

Caffeine culture

Coffee shop's clientele just as educating as schoolwork



SHAWN MEYSENBURG is a sophomore news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

I had just stepped in the door of the coffee shop when my eyes beheld an amazing sight.

A free booth. Booths aren't often free at that time of day (around 11 a.m.), so I quickly snatched it up.

After removing my thin jacket and unzipping my backpack, I unceremoniously plopped a well-worn copy of "The Odyssey" on the acceptably clean table and sauntered up to the counter.

I had come to the coffee shop with the honorable intention of reading (well, maybe just skimming) the assigned text for my mythology class.

Although the exploits of Odysseus seemed interesting enough at first, the hustle-bustle of this quaint and lively coffee house soon distracted me from the task at hand.

After filling up a stoneware mug with some exotically named brew, I poured some cream into the steaming coffee and added a couple of unusually shaped cubes of brown sugar to the mix.

Sliding into the booth I was fortunate enough to acquire, I made a valiant attempt at reading Homer's epic poem while I stirred my coffee.

The effort lasted five minutes. A somewhat loud and animated conversation between two businessmen proved to be only the first of many distractions that would foul my reading efforts.

The famed adventures of Odysseus lost their hold on my attention as I observed and listened to these characters.

The first man was squat and heavyset; his large belly was grotesquely hanging over the waistline of his trousers.

Despite his corpulence, however, his appearance was quite sharp. The suit he wore looked expensive, and his loafers were well-shined. An impressive watch adorned his wrist. His full head of hair was impeccably groomed.

His companion stood out a bit less. The second fellow possessed an average build, unremarkable facial features, and he dressed in a less-ostentatious manner than his companion.

They were boring. Very boring. How two people could have an enthusiastic and colorful conversation about such sleep-enducing topics astounded me.

About the time they shifted from a heated discussion about mutual funds to taxes, I ran out of coffee and returned to the counter for a refill.

I once again walked up to the counter and filled my cup, this time with another flavor of coffee. After repeating the cream-and-sugar routine of the first cup, I walked slowly back to the booth, being careful not to slop coffee on the floor.

As I sat down and began briskly stirring my coffee, something interesting caught my attention.

What a diverse crowd was here. I'd always had the impression that coffee shops were the exclusive hangout of the too-cool-for-you set, but the crowd in this place shattered that stereotype.

A few cops squeezed around a small table, swapping stories. Two grubby construction workers were filling up Styrofoam cups with decaf. College students of various schools of fashion sat around reading, studying and chatting with one another.

The aforementioned businessmen's conversation blended with the din of the other voices in the place; an old couple sat two booths down from me having an intimate talk.

About the time I began pondering how cool it was that people from so many walks of life could comfortably congregate in one place, I saw her.

She'd pulled her curly, chestnut hair back into a ponytail. She wore no makeup. She was beautiful. Perfect brown eyes, finely formed lips and an expertly sculpted nose adorned her face. She wore a red, woolen sweater and wide-legged jeans over a well-formed, curvy body.

As soon as I realized I was staring, I quickly opened Homer's epic and pretended to read, occasionally casting glances in her direction.

After finishing my second cup of coffee, I made a trip to the restroom. When I returned, she was gone.

For some reason, a third cup of java sounded appealing, so I returned to the counter and obtained some more.

When I sat down, an intriguing conversation filled my ears. Two guys about my age engaged one another in a hot debate. The subject: Is there a God?

Although I have a bias towards theism, I'll admit that agnostic fellow seemed to possess the upper hand. Then, out of nowhere, the Catholic spurted out an ingenious rebuttal.

The agnostic retorted, and the debate continued on an even playing field.

Not feeling like entering this battle, I concentrated on consuming my third and final cup of coffee. About this time I placed "The Odyssey" in my backpack, having long since abandoned any hope of reading the book in this place.

After seeing that it was 10 minutes to noon, I decided to leave the coffee shop, check out a record store and then attempt to do my reading assignment in the solitude of the library.

As I prepared to leave the coffee shop, I took a last look at the people remaining inside. Maybe I hadn't read my assignment, but I didn't feel that the hour had been a waste of time.

Quite the contrary; few hours of my life during which I had ostensibly done nothing had been more eventful or fulfilling.

My belief that the business world is dull was supported, I learned a few new arguments from both sides of the camp in probably one of the oldest debates going, and a vision of beauty passed before my eyes.

