

Long Paddock

KEN BOLTON

*Kirkman Guide To The Bars Of Europe
their music, their service, views etcetera*

Tony Kirkman - What are you doing here? Shouldn't you be in Europe?

Me - I'm going, I'm going. Next week.

Tony Kirkman - Tell us about the bars!

The Kirkman Guide
to the bars of Europe
begins in that city so
very much at Europe's centre -
though like the perfect bar,
where foot traffic is permitted
but not the noise of cars - not
too vertiginously at the
absolute centre
of the working world, not
London, Paris or Berlin -
which, though not like bars,
host many bars themselves -
but Rome. And where better
than the raffish, the louche,
the frankly insouciant Bar
San Calisto?

Nowhere, that's where! Dubious,
but confident, seedy but nonchalant,
the Bar San Calisto
issues its challenge.

What to have there? A Strega. And,
yes, we could consider the bars of Europe
thus: the best drinks
& where to have them? A Cynar
in The Ghetto Bar of Trieste, a whiskey sour
in Prague's amusing Lucerna Cafe,
an ouzo at Madrid's Chicote,
or the Bar Cock. A retsina -
but you can only get those in Greece.
Or Australia. Australia

is not Europe. Is Greece? We're thinking
'continental' Europe. Old World charm.
But if Prague, & London, Edinburgh,
Cork & Dublin - why not Greece? A toast,
on Ithaca - or is it Hydra? -
to the Johnstons!

The Calisto is not the bar for everyone.
Is it too rickety & ephemeral? Can
a celebrity *sit* there? No. The
San Calisto refuses the look extended,
say, by Harry's Bar, once, The Bar Americain -
for your Hemingway, your Robbie Williams,
for your Nick Cave, your Adam Cullen -
too real for one generic type, not
real enough for the other. Existential.
The San Calisto has no 'amplifying' effect
for the personality that might require it -
Ashley Crawford? Robert Gray?

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Ah, a sunny morning at the Bar San Calisto!

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Outside the Bar San Calisto in the early evening
chill.

A moment ago it was dusk, people drifted
from the square, hurrying home. Now, an hour
or so later, those out for dinner,
or a drink at a bar, through the square -
& stare, some of them, at you.
Ripped. None of them comes
to the San Calisto, so stern its charm.
You drink on alone while inside a vocal
cohort of drunks shout & laugh, bathed
in its light. Better for you to sit tight -
tight in one sense & tight in the other -
&, because of this, plan your next move
cautiously. Another inch of Strega
could be incapacitating
& you should get home. Deep breaths
(the advice of John Jenkins)
seem both refreshing, in the cool,
& giddy-making. The voyage will be
a test & an adventure. Another afternoon
at the San Calisto.

I have to laugh.

Laurie at the San Calisto? But no Internet,
no jukebox! Pam?
Pam would find its sham quality
'de trop'. Gig? Too self conscious -

fearing to appear 'taken in'. Peter B. on the other hand, likes it, I know. And I can see him there - only 'in my mind's eye' - but he 'resembles' there the same Peter we see everywhere, even in Melbourne - so my mind's eye's view is accurate. He wears a hat or maybe a beret & reads the film criticism, say, of Manny Farber - as you would at the San Calisto. John Tranter, another major poet, sits quite near, oblivious, having a Campari Soda, a good drink to have at the Calisto. "Tranter!" says Lyn T, who has just entered, & looms in the doorway, "So this is where you are! What a dump!" Peter Bakowski frowns.

David Kennedy, dressed a little like Richard Harris in *This Sporting Life*, though benign, benign, sits in the San Calisto. What does he read? Who knows? Perhaps he is marking essays. But no - he would not bring work to the San Calisto. I might. I do. But then, I'm the kind of loon who makes life work. I buy David another beer, a Guinness, not the 'usual thing' at the Bar San Calisto, but he is my English friend & I want him in character.

Orson Welles. I see the Harry Lime figure. Authentic? In-authentic? Neither. It was not the point. That is the Bar San Calisto's attitude. Is the Bar San Calisto authentic? Are you kidding? Is it not? Sure it isn't. It is the Bar San Calisto - just as you left it. I think the Welles figure was Alan Wearne. I have been astral travelling. It is the Bar San Calisto - just as you left it. Someone has swept. So the butt-ends are not embarrassingly in the way, the 'offing'. It is itself almost detritus. If Italy would only clean up its act it would be gone! Is that fair to say? It may be true. Berlin has no San Calisto. A San Calisto in Britain would be fashionable for fifteen minutes. Then people would move on. Used up. In Paris

it would become dowdy, or sad,
& upgrade & succeed at being something else,
the bar Borgelt or Bougogne or something suggestive
of new cars & insurance. The Bar San Calisto -
the real one, in Rome, exists. Is it 'a Gilligan
among bars'? No, Steve Kelen. *No*, its clientele objects
(some, apparently, care), *It is not sappy*. So who, what?
Watteau's *Gilles*, Stan Laurel? No. Yes. I don't know.
Could you repeat the question?

