgeois values and traditions, such as a strong domestic life and a sense of importance or honorability in public life, the restaurant emerged as a complementary social setting where bourgeois culture was safeguarded from impinging mass culture and imitation. As Jean-Paul Aron notes:

\begin{quote}
Ainsi, au moment même où s’impose l’ordre bourgeois et où s’afferment ses valeurs: respectabilité de la maison, intégrité de la famille, douceur de l’intimité domestique, la société française se ménage des échappatours. Dès le début du siècle, le restaurant prend place, avec une belle indé d’honorabilité, parmi les refuges de l’initiative et de la liberté.\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

The restaurant managed to bridge the gap between the private and public lives of middle-class men at the beginning of the nineteenth century. By the end of the century, the social function of the restaurant underwent yet another change.

The bourgeoisie was certainly not the only group affected by social changes that concerned eating habits and domestic life. Dining establishments, other than the middle-class restaurant, were emerging in Paris. To name but a few, there were restaurants that catered to students in the Quartier Latin, there were \textit{traiteurs} who served light fare in almost every neighbourhood and there were working-class cafés.\textsuperscript{15} Despite the abundance of new places to eat outside of the home, the bourgeois restaurant had its defining characteristics. For a large part, cuisine was what set the middle-class restaurant apart from other venues. The competition between restaurants bred culinary creativity.

\textsuperscript{14} Aron., p. 17. 
\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 26.
Chefs, such as Auguste Escoffier (1847-1935), prided themselves on the novelty of their dishes. Innovation was the predominant characteristic of middle-class restaurant fare during the Second Empire. Bourgeois cuisine drew on tradition and reinvented the classics to suit the culinary tastes of the day.

It cannot be overlooked that dining at home was still an important part of middle-class life, but the popularity and facility of restaurants challenged the domestic kitchen and threatened to change an important part of everyday life. In Zola's *Nana*, Nana appreciates the privacy of dinner at home, yet she desires the ease and luxury of a dinner party at a restaurant. Nana's status as a rising starlette of the theatre left her ill equipped to serve a dinner in her home that would meet the standards of her distinguished bourgeois guests. Hence, Nana called on Paul Brébant of Chez Brébant for assistance:

Since morning Zoe had delivered up the flat to a managing man who had come from Brébant's with a staff of helpers and waiters. Brébant was to supply everything, from the supper, the plates and dishes, the glass, the linen, the flowers, down to the seats and footstools. Nana could not have mustered a dozen napkins out of all her cupboards, and not having had time to get a proper outfit after her new start in life and scorning to go to the restaurant, she had decided to make the restaurant come to her. It struck her as being more the thing. She wanted to celebrate her great success as an actress with a supper which should set people talking.\(^{16}\)

The above passage, although fictitious, does demonstrate the blurring between public and private lives that occurred during the Second Empire. It also indicates the importance of food and social class. Nana, concerned with impressing her guests in order to confirm her new social status, wanted to secure her position by having a dinner that would impress her suitors. As the restaurant itself was not an entirely suitable venue for a lady, the home offered the privacy that Nana desired.

\(^{16}\) Emile Zola, *Nana* (New York, 1989) (Chapter IV)
In addition, the restaurant was also an economic solution to the costly expenses of employing a first rate chef in the home. There were only a few "très grands bourgeois" who could afford to maintain the cuisine of the ancien régime in the home.\(^{17}\) The choice and abundance that restaurants offered were attractive to the bourgeois diner. At Chez Véry diners had a choice of up to 150 different dishes.\(^{18}\) It would have been difficult to rival that type of choice in the domestic kitchen. The restaurant allowed for spontaneity and the fulfillment of gastronomic fantasy. This new movement in dining out allowed for the democratization of expensive tastes and, at the same time, provided a public arena in which to display conspicuous consumption.

On an aesthetic level, the presentation of the food itself indicated the importance placed on, not only the taste, but on the entire sensory perception of the food. Many dishes were elaborate works of art that drew on architectural design and the fine arts for inspiration. In particular, Antoine Carême was a chef who prided himself on the extravagant presentation of his dishes. Throughout the nineteenth century, chefs struggled to be recognized as true artists in the same league as great sculptors and painters. An elaborate style, which catered to middle-class tastes, proliferated throughout the decorative arts. Wine and other libations were also an important part of the restaurant dinner. Consuming the most prestigious vintages from the most famous houses was another form of conspicuous consumption in the restaurant. This followed the tendency of middle-class decadence and abundance that was predominant during the Second Empire.

\(^{17}\) Pitte, p. 167.

French cuisine offers an explicit example of this trend in changing tastes. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, chefs attempted to create the most lavish, decorative and luxurious dishes. This was an attempt to bring aristocratic tradition and style to the bourgeois table. As the century progressed, there was a move away from this type of decadence. Auguste Escoffier broke away from the excesses of the beginning of the century and revolutionized French cuisine at the end of the century. His ‘simple’ dishes emphasized the flavour of the ingredients and took into consideration the rapidity of their preparations. Escoffier remodeled the restaurant kitchen to enable it to produce high quality food for a large number of diners. This development in itself mirrors a move towards mass consumer consumption of even luxury goods. Middle-class attempts at distinguishing themselves in the public sphere were slowly fading by the end of the nineteenth century. This was one of the general causes of growing bourgeois anxiety during this period. Group identity was increasingly challenged by the democratization of luxury goods that were previously only available to bourgeois consumers.

Transportation and the geographic restructuring can also help explain the changes that occurred in the middle-class restaurant at the end of the nineteenth century. The development of the railway system in France facilitated the transportation of produce from all the regions of France and other countries to Paris. This allowed for the diversification of cuisine in the capital city. It also exposed Parisian diners to cuisine from other regions and countries and in turn, it brought an international audience to the Parisian restaurant. The world of the bourgeois restaurants of Paris were no longer a closed circle of local diners. Many foreigners and diplomats ate at restaurants like Chez
Very that had international reputations. By the time of the World Exposition in 1900, French cuisine in Paris had become a veritable tourist attraction. The Guide Michelin, first published in 1900, marked the rise of gastronomic tourism in France. This movement of ideas and people, as Georg Simmel suggests, has great social importance. In Simmel’s study of sociological space, he associates high mobility with low internal differentiation and strong integration. An article on French cuisine from the *Le Temps* echoes this sentiment; stating the high demand placed on restaurants, due to rising tourism, spoiled the quality of the cuisine in these venues. This trend can also be seen with the rise of greater mobility within Paris itself and with the facility of transportation to and from outlying areas. Greater physical mobility and its impact on eating habits had far-reaching consequences for middle-class social life and group identity.

