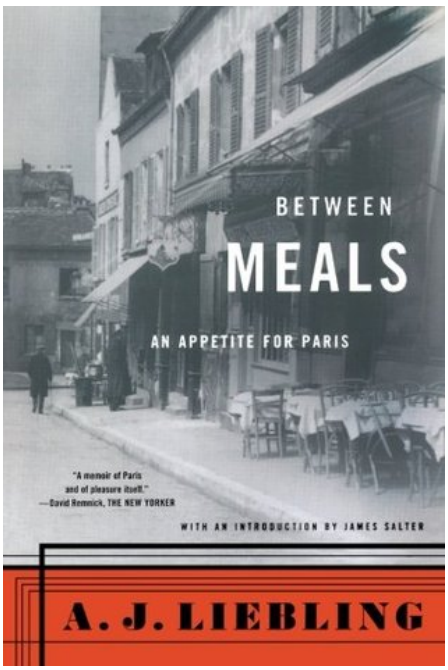

Between Meals: An Appetite for Paris

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New Yorker writer A.J. Liebling recalls his Parisian apprenticeship in the fine art of eating in this charming memoir.

No writer has written more enthusiastically about food than A. J. Liebling. *Between Meals: An Appetite for Paris*, the great *New Yorker* writer's last book, is a wholly appealing account of his *éducation sentimentale* in French cuisine during 1926 and 1927, when American expatriates like Ernest Hemingway and Gertrude Stein made café life the stuff of legends. A native New Yorker who had gone abroad to study, Liebling shunned his coursework and applied himself instead to the fine art of eating – or "feeding," as he called it. The neighborhood restaurants of the Left Bank became his homes away from home, the fragrant wines his constant companions, the rich French dishes a test of his formidable appetite. is a classic account of the pleasures of good eating, and a matchless evocation of a now-vanished Paris.

Between Meals: An Appetite for Paris Details

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From Reader Review Between Meals: An Appetite for Paris for online ebook

Steven says

Due to a combined misfortune of timing and circumstance, I have not been to the Paris that Liebling describes in "Between Meals." Given that this was Liebling's last book before his death in 1963, I suspect that the Paris contained within this slender book were no more than so many remembered meals by the time this was published. Regardless, Liebling's Paris recalls a time when people savored their food and drink. (Then again, this was also when our traditional notions of men and women dominated and civil rights in America were not at a high point.)

However, as the title implies, the meals were secondary to the people who toiled to create them and the company they provided to those who appreciated good food. The meals, which are sumptuously described, are nothing more than catalysts for Liebling to recall his Paris and its inhabitants.

Liebling's writing exemplifies the New Yorker magazine's style: literary in tone, knowledgeable without sounding too snobbish, rich with the right details, humorous and opinionated without being unseemly. Few writers and journalists nowadays can write like this and not sound pretentious. Even though "Between Meals" represents its time and an era that no longer existed, it continues to serve as a classic food memoir by which other food memoirs should be judged. Well worth reading.

David says

Great writing about great food and a vanished time.

Caterina Pierre says

Rather than a book solely about French cuisine and old restaurants in Paris, Between Meals is actually a memoir of A.J. Liebling’s student days in Paris during the academic year of 1926-27. Instead of going to his classes at the Sorbonne to study Medieval History, he used his monthly stipend to teach himself about French food. This is a lovely slice of 1920s Jazz Age Paris, and some of the restaurants he mentions, such as Laperouse and Drouant, still exist. In Liebling’s time, dinner at Laperouse cost $2.00 and was the most expensive restaurant in the 6th arrondissment; now it’s $200.00 minimum per person, but at least it still exists. Most of the dream eating establishments he enjoyed in the 20s are long gone, as is most of the Paris he knew and loved. He has an interesting theory about why French cuisine declined after the wars: doctors started telling people to drink less alcohol and eat less fat; young children had obligatory education and could no longer apprentice as cooks and sous chefs at the age of 8 or 10; and busy people no longer could appreciate the 4 hour, eleven course meal. He was correct on all counts, of course.
I knocked off a star for the edition I have from 1986. The book deserves to be republished, but needs some annotation now that so many historical figures mentioned in the book are long forgotten. The parts about boxing are the least interesting parts of the book. It also is very much of its time: men will pinch bottoms, slurs are sometimes used; so it has to be read as part of its own historical context. The last chapter, “Passable,” is however a sweet end to the book. Liebling visited Paris frequently throughout his life; those of

us who follow in his footsteps always fear that when we return, our old haunts will be changed or gone. We should all write a book that is a love story about being in love with Paris; if we did half as well as Liebling did with this book, it would be a masterpiece.

