



In my last column, I discussed *The Bluffer's Guide to Etiquette*, by the Englishman William Hanson.

It seems that I forgot to mention that, according to Hanson, if you are presented with a selection of cheeses, it is extremely poor form to cut the “nose” or point of cheese; instead you should cut from the rind. He explains that cheeses are made in the round and cheese makers consider the center to be the best part, so you should avail yourself of the rind and save the best for someone else – who knows who that would be? – who must be quite more important than yourself. Make note: we'll be watching at the next party.

Now, if you think for a moment that you might want to be a student of Mr. Hanson, and you are from our dear waters, you might reconsider when I tell you the tale of how he explains proper etiquette regarding one of our local favorites – the oyster. Listen carefully; after he's educated us that oysters are only eaten in “R” months (I applaud his savoir-faire), he tells us that we should eat the oyster by sliding it into our mouths after “having loosened it with a fork.” He goes on to explain that “an oyster fork is a Victorian middle-class invention and does nothing a normal fork cannot do . . . Never ask for an oyster fork or that will set you into a class of your own. Goat class!” Poor Mr. H, it seems no one ever offered him an oyster knife.

Our dear Emily Post simply assumes that we know how to eat oysters and doesn't offer guidance.

Alrighty then, enough instruction. Let's recap: Use knives and forks, employ them from the outside in; don't talk with food in your mouth (how many times do I have to say this???) use

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Written by L.A. Plume

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your napkin instead of your sleeve; say please and thank you; and don't assume that pudding is actually pudding if you are dining with the British, it could be trifle, or spotted dick (which actually *is* a pudding but who would want to eat that?). Whatever else you do, do not serve coffee in a tea pot. Drink port, copiously.

Dinner party over. Write a thank you note to the host/ess and pop it in the mail; very important.

Should you be fortunate enough to find a copy of Mr. Hanson's book, you might be highly entertained by his chapter entitled "Don't Wear Brown In Town," in which he advises us on such points as dressing for highly formal occasions, formal occasions, and moderately formal occasions . . . and addresses the subjects of cleavage, tattoos and piercings. Happily for us, good etiquette forbids me from informing you of his opinion on the latter group; however, our own dear Mr. X does share Mr. H's attitude about wearing brown in town, so make sure if you're visiting London you have the requisite black footwear, gentlemen, or you understand the hidden code in that phrase.

Most of us don't encounter royalty as such, so we really don't need to know how to approach that situation, but if you are a student of good manners, or are simply curious, Mr. Hanson has the answer. (Ms. Post, by the way, does not. She offers us a prologue and nine pages of "addressing important personages.")

Mr. H sums it up in a paragraph: "Bowing to Japanese Royalty. The bow here is from the waist. Go down first and strive to be as parallel to the floor as possible. Never rise from the bow until they have risen from their bow (which will vary in depth depending on who your are). If you put your back out doing this, then that is the price you pay for mixing with royalty."

I hope you all find this helpful and encounter Japanese Royalty soon, so you can make use of this information.

Etiquette and good manners aside, Mr. Hanson not only educates but amuses. His book is simply fun reading. Emily Post is perhaps a bit more dry, but also gives insight into a time and place where "the rules" now sound like historical fiction.

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Without the instruction of these people who care that we behave in some sort of social fashion, we might all just be like prairie dogs on the plain.