The affect of the physical restructuring of Paris during the Second Empire, known as Haussmannization, upon the middle-class restaurant, will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. The interconnection of urbanization, modernization and changing middle-class identity was central to bourgeois anxiety during this period.

The history of the restaurant in Paris during the nineteenth century is closely connected to the history of the bourgeoisie. The changes that occurred not only in the restaurant as an institution, but also in the cuisine itself, are indicative of larger social changes that affected the group identity of the middle-class. Gastronomy and eating habits offer insight into this transformation. Over the course of the century, the restaurant changed from an aristocratic institution concerned with convalescence to a Rabelasian establishment defined by its decadent cuisine and luxurious décor. By the fin-de-siècle,

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the restaurant was undergoing yet another transformation. The rise of mass culture and the decline of the middle-class restaurant will be discussed in conjunction with the increasing phenomenon of bourgeois anxiety during this period.

21 “Lectures Étrangères: Ce qu'on dit en Europe de la cuisine française” in Le Temps, March 13, 1886: 3.
Chapter Two—Life on the Boulevard: Bourgeois Anxiety Chez Brébant

"[...] il en est peu qui se doutent qu'il est impossible que celui qui créa le restaurant ne fût pas un homme de génie et un observateur profond."¹

As Brillat-Savarin suggests in the quote above, the restaurateurs of Paris had special insight into the culinary, as well as the social climate of the city. The history of the restaurant Chez Brébant offers a new perception of the social, economic and political changes that affected bourgeois culture and identity from about 1860 to the late 1880s. I will consider the changes that occurred in restaurant culture due to Haussmannization and the rise of mass culture in relation to middle-class identity. New venues, such as the café-chantant, present a comparison between the new and old style of sociability in Montmartre. The political function of the restaurant during the Second Empire will illuminate many of the social changes that occurred at this time. I will also look at the impact these transformations had on middle-class gender relations. In addition, fashion, urban space and transportation will help to identify changes in bourgeois identity at the end of the nineteenth century.

At the beginning of the First Empire, the Café des Grands Hommes was founded at 32 boulevard Poissonnière. It was not until François Vachette purchased the café in the 1830s that it finally gained repute amongst Parisian diners. The clientele at Chez Vachette consisted mainly of journalists and *hommes de lettres.*² Chez Vachette was not unlike many restaurants in the Montmartre area during the period of the July Monarchy: prostitutes mixed with the mostly male clientele and boisterous dinners went on well into the night. Montmartre had not yet begun its renaissance. During the 1830s, the nearby boulevard du Temple was also known as the boulevard of crime. During the Second

Empire, it was one of Baron de Haussmann’s main objectives to suppress such areas and rid Paris of vice. Chez Vachette directly experienced the impact of Haussmann’s urban projects. Following opening of new theatres, a literary and artistic community was established in the neighbourhood of Montmartre around this time. The boisterous nature of the restaurant calmed and cuisine, art and literature became the restaurateur’s prime occupations.

During the Revolution of 1848, Vachette refused to close his restaurant’s doors. He put the cause of restauration before that of revolution. For Vachette, eating was just as important as political upheaval. General unrest did not disturb the service at Chez Vachette. In fact, the restaurant was an important place where people could meet and exchange ideas. As people met to discuss the latest political happening in the dining room, the cook and the patron were prudently choosing the *plat du jour* in the kitchen. Appetites still needed quelling.

In 1852 Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte was named Emperor of France and during the Second Empire, the Parisian restaurant flourished. In particular, the boulevard des Italiens in Montmartre, not far from the boulevard Poissonnière, was the site of some of Paris’ most reputed restaurants. During this same period, due to an extensive plan to change the shape of Paris, Montmartre underwent drastic restructuring.

In 1853, Baron de Haussmann was named prefect de la Seine. Haussmann, in collaboration with the Emperor, restructured Paris in attempt to create a city that would be not only the capital of France, but also, as Benjamin later called it, the capital of the

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4 Courtine, p. 49.
nineteenth century. In this new urban scheme, public control was key. Louis Napoleon wanted to avoid the revolts and political uprisings that had plagued the capital throughout its history. Common sense changes included the widening of streets into grand boulevards that facilitated the movement of troops in case of insurrection and this hindered the building of barriers. These new magnificent vistas evoked greatness on a Roman scale. Paris was to be Louis Napoleon’s new Rome.

Haussmann’s plans for Paris had a significant impact on the bourgeois restaurant. The widening of streets and the facilitation of transportation within the city opened neighborhoods to a wider public. Before the Second Empire, Montmartre was often compared to a village. During this period, most people did business and conducted their social lives in one area or neighbourhood. To a large degree, each quartier was a closed economic and social microcosm. Beginning in 1853, the widening of streets, the improvement of traffic circulation and the popularity of the omnibus helped people traveled easily throughout Paris. In areas like Montmartre, this led to a mixing of social groups: poor workmen rubbed shoulders with middle-class bohemians. Dining out was no longer segregated to local neighbourhoods after 1853.

Among Haussmann’s many plans, which included the construction of new public buildings, an extensive project was begun in 1854 to provide Paris with a central market. The Halles became the ‘ventre de Paris’ and, a locale that supplied restaurants with produce and ingredients from all over France. Other projects included the development of the arts. Haussmann’s building of the new Opéra Garnier in 1861 had an important

5 This is also the title of Walter Benjamin’s essay “Paris: Capital of the Nineteenth Century” which addresses the ways in which Paris embodied modern urbany.
6 Jean-Paul Carracallia, Montmartre: Gens et légendes (Paris, 1995), p. 34.
7 This term was coined by Emile Zola.
impact on Parisian restaurants. This new entertainment district drew potential customers to the restaurants in the surrounding area. It was during the Second Empire that the restaurants of Montmartre experienced the height of their popularity.

