WORLD COFFEE CULTURE: COFFEE HOUSES AND CAFÉS LITTÉRAIRES – FOCUS ON ITALY

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*For **Marianna, My** inspiring coffee lover **Muse**.*

Abstract: The idea to write this article was inspired by a Ugandan-born English writer, Anthony Capella, who is the author of the novel *The Various Flavours of Coffee* (2008), in which coffee flavours are compared with the varying 'flavours' of love depending on the protagonist's many flirts. I will argue that coffee traditionally accompanies emotional experiences to fight against stress and moodiness or it can be seen as a shelter or a facilitator of relationships. As widely acknowledged, coffee is some sort of ritual enjoyed, first in the morning for a caffeine boost to power your day, during coffee breaks, and after meals. We will see how such functions represent the role coffee had throughout history. Initially, coffee houses grew as meeting places for discussing business and matters of high historic and social relevance. Then, they acquired a key role in the literature world, and became literary cafés. Thus, it is not incidental that poems, short stories, music compositions, and even novels have been dedicated to coffee and cafés have been used as the ideal place where stories were set. Besides referring to some leading world writers and artists, I will focus on some of the most prominent Italian examples, including Goldoni's *La bottega del caffè* (1750), Luigi Pirandello's *L'ultimo caffè* (1912), and among contemporary writers to Luciano De Crescenzo with *Il caffè sospeso* (2017). You can bump into a 'caffé letterario' even in the remotest areas of the country.

Keywords: coffee, coffee house, literary café, literature, relationship, flavour, culture, energiser.

Historical background to the diffusion of coffee

Capella's *The Various Flavours of Coffee* is a novel serving multiple purposes. On the one hand, it is particularly suitable to explore the growth in the demand for coffee and its appreciation in early twentieth-century London, on the other hand, it may function as a brief introduction to the history of coffee. It deals with the impact that this beverage had on the economy and the social relations in the western

world, while opening up an unknown scenario over a mysterious far-away country as ancient Abyssinia, notably modern Ethiopia.

Robert Wallis, the protagonist of the novel, a would-be poet and dandy, accepts a commission from Samuel Pinker, a coffee merchant who asks him to categorise the different tastes of coffee to compile a guide to global coffee beans. This job reveals a world of its own which drives to ecstasy the people who can discern the slightest differences in taste, aroma, and mouthfeel. Or, as suggested by the title given to the Brazilian translation of this novel, *Os Various Sabores Da Vida* ("The Various Tastes of Life," 2008), the story is also about the varying aspects of life, including love. Wallis accomplishes his job, resulting in the Wallis-Pinker coffee codifier: "At last the Guide was complete. The perfumer had made up a dozen stout mahogany boxes, which opened at the side to reveal an ingenious series of shelves holding thirty-six glass-stoppered bottles of aroma" (Capella, 2008: 110). That was an absolute achievement which persuaded Pinker to coax Wallis to go and start up a new coffee plantation in a particular spot of ancient Abyssinia, Kaffa, widely considered as the birthplace of the word 'coffee' and as having the best growing conditions to produce the legendary Arab Mocca. Historically speaking, it appears that the uncultivated coffee bean spread from Ethiopia to Yemen, Mecca, and Egypt. But as reported by an old legend, coffee has been around since the 9th century when a shepherd in the desert of Yemen realised that coffee beans had a very stimulating effect on his goats, which could not sleep and jumped all night. He decided to follow his herd and saw that the goats got excited after eating some berries. So, he took them to the Imam who refused to believe his story until he tried their effect on himself. Then, it did not take long before some Islamic clerics began to cultivate the beans, making coffee very popular among their communities. By the 15th century, coffee reached Turkey where as early as 1475 "Kiva Han" was the first public place serving coffee in Constantinople (now Istanbul). Regarding coffee-houses in Turkey, Ellis quotes a certain English traveller Biddulph who said:

> Their most common drinke is Coffa, which is a black kind of drinke made of a kind of Pulse like Pease, called Coaua; which being grownd in the mill, and boiled in water, they drinke it as hot as they can suffer it; which they Find to agree very well with them against their crudities and feeding on herbs and rawe meates. Their coffa houses are more common than ale-houses in England […] if there be any news; it is talked there. (Ellis, 2014: 8)

The Italian Pietro Della Valle (1586-1652), a Roman nobleman who travelled all over the Ottoman Empire, India, and Persia from 1614 until 1626, sailed from Venice to the East with ten people, including two servants and a painter. He stopped in Constantinople for a year where he was introduced to coffee, a beverage unknown in Italy until then. He associated the black brew to a plant called Nepenthes, which had the characteristic of relieving pain and making one fall into oblivion. Della Valle argued that coffee was the 'nepenthes' (*ne penthos* - 'no grief' - an ancient Greek plant) that, according to Homer is the *Odissey*, Paris gave to Helen of Troy after he abducted her to make her forget even where she came from.