Mary says

If this book doesn't make you want to get on a plane immediately to eat your way around Paris, nothing will. I love Liebling's writing--funny, touching, and erudite all at once, which is not an easy note to hit. Recommended for Francophiles, gourmands, and lovers of great writing. (He also has a collection of World War II writing that is excellent.)

Alex Marshall says

I was disappointed with this book that I had seen referenced so many times as a classic that would teach one about food, wine and life in France, in the first half of the 20th century. It did not live up to the hype. Seemed more like a collection of windy, self-involved tales from a glutton, as opposed to subtle commentary about food, meals and culture. I think what happened is that a lot of important people remember Liebling fondly, and so built the book up.

There is a great introduction to the book by James Salter, the famous and very good writer who overlapped slightly with Liebling at The New Yorker. The Introduction is basically a mini-profile of Liebling, and it’s unsparing and unsentimental. It paints a picture of this obese glutton, who is on a merry go round of food and writing that he can’t get off of. But the despite the lack of sentimentality, it somehow ends up being very loving towards Liebling, and makes you want to read the book. Which then disappoints.

My biggest disappointment was that Liebling, early on and consistently, equates being a gourmet with being a glutton. If you can’t eat copious quantities, you aren’t really a gourmet, that is, a food lover, he says. So he is constantly bragging about how much food he eats, which he gives you long lists of. It’s gross. And it’s no accident that Liebling died of obesity related problems, like gout, at an early age.

Still, there are some good observations and tales in the book. I don’t want to discount it completely.

One thing Liebling said early on that I liked is that to be a gourmet, a knowledgeable authority on food, you need to have not quite enough money. This makes you hunt and dig into a menu, to find good values, which ends up increasing your knowledge of food. Those with rich bank accounts just order the top menu items, which are usually good, but sometimes aren’t as good as a cheaper item, and which don’t improve one’s knowledge of food beyond the obvious. So the rich guy often ends up being served the obvious and sometimes mediocre but always pricey dishes, while the scrounger ends up knowing how to spot the great, the undervalued, and the consistently good.

One tale he told I liked a lot was about taking his parents, who were visiting him in Paris I think in the late 1920s, to what was then considered one of the best restaurants in Paris, perhaps the best. It was an odd establishment, Liebling said, because the owner/chef put almost no value on ornament or decor, and had built the restaurant’s reputation solely on the food, in an anti-establishment spin that worked. And the restaurant was at the same time amazingly expensive, which took real gaul.

So he took his parents there. His mom was disappointed with the humble decor, but his dad was enthused at getting a real Parisian experience. It was not a busy night, and the owner/chef knew Liebling somewhat well at that point and was game to give his parents a real experience. The owner insisted that his parents, who I think had not been to France before, start with the most humble meal possible, as a way to get to know French food from the bottom up, so to speak. So the meal they were served -at a huge price - was, I kid you not: Vegetable soup; boiled chicken, and one other simple dish I'm forgetting. The dishes were, says Liebling, incredible, sublime. So won over were his parents, that they dined every night at the restaurant for the next week, and every night, the owner would increase the complexity of the dishes, until they were eating really complicated stuff. I think that would be a great way to know a country's cuisine. Start with the simple, then get more complicated.

Another observation Liebling said, which may or may not be true but which is interesting, and one that resonates with what some are saying about French food today, is that French cuisine hit its high point in the teen years before World War I. When Liebling came to Paris in the 1920s, what he took as the high point was really the after-glow of a great era, one that continued to fade. Writing in the 1950s, Liebling said French food had continued to go downhill, killed off by modern habits, the car and other such things. People no longer wanted to wait for the really classic dishes to be made. There were all sorts of grumpy observations like this.

Now, this may be simply the observations of a grumpy, unwell man a few years from death who, looking backward, sees everything in rose-colored glasses. Or they may have some truth to them. Either way, they are interesting.

I recommend downloading the sample chapter for one's e-reader. Then one can read the great Introduction by James Salter.

Oh yeah, one more tale from the book I liked.