It was at this time that Paul Brébant decided to purchase the restaurant Vachette. Chez Brébant opened in 1863. Under new ownership, this restaurant underwent a number of changes and Brébant’s quickly became well known for its fine cuisine and literary clientele. Extravagant dinners and a first rate wine cellar were one of Brébant’s claims to fame. On the occasion of a dinner offered by Alexandre Dumas fils in honour of his father, the following menu was served:

Huitres de Marenne 1er choix  
Potages à la reine—aux avelins  
Bisques de poupards  
Turbot à la purée d’huîtres vertes  
Reins de sangliers à la Saint-Hubert  
Pâté chaud de pluviers dorés  
Matelotte de lottes à la bourguignotte  
Canetons à la burgarrade  
Sorbet au Xéhers  
Chapons truffés  
Buissons de cailles, engoulevents, tourteraux  
Salades de romaines  
Salade de tomates, artichauts  
Asperges à la sauce Pompadour  
Pois nouveaux à la bonne femme  
Sorbetières de glaces assorties  
Profiterolles au chocolat  
Fanchonnettes à la gelée de pommes de Rouen  
Fromages, fruits

Vins

Sauterne, Chablis, Montreus, Lunel paillé  
Mercurey, Romanée Conti, Ai de Moet frappé  
Château Lafite, Malvoisie de Chypre  
Lacryma Christi

Café, liquers, eaux-de-vie, liqueur Foking
Mirobolants de Mme Amphoux

As this Rabelasian menu demonstrates the host spared no expense: Brébant excelled at preparing a feast fit for a king. The decadent nature of this meal impressed the guests gathering to celebrate the literary greatness of Alexandre Dumas père. The bourgeois literary set of Montmartre celebrated in aristocratic style. Typical of the cuisine of this époque, the above menu features produce from a variety of regions in France: oysters from the north, artichokes from the south and truffles from Périgord to the west. Brébant drew together flavours from all over the country to create a uniquely Parisian cuisine. This was a luxurious style found only in the country’s capital.

Brébant’s literary clientele did not want to indulge their palettes in private; they came to the restaurant to display their good taste in public. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why Paul Brébant decided to restructure the dining room. According to Robert Courtine, Brébant renovated the vast dining room that consisted of twenty-five booths on the ground level alone. From the caisse overlooking the salle, Mme Brébant kept watch over the restaurant. The garde-manger faced out on to the boulevard so that the public could admire the abundance of the victuals and the order and propriety that reigned in this establishment. Cuisine itself was a spectacle at Chez Brébant.

The public displays of opulence in the kitchen at Brébant’s certainly caught the eye of those strolling along the boulevard, but more importantly, the diners in the restaurant were distinguished from the masses that rolled past. By making a public appearance and choosing a specific restaurant, an individual demonstrated his membership in a select community. During the Second Empire, dining out was a

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8 Courtine, p. 58-59.
9 Ibid., p. 52-53.
confirmation of social status at a time when class identity was becoming unclear. It was a form of resistance to the assimilating nature of mass culture, which was most pronounced after the execution of Haussmann's major urban plans, beginning in 1854, and before 1870.

In relation, other forms of material culture began to experience the infringement of mass culture on symbols of class distinction. For example, in 1880 fashion no longer offered them same external social differentiation as it did 1800. With the rise of the textile industry in France and the affordability provided by mass production, it was easier for more people to dress in the bourgeois style. Early in the nineteenth century, this type of superficial social blending was difficult. Despite the changes that took place, for the middle class, fashion was an important public indication of status. As Georg Simmel explains in "The Philosophy of Fashion": fashion is one way in which groups create an identifiable, yet exclusive, membership:

Fashion is, as I have said, a product of class division and operates--like a number of other forms, honour especially--the double function of holding a given social circle together and at the same time closing it off from others.

Fashion is just one example of the ways in which social inclusion and exclusion were created in nineteenth-century Paris.

Historians have argued against Gustave Le Bon's theory of social anxiety due to modernization. In particular, Vanessa Schwartz's Spectacular Realities argues that mass culture did not alienate the individual and did not cause anxiety. Schwartz believes that mass culture allowed for a more egalitarian society in nineteenth-century Paris and that

consumer culture allowed Parisians to become modern. On the contrary, it was this equalizing effect of mass culture that caused a large degree of anxiety amongst the middle class. Parisians did not easily adapt to modern life. In particular, the modern was threatening to the middle class and their customary way of life. Traditionally, the bourgeoisie was a group that had made great efforts to distinguish themselves from other Parisians. It would not have been so easy, as Schwartz suggests, for the bourgeoisie to embrace the democratization of public life. Gastronomic literature and the headlines of daily periodicals clearly voice resistance to this trend.

Although, middle-class men increased their leisure time in the public sphere, enabling them to assert their social identity in a wider arena, this provided little ease to the increasing sense of social anxiety. Sunday strolls in the newly landscaped Bois de Boulogne were a popular activity for the middle-class families, yet they did not offer a great deal of refuge from the Parisian masses. Parisians from all areas and social backgrounds frequented Haussmann’s rambling park. The anonymity of the Parisian crowd challenged traditional social class structures and sociability.

During the 1870s, political instability magnified social anxiety. The siege of Paris and the Commune shook many bourgeois ideals. Middle-class moralists criticized the decadence and luxury enjoyed by the hommes de lettres who frequented Brébant’s. The popular press made an appeal for a return to the private sphere of the home. Brébant was rebuked for his lack of morality in continuing business as usual during the siege of Paris. While many died of hunger in the city, dîners littéraire continued on a regular basis.

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at Brébant's. Previously, these displays of luxury were seen as distinguishing, but after 1870, public opinion criticized this type of excess and indifference to human suffering.

The political climate began to stabilize after 1875 when the Third Republic was established. Yet, Chez Brébant never recovered its previous fame. In 1888, Paul Brébant, in debt, ceded his restaurant to la Société des bouillons de Paris. The fate of Chez Brébant's was indicative of the general decline of the bourgeois restaurant and partially the result of a new bourgeois outlook that frowned upon excess.

