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Denise Z. Davidson, *France after Revolution. Urban Life, Gender, and the New Social Order*. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2007. 257 pages. Maps, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$49.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-674-02459-1.

Review by Jo B. Margadant, Santa Clara University.

This is an ambitious book on several levels. It purports to track the emergence and consolidation between 1800 and 1830 of a new bourgeois social order in France through the changing sociable practices of ordinary people. While never losing sight of how the state, the Church, and various “producers of culture” such as journalists, novelists, and playwrights helped to shape the perceptions and behavior of men and women in the newly class-based social order, Davidson premises her research design on the assumption that choices made by anonymous individuals about how to behave, where to go, what activities to pursue, and with whom to socialize also brought that new social order into being. She thus engages artfully in the debates over agency that recently brought the linguistic turn in cultural studies into question and that even Michel de Certeau’s influential work on the shaping power of the practices of daily life and Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* fail to capture. The agency that Davidson assigns to the subjects of her study reshapes rather than reproduces the social order in post-revolutionary France as people acquired a solid sense of their own and others’ group identities.[1]

A second conceptual novelty of this study is the attention given to the sexed dimension of the bourgeois social imaginary in the process of formation. The ideology of separate spheres for men and women is practically synonymous with bourgeois culture in the existing literature, though historians of both French and Anglo-American women’s history no longer argue that women were confined to a private sphere. Even without the vote, Anglo-American and French women took part in civic life throughout the nineteenth century, though precisely how to interpret that participation in France is one of Davidson’s objectives. She wants to show, above all, that the ideology of separate spheres developed in lock step with an emerging consciousness of class and that together these ideologies altered over time the way elite and working-class women as well as prostitutes might use urban space. Any changes she detects in how women figured in the sociable activities of the city announce, for Davidson, the new socio-political order coming into being.

Her most ambitious claim is to have produced a national study of the sort of social practices that under the Empire and Restoration would sharpen social boundaries which had been blurred or brought in question by the Revolution. As she puts it, “in the wake of revolution, the mechanisms and markers through which social distinctions operated had become vague.” Moreover, people-watching was essential to re-creating the new social order because “with social distinctions and the markers of social position and deference unclear, visibility and observation helped people understand how their society was supposed to operate and how they were expected

to act within it" (pp.11-12). Persuasive as this proposition might appear, Davidson engages in a curious sleight of hand in marshaling evidence to reveal the new social order coming into being nationwide. In her analysis of daily practices, she focuses almost exclusively on the two provincial cities of Lyon and Nantes, while dismissing Parisians' daily habits as largely unrepresentative of socio-cultural trends elsewhere, and yet to demonstrate the social fluidity and uncertainty surrounding social boundaries, she relies above all on evidence culled from Parisian boulevards and especially from Parisian boulevard theater. Yet the social blurring that she finds in the capital may not have resembled the social perceptions of inhabitants of these two provincial cities any more than their social practices did.

Unquestionably, the Revolution had shattered a pre-existing social order in Paris dominated by its aristocracy. Furthermore, the combined presence of a restored aristocracy of new and old families, growing numbers of wealthy bourgeois families, and numerous celebrities continued to blur social boundaries in this rapidly growing city for the first three decades of the century. By contrast, nothing in Davidson's analysis would suggest that the social order of either Lyons or Nantes had undergone a similar upheaval either as a result of the Revolution or in response to new socio-economic forces reshaping the social hierarchy after 1800. Having lost its major source of wealth in the slave trade, Nantes stagnated at between 77,000-78,000 inhabitants between 1800 and 1831 with the old divisions between aristocratic and bourgeois social networks still in place; while Lyon, despite the sizable expansion of its population from 89,000 to 131,000 over the same period, remained as before the Revolution a great textile city under the sway of its wealthy bourgeoisie.[2] Uncertainty about who belonged where in the social order was unlikely to have troubled either of these provincial cities' residents greatly. This potential objection aside, Davidson couples an important study of boulevard theater in post-revolutionary Paris under the Empire and Restoration with a fascinating profile from a rich archival base of gendered social practices in a changing political environment in two important provincial cities. Shifting historians' attention to the provinces in this period, as has recent work by Carol Harrison and Sheryl Kroen, constitutes one of the book's most significant contributions.

The chapters are organized around various social spaces starting with those that attracted a great diversity of people like public squares and theaters, followed by those which brought together ever narrower segments of the population such as clubs and cafes. The two chapters of part I investigate political festivals in provincial cities under the Napoleonic Empire and the restored Bourbon monarchy to discover each regime's methods for attracting the popular classes, whether women attended in large numbers, and if women had any particular salience in official ceremonies. The second section, devoted to the theater, begins with a chapter on the socially mixed theater crowd for melodramas and other spectacles on the boulevards of Paris, followed by another on the politicization and policing of theaters in Lyon and Nantes with special attention to the place and activities of women in each setting. A final section focuses on social activities in Nantes and Lyons, looking first at the emerging gender order in elite clubs and associations and then at the sorting out of society by class and gender in drinking establishments and at popular and society dances.