Liebling returned to Paris in 1939, after an absence for a decade, as a correspondent, I think for The New Yorker. This was a time when France had already declared war on Germany, but the two nations were sitting in this uneasy state of war with almost no fighting. This went on, if memory serves, from about September 1939 to September 1940. Liebling describes well this weird, uneasy state of affairs where the restaurants were doing well, people were living out their lives, but knowing there were gunshots at the borders. People gradually calmed down, and started living normally, he said. A huge mistake, in retrospect. France should have attacked Germany while it had the chance. His stories from this time showed me that people can get used to anything. Liebling stayed until Germany attacked, and its troops conquered the country in like three weeks.

Needless to say, Liebling got out of town quickly.

Manray9 says

If you can read Liebling's *Between Meals: An Appetite for Paris* without your mouth watering for *cassoulet, pot-au-feu* or *escargots en pots de chambre* with a bottle of Côte Rôtie, you're made of stouter stuff than I.

Sketchbook says

"Lamb larded with anchovies, artichokes on a pedestal of foie gras..." Take a bite of book.

(A)bbott (J)oseph Liebling (1904-1963), we learn, easily knocked back hot sausage, wild boar, lobster and various cheeses w wines and champagne at a meal. If you et as much as AJ, you too would become a battered fatso and drop dead at age 59. This, his last book, is a fuzzy-muzzy compiled of 3 or 4 articles, hence its gooey sense of dislocation.

Decades before the exclamation ejaculations of Tom Wolfe and the tiresome phrase "New Journalism," there was the chewy AJ. In this memoir, AJ - a Francophile - ruminates on Paris pre WW2. Food, wine, sex. He engages when he recalls Yves Mirande, dramatist of boudoir farces whose "Quick! Hide!" hit plays reflect the chaos of Mirande's randy sex life.

AJ's memoir gets a fine intro by James Salter who neglects to mention he was a New Yorker writer who often added fiction to his journalism. Here, AJ ends with a portrait of a favored "business" girl named Angele who had a retrousse nose (well, naturally) and "large eyes with sable pupils" (Uh-huh). She conveniently succumbs to the flu of 1927 after he returns to the US. Stick with him on digestive matters. AJ advises on your sip with fish : beer or vin rose. His writing, at best, has the elasticity and snap of a rubber band.

Joy says

I had some great meals in Paris recently so this title caught my eye! And now I'm hungry..:)

Melzie says

I will no longer consider myself pretentious about food....or anything, really. It's wonderful how even frequenting prostitutes is written about with great pretension..

Jennifer Wilson says

I read this in Paris. Often in a bathtub. Yes, I know I am a lucky woman.

Lobstergirl says

A.J. Liebling wrote press criticism for the *New Yorker* in the 40s and 50s; I'm told that these writings are the apex of the subgenre, better than his writing on boxing and food. His writing in *Between Meals*, essays about his year spent in Paris in the 20s, learning how to eat and drink, is very good. He's an excellent storyteller. His style is also crusty and quaint, like an artifact unearthed from an archeological dig. It is helpful in

reading this book to suspect vaguely what a perihelion or prestidigitation might be, and to know that a Tuareg is a member of one of the tall, nomadic, Hamitic-speaking peoples who occupy western and central Sahara and who have adopted the Moslem religion, not just an SUV Volkswagen makes. Your reading will go more smoothly if you grasp allusions to Bithynia, the King of Nemi, Paul Dudley White, and bunco joints.