Changing social decorum and political expression were perhaps two of the most predominant reasons for the failure of the bourgeois restaurant. With the rise of new types of sociability and entertainment, the bourgeoisie had a wider variety of venues to choose from. Consequently, perhaps Charles Monselet's complaints about the bourgeois restaurant also rang true: a lack of innovation and spirit of change were also factors in the eventual demise of the traditional middle-class restaurant, such as Chez Brébant. The meals offered in restaurants were seen as overly decadent and lacking in subtlety. A new style was needed to mirror larger cultural and social changes. The bourgeois restaurant clung to its tradition and failed to rise to the occasion by creating a new cuisine that redefined middle-class tastes. Entertainment and conspicuous consumption seemed to be the new distinguishing factors of class. Culinary tastes and expectations concerning service changed to mirror increasingly fast-paced social lives. Restaurants, such as Café d'Or and Café Anglais, that were popular during the Second Empire were extinct by the turn of the century.

13 Periodicals such as Le Temps and Illustration were filled with headlines decrying the decay of Parisian society due to prostitution and alcoholism. Suicide and crimes of passion were often blamed on these vices.
14 Le Temps, 24 mai, 1892: 3.
After the Paris Commune, the government of the Third Republic closed a number of bourgeois restaurants. Authorities feared that these establishments were breeding grounds for political dissent. As Auguste Lecomte notes, dîners littéraires, such as the dîners du Pluvier, were suppressed after the commune.\textsuperscript{16} This is one example of the ways in which the rejuvenated Republic attempted to control politics in the public sphere. With the end of the dîners littéraires an important social forum for political expression and bourgeois fraternity was lost.

By the end of the century, the bourgeois restaurant encountered economic difficulties. As mentioned early, one way in which the clientele of the middle-class restaurant distinguished themselves was through the economic privilege that allowed them to dine at these expensive establishments. Economic depression in France, beginning in 1870, affected what types of luxury the middle class could afford. Consumer choice was not just a matter of taste; it was driven by the economics of everyday life. At the fin-de-siècle restaurants catering to the working class, students, the petite bourgeoisie, women and tourists proliferated. New venues, that emphasized entertainment rather than cuisine, opened their doors and were in high public demand. Cabarets like the Chat-Noir could be found in almost all areas of Paris.\textsuperscript{17}

The end of this bourgeois tradition had a significant impact on gender relations amongst the upper middle class. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the middle-class restaurant was an important space for the expression of bourgeois masculinity, class distinction and political activities. In \textit{Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{17} Charles Simond, \textit{Les Centennales Parisiennes: Panorama de la vie de Paris à travers le XIXe siècle} (Paris, 1903), p. 176.
\end{footnotesize}
France, Robert Nye suggests that middle-class masculine identity in France was closely connected to a sense of honor. Originally, in France male honor was an ideology that stemmed from noble military service and was related to strategies of inheritance. After the French Revolution, male honor persisted and was adopted by the bourgeoisie. This noble tradition was not imitated wholesale by the middle class, they infused this ideology with their traditions of urban struggle, their preoccupations with discipline, values and family ties. Masculine honor and restaurant culture were both traditions adapted from the French nobility that for the Parisian middle class served an important function in securing social status.

As the bourgeois restaurant disappeared and their social function changed, middle-class men had to find new outlets of expression and cultural distinction. This was a central cause of anxiety, expressed in the new social arenas of the city. As crowds of Parisians flooded the boulevards, new forms of subjective culture (for example, the café-concert that had a very mixed clientele of men and women from diverse social backgrounds) challenged the male conception of the urban landscape. The restaurant, in contrast to the boulevard, was the epitome of male dominated closed social space. As Roslyn Wallach Bologh suggests, objective culture, as in the case of the restaurant, was inherently male, and as subjection, the crowd, unsettled male objectivity, masculine identity became increasingly destabilized. Walter Benjamin develops this theme in his discussion of Baudelaire’s Paris. For both Benjamin and Baudelaire, the image of the

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flâneur,\textsuperscript{21} or the man in the crowd, embodied the turbulence of middle-class male identity as he faced the increasing masses in the streets of Paris.\textsuperscript{22} Masculine identity became harder to define and affirm in terms of material culture, as tradition and middle-class honor disappeared and as mass culture began to democratize taste.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, male identity was largely dependent on well-defined social norms: this included both physical and social stereotypes. Characters such as Walter Benjamin’s flâneur and Oscar Wilde’s dandy challenged the external notions of how a man should look and act in public. These types pushed the limits of ‘acceptable’ male behaviour in society. The dandy espoused effeminate qualities and the flâneur made himself superfluous to society. Both challenged the traditional values of masculinity and male honour. Despite the appearance of these new masculine types in the urban landscape, middle-class tradition was closely tied to masculinity during this period.

Within this new social context, the middle-class restaurant no longer provided a place of confirmation for male identity. As the bourgeois took to the streets, he faced an uncertain social standing. Public space was socially shared space. Bustling boulevards, arcades populated with eager shoppers and parks peopled with strolling Parisians offered spaces where the classes could mingle. The rowdy café-concerts and the social life on the boulevards of Paris marked the end of an era of closed middle-class society. The

\textsuperscript{21} The character of the flâneur, as mentioned by Walter Benjamin, is not easy to define. Evasion of classification is central to the function of such a social type. The flâneur is the man in the crowd who evades the gaze of observer. He is both part of the crowd, yet he was an aware internal observer: “It is the gaze of the flâneur, whose mode of life still surrounds the approaching desolation of city life with propitiatory luster. The flâneur is still on the threshold, of the city as of the bourgeois class. Neither engulfed him; in neither is he at home. He seeks refuge in the crowd.” Walter Benjamin, “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century” in Reflections trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York, 1978), p. 156.

lines of class identity began to blur by the end of the nineteenth century. Establishments like Chez Brébant represented an earlier period in which the restaurant was a controlled environment where bourgeois social norms were respected. A book celebrating the Parisian centennial in 1900 noted that, after 1870, the luxury restaurant fell out of popularity with the public.\(^{23}\)

Despite Charles Monselet's criticisms and a call for change, there was no saving the old dining establishments of the middle class. Due to Haussmannization, social permeability allowed the classes to mingle in the new public spaces of the city. Previously, this type of sociability was neither possible nor acceptable. The encroachment of mass culture upon middle-class traditions was a cause of social anxiety. Distinction became harder to attain as mass production made luxury items accessible to a broader market of consumers. Not only was middle-class identity challenged by the mimicry of the petite bourgeoisie, this group's way of life and daily social interaction was displaced by new types of entertainment and the restructuring of the city. In addition, the political nature of the restaurant faded after the Second Empire as the government cracked down on the meetings of literary and political groups. The bourgeois diner found himself lost in the new social landscape of Paris.