This new beverage then spread to the Balkans and - via Italy - to the rest of Europe. As it happens, when the Sultan of Egypt authorised its consumption, the Muslim religious leaders in Mecca and Cairo forbade it as they considered it dangerous for people's health. Consequently, when coffee was first brought to Christian Europe was greeted with great suspicion because it was seen as the favourite drink of Muslims, with whom Christians had been at war for centuries. Sam Guzman maintains that some 'fanatics' even called it 'Satan's drink.' Quite surprisingly, when they introduced it to Pope Clement VIII (1536-1605), although some high-ranking clergy tried to convince him in advance to ban the drink to the faithful, the Pope had a taste of it and ironically declared: 'This devil's drink is delicious. We should cheat the devil by baptizing it' (Guzman, 2014: 8). As a result, coffee drinking quickly spread throughout Europe and eventually around the world where it remains a uniquely popular drink.

Spreading of coffee houses and literary cafés

The first European coffee house was established in Hungary in 1526 and in Vienna a year later. Then came Leghorn in 1632 and Venice in 1640 in Italy. Regarding England, the Queen's Lane appeared in Oxford in 1651. But according to Pasqua Rosée, the servant of Daniel Edwards, an importer of Turkish goods, he was helped by this businessman to start up a new establishment on St Michael's Alley, off Cornhill London in 1652 because his master's depot, known as "Edwards' Home," could no longer host the increasing number of customers eager to taste the new, exotic beverage.

Fig. 1: Plaque on display in St Michael's Alley, London.

All the above is confirmed by John Aubrey (1625-1697) in the notes on the history of London coffee-houses that he collected in his *Brief Lives* in the early 1680s. He maintains that

> The first coffee house in London was in St Michael's Alley in Cornehill opposite to the church, which was sett up by one … Bowman (Coachman to Mr Hodges, a Turkey-merchant, who putt him upon it) in or about the year 1652. 'Twas four yeares before any other was sett up, and that was by Mr. Far. Jonathan Paynter, opposite to St Michael's Church, was the first apprentice to the trade: viz. to Bowman. (Aubrey, 2000, xxii-xxiii)

As specified by the news-sheet writer Henry Muddiman, coffee was first brought into England at a time when there was an absolute craze for coffee and Oliver Cromwell's revolutionary ideas and the establishment of his Commonwealth. An anonymous satirist said that explicitly in a short poem in 1665:

> *Coffee and Commonwealth* begin
> With one letter both came in,
> Together for a *Reformation*
> To make's a free and sober *Nation*.[1]

The fast diffusion of coffee houses in the following years caused great worry that King Charles II (1660-1685) tried to close them down for fear of conspiracy. Indeed, they became favourite meeting places, especially with the middle- and upper- classes that usually had two back rooms at their disposal where the growing bourgeoisie met to discuss their ideas about politics, religion, society, and later also literature. But

women were excluded from all those lively activities. Actually, they even became suspicious about the negative effect that coffee had on the virility of their men, and, perhaps to vindicate themselves, produced *The Women's Petition against Coffee*, reading:

> [1] *The Character of a Coffee-House. Wherein is Contained a Description of the Persons usually frequenting it with their Discourse and Humours. By an Eye and Ear Witness. London: no publisher, 1665, p. 6.*
>
> […] we find of late a very sensible Decay of that true old English vigor; our Gallants being every way so Frenchified, that they are become mere Cock-sparrows, but they are not able to stand to it, and in the very first charge fall down flat. […] The occasion of which such insufferable Disaster […] we can attribute to nothing more than to the excessive use of that Newfangled Abominable Heathenish Liquor called coffee.
>
> (Anoymous, 1674, n. p.)

Men replied accordingly with *The Men's Answer to the Women's* document, where they, on defending the good qualities of coffee, stressed that 'it collects and settles the spirits, makes the erection more Vigorous, and the Ejaculation more full […] (Anonymous, 1674, n. p.) Meanwhile, coffee houses became ideal venues for trading, known as "penny universities," such as that run by Edward Lloyd (1648-1713), who by 1688 founded the world known Lloyd's of London insurance company. Professor Markman Ellis best summarises the function of coffee-houses as follows:

> Their success was incredible, there were about 3,000 coffee houses only in the city of London by the end of the 18th century. Coffee-houses accomplished what the theatre in the Renaissance England did for the public. The periodicals were new dramatic plays and the coffee-houses were virtual stages. (Ellis, 2014: 156)

The ale sellers feared that coffee was becoming very popular in rich and private houses. This made the ale sellers fear that that could damage their trade and petitioned Pasqua Rosée for not being a freeman. On this purpose the English historian Lord Macauley (1800-59) wrote in his five-volume study, *The History of England*, covering the 17-year period from 1685 to 1702:

> Foreigners remarked that the coffee-house was that which especially distinguished London from all other cities… that the coffee-house was the Londoners' home, and that

> those who wished to find a gentleman commonly asked not whether he lived in Fleet Street or Chancery Lane, but whether he frequented the Grecian or the Rainbow.(Macauley, 1848, n. p.)

Then, legend has it that Rosée himself opened the first café at the fair of Place Saint-Germain in 1672. However, venues like that did not become popular until the "Café de la Regence" was not opened in Rue Saint Honoré in 1681, under the name 'Café du Palais Royale,' boasting among its clients Voltaire and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. (Note that it is still one of the most elegant venues in the heart of Paris.) Its major competitor was the "Café Procope," established by the Sicilian François Procope dei Coltelli in 1689. This 'institution,' located in 'Rue de l'Ancienne Comédie became a favourite meeting place with playwrights, actors, writers, and musicians.