The parts I enjoyed most weren't the between, but the meals themselves. Many of them are orgies of consumption: Liebling's friend the theater producer and playboy Yves Mirande dispatches "a lunch of raw Bayonne ham and fresh figs, a hot sausage in crust, spindles of filleted pike in a rich rose *sauce Nantua*, a leg of lamb larded with anchovies, artichokes on a pedestal of foie gras, and four or five kinds of cheese, with a good bottle of Bordeaux and one of champagne, after which he would call for the Armagnac and remind Madame to have ready for dinner the larks and ortolans she had promised him, with a few *langoustes* and a turbot – and, of course, a fine *civet* made from the *marcassin*, or young wild boar…." followed by woodcock and truffles baked in ashes. Soon Mirande's doctor is forbidding him to dine at restaurants, so a friend prepares them something light and healthful, beginning with "a kidney and mushroom mince served in a giant popover – the kind of thing you might get at a literary hotel in New York. The inner side of the pastry had the feeling of a baby's palm, in the true tearoom tradition." Liebling joins a rowing club which spends as much time at table as in the boats. There is "no time to waste on elaborate dinners," apologizes the coach, as they sit down to an hors d'oeuvre of duck pâté, pâté of hare, tins of sardines, muzzle of beef, radishes, and butter. This is followed by "a potato soup, a *buisson de goujons*, a mound of tiny fried fish…a leg of mutton with roast potatoes, a salad, cheese, and fruit", red and white wine, coffee, and brandy. On other occasions Liebling dips his shovel into *canard au sang* (pressed duck served in a sauce of blood and marrow), trout *grenobloise, poulet* Henri IV, and *jambon persillé* - parsley-flavored ham with mustard and pickles. Liebling gives us Dumas père's description of the perfect *pot-au-feu*, in which a rump of beef must be simmered seven hours in the bouillon of the beef that you simmered for seven hours the day before, and there is a discussion of the disappearance of flavor from spirits as well as food: "The standard of perfection for vodka (no color, no taste, no smell) was expounded to me long ago by the then Estonian consul-general in New York, and it accounts perfectly for the drink's rising popularity with those who like their alcohol in conjunction with the reassuring tastes of infancy - tomato juice, orange juice, chicken broth. It is the ideal intoxicant for the drinker who wants no reminder of how hurt Mother would be if she knew what he was doing."

Liebling eventually became a war correspondent, but you'd never know it from his writings here, where the two World Wars are brought up merely as events that impinge on restaurant culture and eating habits. The heyday of French cuisine was pre-World War I; Liebling finds out later that the golden age he thought he was living through was actually a gastronomic twilight, in part because gluttony had fallen slightly out of fashion. "Without exception, the chaps who emerged from the trenches at the end of the war had lost weight, and at such a time everyone wants to resemble a hero." Along with wars, sad developments like child-labor laws and compulsory education prevented the young from entering the early apprenticeships that are the launching pads of great chefs. (Liebling should probably stop here, but he can't resist noting that "when Persian carpets were at their best, weavers began at the age of four and were master workmen at eleven.")

He is skilled at tossing off one-liners.

• *When one considers the millions of permutations of food and wine to test, it is easy to see that life is too short for the formulation of dogma.*

• *No ascetic can be considered reliably sane. Hitler was the archetype of the abstemious man.*

• *He was thirty-eight, and I could not conceal my incredulity when he told me that he still had a sex life.*

• *It was one of the fanciest beatings I ever saw a man take.*

• *In a menu so unpretentious, the cheese must represent the world of mammals from which it is a derivative.*

• [on the extremely well-fed pre-WWI courtesans:] *Waists and ankles tapered, but their owners provided a lot for them to taper from.*

Like any considerate friend, when Liebling happens to be in the company of a very pretty woman he rings Mirande's doorbell "simply because I knew he would like to look at her." Food, women – all pleasures along a spectrum, unless killjoys intervene.

> Currently [the book was published in 1959:] pleasure and women are held matters incompatible, antithetical, and mutually exclusive, like quinine water and Scotch. Mirande also gave women pleasure; many women had pleasure of him. This is no longer considered a fair or honorable exchange. Women resent being thought of as enjoyables; they consider such an attitude an evidence of male chauvinism. They want to be taken seriously, like fall-out.

Quite, quite. No one comes out the winner when women want to be taken seriously, whether it's seriously like fall-out, mustard gas, or bubonic plague. The groaners continue: "…in those days young men liked women. We did not fear emasculation. We had never heard of it." (This guy had heard of Bithynia, but not emasculation?)

Developing one's tastes in women was somewhat like developing one's tastes in food. But "it was trickier than that because a woman, unlike a *navarin de mouton* [lamb stew:], has a mind. A man may say, when he begins to recognize his tastes, "Legs, on a woman, are more important to me than eyes." But he has to think again when he must choose between a witty woman with good eyes and a dull one with trim legs. Give the witty woman a bad temper and the dull one constant good humor and you add to the difficulty of the choice. To multiply the complexity the woman, unlike the *navarin*, reacts to you..." Liebling finds that his taste in girlfriends runs to hooker types. His steady sweetheart "was well-joined – the kind of girl you could rough up without fear of damage." Meaning athletic sex, I wondered, or that you could safely chuck her down a flight of stairs? Seven pages later the answer: "In bed she was a kind of utility infielder." As he writes his New Yorker columns, Liebling finds that he has retained little that she said, with the exception of a story she once told him about two *other* hooker types who got heaved down some stairs, over an argument about smelly feet. He then reminisces fondly about two little hotel maids who "allowed themselves to be trapped long enough for an invigorating tussle."