\(^{23}\) Simond, p. 176.
Chapter Three - The Bourgeois Diner: Gastronomic literature and *dîners littéraires*

"Les animaux se repaissent, l'homme mange; l'homme d'esprit seul sait manger."¹

How was the bourgeois diner to know where to sup? How would he know the right dishes to order to impress his dinner guests? The complex world of the Parisian restaurant was made accessible by gastronomic literature, which, after the French Revolution, became essential reading for the upwardly mobile bourgeois. This new literature, embodied by the guidebook, almanacs and periodicals, also facilitated the codification of the middle-class social habits in the restaurant. As privileges, such as dining in restaurants, became readily accessible to a wider audience, the traditions that the haute bourgeoisie borrowed from the aristocracy came under attack. Restaurant society became less exclusive by the end of the nineteenth century. Consequently, the democratization of taste greatly affected the development of restaurants and the social life of the middle class. Gastronomic literature played an important part in this movement.

What was gastronomy in the nineteenth century and who were its proselytizers? Gastronomy was a complex combination of good taste, sensibility and a love for the culinary arts. This literature disseminated aristocratic rules of social interaction concerning food to an eager middle-class audience. In the process, a standard for bourgeois etiquette was set. The most renowned gastronomes were perhaps Auguste Brillat-Savarin and Grimod de la Reypière. In *La Physiologie du goût*, Brillat-Savarin outlines the history of the restaurant and puts forth a philosophical tract for the discerning diner to follow. He presents gastronomy as a vocation, not simply a personal

indulgence. On a practical level, periodicals, such as *Le Gourmet*, gave explicit instructions for conducting a successful evening at the table:

*Le Gourmet* dira ce qu’il faut manger chaque semaine, et aussi ce qu’il faut pas manger. Combien en avez-vous rencontré de ces diners embarrassés qui feuilletent pendant une demi-heure une carte de restaurant? *Le Gourmet* va rendre cette carte inutile, on entrera désormais avec certitude chez Verdur ou chez Very en sachant d’avance ce qu’on doit demander […]

The editor of this review, Charles Monselet, and his savvy collaborators suggested entire menus, instructed the reader on table manners, defined the role of the host and his diners and recounted tales of triumphant dinner parties. This type of literature aimed at a readership who wanted to enjoy the finer things in life and who wanted to be recognized for their distinguished style in doing so: “Elle [la gastronomie] donne la mansuétude et la galanterie.” In detail, these writers gave advice on the selection of sauces and wines and inspired their readers with philosophical musings on the joys of eating. The early works of Brillat-Savarin set the philosophical tone and model for gastronomic writing throughout the nineteenth century. Consequently, men like Charles Monselet and Brillat-Savarin put forth the art of eating as a bourgeois ideal.

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2 Auguste Brillat-Savarin, *La Physiologie du goût*, (Paris, 1982), see Meditation III “De la gastronomie” in which gastronomy is defined as a science and profession. This piece helped create a serious discourse of gastronomy. Also see Meditation XXVIII “Des Restaurateurs” in which Brillat-Savarin outlines the development of the restaurant and gives an excellent social history of these institutions.


6 Gastronomic writers often gave menus for entire five-course dinners to be served in the home and gave advice for dining out in restaurants. The public and private domains of eating were equally important in these reviews. This demonstrates that the readership of the periodicals such as *Le Gourmet* had the economic means to support their good taste. In an introduction to Brillat-Savarin’s *Physiologie du goût*, Roland Barthes suggests that: “les grands gourmands de la société sont principalement les financiers, les médecins, les gens de lettres et les dévots, ce qu’il considère, c’est un certain profil d’habitudes, bref une psychologie sociale: le goût gastronomique semble à ses yeux lié par privilège, soit à un positivisme de la profession, soit à une aptitude particulière à dé placer, à sublimer ou intimiser la jouissance.”, Rolande Barthes “Lecture de Brillat-Savarin” in Auguste Brillat-Savarin, *Physiologie du goût* (Paris, 1975), p. 31.

7 Brillat-Savarin’s *La Physiologie du goût*, first published in 1825 posthumously, remains a canon piece in gastronomic literature.
How did one become a gastronome? Was good taste an inherited trait or was it a cultivated characteristic? Monselet’s life offers some elucidation. Pierre-Charles Monselet was born in 1825 in a bourgeois home at the corner of place du Grashin and place du Grand-Théâtre in Nantes. His father owned a bookstore and Monselet grew up in a family where literature and learning were important. According to Monselet’s son and biographer, this was where Charles Monselet’s real education took place. After his formal education, Monselet moved to Paris to pursue a career as a writer.

Despite Monselet’s lack of popular success as a writer, he was part of an important Parisian literary circle that included the Goncourt brothers, Sainte-Beuve, Prosper Mérimée, Alexandre Dumas (fils), and Paul de Saint-Victor. Monselet was a member of a bourgeois literary circle that exemplified middle-class masculinity, honour and cultural refinement. Known for his good taste, Charles Monselet was a writer who played an important part in the gastronomic literary tradition. Monselet’s contributions include La cuisinière poétique (1859), Almanachs des gourmands (1862-1870), Gastronomie (1874), Récits de table (1874), Lettres gourmandes (1877), Manuel de l’homme à table (1877) and many critical commentaries on the restaurants of Paris published in numerous Parisian periodicals. However, why did Charles Monselet choose to focus his literary talents on gastronomy? It seems that he considered eating of the utmost importance in everyday life. Specifically, as an homme de lettres, dining out was an important forum for exchanging ideas. Charles Monselet bridged the gap between the worlds of lettres and gastronomie, bringing them together in his love of writing.