By the way, the coffee had a delicious, nutty flavor.

If you haven't been to a coffee shop lately, go. It can be very enlightening.

Just don't try to read "The Odyssey" while you're there.

Taking the offensive

Constantly looking for insult is no way to go through life



MARK ZMARZLY is a senior English and speech communications major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

READ THIS ARTICLE OR I'M GOING TO CLUB THIS BABY SEAL!

WHAM! Oh, sorry! I thought you had stopped reading.

It's been said that the extreme makes an impression. This article is going to be filled with statements of extreme satire or extreme offense, depending on what type of person you are.

WHAM, WHAM! Sorry, he was still moving.

Something really cool happened last week. Last week I got some people to write in to the Daily Nebraskan and say that they didn't like my article because I offended them.

I'm the first to admit that I really didn't like the article I wrote last week. I had no topic, and I wrote the thing in, like, 20 minutes.

After thinking the article over, I went in the next day and was planning on changing the first half and giving the article more focus.

Problem was that the article already went through the editing process. I decided to let the article stand as it was rather than bothering my fellow workers with re-editing it.

I'm glad that the article went out the way it was. The reaction that I encountered from two angry readers was one that I hadn't expected but have been thinking a lot about.

This semester I have chosen topics that are far from controversial. I have steered clear from topics like abortion, capital punishment and

religion.

Truth is that I don't think anyone cares what I have to say about topics like those. They have been beaten into the ground.

I was not afraid of offending anyone out there, just boring them. Well, now I'm in the mood to offend some people.

KOALA BEARS ARE THE CUTEST OF THE MARSUPIALS, AND DAMN, THEY SURE ARE TASTY.

I enjoy offending people on a certain level. I don't enjoy degrading people or making them cry, just mildly offending them. When I offend someone, it is pretty obvious.

Over spring break my friend Matt and I had shirts made that said, "Got Roofies?" We wore them out on our second-to-last night. I got laughs and compliments, he got slapped and called an asshole.

We were wearing the same shirt but encountered different reactions. Why?

The way I see it, some people realize that life is supposed to be fun, and some people don't. Some people want to turn everything you say or do into something personally offensive.

THE BIBLE WAS THE MOST BLATANT PIECE OF PROPAGANDA EVER PUBLISHED.

Communication is a principle that our society is based on. You need a sender, a receiver, a message and feedback for communication to take place.

The feedback is essential for communication to be valid. Feedback allows both parties to confirm the message's true content and meaning.

When the Ku Klux Klan holds a rally, the message is clear and the offense is blatant. You know the intent behind the message to be one of hate and persecution. This is a rare case of message and hateful intent being clear.

It is my opinion that some receivers want to bend a message so that it becomes offensive.

They distort a message so that it becomes an evil device passed on by

an evil individual. They need a cause to fight against for the day.

Or maybe they can't separate source and message.

Maybe only my friends will be able to laugh at this article. This would be because they know me. They know what I am like.

People out there don't really know me, but they seem to want to fill my words with hidden meaning as if they had a personal insight into my head.

Is life so boring that people need to invent a new evil to fight against? Aren't there enough causes in the world already?

CANCER KILLS GRANDPAS DEAD. (T-shirt design, not my own)

Maybe I and people like me have been feeding our "inner children" unfiltered cigarettes. Maybe we've killed the poor little bastards.

Or maybe life is too short to be taken so seriously.

I laugh more in a day than most people laugh all week. I'm having a lot of fun with my life. Why is that?

I learned a long time ago that you can find humor in any situation. Humor is as important to life as self-esteem. You need to be able

to laugh at yourself before you can understand people and this world that we live in.

The people who can't laugh at themselves are taking life too seriously.

I'm not saying you should take abuse from people for no good reason. Stand up for yourself but only when the cause is real, not imagined.

Creating a cause is not gallant or special, it's demanding attention.

If people like me are the greatest evil in your life and the cause of all

of your stress, then you need a hobby. Try sniffing glue.

Don't look at others for an ego boost. Don't look at everything people say as serious and life-threatening. Realize that not everything is directed at you and against you. If you cry that you are offended at every little thing, then who will fight for your cause when you find a real one?

FINALLY, JESUS CHRIST WAS JUST A GOOD MAGICIAN AND MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER.



ROBB BLUM/DN