Rufussenex says

Liebling is mad. May all the world be as mad as he. A personal account of how he cultivated his passions for food–and love, and consequently, life–while in Paris as a young man, accompanied by his observations on Paris as an older man. Liebling at his most charmingly fecund.

Lily says

Loved it! Made me so excited to for next year! One great quote: Monsieur Pierre says, "Only 25% of my customers order a plat du jour...The rest take grilled things. It's the doctors you know. People only think of the liver and the figure. The stomach is forgotten." Ha! How great would it be if I could eat my way around France and never think of my liver or my figure? And then of course come back to the states and have my liver and figure totally fine...

It was such a wonderful, delicious read. I was trying to track the historical progress with what I learned in my Modern France class. Then all of a sudden, it was 1939! I got all tense wondering what would happen to the food and restaurants during the occupation (which is frankly the least of their worries) and then it just kind of ended. (Did he go back to the US? Did I miss something?)

One interesting thing I learned was that apparently the 20s and 30s was in fact the beginning of the decline of French cooking. Liebling said that the automobile was what killed the rural auberge (or inn) that served a delicious, unpretentious meal every night. The cooks didn't have to cater to a regular stream of customers, only travelers that would be on their way and probably never return, and therefore they didn't have to try as hard. Liebling was a student in Paris in 1926-27 and what he thought was the Golden Age was really the Late Silver (paraphrasing.) That just killed me. How can the meals he described be the "Late Silver Age??" And then just think about what that means for today's food! I think about my commute to work; we pass a Quizno's, a Cosi, a Starbucks, another Cosi, another couple of Starbucks... If that was the Late Silver Age, this is the Cheap Nickel Age (get it? Because of my earrings thing? Ha!)

On another note, it was really weird to read a book in English with so much French. It was a little frustrating because every time I would finish a little phrase or word in French, I would be all prepared for the next word to be in French, and in my head I would pronounce a normal English word in the French way and it would make no sense. If I were to read it out loud, I think it would sound hilarious.

Tim says

I found this on a list of books read in 1991, but I only remember one line from it, about eating a couple dozen oysters before a meal of cassoulet but not worrying about the volume of food "because oysters have no bulk." :)

Lisa Tangen says

I read this book at the encouragement of my husband. He's a big fan of AJ liebling especially his work on War Stories and sports stories. This particular book is a course about food and eating in Paris and mostly the 1920s and later. I know next to nothing about the topic so it was all new and someone interesting if a little little hard to follow sometimes. There were some passengers that I enjoyed this one in particular I appreciated quote my introduction to the wine at its best and in profusion can only be compared to the experience of the young woman I know who having intended Progressive schools all the way to college had her first massive introduction to Shakespeare and the Old Testament in the same year. My introduction was a

bit overwhelming but I had had a stout preparation for it during the Academic Year at the sorbonne he goes on to compare the quality of wine to the quality of literary works here's another passage Shakespeare and Tolstoy because more accessible are not necessarily inferior to say Dawn and dust I have ski. The merits of the Parthenon sculptures are not inferior to those of The Primitives for being easier to recognize. Burgundy fast has to Publix one that likes it for its profound as well as its superficial qualities and one that likes it only because it is easy to like the second public is its Monopoly and is increased since the Second World War. there's one more passage or actually it's just a sentence and it was one that my husband read to me before I read the book. here's the line and it's in a passage about a ship that he's sailing on the ship she was a delightful Conrad kind of ship that took the dull certainty at a peacetime sea travel. I found that fascinating well not fascinating but rather clever. I forgot there is one more passage and this was related to his friend Roots perspective and it looks like you wrote a book about how the fat used in French cooking was the ultimate shaper of the cuisine so it says Roots domains are that of butter Northeastern in northern France thought of fat Lorraine Alsace and the central plateau and that of oil for avant's and the county of nice. I'll have to look up the book that he wrote sounds kind of interesting to understand the different regions and how the flavors are influenced by the fats that are used in cooking