But having bought it - did I buy this? - Kennedy may have
bought it, or Tranter. I see that they are gone. A Cynar,
or a three inch yellow Strega - where will you
sit, inside or out? That is the problem, not such a
bad problem. Where will you sit in the San Calisto,
time passing differently in each of these two realities,
inside & out, where? It would be good to sit
with Ava Gardner, outside, or Johnny Depp. But inside:
it would be terrible. It is always terrible to sit
inside - a hell interminable - & which every minute
calls for all your attention -
the sort of thing, probably, Sartre hated, though it
puts you on your mettle. Are you tough enough
for the San Calisto? You look at the photo
someone has pasted up, of Howlin' Wolf hunched forward,
boxing gloves raised & full of menace -
or the neighboring photo of Muhammad Ali
fronting Howlin' Wolf's band - plainly
someone has made a switch - & the existential
threat, the challenge, is terrific.
I remember someone - crazy Robert Hughes? -
characterized the bar Van Gogh drank in
as a place where "a man could go mad". The
Bar San Calisto? Yes, it is maddening. (It is
always "a man"! - to admire, pity, regret.) Something
has occurred to me, that
has occurred to me before - days, minutes ago? - it
reminds me slightly of the fly-paper,
the hopeless futility of it. An each-way bet.
Did it catch flies, attached there, hanging,
from the fan of the San Calisto? The futility -
death, death, death! Some have died, stuck to the shellac.
Some haven't, slowly spinning, in the wind from the fan,
where Howlin' Wolf, Muhammed Ali, Joe Louis
challenge one & the table needed something additional
shoved under one leg to make it balance -
a bit of ear would do it - & the bicycle racing team
or soccer team from 1974,
combative, implacable, somehow raise the ante
& an old woman comes in, sits down opposite, in black

& moments later you are outside the San Calisto
& stumbling from it, a foreigner, & it is good
to be a foreigner - to use Hemingway's formulation -
abashed, unnecessary, challenged -
like someone in *Fiesta* - but Australian,
because that is how you do things, as if the spirit
were an eye & the Calisto a burnt stick
poked in it - but the spirit is
better than this & you have learned something.

(Learned not to come back to the San Calisto
till you can claim, plausibly, to have forgotten
what took place here. So maybe not tomorrow.)

A bloated, inebriate Russel Crowe, an etherized,
botoxed Nicole Kidman. Emma Balfour. At the
San Calisto? Maybe. Emma, buy Nicole a toasted
sandwich. I might buy Ava one - or Anna
Banens-Kenneally: she looked real at the San Calisto.
I see her outside. Now. Hey, Frontein!

Does this guide mean to say
the San Calisto Bar is the only bar in Italy?
No, in Lecce, for example,
in the square, a number of pleasant
watering-holes abide & beckon. Further North,
in Trieste, the Ghetto Bar is a nice place to be,
pleasantly situated & drawing
a very nice crowd of friendly people.
One night I sank quite a number
of rather large Cynars there -
a curious drink to order at all
at that hour, perhaps, & in quantity, from
an Italian point of view. But
the Ghetto crowd were amused.

Cynar might constitute a sort of test case.
In Split the waiter refused
to acknowledge that he knew it -
"We have no Cynar - whatever that is!" -
though one's finger found it on the menu -
the same menu the waiter continued to put out
on all the tables. You can buy Cynar
at the Bar San Calisto.

In Berlin one longs to stand
proud & tough & worldly, like Beckmann
in his famous self-portrait, or slump,
debauched & frowzy, like Fassbinder -
which requires no suit or bow-tie, there is
that to be said for it - and drink good wine,
or whiskey. Berlin has come a long way, since

Laforgue's time. *He would hardly recognise it.*
He would find it much improved,
though disconcertingly modernized.
By the same token, he would hardly recognize
Paris, either. I look out the door of the
Alt Berlin, paradoxically a Negroni in my hand.

The Negroni is not such a great drink -
but it was mentioned often in the books of my youth,
that I read to develop sophistication,
so I try it. No, I cannot see the point.
A cowboy walks past, in modern Berlin -
the sort of outlandishness
Laforgue would deplore - would have - and I am
almost with him, on that, except
Dennis Hopper, in *The American Friend*, dressed that way,
a film set in Germany -
& in the modern era - *pace* Laforgue, & in fact
who knows how Laforgue is dressed 'these days'? -
you can do this thing. This guy has.
I see with surprise, but not quite surprise,
it is Richard & Suzie.
Suzie is dressed strikingly - but 'normally' - & says,
"All this way, to Europe, to drink Negronis?"
Richard says, "Let me buy you another!
Or are you switching?" Noting my discomfort.
We place our orders. It is great to be in Berlin,
at Munz Strasse's Alt Berlin, with them,
myself again, not Max Beckmann.