Monselet's cultural criticisms often focused on the decline of the bourgeois restaurant. This demonstrates the gastronome's fear of social change and reactionary attitudes in the face of working class social empowerment. Monselet's preface to an 1879 edition of Brillat-Savarin's _La Physiologie du Goût_ clearly expresses these concerns:

> Depuis Brillat-Savarin, la gastronomie est-elle en progrès? C'est une question que j'entends souvent poser, et à laquelle je voudrais pouvoir répondre affirmativement, mais je cherche en vain les tables que l'on cite, les amphitryons qu'on renomme. Où sont les grands cuisiniers? Quels noms avons-nous actuellement à opposer à ceux de Câreme et de Robert?

> On mange beaucoup ce pendant; les restaurants se sont multipliés à l'infini. Qu'est-ce que la cuisine y a gagné? Je pourrais plutôt vous dire ce qu'elle y a perdu. Presque tous les rôtis se font aujourd'hui au four. Abomination!  

In this passage, Monselet criticizes new cooking methods. He suggests that the democratization of the restaurant placed a demand on the kitchen that caused chefs to compromise the quality of the cuisine. Monselet abhorred the infringement of other class groups, specifically the petite bourgeoisie, on the cultural traditions of the Parisian bourgeoisie because at the heart they were challenging bourgeois social status and power. The democratization of bourgeois taste was central to these criticisms.

Charles Monselet wanted middle-class dining habits to remain distinct, not vulgarized by popular culture. At the same time, Monselet detested the overly ornate tendencies of cuisine during the Second Empire:

> [...] j'ai dîné dans un restaurant comme on en voit trop dans Paris, ornés du haut en bas, peints jusqu'au criard, sculptés dans tous les coins. [...] les hommes qui recherchent une nourriture sérieuse et qui ont autant d'égards pour leur estomac que pour leur cerveau; ces hommes-là s'affligent d'une

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10 Due to the limited scope of this paper, I am unable to develop this theme of the origins of the traditions of bourgeois masculinity. For further reading on middle-class masculinity in nineteenth century France see Richard Nye. _Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France_ (New York, 1993).

ornamentation si détestable et si puérile.\textsuperscript{12}

The true spirit of gastronomy: good taste, a focus on the senses and contemplation, were key in Monselet’s gastronomic discourse. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, these same elements were central to the bourgeois aesthetic in general. For the bourgeoisie stylish furniture, fashion and architecture were essential for maintaining social status in the public sphere.\textsuperscript{13} Gastronomic culture was another way in which the middle class tried to distinguish themselves as a social group a step above other Parisians.

Another element of Monselet’s writing is his bourgeois vision, which allows him to praise the rural peasantry but criticize the urban proletariat.\textsuperscript{14} This attitude harkens back to the pre-industrial age. There is a precarious conflict between accessibility and distinction in Monselet’s writing. On a larger scale, this is perhaps an indication of the social changes that were taking place in Paris at the end of the century. The rapidly industrializing economy appealed to a popular market, while the bourgeoisie struggled to differentiate themselves from the masses. Following this trend, restaurants moved towards attracting a wider audience. The restaurant \textit{à prix fixe} offered a wide range of menus ranging from expensive to very affordable.\textsuperscript{15} This shift away from the more expensive \textit{à la carte} option of dining indicated an attempt to solicit business from a clientele with diverse budgets. As dining in the bourgeois style became accessible to


\textsuperscript{13} Many contemporary historians have explored bourgeois aesthetics in detail. See Deborah L. Silverman, \textit{Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style} (Berkley, 1989) and Leora Auslander, \textit{Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France} (Berkeley, 1996).

\textsuperscript{14} “C’est une profonde erreur de croire que l’homme d’une humble condition—et même pauvre—ne peuvent participer aux puissances de la cuisine.” This quote exemplifies Monselet’s belief that some of the best cooking could be found in the humblest homes. His poem, \textit{Le Soupe au Fromage}, published in the first edition of \textit{Le Gourmet}, is a celebration of simple French cuisine. Charles Monselet, \textit{Le Gourmet: Journal des intérêts gastronomiques}, 1858 (1): 1.

\textsuperscript{15} Jean-Paul Aron, “Essai sur la sensibilité alimentaire à Paris au 19e siècle” \textit{Cahiers des annales} (Paris,
people of limited economic means, there was a need to redefine middle-class traditions in order to reappropriate the social space of the restaurant and its cultural symbolism. This was what writers like Charles Monselet were trying to do.

For Charles Monselet reforming the bourgeois restaurant and society in general did not include the ostentatious displays of wealth or the social spectacles that were becoming increasingly frequent amongst the middle class. Consequently, not all middle-class restaurants were to Monselet’s liking. By the late 1870s, Monselet began to express his views on the deplorable state of Parisian restaurants. He was someone who had a genuine love of food and found it distasteful to take away from the actual dining experience: “Un chef n’est plus qu’un impresario de théâtre, dont la préoccupation se tourne exclusivement vers le décor et les costumes.”

For Monselet many of Paris’ middle-class restaurants, such as Chez Brébant, were the last bastions of bourgeois sensibility and taste. His writings tend to indicate a desire to maintain a high standard of cuisine and a return to a more understated style of sociability.

In response to this call for change in the kitchen, as well as the dining room, during the 1880s Auguste Escoffier rose to the challenge. Escoffier, one of France’s most renowned chefs, was attuned to the social and psychological changes that took place in the restaurant at the end of the nineteenth century: “L’Art Culinaire, pour la forme de ses manifestations, dépend de l’état psychologique de la société; il suffit nécessairement et sans pouvoir s’y soustraire les impulsions qu’il reçoit de celle-ci.” Escoffier listened to what his clients wanted: accelerated service, high quality food and simple cuisine. He suggested the simplification of garnitures and dressings, which cut down on the


16 Monselet (1879), p.xiv.
preparation time of the dishes. Moreover, Escoffier emphasized the importance of the adaptability of the culinary arts to suit the needs of the diner, while not forgetting tradition and the greatness of French cuisine in the past. In this way, even the most exclusive cuisine became accessible to a wider audience. The rise of the dining room in the *grands hôtels* at the turn of the century was a result of this consumer trend. These new establishments altered the social dimension of dining out by accommodating a large number of diners all at once.