Fig. 2: Café Procope, Paris.

The Court did not ignore "Café Procope" either. Following certain records of the time, coffee was introduced to France in 1669 by Suleyman Aga, the ambassador to the court of Louis XIV, le Roi Soleil. The monarchy's interest in the "Café Procope" continued with the King's successors, Louis XV, and his grandson Louis XVI in 1774. Most interestingly, even during the turbulent days of 1789, you could find sitting at the tables such leaders of the French Revolution as Marat, Robespierre, and Danton, drinking coffee and discussing crucial affairs regarding the impending destiny of the country. It will suffice to consider that during the reign of Louis

XV, there were 600 and by 1843 there were more than 3000. They say that even Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) was held as an example of the beneficial effect of coffee. Like many teetotalers, he enjoyed coffee at any time of the day.

The next country that we will consider is Germany. Coffee was introduced there in 1670 when it became a substitute for beer and wine drinking at the end of meals. There was such a craze for this beverage that the royal family had to spend a lot of money to import it. Hence, King Frederick II (1740-1786) increased its price to make it affordable only for the richest layers of society. But the lower classes took that move as social discrimination, meant to deprive them of the drink they liked most. Consequently, the authorities, supported by doctors, launched a campaign against coffee, and while saying that they were just trying to help them, declared: "You had better leave it alone. Anyhow, it's bad for you because it causes sterility" (Ukers, 1922: Ch. VIII, 46). But, instead of convincing them to stop protesting, that initiative raged them more and prompted them to continue. It is here that Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) comes into play. By 1720, he was the musical director of the *collegium musicum* for hymn writing in Leipzig which was near *Zimmermannsches Kaffeehaus* (Zimmermann's Coffeehouse), a most popular venue with middle- and working-class people in town, where Bach enjoyed spending a lot of free time himself. He decided to give the protesters a hand by composing a comic opera with the collaboration of his friend Christian Friedrich Henrici, who wrote the words for *Kaffeekantate* ("Coffee Cantata," 1732) whose protagonist a young woman called Lieschen sings: "Mmm! How sweet the coffee tastes, more delicious than a thousand kisses, mellower than muscatel wine. Coffee, coffee I must have, and if someone wishes to give me a treat, ah, then pour me some coffee!" (Translation of 'libretto' by Dmitri Matheny).

In the German-speaking area, Austria is another important country, whose coffee houses are onsidered a world cultural heritage by UNESCO. Unlike Bach, Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827), who lived there when he was a young member of the Habsburg Empire's court orchestra, though he was hardly ever seen in a coffee house, he was known to be a true coffee lover.

On concluding this paramount presentation, we will turn to Italy where coffee was first brought to Venice by the Paduan Prospero Alpino as early as 1570. No wonder then that the oldest coffee bar in the world is "Caffé Florian," which was opened by Floriano Francesconi on 29 December 1720, with the name "Alla Venezia Trionfante" ("To the Triumphing Venice"), though it is still known after the name of its owner,

Floriàn in the Venetian dialect. Afterwards, coffee in Italy was associated with a cultural-political institution, the "Accademia dei Pugni" that was founded in Milan in 1761, and, from 1764, even published a journal called *Il Caffè.* This publication was modelled on Joseph Addison' and Richard Steele's *The Spectator*, creating a fictional narrative situation within which the various articles were presented. Similarly, we know that the journalists pretended to report the customers' conversations in a coffee shop to avoid the strict Austrian censorship which tried to prevent the spreading of the emerging ideas of French Enlightenment philosophers. In his *L'Introduzione al "Café* (*Introduction to the "Café"'*), Pietro Verri, one of the co-founders of the "Accademia dei Pugni" ("The Punches Academy") explains why he and a few other intellectuals, including his brother Alessandro, got the idea to found this institution in 1761, saying that they called it like that because they meant to fight on behalf of the community both in a metaphorical and, if needed, also in a physical sense. "In there you can mainly drink coffee which deserves to be called so; coffee real coffee from the East […]" But in 1766, due to the progressive socio-political opinions of Cesare Beccaria and the Verris, "Accademia dei Pugni" broke up and *Il Caffè*, which had appeared as many as 74 times in only two years, stopped its activity, too. (See AA.VV. 2018. Roma-Bari: Giuseppe Laterza & Figli).

As we will see in the next section, following the unique example set by the "Accademia dei Pugni," many coffee establishments sprung up. But besides being a hub for political issues, they also became common places for discussions on intellectual and literary matters, and even everyday life situations, such as love affairs, as in Goldoni's *La bottega del caffé*. In short, literature began to boast the role that coffee traditionally had in society through poems, fiction, and essays which were increasingly dedicated to this lovable drink. So, in Venice as in many other European cities, it was thanks to the Enlightenment movement that the "literary cafés" took culture out of traditional meeting places and far away from elitist ideas.

Fig. 3: A. Perego: *Accademia dei Pugni* (meeting of founding members from left): A. Longo, A. Verri, G.B. Biffi, C. Beccaria, L. Lambertenghi, P. Verri, G. Visconti.