The presence of women at major political festivals such as the ruler's birthday or saint day celebration or when any member of the ruling family visited a provincial town turns out to have had political importance for each post-revolutionary regime, though not necessarily for the same reasons. All dynasts including Napoleon, who

disparaged political women individually, wanted women at these official celebrations to signal the regime's popularity, encourage the attendance of men, and discourage violence, but each regime also assigned women to specific roles in official ceremonies. Napoleon's administration used its two annual festivals to sponsor marriages for a select group of working-class women, chosen for their "virtue" and married in a ceremony that urged prudence and obedience to their husbands on the newly wedded wives. The political intention behind such occasions was not only to enhance reproduction but even more to celebrate obedience under a beneficent male authority because such families were considered the foundation of a well-ordered imperial state. By contrast, elite women had no place in Napoleonic official ceremonies except on rare occasions when the emperor traveled to provincial cities with his wife. Officials would then assign girls and women from elite families to the Empress's reception and expected wives of the elite to attend the inevitable ball. Women as a group, however, received no recognition under the Napoleonic state.

The Restoration Monarchy gave much greater prominence to women in official ceremonies, principally, Davidson claims, because the Bourbons believed that women's opposition to Napoleon's endless wars made them more loyal Bourbon subjects. Girls and women from elite local families took up privileged positions in all receptions for traveling royalty while only market women, in imitation of the *poissardes* of Paris, had any official visibility among the working classes. Furthermore, rather than celebrating marriages at royal festivals, the Bourbons celebrated births among their subjects, synchronizing this royal patronage with a birth, baptism, or marriage within the royal family, a practice that Davidson interprets this way:

Under Bonaparte, money was given to people who had proven their merit, whereas under the Bourbons, it was distributed at birth regardless of later conduct. It no longer seemed necessary or useful to glorify mothers. Instead the Bourbons emphasized the role of God or destiny in determining which children would receive this gift, as chance — their date of birth — gave them this honor (p. 66).

Surprisingly, she fails to mention Old Regime precedents to explain all these practices regarding women and newborns, despite the Bourbons' notorious policy of resurrecting anachronistic ceremonies to legitimize their return.

State festivals under Napoleon and the Bourbons also differed in the way they entertained the popular classes. Not only did the Napoleonic state spend more lavishly on such occasions, offering free admission to performances in state theaters to the poor; they also allowed the merriment and drinking to go on through the night. Popular dances like official balls for the elite generally ended with the dawn on such occasions. Under the Bourbons, theaters were no longer gratis on official holidays, and entertainments for the popular classes closed down by 11:00 p.m. Davidson attributes these restrictions, no doubt rightly, to diminished public funds but also to a greater fear under the Restoration Monarchy of popular disorder and less confidence among officials in the state's policing powers.

She then shifts attention to the social order taking shape in Paris after 1800 in the favorite spaces for shopping, socializing, and seeking entertainment among a cross-section of the population, while focusing in particular on boulevard theaters. Under the brilliant direction of the playwright-producer, René-Charles Guilbert de Pixérécourt, a spectacular form of melodrama, staged to excite terror as much as

sympathy among the viewers would become the theatrical genre of choice for both elite and popular audiences and especially for women up until the early 1820s. Because this shared taste brought people from all walks of life into the same theaters, regularly exposed them to the same didactic messages of the plays about the social hierarchy and the moral order, and allowed those from humbler social backgrounds to watch and even sometimes emulate spectators who were better off, Davidson attributes to this locale a particularly powerful shaping influence on the social imaginary of Parisians regarding class markers and gender differences.

The plays themselves were only one source of these cultural messages; even more important for women may have been observing how other women, especially those in the most expensive seats, reacted to the frightening scenarios in which virtuous heroines were helplessly trapped by evil men and forces they could not defeat alone. The fragility of women's nervous systems on which doctors and biologists had only recently begun to insist received a nightly demonstration in the tears and screams of frightened women in the audience mimicking each other down the social scale, though Davidson also notes that an overly noisy emotional response was coded lower-class. By the early 1820s, the growing importance of that class distinction would drive the middle and upper classes away entirely from boulevard theaters specializing in melodrama.

