

Getting a Good Cup of Coffee

Some days Jeff Ferguson feels like he's been talking coffee since he woke up. Maybe even living coffee. Hands plunged into the smoking beans, just now turned out of a monster, gas-fed roaster which sits in the center of the room, he gives them an expert examination and decides they're done.

And he's just in time to tell a stubborn customer who's looking for "coffee like the Butternut coffee they had in the forties," that he bets he has one of the best blends in town. But it's House Blend, not Butternut.

The Coffee Bean opened its doors on 32nd and Willamette four months ago and the fragrant, sweetish smell of roasting beans has been hanging over the neighborhood ever since.

"In fact, I'm thinking of building a pollution device," says Jeff, wiping off his hands and sitting down for—what else?—his morning cup of coffee.

He could be the only roaster proprietor in town. He's certainly the only store owner that's going along on coffee alone (with teas promised for the end of the month).

Business has been uneven, but coffee fanatics have a way of smelling out the kind of store which will cater to their coffee peculiarities and a loyal, if eccentric, clientele is slowly building up. The only real crisis The Coffee Bean has suffered through so far was a small fire which flared up in the roaster one morning.

"As I was trying to put a dark, dark roast on it," Jeff explains, "you know—like an espresso?" He gazes at the roaster as if expecting it to speak for itself. "Guess it got too dark and that's how the fire began."

He paces out the scene. "Before I knew it the fire department was in here and there was smoke everywhere. Finally I got the firemen to concentrate on the fire in the roaster and the rest of the beans, in bags all over the place, survived o.k."

"But I watch those dark roasts carefully now."

"One of the things about this business is you have to know what you're doing," Jeff shakes his head with the concern of a businessman new in the field. "Your mistake is their dollar."

"Some people just come in to look. You know? There's one guy who just comes in to talk to my coffee plant. That's right. He comes in and gets a free cup of coffee—the coffee over there in the pot is free—and then he sort of tries to make the plant feel better." Jeff points to the brown tips on some of the leaves.

"About the weather and everything. Eugene just isn't Brazil."

Some of Jeff's Thurberesque customers just want to know how to make a good cup of coffee, once they've purchased custom-ground, freshly roasted moka, Kenya, Guatemalan, Colombian, or Ethiopian beans.

"We filter here," Jeff tells inquisitive novices, but, he adds philosophically, "the way you like your coffee is the best way to make it."

For those who insist, he suggests a very clean glass pot with a cone shaped top. A paper filter goes into the cone, the coffee goes into the filter, and the coffee drips through the grinds and into the pot.



Photo by Peter Grant

Start with cold water and barely bring it to a boil. Pour enough over the grinds to make them foam and swell. One fanatic calls this process "breaking down the woody infrastructure." After the grinds begin to "relax" add the rest of the water all at once.

Proportions depend on taste. Some start at a tablespoon of grounds per 6 oz. cup of coffee. But you have to experiment some before you can qualify as a fanatic and after that it's just a matter of learning the language.

FOOD

Mailer Converts--Almost

Review by Barry Mitzman

Someday Norman Mailer will convert to Catholicism. The signs have been around awhile: his declaration in "The White Negro" that "To be a real existentialist one must be religious"; his appalled fascination at the triumph of the Wasp in the moon shot, and his concomitant sense of dread at man's meddling in the universe; his denunciation in *The Prisoner of Sex* of con- and permanently sets in, but if he doesn't then take Hemingway's way out, it seems inevitable; only Catholicism could accommodate Mailer's love of mystery, the elegance of his eschatology, and his demonism.

Mailer's incipient Catholicism is the source of the ambivalence that runs through his new book on the Democratic and Republican conventions, *St. George and the Godfather*. With as acute a sense of outrage as can be managed against the numbing, ineffable evil of American actions in Vietnam, Mailer comes to the Democratic convention prepared to view the McGovern candidacy as "a rare and blithe watershed in the civil affairs of men." This benediction presents some difficulties for Aquarius, Mailer's journalistic embodiment, for "The convention was obliged to be boring. There was insufficient evil in the room."

But that is a small matter. It is Mailer the Catholic who cannot be completely pleased with McGovern. If Hubert Humphrey is "a Renaissance priest of the Vatican who could not even cross a marble floor without pieties issuing from his skirt," still Mailer finds "a flatness of affect in McGovern which depresses, and the muted sing-song of his conversational voice might lead one to divine he grew up in a rectory, if indeed one did not know it already." In fact, asks Mailer, "If there was a man in America who was more of a Wasp than Richard Nixon did it not have to be George McGovern?"

McGovern is too much the Methodist minister for Mailer's liking; McGovern reminds Mailer of an astronaut in "the sense he gave off of Christian endeavor," and of course the astronaut, as Mailer declared in *Of A Fire On The Moon*, is the sterile apotheosis of the Wasp. Mailer's complaints against McGovern occasionally even sound like an attack on the Reformation:

"There is a poverty of spirit in the air. While it is certainly not a poverty of moral principle...it is perhaps a paucity of pomp and pleasure which those very moral principles forbid."

Aquarius confesses to Gene McCarthy, the ex-novitiate, a wish that it was McCarthy who would be nominated. "I like McGovern," Aquarius says, "BUT I just wish he spoke with a little metaphor from time to time."

"Methodists are not much on metaphor," says McCarthy.

In a spirit of ecumenicalism Mailer finally accepts the new parson, but he still must wrestle with a more difficult ambivalence toward Richard Nixon. Here all of Mailer's considerable spleen might be vented, for Nixon is both a monstrous war criminal and the candidate, as in Miami and the Siege of Chicago in 1968, of "Puritanism, Calvinism, conservatism and golf." But the last four years suggest something more. Mailer must admit that Nixon has genius, for Nixon has demonstrated that a thoroughly dislikeable man, "a man who does not even know how to move his body," can be President. Moreover, as the ingeniously staged pseudo-event called the Republican convention proved, Nixon is an artist, "the Eisenstein of the mediocre and the inert," "the first social engineer to harness and then employ the near to illimitable totalitarian resources of television." With the amazing success of this artistry, Aquarius is even forced to consider how, among theories of the American experience, "Nixon's vision might be conceivably more comprehensive than his own."

So Nixon cannot be dismissed as the stupid creep he appears to be. He is the Godfather, or perhaps the Grand Inquisitor, and we are his family, his flock; the Catholic images re-emerge, and are a measure of Mailer's respect.

Mailer remains convinced of Nixon's depravity, of course, but the ambivalence, McGovern's decency and Nixon's lack of it, Nixon's artistry and McGovern's lack of that, deprives Aquarius and the book of the depth of insight we have come to expect from Norman Mailer. Ambivalence turns Aquarius into a self-avowed "face-watcher." And though the descriptions that emerge from his face-watching, whether of Wilbur Mills or Mary Ann Mobley, are each a superb tour de force, they don't

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BOOKS