It is self-evident that coffee houses had an enormous impact on the English and the Italian socio-cultural environment, but France did set an exceptional example of its own. Indeed, starting from the early days, the joy of coffee drinking in the Age of Enlightenment is highly represented by some leading cultural members of the French milieu as, the above-mentioned Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), who once said: "*Ah*, that isa *perfume* in which I *delight*; when *they roast coffee near my house*, I *hasten* to *open* the *door* to *take* in *all* the *aroma." (See Sitography). And his friend, the* philosopher Voltaire (1694-1778), who, as the legend goes, drank about 50 cups of a blend of coffee and chocolate daily. His doctor used to tell him that if he continued to abuse coffee, he would kill himself, to which he ironically answered: "if it is like that, I have been trying to poison myself for 80 years!" Another coffee addict at the time, was the writer Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850) who, like Voltaire, drank over 50 cups of coffee a day, corresponding to the period when he wrote his *Comédie Humaine* ("The Human Comedy"), a multi-volume collection connecting novels and stories from 1815 to 1848. According to his biographer Anton Schindler, he had a personal 'magic formula, consisting of 60 coffee beans, corresponding to about eight grams of grounded coffee. To prepare that, he invariably used his famous white Limoges coffee pot, received from the French author Zulma Carraud in 1833.

Fig. 4: Balzac's Coffee Pot, currently exhibited at the Maison Musée Balzac, Paris.

No wonder that, following such an amazing tradition, at the turn of the 19th century, there was a plethora of "café littéraires" in Paris, amongst which the emerging one was "Le Deux Magots," founded in 1914, at 6 Place Saint Germain-des-Prés. This, still highly fashionable venue, boasted the early presence of Rimbaud, Verlaine, and Mallarmè, who were followed by André Gide, Jean Giraudoux, Picasso, Jacques Prévert, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and also the American writer Ernest Hemingway, who even used it as a favourite venue in *The Sun Also Rises* (1926). Mainly to show that such tradition of setting stories at literary cafés is going onto our day, let us just refer to another novel *Dans le café de la jeunesse perdue* (2007) ("In the Café of the Lost Youth", 2012), in which the Frenchwriter Patrick Modiano (1945-), Noble Prize winner in Literature 2014, sets the story at the Parisien 'Café Condé,' where a group of students meet regularly in a bohemian ambience every night.

Fig. 5: Café Deux Magots (Café Littéraire), Paris.

As we have said from the beginning, on turning to Britain, we find that there was a long-standing connection between Coffee and Literature from the early days of coffee-houses, anticipating by and large today's Foyles, Waterstones or Barnes & Nobles where you can sit down and enjoy a cup of coffee while leafing through a book. However different they are, these bookshops lead us back to the Scriblerus Club, which was an informal association of authors established in London at the beginning of the 18th century. They called themselves Scriblerians and included the playwright John Gay (1685-1732), author of the famous *The Beggar's Opera* (1728), the satirist and essayist Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) who, unlike other fellow writers, was very moderate and found coffee so invigorating that he said he needed to have some at least once a week:

> The best Maxim I know in this life is, to drink your Coffee when you can, and when you cannot, to be easy without it. While you continue to be splenetic, count upon it I will always preach. Thus much I sympathise with you that I am not cheerful enough to write, for I believe Coffee once a week is necessary to that. (Swift, 1950, 47)

And also, the poet and satirist Alexander Pope (1688-1764) who, in his famous poem *The rape of the Lock*, about the popular new beverage said:

> Coffee (which makes the politicians wise,
> And see through all things with his half-shut eyes)
> Sent up in vapours to the Baron's brain
> New stratagems, the radiant Lock to gain.
> (Pope, 1986, Canto 3, ll. 117-120, 1119)

Given the clear link between past and present that the examples offered above offer us, we can move on to our times, right where this article started from, Cappella's *The Various Flavours of Coffee*. Thus, we come across a Scottish writer Joanne K. Rowling (1965-), who has greatly contributed to the popularity of coffee bars as she began to write on a serviette the story of her world-famous character Harry Potter at the 'Elephant House' in Edinburgh (Scotland). This venue has become an iconic place where people go and sip a cup of coffee to feel the atmosphere of Rowling's magic stories. Another contemporary good example is represented by *The Devil's Cup: A History of the World According to Coffee* (1999), an intriguing story, partly historical and partly travelogue, through which the English writer and stand-up comedian Stewart Lee Allen (1968-) shows how coffee emerged as the popular beverage the vast majority of us consume every day. Allen, like the protagonist of Capella's novel, travels almost all over the world for about a year wondering about the role that coffee had in the development of the history of mankind. He goes from the remote areas of Southern Yemen, moving to a coffee house in Calcutta (India) and from there to the famous Parisian *cafés* where, as we have seen above, he is right on claiming that the French Revolution was conceived. Eventually, he ends his journey at an American Starbucks. Particularly intriguing is the fact that Allen intends to prove that - through coffee - the planet was provided with some sort of web well before the Internet was invented.