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On August Strasse is the Hackbarth,
for hanging out after openings, also
The Ballhaus Mitte, formerly of old
East Berlin, lovely front garden, with benches,
& upstairs an old & faded ballroom, with ornate mirrors
whose reflective powers are nil
into which you may peer, glass in hand,
& wonder where your soul has left for, & will it
'return', will you be Audie Murphy when it does,
or Giorgio di Chirico, Zazu Pitts or Stendhal? John
Meillon?
Can mirrors do that,
or only with enough Jameson's
famous Irish whiskey? Each glass is like the last
but tells you something different.
On Berlin's Karl Marx Allee is
Cafe Moskau. It caters to those
with a special nostalgia for the 'East'.

I have none - though I recently purchased
this pack of *Sprachloss* cigarettes. 'Speechless'
the name translates as, which I love
for its suggestion of emphysema,
the *Trabant* of cigarettes. I don't smoke
but I like the packet - like the
Ardath of my youth. Hip & expensive -
but if you can't resist the idea
of drinking in a former Czech or
East German travel agent's -
further down Karl Marx Allee is the CSA Bar.
What should you have? *Stolychnaya*, perhaps.
Or a Mickey Finn. Ha ha, the Cold War & its
Maxwell Smart ways.

Paris! - speaking of spies - a prosecco
or a Ricard at Le Varenne,
on Rue de Varenne,
where Harry Mathews lives.
A common sight - Mathews
drinking with his cryptic friend,
Georges Perec.

In Budapest, where I went in 1992:
I don't remember the name of the bar.
It was in a small cellar. The tables
were in vaulted stone arches. And it
was full of Hungarian intellectuals
in heated discussion. You can tell them from
Australian intellectuals by their tall
foreheads, but you can't tell them
this way from other Hungarians -
they all have the tall foreheads,
the rather fine features, the clear skin:
think chess, madness, manic depression.
I will have what they're having.

In Lisbon's Pavilhao Chines, on Rua Dom Pedro V,
the bar is full of curiosities - tin soldiers,
model trains, hats, model planes. The effect,
'paradoxically', is to force you upon yourself -
which is why I go to bars anyway
(Hullo, who are you? *It's me you fool,*
I've come back to claim you,
or to touch base at any rate -
haven't you had enough?') -
at Pavilhao Chines
there is the sudden urge
to dust, to order a drink,
sweep all the stuff into a sack
& clear off, before the drink comes,

Then you breathe out, you drink the drink
& go somewhere - the Mirador de Graca or Casa do Alentejo,
which are pretty, frankly,
& where you can have fun
& scuttle home, even late at night,
without too much hissing from the lecherous men
if you've become a woman, as maybe I have become
with all this drinking - Imogene Coca, Madeline Kahn,
Sarah Crowest, Thelma Todd. Vinho Verde
did this? Anyway, to quote my friend Dave Glazbrook,
"There's a little Audie Murphy
in every girl", & I check my knuckle-dusters
are in my purse, order
another wine, cast a final look
over the gardens, palm trees, moorish arches, the lemon
& olive trees that my heart loves so much,
toss back my drink & make my way out.
I push the waiter hard in the back
as I pass - now why did I do that -
he pulled my pigtails in another life? I start to run
as I hear the crash & cry of surprise,
back to my apartment in Mouraria
in lovely Lisbon. What a night!

The waiter, actually, looked like
Tony Kirkman! *Kirkman, you got me into this,*
asking for an account of the bars of Europe.
But *was* it Tony?

In Newcastle, England, there's the Bodega.
A grand old losers' club. I was talking to a trust-fund
Scandinavian artist there one night,
when who should walk in
but Suzie Treister. I bought her an Australian
white wine & we got along famously - me, Suzie, & Sven,
if that was his name. He had blonde hair & clear skin
& wore a polo-neck jumper.
His eyes were pale, & staring in them I could see
an horizon line, of snow, with little wolves
running from left to right. Then I realized
it was the reflection of the greyhound racing
on the bar's tv
& as Sven wasn't saying much I went outside with the Treister.

In London there is The French House in Dean St., Soho
& the Coach & Horses, in Greek Street, nearby.
Down Lamb's Conduit Lane there's a nice pub
& a nice Italian restaurant. In fact, London
is full of bars that are nice places to drink, though none,
sadly, is the San Calisto.

In Dublin - though do the Irish still drink?
I mean 'any more'? Did they ever?
Are you kidding? Does Derek Moon?
Like a fish! But where? All over town!
Here & in Belfast. He is a man-of-the-world,
an international drinker - he actually *does*
look a little like Max Beckmann in his photographs -
perhaps
he should be writing this!
 I *can't* -
or can I? - see him at the Bar San Calisto.