

Starbucks! Just an American Coffee Bar

Fred Plotkin (May 19, 2016)



Caffè of course means coffee but in Italian it means so much more. It is the place where you go to have a coffee. But above all, it means that wakening in the morning. It means that moment of pause alone or with a friend in the afternoon.

When you say to someone, “Andiamo a prendere un caffè”, what that means is not only “Let’s go have a coffee” but let’s spend time together. Let’s take a break from our busy lives, share it, and then go on with our lives. They call it “la pausa caffè”, the pause for a coffee. Il Caffè Italiano, which is just espresso, to me is also the exclamation point at the end of a magnificent Italian meal. There are other kinds of coffee and there are coffee drinks but that is not for me. I like ‘un caffè espresso all’Italiana senza zucchero’, without sugar. Just a beautiful espresso.

I am troubled by the idea of Starbucks opening in Milan because it confuses what quality coffee is. This happens to be a very fine company in terms of the environment, the proper treatment of its



employees and various forms of social policy. However, its founder, Howard Schultz built the legend of his company on his discovering the classic Italian coffee bar in Milan and bringing its traditions to the U.S.A. Starbucks, which is sui generis, does not reflect an Italian model in terms of style and service.

Most especially, its over-roasted coffee beans are a gross exaggeration in terms of flavor and the enormous size of its cups are distortions that do not correspond to anything an Italian would know or like. Starbucks adds all kinds of syrups and flavorings to its coffee drinks, something that is very un-Italian.

The food Starbucks sells is inferior to the wonderfully yeasty and airy brioche with apricot jam that is the traditional accompaniment to a morning cappuccino or the delicate savory tramezzini sandwiches that come later in the day. Starbucks does not serve alcoholic beverages while Italian coffee bars do. If Starbucks wants to open stores in Italy, it has the right to. But it should be advertised for what it is: an American coffee bar.

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