These changes in the social aspects of dining out were of dually noted by Charles Monselet: “Le destin nous a condamné à manger en public, pour l’édification et utilité générales.” This discourse on the public nature of dining out pervades Monselet’s culinary musings. In direct contrast to the democratization of cuisine proposed by Escoffier, the *dîner littéraire* was an ideal forum for uniting bourgeois cultural ideals, gastronomy and philosophy. These were soirées where a small group of men would gather in an intimate restaurant. This type of evening would not have been possible in the dining room of a *grand hôtel* with its large open spaces and numerous guests. The men who took part in and organized the *dîner littéraire* saw themselves as models of the perfect bourgeois society that looked towards an idealized aristocratic past for legitimacy and cultural guidance. The restaurants in the *grands hôtels* did not recognize the *hommes de lettres* as special guests. They opened their doors to tourists and Parisians alike.

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18 “Nous devon respecter, aimer étudier ces oeuvres admirable; elles doivent être, avec celles de Câreme, la base de nos travaux. Mais au lieu de les copier servilement, nous devons chercher nous-mêmes de nouvelles voies afin de laisser, nous aussi, des méthodes de travail adaptées aux moeurs et aux usages de notre temps.” *Ibid.*, p. X.
With such a large number of clients, it was impossible for the restaurateur to give the same type of special attention to his guests as Paul Brébant did to his regular diners. Despite its important social function for the bourgeois hommes de lettres, the diner littéraire was effected by the social changes that took place in the restaurant. By 1858, diners littéraires were beginning to change. As Monselet reflected:

Autre fois il y avait des groupes, des séries d’hommes intelligents et spéciaux qui se réunissaient pour manger. Ces groupes étaient un perpétuel stimulant pour les cuisiniers: ils ont disparu et n’ont pas été replacés; ils pourraient l’être cependant. […] La renaissance pourrait nous venir aussi des cercles, qui n’auraient pour cela qu’à se monter plus exigeants sur l’article de leur table.²¹

Here Monselet laments the loss of the nobility of the diner littéraire. In other writings, he suggests that these dinners had become too political or pedestrian. They lost their magic and bourgeois beauty. Again, Monselet refers back to the noble bourgeois character of these exclusive groups of hommes de lettres, which was a central element of a wider spread feeling of social distinction.

In 1884, Auguste Lepage felt it sufficiently important to make a record of the numerous literary dinners that took place in Paris during the nineteenth century. Like Monselet, Lepage bemoans the dying out of this Parisian tradition. Lepage’s book, Les diners littéraire de Paris, offers detailed descriptions and definitions of numerous groups that met under a number of original titles. The name and conditions of membership were significant marks of distinction: they helped concretize the exclusive nature of these soirées. In many ways, these meetings resembled ancient and noble traditions, particularly the gatherings held by secret societies. This was one way in which these bourgeois men attempted to appropriate aristocratic culture and create their own distinct

society. Literary dinners were a celebration of social class, along with regional and artistic affiliations.²²

Charles Monselet took part in several of the *dîners littéraires* held at the restaurant Chez Brébant. This restaurant was often called the Magny *de la rive droite.*²³ The *dîners littéraires* at Chez Brébant included gatherings of the Spartiates, l'Hippopotame, dîner du cercle de la critique, dîner du pluvier and Boeuf Nature. Chez Brébant was a favourite gathering place for *les hommes de lettres,* largely due to the fact that the restaurateur Paul Brébant encouraged his artistic clientele to meet at his restaurant. Brébant was known as the *restaurateur des lettres.*

The political nature of the restaurant during the nineteenth century was an important part of middle-class social life. In times of political upheaval, the restaurant became an important public place where ideas could be shared and disputed. Despite attempts by many groups who met for dinners at Brébant's, politics was a topic that was difficult to avoid. As Jurgen Habermas notes, bourgeois involvement in the political sphere became an important part of this group's identity and central to their relation to other inhabitants of the cities in which they lived.²⁴

The political nature of the *dîners littéraires* was not part of the original idea of these meetings. Founded as strictly amicable gatherings, the discussion of politics was to be avoided. This ideal was not usually respected. The dinners of *la Cigale* brought together artist and writers born in the Midi who lived in Paris. They often discussed

²² Ibid., p. vii.
²³ Magny was a restaurant on the *rive gauche* where the famous Magny dinners took place. These dinners united many of the period's most renowned writers.
²⁴ Habermas, p. 177.
Occitan political interests. There were even dinners formed by men with common political interest. For example, to be a member of the la Marmite group you had to be a Republican. These dinners were much more political in nature than artistic or literary. In contrast, strict rules against political pontification were in place at other diner littéraire. At the diners du Pluvier, the discussion of politics was forbidden and no one person was allowed to speak for more than five minutes.

The political nature of the bourgeois restaurant was an essential part of its social atmosphere. The previous owner of Chez Brébant, Vachette, christened this restaurant a site of political activity. Vachette’s political activism demonstrated the degree to which restaurant culture was part of political life. In 1858, Charles Monselet recorded a particularly interesting incident in his periodical Le Gourmet:

Ceci se passait un peu avant les journées de Juin, raconte M. Jean Rousseau, dans le Figaro—Parmi les hommes politiques qui sentaient venir l’orage, le moins clairvoyant n’était pas M. Vachette, l’honorable restaurateur du boulevard Poissonnière.—M. Vachette faisait de sinistres réflexions sur les dangers qui menaçaient la France en général et son restaurant en particulier. Il songeait aux moyens de sauver son restaurant [...] Il lui vint une idée pleine de profondeur. Pour que l’anarchie n’enfonçât pas ses portes, il les ouvrit toutes grandes. Pour n’être pas dévoré par l’hydre, il l’invita et leur servit, dans un sens de ses salons, un festin magnifique,— avec les restes de la ville.

Vachette also proceeded to post a sign on a tree outside of the front door that read:

“VACHETTE ET PATRIE.” Under Paul Brébant’s ownership, Chez Brébant carried on this tradition of political activity and gastronomic culture.

