him plucking feathers of some game bird he’s shot himself and carving a four-rib roast from one of his North Devon cows and spit-roasting one of his Gloucester Old Spot pigs. I have to remind myself that he’s an Oxford grad, with a degree in philosophy and political economy, and that he’s made up this regular guy image with an engaging tell-it-like-it-is voice. According to Bill Buford in The New Yorker, this image has sustained him through “nine television series, three specials, and ten books.” In America this country boy stance translates into a thinking man’s Emeril.

The fact that the author is not a farmer born, however, has lured him to think through the moral issues of meat eating, and he does so with straightforward commitment to the animals he raises to be killed. Part of “the symbiotic contract” (p.23) between men and animals as fellow creatures, he says, is “the contract of good husbandry” (p.24), which works only if we give animals a better deal than they’d have in the wild. His idea of the “consensual domestication” (p.23) of certain animals resembles the argument of Michael Pollan in The Botany of Desire, where he wittily claims that plants got the best of the deal in getting man to perpetuate them. The husbandman’s contract is that he makes the short life of his animals a happy one and that he respects them after their death by treating their meat with care. That means cheap meat is a contradiction in terms.

The author’s plaints about the abusive persecution of animals in our industrial system and the cheapening of meat in our supermarkets are familiar but bear retelling, because what’s true in England is far truer in the States. Far more than the English consumer, we demand cheap meat, which doubly degrades the animal that provides it. Perhaps Fearnley-Whittingstall’s best contribution in his celebration of meat in getting man to perpetuate them. The husbandman’s contract is that he makes the short life of his animals a happy one and that he respects them after their death by treating their meat with care. That means cheap meat is a contradiction in terms.

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What we don’t see can hurt us. Near the beginning of his book, Fearnley-Whittingstall devotes a double-page spread to a picture sequence of the killing, skinning, and butchering of one of his cows. In America, this might fill a wall-size television screen with images nowhere visible in the forever glossy sequences of Emeril and Rachael Ray. It appears that American cooks and eaters haven’t yet got the courage to look at the big picture of meat. Perhaps the big picture depends less on scale than on moral depth, and for that we might well look to ancient roots in England’s green and pleasant land.

—Betty Fussell, New York City

Notes

Bookends

Tea Cult of Japan: An Aesthetic Pastime
Yasunosuke Fukukita
xvi + 164 pp. Illustrations. $81.00 (cloth)

For many Western visitors to Japan, a tea ceremony is high on their “must do” list. This tea ceremony, known as chanoyu, is the epitome of Japanese society. For those unfamiliar with Japanese culture, chanoyu is a mysterious and very complicated ritual.

Yasunosuke Fukukita’s classic 1955 book, Tea Cult of Japan: An Aesthetic Pastime, has recently been reissued by Kegan Paul. Compared to current books on the market about the tea ceremony, this is not a lavish publication, but it does reflect the classic, timeless nature of chanoyu. All photographs are in black and white, and although they are not of the best quality, they offer a good glimpse of what is to be expected by a tea ceremony guest. Some text is dated, such as in Chapter 2, “Training in the Etiquette,” in which Fukukita describes how all young Japanese women are encouraged to train in tea ceremony before marriage—to learn not only about tea but about correct manners and comportment. This custom went out of fashion decades ago.

The book informs the Western reader about the history of the tea ceremony, including the beginnings of this ritual centuries ago under its founder, Sen no Rikyu. It also explains how Rikyu’s two great-grandsons created the two main schools of tea, Urasenke and Omotske. Fukukita describes the meaning and importance of the flowers, the flower container, the scroll, and the tea implements (tea caddy, tea bowl, and tea scoop). The many photographs and drawings clearly show the parts of a tea pantry and the layout of a tea garden. Fukukita precisely details how each object used in the tea ceremony is carefully selected for the guests and may be part of the host’s family treasures. He advises Western guests to display appreciation of the tea
implements through comments and inspection of the items; not to do so would be deemed an affront to the host.

