

Position: Coffeehouses are Dangerous

excerpt from *The Character of a Coffee-House*, 1673 (England)

. coffee-house is a...Rote [i.e. club room], that, like Noah's ark received animals of every sort, from the precise diminutive band, to the hectoring cravat and cuffs in folio...it is the rendezvous of idle pamphlets, and persons more idly employed to read them; a high court of justice, where every little fellow in a camlet cloak takes upon him to transpire affairs both in church and state, to show reasons against parliament, and condemn the decrees of general councils.

Pamphlet: *A Character of Coffee and Coffee-Houses* (London, 1661).

Six or seven years ago was [coffee] first brought into England,
When the Palats of the English were as Fanatical, as
Their

Brains. Like Apes, the English imitate all other people
In their ridiculous Fashions. As Slaves they submit to
Customes even of Turkey and India. . . .

With the Barbarous Indian he smeaks Tobacco.

With the Turk he drinks Coffee. . . .

Even the Deserts of Arabia are ransackt for a Berry,
Which made into a drink, is as thick as puddle-water,
And ugly in colour and taste, . . .

'Tis extolled for drying up the Crudities of the
Stomack, and for expelling Fumes out of the Head.

Excellent Berry! Which can cleanse the English-man's
Stomak of Flegm, and expel Giddinesse out of his Head.

Yet it is certain, that for the small space of an hour or
Thereabouts it hath expelled out of his Head and

Stomack these infirmities. But Physicians say that

Coffee causeth the Migraine and other Giddinesses in the
Head. Of these daily experiment may be made: For

If you set Short-hand-writers to take down the

Discourse of the Company, who prattle over Coffee, it

Will be evident on reading the Notes, that the talk is

Extravagant and exactly like that of the Academians of

Bedlam, and such, as any others, would be ashamed of
But themselves.

The other sex hath just cause to curse the day, in

Which it was brought into England; Had Women any sense of spirit

They would remonstrate to his Majestie, that Men in

Former times were more able, than now, . . .

Men drink so [much]

They are grown as impotent as Age, as dry and as

Unfruitful, as the Deserts of Africk. . . .

In this Age Men tattle more than Women,

And particularly at the Coffee-house, when the number hath

Been but six, five of them have talked at one time. The

Company here have out-talk'd an equal number of

Gossiping Women, and made a greater noise than a Bake-house.

The Relater hereof hath heard

A young gentleman affirm, that he used to go to the Coffee-house

Purposely to vent his strange and wild Conceits, . . .

[An] opinion, how foolish or fond soever,

Here received entertainment

Position: Coffeehouses are not dangerous

Jules Michelet, French historian (1798-1874)

“Coffee, the sober drink, the mighty nourishment of the brain, which unlike other spirits, heightens purity and lucidity; coffee, which clears the clouds of the imagination and their gloomy weight; which illuminates the reality of things suddenly with the flash of truth.”

Pamphlet: *Coffee-Houses Vindicated*, 1675 (England)

Though the happy Arabia, nature's spicery, prodigally furnishes the voluptuous world with all kinds of aromatics, and divers other rarities; yet I scarce know whether mankind be not still as much obliged to it for the excellent fruit of the humble coffee-shrub, as for any other of its more specious productions: for, since there is nothing we here enjoy, next to life, valuable beyond health, certainly those things that contribute to preserve us in good plight and *eucreasy* (such a due mixture of qualities as constitutes health), and fortify our weak bodies against the continual assaults and batteries of disease, deserve our regards much more than those which only gratify a liquorish palate, or otherwise prove subservient to our delights. As for this salutiferous berry, of so general a use through all the regions of the east, it is sufficiently known, when prepared, to be moderately hot, and of a very drying attenuating and cleansing quality; whence reason infers, that its decoction must contain many good physical properties, and cannot but be an incomparable remedy to dissolve crudities, comfort the brain, and dry up ill humors in the stomach. In brief, to prevent or redress, in those that frequently drink it, all cold drowsy rheumatic distempers whatsoever, that proceed from excess of moisture, which are so numerous, that but to name them would tire the tongue of a mountebank.

Lastly, for diversion. Now, whither shall a person, wearied with hard study, or the laborious turmoils of a tedious day, repair to refresh himself? Or where can young gentlemen, or shop-keepers, more innocently and advantageously spend an hour or two in the evening, than at a coffee-house? Where they shall be sure to meet company, and, by the custom of the house, not such as at other places, stingy and reserved to themselves, but free and communicative; where every man may modestly begin his story, and propose to, or answer another, as he thinks fit.

In brief, it is undeniable, that, as you have here the most civil, so it is, generally, the most intelligent society; the frequenting whose converse, and observing their discourses and deportment, cannot but civilize our manners, enlarge our understanding, refine our language, teach us a generous confidence and handsome mode of address, and brush off the *pudor rubristicus* (as, I remember, Tully somewhere calls it), that clownish kind of modesty frequently incident to the best natures, which render them sheepish and ridiculous in company.