On turning to the United States, coffee was introduced there around the 1670s. Interestigly, the drink was not popular until the Boston Tea Party of 1773 when switching from tea to coffee became a patriotic duty. The tradition began with John Adams, the second President of the United States (1797-1801) and his wife Martha became addicted to coffee by drinking it regularly. Curiously enough, J. F. Kennedy (1961-63) and his wife Jaqueline, to support his Senate campaign in 1952, staged the so called 'Coffee with the Kennedys' by sharing the beverage with people interested. Among the most prominent American literary figures, we cannot miss out for loving coffee, the American-born author, who acquired the British citizenship, T. S. Eliot, who with the famous line from *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (1915), "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons" (Eliot, 1963: 14) shows how coffee was widely consumed, especially by the bourgeoisie.

Another relevant writer is Lula Carson Smith alias Carson McCullers (1917-1967) with his novella, *The Ballad of the Sad Café* (1951), which was first adapted into a successful play, on the bill for 123 reruns at the

Martin Beck Theatre in Broadway (NY) between 1963-64, and then into a film in 1991. This story is particularly suitable for the purposes of this article, showing the continuing traditional social function of coffee. The place is as sad and lonesome as one can imagine. The story introduces a daring, striking central character, Miss Amelia Evans, who transforms the general store inherited from her father into a lively coffee bar called "Sad Café" where the locals can meet and socialise.

The café expanded in a gradual way. […] Within two years the place was a store no longer, but had been converted into a proper café, open every evening from six until twelve o'clock. […] The café itself proved profitable and was the only place of pleasure for many miles around. (McCullers, 2005, 13-14).

To close this roundup of international writers, we cannot but conclude with Brazil, which boasts a unique 'literary café' (a bar-restaurant), "Garota de Ipanema.," located in Rua Montenegro, Rio de Janeiro. The name of this venue is associated with the world-famous poet Vinicius de Morais (1913-1980), and his friend, the musician Antonio Jobim (1927-1994), who by uniting their respective arts invented bossa nova, resulting from a mixture of poetry, music, and coffee. In this must-go place, they conceived the world-renown poem/song *Garota de Ipanema* ("The Girl from Ipanema").

Fig. 6: Landmark of Bar at Ipanema Beach. Fig.7: Original score of *Garota de Ipanema*. Rio de Janeiro.

Italian 'Caffè Letterari' and literature

Here I will argue that the coffee drinking tradition in Italy is deeply rooted in society as in literature. Like everywhere else in Europe when coffee first appeared it contributed to draw a line between aristocrats, who were originally consumers of chocolate, and the emerging bourgeoisie, which enjoyed the exotic beverage, whereas the rest of the

population kept on drinking wine or at times beer. Most importantly, this varied social environment favoured the creation of certain typical characters and caricatures that represented a wide picture of Italian society. Carlo Goldoni with *Le femmine puntigliose* (*The Stubborn Females*, 1754), and his more famous *La bottega del caffè* (*The Coffee Shop*), both written and represented in Mantua in the same year, showed how coffee shops gradually became a pivotal meeting centre. The protagonist Don Marzio, a Neapolitan nobleman, wastes his time away sitting at a table drinking coffee and gossiping to ruin people's reputations. The opening scene of the comedy introduces us into the colourful and lively atmosphere that one could enjoy in coffee shops. They were vivacious meeting places for people from all walks of life. Rodolfo, the shop owner, is talking to Trappola, a young man who helps him in the business:

> RIDOLFO. Come on boys, behave yourselves; be quick and ready to serve our customers civilly and politely. You know that the reputation of a bar depends on the waiters' good manners.
>
> TRAPPOLA. Dear master, to tell you the truth, getting up so early is not good for my health.
>
> RIDOLFO. And yet, one needs to get up early. We need to serve everybody. Those who come here betimes are workers, boatmen, and sailors. They get up early in the morning.
>
> TRAPPOLA. It cracks me up seeing that even porters come here for their coffee.
>
> RIDOLFO. Everybody tries to do what everybody else does. In the old days *grappa* used to flow, while coffee is popular today.
>
> TRAPPOLA. And the lady, to whom I deliver the coffee every morning, almost always asks me to buy her four *soldi* of wood, yet she wants to drink her coffee.
>
> RIDOLFO. Gluttony is a never-ending vice, and it is that kind of vice that grows with age.
>
> […]
>
> RIDOLFO. Oh now! go roast the coffee to make a fresh pot.
>
> TRAPPOLA. Shan't I warm yesterday's coffee grounds?
>
> RIDOLFO. No, make it good.
>
> TRAPPOLA. Sir I have a short memory. When did you open this shop?
>
> RIDOLFO. You know well. It must be about six months.
>
> TRAPPOLA. It's time for a change, then.
>
> RIDOLFO. What do you mean?

TRAPPOLA. When a new shop opens, they make an excellent coffee. In no longer than six months, hot water and wish-wash. [*Exit.*]

RIDOLFO. He is a pleasant fellow. I hope he'll do my shop well. People like going to a shop where there is a clown helping.

(Goldoni, 1984: Sc. i., 4. *My translation*).

