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Ode to Coffee, Dawn

I roll over lethargically to mute the alarm, stretch—still under the covers—and blearily blink my eyes. The light outside is tender, blue. It seeps through the splintered bottom row of blinds. I tug at the string and they let out a shrill, curt screech as they collapse together at the top of the window. Ordinarily, sun floods the bedroom when I do this; but the light, being still young, is slow to infiltrate this space. It diffuses only gradually, a ponderous vapour, an azure dust of dreams. If lapis lazuli could effloresce, it would resemble the dawn.

There is always time at this hour. Time to get out of bed. Time to, à la Joyce, “encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race.”¹ Even when my body is a misshapen sack of oil. Sleeping, it’s a weighted balloon, an anvil floating in the sky—in other words, a sheer and harrowing impossibility, a defiant existence.

I crawl out of bed, stand, crane my neck to peer through the window. There, the moon’s outline, a tenuous orb superimposed upon the smouldering heavens. Wasn’t it Bukowski who said this? “Love is a fog that burns with the first daylight of reality.”² I remember the interview where it spilled out of his mouth, they made fun of him for it, it

was so pretentious, so sentimental, he seemed embarrassed for having said it at all, looked away while sucking on a cigarette with a protective smile and narrow eyes. If love is a fog that burns I wonder where its ashes go.

I leave the room to brush my teeth, fill the Moka pot with water, grind the beans, set it onto the stove. Twist the dial to high, sit down on the only chair—a black Stefan from IKEA—in the kitchen and stare at the ground. Bland beige-grey tiling. I glance outside, clench my jaw. Harsh white streetlamps, shining like synthetic stars, tyrannize the unborn hour. Their abominable artifice—continuous, unholy—brings out the uncomplicated idealist in me, rekindling an impotent desire to rage against the machine. Must we really drench the streets in our hubristic protraction of daylight? Mercifully, they automatically extinguish around this time, but not before arousing my hostility. Knowing they will return to violate twilight doesn't help.

I like to remind myself that, “until streetlights, being up late meant wandering town in butt-clenching terror, tripping over stray animals until the wind blew out your lantern and you were set upon by armed bandits.”³ Facetiousness aside, I wonder what pure darkness like this would've been like. I've only glimpsed it—camping in White Sands, for instance, tented amid dunes, gazing up into the sky, a black carpet on which God spread his host of jewels. Light pollution, though, even there. What a concept. Even this ethereal substance we've managed to turn into a waste product.

Soon, a churning effervescence. I look up. The Moka pot is rattling. Finally, eruption. Coffee spills over onto the element, which sizzles angrily in response. I lurch over to the stove, switch it off with a snap, pause. Lift the gleaming silver object—teeming with the

elixir in question—pour my cup, return to the room and sit down at my desk. Here, I inhale its promulgation of fumes, its steam aspiring to the sky, and try to write.

Only so can it happen. Only cradling the white metal cup, almost too hot to grasp. Taking loud sips, the fragrance in the back of my throat like cigarette smoke, its pungent sootiness undercut by a robust acidity. Only with my mouth full and my eyes closed, open to these flavours, can the sentence I am seeking come to me. By now, I am accustomed to this ritual. I anticipate with an eagerness bordering on faith the moment it inaugurates a word, induces a line inside of me. Without this little nudge, this interior propulsion, the engine of my brain simply doesn't start: I'm pushing the heavy metal frame of the car uphill, gasping, irritable, seriously displeased with my rotten lot in life. It's true, there's no denying it: I am reliant on coffee for getting into gear as a writer, for kick-starting the process of rendering reality into words. Can I help it if I need a push? Some little spark of symbolism to get me going? Coffee is, after all, the perfect metaphor. This dead thing revivifying me. The surge of caffeination—profane, munificent—the vivid blackness. It's almost vampiric. There is no question: I cradle with my mouth an ambiguous substance. Somewhere in the murky realm between demons and light, coffee nourishes—it understands.

I gulp down another mouthful, take a deep breath in, expel it quietly. But why the dawn, I wonder? Why am I doing this? Brutalizing my hypersomniac brain with such an absurd regimen. I'm a night owl, after all, it's an unnatural thing to do. I glance behind me. The wedge of sky framed by my window is thickening with light. It's a somewhat disconsolate process, at least for me: as the sun rises, reborn—the perennial Christ, as it were—it displaces the soft, exquisite, bashful blue of dawn, suffusing gradually the sky with its omnipotent gold. Isn't it curious? A blue so fraught with darkness it is almost purple, and

gold. Every day is a dance between these antithetical archetypes. At dawn, God slowly triumphs; dusk reinstitutes darkness's reign. Indeed, my cheeky Christ allusion isn't off. Bahá'u'lláh employs the sun as an instructive analogy in order to explain the unity of the prophets, the oneness of religion, the singleness of God. "Consider the sun," he writes. "Were it to say now, 'I am the sun of yesterday,' it would speak the truth."⁴ The famous painter J.M.W. Turner exclaimed "The sun is God" on his deathbed, burst out laughing and died.⁵ And I am starting to believe him. The day concludes as it began: with the erotic interplay of indigo and fire, a primordial struggle between darkness and the Lord. Coffee, that mournful wonderment, situates itself at the heart of this conflict—poised, agnostic, a perfect question scrawled onto the wall, a prayer in another language, a river outside of time.

I finish the drink, set the tin cup down onto my desk, and stare inside. A mystical discovery: the evaporated grains at the bottom resemble virgin nebulae, the dust of stars. Now I understand. Dawn, with its shimmering quality, rescues the oppressed soul of the temporal athlete within an hour of waking.

Coffee remembers the sun, eulogizes it; but it is also an homage to oblivion, an unsettling love letter to the void. I drink it quietly, listening for the verse it seeks to breathe into my heart. Something inside of me quivers when I do this. Perhaps the soul. Perhaps another star in the sky, afraid of perishing too soon, before its sempiternal light has been discerned by mortal eyes.

Works Cited

¹ Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man*. Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1960, p. 253.

² Bukowski, Charles. "Charles Bukowski - Love is a fog." *YouTube*, uploaded by Die Blume, 13 May 2011, [youtube.com/watch?v=7oavXeLjDgQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7oavXeLjDgQ). See 0:30-35. Accessed 26 Oct. 2019.

³ Barron, Jesse. "Letter of Recommendation: Segmented Sleep." *The New York Times Magazine*, 31 Mar. 2016, www.nytimes.com/2016/04/03/magazine/letter-of-recommendation-segmented-sleep.html. Accessed 26 Oct. 2019.

⁴ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán: The Book of Certitude*. Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Illinois, 1989. p. 21.

⁵ Turner, J.M.W. Cited by Kate Kellaway in "Mike Leigh on Mr Turner: 'He was an enigmatic character – conflicted. He was so driven. He never stopped.'" *The Guardian*, 5 Oct. 2014, www.theguardian.com/film/2014/oct/05/mike-leigh-mr-turner-enigmatic-character. Accessed 26 Oct. 2019.