She did not find the same degree of interclass mixing in provincial theaters, where the elite went far more regularly than those in humble circumstances, so regularly in fact, that for the many spectators with annual subscriptions, their local theater functioned almost like a club. The major tensions in these theatrical spaces revolved around politics and age rather than class. The *parterre*, where chairs had not yet been installed as they were in Paris, attracted young men from well-off families who felt free to comment loudly throughout the show on whatever and whomever they disapproved, either on the stage or among those seated in the boxes. Sometimes sexually charged, this continual banter also often carried political intent since under the Restoration, opposition to the Bourbons and their allies in the Church found its most popular expression outside Paris in provincial theaters, an arena that local authorities could not easily control. Yet women did not desert these venues despite this rowdy male behavior. Rather, as Davidson points out, as long as political battles were fought out within the theater, women had a ringside seat. The one concession made to elite female sensibility was the increasing policing of where in the audience prostitutes might sit or stand, making female sexuality a clear class marker in these spaces.

The rest of this probing study highlights in multiple venues an ever greater tendency in the Restoration for men to congregate with only a sprinkling of women present and for sociable activities of all sorts to respect class lines. The main interlopers likely to cross those lines in pursuit of pleasure were working-class girls [*grisettes*] and their bourgeois boyfriends, but that exception only served to reinforce the social order by underscoring a *sexual* order that denied elite women and girls the same freedom of movement. A major catalyst for this masculinization of public spaces in the 1820s was a new tolerance for political opposition under the Restoration Monarchy. Bourgeois men especially patronized *cabinets littéraires* and *cercles* whose exclusively male members often shared the same political convictions, though as Carol Harrison has shown, the learned societies of bourgeois men downplayed political and religious differences in a shared pursuit of science in this period.

Cafes, however, did become centers of conviviality for bourgeois men who enjoyed discussing politics and the latest news. In this new political environment, salons gradually lost political importance and social power, while public venues for heterosexual socializing declined in number. In organizations that did still bring elite men and women into public life together, such as charitable societies, men held the administrative posts, while women took charge of those activities designated natural to their sex. Even the one national charity run exclusively by women, the Société de la Charité Maternelle, appointed a man to be its treasurer. As for the reading cabinets and cafes frequented by elite men, the only women likely to be present were the owner, if a woman, the owner's daughters, and female cafe servers. As Davidson sees it, whatever flirting went on in these establishments confirmed the sexualized class order that placed such venues off limits for elite women and made working women the object of sexual fantasies among bourgeois men. Indeed, in her view, "the social and moral order hinged on controlling women's behavior, especially their sexuality" (p. 182).

Under the Restoration Monarchy, the separation between elite and working classes hardened in two further ways. The upper classes removed their own leisure pursuits away from spaces where working men and women also entertained themselves. This development, noted earlier with regard to boulevard theaters in Paris, Davidson also detects in provincial cities when bourgeois families deserted crowded popular festivals held outside the tax barriers of the city in districts where cabarets and *guinguettes* [dance halls] patronized by workers and soldiers proliferated because of cheaper food and drink. Venues for dancing, a passion shared by all classes of French society, also divided along class lines, and so did their duration. Balls for the elite, whether in private homes or theaters, began late and lasted normally till dawn; while the Restoration Monarchy imposed a curfew on dance halls and cabarets for the lower classes, forcing them to close by 11 p.m., not just on holidays but always. On Sunday, such establishments could not open before 5:00 p.m. These restrictions were accompanied by increased policing of outlying districts that also signaled a hardening of class lines originating partly in a growing intolerance for "debauchery" under the Bourbons' Catholic rule but also in a view shared by officials and the elite classes alike that the working class was dangerous.

Much of what Davidson has uncovered in this study will not surprise those knowledgeable about this period of French history, though its provincial and comparative dimension provides a salutary confirmation of social practices already studied elsewhere or inferred from contemporary writings. She has, of course, exposed some features of these social practices that other scholars have overlooked. Above all, though, the interpretive slant that frames this work is refreshingly original. Whether or not one accepts her premise that confusion reigned across urban France regarding social identities in the first decade or so after 1800, her evidence does reveal the coming into being of a bourgeois social order in the 1820s against which feminists and workers would flail in the aftermath of a political revolution in 1830 that consecrated the new social order. Indeed, she contends that her findings in this study provide an explanation for the timing of such protest.

NOTES

[1] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of the*

Theory of Practice, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) and *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1990). For a useful overview of the theoretical debates after the linguistic turn, see Gabrielle M. Spiegel's "Introduction" in *Practicing History: New Directions in Historical Writing After the Linguistic Turn*, in Gabrielle M. Spiegel, ed., (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 1-32.

[2] These statistics come from "Des villages de Cassini aux communes d'aujourd'hui" located on the web site of the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales at <http://cassini.ehess.fr/cassini/fr/html/index.htm>, consulted August 28, 2007. I have rounded the figures off for purposes of comparison.

[3] Carol E. Harrison, *The Bourgeois Citizen in Nineteenth-Century France: Gender, Sociability, and the Uses of Emulation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Sheryl Kroen, *Politics and Theater: The Crisis of Legitimacy in Restoration France, 1815-1830* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

[4] Harrison, *The Bourgeois Citizen*, p. 56.

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