Equally interesting is what Ridolfo says to one of his regulars, Pandolfo, a gambler whom he reproaches for ruining young people's lives, while he was very happy with what he earned just by selling coffee: 'No, no, coffee, coffee; since with coffee one earns 50%; how much better than that would you like to make?' (Goldoni, Sc. ii, 9. *My translation*).

This is how a long-standing tradition started, making places like "Floriàn" an unmissable venue, especially if you wanted to enjoy a coffee in a lavish and elegant atmosphere where enthusiastic coffee drinkers as Casanova, Goethe, Mann, Monet, De Chirico, Chanel, Mastroianni, and many other celebrities used to hang out. In 1775, 'Caffè Quadri' was opened in Piazza San Marco (Venice), and praised among its customers the English Romantic poet Byron, who in a note to *Child Harold*, he jeeringly says of his valet Fletcher's liking tea, though he did not really disdain it himself: "*Tis pity wine should be so deleterious, / for tea and coffee leave us much more serious."* (Summer, 1863, 48) Among other artists, who used to spend a lot of time at the 'Quadri,' there were the French Alexandre Dumas, Stendhal, Proust, the German composer Richard Wagner, and the American film director and actor Woody Allen. In Padua, near Venice, 'Caffè Pedrocchi' kept its doors open from its inauguration in 1831 until 1916. It became the meeting place of patriots and artists as Ippolito Nievo, Giovanni Prati, Alfred De Musset, George Sand, Eleonora Duse, and Marinetti. Today it remains one of the symbols of the city where they hold poetry readings and present new books.

Then in Tuscany we find the 'Caffè le Giubbe Rosse,' which was established in Florence in 1897 and became a favourite venue for artists as Pietro Verri and Marinetti, Carrà and Boccioni. In the 1930s, Giuseppe Ungaretti (1888-1970), Salvatore Quasimodo (1901-1968) and Elio Vittorini (1908-1966) became regulars. One more memorable place in Central Italy is the *Antico Caffè Greco*, the second oldest coffee shop in Italy, opened in Rome in 1760. It boasted among its many famous customers great artists like Byron, Shelley, Keats, Stendhal, Wagner, Liszt, Rossini, Toscanini, Ibsen, Joyce, Mann, Guttuso, and Mark Twain.

Fig. 8 'Antico Caffè Greco' (1760), via Condotti, Roma.

Caffé letterari such as those just mentioned are still a distinguishing landmark also in cities like Trieste, as is the case with the historic *Caffè Tommaseo*, (1830) and *Caffè Pasticceria Stella Polare* (1848) which used to offer an ideal environment to intellectuals and patriots. The latter was the favourite haunt of James Joyce and his Italian friend, Italo Svevo, as well as Umberto Saba and Franz Kafka, who loved spending long hours there discussing literature. Incidentally, it was in Trieste that the founder of the futurist movement, Filippo Tommaso .(1876-1944) and his friend Fillia (1904-1936), declared that, on 12 January 1910, they had a meal starting from coffee to celebrate the first futurist event at the "Teatro Rossetti." That was the famous *cena a rovescio* ("backwards dinner"), where the conventional order of serving a meal was inverted: "coffee and cakes first, followed by roast mummies with teachers' livers, ... to end with demolition starters and vermouth." (Marinetti & Fillia, 38). In Marinetti's opinion, coffee was a booster to modernity on the advent of coffee machines. He even thought that this beverage could 'free' Europe from the 'idolatry of the past.' Indeed, he was ironically nicknamed "Europe's Caffeine" for the energy he applied to disseminate his new ideas.

In the same period there were other great artists as the 1934 Noble Prize winner, the Sicilian, Luigi Pirandello (1867-1936), who was renowned for being particularly fond of coffee. In some of his works, he brings this beverage up at several different points in his works. However, the coffee experience is often a moment of profound introversion unlike the function it has in Goldoni's plays. Although Pirandello is most known as a playwright, he was also a life-long poet. He dedicated "L'ultimo caffè" ("The Last Coffee"), first published in *La Riviera Ligure* in June 1912, nr. 6, to be revised later in 1933. Pirandello praises the virtues of coffee in this poem, where having a coffee is described as a moment of

introspectiveness during the sleepless night of an old man, who, being aware of his imminent death, indulges in drinking what could be his last cup of coffee:

Being unable to sleep,
is for old people, a bad sign
of death approaching:
it means that
the vital device
is messed up.

Alone
on the roof
of the old house opposite
a chimney exhales
a light smoke
in spirals
in the clammy and colourless
dawn.
Opposite
lives an old little man
who is certainly in the kitchen
for his coffee.

(Death
is near
those who can't sleep.)

Bent over the fire
the old man fans vigorously;
then the usual white cup
he prepares:
three little bits
of sugar, as coffee always bitter
tastes to him.
The fire is sparkling.

(Dear little old man,
perhaps you weren't expecting me.
Yet, in a while
You'll come with me.)

[…] Here he is: behind

the balcony panes, dead slowly
now
the good old man
his hot coffee sips.
Before sipping
he blows on it; he closes his eyes:
who knows what he may recall!
Perhaps last night's
foolish dreams.
[…]

Come on, come on another sip,
little old man don't worry.
Why are you looking around?
Silence. The clock strikes the hours.

