

# Java Man

How caffeine created the modern world.

The original Coca-Cola was a late-nineteenth-century concoction known as Pemberton's French Wine Coca, a mixture of alcohol, the caffeine-rich kola nut, and coca, the raw ingredient of cocaine. In the face of social pressure, first the wine and then the coca were removed, leaving the more banal modern beverage in its place: carbonated, caffeinated sugar water with less kick to it than a cup of coffee.

But is that the way we think of Coke? Not at all. In the nineteen-thirties, a commercial artist named Haddon Sundblom had the bright idea of posing a portly retired friend of his in a red Santa Claus suit with a Coke in his hand, and plastering the image on billboards and advertisements across the country.

Coke, magically, was reborn as caffeine for children, caffeine without any of the weighty adult connotations of coffee and tea. It was, as the ads with Sundblom's Santa put it, "the pause that refreshes." **It added life. It could teach the world to sing.**

One of the things that have always made drugs so powerful is their cultural adaptability, their way of acquiring meanings beyond their pharmacology. We think of marijuana, for example, as a drug of lethargy, of disaffection. But in Colombia, the historian David T. Courtwright points out in "Forces of Habit" (Harvard; \$24.95), "peasants boast that cannabis helps them to *quita el cansancio* or reduce fatigue; increase their *fuerza* and *ánimo*, force and spirit; and become incansable, tireless." In Germany right after the Second World War, cigarettes briefly and suddenly became the equivalent of crack cocaine. "Up to a point, the majority of the habitual smokers preferred to do without food even under extreme conditions of nutrition rather than to forgo tobacco," according to one account of the period. "Many housewives... bartered fat and sugar for cigarettes."

Even a drug as demonized as opium has been seen in a more favorable light. In the eighteen-thirties, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's grandfather Warren Delano II made the family fortune exporting the drug to China, and Delano was able to sugarcoat his activities so plausibly that no one ever accused his grandson of being the scion of a drug lord. And yet, as Bennett Alan Weinberg and Bonnie K. Bealer remind us in their marvellous new book "The World of Caffeine" (Routledge; \$27.50), there is no drug quite as effortlessly adaptable as caffeine, the Zelig of chemical stimulants.

by Malcolm Gladwell



At one moment, in one form, it is the drug of choice of café intellectuals and artists; in another, of housewives; in another, of Zen monks; and, in yet another, of children enthralled by a fat man who slides down chimneys. King Gustav III, who ruled Sweden in the latter half of the eighteenth century, was so convinced of the particular perils of coffee over all other forms of caffeine that he devised an elaborate experiment.

A convicted murderer was sentenced to drink cup after cup of coffee until he died, with another murderer sentenced to a lifetime of tea drinking, as a control. (Unfortunately, the two doctors in charge of the study died before anyone else did; then Gustav was murdered; and finally the tea drinker died, at eighty-three, of old age--leaving the original murderer alone with his espresso, and leaving coffee's supposed toxicity in some doubt.)

THE SATURDAY EVENING POST



**MY HAT'S OFF to  
the pause that refreshes"**

Old Santa, busiest man in the world, takes time out for the pause that refreshes with ice-cold Coca-Cola. He even knows how to be good to himself. And so he always comes up smiling. So can you. Wherever you go shopping, you find a cheerful soda fountain with ice-cold Coca-Cola ready.

**LISTEN IN**  
Grand Old Opry—Bessie  
Smyke—Country Club  
—Coca-Cola Orchestra  
—Beverly Hills—Billie Holiday  
—Riviera—Helen Hayes  
—Coca-Cola Chorus  
—NBC Network

The Coca-Cola Co., Atlanta, Ga.

OVER NINE MILLION A DAY . . . IT HAD TO BE GOOD TO GET WHERE IT IS

THE SATURDAY EVENING POST



**MY HAT'S OFF to  
the pause that refreshes"**

Old Santa, busiest man in the world, takes time out for the pause that refreshes with ice-cold Coca-Cola. He even knows how to be good to himself. And so he always comes up smiling. So can you. Wherever you go shopping, you find a cheerful soda fountain with ice-cold Coca-Cola ready.

**LISTEN IN**  
Grand Old Opry—Bessie  
Smyke—Country Club  
—Coca-Cola Orchestra  
—Beverly Hills—Billie Holiday  
—Riviera—Helen Hayes  
—Coca-Cola Chorus  
—NBC Network

The Coca-Cola Co., Atlanta, Ga.

OVER NINE MILLION A DAY . . . IT HAD TO BE GOOD TO GET WHERE IT IS

Later, the various forms of caffeine began to be divided up along sociological lines. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, in his book "Tastes of Paradise," argues that, in the eighteenth century, coffee symbolized the rising middle classes, whereas its great caffeinated rival in those years: cocoa, or, as it was known at the time, chocolate, was the drink of the aristocracy.

Coffee Aspect Tea Aspect Male Female  
Boisterous Decorous Indulgence Temperance  
Hardheaded Romantic Topology Geometry  
Heidegger Carnap Beethoven Mozart  
Libertarian Statist Promiscuous Pure

"Goethe, who used art as a means to lift himself out of his middle class background into the aristocracy, and who as a member of a courtly society maintained a sense of aristocratic calm even in the midst of immense productivity, made a cult of chocolate, and avoided coffee," Schivelbusch writes. "Balzac, who despite his sentimental allegiance to the monarchy, lived and labored for the literary marketplace and for it alone, became one of the most excessive coffee-drinkers in history.

Here we see two fundamentally different working styles and means of stimulation: fundamentally different psychologies and physiologies." Today, of course, the chief cultural distinction is between coffee and tea, which, according to a list drawn up by Weinberg and Bealer, have come to represent almost entirely opposite sensibilities:

Coffee Aspect Tea Aspect Male Female  
Boisterous Decorous Indulgence Temperance  
Hardheaded Romantic Topology Geometry  
Heidegger Carnap Beethoven Mozart  
Libertarian Statist Promiscuous Pure

That the American Revolution began with the symbolic rejection of tea in Boston Harbor, in other words, makes perfect sense. Real revolutionaries would naturally prefer coffee. By contrast, the freedom fighters of Canada, a hundred years later, were most definitely tea drinkers. And where was Canada's autonomy won? Not on the blood-soaked fields of Lexington and Concord but in the genteel drawing rooms of Westminster, over a nice cup of Darjeeling and small, triangular cucumber sandwiches.