Lengthy meals at Chez Brébant united writers and thinkers together. As each course was served the topics varied from politics to art. Along with the quality of the

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25 Lepage, p. 25.
26 Ibid., p. 49.
27 Ibid., p. 130.
cuisine, the condition of civilized society was amongst the topics under debate. For many of these men middle-class culture and traditions embodied civilization. Cuisine and the rituals of dinner should not be separated from the philosophical discourse of these dinners. The menus of these feasts were meant to be physical demonstrations of refined bourgeois taste.

Charles Monselet’s written commentary offers a striking contrast to the rapidly evolving social reality of Paris at the end of the nineteenth century. Resistance to change and a struggle to maintain a distinct group identity were essential to his discourse. Amongst the middle class in general, these elements were also at the heart of a widespread feeling of social anxiety. This social malaise was visible in the changing public behaviour of the bourgeoisie and the shifting function of the restaurant in everyday life. The end of the traditional bourgeois restaurant of the nineteenth century and the dying out of the diner littéraire signaled the calming of middle-class resistance to mass culture in the public sphere. Yet, other forms of resistance did exist. Many middle-class men turned toward the home and the private sphere as the last bastion of bourgeois tradition.

29 See Robert Baldick’s reconstruction of the Magny dinners. Robert Baldick, Dinner at Magny’s (London, 1971)
Conclusion

The history of Paul Brébant’s restaurant on the boulevard Poissonnière and Charles Monselet’s writings provides insight into changing middle-class identity during the nineteenth century. A number of conclusions can be drawn from this study of bourgeois restaurants in Paris during this period. Firstly, during the nineteenth century, the history of the Parisian restaurant mirrors the social history of the middle class. Dining out played an important part in distinguishing a distinct bourgeois group identity. Restaurants began as aristocratic institutions, but after the Revolution, they began to open to the middle class. During the nineteenth century, the bourgeoisie adopted these institutions as their own. This was one of the ways that the Parisian middle class attempted to appropriate aristocratic culture. By emulating the aristocracy in their culture and traditions, the bourgeoisie hoped to distinguish themselves from other Parisians. In relation to this tendency, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the middle-class restaurant offered a noble setting where bourgeois men could gather in an exclusive social atmosphere. By the end of the century, further democratization of the restaurant threatened this closed social atmosphere. The opening up of previously middle-class spaces to a larger public was a central cause of bourgeois anxiety during this period. The bourgeoisie was forced to find new spaces where they could carry out their public lives.

Secondly, the history of the restaurant demonstrates that the rise of mass culture and the urban restructuring carried out by Baron de Haussmann also had a profound impact on the group identity of the bourgeoisie. Uncertainty about social image and distinction were directly related to changing forms of entertainment and sociability. New venues, such as the café-concert, offered alternatives to the restaurant. In these new
settings people from all social and economic backgrounds often mixed. These were not exclusive public spaces like the bourgeois restaurant. As Haussmann widened the streets of Paris, created parks and other public places, middle-class men found themselves more and more in the crowd. The rise of mass culture compounded this lack of social distinction between the bourgeoisie and the masses. Fashionable items such as clothing and furniture, which were once considered luxury goods, were made affordable by modern means of production. Industrialization created a consumer society that democratized the previously exclusive taste of the bourgeoisie.

Thirdly, gastronomic literature voiced many bourgeois concerns and spoke out in reaction to new trends in sociability and mass culture. Gastronomic writing was not only a culinary discourse; it expressed political opinions and disseminated information that helped create cultural norms that further defined the bourgeoisie as a distinct social group. Parisian gastronomes such as Charles Monselet tried to hold fast to bourgeois traditions, while suggesting conservative changes. These texts can be used as a rich source of information concerning the middle-class opinion of the restaurant and bourgeois entertainment.

Finally, by looking at restaurant culture during the nineteenth century we can see that dining out became a form of resistance to mass culture. In relation, another way in which the hommes de lettres tried to conserve bourgeois culture was by holding numerous diner litteraires in restaurants like Chez Brébant. These meetings were a way of exchanging ideas, a place for debating political positions and a forum for discussing art and literature. By the end of the nineteenth century, these types of gatherings were becoming increasingly infrequent. This change indicates that bourgeois men were
looking to new forms of entertainment and sociability. Yet, not all middle-class men
embraced this movement towards a more public social life. *Hommes de lettres*, such as
the Goncourt brothers, bitterly disapproved of life on the boulevards and the infringement
of mass culture on bourgeois traditions such as the restaurant. Gastronomes were not the
only writers to express their concern for the new type of public life that was becoming
predominant in Paris by the *fin-de-siècle*. The dying out of traditional bourgeois
restaurants and the *dîners littéraire* caused a great deal of anxiety amongst the middle
class. It was becoming harder for the bourgeoisie to differentiate themselves from other
Parisians.

The crowds that clogged Paris’ boulevards swallowed up the bourgeois, along
with workers, prostitutes and *flâneurs* alike. As city-life became increasingly public the
individual faded into the mass. A new egoistic individualism lead to increased anxiety
and social disorientation—distinctions, such as class, were no longer so clear. In the
poem “Les Foules”, Charles Baudelaire describes the wanderer lost in the crowd:

> [...] Le promeneur solitaire et pensif tire une singulière ivresse de cette
universelle communion. Celui-là qui épouse facilement la foule connait des jouissances fiévreuses, dont seront éternellement privés l’égoïste, fermé comme une coffre, et le paresseux, interne comme un mollusque. Il adopte comme siennes toutes les professions, tout les joies et toutes les misères que la circonstances lui présente [...]¹

In this poem, the wander finds himself communing with the crowd and at the same time
he feels entirely alone and lost. This contradictory dichotomy was a common theme for
many writers and thinkers at the end of the nineteenth century. How was the individual
to overcome the destabilizing effects of the modernization of city-life? The crowded
boulevards of Paris were the new spaces of public sociability where bourgeois identity

was transformed at the end of the nineteenth century. The middle-class tradition of restaurant society faded into the background of the whirring streets and noisy café-chantant. At the turn of the century, modern life was welcomed by the bourgeoisie with a great deal of anxiety and a degree of caution.
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