For the newcomer to Japanese tea culture, this book includes step-by-step instructions on how to conduct a chanoyu party; how to serve thin tea (usucha) and thick tea (koicha); and how to serve a kaiseki meal (the light dinner served before tea at a formal tea gathering).

Although this small book may be somewhat dated and nostalgic, it is still very informative and would be a great asset to any Westerner visiting Japan who is unacquainted with tea ceremony etiquette and ritual.

—Judith Krall-Russo, tea specialist, Edison, NJ

Knowing the origins of fortune cookies can be an obsession. It was for Yasuko Nakamachi, a graduate student of history at Kanagawa University, near Tokyo, whom Jennifer 8. Lee wrote about in the New York Times before publishing the book now under review (see “Solving a Riddle Wrapped in a Mystery,” January 16, 2008). It became an obsession for Lee, as well, a Harvard graduate back home in New York City and a metro reporter for the Times. Why did both women need to know the origin of this famous bakery product, and what did they learn?

Lee bears the middle name of “8,” ba in Chinese, which connotes prosperity. Her book is a great read, and if it catches on, her future should be prosperous. But first she needs to learn a bit more about fortune cookies, as well as about other popular Chinese food mysteries. Although she knows that there are more Chinese restaurants in the United States than all the McDonald’s, Burger Kings, and Kentucky Fried Chickens combined, she does not clearly state the origin of these cookies that represent her combined heritage. Lee’s earlier article reveals much more; it tells what her book does not detail adequately—that fortune cookies are neither Chinese nor American; they are Japanese. The article also explains how and why they came to the United States.

Loaded with curiosity, Lee cannot rest until she finds answers to all that she considers an adventure in the world of Chinese food. Her writing is delightful and expert, and she offers up a great deal of information about her culinary curiosities, which appear in eighteen chapters. She ruminates on such questions as, Why is chow mein the chosen food of a chosen people? What is the relation between Jews and Chinese food? Who was General Tso? Was there a kosher duck scandal? And what are the facts surrounding American stir-fries? She even asks, What did Confucius really say?

Although this book is thoroughly researched, including a five-page bibliography, Lee did not always delve deeply enough. She fails to cite numerous articles that have appeared in Flavor and Fortune, which would have yielded helpful information to fill out her stories, especially those regarding fortune cookies and bean sprouts. Nevertheless, like a good mystery, her book is difficult to put down. Her curiosity is healthy, her culinary explorations hearty. The Fortune Cookie Chronicles is a fine chow down, which deserves your attention.

—Jacqueline M. Newman, Editor, Flavor and Fortune

Biographer Noel Riley Fitch’s customary beat covers twentieth-century American expatriates (Anaïs Nin, Sylvia Beach, Ernest Hemingway, Julia Child) and the Paris they played in and loved. So it’s only fitting that she’s rounding out her œuvre with another biography, though this time of place: a tour of Europe’s greatest literary cafés, buttressed by a survey of coffeehouse contributions to literature and political history.

After detailing Paris’s ten best literary cafés, Fitch leaves her comfort zone, spiraling around Europe to include coffeehouses in Bucharest, Leipzig, Lisbon, Padua, and eighteen other cities. The book, serendipitously sized to fit—what else—coffee tables, is handsomely illustrated with photographs antique and new (the latter shot by the lucky Andrew Midgley) that do a lovely job of evoking the café’s fundamental objective: existing as a venue for the gentle passing of time.

An engaging introductory essay begins by taking the reader through the science and history of coffee as a beverage and the Arab origins of the coffeehouse. Fitch tells us that in England, colonial imports were responsible for tea eclipsing coffee (noting that Thomas Twining’s was originally a coffeehouse) and explains the deterioration of cafés in Germany and the Baltic states by blaming alcoholic beverages. She does touch on regional differences, like those