It's five. Who's waiting for you?
It's daytime, can you see?
It's already a clear day.
Finish your coffee.
("Then, dear little old man,
take courage,
you'll come with me"). (Pirandello, 123; *My translation*)

An equally interesting piece of work is the one-act play *L'uomo dal fiore in bocca* (*The Man with the Flower in His Mouth*) (1923), which Pirandello based on his novella *La morte addosso* (*Bring Death Upon You*) (1918), whose original title was *Caffè Notturno* (*Night Coffee Bar*). The story takes place in a provincial, little coffee bar station where the man with the flower, that represents a painful end – the man knows he has cancer, after missing his train home, which he will be missing indefinitely, sits at a table on his own until another person joins him. They start chatting about everything around them and the value of life itself, and he eventually tells him about his terrible problem. Thus, Pirandello makes a public place the ideal psychological setting for people to meet and socialise.

Fig. 9: Literary Café "Luigi Pirandello" in Agrigento, Pirandello's hometown.

Another coffee fanatic is Eduardo De Filippo (1900-1984), the world-famous Neapolitan playwright, who, in the comedy film, *Fantasmi a Roma* (1961), featuring some of the greatest Italian actors, Marcello Mastroianni, Vittorio Gassman, utters the famous cue: "Quando moriró, tu portami il caffé, e vedrai che io resuscito come Lazzaro" ("When I am dead please bring me a cup of coffee, and I'll raise from the dead like Lazarus!" *My translation*). The message here sounds obvious: coffee is such a powerful energiser, an irresistible pleasure, an excuse to spend time together. Finally, we come across one of the most haunting scenes from one of De Filippo's plays, the opening of Act II of *Questi Fantasmi* (*These Ghosts*, 1945). In a lengthy monologue, one of the characters, Pasquale Lojacono explains to professor Santanna, his neighbour across the balcony, who never appears nor speaks, the secrets of true Neapolitan coffee: the philosophy of its preparation, with advice and tricks to make coffee even better and more flavoured:

> Depriving us Neapolitans of this little relief out here on the balcony... Take me, for example, I would give anything up except drinking in peace this little cup of coffee on the balcony, after dozing off for half an hour after lunch. And I need to make it myself, with my hands. This is a four-cup coffeemaker, but you can get even six, and, if the cups are small even as many as eight… when friends pop in… on the other hand coffee is so expensive… (*He listens, then*) My wife does not honour me … [with her collaboration; *My addition*] she doesn't understand such things. You know, she is much younger than me, and the new generation has lost these habits which, to me, from a certain point of view, are life's poetry! Because, besides making one pass the time, they give some peace of mind as well. Anyway, excuse me?... Who could ever make me a cup of

coffee like I do, with the same zeal, with the same care?... I'm sure you'll understand that, as I need to help myself, I follow the real experiences and don't neglect anything. […] This paper top seems useless but has its function. [He places it on the spout; *My addition*]. Yeah, because the thick smoke of the coffee coming up first, which is the most intense, is not lost. On the contrary, it remains inside and impregnates the environment, preparing it to receive the substance, the coffee. Moreover, professor, before you pour the water, which needs to boil for at least three or four minutes, into the internal part of the perforated capsule, first you need to sprinkle a half coffee spoon of freshly ground coffee powder. That's a little secret! Because when the water is in full boil it gets flavoured on its own as you pour it. Professor, you too have fun sometimes, because I see you out on the balcony celebrating the same rite as me. (*He listens*) And me too. Actually, as I've told you, my wife does not collaborate, I roast it myself… (*Listens*) You too, professor? … You do the right thing… Because that's the hardest thing: guessing the right roasting point, the colour… A monk's coat… Monk-coat colour. […] (*By then the coffee is ready*). Professor, it's done. (*Pours the coffee in the cup and begins drinking*) Are you ok? ... Thanks. (*Drinks*) Woh, this is coffee… (*He declares*) It is chocolate. See how little it takes to make a man happy: a half cup of coffee taken out in peace on the balcony, a little fresh air… with a pleasant neighbour living opposite… you are nice professor… You see, I save half a cup, I'll drink it between cigarettes. (*Goes on drinking*) (De Filippo 261-262; *my translation*).

Fig. 10: Traditional Neapolitan coffeemaker like that described by E. De Filippo in the monologue.

Today, Luciano De Crescenzo (1928-2019) is one more Neapolitan author, who wrote about the special relationship that his fellow citizens have with their favourite drink. His last work, *Il caffè sospeso: Saggezza quotidiana in piccoli sorsi* (*Pre-paid Coffee: Daily Wisdom in Little Sips*) (2017) deals with a very original local custom that is pretty common in Southern Italy. But before proceeding, it takes an explanation for a better understanding of the book. At the elegant *Gran Caffè Gambrinus*, established in Naples in 1860, boasting among its clients Oscar Wilde, Gabriele D'Annunzio, and even Empress Sisy of Austria, its regulars introduced the custom of pre-paying a coffee for anyone who could not afford it. Today, on entering the *Gambrinus,* you can still see a huge coffee machine where customers used to leave the so-called *scontrini sospesi* (i. e. receipts of a pre-paid coffee). This practice even reached the United States, especially amongst the Italian community. This tradition has inspired De Crescenzo to write stories and anecdotes, in which he imagines conversations with Plato and Aristotle about local places and events. He suggests leafing through his book while sipping a nice cup of coffee if you really want to enjoy it. Indeed, De Crescenzo says that wisdom is often hidden in simple daily gestures such as tasting a good coffee. That is how he gathers reflections that he magically turns into food for thought.

Figure 11: Bar at Spaccanapoli, Naples. Poster featuring Totó and Peppino, two of the greatest Neapolitan comedians.

However, while Naples is an incredibly throbbing cultural centre, south of it there are hardly any literary cafés. The 'Gran Caffè Renzelli' (1803), in Cosenza (Calabria), is an exception. Legend has it that on 9 March 1844, when it was still called "Caffè Gallicchio," the patriots Domenico Frugiuele and Gianfelice Petrassi organised a rebellion against the Bourbon regime. Unfortunately, the rising failed and the leaders of the revolt, the Venetian brothers Attilio and Emilio Bandiera were executed, after being allowed to have coffee at the bar. Mr Gallicchio wished to offer patriots and intellectuals alike the possibility to meet in two little rooms in the back of the bar. In 1910, Mr Renzelli bought the bar, hoping to create the literary cafés tradition, which has never really taken off the ground. Yet only 45 kilometres north of Cosenza, there is a small town, Santa Sofia d'Epiro, where quite surprisingly, there is a coffee bar with an amazing liberty atmosphere, dating back to 1899. This venue has been lending itself to a rather new function as a literary café, when the offspring of the family, a local historian, Giuseppe Baffa, besides organising the presentation of books, such as the well-attended *Peppino Impastato. La memoria difficile* (Ed. P. Manzella) in July 2023, set up a permanent exhibition of old photographs and books about eminent local and national figures.

Fig. 12: Front doors 'Bar Baffa.' Fig. 13: "Bar Baffa," indoor. S. Sofia d'Epiro.

Before ending our fascinating literary trip through Italy, we will pass to Sicily where we find some great authors, who have given coffee and food an important role in some of their works. Apart from Pirandello, who has already been amply quoted above, there is the poet Salvatore Quasimodo, the 1959 Nobel Prize in Literature, who in his young days used to give talks at the 'Antico Caffé Galante' (1908) in Patti (Messina.). In relation to Quasimodo, it is worth saying that the Sicilian poet and literary critic Domenico Pisana had the brilliant idea of inviting authors at the newly opened 'Caffè Letterario Quasimodo,' a literary café bearing the name of the great poet, established in the town of Modica

in 2006. Particularly successful are the 'Literary Saturdays' open to anyone wishing to listen to poets, critics, and musicians. On concluding our visit to Sicily, we come across Andrea Camilleri (1925-2019) whose claim to world fame is the creation of the chief inspector Montalbano. Camilleri had more than 10 million copies sold since 1992 that have been translated into 36 languages. As stated by Stefania Campo, Montalbano is a gourmet and a refined connoisseur of coffee that he buys straight from Puerto Rico. He considers coffee a must to end his famous meals. Such is the case at *Casa Vigata* (the location where his stories take place), a restaurant in rue Léon-Frot, Paris, where the chef offers a menu, based on the dishes present in Camilleri's books, that always ends with a good strong 'espresso' in Montalbano's style.

Fig. 14: Antico Caffé Galante. Patti

Conclusion

This article has been set out to illustrate how coffee has played a central role both in literature and society, thus becoming a prominent protagonist in our world. As you could see, Coffee has taken an increasingly active role, as if it were a living character, in the works and lives of many authors. In this respect, it will be certainly interesting to learn that, according to the findings of a team of Italian Universities researchers as the title of their co-authored goes "Caffeine Improves Text Reading and Global Perception." But to conclude I will leave the last word to the American soprano Barbara A. Daniels (1946) who says, "Life is a beautiful and endless journey in search of the perfect cup." Likewise, I must say that in my experience, I have found that the "journey" is even more involving and demanding if you are also searching for the link

between that "cup" and literature, which makes an article like this an unending job.

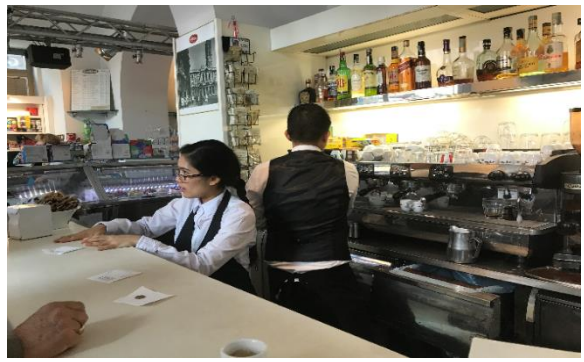

Fig. 15: Espresso coffee machine in action at Bar 'Cottini,' Roma.

Fig. 16: Home capsule coffee machine. Fig. 17: Traditional 4-cup coffeemaker.

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NB All the photographs above have been taken by myself, unless otherwise stated (e.g. except for Fig. 3: retrieved on January 2024 https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Accademia_dei_Pugni)